

Investment in law and order



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Senior citizens grateful for restructure of transport assistance



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Let's live within our means: PM Rabuka

By PRASHILA DEVI

LET'S live within our means and manage our finances prudently.

This is the advice emanating from Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, after the announcement of the \$4.55 billion 2024-2025 National Budget.

Speaking on the pay increment announced in the budget for civil servants ranging from seven to 20 per cent, the Head of Government said that while this would assist as a living wage, it was important to be prudent with their finances.

The Government, he said, has a similar balancing act of its finances which was reflected in the allocations that have been made.

The Head of Government assured that the budget, which was passed in Parliament this week, "is what we can afford".

Many of the allocations have been made to provide relief from a possible economic crunch in the post pandemic era.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, while announcing the budget on June 28, prefaced that the challenges that have caused the rise of cost of living and seeing the current economic climate "are not expected to fall quickly".

DPM Prasad said these issues cannot be dealt with in one budget cycle and that many of these challenges might require inter-generational solutions.

Attending to the social sector, aside from the pay increment for civil servants costing the Government around \$85 million includes the increase in the minimum wage which will be implemented in two trenches.

In the first trench, the minimum wage will go up by 50 cents from August 1, 2024 and then another increase of 50 cents which would take the increase by \$1 from April 1, 2025.

For the aging population, DPM Prasad outlined assistance through the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection with an allocation of "\$200 million to continue the increased social welfare allowances for around 104,000 beneficiaries under the family assistance scheme, social pension scheme, care and protection allowance, disability allowance, rural pregnant mother food allowance and transport assistance scheme".

"Pensioners over the age of 70 will now receive a monthly cash allowance of \$150, an increase from the current \$125 per month."

On the bus fare assistance, he highlighted the restructuring



Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, following the announcement of the 2024-2025 National Budget. **Photo: SUPPLIED**

ing of the allowance for elderly and people with disabilities to allow for flexibility for the 48,000 beneficiaries.

"Effective from 1st August 2024, we will convert the bus fare allowance into a cash allowance of \$25 per month. All our social pensioners above the age of 70 years and those on disability allowance will now receive a \$25 per month cash allowance instead of the current bus card top-up," DPM Prasad explained.

On superannuation, DPM Prasad highlighted that the Coalition Government will be reversing an earlier decision taken by the previous administration of reducing the pension rates for many Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) pensioners by restoring it effective from August 1, 2024.

"The cost of reinstatement will be fully borne by the Government and we have agreed to provide a funding of \$4 million for this year. The full cost is estimated to be around \$57 million over the next two decades," he added.

DPM Prasad also announced that following a remarkable financial performance by FNPF, the Board has declared an eight percent interest payout to its members for the financial year ending 30 June 2024. "This is the highest interest paid in the past two decades and on 1st July, \$562.2 million will be added to the FNPF balances of over 417,000 members," he added.

Another programme aimed at lifting living standards, the first home buyer initiative, will be continued with a budget of \$5.5 million provided for this.

Budget answer to our needs: PM



Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, in the Parliament complex following the announcement of the 2024-2025 National Budget. Photo: AZARIA FAREEN

N most developing countries, the annual national budget sets the tone of the nation's development priorities.

As Fiji's Parliament this week debated the appropriation bill as the precursor to the implementation of the 2024-2025 National Budget for the next financial year, Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, shared his views with the Department of Information on certain aspects of the Government's financial intent.

Department of Information: This is the second budget under the Coalition Government. What are your views on the priority areas such as education, health and national security with the allocation given to them.

Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka: Those social services issues of health and education have always been a major feature in development budgets of developing nations and they broke it down in accordance with the importance Government places on the the Sustainable Development Goals that have those issues. For example, in education, the provision of accessibility of quality education for all

and in order to do that, the Fiji Government in its part as an international player, must contribute, however much it can afford for that social development for the people of Fiji in education.

We need to improve the schools, we may even have to build some more schools or build the capacity of those schools and with the rural population or the population growth, we might also grow the education infrastructure in accordance with those growth.

The number of teachers that have to be trained and provided will have to increase and that is why we see an increasing amount allocated to education.

The same with health, we must develop our health infrastructure as well as increase the manpower of the Ministry particularly the doctors and nurses and practitioners who carry out their roles as custodians of good health in the country.

Security and law and order are always very important. There is always that allocation given to the police.

When we talk about security, we're not really talking about military security because we only have very limited capacity in our military force in Fiji and mostly at the moment, geared towards our role as international peacekeepers to the United

Nations and the MFO (Multinational Force and Observers) in Sinai.

DINFO: An issue of concern regarding the rising cost of living and while global factors do contribute to this, some have also attributed it to domestic taxation policies and lack of increments to a living wage. What's your view on this and how much of this will be addressed by the increments announced in the budget.

PM Rabuka: The increase announced for salaries and wages will go towards addressing those issues, it may not be total or it would still call for prudent governance of our own finances, personally and as a nation. The rise in cost of living, we are not causing that.

The cost of the supply chain and that is the cost of transportation of our imports from their shores to Fiji.

They are affected by security of supply, the length of the supply route. The security of supply with the war. So the effect of war increases the insurance paid by the shipping companies. So the transportation of what we need increases and that the customer pays so we pay for those increases when they're landed here and the duty and so on.

So our pay rise may be 7 per cent or 5 per cent which will address the increase also in the cost of imports that we get. It will not be enough but we must be prudent with the management of our own personal finances as the Government is expected to be prudent in the management of government finances.

DINFO: The disciplined forces have been given increased budgets, how important it is to have a well funded, especially in the case of the Fiji Police Force, to maintain law and order situation while addressing more serious crimes like that transnational and drug trafficking racket we're facing right now.

PM Rabuka: Yes, they are important. Some of that will help, the increase in the military budget is really the acquisition of the protected mobility vehicles that we recently acquired from Australia. That is part of the requirements for the nations to provide secure or safe vehicles for their troops participating in the United Nations peacekeeping.

It will be reimbursed eventually but first of all the the expenditure has to be incurred by Government but the big increase that people are crying out about is brought about by the fact that the peacekeeping budget that used to be separate is now all covered under the military budget. So not a real increase, just two heads brought under the same budget.

DINFO: Encouraging greater participation of iTaukei businesses has seen certain positive provisions in the budget. What would be your advice to those who have the ideas and the skills but still hesitate due to the lack iTaukei participation in entrepreneurial activities?

PM Rabuka: It has been a cultural problem for us because as one very prominent politician used to say bisinisi iTaukei duri ga mai daro (iTaukei

businesses run for a short duration and collapses)

That doesn't have to be, we can ensure that iTaukei businesses can thrive, not only survive but thrive.

So all about adapting our culture of vei kerekerei (borrowing), dinau sega ni saumi (not asking for the return of the borrowed funds) which is part of the dinau kerekerei (asking for credit). We must see that as a development of businesses in totally different way. Businesses do not rely on relationship, they rely on on the exchange of goods and money and they must continue to be that. Not to go into a shop and say "oh belongs to my uncle and we can take this".

We must change our attitude to businesses and cooperatives are coming up again. They came up in the past but a lot of them flopped. We need a whole new attitudinal change to businesses.

The Fiji Indigenous Business Council has now been revived and hopefully they can hook up with bigger business houses like Fijian Holdings etc. and have good business acumen made available for those that will be running those businesses.

DINFO: Upskilling and retention of human capital is very important. Do you feel the budget has managed to address this to an extent?

PM Rabuka: To some extent we incentive given in the increase of salaries and the change in the band system. Hopefully this will incentivise the workers to stay and improve our retention numbers. But when we lose some and they go overseas, we get remittances from them. They work out there, maybe they get better pay and they can afford to send some money home for those that stay back to make our life better.

And there have been some unfortunate cases where those that have been remitting money to Fiji come back with nothing and there is also nothing here because that's already gone to consumables they spent on day to day living.

There is nothing for them when they come back. So, what we're trying to do now is to encourage them to save, of all the money they remit some of it should go to their Fiji National Provident Fund or in their savings so when come back at least there's something for them.

While they have looked after their families while they were away, there is something for them when they come back.

So losing manpower, we call it brain drain is not really losing, we are getting others and we're also replacing them from lower down the age groups.

DINFO: Broadly, your view on the budget?

PM Rabuka: My view is that it (the budget) is what we can afford and it answers is our needs and also it helps us play our part in the global awareness of the development goals that we have set ourselves, on education, on health, on infrastructure development, on good governance, international peace we contribute to are all funded by the taxpayer of Fiji.

Budget supports tourism efforts: DPM Gavoka



Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, Viliame Gavoka, speaks to members of the Fiji media after the 2024-2025 National Budget announcement in Parliament. **Photo: AZARIA FAREEN**

By FELIX LESINAIVALU

“The 2024-2025 National Budget supports the Tourism and Civil Aviation Ministry’s efforts to ensure its continued growth.” This was highlighted by Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, Viliame Gavoka, during the recent 2024-2025 National Budget announcement in Parliament recently.

“The increase from \$52.3 million in the 2023-2024 budget to \$68.8million, would further the growth of tourism this year.”

“Tourism Fiji received a grant of \$44million while \$13.6million goes to the Fiji Tourism Development Program in Vanua Levu.”

DPM Gavoka added that the Government had launched a sustainable framework for tourism going forward and also allocated resources for supporting MSMEs in tourism, further highlighting the budget’s overall support for the industry.

While delivering the 2024-2025 Budget Address in Parliament recently, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, said the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation has been allocated \$68.8 million in this budget including the Tourism Fiji grant of \$44 million and \$13.6 million for the Fiji Tourism Development Program in Vanua Levu.

“To support and empower tourism MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) we are setting up a Pilot Tourism MSME fund that will provide assistance up to \$15,000 to rural communities to assist in creating an enabling environment for investment, decent employment and sustainable tourism activities,” DPM Prasad said.

He also stated that the tourism industry flourished with a record of 929,000 visitors last year.

“Our national airline, hoteliers and other industry players had a year of record profits. This had a major flow on effect on other sectors, fueling increased domestic spending, employment opportunities and increased tax collections.”

Investment in law and order



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, met with residents of Mamas Place in Caubati and other nearby areas last month with the Fiji Police Force officers. **Photo: SUPPLIED**

By PRASHILA DEVI

MAINTENANCE of law and order is the cornerstone of a thriving democracy and equipping law enforcement officials with the necessary resources is crucial.

Therefore, the allocation of \$226.8 million to the Fiji Police Force sits well with the police re-set agenda that was announced by the Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration, Pio Tikoduadua recently.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, while delivering the 2024-2025 National Budget on June 28, said the force has received an increase of \$41.7m which would help with the full re-set towards law enforcement.

“The Police Reset Strategy would broadly include: development of a new overarching strategy for the Fiji Police Force aimed to modernise the Force through right-sizing and stirring a shift in culture,” DPM Prasad said.

He added that through this Police Reset Strategy, the Coalition Government was committed towards building a police force that serves and protects all members of the society with efficiency, fairness, reasonableness, courtesy, respect and without discrimination or harassment.

“By enhancing intelligence capabilities, human resources, and strategic operational planning, we are committed to making our police force more responsive, accountable, and effective in combating crime. We are embracing

modern technologies such as advanced forensic tools, digitising criminal records, and deploying drones for surveillance,” Minister Tikoduadua emphasised.

“These advancements will enable our police force to effectively combat sophisticated crimes and ensure public safety. Furthermore, we are dedicated to the continuous professional development of our police personnel, ensuring they are well-equipped to handle the evolving landscape of criminal activities.”

Another allocation of \$2m has been set aside to fund the establishment of the Narcotics Bureau within the Ministry of Home Affairs with to focus on law enforcement; investigations; prosecution; intelligence gathering; and conducting awareness in collaboration with key agencies.

DPM Prasad elaborated that the ministry has also launched the Counter Narcotics Strategy 2023-2028 with a focus on seven strategic areas, including demand reduction, supply reduction, harm reduction, legal reform, data collection, establishment of a Drug Court and partnership and international cooperation.

He also announced a tax holiday of 13 years for the set-up of drug rehabilitation centres in Fiji.

The tax holiday includes duty free importation of capital goods required for the establishment of the centre and this concession would be extended to businesses that donate to any drug rehabilitation centre.

Govt’s revenue measures fair and efficient: Finance Minister

By PRASHILA DEVI

THE Government coffers expects to have an injection of \$3.9 billion in revenue in the 2024-2025 financial period to meet the expenditures laid out in the national budget.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, while delivering the budget, explained the need to rebuild “fiscal buffers” through adequate revenues to not only to catch-up on “to fix our deteriorating infrastructure” but also to respond to “any future shocks”.

“We should have a tax system that is simple, efficient and fair and, as I have consistently maintained, with no surprises,” DPM Prasad said.

He explained that the critical tax reforms that were announced in the last budget helped raise additional revenue of \$600 million.

“As a pandemic measure, the departure tax was reduced from \$200 to \$100 while specific tourism taxes like STT (service turnover tax) and ECAL (environment and

climate adaptation levy) were abolished.”

“In the last Budget, departure tax was increased from \$100 to \$140. Given the industry is in a much better position now, the departure tax will increase from \$140 to \$170, effective from 1st August 2024 and will return to the pre-pandemic rate of \$200 from 1st August 2025,” DPM Prasad announced.

Other measures include extending SLIP tax holiday to investors who acquire existing hotels and undertake renovations and refurbishments of more than \$50m, fiscal duty on prefabricated buildings to be reduced from 32 percent to five percent while fiscal duty on steel structures or articles of iron will be maintained at five percent.

DPM Prasad highlighted that excise taxes on alcohol and tobacco products will increase by five percent while the water resource tax rate will increase from one cent per litre to five cents per litre, for producers who extract between 0 to less than 10 million litres per month.

“The rate for producers extracting over 10 million litres per month remains unchanged



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, with the Assistant Minister at the Office of the Prime Minister, Sakiusa Tubuna at the Parliament complex. **Photo: SUPPLIED**

at 19.5 cents per litre which was increased from 18 cents per litre in the last budget.”

“A 200 percent deduction will be allowable for donations over \$10,000 towards the 2031 Pacific Games. Similar

to the tax incentive provided to Fijian Drua, a 13-year tax holiday, duty concessions on imported sports equipment and 200 percent tax deduction will be extended to Fiji National Rugby League.”

Ministry takes up more projects post budget

By AZARIA FAREEN

The 2024-2025 National Budget has been highly commended by the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, Filimoni Vosarogo, as it directly benefits those who have been deprived of some basic necessities.

The ministry received \$5.7 million to establish a taskforce in partnership with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, Water Authority of Fiji, the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Finance to provide access to clean water in rural and maritime areas.

“We have received more than what we asked for simply because of the challenge of getting 1700 boreholes constructed and reticulated in mostly areas where water has not reached,” Minister Vosarogo said.

“This is the biggest challenge we have and we have a responsibility

to deliver and we intend to do just that.”

“As Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, had announced in Parliament, you are trying to be prudent about your ability to earn and also spend and the last decade or so that has not been exercised prudently,” he added.

This project will see 1,000 boreholes built in Viti Levu, 500 in Vanua Levu and 200 in the maritime islands.

He stated that “this budget is giving us what we want, giving the people of Fiji what they want, but at the same time have some of the constraints that would allow us to work within the fiscal space more prudently and more effectively”.

Minister Vosarogo said that they have an open-door policy and have been very transparent about that.

“One of the targets we have at the Ministry of Lands is to provide electronic platforms for all of our

services and while part of that is being achieved, more of it will be achieved in the next financial year,” he highlighted.

“This is so that everything that people need from the ministry can be done online. It makes our services more transparent, more accountable and a lot more people will be benefiting when they lodge applications and do lease renewals.”

“I am sure that those incentives that this Government has already announced is going to help a lot of our communities and at the same time the civil service get what they want,” Minister Vosarogo added.

He also mentioned the improvement on minimum wage among other announcements that the public will appreciate.

The Ministry received a total of \$36.5 million in this financial year in comparison to receiving \$30.1 million in the last national budget.



Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, Filimoni Vosarogo with Member of the Parliament, Alikhi Bia, following the 2024-2025 National Budget announcement in the Parliament complex. **Photo: AZARIA FAREEN**

Ministry to continue with initiatives



Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection, Sashi Kiran, with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications, Manoa Kamikamica and Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lenora Qereqeretabua in the Parliament complex. **Photo: AZARIA FAREEN**

By AZARIA FAREEN

THE Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications will continue to strengthen Fiji's place as the economic and international trade hub of the Pacific with a budget allocation of \$106.6 million in the 2024-2025 Budget.

This will enable the ministry to continue to fund new and outstanding film tax rebates, investment in ease of doing business, digitalfiji, integrated human resource management, trade enhancement program and the northern development program.

In commending the budget allocation, line Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Manoa Kamikamica, highlighted that “this is a really good budget in terms of what we had set out to achieve and we will continue to do that”.

“In terms of building up the country, it is a very well-crafted budget which continues to put emphasis on key areas that we need to focus on and there is still a lot of work that needs to be done.”

“As the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, has stated – our debt to GDP is still high but we are on the right track,” he added.

DPM Kamikamica said that the key was to remain focused with the monetary allocation to the respective ministries which they welcome.

“I think the business owners will be very happy because there hasn't been any change in the tax system, so there is stability and predictability,” he said.

“There are a few grants allocated towards the Tourism

SME's especially for co-operatives with a few increases here and there so it will all help with what we are trying to do in terms of the overall economy,” he added.

In this financial year, the Ministry will continue to work with its stakeholders to achieve a well-coordinated and collaborative response towards socio-economic recovery and accelerated solutions.

The Ministry is currently spearheading several initiatives that will drive economic diversification with positive spillover effects of job creation and livelihood support, such as the Ease of Doing Business Programme, commonly known as BusinessNOW, the development of the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and ICT.

BusinessNow is a national strategic initiative that forms part of Fiji's Digital Government Transformation agenda to provide a single digital portal for Government services for business and investments.

In announcing the budgetary allocation, DPM Prasad also announced a new cooperative grant which will provide \$100,000 maximum, to registered co-operatives within 15 sectors to diversify their business into multiple income generating activities.

“In the 2024-2025 financial year, extensive work will be undertaken towards the digitalisation of the Building Permits and Approvals processes.”

“Ultimately, such reforms are to create an enabling and streamlined environment for businesses in Fiji such as the MSMEs, including co-operative businesses,” DPM Prasad added.

Agriculture Minister satisfied with budget allocation

By FELIX LESINAIVALU

THE Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, Vatimi Rayalu, has expressed satisfaction with their Budget allocation after the 2024-2025 Budget announcement recently.

“Understandably, the Minister of Finance does not have much room to maneuver finance, so I'm happy with what we received.”

The Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways had an increased by \$6 million from \$95.2million in the 2023-2024 budget, to a total of \$101.2m in the 2024-2025 Budget.

“We are looking forward to executing major projects in the new financial year.”

“That should be enough for us to implement our programs for the next financial year.”

Minister Rayalu added his ministry would be addressing the issue of aging infrastructure, such as waterways, in the upcoming fiscal year because some of them were around 50 to 60 years old.

“We need the re-design, and we need to design our waterways infrastructure that will be able to take on the onslaught of floods as a result of climate change,” he said.

In delivering the 2024-2025 Budget Address in Parliament recently, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, announced that a total of \$3million was allocated to fund the Agricultural Marketing Authority and commercial agriculture development.

“A total of more than \$53 million is provided for the crops and livestock research and extension services to strengthen agricultural productivity.”

“Aging farmers is also a critical issue which needs attention now. We need to find avenues to train and educate the younger generation to take up farming.”

DPM Prasad added that to address this issue and provide a platform for agricultural education and training, Government was providing \$3.1 million capital grant to Navuso Agriculture Technical Institute to construct a new facility that can train an additional 160 young agriculture.



Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, Vatimi Rayalu, at the Parliament Complex in Suva. **Photo: AZARIA FAREEN**

Health Ministry target key areas

By AZARIA FAREEN

THE Ministry of Health and Medical Services in this financial year has been allocated a sum of \$451.8 million to deliver quality health care services to Fijians.

This includes a separate funding of \$90 million for the ongoing operations and maintenance cost to Health Care (Fiji) Pte Ltd for the Lautoka and Ba hospitals under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) arrangement.

In commending the budget, line Minister, Doctor Atonio Lalabalavu, said that “like any budget, we had asked for more but we are grateful to the Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, for the ministry’s allocation in the 2024-2025 National Budget”.

“We are looking at improving infrastructure, ensuring that the working conditions for our staff improve plus getting in that new equipment while ensuring that medicines and other perishables are readily available as well,” Minister Lalabalavu highlighted.

“We are also focusing on primary health care and ensuring centralisation of funds to respective divisions.”

“We are also focusing on improving our main hospital, Colonial War Memorial Hospital, and we are grateful for the partnership of DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) for assisting us with \$ 15 million towards the hospital’s masterplan of a well-equipped state-of-the-art tertiary hospital,” he added.



Minister for Health and Medical Services, Doctor Atonio Lalabalavu with other Cabinet Ministers, Assistant Ministers and members of the diplomatic corps following the 2024-2025 National Budget announcement in the Parliament complex. Photo: AZARIA FAREEN.

Minister Lalabalavu expressed his contentment with the overall budget and stated that it deals with important matters such as social issues, security, health, education and infrastructure and believes this budget is a budget for all.

“However, the onus is on how the ministry will be able to fully utilise the funds so that the impact is felt on the ground,” he said.

“We look forward to the next financial year and how we can fully maximise the use of our budgetary allocation so that it has an impact on the ground so our citizens can feel that we are delivering quality

healthcare,” Minister Lalabalavu stressed.

A total of \$96 million has been provided in the 2024-2025 Budget for the procurement of drugs and medical equipment while \$15m has been allocated for the procurement of bio-medical equipment.

In a bid to assist the kidney dialysis patients, an allocation of \$3m has been made to continue with the \$180 per session subsidy which was increased from \$150 to \$180 in the last financial year.

\$12 million has been provided for capital construction and maintenance works at the Labasa Hospital, refurbishment and upgrade

of urban and sub-divisional hospitals, health centres and nursing stations together with the refurbishment of the Savusavu health facility and the construction of a new rehabilitation centre in Tamavua.

For minor maintenance works and upgrades, an additional \$3.8m has been provided for all the health facilities around the country.

Furthermore, the Fiji Government has also contributed towards the construction of a 100 bed Super Specialty Hospital in Nasinu.

We will prioritise: Minister Radrodro

By AZARIA FAREEN

IN reshaping the education sector, the Fiji Government increased the funding for the Ministry of Education to the tune of \$627.6 million in the 2024-2025 National Budget.



The line Minister, Aseri Radrodro, in applauding the increase of \$18.9 million allocated to the ministry in comparison to last financial year, thanked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, for providing a fair budget.

“We assure the minister that we will continue to prioritise our commitment towards the Sustainable Development Goals in making sure that we provide quality education and lifelong learnings,”

Minister Radrodro said.

“Our priority is Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Education and Early Childhood Education (ECE), which is something we have to ensure that the budget allocation is allowing us to implement what we set out to do in this two-specific area.”

“We really have to prioritise our key areas so that we can continue providing quality education to the children of Fiji,” Minister

Radrodro stressed.

The Government has continued with the Free Education Grant (Year 1-13) with allocation to transport assistance for those with households with a combined income of \$16,000 or less together with the tuition grant for TVET, the Tuition Subsidy Grant for Early Childhood Care & Education, provision of food and supplies for boarding schools, and the printing and distribution of textbooks.

This also includes the initiative for menstrual hygiene for girls in Year 6 to 13 with a budget of \$1 million to improve access to basic hygiene products in schools.

“The theme of the budget is “An Economically Stable, Secure and Sustainable Fiji” and I am happy with all the initiatives highlighted in the 2024-2025 National Budget which complements the theme,”

Minister Radrodro said.

“We will continue to work diligently and put in the effort to ensure that we lift up the standard and quality of education in Fiji,” he added.

The ECE plays an important role in the country and therefore received an increase in the allocation by \$2.5 million to \$22.3 million in this financial year.

A total of \$408.3 million has been allocated for primary and secondary education which signifies Government’s commitment towards achieving greater investment and increasing our human capital capacity.

The Back-to-School support for all ECE to Year 13 students has also received the backing for the 2025 school year which adds up to \$40 million.

In the 2023-2024 financial year, a total of 212,740 students were assisted under this programme, with a total pay-out of \$42.5 million.

Meanwhile, a sum of \$150.5 million was allocated to the Tertiary School Loan Scheme to fund 9,940 continuing students and 10,830 new students.

A total of \$1.4 million has also been allocated to fund 20 students to pursue PhD and masters in priority research areas at selected universities in Australia.

The tuition cost will be borne by the Australian University while the Government will provide partial support to cover for airfares, stipend and any other associated cost.

Coalition Government resolves 33 years old dispute

By DIPESH KUMAR

AFTER three decades of turmoil in the fight for their rights, the Vatukoula mining strike has reached a historic resolution, marking a significant achievement in labour relations and justice for the workers and their families.

Standing as one of the longest strikes in the world, the strike lasted 33 years starting on the of February 1991.

Around 368 mining workers in Vatukoula went on strike following all due processes as there was no other way out for them.

These mine workers walked off their jobs after their concerns over poor pay and employment conditions were not met.

Fiji Mine Workers Union president, Joseva Sadreau, said he tried his best to fight for the miners' rights which was not an easy task.

"In 1991 there was a court case in Lautoka which was in favour of the mine workers. The outcome was that we were allowed to stay in the company house until everything was solved."

"From there all miners had to find odd jobs like fishing to feed their families. There were struggles to also educate our children. They couldn't finish their school because we had no income. We worked in the sugarcane field to cater for our families."

"We went through 11 governments, seven presidents, 11 permanent secretaries and 11 ministers for labour and nothing was done about his issue. We also reached out to the previous government but they only made promises."

"We kept on fighting because we had solidarity among the union members. We conducted meetings every week. We are happy that the Coalition Government came down to Vatukoula and said that this would be the last year for the strike."

"We also put through our proposals,

however, this is what the Government came down to, but at least it's something. We thank the Government for this \$9.2 million, at least it's from zero to hero, from nothing to something."

"Thirty-three (33) years of struggling, no income, in poverty level, separations, some died, so it's a painful story to tell."

In a joint effort between the Coalition Government, the Fiji Trades Union Congress and the Fiji Mine Workers Union, a resolution has been achieved to compensate the affected miners.

The Coalition Government will pay-out a total of \$9.2 million which will be distributed over a period of two years to address their long-standing grievances.

Signing of the agreement

The union signed the final agreement on the Vatukoula Strike Payout on the July 5, 2024.

Presented by the Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, Agni Deo Singh, the settlement will compensate 368 miners who have long awaited justice for 33 years.

At the signing, Minister Singh shared that the strike took a toll on the lives of many miners, however, under this agreement, each miner will receive \$10,000 as compensation by August 2024 and an additional payment of \$15,000 reserved for next year.

Mr Sadreau shared the turmoil of the 368 miners over the three decades.

"I would like to thank the Coalition Government for coming down for the signing because at least we are getting something from nothing."

Mineworker Varauni Qarusa who started work at the Vatukoula Mine in 1984 was delighted during the signing as he shared that they had been looking forward to this day.

"We appreciate what the Government has done and request them to relook at the



Fiji Mine Workers Union president, Joseva Sadreau, with union members. Photo: DIPESH KUMAR

amount."

"We had been praying to God for a resolution and the dispute to be resolved. The Government has shown full support in trying to solve the issue wholly."

Out of the 368 miners who went on strike, only 185 now remain as many have passed on.

Minister Singh has shared that for the deceased members, the ministry will identify their families for the payment handout.

Hardship and challenges

Among the challenges presented to these workers, Mr Sadreau shared that broken families were one of the major concerns for them.

He shared that due to financial problems many families were left disheartened and broken.

Gable Beckham, 59, shared that every member of the union has a story to tell of their hardship during the 33 years.

He shared that even his own family lost hope in him, however, he believed in himself and had faith in God.

"My family, they sometimes lost trust in me. Some said you won't make it. But I still had faith."

"For the last 33 years we have suffered a lot. It was not an easy task waiting all these year for someone to respond to us."

"My wife and I as well as my two daughters went through a lot of pain. We undertook farming to survive and also tried to run a business but it never went well for us."

Sharing similar sentiments, Mariana Seiniucirokonai, 47, speaking on behalf of her late father wished that she could share her joy with him when she heard the news.

"I speak for the kids for the Fiji Mine Workers Union. Some of us didn't fully complete our education. Some of us had to go without lunch. The struggle that we went through was really hard."

"I only wish that my dad was here to celebrate with us. Both my parents have passed away. We had to go to school with one pair of uniform from Monday to Friday. We had to share everything and it was hard."

Ms Seiniucirokonai shared that when she got the news about the settlement, their hopes were rekindled and they could fulfil their future plans.

Future plans

As the workers have settled on an agreement, they are now required to vacate the quarters occupied by them in Vatukoula.

Mr Sadreau shared that this poses a significant challenge to the workers as they need time to build their houses back in their villages.

He said that they have requested the Government to resolve the matter whereby they are not vacated until their houses are complete.

"Many of these families would want to move back to their villages and build their homes. We hope the Government relooks at this issue about the figures because these miners want to come out of Vatukoula, they want to buy a land and build a new house."



(L-R- Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, Agni Deo Singh, President of the Fiji Mine Workers Union, Joseva Sadreau, Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Employment, Maritino Nemani, Felix Anthony, FTUC National Secretary, Jemesa Davetanivalu-Office of the Prime Minister. Photo: DIPESH KUMAR



2024 -2025 NATIONAL BUDGET RIGHT OF REPLY

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development & Statistics

HONOURABLE PROFESSOR BIMAN C PRASAD

WEDNESDAY, 10 JULY 2024

Introduction

Mr. Speaker Sir, I rise to provide my right of reply to the 2024-2025 Budget.

Mr Speaker Sir, for the last 2 days I have listened carefully. I did not interject as much as I wanted to but I have listened carefully to to all the contributions coming from both sides of the house. I wish to thank the Hon Prime Minister, all my colleagues on the government side for their contribution and I also want to thank the Hon Leader of the Opposition and all the independent members that came out in support of the budget and the many others who were more balanced, showed some creativity. I can't say the same thing about a few of the loyalists on the other side Mr Speaker, but it does show Mr Speaker that when we have the freedom to speak, we unleash creativity thinking and we don think in a more honest way, if there is no compulsion, and if there is no fear.

As a government, we are very proud that we have provided that environment in the country, in the confidence of our people, for our investors, for everyone to speak their mind, to criticise the Government and to more the government forward.

There was an interesting observation Mr Speaker sir made by Hon Sanjay Kirpal in his contribution. He said in effect in the previous government, cabinet ministers get to see the budget an hour before the budget address.

Mr Speaker Sir, as a government and again I would like to thank the Hon Prime Minister for his leadership where our budget formulation takes a very thorough process at the Permanent Secretaries level, at individual Ministerial level with the Minister of Finance, the cabinet sub-committee culminating in the whole budget being approved by cabinet before the budget address in Parliament. That Mr Speaker sir is a very transparent, open, engaging process that we have formulated in both our budgets, the first one and the second one and I have no doubt that this will be the case as we move into the future.

Mr Speaker Sir, formulating a national budget is not an easy task, especially when you have inherited a large public debt which constrains your ability to fix infrastructure and public services that have been neglected for years. That gets even tougher if you also inherit an economy that is recovering from a major economic setback like COVID-19 with the need for fiscal support to protect that fragile recovery.

But, Mr Speaker Sir, governments can only spend what it collects from taxes and what it can borrow. Both taxes and borrowed money don't come cheap. Therefore, it is important that governments make the best use of these taxpayer resources where it gives the highest return. That involves making tough decisions and policy trade-offs and at most times choosing what is economically correct and fiscally responsible rather than for short term political survival.

At the same time, given the critical role of the Government to provide essential public services, it is important that the Government is funded well. Otherwise, what we had seen over the last many years, was that Government didn't have enough money to fix our hospitals, improve our roads, solve our water woes, clean our drainage, rescue our deteriorating public assets and pay our civil servants well. We may well have this situation into the future until we fix these and until we have growth and we are able to build more fiscal spaces.

This is exactly what we have done in our 2 budgets Mr Speaker Sir. We ensured that Government is well funded, to not only fix public infrastructure and services, but to contain our fiscal deficits and put our public debt on a downward trajectory.

Government Debt

Mr Speaker Sir, I know a lot has been said about government debt and the Hon Leader of the Opposition tried to weave a positive picture of what might have happened before but the fact of the matter is that Fiji's debt to GDP ratio peaked at around 90 percent of GDP in July 2022, rising from around 53 percent in 2006.

By the end of July 2024, we would have brought down the debt to GDP ratio to 78 percent – a reduction of 12 percentage points in just around 18 months. They talked about what we have done in 18 months, and the Hon Minister for Lands in his very excellent contribution said that in 18 months, we can only do so much and he actually said that we have done so much in 18 months. So this was not an easy feat but a great achievement for us as a nation, putting it in a path, a foundation for a downward trajectory in our debt to GDP ratio.

Even more importantly, with the fiscal reforms in the last budget we have fixed our revenue problem and brought fiscal deficits under control from the double digit levels prior to us getting into Government. That means, as the

economy grows, our debt to GDP ratio will continue on a downward path. That's why we need to continue on this course as this is not a problem that can not be fixed in a year or two. We need to be committed to our fiscal plan for at least the next decade.

What we are doing Mr Speaker sir is that we are not thinking that we are going to be in government for the next one or two decades that some people used to think. We are setting honestly, clearly the path for the next decade for whoever will be in government.

Mr Speaker Sir, the political will and national commitment to get our debt problem under control has been commended by the international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, our credit rating agencies and all our development partners. This provides the confidence to our local investors, our foreign investors and everybody else that is looking at Fiji.

Reducing VAT is not an option

However, Mr Speaker Sir, a lot have talked about VAT and I heard the Honourable Opposition members, some of them more so the loyalists saying why we are not reducing VAT. However Mr Speaker sir, we are worried when opposition members like Hon. Premila Kumar, Hon. Hem Chand and others are proposing that we should reduce the VAT rate from 15 to 9 percent.

Mr Speaker, they are forgetting conveniently that they were part of a leadership where the VAT rate was 15% with no exemption. It was the push by the Opposition which is now in government Mr Speaker that forced them after the 2014 elections to reduce VAT. They reduced VAT and they didn't apply zero VAT on basic items, and then Mr Speaker they changed it to 3 rates, they had 15, 9 and 0.

None of them in their contributions on VAT talked about what was there before. Plus Mr Speaker, none of them mentioned that this government kept the zero rate on VAT on food items and we added prescribed medicine, 22 items VAT free Mr Speaker Sir.

Let me tell me Hon Premila Kumar that if we reduce VAT from 15 percent to 9 percent, we will lose \$600 million in revenues. For every 1 percent reduction in VAT we lose around \$100 million in tax revenues. The questions is, how are you going to compensate for this Hon. Kumar? Are you going to increase the fiscal deficit to double digit and add additional \$600 million in debt? But technically you cannot

borrow this additional \$600 million given the availability of financing. Or are you going to reduce expenditures by \$600 million which none of you talked about.

In fact Mr Speaker you will recall that when we were in the opposition, they were saying where is the opposition's alternative budget? For 8 years, they hounded me and say 'where's your alternative budget?' I kept telling them that it is not easy for an opposition to bring an alternative budget given the difficulty that we had to get information. Now they are free Mr Speaker, so where's your alternative budget? Where it is now?

Mr Speaker Sir, the public should note that a lot of information that came from the opposition members were half the information, and half information can be dangerous and misleading. It is easy for them to come here and say we should reduce VAT without saying how to fix the revenue.

Mr Speaker Sir, I would like to reiterate that when we increased the VAT rate from 9 to 15 percent in the last Budget, we had done a thorough analysis, explored different options, consulted with various experts, discussed with our multilateral lenders and even brought it for public discussion. We didn't hide it.

We knew it was not an easy call, so we had to make sure that we get it right. We just didn't pluck out the 15 percent from thin air, but it was based on a thorough analysis and our real revenue needs that will ensure Government is adequately funded and we are also able to put our debt to GDP on a downward path.

If we had not done that, we would have been in a major debt distress by now and most of our lenders would have stopped lending to the Government.

I will talk more about VAT when I talk about cost of living.

Comparison of per capita debt

But let me shed some light on the nominal debt and the debt per capita/person which a number of the opposition members had talked about. Let me put this into perspective:

The Coalition Government inherited a total debt of around \$9.5 billion at the end of December 2022;

In terms of debt per capita, this was around \$10,700;

By the end of this Budget in July 2025, our total debt is projected at \$10.9 billion, or \$12,300 per person.

This means that in terms of debt per capita, the Coalition Government in 3 years would have added around \$1,600 debt per person.

On the contrary, Mr Speaker Sir, the previous Government inherited a total debt of around \$2.9 billion in 2006 or \$3,400 per person.

During their term, they increased the total debt levels to \$9.5 billion or \$10,700 per person. That is an additional debt of \$6.6 billion or in per capita terms an additional per capita debt of \$7,300 per person.

So, Hon. Leader of Opposition and Hon. Sachida Nand, this is reality if you talk about debt per capita. By July 2025, we would have added \$1,600 in additional debt per person, while you added \$7,300 additional debt to every person.

Debt trends

| Year | Debt (\$billion) | Population | Debt per Capita (\$) |
|--------|------------------|------------|----------------------|
| 2006 | 2.9 | 837,271 | 3,400 |
| 2013 | 3.8 | 837,271 | 4,580 |
| Dec-22 | 9.5 | 884,887 | 10,700 |
| Jul-23 | 9.7 | 884,887 | 11,000 |
| Jul-25 | 10.9 | 884,887 | 12,300 |

Cost of living

Mr Speaker Sir, let me now provide some clarifications on prices and cost of living. This is a sensitive issue and is always subject to political point scoring. But let me put through some basic economic facts:

First, prices are generally set through market forces based on demand and supply. Sellers or producers decide the price of their product based on the cost of production, including labor, raw materials, transportation, storage, taxes and other associated costs.

Based on the level of demand and competition from other supplies, they decide on a mark up and the final price for the product. But the basic principle remains that no one will ever sell their product at a price below the cost of production.

Secondly, governments can only influence the price of any product only to a certain extent and it can do so in 3 ways. Either through price controls, or by changing the level of taxes it applies on these products or by producing the product itself and selling it at a loss (like most Government services, including water).

Even with price controls and changing the level of taxes, there is only so much that can be done and there are trade offs for these decisions. Mr Speaker Sir, as a government we had looked at all these options and the Hon DPM and Minister for Trade under which FCCC comes under is constantly llooking at how we can use some of these tools, some of these policies to provide relief to our people. That is being done and I'm sure the Hon DPM will be making some of those decisions soon.

Mr Speaker Sir, the point that I am trying to make is, that it is not easy to bring down prices as those in the opposition seem to suggest. Even for some of the zero rated VAT items and quite conveniently none of them talked about the fact that 22 items have zero VAT, 21 essential food items and prescribed medicine. So despite the fact that there is no VAT on these items, the price had increased due to the increase in either the production costs, or other associated costs like freight, insurance, storage, etc, which is completely beyond our control.

They know that. It happened during COVID. The freight cost went 3 or 4 times higher and some of these stayed up for a long time. So even when you reduce the duty, even when you have zero VAT, the prices Mr Speaker Sir still went up.

Even, we saw prices for local produce like dalo, cassava and vegetables rising, although it does not attract any taxes or VAT. It basically means that when supply is disrupted due to bad weather or when enough people are not planting, or when suddenly we have a pick up in exports of these products, the price will rise. That means we need to increase production to bring down the price, but again that cannot be done immediately.

Also, Mr Speaker Sir, we import most of the products that we consume here in Fiji and as such it is difficult to control the import prices which are determined in the global markets.

Our major trading partner countries including Australia, New Zealand, and the US have all been experiencing the high inflation rates due to global supply chain disruptions associated with the pandemic. Australia's inflation was 6.6 percent in 2022 (highest in 31 years), while NZ was 7.2 percent (highest in 34 years) and US was 8.0 percent (highest in 40 years).

Given Fiji's trade links with these countries, it's natural that the prices of imports from these countries would be higher and have a bigger impact since around 50 percent of our consumption basket is made up of imported items.

Looking at comparable countries such as Mauritius, inflation was 10.8% in 2022, 7.0 percent in 2023 and 5.9 percent in 2024. In our neighboring Pacific Island Countries, Vanuatu recorded inflation of 6.7% in 2022, 12.0% in 2023 and 6.7% forecast for 2024, while Tonga noted inflation of 8.5% in 2022, 10.2% in 2023 and 5.4% expected in 2024.

Mr Speaker Sir, our inflation rate in Fiji stood at 5.1 percent at the end of last year and had peaked around 7.1 percent in April this year. Our current inflation rate in June 2024 stood at 6.7 percent and is projected to stabilize around 3 to 4 percent by year end.

Hon Usumate said that never in history have we had high inflation rate. But if you look at the inflation rate

during their time, 2009 it was 6.8%, 2011 7.7%, 2018 6.6%.

Mr Speaker Sir, in the last 2 budgets to help our people with the cost of living challenges, we have;

We maintained zero VAT on 21 items and also added prescribed medicines to make it 22 items. So, we now have sugar, Flour, Rice, Dhal, Tea, Potatoes, Onions, Garlic, Canned Fish, Cooking Oil, Salt, Liquid Milk, Powdered Milk, Baby Milk, Sanitary Pads, Soap, Soap Powder, Toilet Paper, Toothpaste, Cooking Gas, Kerosene and Prescribed Medicines on zero VAT. These are basically the first things we buy when we go to supermarkets. In fact Mr Speaker, this list is what we proposed before the 2018 elections and they copied the same list and included it, and we were happy they did that, just ahead of the 2022 elections.

In the last budget, we also increased the social welfare allowances by 25 percent for those above the age of 70 and by 15 percent for those below 70.

We increased the government pensions and aftercare allowances by 15 percent.

We had increased the allowances for our Turaga-ni-koros, Mata-ni-tikinas, Turaga-ni-Yavusa. Provincial administrators and district advisory councilors.

We introduced the \$200 per child back to school support for all families below an annual income of \$50,000 assisting over 200,000 students.

Mr Speaker Sir they lied when they said that this was a FijiFirst initiative. What FijiFirst had was an inflation mitigation measure. From August 2022 and up to January 2023 and it was \$1 a day for 6 months, so \$180.

That was an election gimmick Mr Speaker Sir. A \$1 a day for 6 months of \$180 and this was paid to the school. They lied when they say this was Back to School support.

We as a government when the Hon Prime Minister announced it last year was not thinking about the next election. As soon as we came into government, we realised that our children, our rural children needed our support. That is why we did it. It was not an election gimmick. It was a new measure, a flagship measure of the People's Coalition Government to help our students.

We wrote off \$650 million in TELS debt for 53,000 tertiary students, freeing them from the shackles of debt when they start working, so they can use that repayment money to support themselves and their families.

In this budget, we are providing over \$85 million in pay increases for over 38,000 civil servants who were deprived of a salary increase since 2017.

We have taken a bold step to increase the minimum wage rate to \$5 an hour, an increase of 25 percent. Mr. Speaker Sir, Hon. Bala and others claimed that the minimum wage increase is too slow. They should go and look at themselves in the mirror. When they were in Government, it took them almost 8 long years to just introduce the minimum wage rate in 2014 and that too at only \$2.00 an hour. Then, they increased it to \$2.32 and later to \$2.68 per hour in September 2017. Only before the elections did they announce a 4 phase increase from \$2.68 to \$4.00 an hour.

Before the 2018 elections, we were campaigning for \$5 an hour and they went around threatening garment factory workers saying government cannot afford it when the economy at that time was better. That was the time to raise minimum wages.

We are increasing the minimum wage rate to \$5.00 based on a comprehensive review by a panel of experts that have undertaken a thorough analysis and consultation with employers, unions and other stakeholders. We are doing it in 2 phases as we need to be also mindful of some of the employers who need time to adjust.

The other point Mr Speaker which you can see happening in the last 18 months already. The unions are negotiating better conditions and internationally including organisations like the IMF all evidence show that in countries where you suppress the unions, where you suppressed their union leaders, where you restrict employees, the workers of those countries will suffer in terms of their pay and all that this is exactly what happened in this country in the past 16 years.

Mr Speaker if workers were allowed over the years, we would not have to see this problem we are seeing today, that is what this government is trying to correct.

We are paying our sugar farmers around \$102 per tonne of cane for the 2023 season. For the 2022 season, we paid \$91.38 per tonne. Both were higher than the \$85 guaranteed price.

We are paying our rice farmers \$1,000 per tonne of rice paddy. And most of our cash crop farmers, including our dalo and cassava farmers are receiving much higher prices for their crops.

We are also continuing with other social support measures like provision of free education, transport assistance, free water and subsidized electricity for households earning less than \$30,000, free medical service through private GPs, subsidized dialysis treatment, first home buyers initiative, scholarships, free legal services, amongst others.

All this support from the Government will cost us almost \$750 million this year alone. So this is how much we are providing directly to the people to help

them. This includes:

- Zero VAT on 22 items - \$250 million
- Back to School Support - \$40 million
- Social Pensions Scheme - \$78 million
- Family Assistance Scheme - \$44 million
- Disability allowance - \$17 million
- Child Protection Allowance - \$17 million
- Electricity Subsidy - \$10 million
- Water Subsidy for around 40,000 households \$4million
- Transport Assistance for 90,000 students - \$37 million
- Scholarships - \$150 million
- PPP Free health scheme - \$5 million
- Kidney Dialysis subsidy - \$3 million
- First home buyers grant - \$5 million
- Civil service salaries - \$85 million
- TELS write off - \$10 million

Economy

Mr Speaker Sir, let me talk about the economy because a lot of comments have been made that the economy is slowing down, that there is confidence, investment is not taking place and so on.

Mr Speaker Sir, the economy is not declining.

Let that be clear.

The economy is growing.

While we are facing some economic headwinds from the slowdown in Australia and New Zealand and challenges with our declining population which is putting pressure on domestic demand and labor supply, the economy is still projected to grow by 2.8 percent this year.

Although this was a slight downward revision from 3.4 percent, our growth remains positive which means that the economy is still growing and not contracting as misunderstood by some members.

Nonetheless, with the fiscal stimulus and economic optimism provided in this Budget, there is a likelihood that this growth may be later revised upwards. That is what ANZ has now come out to say - that the growth may be much higher than 2.8 percent.

Obviously, they are taking into account the positive impact of the budget and some major progress made with a number of private sector investments that are now getting expedited with shovels on ground.

We have over \$2 billion in private sector investments. We are fixing the issues with our immigration. The banks are ready with the financing for these projects. Our approval agencies have been put on high alert to make sure that there are no further delays. So, we will soon see a major pick-up in investment and economic activities.

Some of the major investments in the hotels will add to the room inventory which has become a bottleneck for our tourism industry in the peak months. This is also important to help make our

room rates and tourism industry more competitive.

We are also working with some of our key entities to increase capacity in terms of our airports, port infrastructure and renewable energy. This should also see some major investments moving forward.

Mr Speaker Sir, we are also seeing new private sector interest in commercial agriculture, outsourcing, ICT and few other new industries which should help grow our economy, support economic diversification, job creation and export growth.

All this, and our efforts at a whole of government level is aimed at raising our growth rate to 4 and 5 percent from the current trend growth of 3 percent.

Expenditure utilization

Mr Speaker Sir, the opposition had made a big “hoo haa” about the expenditure utilization of the Coalition Government and the execution of capital projects.

I wish to clarify that for the FY 2023-2024 Budget, we are projecting overall expenditure utilisation to be around 94 percent.

This includes a 97 percent utilisation of the operating budget and an 85 percent implementation of the capital budget. I agree that we can improve further on the execution of the capital projects.

But Mr Speaker Sir, let me share the expenditure utilisation during their time in Government.

For the 2016-2017 Budget, capital budget utilisation was only 70.5 percent while total expenditure utilisation was 84 percent;

For the 2017-2018 Budget capital budget utilisation was only 77.7 percent while total expenditure utilised was 85.9 percent;

For the 2018-2019 Budget capital budget utilisation was only 61.2 percent while total expenditure utilised was 77.4 percent;

Now Mr Speaker, let me bring up this very important point. It was not the ineffective or the inefficiency of the people executing the projects at that time. It was because government was running into cash flow problems before the 2018 elections. That is why before the 2018 elections, they announced so many things and their execution was capital projects 62% and 74% overall. That is why Mr Speaker in 2019, they had negative growth. The economy contracted.

Mr Speaker Sir. We are not trying to justify our expenditure execution rate. In fact we are working amongst government agencies to further improve the utilization.

But it's important for our opposition members to understand what was happening during their time.

Operating capital mix

Mr Speaker Sir, some also claimed that our operating to capital mix of 73:27 is low.

Because governments are the major providers of social services like education, health, security, judicial services which are labour intensive, you would generally require around 70 percent expenditures towards operating spending.

Similarly, capital expenditure is around 30 percent as we can only budget what we can execute which is based on the absorption capacity of the Government.

But we agree that we can do more to beef up our spending on capital projects.

Revenue Projections are realistic

Mr Speaker Sir, I would like to also clarify the revenue projections for FY 2024-2025 is not too optimistic or is not simplistic.

No, Mr Speaker Sir, I would like to assure everyone that the revenue numbers are being set as realistic as possible. The question is why would Government overstate its revenue projections – because if you do that, you will ultimately get caught and struggle with serious cash flow problems that the FijiFirst Government brought upon themselves in FY2018/2019 before the elections.

So, there is no real incentive for us to be too optimistic with our revenue numbers.

Mr Speaker Sir, given our successful revenue reforms in the last Budget, we are projecting total revenues at \$3.9 billion, of which \$3.3 billion is tax collections, while \$0.6 billion will be collected from non-tax revenues. We are not making any major changes to the taxes apart from departure taxes and other small changes here and there.

Mr Speaker Sir, in the current Fiscal Year 2023-2024, we are very much confident now that we will be collecting slightly over \$3.0 billion in taxes – the highest ever in Fiji's history. Therefore, it should not be a struggle to increase our tax collections from \$3 billion this year to \$3.3 billion next year.

Out of the additional \$300 million in taxes that we project to collect, around \$45 million is additional collection from departure taxes while the major chunk will be due to the bigger economic pie as the Fijian economy will continue to grow at around 3 percent.

In terms non-tax revenues, as I have already stated, we will be receiving around \$162 million in dividends out of which \$130 million will be from the Reserve Bank profits, \$170 million in fees fines and charges from entities such as LTA (\$60 million), Water tariffs (\$49 million) Immigration and other agencies and over \$150 million in budget support grants from our

development partners.

Lack of Consultations on the Budget

Mr Speaker Sir, some of the opposition members including Hon. Ketan Lal claimed that there were no consultations on this Budget, how absurd is this?

We have done numerous consultations starting from the National Economic Summit, Fiscal Review Committee discussions, multiple meetings with the private sector institutions, industry groups, civil society organisations, academia, students, faith-based organisations, disciplined forces, and targeted focused group discussions.

Just in February 2024, we concluded the nationwide consultation on the National Development Plan and this is where more than 22,000 people from across all 4 divisions including our elderly, our youths, farmers, cane growers, working people and people in rural remote areas openly shared with us what they wanted, both in the development plan and in the national budget.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that consultation of such extent was never carried out by the previous government, yet the Honorable members on the other side continue to raise such misleading remarks.

I am confident Mr Speaker that these consultations, and a lot of these have been reflected in the Budget. A good example are the boreholes. The 1700 boreholes that we are going to do in the next 1 or 2 years Mr Speaker Sir came from the people.

Taxing of Property Income of Non-Profit Organisation

Mr Speaker Sir, I wish to also clarify the issue around the taxing of business income for non for profit organizations.

Firstly, all donations and fundraising activities for charitable organizations are exempt from tax. Apart from this, businesses making cash donations to any registered charitable organization can claim it as a deductible expense.

Following the amendment to the Income Tax Act in 2016, not for profit organizations engaging in profit-oriented activities were subject to tax only for their business income component. This policy ensures fairness within the tax system, as individuals or businesses conducting similar business activities are also subjected to taxes. Otherwise, we would create an unlevel playing field.

Prior to 2016, FRCS also picked up that there were a number of NPOs starting their commercial arms, some with good intentions and some as a means of tax avoidance.

To close this loophole, NPOs conducting commercial activities such as supermarket businesses, retail stores etc. were taxed since 2016. The amendment in the current budget was

intended to bring clarity in the law that property income earned by NPOs will be treated as business income and subject to tax similar to property income of individuals.

Another important factor influencing this change was the formation of NPOs by various commercial entities to shelter properties. The intent behind these businesses forming NPOs could be questioned regarding whether it was genuinely for charitable or nonprofit purposes or simply to obtain tax exemptions on property income. This loophole has been addressed in the current budget.

Donations and income from fundraising etc will continue to be tax free.

Drugs and Crime

Mr. Speaker Sir, I was surprised with some of the opposition members raising fingers on the Coalition Government on the drug problem. Mr. Speaker Sir, Fiji has been plagued with the drug problem which is not of our making. This had been brewing up for the last many years with no decisive action from the previous Government which was in denial mode for reasons better known to them.

We are taking some concrete steps now to address this with the establishment of the Narcotics Bureau, launch of the Counter Narcotics Bureau Strategy 2023-2028, a major RESET of our Police Force and closer collaboration and intelligence sharing with our key security partners. Our intelligence sharing and active surveillance has led to some of the major drug busts in the previous months.

I have a number of quick points Mr Speaker that I would like to respond to before I conclude.

On the point raised by Hon Sachida Nand on Hon DPM and Minister for Tourism's reference to tourism receipts, he confused himself. He was talking about a \$2.9b figure and Hon Nand said with the \$2.9b in tourism receipts, the contribution of tourism to GDP is much lower. This is not true. This is bad economics. Because receipts is just one part of the tourism industry. There are a lot of spin-offs; hotels, transport and so on, and the total contribution of the tourism industry is close to 40% of GDP.

The point that Hon Nand raised and again I would urge the Hon member to refrain from talking on this subject because Mr Speaker, when we come into this parliament as an MP, you have to make sure that what you say is correct.

Hon Nand also talked Revaluation. Mr Speaker Sir, when you talked about Revaluation and Devaluation is a very sensitive issue. It is a very, very sensitive issue because it can ignite a lot of activities which can be damaging to the country.

Mr Speaker Sir, already our dollar has appreciated against the currencies of some of our trading partners and it will be silly to suggest any kind of revaluation of the dollar or devaluation. You know when we had devaluation in 2009, there was a major increase in prices, and it set a train of activities that took years for us to deal with. Without understanding the impacts of revaluation and devaluation, he should refrain from talking about it.

On the reference by Hon Bala about the Exim Bank loan, I thought it was unbecoming of Hon Bala, in fact an insult to our Prime Minister and insult to the Indian Prime Minister because that decision for a 100-bed Super Speciality Hospital was announced by the Hon Prime Minister of India together with the Hon Prime Minister of Fiji as a grant to build a 100-bed Super Speciality Hospital in this country. For him to then come and say, oh this was traded with the Exim Bank loan, I think Hon Bala should correct that outside parliament. That information is wrong Mr Speaker.

On the point made by Hon Usumate about the FNPF Pension and the Vatukoula strike. You know they promised in 2015 and somebody said 'oh, they wanted millions of dollars. I don't think they were negotiating with the union in good faith. This is a government that has solved this problem because we provided that platform for the unions to talk to the government to understand the imperative of resolving this. Mr Speaker that is the leadership that the Hon Prime Minister provided because he visited them before the elections and this is a promise we made to them before we came into government and we have been able to settle this.

We actually trust the union leaders. If you look at the history of union in this country, they have been responsible leaders. We have not had the kind of disruptions they were thinking when they brought those draconian laws. We have taken all those laws away, we have provided a platform, and I don't think this will be used as a pretext, or as a platform to settle other disputes.

On the FNPF pensions, all I want to say is that some of the things that the military government did without consultation, without empathy, without explaining to the people why it was going to do caused a lot of pain to a lot of people in the last 16 years Mr Speaker in this country.

This is a government that is not promising to right every wrong that were done, but where it has the means, where it can show leadership, we are correcting those Mr Speaker Sir.

I think this is the message that our investors and our people in this country are getting. This is a government that is not vindictive, that is not creating fear and which is determined to resolve issues that have been pending for years. The Vatukoula strike and the FNPF Pension are very clear indication of

what we want to do.

On the contribution of what I can say the leader of the loyalist group on the other side, Hon Koya, you know we accept criticisms when the intentions are sincere, when there are clean hands.

On Hon Naupoto's contributions on the quality of education, I agree with him that the quality of education is very important. But he was insinuating that the new scholarship scheme based on merit was going to deprive students with lower marks.

This is not correct. When we talked about quality of education, we are talking about improving the quality of learning and the teaching environment. For the last 16 years in the Suva-Nausori area, and the Hon Minister for Education knows this very well for as soon as we got into government, he realised this and he picked up about the quality of education, that the staff-student ratio in our primary schools, in our secondary schools is overflowing. In some cases, there are 50 to 60 students in primary school classrooms.

We have started as a Government, working with the Australian Government. We have signed an agreement already and there's an audit being done in terms of the number of classrooms and schools we need in the Suva-Nausori area. That is a very, very clear target for us in the next one or two years to build more classrooms so that we reduce and improve the staff to student ratio.

I want to assure all the students who are coming out of form 6 or form 7 that the current scholarship scheme has a place for each one of them. If they can't get to university, if they can't get to medicine, engineering or pursue a degree, there are things that they can do, qualifications that they can get and they will get scholarships.

On to the matter of Pacific Polytech, Mr Speaker, the way they are talking it as if Biman Prasad has something to do with Polytech. I mean Hon Hem Chand was in the Ministry of Education, he knows the process. All higher education institutions are registered and approved by an independent Fiji Higher Education Commission. They registered Pacific Polytech in 2021, and they are doing a good job by replacing the defunct technical colleges that they set up and they wasted \$30m Mr. Speaker Sir. That went down the drain.

Hon Usumate talked about funding for FNU. Let me explain how funding is determined for all higher education institutions including the smaller ones like Sangam Nursing School, etc.

The submissions by these institutions don't come to the Ministry of Finance. It goes to the Ministry of Education through the Minister for Education to the Higher Education Commission. The Higher Education Commission does its analysis, they make a recommendation, they have a formula then it comes to the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance can only in a limited space,

can't even increase it, we can only reduce it.

We reduced the funding allocation, the recovery, the amount they didn't pay USP, so we've paid \$10m last year, \$20m in the last budget, this budget they wanted to recover a bit more so we've reduced it to \$5m only. Polytech wanted \$9m, that was reduced to \$5m.

So Mr Speaker, the Higher Education Commission funding model, Hon Usumate spoke about reductions in funding for FNU, there has been reductions in funding in the past, there has been increases in funding, it doesn't mean next year FNU is not getting more or Polytech is going to get its budget increased or reduced just like for Sangam Nursing School. They didn't ask for more last year but we as a government gave them more because we wanted them to train more nurses.

On investor confidence, let me say this. For the first time, I think after so many years that the confidence of investors Mr. Speaker is unprecedented, to use their own words. There is a leading global commercial real estate investment company JLL, this is what they said: "When compared with most other markets, Fiji's investment fundamentals have remained and are growing strong and highly attractive in the current environment."

One last point before I conclude Mr Speaker.

They make a big deal about this '18 months what have you done'? 18 months is a long time. The Hon Prime Minister during the campaign I remember didn't use these words but I am going to use them, you cannot, no government in 18 months can deal with every mess that were left for them to deal with. This is the fact, Mr. Speaker.

The Hon Prime Minister was being very polite. I am not going to be that polite. That in 18 months and all my colleagues this side pointed it out very clearly what this government has done in 18 months. We have set this country on a path to stability, security and prosperity Mr. Speaker with our policies.

I take this opportunity to thank the Prime Minister Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka for his trust and confidence bestowed upon me as the Coalition Government's Finance Minister. I thank him for his visionary leadership and I assure him of my unwavering support.

I also thank all my Cabinet colleagues for their support during the entire budget process.

I also take this opportunity to thank all our staff that worked on the Budget from the Ministry of Finance, Fiji Revenue and Customs Service and the legal support provided by the office of the Solicitor General.

Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir.

30 years of wait and sacrifice finally pays off for Namaqumaqua Villagers

By DIPESH KUMAR

THE Bitolevu clan of the Naculava tribe in the village of Namaqumaqua in Serua achieved a significant milestone after 30 years as they reclaimed 34 acres of land under the Coalition Government's Buy-Back Scheme.

The 34 acres of Namaqumaqua Freehold land was purchased by Government in 1995 after the approval of the then Cabinet. Since then, the Mataqali Bitolevu embarked on a 30-year bold and steadfast course to repay the Government that was now bearing fruits of collective effort and perseverance.

Upon receiving the land title recently, mataqali member Solomon Seruitamana, expressed his gratitude and thanked the Government for their continued support.

Sharing future plans for the land, Mr Seruitamana said that without the Government's help the repayment of \$250,000 would not have been possible.

He shared that the repayment was not easy as they went through several challenges.

"There was a lot of sacrifices made in regards to the repayment. Within those 30 years, all mataqali members had to try and find a way in doing the repayments."

"There were lots of activities organised. At the end of every year our mataqali had a day called Bitolevu Day whereby all members including the vasu who have maternal links to the village came together to do soli just to ensure that we continue to pay the Lands Department."

"Sometimes there were quarrels. People had no money to even try and put in their

contribution. So sometimes when the payment was done, it was not full payment as required in the agreement of payment between the mataqali and the Ministry of Lands. Sometimes our end of the bargain was not fulfilled. There was a big struggle

money, using some system that they have put in place."

"I am really happy and I believe all the struggles that was made 25 to 30 years ago have today been fulfilled. It was quite a struggle. Sometimes we had lost hope that

She shared that their sacrifice will not go in vain as they will utilise the land to its maximum potential and redirect the income for the better of the Namaqumaqua village.

"I would like to thank the elders for buying the land back. We are blessed as



Minister for Lands, Filimoni Vosarogo, with Bitolevu Mataqali members. Photo: DIPESH KUMAR

on our side, in terms of mataqali paying for the land."

Mr Seruitamana shared that many a times in hardships, the Government was willing to extend the timeline of the repayments so that the villagers can fulfil their end of the bargain.

"The Government officials came several times to sit with the mataqali members, especially the Ministry of Lands and the land use unit. They came most of the time to try and have sessions with the mataqali. There was discussion with regards to ways and means of how we can better pay the

this land might never be given to us because of the struggle that we had to face."

Mr Seruitamana emphasised that mataqali Bitolevu already has plans with reclaimed land to utilise and derive income from it which was located just meters away from the village.

He shared that as three generations of the Bitolevu clan struggled to attain the land, it was the future generations that will benefit from it.

Sorani Divuya, 28, resident of Bitolevu, shared her gratitude to her ancestors and thanked them for their sacrifice.

the future generation. We are thankful for them."

"We plan to use the land the land for agriculture mostly, however our elders already have plans in place for the land."

Along with the mataqali Bitolevu, around eight land-owning units are part of the Freehold Land Buyback scheme.

The scheme was established in 1989 with the vision to revert land and assist iTaukei land owning units who had little to no cultivatable agricultural land that was purchased in the colonial days through barter and trade.

Tourism industry thank DPM for consistency in budget

By DIPESH KUMAR

THE tourism industry has thanked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, for delivering a budget that was consistent.

Vuda Marina general manager, Adam Wade, while speaking at the Nadi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) post budget consultation held last week, emphasised on this feature of the budget.

Mr Wade shared that over the years businesses have had a looming threat over them due to inconsistency in the budget making it hard for businesses to undertake future corporate decisions.

"Being a business owner, one of the important things that we came across this budget was consistency. With the previous government it was always very scary."

Mr Wade highlighted that businesses like his will now be able to focus on operating and bringing in more tourists in the country.

"One year it was 10 per cent VAT (value added tax) and then 15 per cent VAT and then it goes down to nine per cent so it becomes very hard to run a business and very hard to foresee on where we are going."

"This is sort of the perfect budget for us."

Speaking at the post budget consultation, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, shared that the Coalition Government was working towards building public trust.

He shared that business such as these create economic growth and the Coalition Government will take constructive criticism on board as this will benefit both stakeholders.

"It is our people, people in the private sectors, farmers, doctors, nurses and everyone that you can think of, they make the country productive and they contribute to its growth."

He emphasised that tourism industry has been at the forefront for Fiji and that the Ministry of Finance had taken their suggestions on major policy changes.

"You may agree with some and you may not agree with anything in terms of policies, but one thing we will have to agree on is that we now have a very open political environment where people are free."

DPM Prasad stated that the Coalition Government will continue to engage with stakeholders in constructive dialogue for better implementation of the budget.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, speaks at the post budget consultation in Nadi last week. Photo: DIPESH KUMAR

Govt allocates funding to address aging issue in agriculture sector

By JOSIA RALAGO

IN Government's bid to address the issue of aging farmers in the country, it has allocated over \$3 million to two agricultural institutions responsible for the training of young farmers.

While delivering the 2024-2025 National Budget, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, said the aging issue which was affecting farming communities across the country needed to be addressed urgently.

"We need to find avenues to train and educate the younger generation to take up farming," DPM Prasad said.

"To address this issue and provide a platform for agricultural education and training, we are providing \$3.1 million capital grant to Navuso Agriculture Technical Institute to construct a new facility that can train an additional 160 young agriculture farmers.

"We are also providing \$330,000 to Tutu Training Centre for infrastructural development of existing facilities."

The Head of the Navuso Agricultural Technical Institute, Uraia Waibuta, said they welcomed the investment by Government towards the institution of \$3.1 million, which was an increase of \$2Million from last year.

"Last year, our allocation through the Ministry of Agriculture was \$1.1 million, and this was because we had lost our administration block and two classrooms in a fire last year," Mr Waibuta said.

"In addition to this, the Government has entrusted the institution to not only help address agricultural issues but to also be an avenue for school dropouts and unemployed youths interested in farming to develop their skills.

"We are truly grateful for this assistance as it would mean rebuilding the blocks and would allow the institution to increase its



The Government is allocating funding to address the aging issue in the agriculture sector. Photo: JOSIA RALAGO

intake."

Tutu Rural Training Centre in Taveuni director, Father Petero Matairatu, shared similar sentiments and commended the Government for allocating \$330,000 towards their institution.

"This is much needed as it would help

the school provide a better learning environment for our students," Father Matairatu said.

The school offers a range of agricultural programmes with the young farmers three course as its core programme.

Continuation of free education hailed



Villagers of Valovoni in the interior of Cakaudrove have thanked the Government for its education assistance scheme. Photo: JOSIA RALAGO

By JOSIA RALAGO

"THE continuation of the free education scheme is much needed amidst the high cost of living that we are encountering."

This was the statement from Jone Waimoka, a 64 villager of Valovoni in the interior of Cakaudrove, in reaction to the 2024-2025 National Budget announced on June 28, 2024.

Mr Waimoka said in the past they not only struggled to pay for the school fees but had to relocate their families to urban areas to access education.

"As farmers, with limited access to basic services like road, health centres and even a school, we toiled hard to put our children into the formal education system, with some dropping out because of the financial hardships faced," he said.

"The priority Government has placed in the education system is commended greatly, as it not only addresses one of the major difficulties we face, but it has allowed our children to pursue

higher education and ultimately get a job.

"This budget is one that looks at the welfare of the people, and for that I would like to thank the Coalition Government."

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, while delivering the 2024-2025 National Budget said, "We are providing \$66 million in the 2024-2025 Budget to support the provision of free education for our early childhood care education, primary and secondary students".

"For the continuation of the transport assistance for about 90,000 students, we have allocated \$37 million in this Budget.

"The \$200 back to school support for our children from families with household income of less than \$50,000 has become one of the flagship initiatives of the Coalition Government.

"We introduced this as soon as we came into Government and extended it again in the last budget assisting over 200,000 students in both rounds."

The Ministry of Education has been allocated a budget of \$627.6 million.

Senior citizens grateful for restructure of transport assistance



Sixty-eight year old Esiteri Samunidawa of Valovoni, Village in Cakaudrove thanks Government for the continuous assistance. Photo: JOSIA RALAGO

By JOSIA RALAGO

"WE are blessed to have a government that continues to take care of us in our old age." These were the words of 88-year-old Kalara Visako of Vuinqalutu Village, Dreketi in Macuata in reaction to the restructure of the social pensioner's scheme.

While delivering the 2024-2025 National Budget, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Biman Prasad, highlighted that from the August 1, 2024 senior citizens who are 70 years and above would be receiving \$150 monthly, as compared to the \$125 they are currently getting.

DPM Prasad said the additional \$25 was from the monthly transport allowance that would now be directed to their cash assistance.

Mrs Visako commended the initiative saying that at her age, it was difficult for her to use the bus and the \$25 would be put into good use this way.

"This is more reasonable and I would like to thank the Government for heeding to our complaints and for considering us in this budget," the mother of six said.

"While three of my children live next to me in the village, I live in my own house and this assistance has helped greatly in my day to day living."

Sixty-eight-year-old Esiteri Samunidawa of Valovoni, Saqani in Cakaudrove shared similar sentiments saying that she has been able to live independently with the allowance she has been getting.

"Imagine being at home and expecting your monthly allowance from Government, and as an elderly person this means a lot," Ms Samunidawa said.

"This is because we do not have the energy to continue with income generating activities like we did when we were young, we do what we can and the Government is there to help us."

"The restructure means that they continue to hear our voice and that we are cared for," she said.



Rewa province looks at sustainable development

By JOSEFA ULUILAKEBA

THE Rewa Provincial Council has been commended for being among the first provinces to develop a sustainable development plan.

Rewa high chief and Minister for Public Works, Transport, and Meteorological Services, Ro Filipe Tuisawau, in opening the Rewa Provincial Council Meeting in Lami recently, has asked the council to align the plan to the National Development Plan.

He said this, however, does not prevent the province from seeking support from financial backers, including other governments or non-governmental organisations, to assist with development initiatives.

In his address, Minister Tuisawau briefly discussed various government initiatives aimed at empowering the people, with a

particular focus on those in rural areas.

On climate change, he said the province, located in the Rewa River delta, faces significant challenges from rising sea levels.

This has led to numerous requests for seawalls and other mitigation measures but the Minister has emphasised that established protocols must be followed for such requests.

This process involves initiating requests at village meetings, progressing them to the Tikina level, and then advancing them to the Provincial level, where they will be prioritised and presented to the Government.

On infrastructure, Minister Tuisawau said the Fiji Roads Authority will work with Public Works Department to address roads that have been neglected for a long time.

He updated the council on the Rewa-Vutia road, highlighting that the technical and engineering works were progressing and



Rewa high chief and Minister for Public Works, Transport, and Meteorological Services, Ro Filipe Tuisawau, with the women of Rewa who were at the opening of the Rewa Provincial Council Meeting. Photo: JOSEFA ULUILAKEBA

once completed, the costing will be worked out before the call for tender.

On health, Minister Tuisawau, while encouraging a healthy lifestyle to combat non-communicable diseases, raised concern regarding the rise in HIV cases, calling on youths to be more responsible and support

government efforts to curb its rapid rise.

The Government has, on its part, approved the establishment of the Anti-Narcotic Bureau, which was envisioned to address the drug-related challenges being facing, which was also a contributing factor to the rise in HIV cases.

You are here for a purpose: PM



Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka with invited guests and members of the Kadavu Provincial Council. Photo: JOSEFA ULUILAKEBA

By JOSEFA ULUILAKEBA

“EMPOWER the people of Fiji through unity.” This was the message of the Prime Minister, Sitiveni

Rabuka, while opening Kadavu Provincial Council, he stated that this vision drives everything the Government undertakes including the recent announcement of the National Budget 2024-2025.

He said that rural development was ongoing and some villages have been relocated due to climate change impacts, and others earmarked for future relocation.

The Prime Minister highlighted that the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) has restructured its operations to align with the plans of the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

“I am thankful for the revitalisation of the Indigenous Business Council, and I have urged them to dispel the misconception that iTaukei businesses are destined for failure.”

“As of today, all iTaukei businesses are expected to rise and thrive, with the assistance of the FDB’s interest-free loans for the first three years.”

“It is imperative to discuss matters beyond the administration of the province. This should include a robust focus on economic empowerment and income generation. The Ministry of Trade is committed to supporting Micro, Medium, and Small Enterprises (MSMEs).”

PM Rabuka also urged the people of Kadavu to actively engage with the Government’s economic empowerment initiatives and to participate in these programs including the ‘Rural and Outer

Development Program’ or ROI.

He mentioned that the Government was also addressing communication difficulties faced in many areas around the country such as some areas in Kadavu which are without cellular networks.

On the 2024-2025 National Budget, PM Rabuka said the focus will be to prioritise utilisation.

“You will be aware that certain allocations have been made in the Budget for various developments but implementation has been slow in the current financial year as many Ministries did not utilise their capital allocations.

“As Mata-ni-Tikina (District representatives) to the Provincial Council, you must be vigilant and raise these hard questions when capital implementation delays happen for developments in your province which have been approved for implementation with an allocation in the Budget.”

He said that holding the government departments accountable for fulfilling their commitments was crucial and if they fail, it should be reported through the iTaukei Administration channels.

On the war on drugs, PM Rabuka said this battle requires all hands-on deck approach, as it falls on everyone to do their bit to fight this drug epidemic which was destroying individual addicts, families and threatens communities and the nation.

“At the same time, we must support those affected by drug use. It’s never too late to rehabilitate someone, whether they have been addicted for decades or have just started. They need our love and support to free themselves from drugs,” he said.

Govt pledges support for iTaukei empowerment at Lau Provincial Council meeting

By JOSEFA ULUILAKEBA

“THE restoration of the Great Council of Chiefs is envisioned to assist us iTaukei’s in generating dialogue on facing challenges and bringing new ideas for business, education, and development.”

This was highlighted by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises, and Communications, Manoa Kamikamica, during the Lau Provincial Council meeting held in Suva recently, where he also assured the Vanua o Lau of the Government’s commitment to assist in the installation of the Tui Nayau in July of next year.

The DPM stated that it is only right for the Government to fund the 14 provincial councils, relieving the people of provincial levies.

He added that the current review of the iTaukei Administration will include the iTaukei Affairs Board, provincial councils, Tikina councils, and the position of Roko.

“The purpose is to develop a comprehensive strategy that addresses the iTaukei people’s needs and ambitions while also encouraging community unity and resilience,” DPM Kamikamica told the council.

On national development, he said the road upgrades and construction on some islands will bolster economic activities and enable farmers to venture into commercial agriculture.

“In support of that, my Ministry is steadfast in our efforts to introduce cooperative businesses in our villages and rural communities, enhance existing ones, and revive those that have succumbed over the years.”

DPM Kamikamica announced that Fiji Water was expanding into commercial agriculture and that this new business activity will benefit rural communities, supporting many farmers by including them in their network of suppliers and ensuring a stable market for their produce.

Citing an example of a steady market, he said the West Coast of the United States has about 400 Kava Bars, with an average of 10 new bars opening each week.

“That is a very lucrative business opportunity for our yaqona farmers, and I implore farmers in the islands that grow yaqona to plant more and tap into that market.”

“The Government is here to support you and ensure the economic empowerment of our communities. This empowerment will, in turn, enable the Government to bring development to our rural areas.”

DPM Kamikamica added that while the Government was in the rebuilding process, there were challenges that must be faced and will require the support of the people.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises, and Communications, Manoa Kamikamica, during the Lau Provincial Council meeting held in Suva recently. Photo: JOSEFA ULUILAKEBA

Team Fiji presents iTatau to the Head of State ahead of 2024 Paris Summer Olympics



President, Ratu Wiliame Katonivere with members of the Fiji Rugby Men's 7s team at the State House recently. **Photo: NANISE NEIMILA**

By NANISE NEILMILA

MEMBERS of the Fiji team that will be representing Fiji at the Paris 2024 Summer Olympic Games, including officials, presented their itatau to the President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere, at the State House recently.

Leading the delegation was the Team

Fiji Chef de Mission to the 2024 Paris Summer Olympic Games, Sale Sorovaki, extended his heartfelt thanks to the Head of State for receiving the team .

President Katonivere, on behalf of his wife and the people of Fiji, extended his well wishes to every athlete that will be participating at the upcoming 2024 Paris Summer Olympic Games held next month.

“When you depart our shores to

represent our beloved nation, you take with you the hopes of every Fijian back home. Whether it be rugby, swimming, or any sport, remember that you are ambassadors of Fiji.”

“Listen to your coaches and officials, enjoy yourself, and do your best. Always remember where you began this Olympic dream and ensure that you will all participate in your individual sport to the best of your ability.”

President Katonivere thanked

the officials and coaches for their commitment and dedication to nurturing the athletes that will be representing our country.

Team Fiji will be represented in the sports of rugby 7s men's and women's, sailing men's and women's, taekwondo, swimming, athletics, and judo.

The 2024 Paris Summer Olympics will take place from July 26–August 11th, 2024.



President, Ratu Wiliame Katonivere with the First Lady Madam Vilomena Katonivere with the members of Team Fiji that will be representing the country to the Paris 2024 Summer Olympic Games at the State House recently. **Photo: NANISE NEIMILA**

Noda Viti

Sigatabu, 14 ni Jiulai 2024

| 8 Drauniveva, 10 Tabana 15 ni Lavelave ni Ivola

**VAKAVINAVI-
NAKATAKA O HON
SAUKURU NAI
VOTAVOTA KINA
NONA TABANA**

iTalanoa ena Drauniveva 3



**VAKAMACALA ME
BALETA NAI TUVATUVA
VAKAILAVO.**

iTalanoa ena Drauniveva 6



VEIVAKADEITAKI O PM RABUKA NA BIBI NI TAVI NI LEWENIVANUA



Nai Liuliu ni Matanitu o Hon Sitiveni Rabuka ena kena laki dolavi na Bose Ni Yasana ka vakayacori ena Civic Center.

E laki vulagi dokai nai liuliu ni Matanitu o Hon Sitiveni Rabuka ena kena laki dolavi na Bose Ni Yasana o Kadavu.

E vica sara nai ulutaga e vakabibitaka tiko o Hon Rabuka ena vuku ni kena gadrevi na veivakatoroicaketaki ka vaka kina na kena gadrevi na Duavata ena vanua o Viti.

“Onisa kila nisa toso tiko na veivosaki me baleta na tuvatuva veivakatoroicaketaki ni Matanitu, ena vuku nin vica na yabaki sa tu e matada,

nai tuvatuva ni veivakatoroicaketaki ni Matanitu ena dau rogoci e liu na nomuni nanuma na lewenivanua”.

E vakaraitaka o Hon Rabuka na bibi ni Matabose vakoro, nina dau rogoci kina na domodra na lewenikoro, kau cake ena Bose Ni Tikina , ka laveti cake sara kina Bose Ni Yasana, ni bera ni biu yani kina Tabana se na matabose e qarava na vakatabakidua na kena sokomuni mai na veitukutuku ni bera ni biu ki nai tuvatuva ni Matanitu.

E kuria o Hon Rabuka nisa toso sara tiko

na cakacaka ni kena valuti na waigaga ni veivakamatenitaki, ka sa vakavuna sara tiko ga vakalevu na kavoro ni vuvale, ka vaka kina na veivakasaurarataki vei ira na lewenivanua e Viti.E sa gadrevi na Duavata kei na Cakacaka Vata ena vuku ni kena tovolei mena valuti na kena vakayagataki na Waigaga. E na sega ni rawa ni galala o Viti enai valu oqo esa dodonu meda taqomaki ira nai Tabagone kei na gone.

“Au. vakavinavinaka vakalevu ena vuku ni noqu mai tiko ni Bose Ni

Yasana na siga nikua , na veika kece sara eda cakava , se Valenivolavola Ni Yasana se Bose Yaco , se Matabose Cecere , eda na dau raici ira na ena loloma ni Turaga. Sa dodonu meda tucake , ka vakaukauwataki keda”.

Sa vakanuinui vinaka tu na Paraiminisita o Hon Rabuka nina dua na yabakai vinaka ni veiqaravi ena Yasana o Kadavu ka veitauriligataki na sasaga ni veivakatoroicaketaki ena noda vei vanua kece sara.

VAKAMATATATAKI NA TUVATUVA VOU VAKAILAVO NI MATANITU

Esa vakamatatataka na Minisita ni Lavo o Hon Biman Prasad nai tuvatuva vou vakailavo ni Matanitu Cokovata ni oti na kena mai kacivaki ena Mua ni Macawa sa oti eda sa vakanadakuya. E laurai ni veika vakailavo ena vanua o Viti esa tubu kina 2.8 na pasede ena yabaki. E vica sara na vanua bibi esa tuvana na matanitu ena kena tubu eso nai votavota kina duidui Tabana Ni Veiqaravi.

- Tubu cake na kedra I sau na Cakacaka Vaka matanitu kei na Veikabani, ka vaka talega kina na oira na veiqaravi ena vanua ni Veivakadodonutaki.
- Vagolei e 9.2 na milioni ki vei ira na Tamata Caka caka ena Vatukoula Gold Mine.
- 57 na Milioni kina Fiji National Provident Fund me baleta na Penisini ena lomani 20 na yabaki mai qo, ka 4 na milioni ena saumi ena loma ni yabaki oqo.
- Veisautaki na \$25 nai vodovodo ka na rawa ni solia na cash vei ira na lewe 48,000 na lewenivanua ka ra vukei ena Social Welfare era yabaki 70 ka lako cake.
- Tosoi cake na nodra I lavo na peniseni mai na \$125 kina \$150 vei ira na yabaki 70 ka lako cake.
- Vagolei e \$10 na Milioni kina veivakalivalivataki ka rawa ni okati kina e 55,000 na veivuvale.
- Vagolei e \$4 na milioni kina kena vakavinakataki na veiqaravai ni Tabana ni Wai ka rawa ni qaravi kina e 40,000 na vuvale.
- \$66 na milioni kina Tabana ni Vuli ena Free Education Scheme (Sova ni vuli, Primary ka vaka kina

na Secondary).

- Vagolei e \$37 na milioni kina veivuke ni vodovodo vei ira na gonevuli ka rawa ni okati kina e 90,000 na ginevuli.
- \$40 na Milioni kina veivuke ni lesu ki vuli (Back to School) ena 2025.
- \$3 na milioni kina veivuke ni porokaramu ni “Termite Control Assistance Programme”.
- \$24 na milioni ena veivuke ni Free Medical Check vei ira na General Practitioners. \$30,000 vei ira na lailai na rawaka vakailavo, ka vaka kina oira na ruku ni social welfare schemes, kei ira na vakale qai na nodra Ivi (kidney dialysis).
- \$96 na milioni kina ena veivuke I wanimata kei nai yaya ena veivalenibula.
- \$150.50 na miliuoni e vagolei kina sikolasivi vei ira na 9,9940 na gonevuli era vuli tiko mai ka vaka kina na 10,830 vei ira na vakalewe fomu vou.
- \$13.5 na milioni ena kena vakavinakataki na vei vakavaletaki enai tikotiko e Sakoca, Tavle, Field 40, Tore, Valewaquyaya (Ba) kei na Vunika Labasa.
- \$7.9 na Milioni na kena vakavinkataki na wavu e Veikoba (Valelevu) vakatoroicaketaki na Public Rental Board Subsidy, na taoni lailai e Koroipita ka vaka kina na Tabana ni Habitat for Humanity.
- \$5.8 na Milioni ena kena vakatoroicaketaki na Veikau ena noda vanua, ka vaka kina na Paini ena veiyanyanu kei na REDD+.
- \$5.7 na milioni ena vagolei kina 1,7000 ena porokaramu ni Borehole e Vitilevu, Vanulaevu ka vaka



O Hon Biman Prasad na Minisita Ni Lavo ena kena kacivaki ena Bose Lawa nai Tuvatuva Vou Vakailavo ni Matanitu.

kina na Veiyanyanu.

- \$5.5 na milioni na grant e vagolei vei ira na voli vale (1st Home Buyers Grant.)
- \$4 na milioni na vei ira nai taukei ni Bisinisi ka vaka kina na Provincial Holding Companies na baqe ni Veivakatoroicaketaki (FDB) ka vaka kina na Merchant Finance)
- \$5000,000 mme baleta na Womens Expo
- Veivuke me baleta na veisinisi ena Tuadaku ni Koro Lelevu (MSME).
- \$100,000 e vagolei ena Co-Operative grant ka vaka kina na Veibisinisi.

TOSOI CAKE NA POROKARAMU NI VEIVAKAVALETAKI



Na Tabana ni Veivakatoroicaketaki ena Taudaku ni Veikorolelevu, Veiyanyanu kei na Leqa Tubukoso esa cavu I kalawa saraa ena kena vakavoui na Porokaramu ni Veivuke ni Vevakavaletaki (Rural Housing Assistance Programme) ena yabaki vou vakailavo oqo. E mai raiclesu nai tuvatuva oqo ena Tuvatuva Vakailavo ena yabaki oqo ka rauta ni 3 na milioni na dola e votai taumada kina Tabana ni Veivakavaletaki.

“E na yabaki vakailavo 2023-2024 keitou marautaka na kena raici nisa rawa mena vakayacori e 155 na porokaramu ena va nai wasewase e Viti. Na Porokaramu oqo e oka kina na na kena tara na vale vou, vakacavari na veicakacaka, semati tale eso ka tara talega na nodra vale na vakaleqai tu na tiki ni yagodra.”

E na gauna oqo e tiko ga na tuvatuva

ni vale ena 24*16 na kena balavu kei na Raba ia ena yabaki vou vakailavo, keitou sana tuvatuva ka tiko mena veisautaki nai tuvatuva ena kena sa biu yani na vale e rua na kena rumu.

“E na kena ciqomi nai vola kerekere, na cakacaka oqo e gadrevi mena vakaukauwataki na RHA Programme.

Oqo sa neitou tuvatuva tiko ena yabaki vakailavo vou, e bibi mena kilai ni sega ni veiraurau na wasewase ni lavon e ciqomi, ena sega ni rawa nira na vukei kece na lewenivanua era vola kerekere mai”

E sa matata vakavinaka ni porokaramu ni RHA e dua na veika e ratou sa tutaka na Matanitu Cokovata, ena vinakati mena vakadrodroi vakalevu vei ira na veiyanyanu kei na Taudaku ni Koro Lelevu, nisa tu vakarau na Tabana ena kena raici mera vukei na lewenivanua, ena kena muri na veilawa ena va nai wasewase ni veivuke ena veivakavaletaki.

GADREVI ME TAROVI NA LEQA NI WAI NI GUNU ENA KOROTURAGA



Hon Ro Filipe Tuisawau ena kena laki sikovi nai Vakaso ni Wai e Colo I Suva.

Esa mai vakaraitaka na Tabana Ni Wai ena noda vanua nisa tiko nai tuvatuva mena vakavinakataki na veiqaravi ni Tabana ni Wai ena veivanua e Tacirua ka vaka kina e Colo I Suva. Na usutu levu ni sasaga oqo sai koya na kena laurai na veiqaravi ni tabana, na veidredre e na vei mataitikitiko ka vaka kina na kena vakadrodroi na wainigunu savasa.

Na Tabana ni Wai e vakarautraka na wainigunu savasava taudua ena noda veivanua kece sara e Viti. E vakatekivu mai ena kena tarai cake nai yaya ni veiqaravi mena rawa ni veisotavi kei na veigagadre ena loma ni vanua e Tamavua kei Colo I Suva. Na veiqaravi oqo ena laveta cake tale na vakadrodroi ni wai ena veivanua oqo. E na gauna saraga oqo e dua na leqa levu e sotavi sai koya na kena sotava na leqa. ni wai oira na veibisinisi ka vaka kina na veivuvale. Sai tuvati ni Tabana Ni Wai na kena sagai mena wai savasava kei na tokoni ni ni toos na

noda vanua.

E ratou sa biuta cake talega na Tabana Ni Wai na nodratou vakatutu mena dua na Kabani mena rawa ni konitaraki taki ena vuku ni veiqaravi mena rawa ni tara na porokaramu ni Elevated Princess Road Infrastructure. Na porokaramu oqo ena vakarurugi ena “Conditions of Contract for Plant and Design Build”, FIDIC Yellow Book 2017. Na konitaraki ena dodonu mena kila vinaka na veiyya kece ka vaka kina na vakatutu mena rawa ni walia ka dei talega na veiqaravi. E biu na veivosaki oqo enai ka 31 ni vula o Me, 2024ka na sogo talega ena siga Vakaraubuka nai ka 26 ni Jiulai, 2024.

E vakaraitaka na Minisita ni Veiqaravi ena Tabana ni Wai ka vaka kina na draki o Hon Ro Filipe Tuisawau na nona tokona na cakacaka oqo. E ra kuria ena nodra vakaraitaka na bibi ni kena vakavinakataki na veiqaravi ni Tabana Ni Wai mena veisotavi kei na tiko bulabula ni lewenivanua e Viti.

E vakaraitaka talega o Hon Tuisawau na vakavinavinaka levu vei ira nai vakalesilesi ni Tabana Ni Wai ena vuku ni veiqaravi yalodina ena kena vakarautaki na wainigunu savasava vei ira na lewenivanua. E vakavinavinakataki talega ena vuku ni tavi bibi ni kena maroroi tiko bulabula ena yabaki oqo.

Esa tu vakarau na Tabana Ni Wai mena vakacavari na cakacaka oqo ka tomani tiko ga na veiqaravi ni wai vinaka ena veivanua e Tamavua kei Colo I Suva.



VOTAI E 2 NA BILIONI NA DOLA KINA TABANA NI SARAVANUA



- Rydges mai vei ratou na Flour Mills of Fiji
- Days Inn by Whyndham
- Radisson Blu Mirage
- One n Only ena Yatu Yasawa Balaba lavu
- Namuka Bay Resort
- Nalagi Apartments ka vaka kina na
- Yatu Lau kei na Damodar Investment e Pacific Harbour.

E so talega na vanua ni saravanua e sa vakavinakataki tiko ena gauna nikua me vaka na

- Vatu Talei ena Sofitel Fiji
- Crowne Plaza
- Westin
- Hilton Garden Inn ena Koroturaga
- Cathay Hotel e Lautoka
- Paramount Hotel e Nadi ka vaka kina na
- Wyndham Graden e Wailoaloa Nadi.

Sa vakanuinui vnk tu na. Minisita nina tubu levu sara na veiqaravi ni Saravanua ena noda Vanua.

E vakaraitaka na Minisita Ni Saravanua o Hon Viliame Gavoka na kena marautaki nai Tuvatuva Vou Vakailavo ni Yabaki 2024-2025. Ni oti na kena votai kina nodratou tabana e \$2 na bilioni mena laveta cake tale kina na veiqaravi ka vaka na nodra gole mai vakalewelevu na saravanua ena noda vanua.

“E marautaki vakalevu na Budget oqo ni saravanua, na 40% GDP ni Matanitu e lako tiko mai na Saravanua , ia nai tuvatuva qo ena vukea sara vakalevu na kena cakacakataki na saravanua.

E vakaraitaka talega na Minisita ni Lavo o Hon Biman Prasad nisa tu nai tuvatuva ena kena tosoi cake nai vakatagedegede

ni veiqaravi. E vica sara na vanua esa navuci mena vakavinakataki ka vaka talega kina na kena tara tale e vica na Otele mena rawa ni tasova tiko ga mai vakalevu na Saravanua ena Noda Vanua.

E vica na vanua esa nanumi taumada mena tara vou kina e so na otela me vaka taka

VAKAVINAVINAKATAKA O HON SAUKURU NAI VOTAVOTA KINA NONA TABANA



Na Minista ni Veivakatoroicaketaki ena Noda Vei Taoni o Hon Maciu kei ira na Mata ni Veitaoni ena Noda Vanua

E vakaraitaka na Minisita ni Tabagone kei na Qito o Hon Jese Saukuru na nona marautaka enai votavota e ratou sa votai kina na nodratou tabana ni veiqaravi ena kena mai kacivaki nai tuvatuva vou vakailavo ni Matanitu 2024-2025.

“Keitou marautaka na tuvatuva vou vakailavo, me vaka nisa tubu mai na 20% , esa tomani tiko ga na kena tubu mai na gauna tekivu kina na veiqaravi 2022, esa

dua nai vakaraitaki vinaka vei keuitou , e vakaraitaki talelga ni Matanitu esa to-kona vakalevu na bibi ni qito ena noda vanua”.

E kuria o Hon Saukuru nai tuvatuva esa biu tu me baleta na veivakatoroicaketaki ni Tabagone ka vaka kina na Qito. Na qito edua na sala ena rawa ni nodra rawa ni gole yani Taikadua na Tabagone ena vuku ni sasaga vakaqito, mera na laki vakaraitaka na nodra taledi ka sala talega

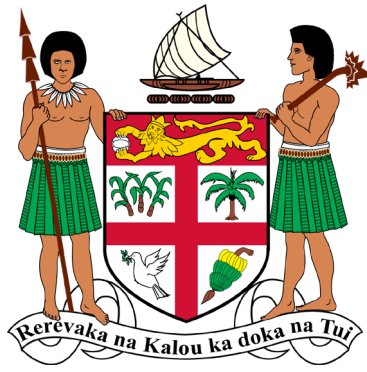
ni nodra rawa ni laki konitaraki ki vanua tani.

“Nai tuvatuva esa biu tiko oya na kena gadrevi mena vakavinakataki na veirara ni qito ena noda vanua, mena rawa ni vakayacori na qito ena veivanua mena rawa ‘ni tadola na nodra rai kei na gaunisala mera na muria”.

E tomana o Hon Saukuru na kena tomani tiko na vanua ni sisili e Lautoka(Swimmimg Pool) ni sa tu talega

e levu na cakacaka mena qaravi , nisa t enai tuvatuva ni Matanitu.

“E sa tu talega nai tuvatuva ena yabaki vou vakailavo oqo ena kena sagai na cakacaka vakavoleka kei ratou na Tabana Ni Lawa, me vaka sa tubu cake sara tiko na kisi ni basu lawa vei ira nai Tabagone, edua na tuvatuva mena rawa nira vakaitavi taki ira nai Tabagone ena qito kaq vakalailai na Basulawa”.



Eso na vanua ni rawa I lavo lelevu ena Otela e sana umani ena veirumu me vaka nisa dua tale ga na vakauos ni domo kina Tabana Ni Saravanua ena veivula. Oqo e dua talega naka bibi mena vukea cake na kena vakavinakataki na rumu ka vaka kina na kena tabana.

vanua, ea vakacali koya tale kina vakai koya. A tukuna tiko o koya na \$2.9b ka rawati mai na saravanua ena risiti ka kaya o Hon Nand ena \$2.9b, ni lailai sara na cau ni saravanua ki na bula vakailavo ni noda vanua. E sega ni dina oqo. E vakamacala cala. Baleta ni dua ga na tiki ni tabana ni saravanua na risiti. E levu tu na veibisinisi e kotai kina; otela, veila-koyaki kei na so tale, kei na levu taucoko ni cau ni tabana ni saravanua e voleka ki na 40 na pasede ni GDP.

Na inaki ni nona laveta cake mai kina o Hon Nand au veivakauqeti kina vei keda na lewe ni Bose Lawa me dau vakadeitaka na tukutuku eda dau mai cauraka ena loma ni vale oqo.

A vakaraitaka talega o Hon Nand na me vakaukauwa tgaki na ilavo ni noda vanua. **Turaga na Sivika**, ni da veivosakitaka na Vakaukauwataki keina Vakamalumalumutaki ni lavo, e sa dua dina na ka bibi. E bibi baleta ni rawa ni lai vakavuna e vuqa na cakacaka tale eso ka na rawa ni vakaleqa na bula vakailavo ni noda vanua.

Turaga na Sivika, sa tubu vakavina naka oti tu na noda ilavo ni veivadutai taki kei na ilavo ni so tale na matanitu tani ka ra na noda itokani ni veivoli ka dina ni veivakasesei na vakasama me Vakaukauwataki kei na Vakamalumalumutaki ni noda lavo. O ni kila na gauna e vakamalumalumutaki kina na noda ilavo ena 2009, a tubu sara vakalevu na isau ni yaya, ka taura e vica vata na yabaki na noda sotava tiko.

Kevaka eda sega ni kila na revurevu ni na Vakaukauwataki keina Vakamalumalumutaki ni lavo, e dodonu me kua ni vosa kina.

Ena vuku ni veika e cauraka o Hon Bala me baleta na dinau ena Baqe na Exim, au nanuma ni sega ni kilikili vei Hon Bala, e dua dina na veivakacacani vua na noda Liu ni Matanitu kei na Paraiminisita ni vanua ko Idia baleta na vakatulewa oqori me baleta na valenibula ni Super Speciality Hospital ka 100 na kena idavodavo a kacivaka na Matanitu Levu ni Idia vata kei na na Matanitu ni Viti me tara e dua na Valenibula Ni e 100 na kena idavodavo e Viti. Me qai lako mai ka kaya, oi oqo a veisautaki ena dinau ni Baqe ni Exim, au nanuma ni dodonu me vakadodonutaka o Hon Bala na ka oqori ena tau-daku ni palimedi. E cala na itukutuku oqori **Turaga na Sivika**.

Na veika e vakaraitaka o Hon Usumate me baleta na FNPF Pension kei na kudru mai Vatukoula. Oni kila ni ratou a yalataka ena 2015 ka dua e kaya ‘ Oi, era vinakata e vicasagavulu na milioni na dola. Au sega ni vakabauta ni ra a veivosaki tiko kei na duavata ena dina. Na matanitu oqo e walia na leqa oqo baleta ni vakarautaka na vatavata ni veitalanoa me ra vosa kina na isoqosoqo ki na matanitu me kilai kina na bibi ni kena wali na ka oqo.

Turaga na Sivika oqori na roko ni na nodra veiliutaki na Liuliu ni Matanitu baleta ni a sikovi ira ni bera na veidigidigi ka ra yalayala kina ni ra saga me wali na nodra leqa.

Keitou a nuitaki ira na Liuliu ni Unioni. Kevaka eda raica lesu na itukutuku ni Unioni ena vanua oqo, era sa iliuliu dau lewa vakamatau. E sega ni yaco na tiko yavavala ena nodratou kauta mai na lawa ka vauci ira na soqosoqo ni tamata cakacaka. E sa kau tani kece na lawa oqori, e sa vakarautaki e dua na vatavata, kau sega ni vakabauta ni oqo ena vakayagataki me iulubale, se me vatavata me wali kina na veileti tale eso.

Ena peniseni ni FNPF, na ka ga au via tukuna o ya eso na ka e cakava na matanitu vakaivalu e vakayacori ka sega kina na veitalanoa, ka sega ka sega kina na loloma, ka sega ni vakamacalataka vei ira na lewe ni vanua na vuna e vakayacori kina ka kauta mai na mosi kei na yaluma vei ira na lewe ni vanua ena loma ni 16 na yabaki sa oti Turaga na Sivika.

Na matanitu cockovata e sega ni yalataka me vakadodonutaka na cala kece sara a vakayacori, ia na vanua e tiko kina na kena sala, me rawa ni vakaraitaka kina na veiliutaki, era sa vakadodonutaki tiko Turaga na Sivika.

Au vakabauta ni oqo na itukutuku era sa ciqoma tiko na noda dauveivakarautaki vaka bisinisi kei ira na lewe ni vanua oqo. Na matanitu qo e sega ni ivakarere ia e sa bucina me walia na veileqa e so e ra se dodonu me ra wali ena vei yabaki sa sivi. Na vakabesebese mai Vatukoula kei na Peniseni ni Lavo Musuki e ivakaraitaki matata ni veika keitou sa vakayacora tiko.

Ena cau nei Hon Koya, e kila o koya ni keitou ciqoma na veivakadiloi ni keitou cakacaka tiko ena dina. Ena nona cau o Hon Naupoto ena ivakarau ni vuli, au duavata kei koya ni sa ka bibi sara na ivakarau ni vuli. Ia a dusia tiko o koya ni sikolasivi vou e yavutaki ena rawaka vaka vuli e na vakuwai ira na gonevuli era sega ni rawa ka vakavinaka ena vuli.

E sega ni dodonu na veika e vakaraitaki oya. Ni da veivosakitaka na ivakarau ni vuli, eda sa veivosakitaka tiko na kena vakavinakataki cake na ivakarau ni vuli kei na ituvaki ni veivakavulici. Ena loma ni 16 na yabaki sa oti e Suva-Nausori, ka kila vinaka tu oqo na Minisita ni vuli ena gauna ga keitou curu mai kina ena matanitu, e Tomika rawa na Minista na ivakarau ni vuli, ni ni sega ni veiraurau na levu ni qasenivuli kei na levu ni gonevuli ena loma ni noda veikoronivuli. Ena so na vanua, e 50 ki na 60 na gonevuli ena dua kalasi.

Keitou a tekivu me dua na Matanitu, ka cakacaka vata kei na Matanitu o Ositereia. Keitou sa toqa oti e dua na veidinadinati ka sa vakayacori tiko e dua na vadidikevi ena iwiliwili ni vale ni vuli kei na koronivuli ena gadrevi ena vanua vaka Suva kei Nausori. Oqori e dua na takete matata ena loma ni dua se rua na yabaki mei qo oya me tara eso tale na rumu ni vuli me rawa ni da vakalailaitaka ka vakavinakataki cake na kedra iwiliwili na vakaillesilesi ki na gonevuli.

Au vinakata me’u vakadeitaka vei ira kece na gonevuli era varaua vacakavara na Fomu 6 se fomu 7 ni tiko na tauyavu me baleti ira yadudua ena ituvatuva ni sikolasivi oqo. Kevaka era sega ni rawa

ni yaco ki na univesiti, kevaka era sega ni rawa ni laki vei qaravi vakavuniwai, idinia se vakasaqara e dua na koroi, e tiko na veika e rawa ni ra cakava, na kila ka e rawa ka ra na rawata na kena sikolasivi.

Me baleta na Pacific Polytech, Turaga na Sivika, na ivakarau ni nodra vosa tiko me vaka sara ga e tiko e dua na ka vei Biman Prasad kei Polytech. Au kaya ni o Hon Hem Chand ea cakacaka mai na Tabacacakak ni Vululi, e kila o koya na kena icakacaka. Era sa vakaivolataki ka vakadonui na isoqosoqo kece ni vuli torocake mai na dua na Matabose ni Vululi Torocake e Viti. Era a volayaca kina Pacific Polytech ena yabaki 2021, ka ra sa cakava tiko e dua na cakacaka vinaka ena nodra vakaisosomitaka na vei Koroni vuli ni Vululi Cakacaka kara a tauyavutaki ena matanotu sa oti ka ra sa vakalusi kina e \$30m **Turaga na Sivika**. A lusi wale na sasaga oya.

E tukuna o Hon Usumate na vakailavotaki ni FNU. Me’u vakamacalataka mada na sala e vakadeitaki kina na vakailavotaki me baleta na isoqosoqo ni vuli torocake taucoko oka kina o ira na ka lalai me vakataka na Sangam Nursing School, kei na so tale.

Na nodra vakatutu na isoqosoqo oqo era sega ni lako mai ki na Tabacacakaka ni Veika Vakailavo. E lako ki na Tabacacakaka ni Vululi ka lako curuma na nondra Valenivolavola na Minista ni Vululi ki na Matabose ni Vululi Torocake. Na Matabose ni Vululi Torocake e dau vakadikeva, vakatututaka, sa tiko na kena iwalewale ka na qai yaco mai ki na Minisitiri ni Veikavakailavo. Na Minisitiri ni Vakailavo e sega mada ga ni rawa ni vakalevutaka, e na rawa walega ni vakalailaitaka ni ivotavoita vakailavo.

Keitou a vakalailaitaka na ivotavota vaka ilavo, na kena sa vakalesui mai, na levu ni ilavo eratou a sega ni sauma kina USP, ka keitou sa sauma oti e \$10m ena yabaki sa oti, \$20m ena iTuvatuva Vakailavo sa oti, ena iTuvatuva Vakailavo oqo era vinakata me ra toso cake ia e vakalailaitaki ki na \$5m walega. E vinakata o Polytech e \$9m, oqori e vakalailaitaki ki na \$5m.

O koya gona ya Turaga na Sivika, na ivakaraitaki ni votai ni lavo mai vei ratou na Matabose ni Vululi Torocake, a vosa kina o Hon Usumate me baleta na vakalailaitaki ni votavota kina FNU, ea vakalailaitaki na ivotavoya vakailavo ena veigauna sa oti, ena so na gauna e toso cake na ivotavota vakailavo, e sega ni kena ibalebale ni yabaki mai oqo sa na sega na ivotavota nei FNU se Polytech me na vakalevutaki se vakalailaitaki na kena ivotavota me vaka na Sangam Nursing School. Ea sega ni kerea me levu cake na yabaki sa oti ia keitou a tosoya cake baleta ni gadrevi me levu na nasi ena noda vanua.

Era yalodei na dauveivakarautaki vakabisini, kau gadreva me’u tukuna mada eso na ka oqo. Ena imatai ni gauna qo, au nanuma ni oti e vuqa na yabaki ni nodra yalodei tale na dauveivakarautaki vakabisini **Turaga na Sivika** e sega ni bau vakatauvatani keina dua tale na gauna rawa, me ra vakayagataka ga na nodra vosa. E dua na kabani ni vakatubuilavo ena Veivoli ni ni Qele kei na Vale e vuravura na JLL, e kaya: “Ni vakatau-

vatani kei na vuqa tale na makete, sa tu ga na yavu ni kena vakayagataki o Viti ka sa tubu cake tikoga na kaukauwa ni tubu vakailavo ka rairai totoka sara ena ituvaki ni bula ni vakatubuilavo.”

Na ika otioti ga ni ka au via vakaraitaka ni bera ni’u tinia o **Turaga na Sivika**.

E ratou kailavaka ena domoilevu se cava e keitou sab au rawata ena loma ni ‘18 na vula sa oti? Na 18 na vula e gauna balavu. Na Liuliu ni Matanitu ena gauna ni vunau vaka politiki au nanuma ni a sega ni vakayagataka na veivosa oqo ia au na vakayagataka, e sega ni rawa, e sega ni rawa, kina na dua na matanitu mena vakavinakataka na veika ka e leqa tu se ena loma ga ni 18 na vula. Oya na ka dina, Turaga na Sivika.

Era veidokai vakalevu ena nodra vosa na Liuliu ni Matanitu. O au ena sega soti sara vei au na veidokai vaka o ya. Ni oti e 18 na vula ka ra vakaraitaka kece na noqu itokani ena yasana ni vale oqo ka ra vakamacalataka vakamatata sara na veika sa cakava na matanitu oqo ena loma ni 18 na vula oya. Keitou sa vakatora na matanitu oqo ena dua na sala ki na bula tudei, bula vinaka kei na bula sautu o Turaga na Sivika ena vei lawatu keitou sa biuta vata mai.

Au taura na gauna oqo me’u tauca edua na vakavinavinaka ki vua na Paraiminista Honourable Sitiveni rabuka ena nona veivakabauti ka ra lesi au kina qarava na Minisitirib ni Veikavakailavo ena loma ni Matanitu Cokovata. Au vakavinavinakat-aki koya ena nona veiliutaki raiyawa kau vakadeitaka vua na noqu veitokoni ni dei ka sega ni na yavalati rawa.

Au vakavinavinaka talega vei ira kece na noqu itokani ena Bose Yaco ena nodra veitokoni ena gauna taucoko e vakarautaki tiko kina na iTuvatuva Vakailavo oqo.

Au dau taura talega na gauna oqo me’u vakavinavinakataki ira kece na ivakaile-silesi era cakacakataka na iTuvatuva Vakailavo oqo ena loma ni Minisitiri ni Veika Vakailavo, Na Tabana ni Kasitaba keina iVakacavacava kei na veitokoni vakalawa e vakarautaka na valenivolavola ni Daunivakasala Vakalawa ni Matanitu.

Vinaka vakalevu Turaga na Sivika.

GADREVI NA VAKATUBU BISINISI ENA NODA VANUA



Na Minisita ni Veivoli, Vakaturu Bisinisi kei na vakau iTukutuku, Hon Manoa Kamikamica ena kena laki vakananumi na siga ni Bisinisi ena Noda Vanua (MSME Day) ena Loma ni Yasana o Namosi.

Ena sa navuca tiko na Matanitu na kena biu nai tuvatuva mena tokoni kina na vakaduri Bisinisi ena noda vanua. Oqo na veika e vakaraitaka na iVukevuke ni iliuliu ni Matanitu ka Minisita talega ni Veivoli, Vakaturu Bisinisi kei na vakau iTukutuku, Hon Manoa Kamikamica ena nodra laki vakaitavi ena siga ka vakananumi kina na me baleta na vei Bisinisi ena noda vanua ka laki vakayacori enai sevu ni gauna kina Yasana o Namosi. Ena loma ni 6 na vula sa sivi, na Matanitu Cokovata esa vakanamata

ena kena vakadeitaki nai tuvatuva ni kena tuvani na veivakatoroicaketaki kina veitabana mena rawa ni matata ni Tabana ni Veibisinisi Lalai (MSME) sa tosoya tiko ga na rawaka ena tabana vakailavo kece sara. “Nikua e dua na siga namaki ena kena vakararamataki mai nai tavi bibi ni kena tubu na rawaka vakailavo ena veibisinisi. E vakarautaki e dua nai tuvatuva ena kena vakarautaki ka vakaraitaki talega na yalo ni dau caka Bisinisi, ena kena sotavi eso na dredre ka tomani tiko ga na rawaka ena noda tuvatuva vakailavo.”

“Na ulutaga ni MSME e vakamacalataki talega kina na SDG 1. Na MSME ena rawa ni vakarautaka na cakacaka ka vaka kina na kena vakatoroicaketaki na vakaturu I lavo ena noda vanua. E na noda vuravura, na MSME e rawta e 90% na bisinisi, 60% na veivakacacataki, kei na 50 % na GDP”. E vakabibi taka talega o Hon Kamikamica ni gauna oqo sa tiko ena 18% na GDP, ka vakanuini tiko nina 10 na yabaki mai oqo sana tubu cake kina 30%. E na rawarawa kevaka meda tadolava e levu na veigaunisala ni veise-mati kina vei bisinisi. Mai na Tabana

ni Veivoli, Vakaturu Bisinisi kei na vakau iTukutuku esa rauta ni 75 kina 80 na milioni e votai kina veiqaravi ni MSME. E vakaraitaka talega na nona vakavinavinaka o Hon Kamikamica ki vei ratou na Fiji Commerce kei na Employers Federation kei na MSME Council ena vuku ni kena tutaki tiko na sasga yaga oqo ka nuitaka ni rabailevu sara na nodratou veiqaravi ena nodra vukei na lewenivanua e Viti.

टुरिज़्म व्यवसाय
सै जुड़े लोग रिकोड
तोड़ मुनाफा कमा
रहे हैं जबकि फीजी
इस साल एक
बिलियन टुरिस्टों
का स्वागत करेगा



पूरी कहानी पृष्ठ 3 पर

चीनी व्यवसाय
को सक्षम बनाना,
चीनी, मल्टी
एथनिक अफेयस
मंत्री माननीय चरण
जित सिंह की प्रथम
प्राथमिकता है



पूरी कहानी पृष्ठ 6 पर

सरकार ने इस
राष्ट्रीय बजट में
सबसे ज़्यादा शिक्षा
क्षेत्र के लिए सात
सौ मिलियन डोलर
से ज़्यादा अलग
किया है



पूरी कहानी पृष्ठ 7 पर

सरकारी कर्मचारियों की वेतन वृद्धि



उप प्रधान मंत्री तथा फायनेन्स मंत्री माननीय विमान प्रसाद हालही संसद में जवाब देते हुए चित्र: संसद भवन

रोनल देव

सरकारी कर्मचारियों के लिए खुश खबरी है क्योंकि उनके वेतन में भारी वृद्धि करने की घोषणा की गई है। उप प्रधान मंत्री तथा फायनेन्स मंत्री माननीय प्रोफेसर विमान प्रसाद ने 2024-2025 राष्ट्रीय बजट, जो कि गठबंधन सरकार का दूसरा बजट है की घोषणा करते हुए आम किया कि लगभग बयालिस (42) हजार सरकारी कर्मचारियों की जेब में पचासी (85) मिलियन डोलर जाएगा जहाँ सेलेरी बेन्ड के आधार पर उनके वेतन में सात प्रतिशत से लेकर बीस प्रतिशत तक की वृद्धि की जाएगी। इस साल के राष्ट्रीय बजट का मुख्य विषय है, आर्थिक रूप से स्थिर, सुरक्षित और टिकाऊ फीजी। मंत्री प्रसाद ने कहा कि एक स्वतंत्र, पेशेवर और अच्छी तरह से सुसज्जित सरकारी सेवा महत्वपूर्ण

है। मंत्री प्रसाद ने कहा कि यह दुख की बात थी कि पिछले कुछ सालों से सरकारी कर्मचारियों का वेतन बढ़ाया नहीं गया था जिससे उन्हें बिगड़ती रोजगार स्थितियों का सामना करना पड़ा। उन्होंने कहा कि सरकारी कर्मचारियों ने पर्याप्त ट्रेनिंग, क्षमता निर्माण में पूँजी लगाने की कमी तथा खराब उत्तराधिकार योजना का भी सामना किया। ओ.एम.आर.एस नियम के चलते कई सरकारी कर्मचारी पद उन्नित से वंचित रह गए जबकि सरकारी सेवा में जिनके पास कोई अनुभव नहीं था को उँचे पद देने के लिए प्राथमिकता दी गई थी। इस साल पहली अगस्त से सरकारी कर्मचारियों का सालाना वेतन सात से दस प्रतिशत तक बढ़ाया जाएगा जबकि सप्ताहिक वेतन पाने वाले सरकारी कर्मचारियों का वेतन दस

से बीस प्रतिशत तक बढ़ाया जाएगा। सरकारी कर्मचारियों के वेतन में वृद्धि से सरकार को अतिरिक्त छियासठ (66) मिलियन डोलर का खर्च बैठेगा। सरकार चाहती है कि देश में सभी मजदूरों को न्यायपूर्ण ढंग से वेतन मिले। फायनेन्स मंत्री ने कहा कि अच्छी तरह विचार करने के बाद सरकार ने मिनिमम वर्डज दर को पाँच डोलर प्रति घण्टा करने की घोषणा की है। लेकिन यह वृद्धि दो भागों में होगी जहाँ इस साल पहली अगस्त से मिनिमम वर्डज बढ़ाकर चार डोलर पचास सेन्ट्स किया जाएगा और अगले साल पहली अप्रैल को मिनिमम वर्डज फिर बढ़ाकर पाँच डोलर प्रति घण्टा कर दिया जाएगा। ऐसा इसलिए होगा ताकि मजदूर मालिक इस वृद्धि से होने वाले असर को सह सकें। मंत्री प्रसाद ने कहा कि

रोज़गार मंत्रालय निगरानी रखेगा कि मजदूरों को उनके हक का वेतन मिले। “हम सरकारी कर्मचारियों के लिए मेडिकल इंशूरन्स स्कीम शुरू करने पर विचार कर रहे हैं। सबसे बड़े मजदूर मालिक होने के नाते, इस स्कीम से सरकार को काफी खर्च बैठेगा इसलिए हमें सावधानी से विचार करना पड़ेगा कि यह कैसे काम करेगा और शुरूआत करने के लिए सही समय कब होगा। हम जेनरल ओडस पर पुनः विचार कर रहे हैं ताकि सरकारी कर्मचारियों को मिल रहे अलावन्स तथा काम करने की शर्तों पर फिर से विचार किया जा सके। मंत्री प्रसाद ने कहा कि सही दिशा में एक बड़ा कदम उठाया गया है लेकिन सब कुछ एक या दो बजट में नहीं हो सकता है।

देश में मजदूरों का वेतन बढ़ाने की घोषणा की गई

रोनल देव

सरकार चाहती है कि देश में हमारे सभी मजदूरों को उचित वेतन मिले। राष्ट्रीय बजट की घोषणा करते हुए उप प्रधान मंत्री तथा फायनेन्स मंत्री माननीय विमान प्रसाद ने कहा कि 'राष्ट्रीय मिनिमम वर्ज' को बढ़ाकर पाँच डोलर प्रति घण्टा करने का फैसला किया गया जब विशेषज्ञों का स्वतंत्र पेनल ने इसपर पुनः विचार किया, मजदूर मालिकों, युनियन, सरकार तथा अन्य साझेदारों के साथ कई वार्ताएँ हुई। इसे दो भागों में लागू किया जाएगा जहाँ इस साल पहली अगस्त से 'राष्ट्रीय मिनिमम वर्ज' को चार डोलर से बढ़ाकर चार डोलर पचास सेंट्स किया जाएगा और अगले साल

पहली अगस्त से इसमें पचास सेंट्स की और वृद्धि होगी जहाँ ये पाँच डोलर प्रति घण्टा हो जाएगा। उदाहरण के तौर पर एक केशियर जिन्हें अभी \$4.44 प्रति घण्टा का वेतन मिल रहा है, पहली अगस्त से उनका वेतन \$4.94 प्रति घण्टा हो जाएगा और अगले साल पहली अप्रैल से उनका वेतन बढ़ाकर \$5.44 प्रति घण्टा कर दिया जाएगा। घरों तथा इमारतों का निर्माण करने वाले व्यवसाय में काम करने वाले फोमन का वेतन अगर \$6.54 प्रति घण्टा है तो अगले साल पहली अप्रैल से इसे बढ़ाकर \$7.54 प्रति घण्टा कर दिया जाएगा। मंत्री प्रसाद ने सभी मजदूर मालिकों से माँग की है कि वे ध्यान में रखें कि उनके मजदूरों को सही मिनिमम वर्ज मिले तथा रोजगार मंत्रालय कड़ी निगरानी रखेगा कि इसका

पालन हो। 'हमें पता है कि कुछ मजदूर मालिकों पर अतिरिक्त आर्थिक बोझ पड़ेगा तथा हम उन मजदूर मालिकों द्वारा सामना की जा रही चुनौतियों का समाधान ढूँढने में ज़रूर सहायता करेंगे। लेकिन हमारा यह भी इरादा है कि नया मिनिमम वर्ज से उत्पादकता में सुधार होगा और कम वेतन वाले कर्मचारियों को उनकी उपस्थिति में सुधार करने और अधिक उत्पादक बनने के लिए अधिक कौशल और अनुभव प्राप्त करके उच्च आमदनी की आकांक्षा करने के लिए अधिक प्रोत्साहन प्रदान करके कर्मचारी नौकरी पर अनुपस्थिति को कम करेंगे। कई सरकारें आई और गई लेकिन बिना किसी सामाधान के वतुकउला गोल्ड माईन के मजदूरों की हड़ताल जारी रही। गठबंधन सरकार, फीजी ट्राईड्स युनियन कोन्ग्रेस

तथा फीजी माईन वर्कर्स युनियन आखिर में इस नतीजे पर पहुँचे कि मजदूरों को 9.2 मिलियन डोलर का हरजाना दिया जाए। हड़ताल पर गए तीन सौ अड़सठ 368 मजदूरों में से हर एक को पचीस हजार डोलर भरा जाएगा, पहला दस हजार डोलर इसी बजट से दिया जाएगा और बाकी पंद्रह हजार डोलर अगले साल 2025-2026 बजट से भरा जाएगा। उप प्रधान मंत्री प्रसाद ने एफ टी यू सी के जेनरल सकेटरी फिलिक्स एन्थनी को धन्यवाद दिया है जिन्होंने खान के मजदूरों पर कई सालों से हो रहे अत्याचार को खत्म करने के लिए सरकार को अपना पूरा समर्थन दिया। सरकार, वोटो अथोरिटी ओफ फीजी तथा उनके कर्मचारियों के बीच चल रहे विवाद को भी सुलझाने के लिए सहमत हुई है।

फीजी नेशनल प्रोविडन्ड फंड का दर सामान्य हुआ

संसद सदस्यों के वेतन वृद्धि से पहले स्पष्टीकरण दी गई



फीजी नेशनल प्रोविडन्ड फंड के सदस्य, सेवा हासिल करते हुए चित्र: प्रदान किया गया



संसद सदस्य हाल में संसदीय बैठक में हिस्सा लेते हुए चित्र: प्रदान किया गया

रोनल देव

देश में मजदूरों का भविष्य सुरक्षित करने के लिए सरकार ने फीजी नेशनल प्रोविडन्ड फंड में जमा होने वाले दरों को वापस अट्ठारह प्रतिशत कर दिया है। "गठबंधन सरकार ने ऐसा वादा किया था और वादा पूरा हुआ है।" फायनेन्स मंत्री माननीय विमान प्रसाद ने बजट में घोषणा की कि बेहतरीन आर्थिक प्रदर्शन के कारण, एफ एन पी एफ बोर्ड ने तय किया कि इस साल तीस जून को बन्द होने वाले आर्थिक वर्ष पर फंड के सदस्यों के खाते में आठ प्रतिशत ब्याज जोड़ा जाएगा। पहली जुलाई को फंड के चार लाख सत्रह हजार 417,000 सदस्यों के खाते में पिछले बीस सालों के मिलान में सबसे ज्यादा ब्याज के रूप में 562.2 मिलियन डोलर जमा किया गया है। उप प्रधान मंत्री और फायनेन्स मंत्री ने एफ एन पी एफ बोर्ड, मेनेजमन्ट तथा उनके मेहनती कर्मचारियों को इस भारी

उपलब्धि के लिए बधाई दी। उन्होंने कहा कि एफ एन पी एफ एक्ट में बदलाव किया जा रहा है ताकि बोर्ड में त्रिपक्षीय भावना लाई जा सके। ये कानून असर में आने के बाद बोर्ड में मजदूरों का एक प्रतिनिधी और मजदूर मालिकों का भी एक प्रतिनिधी शामिल करने की ज़रूरत होगी। इससे इस बात का ध्यान रखा जाएगा कि एफ एन पी एफ के शासन और रणनीतिक मामलों में मजदूरों और मजदूर मालिकों को बोलने का ज़्यादा अधिकार होगा। एफ.एन.पी.एफ देश की सबसे बड़ी आर्थिक संस्था है जो सदस्यों के खून-पसीने की कमाई की देखभाल करती है। कुछ मजदूरों के लिए उनकी यही एकमात्र बचत है। इसीलिए हमारे सदस्यों के बचत की देखभाल सही लोगों के हाथ में जाना चाहिए। ऐसा इसलिए होगा जब हम सही समय पर, सही जगह पर पूँजी लगाएँगे जिससे ब्याज के तौर पर लौटने वाले पैसे से फंड के सदस्यों का लगातार फायदा हो।

रोनल देव

उप प्रधान मंत्री तथा फायनेन्स मंत्री माननीय विमान प्रसाद ने राष्ट्रीय बजट की घोषणा के बाद यह स्पष्ट किया कि संसद सदस्यों के वेतन वृद्धि से सरकार को 4.2 मिलियन डोलर का खर्च बैठेगा न कि 8.1 मिलियन डोलर जैसा कि समाचार माध्यमों में रिपोर्ट की गई थी। अगर कोविड-19 महामारी के दौरान संसद सदस्यों के वेतन में जो बीस प्रतिशत कटौती की थी, उसी ठीक की जाए जो सरकारी खजाने को 1.4 का झटका लगेगा। पिछले आठ सालों में यह पहली वृद्धि रही है जबकि माना जा रहा है कि मंत्री मण्डल के कई सदस्यों को प्रति साल के लिए एक प्रतिशत की वेतन वृद्धि मिली। उधर प्रधान मंत्री का वेतन तीन प्रतिशत से घटाया जाएगा और फायनेन्स मंत्री का वेतन सत्रह प्रतिशत से घटाया जाएगा। फायनेन्स मंत्री ने कहा कि हाल ही संसद में संसद सदस्यों का वेतन

बढ़ाने पर जो मत लिया गया था से कई लोग खुश नहीं हैं। हम समाचार माध्यम, सौशल मिडिया, विरोध दर्शाने की योजना तथा पेटिशन के द्वारा उठाई गई आवाज़ को अनदेखा नहीं कर रहे हैं। उनके अनुसार सच बात तो यह है कि अगर वेतन वृद्धि की बात अच्छी तरह की गई होती तो आम जनता से इसका समर्थन ज़रूर मिलता। उप प्रधान मंत्री प्रसाद इस बात से राज़ी हुए कि संसद सदस्यों के वेतन वृद्धि का फैसला खुद संसद सदस्यों को नहीं लेना चाहिए बल्कि यह काम किसी योग्य और स्वतंत्र उपब्लिधियाँ कमिटी द्वारा होनी चाहिए। एक गठबंधन सरकार होने के नाते हम इस बात से सहमत हैं कि भविष्य में ज़रूर एक योग्य और स्वतंत्र कमिटी होगी तथा आम जनता से सलाह मशवरत किया जाएगा। इस स्वतंत्र कमिटी के द्वारा संसद सदस्यों का वेतन तय करने का यह सबसे पारदर्शी तरीका है।

देश में पूँजी लगाने की दिलचस्पी दिखाने वालों को धन्यवाद

रेनल देव

उप प्रधान मंत्री तथा फायनेन्स मंत्री माननीय बिमान प्रसाद ने राष्ट्रीय बजट की घोषणा करते हुए कहा कि फीजी में पुँजी लगाने के लिए सरकार स्थानीय पूँजीपतियों तथा फीजी के भुतपुर्व नागरिकों की दिलचस्पी को देखकर बहुत खुश है। कई पुँजीपतियों ने देश में होटल की योजना में पुँजी लगाने में दिलचस्पी

दिखाई है। इन योजनाओं का मूल्य कम से कम दो बिलियन डोलर है। 'हम सभी को बढ़ती अर्थ-व्यवस्था पर अपना ध्यान केन्द्रित करना चाहिए क्यों कि भारी आर्थिक विकास के द्वारा ही हम अच्छे वेतन वाली नौकरियाँ पैदा कर पाएँगे, लोगों का जीवनस्तर सुधारेंगे, रास्तें, बिजली तथा पानी की सेवाएँ सुधारेंगे तथा आखिरकार देश पर लदा कर्ज चुकाएँगे। उधर, व्यक्तिगत रिमिटन्स पिछले साल

बढ़कर 1.25 बिलियन डोलर हो गया जिसमें बीस प्रतिशत की वृद्धि देखी गई। ये वो पैसा है जो विदेश में नौकरी कर रहे या बसे लोग फीजी में अपने चाहने वालों को पैसे भेजते हैं। अपने चाहने वालों को सहारा देने के लिए सरकार ने इन लोगों को धन्यवाद दिया है। फायनेन्स मंत्री ने कहा कि रिमिटन्स, देश की अर्थ-व्यवस्था में मुख्य योगदान देता है, जिससे हज़ारों परिवारों की जिन्दगी चलती है तथा

अनुमान है कि रिमिटन्स में वृद्धि होती रहेगी। उन्होंने कहा कि हमारी विदेशी भंडार स्थिति लगभग 3.3 बिलियन डॉलर पर मजबूत बनी हुई है, जो पाँच महीने से ज़्यादा समय के लिए आयात करने के बराबर है। एक्सचेंज रेट स्थिर है। व्यापार प्रवाह बढ़ रहा है। लिक्विडिटी का स्थर लगभग 1.9 बिलियन डॉलर है जिससे ब्याज का दर कम रखा गया है।

टूरिज़्म व्यवसाय से जुड़ने वाले स्वास्थ्य मंत्रालय के बजट
रिकोड तोड़ मुनाफा कमा रहे हैं- में वृद्धि करने से लोगों को
इस साल फीजी एक बिलियन बेहतर सेवा मिलने की उम्मीद
टुरिस्टों का स्वागत करेगा

रोनल देव

सरकार ने स्वास्थ्य के क्षेत्र के लिए पाँच सौ चालिस मिलियन डोलर अलग किया है ताकि देश में बिगड़ती स्वास्थ्य सुविधाओं तथा स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं को सुधारा जा सके। पिछले साल के बजट में पाँच सौ मिलियन डोलर निकाला गया था जिसमें एक सौ मिलियन की वृद्धि हुई थी लेकिन इस साल इसमें चालिस मिलियन डोलर और जोड़ा गया है। इस पाँच सौ चालिस मिलियन डोलर में से चार सौ पचास मिलियन डोलर, स्वास्थ्य मंत्रालय को दिया गया है और नब्बे मिलियन डोलर बा और लौतोका अस्पतालों के संचालन के लिए निकाला गया है।

फायनेन्स मंत्री ने कहा कि पिछले कई सालों से स्वास्थ्य क्षेत्र को नज़रअंदाज़ किया गया था इसलिए हमें इस क्षेत्र में लगातार पुँजी लगाने और ध्यान देने की ज़रूरत है। इसमें समय लगेगा लेकिन हम धीरे-धीरे प्रगति कर रहे हैं। उन्होंने स्वास्थ्य सेवा प्रदान करने वाले पेशेवरों को धन्यवाद दिया जिन्होंने चीजों को ठीक करने में लगनशीलता दिखाई। उन्होंने कहा कि सरकार इस दिशा में और भी संसाधन लगाने के लिए तैयार है तथा सरकार के विकास साझेदारों ने इस यात्रा के लिए अपने सर्वोच्च समर्थन का आश्वासन दिया है। ओस्ट्रेलिया की सरकार के साथ मिलकर, सरकार सूवा के सी डबलू एम अस्पताल की फिर से विकसित करने या खिस्काने की योजना पर काम करेगी। लम्बे समय की योजना में एक अत्याधुनिक राष्ट्रीय रेफरल अस्पताल का निर्माण शामिल है जो आधुनिक, मजबूत तथा मरीजों पर केंद्रित होगा। इस साल मार्च में ओस्ट्रेलियन सरकार ने सी डबलू एम अस्पताल के संसाधन योजना के लिए पंद्रह मिलियन डोलर प्रदान किया था। सरकार अब अपने अन्य साझेदार जैसे कि अईशियन डिवेलोपमन्ट बैंक तथा वोल्ड बैंक से भी इस योजना में आर्थिक सहायता के लिए बातें कर रही है।

लिए भारतीय सरकार को धन्यवाद दिया। इस बारे में भारी प्रगति हुई है जहाँ हमने फीजी नेशनल युनिवर्सिटी के पीछे एक ज़मीन देखी है। इसका निर्माण से पहले वाले कार्य भलि प्रकार से जारी है। कुछ निजी स्वास्थ्य संसाधन जैसे कि पॅसिफिक स्पेशलिस्ट हेल्थ केंटर तथा श्री सत्य साईं संजीविनी चिल्ड्रन्स अस्पताल में भारी पूँजी लगाई गई है, जिसके लिए सरकार इस बजट में चार मिलियन डॉलर का योगदान दे रही है। स्वास्थ्य सेवा में सुधार लाने के लिए निजी और सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य केंद्र साथ मिलकर काम कर रहे हैं। पिछले बजट में इसकी शुरुआत हुई थी कि जिन लोगों की सालाना आमदनी तीस हजार डॉलर से कम है वे जेनरल प्रैकटीशनर्स से मुफ्त में सेवा हासिल कर सकते हैं। जो लोग सौशल वेल्फेयर स्कीम के नीचे हैं, मुफ्त दवा वाली स्कीम तथा जिन्हें किडनी डायलीसिस के लिए सब्सिडी मिलती है को यह सहायता मिलती रहेगी। सरकार ने अभी तक इन सेवाओं के लिए उन्नीस मिलियन डॉलर भर दिया है तथा अनुमान है कि इसमें पाँच मिलियन डॉलर की वृद्धि होगी। जो लोग किडनी डायलीसिस पर हैं के लिए सरकार ने तीन मिलियन डॉलर अलग किया है ताकि डायलीसिस के मरीज़ एक वक्त के लिए एक सौ अस्सी डॉलर की सहायता ले सकें। पिछले बजट में इसे एक सौ पचास डॉलर से बढ़ाकर एक सौ अस्सी डॉलर किया गया था। दवा तथा चिकित्सा उपकरण खरीदने के लिए सरकार ने बजट में छियाब्बे 96 मिलियन डॉलर निकाला है। हमारे अस्पतालों में उपकरण, सुईयाँ तथा चिकित्सा उपकरणों की समय पर सप्लाई करने के लिए लगातार सुधार की ज़रूरत है। निर्माणकार्य तथा सुधारकार्य के लिए बारह मिलियन डॉलर अलग किया गया है जिससे लम्बासा अस्पताल के अन्दर काम किया जाएगा, शहरी और ग्रामीण अस्पताल, हेल्थ सेंटर तथा नेसिंग स्टेशन पर सुधारकार्य, सावूसावू स्वास्थ्य सुविधा पर मरम्मत तथा तामावूआ में नया रिहैबिलिटेशन सेंटर बनाया जाएगा। इसके अलावा 3.8 मिलियन डॉलर खास रूप से देश भर के स्वास्थ्य सुविधाओं पर छोटे-मोटे मरम्मत के लिए निकाला गया है।



ट्रिजिम व्यवसाय से जड़े साझेदार रिकॉर्ड तोड़ मनाफा कमा रहे हैं

चित्र: ट्रिज़िम फीजी

रेनल देव

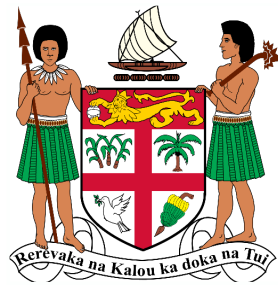
टूरिज़्म व्यवसाय फल फूल रहा है जहाँ पिछले साल नौ लाख उनतीस हज़ार (929,000) टूरिस्ट फीजी घूमने आए थे। हमारी अंतराष्ट्रीय हवाई कम्पनी, होटल मालिक तथा टूरिज़्म व्यवसाय के अन्य साझेदार रिकोर्ड तोड़ मुनाफा कमा रहे हैं। इससे अन्य क्षेत्रों पर सकारात्मक असर पड़ा जहाँ घरेलू खरीदबीन में वृद्धि हुई, नौकरियाँ पैदा हुई तथा कर बटोरने में वृद्धि देखी गई। व्यवसाय उसी गति से आगे बढ़ रहा है जबकि इस साल के प्रथम पाँच महीनों में टूरिस्टों की संख्या में सात प्रतिशत की वृद्धि देखी गई है। इसके चलते कई नई होटल योजनाओं की घोषणा की गई है जैसे कि एफ एम एफ गुप द्वारा रायजस, विंडम द्वारा डैस इन, रेडिसन ब्लू मिरज, यसावा गुप में वन एन्ड ओनली, नमूका बाए रिज़ोट, नलांगी अपार्टमन्ट्स और यातू लाउ तथा पेसिफिक हावा में दामोदर इवेस्टमन्ट। जिन होटल का निर्माणकार्य जारी है में, सोफिटेल फीजी द्वारा वातू तलेई, काउन प्लाज़ा, वेस्ट इन तथा सूवा में हिल्टन

गार्डन, राकीराकी में वानानावू बीच रिज़ोट, लौतोका स्थित कथै होटल को फिर से विकसित करना, नान्दी में पारामाउन्ट होटल तथा वाईलोआलोआ नान्दी में विंडम गार्डन।

टूरिज़्म तथा सिविल अविएशन मंत्रालय को राष्ट्रीय बजट में 68.8 मिलियन डॉलर दिया गया है। इसमें से टूरिज़्म फीजी ग्रान्ट के रूप में चौवालिस (44) मिलियन डॉलर अलग किया गया है तथा वनुआ लेवू में फीजी टूरिज़्म डिवेलोपमन्ट प्रोग्राम के लिए 13.6 मिलियन डॉलर निकाला गया है।

फायनेन्स मंत्री ने कहा कि सरकार, इन पुँजीपतियों की योजनाओं को स्वीकृति दिलाने के लिए स्वीकृति वाली आईजन्सियों के साथ मिलकर काम कर रही है जबकि मौसम ठीक होने से अन्य योजनाएं तेजी से आगे बढ़ रही है।

वर्तमान में कम व्याज वाला वातावरण भी इन भारी योजनाओं का समर्थन करने के लिए अनुकूल है। इमिग्रेशन सेवाओं में सुधार लाने तथा हुनर निखारने वाली ट्रेडिंग प्रदान करने में पूँजी लगाने से वे मजदूरों की समस्याएँ सुलझाने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं।



2024 -2025 राष्ट्रीय बजट

जवाब

उप प्रधान मंत्री, फायनेन्स मंत्री, स्ट्रेटिजिक प्लेनिंग, राष्ट्रीय विकास और आकड़ा मंत्री माननीय प्रोफेसर बिमान प्रसाद उत्तर देने का अधिकार बुद्धवार दस जुलाई 2024

परिचय में श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, मैं 2024-2025 राष्ट्रीय बजट पर उत्तर देने के अधिकार के निमित्त उठ खड़ा हुआ हूँ।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, पिछले दो दिनों से मैं सरकार और विपक्ष की ओर से बजट पर योगदान ध्यान से सुन रहा था। मैं एका-एक बीच में जितना बोलना चाहता था उतना बोला नहीं। मैं माननीय प्रधान मंत्री, सरकारी पक्ष में अपने सभी साथियों को उनके योगदान के लिए धन्यवाद देना चाहता हूँ। मैं विपक्ष के नेता तथा सभी स्वतंत्र संसद सदस्यों को बजट का समर्थन करने के लिए धन्यवाद देना चाहता हूँ तथा कई अन्य सदस्यों ने संतुलित बयान दिया और कुछ ने अपनी कला दिखाई। श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय विपक्ष में कुछ वफादारों के लिए मैं ऐसा नहीं कह सकता लेकिन श्रीमान स्पीकर यह जरूर दिख रहा है कि जब हमें बोलने की आज़ादी मिलती है, अगर कोई डर या कोई मजबूरी न हो तो हम रचनात्मकता की सोचक को उजागर करते हैं और हम अधिक ईमानदार तरीके से सोचते हैं।

एक सरकार होने के नाते हमें बहुत गर्व है कि हमने देश में ऐसे वातावरण की व्यवस्था की है, लोगों में भरोसा पैदा किया है, अपने पूँजीपतियों के लिए, सभी के लिए कि वे अपने मन की बात खुलकर करें, सरकार की आलोचना करें तथा आगे बढ़ने में सहयोग करें।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, माननीय संजय किरपाल ने अपने भाषण में एक दिलचस्प बात कही कि पिछली सरकार में मंत्रीमण्डल के सदस्यों को बजट भाषण से एक घण्टे पहले बजट देखने का अवसर मिलता था। श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, मैं एक बार फिर माननीय प्रधान मंत्री को उनकी नेतागिरी के लिए धन्यवाद देना चाहता हूँ जहाँ बजट तैयार करने में पेमनन्ट सकेटरी के स्तर, मंत्रियों के स्तर, तक फायनेन्स मंत्री, मंत्रीमण्डल की सब-कमिटी संपूर्ण प्रक्रिया पूरी करके मंत्रीमण्डल बजट को स्वीकृति देता है जिसके बाद बजट भाषण, संसद में पेश किया जाता है।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, यह एक बहुत ही पारदर्शी, खुली, आकर्षक प्रक्रिया है जिसे हमने अपने दोनों बजट में तैयार किया है, पहले और दूसरे बजट में और मुझे इसमें कोई संदेह नहीं है कि भविष्य में आगे बढ़ने पर ऐसा ही होगा।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, एक राष्ट्रीय बजट तैयार करना आसान काम नहीं है, खास करके जब सर पर भारी कर्ज लदा हो जिससे आप संसाधनों और सेवाओं को सुधार नहीं पा रहे हो जिन्हें कई सालों

से नज़रआदाज़ किया गया है। ये और भी कठिन हो जाता है जब आपकी अर्थ-व्यवस्था, कोविड-19 जैसी महामारी की मार से उभरने की कोशिश कर रही हो तथा आपको उस नाजुक सुधार की रक्षा के लिए राजकोषीय सहायता की ज़रूरत है।

लेकिन, श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, सरकार सिर्फ वही पैसे खर्च कर सकती है जो वो टेक्स द्वारा बटोरती है या कर्ज लेती है। दोनों टेक्स बटोरना और कर्ज लेना सस्ता नहीं है। इसीलिए यह ज़रूरी है कि सरकार करदाताओं के संसाधनों का सही उपयोग करें जिससे सबसे ज़्यादा फायदा हो। इनमें शामिल है कठिन तथा नीतिगत फैसले करना और ज़्यादातर समय यह चुनना कि आर्थिक रूप से क्या सही है, छोटे समय के राजनीतिक आस्तित्व के बजाए राजकोषीय रूप से क्या कुछ ज़िम्मेदार है इसपर विचार करना चाहिए।

साथ ही साथ, सरकार को सार्वजनिक सेवाएं प्रदान करने की जो ज़रूरी भूमिका मिली है, यह ज़रूरी है कि सरकार के पास पर्याप्त धन हो। नहीं तो जैसा पिछले कई सालों से देखा गया था कि सरकार के पास हमारे अस्पतालों को ठीक करने, रास्ते सुधारने, हमारी पानी वाली समस्या हल करने, नालों को साफ करने, हमारी बिगड़ती सार्वजनिक संपत्तियों को बचाने तथा हमारे सरकारी कर्मचारियों को अच्छा वेतन देने के लिए पर्याप्त धन नहीं था।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, यही हमने अपने दो बजट में किया है। हमने ध्यान में रखा कि सार्वजनिक संसाधन तथा सेवाओं को सुधारने के लिए सरकार के पास केवल पर्याप्त न धन हो बल्कि हमारे राजकोषीय घाटे को काबू में करें और हमारे सार्वजनिक कर्ज को नीचे की ओर ले जाएं।

सरकार का कर्ज

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, मुझे पता है कि सरकार के कर्ज के बारे में बहुत कुछ कहा गया है तथा विपक्षी नेता ने पहले जो हो सकता था उसकी एक सकारात्मक तस्वीर बुनने की कोशिश की थी, लेकिन मामले की सच्चाई यह है कि फीजी का कर्ज-जीडीपी अनुपात जुलाई 2022 में सकल घरेलू उत्पाद के लगभग नब्बे प्रतिशत पर पहुँच गया, जो 2006 में लगभग तिरपन 53 प्रतिशत से बढ़ रहा था।

इस साल जुलाई के अंत तक अनुमान है कि हम फीजी का कर्ज गिराकर जी डी पी के लगभग अठहत्तर (78) प्रतिशत तक पहुँचाएंगे - पिछले अट्ठारह महीने में यह बारह प्रतिशत गिरेगा। उन्होंने बातें की कि हमने अट्ठारह महीने में क्या किया तथा माननीय लेन्ड्स मंत्री ने अपने लाजवाब

योगदान में कहा कि अट्ठारह महीने में हमसे जो बन सका वो हमने किया जबकि उनका मतलब था कि अट्ठारह महीने में हमने बहुत कुछ किया। यह कमाल आसानी से नहीं हुआ लेकिन एक राष्ट्र के तौर पर यह एक भारी उपलब्धि है, जहाँ इसे एक ऐसे रास्ते पर लाया गया जो हमारे कर्ज-जी.डी.पी अनुपात में गिरावट की नींव रखता हो।

इससे भी ज़रूरी बात यह है कि पिछले बजट में हमने राजकोषीय सुधार किया जिससे आमदनी वाली समस्या सुलझाई गई, हमपर लदा दो अंकों का कर्ज काबू में किया गया जबकि हमारी सरकार आने से पहले स्थिति बहुत ही खराब थी। इसका मतलब है कि जैसे अर्थ-व्यवस्था में सुधार होगा फीजी का जी डी पी कर्ज नीचे की ओर जाएगा। इसी वजह से हमें इसी राह पर रहना ज़रूरी है क्योंकि इस समस्या का सामाधान एक या दो साल में नहीं हो सकता। हमें लगभग अगले दस सालों तक अपनी योजना पर अटल रहना है।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, हम यह नहीं सोच रहे हैं कि हम दस से बीस सालों तक सरकार में रहेंगे जैसा कुछ लोग सोचा करते थे। जो भी सरकार में होगा हम ईमानदारी से, स्पष्ट रूप से अगले दशक के लिए रास्ता तय कर रहे हैं।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, अंतराष्ट्रीय आर्थिक संस्थाएं जैसे कि आए एम एफ और वोल्ड बेन्क, कर्ज देने वाली अर्इजेन्सी तथा हमारे विकास भागीदार, हमारी कर्ज समस्या को काबू में लाने के लिए राजनीतिक इच्छाशक्ति और राष्ट्रीय प्रतिबद्धता की सराहना कर रहे हैं।

वेट कम करना कोई विकल्प नहीं है

लेकिन श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, वेट के बारे में बहुत बातें की गईं तथा मैंने सुना कि माननीय विपक्षी सदस्य जिनमें से कुछ वफादारों ने कहा कि हम वेट में गिरावट क्यों नहीं कर रहे हैं।

लेकिन श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, हम चिन्तित हैं जब विपक्ष के संसद सदस्य जैसे माननीय प्रेमिला कुमार, माननीय हेम चन्द तथा अन्य सदस्यों ने प्रस्ताव रखा है हमें वेट का दर पंद्रह प्रतिशत से घटाकर नौ प्रतिशत कर देना चाहिए। श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय ये लोग आसानी से भूल रहे हैं कि वे उस नेतागिरी का हिस्सा थे जहाँ वेट का दर पंद्रह प्रतिशत था और कोई छूट नहीं थी। उस समय विपक्षी दल जो अभी सरकार में है ने बहुत दबाव डाला और 2014 आम चुनाव से पहले वेट का दर घटाने के लिए मजबूर किया गया था। उन्होंने वेट घटाया

लेकिन किसी भी ज़रूरी उत्पादन पर से वेट पूरी तरह नहीं हटाया था और फिर स्पीकर मोहुदय उन्होंने वेट का तीन दर लागू किया, एक था पंद्रह प्रतिशत, नौ प्रतिशत तथा कुछ सामानों पर वेट लागू नहीं होता था।

वेट पर किसी ने भी अपने भाषण में यह नहीं कहा था कि पहले क्या व्यवस्था थी। इसके अलावा श्रीमान स्पीकर, किसी ने भी अपने भाषण में यह नहीं कहा था कि इस सरकार ने ज़रूरी भोजन सामानों पर वेट बिल्कुल भी लागू नहीं किया तथा इस सूची में डाक्टरों द्वारा लिखी गई दवा शामिल की। श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय बाईस सामानों पर वेट बिल्कुल नहीं लागू होता है।

मैं माननीय प्रेमिला कुमार को बताना चाहता हूँ कि अगर हम वेट को पंद्रह प्रतिशत से घटाकर नौ प्रतिशत करते हैं तो हम छः सौ मिलियन डोलर आमदनी खो देंगे। वेट में एक प्रतिशत कटौती करने से कर से होने वाली आमदनी एक सौ मिलियन डोलर से कम होगी। सवाल यह है कि हम इसकी भरपाई कैसे करेंगे माननीय कुमार? क्या आप कर्ज को छ सौ मिलियन डोलर से बढ़ाकर दोबारा दो अंकों तक पहुँचाना चाहते हो? लेकिन आप छः सौ मिलियन डोलर का उधार नहीं ले सकते या आप खर्च को छः सौ मिलियन डोलर से घटाना चाहते हैं जिसपर आपमें से किसी ने बातें नहीं की।

सच तो यह है श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, आपको याद होगा कि जब हम विपक्ष में थे, तब यही लोग कह रहे थे कि विपक्ष का विकल्प बजट कहाँ है? आठ सालों तक इन लोगों ने मुझे बोली मारी कि मेरा विकल्प बजट कहाँ है? मैं उनसे कहता रहा कि विपक्ष को एक विकल्प बजट तैयार करना आसान नहीं है क्योंकि हमें जानकारीयाँ हासिल करना बहुत ही कठिन था। लेकिन ये लोग आज़ाद हैं श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, तो आपका विकल्प बजट कहाँ है? यह अब कहाँ है?

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, आम जनता को इस बात पर गौर करना चाहिए कि ये लोग संसद में आधी-अधूरी जानकारी दे रहे हैं। और आधी-अधूरी जानकारी खतरनाक और धोखे से भरी हुई हो सकती है। यह उनके लिए बहुत आसान था कि वे आकर कहे कि वेट घटाओं लेकिन ये नहीं कहा कि आमदनी कैसे सुधारी जाएगी।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, मैं इस बात पर जोर देना चाहता हूँ कि पिछले बजट में जब हमने वेट का दर नौ प्रतिशत से बढ़ाकर पंद्रह प्रतिशत किया था तो इससे पहले हमने अच्छी तरह विश्लेषण किया, विभिन्न विकल्पों की खोज की, विभिन्न विशेषज्ञों से

परामर्श किया, अपने बहुपक्षीय कर्जदाताओं के साथ चर्चा की और यहाँ तक कि इसे सार्वजनिक चर्चा के लिए भी रखा था। हमने कुछ छुपाया नहीं। हम जानते थे कि ये कोई आसान फैसला नहीं था, इसलिए हमने यह ध्यान में रखा कि हम सही फैसला करें। यह पंद्रह प्रतिशत हम हवा में से लेकर नहीं आए है लेकिन यह एक भारी विश्लेषण और हमारी ज़रूरतों पर आधारित था जो यह ध्यान में रखेगा कि सरकार पर्याप्त रूप से आर्थिक पोषित हो और हम सकल घरेलू उत्पाद के मुकाबले अपने कर्ज को नीचे की ओर लेजाने में सक्षम हो। अगर हमने ऐसा नहीं किया होता तो देश और भी कर्ज में डूब जाता तथा हमें कर्ज देने वाली कई संस्थाएं सरकार को कर्ज देना बन्द कर देती। जीवन जीने के खर्च पर बातें करने के दौरान मैं वेट पर और बातें करूँगा।

प्रति व्यक्ति कर्ज की तुलना

लेकिन इससे पहले श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, मैं नाममात्र कर्ज और प्रति व्यक्ति कर्ज पर कुछ प्रकाश डालूँ जिसके बारे में कई विपक्षी सदस्यों ने बात की थी, मुझे इसे और स्पष्ट रूप से समझाने दीजिए:

- डिसेम्बर 2022 में गठबंधन सरकार ने \$9.5 बिलियन डोलर का कर्ज अपनाया;
- प्रति व्यक्ति के कर्ज के संदर्भ में, यह लगभग दस हज़ार सात सौ डोलर था;
- इस बजट के अंत तक अगले साल जुलाई तक, अनुमान है कि हमारा कर्ज 10.9 बिलियन डोलर तक पहुँच जाएगा या प्रति व्यक्ति के उपर बारह हज़ार तीन सौ डोलर का कर्ज होगा।
- इसका मतलब है कि अगले तीन सालों में गठबंधन सरकार प्रति व्यक्ति के उपर एक हज़ार छः सौ डोलर जोड़ देगी
- इसके विपरीत श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, पिछली सरकार ने 2006 में 2.9 बिलियन डोलर का कर्ज विरासत में लिया था जो प्रति व्यक्ति के उपर तीन हज़ार चार सौ डोलर का कर्ज था।
- उनकी अवधि के दौरान, उन्होंने कुल कर्ज के स्तर को 9.5 बिलियन डोलर या प्रति व्यक्ति पर दस हज़ार सात सौ डोलर का कर्ज लादा था। कर्ज 6.6 बिलियन डोलर से बढ़ा जो प्रति व्यक्ति के लिए कर्ज सात हज़ार तीन सौ डोलर से बढ़ा।
- इसीलिए माननीय विपक्षी नेता और माननीय सचीदा नन्द यही सच्चाई है जब आप प्रति व्यक्ति पर लदा कर्ज की बात करते है। अनुमान है कि अगले साल जुलाई तक सरकार प्रति व्यक्ति पर अतिरिक्त एक हज़ार छः सौ डोलर का कर्ज बढ़ाएगी जबकि आप लोगों ने प्रति व्यक्ति पर अतिरिक्त सात हज़ार तीन सौ डोलर का कर्ज जोड़ा था।

कर्ज का दौर

| साल | कर्ज (बिलियन डोलर) | आबादी | प्रति व्यक्ति कर्ज के संदर्भ में (\$) |
|---------------|--------------------------|---------|--|
| 2006 | 2.9 | 837,271 | 3,400 |
| 2013 | 3.8 | 837,271 | 4,580 |
| डिसेम्बर 2022 | 9.5 | 884,887 | 10,700 |
| जुलाई 2023 | 9.7 | 884,887 | 11,000 |
| जुलाई 2025 | 10.9 | 884,887 | 12,300 |

जीवन निर्वाह खर्च

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, कृपया मुझे चीज़ों

के दामों तथा जीवन निर्वाह खर्च के बारे में स्पष्टीकरण करने का मौका दें। यह बहुत ही नाजुक विषय है जिससे लोग हमेशा अपनी राजनीतिक चाल चलते है। लेकिन मुझे कुछ बुनियादी आर्थिक तथ्यों के बारे में बताने का मौका दें:

- पहली बात, बाज़ार में किसी भी चीज़ का दाम माँग और सप्लाए के आधार पर होता है। बेचने वाला या उत्पादनकर्ता, अपने सामान का दाम, उत्पादन खर्च, मज़दूर खर्च, कच्चा माल, यातायात का खर्च, माल रखने, टेक्स और जुड़े हुए अन्य खर्च के आधार पर तय करते है।
- सामान की माँग तथा अन्य सप्लाएयर से होड़बाजी के स्तर को देखते हुए उत्पादन का मार्क अप और आखरी दाम तय किया जाता है। लेकिन ये मूल सिद्धान्त अटल रहता है कि कोई भी अपना सामान उत्पादन खर्च से कम दाम में कभी नहीं बेचेगा।
- दूसरी बात, सरकार किसी एक उत्पादन का दाम तीन तरीकों से कुछ हद तक तय कर सकती है। ये प्राईस कोन्ट्रोल से, उत्पादन पर लागू कर के दर को बदलने से या उत्पादन खुद निर्माण करके उसे घाटे में बेचने से (जैसे कि बहुत सी सरकारी सेवाएं जिनमें पानी भी शामिल है)।
- प्राईस कोन्ट्रोल तथा कर के दर को बदलने के बावजूद बहुत कुछ नहीं किया जा सकता है तथा इन फैसलों के लिए व्यापार बन्द किया जाता है। श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय एक सरकार होने के नाते हम हर एक पहलू पर गौर कर रहे है तथा उप प्रधान मंत्री जो कि व्यवसाय मंत्री भी है जिनके नीचे फीजियन कोम्पेटिशन और कोनजुमा कमिशन आती है लगातार गौर कर रहे है कि कैसे हम कुछ औजार तथा नितियों की मदद से लोगों को कुछ राहत दे सकते है। यह सब काम हो रहा है तथा मुझे पूरी उम्मीद है कि माननीय उप प्रधान मंत्री बहुत जल्द कुछ फैसलें करेंगे।
- श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय मैं यह बात स्पष्ट कर देना चाहता हूँ कि सामानों का दाम नीचे करना इतना आसान नहीं है जिस तरह से विपक्षी सदस्य सुझाव दे रहे है। ये उन सामानों के लिए भी है जिनपर कुछ भी वेट लागू नहीं है। किसी ने भी ये बात नहीं उठाई कि बाईस सामानों पर वेट नहीं है, इक्कीस ज़रूरी सामानों तथा डाक्टरों द्वारा लिखी दवा पर भी कोई वेट नहीं है। यहाँ तक कि जिन सामानों पर वेट लागू नहीं है, उनका भी दाम उपर गया क्योंकि उत्पादन का खर्च बढ़ा या अन्य संबंधित खर्च जैसे कि सामान पहुँचाने का खर्च, विमा तथा सामान रखने के खर्च में वृद्ध हुई जो हमारे काबू से बाहर है।
- वे जानते है। कोविड के दौरान ऐसा हुआ था। फ़ईट का खर्च तीन से चार गुना बढ़ गया था और कुछ खर्च कई दिनों तक ऐसा ही था। तो सामानों पर डूटी कम करने, वेट हटाने के बावजूद श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय सामानों का दाम फिर भी उपर गया।
- ये भी देखा गया कि स्थानीय उत्पादन जैसे कि डालो, कसेरा तथा शाख-भाजी के दाम उपर गए हालाकि इनपर कोई टेक्स या वेट लागू नहीं है। इसका मतलब यही है कि जब खराब मौसम की वजह से सप्लाई पर असर पड़ता है या जब लोग यह उत्पादन पर्याप्त मात्रा में बोते नहीं है या जब ये उत्पादन भारी मात्रा में विदेश भेजा जाता है तो इसके दाम यहाँ बढ़ जाते है। इसका मतलब है कि हमें उत्पादनों का दाम नीचे करने के लिए उत्पादन बढ़ाना पड़ेगा जो तुरन्त नहीं हो सकता।
- इसके अलावा श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, हम यहाँ फीजी में ज़्यादातर जिन सामानों

का प्रयोग करते है, वो बाहर देश से आते है, इसलिए आयात वाले दाम पर काबू रखना बहुत ही मुश्किल है जो विश्व बाज़ार पर आधारित होते है।

- कुछ प्रमुख देश जिनके साथ हम ज्यादा व्यापार करते है जैसे कि ओस्ट्रेलिया, न्यू जीलैन्ड तथा अमेरिका, सभी महँगाई के दर का सामना कर रहे है, क्योंकि महामारी के चलते विश्व भर में सप्लाई चैन को लेकर बाधाएं पहुँची है। पिछले साल ओस्ट्रेलिया में महँगाई का दर 6.6 प्रतिशत था (जो इक्तीस 31 सालों में सबसे ज़्यादा था), न्यू जीलैन्ड में महँगाई का दर 7.2 प्रतिशत था (जो चौतीस 34 सालों में सबसे ज़्यादा था), जबकि अमेरिका में महँगाई का दर आठ प्रतिशत था जो कि पिछले चालिस सालों के मिलान में सबसे ज़्यादा था।
- इन देशों का फीजी के साथ जबकि व्यापारिक संबंध है तो ऐसे में यह स्वाभाविक है कि इन देशों से सामान मँगाने में ज़्यादा महँगा और भारी असर पड़ेगा क्योंकि जो सामान हम देश में उपयोग करते है उनमें से पचास प्रतिशत विदेशी सामान है।
- अगर हम अन्य देश जैसे कि मोरिशस की तूलना करें तो, दो साल पहले उनके महँगाई का दर 10.8% था, पिछले साल यह दर सात प्रतिशत था और इस साल लगभग 5.9 प्रतिशत होने का अनुमान है। हमारे पड़ोसी देश वनुआतू ने दो साल पहले महँगाई का दर 6.7% रिकोर्ड किया था, पिछले साल यह दर बारह प्रतिशत था और इस साल लगभग 6.7 प्रतिशत होने का अनुमान है जबकि तोन्गा ने दो साल पहले महँगाई का दर 8.5% रिकोर्ड किया था, पिछले साल यह दर 10.2% प्रतिशत था और इस साल लगभग 5.4 प्रतिशत होने का अनुमान है।
- श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, पिछले साल के अंत तक फीजी में महँगाई का दर 5.1 पतिशत तक था और इस साल बढ़कर 7.1 प्रतिशत हो गया। जून महीने में हमारे वर्तमान महँगाई का दर 6.7 प्रतिशत था जबकि अनुमान है कि इस साल के अंत तक या दर तीन से चार प्रतिशत तक हो जाएगा। माननीय उसामाते ने कहा था कि देश के इतिहास में महँगाई का दर इतना उपर कभी नहीं गया था। लेकिन अगर आप उनके समय में महँगाई का दर देखे तो, 2009 में वो 6.8 प्रतिशत था, 2011 में 7.7 प्रतिशत था जबकि 2018 में 6.6 प्रतिशत था।
- श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, पिछले दो बजट में हमने जीवन निर्वाह खर्च में चुनौतियों का सामना कर रहे लोगों की मदद के लिए:
- हमने इक्कीस सामानों पर वेट नहीं रखा है तथा उस सूची में डाक्टर द्वारा लिखी गई दवा भी जोड़ी गई है जो अब बाई स सामान हो गए है। इसलिए अब चीनी, आटा, चावल, दाल, चाय, आलू, प्याज़, लेहसुन, टिन वाली मछली, भोजन पकाने वाला तेल, नमक, दूध, शिशुओं का दूध, सेनाद्री पेड, साबुन, कपड़े धोने का पाउडर, टोईलट पेपर, टुथपेस्ट, खाना बनाने का गेस, करोसीन तथा डाक्टरों द्वारा लिखी गई दवा पर वेट नहीं है। यही कुछ खास चीज़ें है जो लोग सबसे पहले सुपरमार्केट से खरीदते है। सच तो यह है श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, 2018 वाले आम चुनाव से पहले हमने इस सूची का प्रस्ताव रखा था, तथा इन लोगों ने इसी सूची की नकल करके शामिल की, तथा हमें खुशी है कि उन्होंने 2022 वाले आम चुनाव से ठीक पहले ऐसा किया था।
- पिछले बजट में हमने सत्तर साल से उपर के लोगों के लिए सौशल वेल्फेयर

अलावन्स पचीस प्रतिशत तथा सत्तर साल से कम उम्र के लोगों के लिए पंद्राह प्रतिशत से बढ़ाया था।

- हमने सरकारी पेंशन तथा आफ्टा केयर अलावन्स को पंद्राह प्रतिशत से बढ़ाया
- हमने तुरांगा-नि-कोरो, माता-नि-तिकिना, तुरांगा-नि-यवूसा, प्रोविंशल एडमिनिस्ट्रेटस तथा डिस्ट्रिक्ट एडवाएज़री काउन्सलस के अलावन्स को बढ़ाया।
- हमने स्कूल वापस जाने के लिए दो सौ डोलर सहायता की शुरुआत की जो उन परिवारों के लिए है जिनकी सालाना आमदनी पचास हज़ार डोलर से कम है जिससे दो लाख 200,000 बच्चों की सहायता की गई है।
- श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, पहले तो उन्होंने झूठ कहा कि यह फीजीफेस्ट की पहल थी। जो फीजीफेस्ट ने किया था वो महँगाई को सहने का उपाय था। अगस्त 2022 से जनवरी 2023 तक छः महीने के लिए एक डोलर प्रति दिन जो एक सौ अस्सी डोलर हुआ।
- श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय यह आम चुनाव के लिए एक नौटंकी थी। छः महीने के लिए एक डोलर प्रति दिन जो एक सौ अस्सी डोलर था वो स्कूल को भरा गया। उन्होंने झूठ कहा था कि ये स्कूल वापस जाने के लिए कोई मदद थी। सरकार होने के नाते, जब माननीय प्रधान मंत्री ने पिछले साल इसकी घोषणा की थी तब हम आम चुनाव के बारे में नहीं सोच रहे थे। जैसे ही हम सरकार में आए, हमें अहसास हुआ कि हमारे बच्चे, ग्रामीण इलाकों में हमारे बच्चों को सहायता की ज़रूरत है। इसीलिए हमने ऐसा किया। यह आम चुनाव की कोई नौटंकी नहीं थी। यह एक नई पहल थी, बच्चों को सहारा देने के लिए गठबंधन सरकार की एक प्रमुख उपाय था।
- हमने 53,000 टेशरी छातों के लिए छः सौ पचास मिलियन डोलर का टेलस कर्ज माफ कर दिया, जिससे जब भी वे नौकरी शुरू करते तो उन्हें कर्ज की बेड़ियों से आज़ाद कर दिया है। यही पैसे वे अपने आप पर और अपने परिवार को सहारा देने में लगा सकते है।
- इस बजट में हम अड़तीस हज़ार से ज़्यादा सरकारी कर्मचारियों को वेतन वृद्धि देने के लिए 85 मिलियन डोलर अलग कर रहे है जिन्हें 2017 से वेतन वृद्धि मिलने से वंचित रखा गया था।
- हमने मिनिमम वर्डज दर को पाँच डोलर प्रति घण्टा तक बढ़ाकर साहसिक कदम उठाया है जिसमें पचीस प्रतिशत की वृद्धि हुई है। श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय माननीय प्रवीन बाला तथा अन्य संसद सदस्य दावा कर रहे है कि मिनिमम वर्डज दर में हुई वृद्धि बहुत कम है। उन्हें अपने आप को आईने में देखना चाहिए। जब वे सरकार में थे तो उन्हें 2014 में मिनिमम वर्डज रईट लागू करने में आठ लम्बे साल लगे। और वो सिर्फ दो डोलर प्रति घण्टा। फिर बाद में इसे बढ़ाकर 2.32 प्रति घण्टा किया गया तथा सितम्बर 2017 में यह 2.68 प्रति घण्टा हुआ। आम चुनाव से पहले इसमें चार चरण वृद्धि की घोषणा हुई, जो कि 2.68 प्रति घण्टा से चार डोलर प्रति घण्टा करना।
- 2018 आम चुनाव से पहले हम पाँच डोलर प्रति घण्टा को लेकर अभियान कर रहे थे और ये लोग गामेन्ट फेक्टरी मजदूरों को धमकी दे रहे थे कि सरकार यह वृद्धि देने के हाल में नहीं थी जबकि सच तो यह है कि उस समय देश की अर्थव्यवस्था बेहतर थी। वेतन बढ़ाने का वो सही समय था।
- हम विशेषज्ञों के एक पैनल द्वारा व्यापक

समीक्षा के आधार पर मिनिमम वर्डज दर को बढ़ाकर पाँच डोलर कर रहे हैं जिसने मजदूर मालिकों, यूनियन और अन्य हितधारकों के साथ गहन विश्लेषण और परामर्श किया है। हम दो चरणों में ऐसा करेंगे क्योंकि इस बात को ध्यान में रखना है कि मजदूर मालिकों को भी बदलाव करने के लिए समय चाहिए।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, एक और बात मैं कहना चाहता हूँ जो आप देख रहे होंगे कि पिछले अट्टारह महीने हो रहे है। युनियन अच्छी शर्तों पर बातचित कर रहे है। अंतराष्ट्रीय मान्यता प्राप्त संस्थाएं जैसे कि आए.एम एफ के सुबुत दिखाते है कि जिन देशों में मजदूर मालिकों को दबाकर रखा जाता है, मजदूरों पर पाबन्दी लगाई जाती है, उन देशों के मजदूरों के वेतन पर असर पड़ता है जैसा कि पिछले सोलह सालों में इस देश में हुआ।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, अगर बीते सालों में मजदूरों को मौका मिलता तो हमें आज ये समस्या देखने को नहीं मिलता तथा सरकार वहीं सुधारने की कोशिश कर रही है।

- हम अपने गन्ने के किसानों को पिछले साल के गन्ने के मौसम के लिए एक सौ दो डोलर प्रति टन के हिसाब से पैसा दे रहे है। दो साल पहले वाले गन्ने के लिए हमने किसानों को \$91.38 प्रति टन के हिसाब से पैसा दिया। दोनों पर्इमन्ट निर्धारित दाम पचासी \$85 प्रति टन से काफी ज्यादा है।

- हम अपने धान के किसानों को धान के लिए एक हजार डोलर प्रति टन के हिसाब से पैसे दे रहे है। इसके अलावा हमारे नकदी फसल वाले किसान जिनमें डालो और कसेरा के किसान शामिल है को भी अपने उत्पादनों के लिए भारी दाम मिल रहा है।

- हम सहायता देने वाले अन्य पहलों को जारी रखे हुए है जिनमें मुफ्त शिक्षा, यातायात की सहायता, तीस हजार डोलर से कम कमाने वाले परिवारों के लिए मुफ्त पानी तथा बिजली के खर्च में छूट, प्राइवट जी.पी के द्वारा मुफ्त चिकित्सा सेवा, डायलीसीस खर्च में छूट, पहली बार घर बनाने और खरीदने वालों को सहायता, छात्रवृत्ति, कानूनी सलाह की मुफ्त सेवा तथा अन्य सेवाएं।

सरकार द्वारा इस तरह की सहायता से हमें इस साल अकेले सात सौ पचास डोलर का खर्च बैठेगा। तो हम लोगों को सीधी सहायता देने में इस तरह से खर्च कर रहे है। इनमें शामिल है:

- बाईस सामानों पर कुछ भी वेट नहीं- दो सौ पचास 250 मिलियन डोलर
- स्कूल वापस जाने की सहायता में - चालिस 40 मिलियन डोलर
- सौशल पेंशन स्कीम - अट्टहत्तर 78 मिलियन डोलर
- फेमली सहायता वाली स्कीम के लिए - चौवालिस 44 मिलियन डोलर
- विकलांग वाले अलावन्स - सत्ताह 17 मिलियन डोलर

- बच्चों की सुरक्षा वाले अलावन्स - सत्ताह 17 मिलियन डोलर

- बिजली की सब्सिडी के लिए - दस मिलियन डोलर

- चालिस हजार परिवारों को पानी की सब्सिडी - चार मिलियन डोलर

- नब्बे हजार छात्रों को यातायात की सहायता के लिए - सैतीस 37 मिलियन डोलर

- छात्रवृत्ति के लिए - एक सौ पचास मिलियन डोलर

- पी.पी.पी. मुफ्त स्वास्थ्य स्कीम - पाँच मिलियन डोलर

- किडनी डायलीसीस सब्सिडी के लिए

तीन मिलियन डोलर

- पहला घर खरीदने के ग्रांट के लिए - पाँच मिलियन डोलर

- सरकारी कर्मचारियों के वेतन के लिए - पचासी यथ मिलियन डोलर

- टेल्स माफ करने के लिए - दस मिलियन डोलर

अर्थव्यवस्था

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, मुझे अर्थव्यवस्था के बारे में बोलने का मौका दें क्योंकि बहुत सारी टिप्पणियाँ की गई हैं कि अर्थव्यवस्था धीमी हो रही है, आत्मविश्वास है, पूँजी नहीं हो रही है वगैरह।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, अर्थव्यवस्था में गिरावट नहीं हो रही है, मुझे यह स्पष्ट करने दीजिए कि अर्थव्यवस्था बढ़ रही है।

ओस्ट्रेलिया और न्यूज़ीलैंड में कुछ आर्थिक परिस्थितियों का सामना किया जा रहा है और हमारी घटती आबादी के कारण चुनौतियाँ हैं जो घरेलू माँग और मजदूर पर दबाव डाल रही हैं, फिर भी इस वर्ष अर्थ व्यवस्था में 2.8 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि होने का अनुमान है।

हालाँकि यह 3.4 प्रतिशत से थोड़ा नीचे की ओर था, हमारी वृद्धि सकारात्मक बनी हुई है जिसका अर्थ है कि अर्थव्यवस्था अभी भी बढ़ रही है और इसमें गलतफेमी नहीं है जैसा कि कुछ सदस्यों ने गलत समझा है।

इस बजट में राजस्व प्रोत्साहन और आर्थिक आशावाद शामिल है तथा आगे चल कर सफलता की उम्मीद की जा सकती हैं। ए एन ज़ेड द्वारा यह कहा गया है कि बढ़न्ती 2.8 प्रतिशत से ज़्यादा हो सकती है।

जाहिर है कि वे बजट के सकारात्मक प्रभाव और कुछ मुख्य प्रगति जो प्राइवट सेक्टर द्वारा की गई है वो अब ज़मीन पर तेज़ी से आगे बढ़ रहा है

प्राइवट सेक्टर दो बिलियन डोलर से भी ज़्यादा लागत पुँजी लगाना चाहते है। हम अपने इमीग्रेशन सेवाओं से संबंधित मामलों को भी ठीक कर रहे हैं। बैंक इन योजनाओं में पैसे लगाने के लिए बिलकुल तैयार है। हमारी एजेंसियों को सावधान रहने को कहा गया है ताकि कोई देरी न हो। इसलिए, हम जल्द ही पुँजी और आर्थिक गतिविधियों में एक बड़ी सफलता देखेंगे।

हमारे कुछ मुख्य पुँजी होटलों में लगाए जाएँगे जिसमें नए कमरे शामिल है जो व्यस्त महीनों में हमारे टूरिज़म क्षेत्र के लिए प्रगति लाएगी। यह हमारे कमरे के रेट और टूरिज़म क्षेत्र को और भी मजबूत बनाने में मदद करेंगा।

हम अपने हवाई अड्डों, बंदरगाह बुनियादी ढाँचे और रिन्यूअबल एनर्जी को बढ़ाने के विषय में काम कर रहे हैं। भविष्य में इस में कुछ मुख्य पुँजी लगाए जाने की उम्मीद है।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, हम देख रहे है कि कुछ नए प्राइवट सेक्टर कृषि, आउटसोर्सिंग, आई सी टी और कुछ अन्य क्षेत्रों में दिलचस्पी दिखा रहे हैं, जिससे हमारी अर्थव्यवस्था को बढ़ाने, अर्थव्यवस्था को सहायता, बेरोज़गारी में मदद तथा प्रगति के अवसर में वृद्धि होगी।

यह सब, और संपूर्ण सरकारी स्तर पर हमारे प्रयासों का उद्देश्य हमारी विकास दर को

तीन से पाँच प्रतिशत तक बढ़ाना है।

खर्च का उपयोग

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, विपक्ष ने गठबंधन सरकार के खपत उपयोग और पूँजी लगाने वाली योजनाओं के बारे में एक बड़ी आवाज़ उठाई थी।

मैं इस बात को स्पष्ट करना चाहता हूँ कि अनुमान है कि टज़टड-टज़टण बजट में लगभग शण प्रतिशत पैसे जो अलग किए गए थे, उपयोग किए जाएंगे।

इसमें शभ प्रतिशत संचालन बजट और यथ प्रतिशत केपिटल बजट शामिल है। मैं इस बात से सहमत हूँ कि हम पूँजी वाले योजनाओं में और सुधार कर सकते हैं, लेकिन श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय मुझे उनकी सरकार के समय, खपत उपयोग के बारे में बताने दीजिए।

टज़घध-टज़घभ बजट में पूँजी बजट का केवल भज़.थ प्रतिशत उपयोग हुआ था जबकि कुल खपत उपयोग यण प्रतिशत था।

टज़घभ-टज़घय के बजट में पूँजी बजट का उपयोग केवल भभ.भ प्रतिशत था जबकि कुल यथ.श प्रतिशत खपत का उपयोग किया गया था।

टज़घय-टज़घश के बजट में पूँजी बजट का केवल धघ.ट प्रतिशत था जबकि भभ.ण प्रतिशत का उपयोग किया गया था।

अब श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, मैं यह महत्वपूर्ण बात को उठाने जा रहा हूँ। यह उस समय योजनाओं के बारे में है जो उस समय असर में नहीं लाया गया था। ऐसा इसलिए था क्योंकि सरकार टज़घय चुनाव से पहले पैसों की समस्याओं से जूझ रही थी। टज़घय के चुनाव से पहले, उन्होंने इतनी सारी चीज़ों की घोषणा की और उनका कुल मिलाकर धट प्रतिशन और भण प्रतिशन परियोजनाएं थी। इसीलिए श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, टज़घश में उनकी प्रगति नहीं हुई।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, हम अपनी खपत के दर के बारे में सफाई देने का प्रयास नहीं कर रहे हैं बल्कि हम उपयोग को और बेहतर बनाने के लिए सरकारी एजेंसियों के बीच काम कर रहे हैं।

पर यह बहुत ज़रूरी है कि विपक्ष इस बात को समझे कि उनके समय क्या हो रहा था।

संचालन केपिटल मिश्रण

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, कुछ लोगो ने यह भी कहा कि हमारा संचालन केपिटल मिश्रण जो भड:टभ है बहुत कम है।

क्योंकि सरकारो के मुख्य रूप से शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य, और सुरक्षा की सेवा प्रदान करने पर ज़्यादा ध्यान देती है, इसलिए आपको आमतौर पर खपत के लिए लगभग भज़ प्रतिशत खपत की ज़रूरत होगी।

इसी प्रकार, पूँजी खपत लगभग तीस श्डज़त्त प्रतिशत है क्योंकि हम केवल वही बजट बना सकते हैं जितनी सरकार की क्षमता है।

हम इस को मानते है कि हम केपिटल योजनाओं के खर्च को और बढ़ा सकते है।

आमदनी योजना वास्तविक है

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, मैं इस बात को

स्पष्ट करना चाहता हूँ कि 2024-2025 के आमदनी योजनाओं के बारे में विपक्ष के सदस्य बहुत ही गलत सोचते है।

नहीं, श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, मैं सभी लोगों को यह आश्वासन देना चाहता हूँ कि आमदनी के आंकड़े जितना हो सके वास्तविक ही होते है। यह सवाल जिसमें यह पूछा जा रहा है कि क्यों एक सरकार आमदनी योजना को ज़्यादा बताएगी, यह इसलिए है क्योंकि यदि आप ऐसा करते हैं तो फस जाएंगे और गंभीर समस्याओं से जूझेंगे जो फीजीफोर्स्ट सरकार ने चुनाव से पहले 2018-2019 में सामना किया था।

तो, इसलिए हमारे आमदनी के आंकड़ों को लेकर बहुत अधिक गलत होने का कोई वास्तविक प्रोत्साहन नहीं है।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, पिछले दिनों हमारे सफल आमदनी सुधार को देखते हुए बजट में, हमारी कुल आमदनी 3.9 बिलियन का अनुमान लगा रहे हैं, जिसमें से 3.3 बिलियन टेक्स आमदनी हैं, जबकि 0.6 बिलियन नोन टेक्स आमदनी हैं। हम टेक्स में कुछ बदलाव नहीं कर रहे हैं, यहां-वहां और अन्य छोटे-मोटे बदलाव के अलावा।

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, वर्तमान आर्थिक वर्ष 2023-2024 में हमें अब पूरा विश्वास है कि हम टेक्स के रूप में तीन बिलियन से थोड़ा अधिक बटोरेंगे, जो फीजी के इतिहास में अब तक सबसे अधिक है तथा हमारे इस साल के तीन बिलियन डोलर तक बढ़ाने के लिए संघर्ष नहीं करना चाहिए।

हम जो 300 मिलियन डोलर को जमा करने का अनुमान लगा रहे हैं, उनमें से लगभग णथ मिलियन डोलर टेक्स विभाग से जमा किया गया है, जबकि बड़ा हिस्सा बड़ी आर्थिक हिस्सेदारी के कारण होगा क्योंकि फीजी की अर्थव्यवस्था लगभग तीन प्रतियत की दर से बढ़ती रहेगी।

बिना टेक्स की आमदनी की अगर हम बात करे, जैसा कि मैंने पहले ही कहा है कि हमें लगभग 162 मिलियन डोलर रिज़र्व बैंक के मुनाफे से, 170 मिलियन डोलर जुर्माना और एल टी ए जैसी संस्थाओं को धज़ मिलियन तक भरना पड़ता है, पानी के जुर्माने के लिए 49 मिलियन और इमीग्रेशन तथा अन्य एजेंसियों को 150 मिलियन तक बजट समर्थन देना पड़ता है।

बजट पर परामर्श की कमी

श्रीमान स्पीकर मोहुदय, विपक्ष के कुछ सदस्य जिसमें माननीय केतन लाल भी शामिल है ने कहा कि इस साल के बजट पर परामर्श नहीं किया गया था, यह कितना बेतुका है?

हमने राष्ट्रीय आर्थिक सम्मेलन, फिस्कल समीक्षा समिति से चर्चा, निजी क्षेत्र की संस्थाओं, समाजिक संगठनों, छात्रों, धार्मिक संगठनों, सुरक्षा बल के लोग और कई अन्य लोगों के साथ बैठक से लेकर कई परामर्श किए गए थे।

अभी फरवरी 2024 में, हमने राष्ट्रीय विकास योजना पर परामर्श किया और यही पर हमारे बुजुर्गों, हमारे युवाओं, किसानों, गन्ने के किसान, कामकाजी लोगों और ग्रामीण दूरदराज़ के क्षेत्रों के लोगो सहित सभी भागों के 22,000 से अधिक लोगों ने खुलकर बातें की हमारे साथ कि वे क्या चाहते थे. विकास योजना और राष्ट्रीय बजट दोनों में।

7



प्रधान मंत्री माननीय सितिवेनी रम्बूका, सरकारी सेवा दिवस के मौके पर एलबर्ट पार्क सूवा में सरकारी कर्मचारियों को संबोधित करते हुए चित्र: प्रधान मंत्री दफ़्तर

सरकारी सेवा दिवस

रोनल देव

प्रधान मंत्री माननीय सितिवेनी रम्बूका ने देश की जनता को सेवा प्रदान करने के लिए सरकारी कर्मचारियों को धन्यवाद दिया।

“आपका काम ही सरकार को चलाए रखता है फिर चाहे वो पेट्रोलिंग हो और हमारी सड़कें और लोगों को सुरक्षित रखना हो, नितियाँ बनाना हो तथा सरकार की पहलुओं का समर्थन करना हो।” सूवा में सरकारी सेवा दिवस के समापन समारोह में बोलते हुए प्रधान मंत्री ने कहा कि सरकारी कर्मचारी अपने नेताओं की दृष्टि में जान फूँकते हैं। उन्होंने इस समारोह में भाग ले रहे सरकारी कर्मचारियों से कहा कि सरकार उनके द्वारा देश भर में पहुँचाई गई सेवा की सराहना करती है जिससे कि देशवासी

एक अच्छी ज़िन्दगी जी सकें।

कुछ सरकारी कर्मचारी जो ग्रामीण इलाकों या बाहरी द्वीपों में देश की सेवा करते हैं, दिन भर, देर रात तक तथा सप्ताहअंत भी काम करते हैं।

“मेरा मानना है कि सरकारी सेवा, कमज़ोर दिल वालों के लिए नहीं है। आप हमारे लोगों के बहतर जीवन के लिए अपनी हद को पार करते हुए सेवा प्रदान करते हैं जिसके लिए आपकी सराहना की जाती है। मैं सरकार तथा फ़ीजी के लोगों की ओर से आप सभी को अपने बलिदान तथा सेवा के लिए धन्यवाद देना चाहता हूँ। प्रधान मंत्री रम्बूका ने कहा कि इस तरह के समारोह ने सरकारी कर्मचारियों को यह अवसर प्रदान किया है कि वे नए जोश के साथ देश के लोगों को और बेहतर सेवा प्रदान करें। प्रधान मंत्री तथा सरकारी सेवा मंत्री होने के नाते माननीय रम्बूका ने प्रकाश डाला कि सेवा में

सुधार, प्रक्रियाओं को फिर से व्यवस्थित करने और लोगों के लिए सरकार की सेवाओं को बेहतर बनाने के सरकार के प्रयासों पर प्रकाश डाला जो कि एक सतत प्रयास है।

“इसके लिए सरकार को समग्र रूप से देखने, हमारे प्रक्रिया, हमारी सबसे बड़ी सम्पत्ति हमारे लोगों की समीक्षा करने और यह देखने की ज़रूरत है कि हम कामकाजी परिस्थितियों में सुधार करने, प्रोत्साहन प्रदान करने, प्रक्रियाओं को फिर से व्यवस्थित करने, सेवा प्रदान करने में सुधार करने और उत्पादकता को पुरस्कृत करने के लिए कैसे बदलाव कर सकते हैं,” उन्होंने कहा।

“मैं यह आश्वासन देना चाहता हूँ कि यह सरकार आपको उचित संसाधन प्रदान करना जारी रखेगी ताकि आपको अपनी भूमिका निभाने में सहायता मिल सके। इसे सफल बनाने

के लिए सरकार के मुखिया होने के नाते मैं आपसे माँग करता हूँ कि बदलाव की प्रक्रिया के दौरान आप अपना विचार या सुझाव खुलकर दें, बिना डर के, उपकार या गुस्सा के होना चाहिए। प्रधान मंत्री रम्बूका ने सरकारी कर्मचारियों को याद दिलाया कि आम जनता को सेवा प्रदान करना ही उनकी भूमिका है।

“सरकारी कर्मचारी होने के नाते आपको देश की जनता के प्रति वफादार होना चाहिए, राजनितिक तौर पर किसी का पक्ष नहीं लेना चाहिए और अपना काम बिना डर के, उपकार के और बिना गुस्सा के करना चाहिए।

“हम जबकि तेज़ी से आगे बढ़ रहे हैं तो ऐसे में मुझे पूरा भरोसा है कि राष्ट्रीय विकास योजना के लक्ष्यों को ज़रूर हासिल किया जाएगा।