

Citizens' Needs A Priority: PM

By Anita Roberts

THE NEEDS OF VANUATU CITIZENS must be the priority of the Government.

Equal opportunity in society, access to education for all, health services, employment and business opportunities must be the basis of government policies.

These are what the nation wants to achieve in the next years as reflected in the National Sustainable Development Plan.

The Prime Minister (PM), Charlot Salwai, stated this yesterday when was addressing the nation on Independence Day at Independence Park in Port Vila.

Vanuatu needs a strong security system to ensure its citizens are safe and for others to live in and work peacefully, he said.

"The number of force members in Vanuatu is significantly low compared to the growing population growth.

"Force members are not

present on all islands.

"They are old but still serving.

"The government needs to increase force members, improve their working environment and provide training skills to address corruption, anti-money laundering, terrorist financing and trafficking.

"Security, peace and stability are foundation of a nation's building," he said

Education is another important priority of the government.

The government has already decided to extend free education to secondary level from year 6 to 10, including early childhood, said the PM.

"The number of Vanuatu Government scholarship students now is almost 720.

"Over 100 graduated from different universities abroad every year.

"A lot of them are still left unemployed after graduation.

"The government is committed to ensuring they find a job with the support of

private sector.

"There is a need for the University of the South Pacific (USP) to introduce more degree and master level courses.

"Technical institutions needed to be review for the possibility to expand as higher tertiary institutions to offer skills that are needed.

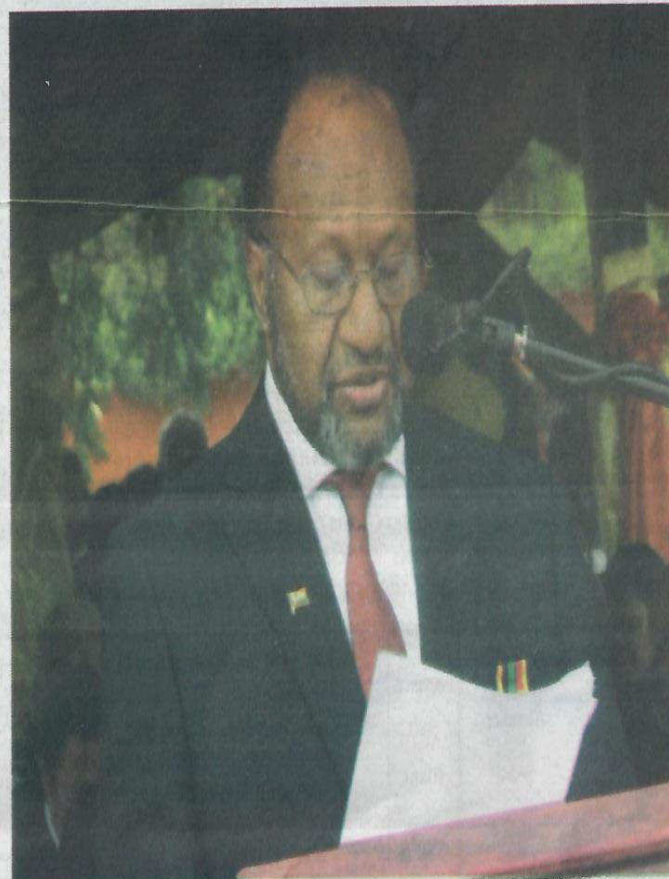
"While the government will continue to provide scholarships, there has to be a transparent, accountable and responsive system in place to orient students according to the country's priority human resource needs."

For development to thrive, Vanuatu needs a healthy population, he said.

"The government is working to improve the entire health sector, meet health workers' needs and ensure health services reaches remote areas.

"Combating non-communicable diseases (NCD) is a priority of the government.

"One of the initiatives taken



PM addressing the nation on Independence Day (photo: Len Garao)

to combat NCD is imposing levy on imported goods such as surgery diets.

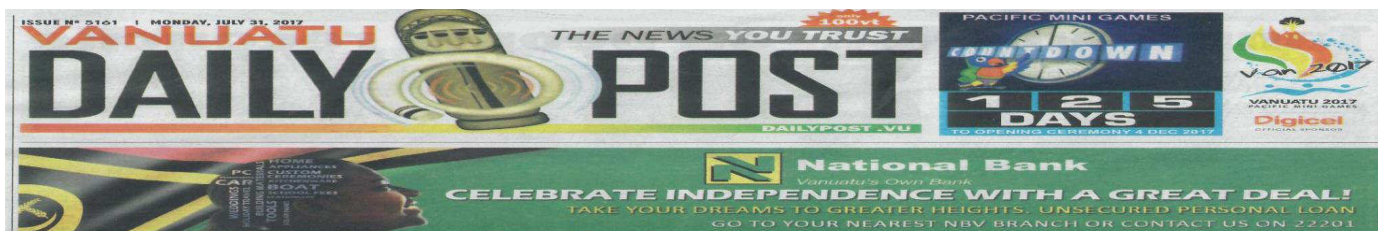
"The government is also

looking at establishing a national health insurance to address the challenge of NCD.

"Efforts are underway to

improve health infrastructure facilities."

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PM Salwai pointed out that development leads to negative environment issues that have impacts on the health of the population.

He took the opportunity to announce that the government has decided to address waste disposal by banning the importation of plastic bottles and plastic bags.

These products are bad for the environment and affect peoples' health, the PM said.

Mr Salwai in his speech focused on this year's independence theme: "Strengthening National Security, Access to Education for All, Priority to Local Employment and Creation of a Health Insurance Plan and good environment".

An estimated 4,000 people went to watch the flag raising to mark the country's 37th Independence anniversary wearing national colours either painted on their faces on their clothes or with Vanuatu flag to show how much they love their country.