MAURITIUS

Fourth National Assembly

First Session

Tuesday 26 May 2009

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MAURITIUS

FOURTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Debate No. 9 of 2009

Sitting of Tuesday 26 May 2009

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis, at 11.30 a.m.

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)
PAPERS LAID

The Prime Minister: Sir, the Papers have been laid on the Table –

A. Prime Minister’s Office -


B. Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment -

The Loan Agreement on Third Trade and Competitiveness Development Policy Loan with Deferred Drawdown Option between the Republic of Mauritius and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (In original).

C. Ministry of Housing and Lands -


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ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr Speaker: Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister. The Table has been advised that Parliamentary Question No. B/477 with regard to the Compagnie Thermique du Sud Ltée addressed to the hon. Prime Minister will be replied by the Deputy
Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities.

CENTRAL POST OFFICE – PARCEL - STUN GUN

(No. B/476) Mrs M. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if a parcel containing a stun gun was recently found at the Central Post Office and, if so, indicate the name of the recipient, indicating if -

(a) the recipient’s house has been searched and other offensive weapons found, and

(b) an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Monday 06 April 2009, one Mr R. A., a student aged 21, residing at Sanatan Road, Mahebourg, called at the Parcel Post Office with a Custom Assessment and Delivery Advice Card to collect a parcel addressed to him.

Upon verification of the parcel, the Customs Officer found a weapon capable of discharging electric shocks, commonly known as stun gun, and a pair of handcuffs.

As Mr R. A. was not in possession of any import permit in respect of the stun gun or the handcuffs, I suppose, the parcel was retained by the Customs Officer. The addressee undertook to produce a permit on the following day.

He called again at the Post Office on the following day without any permit. He was arrested by the Harbour ADSU and he gave his address then as being Karan Lane, Mahebourg, which is a different address to the original.

On the same day, ADSU personnel searched both premises, that is, Karan Lane and the other one, Sanatan Road, whatever it is, and then at Karan Lane, the following items were secured by the Police, that is, by ADSU. They found -

(a) one computer;

(b) one MCB credit card;
(c) two wooden bars fitted with barbwire which could be used as an offensive weapon;

(d) one hard disk and four compact discs suspected to contain information relevant to the purchase of the stun gun and handcuffs;

(e) 250 millilitres phials containing liquids which were subsequently identified by the Forensic Science Laboratory as Dilute Nitric Acid and Barium Chloride respectively, and

(f) they also found lab glasswares.

At Sanatan Road, nothing incriminating was found.

On 08 April 2009, a provisional charge of “Unlawful Possession of Weapon designed for the discharge of other thing to wit, that is, Electric Shock” in breach of Sections 24(1) and 46(1) of the Firearms Act 2006 was lodged against Mr R. A. before the Port Louis Division III Court. He was released on bail on the same day after having furnished a surety of Rs10,000 and Rs25,000 as recognizance.

The investigation is still in progress.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Prime Minister say whether it has been ascertained that the stun gun was ordered by Internet?

The Prime Minister: It has been said that it was ordered by Internet from the United States.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the seriousness of the situation and in view of the fact that facilities are now available and that people can order arms or any other item illegally, does the Prime Minister consider that it is important to amend the appropriate legislation? Because I think, according to the present legislation, there is only an imprisonment of one year and an insignificant fine of around Rs2,000.

The Prime Minister: This is not my reading of the amendment which was brought at some point. I think it says here that on conviction the person shall be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs200,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 15 years.

Mr Dulloo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether,
following this seizure, new measures have been adopted to tighten control against smuggling of weapons and drugs at the Central Post Office?

**The Prime Minister:** In fact, had not the measures been tightened, he could have escaped notice. In fact, because we have tightened, more cases are now being identified.

**Mr Dulloo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister to consider also the fact that one case has been caught, does not necessarily mean that the control is tight? Therefore, there have been many cases and one has been caught out of the many. We will have to review, notwithstanding what has been done before the measures that are in place.

**The Prime Minister:** I think the hon. Member did not understand me, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, I said many cases - not one case - have been caught. If we look at the number of cases which have been caught gradually, they are increasing, because we have tightened the measures.

**COMPAGNIE THERMIQUE DU SUD LTÉE – PROJECT – HIGH-POWERED COMMITTEE**

(No. B/477) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the High-Powered Committee set up to look into the different aspects and components of the Compagnie Thermique du Sud Ltée project, he will state if the Committee had submitted a report and, if so, table copy thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**BAIL RELEASE – CASES – HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS**

(No. B/478) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of cases in which the Police has not objected to the release on bail on humanitarian grounds over the past five years.

**The Prime Minister:** I am advised, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there is no provision in the Bail Act for a detainee to be released on
humanitarian grounds.

However, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that during the last five years, Police did not resist bail in only four cases on account of the defendant’s or detainee’s physical conditions. These cases concern one detainee for breast feeding her newly born child, two for being physically handicapped and one for medical complications.

SALE BY LEVY – PUBLIC GATHERING - PROSECUTION

(No. B/479) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the cases against the persons who were holding a public gathering in relation to the sale by levy and who were recently arrested, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if the prosecution thereof are being continued with, and if so, the number thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to PQ No. B/352 of 28 April of this year. Therein I mentioned that 36 persons were arrested on 20 April 2009, and a provisional charge of ‘Remaining in an Unlawful Assembly After Warning’ was lodged against them before the District Court of Port Louis. They will appear in Court on 17 June 2009.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Police inquiry into the case against the 36 persons has now been completed and is being referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice.

Mr Dulloo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether permission was granted and there was no Police objection that a public gathering be held on that day at that place?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, like all public gatherings, conditions were imposed and permission was given.

PUBLIC GATHERINGS – HOLDING

(No. B/480) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the holding of public gatherings, he
will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the conditions imposed therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the holding of public gatherings is governed by the Public Gathering Act which empowers the Commissioner of Police to impose conditions in that respect, with a view to preventing public disorder, damage to property or disruption of the life of the Community.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that conditions imposed depend on the nature of the gathering which is to be organised. In the case of public meetings, organisers are requested to exercise control over the audience so that the meeting is held in an orderly manner. The organisers and participants should also comply with the following conditions -

(a) the road should be kept clear for easy flow of vehicular traffic and for other road users;

(b) they should not exhibit any writing or slogan that could be prejudicial to public safety or public order, and

(c) they should abide by directives given by the Police on the spot.

As regards the organisation of public processions, the following conditions are imposed on the organisers by the Commissioner of Police -

(a) they are to keep to the left of the road in the direction in which they are proceeding and leave the remaining half on their right free for vehicular traffic and other road users;

(b) they are to refrain from making noise that is likely to disrupt the normal running of daily activities in the neighbourhood and not to address participants at any stage of the procession with public address system;

(c) they are not to act in a disorderly manner nor exhibit any slogan that could be prejudicial to public safety or public order, and

(d) they are to abide by directives given by the Police and should disperse peacefully after the march without attempting to make any address which may constitute a
public meeting.

I am further informed that each request for public gathering is inquired into and specific conditions are imposed depending on the circumstances prevailing at the time the gathering is to be held. In this connection, the Commissioner of Police may request the organisers to change the time, place or itinerary of the gathering.

Mr Bodha: May I ask one supplementary question, Mr Speaker, Sir? May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will consider the fact that, in some cases, permission has been granted to have gatherings or demonstrations in front of the Supreme Court which is, in fact, the symbol of the rule of law? Does he consider this as proper?

The Prime Minister: Personally, I do not have my own views. I do not think it is proper, but this has been granted in the past and it is being followed. If the hon. Member wants me to look into that, we can probably have a look at it.

Mr Bérenger: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether - since the appointment of the present Commissioner of Police - any of his decisions not allowing a public gathering or imposing some conditions, has been challenged before a Judge in Chamber?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that any of his decisions has been challenged except, I think, in the last case of sales by levy where I think a case is in court. I do not know whether he is challenging his arrest or he is challenging because the time has been changed. I am not sure. As far as I know, there is no other case that I am aware of.

MBC - PEPSI HUNGAMA PROGRAMME
- EXPENSES INCURRED

(No. B/481) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the expenses incurred in connection with the Pepsi Hungama Programme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to if -

(a) the Chairperson of the Board thereof has refused to sign cheques pertaining thereto and, if so, the reasons
therefor, and

(b) any amount of money has been taken from the Welfare Fund to pay therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director-General of the MBC that the Chairperson of the Board has not signed a few cheques pertaining to the *Pepsi Sega Hungama* Programme as he wants to have additional information on certain items of expenditure and he is still awaiting for additional information.

In the meantime, however, in view of the alleged cases of malpractices reported in the press in connection with expenditure incurred by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation for the organisation of the *Pepsi Sega Hungama* Programme and for the sake of transparency, I have already instructed the Director of the Management Audit Bureau on 27 April 2009 to carry out an investigation into the matter. This, in spite of the fact that the question was, I think, withdrawn previously, but I still went ahead and did this.

I am informed by the Director of the Management Audit Bureau that he expects to submit his report by mid-June.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the Prime Minister has not answered part (b) of my question, that is, whether any amount of money has been taken from the Welfare Fund to pay thereof?

The Prime Minister: Because an investigation is going on, we will know.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether he has obtained from the MBC the initial budget that was earmarked for that particular show?

The Prime Minister: I know that an amount was earmarked. I think an amount of Rs2,501,705 seems to have been incurred. An amount has been settled and the rest is what is being looked at for additional information.

Mr Gunness: The Prime Minister said that this is what has been incurred up to now. My question was whether the Director of the MBC has given him information about how much that particular show was budgeted?
The Prime Minister: I cannot give that information Mr Speaker, Sir, because there were other sponsors who were involved, who made good their sponsoring. They have given different amounts. I know that there is Quality Beverages Ltd. There are others as well, it appears.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether the local authorities also contributed to the expenses?

The Prime Minister: As far as I remember there were some Municipalities which were involved and District Councils.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether his attention has been drawn that for the organisation of this Pepsi Hungama Programme, cash money was requested by one Mr A. M. of the MBC to several firms and several private sector firms have given cash money and also prizes? Can the MAB be requested to look into the prizes, the gifts which were received? Can we know also whether these gifts were in the custody of that Mr A. M. and several of the gifts have been stocked at his residence?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I have asked the Director of the Management Audit Bureau to look into the whole investigation and action will be taken following that investigation.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm whether there has been a claim of about Rs700,000 for the consumption of food by the participants of the Pepsi Hungama Programme?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, as I have explained the Chairperson of the Board himself is awaiting some additional information. An investigation is going on and it will not take long; in mid-June, that is, probably three weeks’ time, we will have all the details, then we will be able to have a look.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether he has in his file the contribution of the District Councils and Municipalities? How much in total it amounts to?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not have the total. Again, as I have said, Mr Speaker, Sir, all this will come out in the Management Audit Bureau’s investigation.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr Gunness: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that the same
Mr A. M. whom we are talking about, once the inquiry started, is not in the country, he has been to China? I think that up to now the MAB has not been in touch with that particular person to conduct the whole inquiry.

The Prime Minister: I am sure he is not going to bail out, to stay in China for ever, he will have to come back and he will have to face…..

(Interruptions)

Certainly not in China!

Mr Speaker: Next question!

POLICE VEHICLES – DAMAGE

(No. B/482) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the police vehicles which have been damaged in disturbances/riots, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police -

(a) a list thereof, since July 2005 to date, indicating the units to which they were attached;
(b) the number thereof which have been repaired/replaced, and
(c) if Government will consider toughening the law in respect of the persons found guilty of damaging police vehicles.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am tabling the information requested for by the hon. Member.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that 49 of the damaged vehicles have already been repaired and three have been replaced.

As regards part (c) of the question, I would like to inform the House that any person who damages State property or property not belonging to him, including vehicles, is liable for prosecution under one of several different offences. It will be incumbent on the Director of Public Prosecutions to decide upon which particular provision of the law to prosecute any alleged offender, depending
on the particular facts and circumstances of the case.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is to be noted that a severe penalty is already provided for the offence of setting fire to or destroying any State property, namely penal servitude for a maximum term of 30 years under section 65 of the Criminal Code.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that the Judicial Provisions Act, which was passed in December 2008, has stiffened the penalties under the Criminal Code for the offence of “damaging public property, public enterprise or vehicle”. Under section 349, this penalty has been increased from a fine not exceeding Rs3,000 to a fine not exceeding Rs25,000; and from a term of penal servitude not exceeding 10 years to a term not exceeding 20 years.

Furthermore, the penalties for other offences such as “arson”, “damaging property by band” and “damaging goods and chattels” have been similarly toughened.

In addition, Mr Speaker, Sir, I propose to request the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping to give consideration to increasing the penalty under Section 123W of the Road Traffic Act for tampering with motor vehicles.

The question of whether we should treat damaging Police vehicles separately is being looked at, whether we could make this penalty stiffer; this is still being looked at, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm to the House whether any Police officers have been injured in the Police vehicles which have been damaged?

The Prime Minister: There was no specific question to that matter but, as far as I know, yes.

POLICE STATIONS – TELEPHONE LINES

(No. B/483) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Police Stations, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if consideration will be given to provide them with at least two telephone lines.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that in order to respond to the requests of
the public in a timely manner and to carry out their policing duties efficiently and effectively, all the 71 Police stations spread throughout the island are already equipped with two telephone lines or even more, but at least two telephone lines.

Furthermore, depending upon the operational exigencies of a station area, the number of telephone lines allocated thereat may be increased accordingly, but already there are two telephone lines in each Police station.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, my information is that in the evening one of these numbers is shifted to the fax, or that the other numbers are shifted to the clerk office or to the C.I. and that there is only one number which is really available to the public.

The Prime Minister: Very often, Mr Speaker, Sir, people have the same number on a fax and a telephone line. But I will look into that and see whether it is, in fact, the case.

Mr Dulloo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether apart from these fixed telephone lines, Police officers, as from a certain rank, are provided with mobile telephones especially those in charge of Police stations?

The Prime Minister: I know, in fact, that some Police officers have mobile telephones.

POLICE OFFICERS – MASTER DEGREE HOLDERS

(No. B/484) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Police officers who are holders of a Masters degree, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police -

(a) a list thereof, indicating their respective -

(i) grade;
(ii) posting;
(iii) since when, and
(iv) specialization and,

(b) information as to if they are being assigned additional responsibilities and remunerated accordingly.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir with your permission, I
am tabling the information asked for by the hon. Member.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the officers who hold a Masters Degree have not been given additional responsibilities over and above the normal duties assigned to them as per their respective postings and their relevant field of specialization.

However, the PRB Report of 2008 provides for payment of incremental credit for additional relevant qualifications to degree holders in the Police Force and monthly allowances to such officers posted in specialized Units. Qualified officers are being paid accordingly.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, now that the Private Security Services have been regulated, does the hon. Prime Minister have information about whether there is a number of officers who have left for private security companies?

The Prime Minister: Well, in the list that I have here - that is why I am not giving it, I am circulating it – there are 25. But, in that list, I do not see any which says that they have left for anything else. Maybe, there are others which do not fall in the list now because they have already left. But, I do not see that otherwise here.

Mr Lauthan: May we know if the Disciplined Forces Service Commission will make an effort to see to it that we do not lose those Police officers by giving them the opportunity to leave for private companies, because they are very helpful to the Police Force?

The Prime Minister: In fact, as the hon. Member knows, it was under my previous premiership that it started, precisely because we wanted to have more qualified Police officers and, secondly, in fact, I am the one who did ask that we should find a way, either by giving them additional duties or else if this cannot be done, they should have something additional because they have studied and have got a degree. They should be motivated in having known the success, and therefore, this is why the PRB Report has made this change.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether this category of Police officers has to sit for examinations or do they enjoy automatic promotion? Because I know of Police
officers with a BSc in Police Studies who still have to sit for examinations? I think they could be given automatic promotion in view of their tertiary studies.

**The Prime Minister:** I think this is taken into account when promotion is looked at. In the past, I know, for example, that this was created precisely to be able to get very good people at the top in the service.

**Mr Soodhun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Prime Minister is aware, we have very few Police officers who have obtained their LLB degrees and are still working as Police officers and now they have to resign. May we know from the hon. Prime Minister whether he could consider having them transferred to another legal Department and that their years of service be maintained?

**The Prime Minister:** As far as I remember, a former Speaker himself was a Police officer; he took his LLB and became a barrister. Now, the hon. Member wants us to refund their money retroactively, they will get plenty of money.

**Mr Ganoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I come back to my question. I know of Police officers who recently hold a degree in Police Studies and who have not been promoted to the rank of Inspector recently. Can the Disciplined Forces Service Commission revisit these cases?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, in fact, one of the reasons - I think there was a question some time back asking me about whether these courses have been stopped - why they have at least been reduced quite dramatically is because there are too many coming in and getting it. We know what will happen; we will have all the generals and no soldiers if we continue like this.

**WOMEN POLICE CONSTABLES**

**TRANSPORT FACILITIES**

(No. B/485) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the transport facilities provided to women Police Constables for the second and last shifts, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if there has been any change in policy.
The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it was announced in the Government Programme 2005-2010 that a Special Transport Scheme to enable Police officers to return home after night duty would be implemented.

I would like to inform the House that previously Police officers working on night shifts had to make their own transport arrangements to return home.

Subsequently, the Commissioner of Police – because we have this in our Programme - worked out a Special Transport Scheme for both men and women Police officers working on second and third shifts and which was implemented in February of last year. In line with this scheme, the Transport Guard Room organizes and dispatches four buses daily to transport Police officers over the island.

In addition, in each of the seven Police Divisions, there is one mini bus which transports personnel working in their Divisions.

Therefore, presently, all Police officers who work on night shifts benefit from these arrangements.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that in certain Police stations, namely at Vacoas Police Station, such measures are not being taken, especially the Women Police Officers who are facing difficulties to travel and they cannot, therefore, attend duties for the second and last shifts? May I ask the Prime Minister to look into the matter and see to it that such measures be implemented in all Police stations throughout the island?

The Prime Minister: I do not have the information whether this is not being implemented at the Vacoas Police Station, if I heard the hon. Member right. I do not have indication of this. I will certainly ask the Commissioner of Police to look into that.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ No. B/496 has been withdrawn. Questions addressed to the hon. Ministers! Hon. Jugnauth!

PUBLIC DEBT-
PARASTATAL BODIES & AIR MAURITIUS LTD.
(No. B/486) Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier
Militaire & Moka) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether he will state if the figure of Rs141,524 m. as total public debt as at 31 December 2008 includes –

(a) the domestic and foreign debt of parastatal bodies;
(b) Government guarantees to Air Mauritius Ltd;
(c) the recent Rs3.3 billion debt contracted with the World Bank, and
(d) the sum of Rs6 billion in the Consolidated Sinking Fund, at the time of its abolition.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen) Mr Speaker, Sir, the concept of public debt is no longer used. The definition was too narrow and comprised only the amount owed by Government in a narrow sense, that is, Ministries and Departments. Now, in line with best international practice we instead refer to Central Government Debt which includes extra budgetary units. Strictly speaking, public debt does not include –

(a) the domestic and foreign debt of parastatal bodies,
and
(b) Government guarantees to Air Mauritius Ltd.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, these are included in public sector debt as opposed to public debt.

Dr. Sithanen: Concerning part (c), the recent Rs3.3 billion debt contracted with the World Bank was publicly signed in May 2009 and there is always a lag between signature and disbursement. It is, therefore, not included in debt data at end December 2008.

However, it may be useful to elaborate on the debt situation to explain how the components referred in the question actually fit in the debt profile.

The more relevant concept for answering the question is the public sector debt. Here again, we have modernised and broadened the definition to make it more representative.

Previously public sector debt did not include the domestic debt of parastatals nor domestic guarantees extended to them by
Government as in the case of Air Mauritius, but it did include the investments of the Sinking Fund in Government securities. This activity of the Sinking Fund was an anomaly in a modern public finance system as it essentially amounts to Government guaranteeing Government.

The adjustments made to the definition ended practices not useful. In moving to the new definition, Rs6 billion of Government securities held by the Sinking Fund was cancelled leading to an equivalent reduction in public sector debt. However, this was more than offset as stated in the Budget Speech of 2007/2008 by capturing the other liabilities (mainly domestic debt of public corporations) and public sector debt in a new broader definition was Rs10 billion highly than in the previous one, resulting in a net increase in public sector debt of Rs4 billion.

Concerning the absolute debt figure of Rs141,524 m. this figure actually refers to public sector debt and not to public debt which is no longer used nor Central Government debt. It does include the domestic and foreign debt of parastatal bodies as at of 31 December 2008.

Concerning part (b) of the question, an amount of Rs548.9 m. is included in respect of Government guarantees to Air Mauritius.

And I have just addressed parts (c) and (d) in my reply.

Mr Speaker, Sir, whether on the new definition or the old definition, debt as a share of GDP has fallen consistently since 2005 and we have reversed the previous evolution of the debt towards the unsustainable position. In fact, in addition to the positive developments from our development partners, we have also secured a stable rating from Moody’s.

In fact, total external debt service ratio has been reduced from 8.4% in June 2006 to 4.7% in June 2009. This is well below our targeted external debt service ratio. This significant improvement gives us the room to borrow at attractive rates from our development partners.

Similarly, for overall debt, the debt service relative to total revenue has been reduced from 28.2% in June 2006 to 23.6% in June 2009.

**Mr Jugnauth:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am happy that the Vice-
Prime Minister & Minister of Finance has now made the difference between the public debt and the public sector debt. In the written answer that he gave to PQ No. B/161, he only stated total public sector debt as at 31 December 2008. Is he in a position to say, in absolute terms, what is the actual total public sector debt as at March 2009?

Dr. Sithanen: It is published in the document that has just been circulated Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me, again, state very clearly that all Ministries of Finance, all Government institutions, all international development partners always use debt as a percentage of GDP. And, in fact, last year, Mr Speaker, Sir, at pages 499, 500 and 501, we did make the distinction between the new definition and the old definition of the debt. In this year’s Budget, we have included the debt up to December 2010.

Mr Jugnauth: May we know what is the figure since the Minister has circulated or is tabling a document?

Dr. Sithanen: It is in the estimate that we have circulated, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jugnauth: But may we know the figure, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don’t have it with me, but, as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the share of debt to GDP has gone down from 73% in June 2003 to 59.1% in June 2008. As a share of GDP, Government Central debt has come down from 56.1% to 50.9%. But, of course, I know the hon. Member will mention about absolute debt. Nobody speaks about absolute debt, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is always about a share of GDP. Mr Speaker, Sir, for the simple reason…

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: ... that if you have a deficit of one rupee, the absolute level of debt has to increase. Debt is always calculated as a share of GDP.

Mr Jugnauth: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, may I just refresh the memory of the hon. Vice-Prime Minister because he says that nobody speaks in terms of absolute terms, but in terms of percentage. I have proof here that he has made a number of public
statements when he was in the Opposition and he has mentioned so many times, he has made public statements about…

Mr Speaker: Outside!

(Interruptions)

But in order not to leave any doubt, can he confirm that, at that time, he was referring to total public sector debt in absolute terms?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, everybody, the Central Government, the Ministry of Finance, the Bank of England, the IMF…

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: … everybody uses debt as a percentage of GDP, Mr Speaker, Sir. Just like the deficit, the budget deficit is never calculated in absolute terms, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Member should know this, Mr Speaker, Sir. And let me tell the hon. Member also that we talk of debt on a sustainable level. It is the sustainable level that is important.

Mr Jugnauth: One more question, Mr Speaker, Sir. With regard to the Air Mauritius guarantees that Government has given, I heard the Minister saying that up to now Government has included as debt the amount of Rs548 m. But I see in an answer that the Vice-Prime Minister, hon. Xavier Duval, has given to this House that Government has provided guarantees up to Rs4.5 billion while guarantees for a further Rs1.6 billion were eminent. I can understand that Rs1.6 billion cannot be included, but I am surprised that Rs4.5 billion were being guaranteed by Government and yet it does not tally with the figure that the Minister has given.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question of the hon. Member is at 31 December 2008 and the reply that was given by the hon. Vice-Prime Minister is as at April 2009. And most of the guarantees have been given after 31 December 2008. The hon. Member has to be fair. The question is of December 2008.

Mr Jugnauth: That is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, I asked the question. In fact, my question related to total public sector debt as at to date, that is March.

Mr Speaker: The question that was already put by the hon.
Member was in April 2009, I think; it was up to date, that is, up to April, but the answer the hon. Vice-Prime Minister gave was by the end of December.

Dr. Sithanen: But I am ready to give the figure to the hon. Member until 30 April 2009. But the question was 31 December 2008. It's a running guarantee, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jugnauth: One last question. Can the Minister just name the biggest project that the Government has been able to start during its mandate and completed up to now?

(Interruptions)

It relates to debt.

Dr. Sithanen: I have not understood, Mr Speaker, Sir.

QUARTIER MILITAIRE - FOOTBALL GROUND

(No. B/487) Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the project for the setting up of a football ground in Quartier Militaire, he will state if a plot of land has been earmarked.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to records available, no request for earmarking any plot of land for the setting up of a football ground in Quartier Militaire has been received at my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that my Ministry had acquired in 1996 three plots of land at Quartier Militaire for the construction of a football ground. The football ground is now operational and known as Quartier Militaire Stadium.

BANK OF MAURITIUS – CAPITAL OUTFLOWS

(No. B/488) Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the study carried out on capital outflows by the Bank of Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank, information as to the outcome thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I
am informed by the Bank of Mauritius that it has not carried out any specific study on capital flows.

Moreover, there is no apparent need to do so, since, in fact, our Balance of Payments indicates that we have significant unexplained net inflows rather than an issue with outflows. Indeed, this issue is actually the subject of technical assistance from the IMF Statistics Department, including a recent mission.

Whilst the results are preliminary and still being finalised, the recent technical assistance, working with the Bank of Mauritius and the FSC, has concluded that -

First, the Current Account deficits may be overstated due to unrecorded net exports on the service account. The precise source of such under recording is not yet fully established.

Second, FDI may be understated.

Third, some foreign borrowing by the corporate sector may also be under reported, although the sums involved are very marginal, since the outstanding stock of such debt appears to be below 5 percent of GDP.

The information from the Bank of Mauritius is also corroborated by a review of net inflows of investment into the Stock Exchange of Mauritius (SEM). Before the recession, flows were orderly and positive. Since the crisis struck, outflows have been equally orderly but negative on a net basis, reflecting developments in other emerging markets. However, unlike many worse affected markets, the foreign flows to the Stock Exchange of Mauritius have been two-way instead of dominated by outflows.

To get a better handle and reduce the unexplained net positive inflows in the Balance of Payments, I understand that the Bank of Mauritius is expected to launch a Foreign Assets and Liabilities Survey (FALS) 2008 survey soon, and the results would be available by the end of the year. FALS 2008 will collect data from resident enterprises on their claims on non-residents and liabilities to non-residents, both cross-border financial flows and stocks for the year ending June 2007 or the nearest financial year.

The survey is expected to improve the coverage of foreign direct investment in Mauritius amongst others.
Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Vice-Prime Minister aware of the statement that was made by the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius about his concern on capital outflows?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, the question was under study. If anything, there are unexplained inflows that we are trying to disentangle. In fact, I am sure the hon. Member knows that there are net errors that you cannot explain in the Balance of Payment. And, at times, it is a huge figure. I think it is a figure of about Rs5 billion and they think that, probably that, first, the deficit of the current account is overstated and, second, the FDI also is understated.

Mr Jugnauth: Would the hon. Vice-Prime Minister agree that, as a result of the measure that was taken to tax interests on deposits, that has caused an increase in capital outflow?

Dr. Sithanen: This is not borne out by facts, Mr Speaker, Sir. If the hon. Member will take the pain to read the Bank of Mauritius report, there have been more inflows than outflows, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister of Finance as from what date the problem was identified?

Dr. Sithanen: In fact, since a long time, we have had in the Balance of Payment this problem of errors and omissions that we cannot explain. Fortunately for us, it has been positive, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, one of the criteria that we have to meet in order to be eligible for the Flexible Credit Line – there is a question by hon. Bodha on that later on - is the integrity of our statistics on the Balance of Payment. In fact, there is currently a mission of the IMF to try to identify why we have such a large unexplained inflows in the Balance of Payment.

Mr Bérenger: In relation to the current account and to Foreign Direct Investment, the Minister himself provided figures in the Budget that he has just presented. Therefore, can I know what is the magnitude of the problem? How reliable are those figures put forward by the Minister? What is the margin of error that, we, as Members of Parliament, have to take into consideration?

Dr. Sithanen: This is a very fair question. We have been trying to tackle this for a very long time, Mr Speaker, Sir. The IMF
believes that it is due to more inflows coming from the global business. But, because of the way we collect statistics, probably, this is not recorded in the statistics of the Central Bank. The Board of Investment believes, for instance, Mr Speaker, Sir - I speak under their correction - that the inflows of FDI for the first quarter is higher than what is reported by the Bank of Mauritius at Rs1.3 b. But, obviously, we have to rely on the Bank of Mauritius, and they have given Rs1.3b. The Board of Investment believes that part of that difference is basically in errors and omissions. This is precisely what we are trying to sort out with technical assistance from the IMF.

Mr Bérenger: My point was: what is the magnitude of the issue? How seriously are we to take the figures put forward for FDI and current account?

Dr. Sithanen: As I just said, we are trying to find out, Mr Speaker, Sir. There is a team from the Board of Investment, the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Mauritius, to try to minimise completely these errors and omissions, and then to put the figures where they should be. As I said, fortunately, it is a plus as opposed to a minus.

ADDITIONAL STIMULUS PACKAGE — SMES & COMPANIES – FACILITIES

(No. B/489) Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the Additional Stimulus Package, he will state the facilities in real terms, financial and otherwise, provided since December 2008 to date to the –

(a) Small and Medium Enterprises, and

(b) companies other than small private companies.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, we kicked off the Additional Stimulus Package in December 2008 by frontloading and accelerating the implementation of projects contained in the Strategic Plan of the Manufacturing Adjustment and SME Development Fund (MASMED). Rs100 m. out of the Rs500 m. of the MASMED Fund was earmarked for direct support
to SMEs.

In addition, we provide a mechanism for direct support to help enterprises facing financial difficulties as a result of the international crisis.

There were 51 projects and programmes identified by the MASMED Fund to assist enterprises in the following areas –

- Upgrading of standards, quality and packaging for export readiness.
- Productivity and Competitiveness Improvement.
- Market intelligence and export promotion.
- Equipment Modernisation scheme.
- Market development and marketing.
- Market diversification, and
- Product development.

The support is provided through implementing agencies, which are Enterprise Mauritius, SEHDA, and National Women Entrepreneurs Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, so far, 53 companies have participated in seven market promotion fairs organised by Enterprise Mauritius. They are both large and SMEs, and represent a total financial support of Rs15.1 m.

In addition, Enterprise Mauritius has provided support in respect of the following schemes –

- 37 companies have benefited from the Marketing Trip Scheme (US$ 1,000 per trip) for a total financial support of Rs6.2 m.
- 37 companies have benefited from financial assistance for the improvement of norms and standards of their products, as well as packaging improvement. The total financial support stands at Rs5.6 m., and
- 18 companies have benefited from financial assistance under the Technology Diffusion Scheme, which represents a total financial support of Rs7.9 m.

Under these three schemes, 54 companies and 144 SMEs
have been found eligible. The total financial support is estimated at Rs78.5 m.

The second type of facilities concerning the financial support to companies in difficulty is provided mainly through the Mechanism for Transitional Support to Private Sector (MTSP) under the Additional Stimulus Package. The main objective is to save jobs. Third, our tax cuts and reductions have also contributed to saving jobs.

I am informed that five companies in difficulty have benefited from direct financial support under this scheme. Some 2,700 jobs have directly been saved, and total financial support is Rs152 m., of which Rs95 m. is in the form of debentures, Rs50 m. for acquisition of assets, Rs7 m. as guarantee to banks for facilities. Four of the companies are medium size ones.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in my Budget Speech 2009, on Friday last, we announced the restructuring of the Fund into the Saving Jobs and Recovery Fund, which will have a much broader mandate to cover all the sectors of the economy and enterprises of different sizes. Out of the Rs3.5 billion available to save jobs and prepare for recovery, Rs1 billion will be earmarked to support SMEs for direct support, equipment modernisation, risk-sharing, and equity participation to facilitate access to finance.

Mr Jugnauth: Amongst those who have benefited from direct financial support, would the Minister confirm that one of the companies is World Knits Co. Ltd.?

Dr. Sithanen: Yes, it is.

Mr Jugnauth: May I then ask the hon. Minister whether there has been any acquisition of luxurious cars just after the financial support was given to that company?

Dr. Sithanen: Not by World Knits itself. This question was raised by hon. Ms Deerpalsing, and I’ve asked the committee to look into it, and they have issued a communiqué, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jugnauth: The Minister surely must have inquired into the matter and, as he is saying, a communiqué has been issued. Can he confirm whether there has been purchase of vehicles or not?

Dr. Sithanen: Not by World Knits, Mr Speaker, Sir. The
communiqué explained this; that it is another company. In fact, the
officers have told me that there is no direct relation between these
two companies even though there is cross shareholding. And there is
no evidence that the specific money of ASP has been used for the
purchase of the car.

Mr Jugnauth: May we know the name of that other
company?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know. It was published in the
communiqué, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: The question is about finance provided
already; approved, spent and committed. Clearly, the general idea is
to know what part of that money has been committed, what part has
gone to SMEs, and what proportion to non SMEs, that is, bigger
firms. Does the Minister have that information?

Dr. Sithanen: I have given the figures, Mr Speaker, Sir. In
fact, I can circulate the answer: how many have gone to small
enterprises and how many to non small enterprises. However, I must
state, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the definition of where SMEs starts,
where MEs starts, and where large enterprises start is a very blurred
one. Let me give you an example, and I am sure the hon. Leader of
the Opposition and hon. Jugnauth will appreciate that. In Mauritius,
some companies use the turnover to classify some use the number of
employees and some use of the balance sheet. I was just looking at
that this morning. Some commercial banks use Rs40 m. as turnover
in order to qualify a company as ‘S’. In fact, it is for this reason that
my colleague, the Minister responsible for small business, will
introduce shortly a legislation for SMEs to define clearly what is a
SME. Then, the problem becomes what is an ‘M’ and what is a ‘L’.
For instance, among those that have benefited Mr Speaker, Sir, there
is one company that has more than 1,000 employees; there are two
companies that have more than 200 employees. Now, is 200 a
medium size company and is 1,000 a large size company? The
undertaking that I have made to this Assembly, Mr Speaker, Sir, on
a six monthly basis we will publish which firms have benefited;
how many jobs have been saved; what have been the instruments
used to assist these enterprises.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister, himself, has made repeated
statements recently to the effect that a very precise percentage of
total employment is to be found in SMEs - Small and Medium Enterprises. He has been very precise and repeated that figure. Can I know from the hon. Minister which definition has been used?

**Dr. Sithanen:** The definition, which is used by the CSO, Mr Speaker, Sir, is enterprises that have less than 10 employees, and then there are those with more than 10 employees. The statistics provided by the CSO are that 43% of jobs in this country are held by enterprises that employ fewer than 10 people.

**Ms Deerpalsing:** Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the answer given by the hon. Minister regarding World Knits, may I ask whether the inquiry is looking into interrelated party transactions between World Knits and the company of the spouse of the Director of World Knits, which allegedly owes Rs10 m. to World Knits and which company, that is, the spouse’s company, which has bought the luxury vehicles? Is the inquiry going into that direction, and may I know when the inquiry would be completed and the results known to this House?

**Dr. Sithanen:** The information I have from the people responsible for this is that there is no related party transaction between the two companies, even though there is cross shareholding, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, we will continue the inquiry. Let me also take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, Sir, to say very clearly that this is not money being doled out. This is money given either as a loan, that will have to be reimbursed with interests, or it is equity against which we are going to get dividends, or it is guarantee that is used in order to receive facilities from commercial banks, on which there is a fee. Having said that, I do appreciate the point made by hon. Ms Deerpalsing. We will continue the inquiry, but the information that I have is that there is no related party transaction.

**Mr Jugnauth:** The hon. Minister is saying that it is money that has to be reimbursed, provided that the company is alive later on, it doesn't go bust. Can the hon. Minister say, in the light of this example, what close monitoring is being done, in order to see to it that funds that have been earmarked for specific purposes in order to help those companies are, in fact, being used for those purposes?

**Dr. Sithanen:** This is a very fair question, Mr Speaker, Sir. All of us are very concerned about the judicious use of public funds, and that is why we have been criticised for not giving money too
fast and for not giving too much money. We are sandwiched between the two extremes. Rightly so, hon. Members in this august Assembly want money to be judiciously used whereas, outside, people believe that, as soon as they knock on the door, we should give them money. I am sure hon. Members have listened to the criticisms made, in that we are too slow, we are not giving enough money, the conditions are too difficult. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have said very clearly that, once you apply to the committee, there is a study that has to be carried out to ascertain whether le problème est conjoncturel ou structurel. And, then, there are conditions attached to the support granted. For instance, they will have to bring down their costs of operations; they will have not to pay any dividend; they will have to reimburse this money, and there is also some guarantees given. When the hon. Member says that there is a risk of failure, let me tell him that risk exists everywhere in the world. This is a risk that you have to take. But, in some cases, where people did not have the money, but had assets in terms of building, we have set up a structure at the SIC, where Rs500 m. have been transferred to the SIC. They will do an asset swap, and there is one company Mr Speaker, Sir, that has used this facility. They have given their building to SIC and, against that, SIC has advanced financial resources in order to help ease their liquidity problem. If, tomorrow, they don't refund the money, the SIC has some guarantees. In some cases, there are collaterals; in other cases, some risks have to be taken.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer to the answer the hon. Minister gave to PQ No. B/27 some time back, where he said -

‘Enterprise Mauritius has committed Rs144.5 m. to 26 SMEs with three projects already completed.’

Can we know what are the projects? Can the hon. Minister circulate the list? Then, he added -

‘In addition, six project financing schemes have been launched, for which 351 applications have been received by the closing date of 25 March.’

Can we know where matters stand with these six project financing schemes? He also added that -

‘SEHDA has also committed Rs122.5 m. for 6 project financing schemes that are already operational and for
which 82 applications have been received to date and 14 have been approved for implementation by the National Women Entrepreneurs Council.’

Lastly, he stated that -

‘Small and medium size enterprises in the tourist sector are also covered by the Additional Stimulus Package, and Government is reviewing submissions for five projects with a total project value of Rs15.9 m.’

With these four different categories, where are we?

**Dr. Sithanen:** If the hon. Member had cared to listen to the reply, he would have seen that I have already given some answers to the two questions that he had asked. With respect to tourism, two projects have been approved and, in fact, we mention it in the Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir. One is to upgrade the standard in small and medium hotels, and the other one is to help them reduce the energy consumption in their hotels. For the rest, I have already given some answers - and I think my colleague, the hon. Minister has given some answers. We will put all these figures together, and we will circulate the answer, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Jhugroo:** With regard to the question asked by hon. Ms Deerpalsing, can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister confirm that there is no interrelated transaction between these companies?

**Dr. Sithanen:** I said that there is no related party transaction. This is a specific term that is used in finance. Obviously, there is cross shareholding, which is different, but there is no related party transaction.

**Ms Deerpalsing:** Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister agree that we are one of the few countries offering stimulus packages, where we are lending money to enterprises where there has been no casualties of banks. Usually banks lend money to enterprises, but here we have Government lending money to enterprises in a case where banks have not collapsed, as in the US and the UK. Therefore, will the monitoring of such money be really strict?

**Dr. Sithanen:** We will do the monitoring. Mr Speaker, Sir, the problem is that banks have other responsibilities. We have been fighting with banks in order to play their role. The Prime Minister
knows how many times we have had to speak to the banks to tell them that. But they state that their primary responsibility is towards the shareholder. In fact, in one particular case, Mr Speaker, Sir, we could not save one company, because the financial companies étaient trop gourmands. We told them there is no way that we can guarantee all the past debts of the financial institutions. And the financial institutions say that they are not going to share burden. So, we told them that we cannot help. This risk exists, but there are many other countries where both are being used, because bank failures have happened primarily in some Anglo Saxon economies; I mean, in the US and in the UK. But, in France and in Belgium, Mr Speaker, Sir, they are helping enterprises.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME

– MONEY SPENT

(No. B/490) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the Poverty Alleviation Programme, he will state the –

(a) amount of money spent as at to date under the present budget, and

(b) Number of persons who have benefited therefrom, indicating the localities in which they reside, including the Constituency No. 14, Savanne and Black River.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to PQ No. B/328 on 21 April 2009, I indicated that one of the main objectives of the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups is to implement projects with a view to providing the vulnerable families with immediate basic needs in terms of housing units, support to school children and micro-credit facilities to increase household income. Such support is aimed at creating the minimum conditions for them to evolve further towards integrating the mainstream of the society.

Furthermore, I highlighted last Friday in the Budget Speech 2009 that the Eradication of Absolute Poverty Programme has focused on the 229 pockets of poverty comprising 7,157 families.
This Programme is being implemented in close collaboration with the NGOs, CSR companies and other stakeholders. As I stated, 415 children between three and five years of age, who were not attending schools have now been given access to pre-primary school. They benefit in terms of school material, meal, *accompagnement social* by NGOs, school fees, transport facilities where required, and medical screening. The annual average expenditure per child, excluding transport, amounts to Rs12,000 per child. Additionally, some 600 children have been medically screened and, depending on needs, they will be provided with spectacles, hearing aids, food supplements and other facilities.

By June this year, the EAP will initiate integrated projects in six clusters over the island, covering some 500 households. One of the clusters would cover the deprived regions of Le Morne, Cotteau Raffin and La Gaulette.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that a total of Rs65 m. has already been disbursed. In fact, projects have approved projects for a total amount of around Rs129 m., and funds are being disbursed on progress being made in the implementation of the project.

These include –

First, some 1,700 families who are being provided CIS Housing Units for a total sum of around Rs100.6 m.

Second, some 7,500 children have been provided school materials such as uniforms, shoes, school bags and related items for a total sum of Rs8.5 m.

Third, some 46 students have benefited from soft loans amounting to Rs3 m. to finance their tertiary education in local institutions.

Fourth, under the micro credit scheme, some 260 persons in Mauritius as well as in Rodrigues have been provided soft loans totalling Rs9.8 m. to start income generating activities.

Fifth, some 4,000 school children have also benefited under the Trust Fund for a total of Rs0.6 m. in terms of provision of reading materials, projector, book shelves and other related facilities in the deprived areas.
Last but not least, the Trust Fund has disbursed a sum of Rs6.4 m. for 1,350 beneficiaries in Rodrigues for financing of Community Based projects, namely provision of water tanks for rain harvesting, provision of school material to children and provision of housing units.

Insofar as part (b) of the question is concerned, I had, in my reply to PQ No. B/49 of 31 March 2009, underlined that NGOs submit projects covering pockets of poverty in their respective localities and not necessarily in terms of constituency delimitations. In fact, these projects may overlap from one constituency to another, depending on the project catchment area.

I am tabling information regarding the number of persons who have benefited from all these different schemes under the programme in the different localities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to the facilities being provided by the Trust Fund, the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF) is implementing an Integrated Social Development Project in Bambous, which is in the constituency of the hon. lady, which is nearing completion. Under this project, some 198 vulnerable families are being empowered through the provision of soft skills to enhance employability, improve educational performance of children, development of family and community life.

The project also makes provision to accommodate these families in a model village at la Valette, Bambous. The overall cost of the project, inclusive of infrastructure costs, amounts to Rs240 m. A first batch of 71 families has already been accommodated in the model village. As I stated in my Budget Speech, inspired by the success of this project, a second project is being implemented at Cité Lumière, Grand’ Baie, for the benefit of 30 vulnerable families.

Mr Speaker, Sir, apart from what is being implemented by the Trust Fund, the EAP and the NEF, poverty alleviation initiatives are also undertaken under the Decentralised Cooperation Programme. DCP will continue to assist in the capacity building of non State actors, as well as supporting various projects in the provision of basic education, upgrading of social infrastructure and services.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to PQ No. B/49, the Vice-Prime Minister stated that, as a first measure, priority
was being given to the fact that no child of pre-primary school from vulnerable families are left out of school. While I concede that this is a very good measure, does the hon. Minister agree that a child who does not have a decent place to sleep, and is vulnerable to all sorts of diseases by virtue of the environment he is living in, can still attend pre-primary school conveniently? Doesn’t he think that, concurrently to that programme, which is being given priority, he should give due consideration to the housing problems?

**Dr. Sithanen:** Mr Speaker, Sir, again, if the hon. lady had listened to my answer, I said very clearly that we have a unique experience in an ACP country, which is being commended. This is the Bambous Project which is, in fact, in the constituency of the hon. Member and also in the constituency of hon. Dr. Babajee and hon. Ganoo. It is a unique one, Mr Speaker, Sir, where we are not only providing small children with education, but we have also given a house to their parents, training to their mother and empowerment facility to their father, Mr Speaker, Sir. This type of project has never, never happened in this country.

Secondly, we have given priority to the education of pre-primary children that were denied education which they rightly deserve. But it is not easy, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, I would recommend the hon. lady to read an excellent article in “The Economist” which states –

“Defining poverty is difficult. Fighting it is harder.”

This Government has demonstrated its commitment to fight poverty, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we need to broaden and expand the range of this programme. We have started in Bambous, we will try to help the families of these kindergarten children regarding training and housing, where it is necessary.

**Mrs Hanoomanjee:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Vice-Prime Minister has just mentioned that Government has been able “to define” poverty or eradication of absolute poverty. Since the question relates to Constituency No. 14, can he say whether areas, such as Les Salines Koenig, Case Noyale and Camp Rodriguais, where there is extreme poverty, have been covered by the programme as yet?

**Dr. Sithanen:** Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make three points. The largest beneficiary in terms of constituency is, in fact,
Constituency No. 14, for the simple reason that the Integrated Social Development Programme is located in Bambous. And I have stated very clearly that Rs250 m. have been spent on that project. The initial project value was far less than that. But, because of the humanity of this Government, we have agreed to increase the budget in order to do this Integrated Social Development Programme. I have also indicated, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there are some areas – I think I have mentioned three localities in the constituency of the hon. Member - like Le Morne, Cotteau Raffin and La Gaulette. But as I say, we are not doing it on a constituency basis; we are doing it, Mr Speaker, Sir, on a need basis. Obviously, in many cases, there will be overlapping constituency. We are not going to tell some people that if they straddle two constituencies; we will not give them the facility, because, otherwise, we will not put the figures to give it to Assembly Members. Poverty has to be fought wherever it is.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether there has been any recent survey carried out with regard to social housing requirement in the country?

Dr. Sithanen: There is an excellent paper that has been written recently, Mr Speaker, Sir, on the social housing needs. But, let me also inform the hon. Member that Mauritius is one of the few upper middle income countries where more than 85% of the population own their house. Of course, we all know that, probably, in one house, there will be more than three or four people and, as you know, we are in the process of a nuclearisation of the system where we move from an extended family to this new model. But it is one of the highest probably in the world even when compared to advanced developed countries. Having said that, this report has identified where the needs are, and we are trying to answer this problem by the various means that we have, through the NHDC, MHC and also through the Trust Fund for Vulnerable Groups and the NEF.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister, in his reply, has also mentioned about school materials. But, is the Minister aware that, up to now - we are now mid-May - students of primary and secondary schools residing in Rivière Noire and Tamarin have not yet obtained their school materials?
Dr. Sithanen: I am not aware. If the hon. Member would give me the list, I will pass it on to the Trust Fund. We are trying our best, Mr Speaker, Sir, under difficult circumstances. Notwithstanding the difficult economic situation, we have kept our engagement in terms of fighting poverty, Mr Speaker, Sir. Even in the Budget that was presented last week, we have, in fact, redoubled our effort to fight poverty.

Mr Ganoo: The hon. Minister has, on a few occasions, referred to this La Valette Integrated Project. Today, he has given the figure of Rs250 m. Can he confirm whether Medine Sugar Estate has contributed in this particular project as part of its CSR commitment and can he tell us to what extent?

Dr. Sithanen: I am not aware. I have to check. I would say no, with a risk. I’ll have to check. Maybe, they have given the land at a concessionary rate, but I am not aware. We are working with Medine. I must be very fair to Medine; they have a good CSR and, in some areas, they have done well. So, we are working with them, for instance, on identifying a village touristique for that part of the island. But I am not sure about what has happened for La Valette Project. I will check, and let the hon. Member know.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether he could lay on the Table of the Assembly a copy of the concept paper of the ACP he just mentioned, and also a copy of the CSR companies and NGOs involved in the implementation of the project?

Dr. Sithanen: I will try, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guimbeau: The hon. Minister just talked about a report on housing projects in Mauritius. Can he inform the House whether Curepipe/Plaine Wilhems is the area where there is the highest demand for housing?

Dr. Sithanen: I don’t recall the exact detail, but I can find out and let the hon. Member know.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: The Minister has mentioned La Valette Project in his reply as well. Can I inform him that, for La Valette Project, inhabitants of Bambous have not benefited? There are people who have been brought in Bambous. Can the Minister consider that inhabitants of Bambous, who are living in extreme
poverty, benefit from the second phase of the project?

**Dr. Sithanen:** Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make it very clear. Poverty is not linked to a specific area, even though there is a higher incidence in some areas than others. Now, if we have 200 houses, we have to give it to the 200 who are the most deserving, Mr Speaker, Sir, wherever the need is. If people in the vicinity of that particular location pass the test and satisfy the criteria, certainly they will have it. Otherwise, every Member who has been elected in a particular constituency will say that in his constituency also there are poor people, and why don’t give priority to this! Even in our constituency, No. 18, though it has two of the richest wards in the country, there are poor people, Mr Speaker, Sir; less than in others but, obviously, we need to be fair to people on the basis of their personal profile, as opposed to their place of residence.

**MÉTAYERS – TECHNICAL COMMITTEE - RECOMMENDATIONS**

(No. B/491) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security whether he will state if, following the agreement reached between Government and the Mauritius Sugar Planters Association, a Technical Committee was set up with regard to its implementation and, if so, will he -

(a) state the recommendations made concerning the métayers, and

(b) table copy of the agreement signed with regard to the métayers.

**Mr Faugoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, *métayage* is a historic system of land tenure whereby sugar estates and millers lease their land to *métayers* for a rent based on a share of the sugar accrued and under conditions as determined by a lease contract and provisions of statutory legislation.

In the context of the 36% cut in the price of sugar exported to the EU, to be fully effective as from October this year, it would be very difficult for most of the métayers to remain competitive in sugar cane cultivation.

It is important to mention that métayers are very vulnerable given that they have been and are still cultivating sugar cane on
highly marginal lands and have worked very hard to transform such lands into productive lands.

The hon. Prime Minister, concerned by the serious difficulties facing the sugar cane sector in general and the métayers in particular, decided that the métayers issue should also be taken care of in the context of the Sugar Reform. Accordingly, the Agreement reached between Government and the MSPA in December 2007 provides that the most appropriate solutions be defined to ensure that the métayers are also part of the Sugar Reform and the solutions to be considered are –

(i) the possibility of sale of non-strategic land to métayers, and

(ii) the positive review of the rental formula.

As decided in the MSPA/Government agreement, a Technical Committee was set up under the chairmanship of the Director of FARC to make appropriate recommendations. The Committee comprised representatives of the Farmers Service Corporation, Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture, Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment, Mauritius Sugar Authority, MSIRI, MSPA, SIFB, Associations of Métayers and my Ministry. The Committee submitted its report in April 2008 with several recommendations.

Following the submission of the report and at the request of the then Minister, the Commission for the Democratisation of the Economy engaged into negotiations with the MSPA with a view to reaching a final and global agreement. The Director of FARC and representatives of SIFB, MSA, AREU and SLO (State Law Office) also participated in the working sessions chaired by the Chairperson of the Commission for the Democratisation of the Economy. The agreement which was concluded through exchange of letters provides for the following -

(a) the rent shall be fixed to a single rate of 10% of sugar accruing to the métayers as compared with converted rates between 15% to 24% prior to the agreement;

(b) Formalisation of the “droit de métayage”
The perpetuity of land tenure of métayers is an acquired right. This “Droit de Métayage” is the fundamental asset of the métayers and is quantifiable. This “Droit de métayage” is also considered a tradable asset; I must lay emphasis, Mr Speaker, Sir, on the fact that this particular ‘Droit de métayage’ as a tradable asset did not exist prior to this agreement.

(c) On the issue of sale of land to métayers

The principle of sale of lands to métayers who are occupying the said lands is agreed upon as follows -

Sale of lands by owner estates to métayers will be considered for lands which are not defined as “strategic” by the owner estates;

In case of lands occupied by métayers are considered strategic by the owner estate or estates, there are three possible options opened to the métayers -

First, they can continue to cultivate sugar cane on the same strategic land;

Secondly, they can swap the land for non-strategic land of at least similar value both in terms of agricultural output and quality of locations which they can eventually purchase if they so wish, and

Thirdly, again if they so wish, Mr Speaker, Sir they can sell the ‘Droit de métayage’ to the owner estate against payment of compensation.

In all the scenarios, prices will be determined by mutual agreement following valuation and cross-valuation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the deal concluded between Government and MSPA in December 2000 provides for the possibility of sale of non-strategic land to métayers. The final agreement reached, goes far beyond this initial provision in that it enables métayers occupying strategic land to swap such land with non-strategic land which he can purchase afterwards. The agreement also allows the land owner to buy back les ‘Droits de Métayage’ from the métayers subject to the latter’s agreement against payment of compensation. The métayers cannot therefore be coerced to move out of strategic land.
as the security of tenure is guaranteed under the SIE Act and also as per the agreement reached between Government and MSPA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have already indicated, the principle of land swapping has been agreed. Land swapping can also apply in cases of continued leasing in order to allow for regrouping of leased métayers lands into larger portions where derocking and better irrigation and cultivation techniques can be applied, thus allowing the métayers to achieve better yields, whether in sugar cane or other agricultural activities.

In the case of métayers of Bel Ombre, I had a meeting with some of the representatives following which I had instructed the MSA to freeze forthwith all proceedings initiated in view of agreement between métayers and Bel Ombre Sugar Estate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the sake of transparency and for the information of the House, I am tabling copy of the Agreement entered into between Government and the MSPA in December 2000, copy of the Report of Technical Committee chaired by the Director of FARC, and also a copy of the final and global agreement on the métayers issue.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say what motivated the Technical Committee to come with a recommendation to ask the métayers to give back their strategic land and to swap strategic land for non-strategic land against compensation?

Mr Faugoo: If the Member had listened to me carefully Mr Speaker, Sir, there are three options, no one is bound, and no one is forced to give up the land they can stay on a strategic land if they want to continue cultivating sugar cane as it is provided for under the SIE Act. Secondly if they wish to buy land they have to swap to non-strategic land but provided it is of equal value in terms of cultivation and also in terms of location. So as we say, a right which never existed meaning the land has been given value, it has been given the métayers can sell the right which never existed before. Now it has a value now he can swap he can return to the owner and then claim compensation, compensation which is agreed upon mutually.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, in his answer the hon. Minister has mentioned that he has given the order to freeze all agreements that have been reached prior with the Bel Ombre of
Sugar Estate with the métayers. Can the hon. Minister confirmed then that his decision was based on the fact that the Mauritius Sugar Authority has flouted the agreement that the Prime Minister reached with the MSPA and that that decision that had been taken which the Minister has then frozen was actually in disfavour of the métayers and not according to what the Prime Minister had said that the reform had to be just and equitable and that everybody should be a winner and that this agreement was that the métayers were going to be less well off than they were supposed to be according to the agreement. Can the hon. Minister confirmed that the Mauritius Sugar Authority has flouted the agreement that the Prime Minister reached with the MSPA?

Mr Faugoo: After the agreement was reached between the métayers and the MSPA, there were lots of meetings which were held with métayers to explain the pertinent issues in the agreement which was reached between the Government and the MSPA. My colleague the former Minister of Agriculture had gone through all the areas where there are métayers. They were explained, but behind our back, as for the agreement the métayers and Bel Ombre have reached certain decisions. It would appear they have not been given the proper required assistance, Mr Speaker, Sir, and this is where I had to intervene and I have cancelled whatever decision they have reached and we are looking into this.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of this answer, can the hon. Minister then say whether any disciplinary action can be taken or should be taken with respect to the Mauritius Sugar Authority people, because I have been crying, it seems, in a desert that Mauritius Sugar Authority is now an agency of the MSPA and is not working in the interests of either the small planters or the métayers in this country. Can the hon. Minister confirm whether very strong disciplinary action will be taken against the director of the MSA?

Mr Faugoo: I hold the same opinion Mr Speaker, Sir, and same will be done.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the Minister holds the same opinion, can he say whether action will be taken against the officer who is still responsible for having changed the decision of the hon. Prime Minister?
Mr Faugoo: The answer is yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, and very soon.

Mr Dulloo: Is the hon. Minister in a position to give an idea to the House as to how many métayers have been able to purchase land from the Estate?

Mr Faugoo: They are still in the process, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has mentioned that the métayers are not being coerced to sell their strategic land. Can I ask the Minister whether he has made an enquiry with the métayers of Bel Ombre as to whether they are being coerced to sell their strategic land and that the Sugar Estates want to have their strategic land back and buy back their ‘Droit de métayage’?

Mr Faugoo: As I said Mr Speaker, Sir, they were not coerced; they entered into an agreement with Bel Ombre Sugar Estate. What I said is they lack information and they have not been given the proper guidance. This is where I am taking action Mr Speaker, Sir.

Ms Deerpalsing: Given the seriousness of this matter, can the hon. Minister envisage going to the MBC and going to the public to inform the métayers that they should not enter into backdoor agreements with the Sugar Estates even if though they have the knife under their throat and whether the Minister will inform all the métayers that they have no agreement to get into with the Sugar Estates without the supervision of his Ministry?

Mr Faugoo: We are already doing so, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we are going to go to all the areas where métayers are found.

Mr Jugnauth: The hon. Minister has said that the MSPA is doing something behind the back of Government and the deal that was struck between Government and the MSPA and I understand now that the Minister is of the same opinion as hon. Ms Deerpalsing with regard to MSA. What is the Minister contemplating or has done with regard to the MSPA? Because they should also be taken to task.

Mr Faugoo: It is not MSPA as such; it is Members of the MSPA, meaning in this case, Bel Ombre. As from now on we are going to ask that any issue on métayers has to be in the presence of
either the Ministry or the MSA, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mrs Hanoomanjee:** Mr Speaker, Sir, after the Technical Committee had given its recommendations, can we know from the hon. Minister what was the role of his Ministry? Was it left to the MSA or did his Ministry have the role to supervise the whole implementation of the recommendations?

**Mr Faugoo:** As for the implementation is concerned it was the MSA, Mr Speaker, Sir, because we had the role to set up the committee, come up with recommendations and then reach an agreement; once this is done, the MSA is responsible for implementation.

**Mr Bérenger:** Can I know from the hon. Minister as from what date has he and his Ministry been aware that the MSA has been up to no good?

**Mr Faugoo:** When this issue was raised, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was a question in Parliament a couple of weeks or maybe a month ago.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon Members, I understand that an agreement has been reached between the whips that during the whole week debate will be on the Budget Speech and until the Budget is voted we are going to have lunch and dinner for one hour only. So, I suspend for one hour.

*At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.*

*On resuming at 2.03 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.*

**ST FELIX SUGAR FACTORY – BLUE PRINT**

(No. B/492) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security whether, in regard to the ex-employees of the St. Félix Sugar factory, he will state if those who benefitted from the Blue Print following its closure, have been allotted a plot of land, and, if not, the reasons therefor.

**Mr Faugoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised by the Mauritius Sugar Authority that land of a total extent of 31.41 *arpents* has been earmarked at Royal Road, Chemin Grenier for allocation to the 144 ex-workers of St Félix sugar factory who retired on 06 December 2007 following the closure of the factory.
In accordance with the provisions of the Blue Print and conditions set out by Government, the cane receiving mill will have to meet all expenses and implement procedures relating to factory closure.

I am informed that SUD, which is the cane receiving mill, is not the owner of the land identified and agreed upon all parties, for allocation to the beneficiaries. SUD has to purchase the land from St Félix Sugar Estate and the acquisition process is still ongoing. On 21 May 2009, the Government Valuation Office which is assessing the value of the land has informed the Mauritius Sugar Authority that the survey of the land has been completed and the valuation exercise is in progress.

In parallel, the clearances of the utilities and service providing institutions are being sought regarding the suitability of the land for housing purpose. The location and site plans have been forwarded to the institutions concerned on 19 February 2009. Once all the views are received, SUD will submit its application for a *morcellement* permit to the *Morcellement* Board and thereafter proceed with the development of the site.

My Ministry and the MSA will monitor the situation closely to ensure that there is no undue delay in implementation.

**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister, in case agreement cannot be reached between SUD and St Felix, whether legal advice has been sought as to the possibility as to whether it could be constitutional, legal to compulsory acquire?

**Mr Faugoo:** We need to seek advice but, as at date, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is an agreement which has been reached between the parties. This is why they are going further to find out whether the land in question is suitable for housing purposes.

**MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF CUREPIPE – STAFF/WORKERS - RECRUITMENT**

(No. B/493) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the recruitment of staff and workers at the Municipal Council of Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to if any exercise has been carried out, since July 2005 to date and, if so,
indicate for each post -

(a) the date of advertisement;
(b) the number of applications received, and
(c) the number thereof recruited, indicating their -
   (i) names;
   (ii) addresses;
   (iii) age, and
   (iv) qualifications.

**Dr. David:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that officers in various grades have been recruited by the Local Government Service Commission on behalf of the Municipal Council of Curepipe.

However, with your permission, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the replies I made earlier to PQ Nos. B/796, B/1029 and B/1138 where I informed the House that since appointments and promotions in the Local Government Service fall under the sole responsibility of the Local Government Service Commission which is an independent body, it would not be proper to provide the requested information.

**CUREPIPE/MIDLANDS – STATE LAND - LEASE**

(No. B/494) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the lease of State land in Constituency No. 17, Curepipe and Midlands, he will state if, since July 2005 to date, there has been any -

(a) lease signed;
(b) letter of reservation sent, and
(c) expression of interest received from potential promoters, indicating in each case -
   (i) the name of the beneficiary;
   (ii) the location and extent of land;
   (iii) the terms and conditions;
   (iv) if the annual rental value reflects the actual
market value, and

(v) the purpose.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, the requested information is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly once the exercise is completed.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just want to know from the hon. Minister, whether there has been any expression of interest received for land at Trou aux Cerfs, Cité Pitôt, Test de Busch and Mangalkan. Can the hon. Minister give this information?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have the current information. As I said, there is a number of questions and all the information requested is so detailed. If I want to give the precise information to the hon. Member, I will have to abide by what I have said, otherwise the information may be erroneous and I don’t want to do that.

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND
– FLEXIBLE CREDIT LINE

(No. B/495) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the Flexible Credit Line of the International Monetary Fund, he will state the amount thereof Government proposes to solicit from the Fund.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, we have not yet agreed on an amount to solicit from the IMF under the Flexible Line of Credit (FCL). To understand how the amount will be determined, it may be useful to explain how this totally novel instrument from the IMF works.

The Flexible Line of Credit, FCL, is part of the response of the IMF to help members whether the crisis and return to sustainable growth. It is a precautionary arrangement reserved exclusively for well performing countries with sound economic policies as recognised by the international community through a positive assessment in the IMF Article IV review. The instrument aims to provide such well managed countries with an insurance
policy against adverse developments that hit them as a result of the negative effects from the rest of the World.

In fact the FCL is reserved only for countries with very strong fundamentals, policies and track records of policy implementation. Access to the FCL credit line will be particularly useful for crisis prevention purposes. FCL arrangements will be approved for countries meeting pre-set qualification criteria. Access under the FCL is determined on a case-by-case basis. Disbursements under the FCL would not be phased or conditioned to policy understandings as is the case under a traditional Fund-supported program as standby arrangement.

Because of its nature there is no specific conditionality involved with the FCL unlike all other IMF instruments. The view of the IMF and the international community is that if a country has good policies, but is hit by negative international shocks which it cannot influence, there is no need for it to change policies. Instead it needs to be given the support to meet the external challenges.

Only a few select countries have so far qualified, namely Mexico, Poland and Columbia.

The FCL is first of all a precautionary arrangement, more of an insurance policy against negative developments in the world than actual borrowing.

Flexibility includes -

- Large and upfront access to Fund resources with no ongoing conditions.
- Renewable credit line, initially for six months or 12 months with a review of eligibility every six months.
- Long repayment period.
- No hard cap on access to Fund resources, which will be assessed on a case-by-case basis draw at any time on the credit line or treat it as a precautionary instrument.

There are three general qualification requirements -

1. Strong economic fundamentals and institutional policy frameworks.

2. Implementing and has a sustained track record of
implementing – very strong policies.

3. Remains committed to maintaining such policies in the future.

Drawing from the FCL involves no additional conditionality, but does require continued implementation of strong economic policies. The nine relevant criteria for the purposes of assessing qualification for an FCL are -

(i) a sustainable external position;
(ii) a capital account position dominated by private flows;
(iii) a track record of steady sovereign access to international capital markets at favourable terms;
(iv) a reserve position that is relatively comfortable;
(v) sound public finances;
(vi) sustainable debt position;
(vii) low and stable inflation;
(viii) strong and solvent banks – good supervision of banks, and
(ix) data transparency and data integrity.

The IMF is currently assessing our eligibility according to the above nine criteria. Once this is completed we will be in a better position to agree on the relevant amount of insurance required for our country. However, our resilience to the international crisis is likely to mean we will remain in the lower part of the range of between 300 percent and 1,000 percent of quota that is offered under the FCL. Moreover, drawing at the lower level of 300 percent of quota are, at close, to concessional rates, but larger amounts are increasingly close to commercial rates. Our quota is SDR 100 million, approximately $150 m.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether such a decision from him and from Government cannot be interpreted as *le pire est devant nous* as far as the financial crisis is concerned?

Dr. Sithanen: No, it is exactly the contrary. I have just stated in my reply Mr Speaker, Sir, that this is available only to countries that have sound economic fundamentals and I have listed the nine economic fundamentals. What the hon. Member is speaking about is
an SBA and many countries have gone through SBA - standby arrangement - especially in Eastern Europe; even Seychelles next door has had, unfortunately, to go for an SBA. We are trying to avoid an SBA where conditions are imposed, like they have been imposed in Pakistan, Ukraine, Eastern European countries and in Seychelles. A flexible credit line is basically a precautionary agreement that is given to countries that have sound economic fundamentals, that commits to maintaining these sound fundamentals. And you do not have to use it; you use it only if it is required, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: One more question Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the Vice-Prime Minister whether he can name other countries which have had recourse to this Line of Credit?

Dr. Sithanen: I just mentioned it, but the hon. Member does not listen!

(Interruptions)

Yes, that’s what I said: Mexico, Poland and Colombia, I mentioned it in my answer. Other countries are going for the worst one which I mentioned, the SBA. I think that Peru is being assessed. I think Puerto Rico also - if my memory serves me right - is being assessed.

Mr Bérenger: I was going to ask the same question, because in his reply the hon. Minister gave the impression that three only have been granted the facility, but others have applied. He mentioned Puerto Rico; it is not my information. Will he confirm that, in fact, there are those three countries only that have applied and obtained?

Dr. Sithanen: No, no! I think more have applied. I think Peru also has applied, if my memory serves me right. But these three countries have been granted FCL, Mr Speaker, Sir, Mexico, Poland and Colombia.

Mr Bérenger: I am sure the hon. Minister is aware that, in fact, this new facility from the IMF has come forward, because a comparable facility put forward last October by the IMF found no takers at all.

Dr. Sithanen: There are three facilities, Mr Speaker, Sir. The SBA which is the worst one; then there is one which we call HAPA and then this one which is the FCL. The reason why the second one
was not acceded to by many countries is because there were conditionalities. And if there are conditionalities many countries prefer to go straight into an SBA, whereas for FCL there are criteria for admission and this is why, as soon as it has been announced, three countries which have applied, have already benefited from the facility.

Mr Bérenger: The Minister said that there were not many countries that applied for the new facility put forward in October. None! There were no takers at all and the IMF had to come back, because they were at a loss on how to lend their money. Is the Minister aware that a country like Turkey has, in fact, turned down that new facility because they find it too costly?

Dr. Sithanen: I am not sure about that, Mr Speaker, Sir, because I am not sure whether Turkey is eligible for the FCL. There are many who have applied. But, obviously, as I said, if you are on the lower range of the FCL the interest rate is concessional. If you are in the upper range, I did mention between 300 percent quota to 1,000 percent quota, whereas if you go above a particular range conditions becomes commercial. So, those countries that can go on the commercial market obviously do not have recourse to FCL.

Mr Bérenger: Can the hon. Minister inform the House what is the retainer, because this is a precautionary flexible line, but you do not get it free from the IMF. Can we know what it will cost us as a retainer to be in a position to use that, if required?

Dr. Sithanen: I think it is a very small amount. I do not have the figures but, obviously, once we finalize that we will become eligible for it. You know, Mr Speaker, Sir, we will submit all the information to Parliament.

Mr Jugnauth: In the event that Government would so request for this Flexible Credit Line to the IMF, is the Vice-Prime Minister not worried about the Public Sector Debt to GDP ratio that it would exceed the prescribed limit?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, out of the nine criteria that I have mentioned, two of them are sound public finances and sustainable debt. We brought down deficit from 6% of GDP to 3.5% of GDP, ignoring the Rs6 billion that were left in the cupboard.
Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: We brought down public sector debt from 71% of GDP to 59% of GDP, Mr Speaker, Sir, without increasing VAT.

It hurts, Mr Speaker, Sir! It is because we have managed the economy well that we have brought down the deficit as a share of GDP as stated by the OECD - pas bonne craze craze!

This is why we are eligible for the FLC.

**VICTORIA HOSPITAL – INCINERATOR – AIR POLLUTION**

(No. B/496) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the incinerator situated at the back of the Victoria Hospital, Candos, at La Paix Avenue, he will state if his Ministry has received any representation from the inhabitants of the region in relation to air pollution and other inconveniences caused thereby and, if so, indicate the remedial actions that will be taken.

(Withdrawn)

**CATAMARAN HIJACKING – CONTACT WITH MALAGASY AUTHORITIES**

(No. B/497) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the hijacking of the catamaran on which Mr J. F. C. was a skipper, he will state if Government is still in contact with the Malagasy authorities in relation to the searches, indicating where matters stand.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the Malagasy Police is still searching the two Mauritian fugitives namely Mr Rishi Luchun and Mr Sunny Ramkissoon, as well as Mr Jean François Cotte, the skipper of the pleasure craft ‘Patrol One’,...
which was reported missing since 20 December 2008. Investigations are still ongoing and the assistance of the Malagasy authorities has been solicited to trace the whereabouts of the two Mauritian fugitives and the skipper. According to the Malagasy authorities, searches are still being carried out but Mr Cotte and the two fugitives have remained untraceable so far.

For the benefit of the House, I wish to inform further that our Ambassador in Madagascar travelled to Tamatave on 29 December 2008 with a view to extending assistance to Mr Leon Aliphon, the boat helper of the pleasure craft ‘Patrol One’. For this case, a mutual assistance request has been officially lodged with the Malagasy authorities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House may be aware, only Mr Leon Aliphon, the boat helper, was found on the pleasure craft ‘Patrol One’ which was kept under Malagasy police custody for investigation purposes. Mr Aliphon was released on the 29 December 2008 and repatriated to Mauritius on the 30 December 2008.

The skipper of ‘Patrol One’, Mr Jean François Cotte, and the two fugitives are still reported missing by the Malagasy Police. The said vessel reached Mauritius on the 23 March 2009 and was returned to its owner, Mr Patrick Bouic. On arrival in Mauritius, the vessel was examined by the Police forensic experts.

The Mauritius Police authorities are still in contact with their counterpart in Madagascar in respect of the trimaran “Patrol One”.

Our Ambassador in Antananarivo is in touch with the Malagasy authorities with a view to finding out the whereabouts of Mr Cotte and the two fugitives. Our Ambassador in Madagascar has indicated that there is no new development as at now and that searches are still under way.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister to give us some information as to what the Mauritian Police has been doing? Obviously, to get our friends in Madagascar to do their share we must do ours? Can I know from the hon. Minister whether he has liaised with the Prime Minister and the Commissioner of Police to know what stage the local Police inquiries have reached, because there were local people involved who came and went and there was
a local taxi also involved?

**Dr. Boolell:** Yes, in fact, this morning I talked to the Commissioner of Police and he has relayed certain information to Interpol and Interpol is doing the needful.

**Mr Gunness:** Mr Speaker, Sir, it seems that officers are not in touch with the family. Can I request the hon. Minister to ask his officers to be in constant touch with the family and give the relevant information?

**Dr. Boolell:** Unfortunately, the information conveyed by my hon. friend is not right. The three MPs of the constituency met Mrs Cotte and, of course, there were some financial resources which were awarded to Mrs Cotte. Over and above that, I am in touch on a regular basis with Mrs Cotte. Mrs Cotte had a meeting with the Adviser of the Prime Minister, Mr Rivalland. I asked the Ambassador himself to stay in touch with Mrs Cotte, which he did, on a regular basis. So, to come and say that we have not responded to her legitimate request and we know the hardship that she is facing, I think it is not fair. We have been responding very positively. The only thing that we would like to see happening is to see events unfolding to know the whereabouts of Mr Cotte.

**Mr Jhugroo:** Can the hon. Minister confirm whether the photographs of these fugitives have been published in the newspapers of Madagascar?

**Dr. Boolell:** Yes, from information obtained, the photos appeared in the newspapers and all the information are properly disseminated. We are pressing upon the Malagasy authorities to act promptly, but I must say personally I am not too happy.

**Mr Gunness:** Mr Speaker Sir, I have not said that at the beginning the officer was not in touch with the family. What I am telling the Minister concerns the past two or three weeks or even one or two months back. The Minister can check with his officers. At least, let an officer be in constant touch, not with political people; the MPs will go, but let one of his officers who is following the file be in touch with the family. Can the Minister ask the officer who is following the file to be in constant touch with the family? The political people and the MPs will go.

**Dr. Boolell:** I have no problem. In fact, I have even given my
own phone number to Mrs Cotte and on a few occasions she has got in touch with me.

NTC - RESTRUCTURATION PLAN

(No. B/498) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether in regard to the National Transport Corporation he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to if it has set up a restructuration plan to overcome its financial difficulties and, if so, give details thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Transport Corporation (NTC) that in the face of the serious financial difficulties it is encountering, it has come up with a Recovery Plan which aims at cost cutting and also at generating extra revenue.

The plan includes the review of route networks to ensure a fair mix of profitable and non-profitable bus routes thus allowing for a good dose of cross-subsidisation. It also provides for a revisit of night services which have so far proved to be uneconomical. Besides, the central workshop will only operate on a schedule based on felt needs. Overtime is being controlled and kept to the bare minimum. The Corporation will also re-engineer its staff structure to promote an optimum use of human resources. Action is also being taken to step up their fight against illegal operations and pilferage.

It is forecast that these measures will reduce costs by some Rs5 m. and generate extra income of about Rs4 m. each month.

The NTC also intends to request the National Transport Authority to include Student Yellow buses and blue line buses for the purposes of benefiting from the free travel compensation scheme. Furthermore, a variance analysis of kilometres of operation will be carried out to assess actual consumption of diesel and shortfall in receipt of the Bus Compensation Recovery Account over the years from April 2004 to April 2009. This will permit a revision of the formula so that the NTC can be duly compensated for its fuel consumption.

Finally, the Corporation is re-aligning its financial commitments on major projects through structural adjustments, in line with the recommendations of the Deloitte Report, a copy of
which has already been laid in the Library of the National Assembly.

**Mr Gunness:** Can I know from the Minister whether in the restructuration plan there had been an indication as to when all the debts of the CNT will be recouped?

**Mr Bachoo:** The CNT is highly indebted. It is very difficult for me at this particular stage to exactly forecast what will be the future but, in fact, we are trying our best to economise on so many issues and probably we will be able – let’s say at the end of this month - to economise, at least, Rs5 m. to Rs7 m. In addition to this, we are also trying to increase the revenue of the CNT.

**Mr Gunness:** I am not asking the Minister, but, at least, the people at the CNT when they prepared the restructuration plan, they must have forecasted according to their revenue, according to their cash flow, how much money they will get with all their savings and what not. So, have they set up a time frame by when they think this debt will be recouped?

**Mr Bachoo:** No time frame has been set, but for the information of the House I would like to circulate a copy of the recovery plan.

**Mr Bhagwan:** Mr Speaker, Sir, whilst employees are being asked to reduce their overtime and the public is taking its share, has the Minister asked the Chairperson, as a gesture of solidarity towards the travelling public, whether he can get rid of his jaguar, his allowances, overtime and petrol allowance? Has this exercise been done?

**Mr Bachoo:** I will convey the message of the hon. Member.

**Mr Bhagwan:** The hon. Minister has to take a decision.

**Mr Gunness:** Can we know from the Minister what decision has been taken concerning the building of the headquarters of the CNT which is being constructed at Ébène?

**Mr Bachoo:** We are trying to complete the building and once the building is completed, we will have a look at how best we can make use of the building, either we’ll have to sell it or we can utilise the building; at the same time we can rent the building where we can get revenues.
Mr Gunness: Can the Minister reassure the employees of the CNT that there will be no reduction of workforce at the CNT?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, it all depends because many of them are involved in pilferages and until now about 18 have been dismissed. So, if that continues, definitely I’ll have to take action.

Mr Bérenger: I don’t think whether it is linked to the financial situation of the CNT, but I am sure the hon. Minister, like myself, drives around Mauritius on the roads every day. Will he agree with me that there has been a deterioration of smoke pollution in regard to CNT buses recently?

Mr Bachoo: I do admit, Sir, and we are taking steps because we have got many buses which are above 16 years. There is a question on that, I am going to answer. That is the reason why tender exercise is on for procurement of additional new buses.

NTC – BUS FLEET

(No. B/499) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether in regard to the bus fleet of the National Transport Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to the number thereof having attained the age of 16 years and due to be renewed, indicating the actions that are being taken.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the National Transport Corporation has a fleet of 520 buses. 36 of them have reached the age of 16 while 42 have reached the age of 17. They have been duly licensed by the National Transport Authority to operate.

I am further informed that the Corporation has initiated action plan to procure 85 fully built standard buses. The tender exercise is on and the bids are currently being evaluated at the Central Procurement Board.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister confirm to the House why all buses over 15 years old are used by CNT to carry school children and very often they get breakdowns?

Mr Bachoo: It is not necessarily those buses which are 15 years and above. We have got dedicated student buses and those
buses have been authorised by the NTA to carry students on conditions that after every six months they have to undergo examinations and tests.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the 42 buses which he just mentioned were not already out of operation and have been put into operation only recently by the National Transport Corporation?

Mr Bachoo: Normally, the average year is 16, but these buses are above 16. The NTA, under special conditions, has allowed those buses to run, and certificates of fitness have been given to them. But when you see those buses, you feel that you have to scrap them out.

Mr Gunness: The hon. Minister is talking about the NTA. Is it not the Minister who has to give a waiver when it is above 16 years?

Mr Bachoo: But, this is the law. Under regulations, you are authorised. This is what the Member has done in the past; it was so even in the previous Government. This regulation was passed, I think, in 2003.

(Interruptions)
Yes, I was the Minister, and the hon. Member was in Government then.

ANTIVIRAL DRUG TAMIFLU – PURCHASE – JULY 2005 TO MAY 2009

(No. B/500) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the antiviral drug Tamiflu, he will state the

(a) number of consignments purchased, since July 2005 to date, indicating in each case the -

(i) quantity;

(ii) cost;

(iii) number thereof having expired;

(iv) number thereof having been used in
hospitals, and

(b) measures taken to avoid any shortage thereof.

**Dr. Jeetah:** Mr Speaker Sir, since July 2005, *Oseltamivir phosphate*, that is, Tamiflu, has been purchased in three consignments as follows –

- In September 2005, 10,000 capsules of *Oseltamivir* of 75 mg for an amount of Rs631,280.

- In 2006:
  - 30,000 capsules of *Oseltamivir phosphate* (75 mg) for an amount of Rs1,386 m.,
  - 270,000 doses of *Oseltamivir* powder oral mix for an amount of Rs12,474 m., and
  - 48 kg of *Oseltamivir* phosphate powder for an amount of Rs13,273,920 m.;

- and finally, in 2007, 49 kg of *Oseltamivir phosphate* powder for an amount of Rs17,191,350 m.

The expiry of the three consignments of drugs is 2011.

I wish to inform the House that WHO has, on 13 May 2009, donated to the Government of Mauritius drugs for the treatment of 1,056 patients.

As regards part (a) (iv) of the question, as at now, there has been no use of *Oseltamivir phosphate*, that is, Tamiflu, in our hospitals.

Regarding part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the present stock of Tamiflu can cater for the treatment of about 13% of the population. In line with WHO guidelines, the stock is being increased to cover, at least, 25% of the population. Action has already been initiated to procure the additional amount of *Oseltamivir phosphate*.

**Mr Jhugroo:** Can the hon. Minister confirm whether the expiry date of these drugs is on the containers of the Tamiflu?

**Dr. Jeetah:** The hon. Member knows about the process of reviewing the expiry date of drugs. Can I just give some additional information, Mr Speaker, Sir? It is common practice for laboratories to retest samples of active pharmaceutical ingredients
already mixed and finished products before expiry dates. In this particular case, since we are required to stock pile Tamiflu; retesting will be done before expiry in 2011 and expiry, eventually, extended to 2014. I understand also that retesting will be done again in 2014 and, if positive, extended to 2017. I would like to assure the House that this is a commitment that has been taken globally, and it has been validated by WHO, FDA and EMEA, that is, Food and Drugs Administration of the US and European Medicine Evaluation Agencies.

**Mr Bérenger:** Can I ask the hon. Minister if he has the dates on which the orders were placed with regard to the Tamiflu that we received in 2006 and 2007?

**Dr. Jeetah:** I do not have the date, but I can state that it was in September 2005, 2006 and 2007. I do not have the information with regard to the ordering, but these are when Tamiflu was received.

**Mr Naidu:** Can the hon. Minister inform the House of the specific actions which are being taken to increase the stock from 13% to 25%?

**Dr. Jeetah:** We have gone through an emergency procurement process, and the closing date for the tenders is 27 May 2009. Then, we will take a decision.

**Mr Jhugroo:** With regard to swine flu, can the hon. Minister confirm whether all retail pharmacies and private clinics have been informed by the Government pharmacist to sell Tamiflu only on prescription?

**Dr. Jeetah:** I have personally met the press, and I have informed them. But, if this is not the case, we will write to everybody. I know that the Chief Medical Officer has been talking to all the stakeholders. I have personally held six meetings with all the stakeholders, and I would be surprised if somebody does not know, but we will ensure that everybody is aware.

**Mr Jhugroo:** Can the hon. Minister inform the House why the same procedure was not followed during the Bird flu?

**Dr. Jeetah:** The hon. Member ought to know that I am only in charge of human beings. He has to address the question to the
substantive Minister.

**Mr Jhugroo:** The same drug is concerned. Previously, there was no need to sell on prescription but, this time, being given it is for Swine Flu, we need prescription. So, I want to know why.

**Dr. Jeetah:** The hon. Member needs to know that, at the moment, we have a very severe strain of this flu, that is, AH1/N1. This is a combination of three species, that is, the bird, human being and pork, and there is the only molecule available locally that can treat it effectively. So, it is very important to make sure that people do not grow resistance against this drug. If one was to misuse this drug, there would not be any cure at the time that I am speaking.

### AGALEGA – AIRPORT – PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/501) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the proposed construction of an airport in Agalega, he will state where matters stand.

**Dr. David:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the proposed construction of an airport at Agalega, as envisaged following the tourism project submitted by IBL in year 2004, is not on our agenda for the short term. However, taking into consideration the bad state of the runway, approval has been obtained for the rehabilitation of the airstrip, and the Ministry of Finance & Economic Empowerment has committed appropriate funds for that purpose in Estimates 2009.

I am also informed that the OIDC is in the process of recruiting a Project Coordinator to oversee the execution of works, and that tenders for the construction works would then be launched.

**Mr Jhugroo:** Can the hon. Minister confirm to the House whether the Dornier is still using the existing airfield for landing and taking off and, if so, is it safe?

**Dr. David:** Yes, the Dornier is still flying, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is why we are rehabilitating the airstrip, because we find that it is in a bad state.

**Mr Jhugroo:** Is it safe for the Dornier?
Dr. David: The Dornier, so far, has effected - I think - 10 sorties to Agalega, Mr Speaker, Sir.

SALE BY LEVY – PROPERTIES
- JULY 2005-MAY 2009

(No. B/502) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Attorney-General whether, in regard to the properties sold by levy, since July 2005 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number thereof, indicating –

(a) the size and location thereof;

(b) the names and addresses of the -
   (i) buyers;
   (ii) sellers, and

(c) the sale value of each property.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am waiting for the reply from the hon. Master and Registrar, and same will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

MAURITIUS TELECOM - CALL SERVICES - LINE “150” - TARIFF CHARGED

(No. B/503) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Information and Communication Technology whether, in regard to the call services provided on line “150”, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Telecom, information as to the tariff charged therefor, indicating the amount collected for each of the last five years

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Telecom that the service “150” provides local directory information to the public, and that the tariff for the service is published in the Telecom's Directory, and is publicly available and accessible. The current tariff for the “150” service is as follows -

Insofar as the last part of the Question is concerned, as the House is aware, Mauritius Telecom is a registered company and offers a variety of services, either by itself or through subsidiaries.

Mauritius Telecom, being a registered company, it is not
customary in the House to disclose commercially sensitive pieces of information that pertain to its business activities, particularly in a competitive environment.

Further, Mr Speaker, Sir, the pieces of information requested are published in each of its annual audited financial statements and are publicly accessible.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, if it is published, why it that the hon. Minister cannot give figures to the House? He just said that the figures are published.

Mr Speaker: The Minister has said that the information is available in the audited account of the company and, according to our Standing Orders, the question is inadmissible.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the published accounts, it is not stated how much the ‘150’ line brings to the Government. It mentions the total revenue. Can we know from the hon. Minister how much the ‘150’ line brings?

Mr Dulull: The hon. Member has to read the notes to the account.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, when we dial ‘150’, we spend a lot of time listening to the music, which means that this department is understaffed. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he can see to it that there is a better staff?

Mr Dulull: Can the hon. Member repeat this question?

Mr Guimbeau: When we dial the ‘150’, we get music, and this is not the purpose of the ‘150’. The ‘150’ is supposed to give service to a customer. This is why I have been asking the question, Mr Speaker, Sir. What I am asking the hon. Minister has to see to it that there is proper staff in this department, so that customers do not have to wait all this time and pay all that money.

Mr Dulull: We will look into it to reduce the queue.

STC - MUMBAI – HORSE RACING ACTIVITIES

(No. B/504) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Business, Enterprise & Co-operatives whether he has received representations from the Secretary General of the Association des Consommateurs de l’île Maurice, regarding the involvement of the State Trading
Corporation in horse racing activities in Mumbai, India, and the use of its logo at the hippodrome of Maha Laksmi, on 29 March 2009 and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to if –

(a) the Board had approved same;

(b) its General Manager assisted the meeting and, if so, on whose invitation.

Mr Gowreessoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has received a letter dated 07 May 2009 from the Secretary-General of the Association des Consommateurs de l’île Maurice. However, before a reply could be made, the contents of the letter were published in ‘L’Express’ newspaper of 08 May 2009. Same information was aired on the radio on 08 May 2009. At my request, the General Manager of STC intervened on the radio and explained that he had been on a private visit to India and that he had attended the horseracing event on 29 March 2009. He also explained that there was no cost incurred by the STC, and one of the horse races was sponsored by the Gujadhur family and co-sponsored by Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd.

Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd. has been involved in transportation of petroleum products on behalf of STC since August 2006 to date, and has, therefore, publicised the logo of STC as the latter is one of its clients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Managing Director of Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd had invited the General Manager of STC to attend the event, where Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd. was one of the co-sponsors. The General Manager had also received an invitation from the Mauritian organiser, Mr Naresh Gujadhur, as there was one race to be run under the Rajcoomar Gujadhur Memorial Trophy.

There has been no expense incurred by STC, and the General Manager of STC had himself footed his airways bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that, for the events of that day, there were the presence of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA), Naiade Resorts Limited, Board of Investment (BOI), Mauritius Turf Club (MTC), and the Gujadhur family who promoted their organisations all through India across the
media. STC has been able also to promote itself across India without any cost. This is to the advantage of the STC, as the latter has strong commercial links with India through STC India, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd. (MRPL) and Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd.

It is a matter of prestige for displaying the logo of STC across India, and it was an opportunity not to be missed.

Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, all firms engaged in business do use advertising and promoting firms image across the globe. The business mindset has changed, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the STC has followed the path.

Since then, Mr Speaker, Sir, several new firms have conveyed their interest to work with the STC – I am tabling a list thereof.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the question of Board approval does not arise, as it did not involve any fund from STC.

It was not a meeting but an event, to which the General Manager of STC attended through a personal visit.

The event also coincided with the 41st Anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius.

Mr Bhagwan: The hon. Minister has stated that there is no point of asking authority by the Board to use the logo. Can we understand that the logo of STC can be used everywhere, on every occasion, without any authorisation by anybody?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform the House, whether it is the practice of the STC to use the logo anywhere, everywhere, without any authorisation?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have said in my reply, today, to do business, we must do marketing in a proper way, so that we can get more clients. Regarding the logo of the STC, it is because Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd. is our transport carrier for STC petroleum products.

Mr Bhagwan: Has the hon. Minister inquired or taken upon the word of the General Manager that he has settled his bill? Is the
Minister aware that the airfares of the General Manager have been settled by Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd?

**Mr Gowressoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said in my reply that it is the General Manager who has footed the bill.

**Mr Bhagwan:** Has the hon. Minister any proof of that? Is there any receipt, any proof?

**Mr Gowressoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no need to inquire.

**Mr Jhugroo:** Can the hon. Minister inform the House how many times the logo of the STC has been displayed all over India or across India?

**Mr Gowressoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as I know, it is the first time.

**Mr Gunness:** The STC is getting into different activities, namely diamonds etc. Can I know if, in the future, they will be getting in horse racing activities also?

**Mr Gowressoo:** No, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Jugnauth:** From the answer that the hon. Minister has given to the House, would he confirm - because it seems to be now a new principle from this Government - that any officer, who would be going on private visit abroad, would be entitled to use the name of the Corporation or parastatal body in order to promote Mauritius? Is that a new policy now?

**Mr Gowressoo:** It is not like this, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is because of that Mauritian Event, that is, the 41st anniversary of Independence. That event was organised by a Mauritian organiser, Mr Speaker, Sir, and that’s why STC was concerned.

**Mr Bhagwan:** Do I understand from the Minister that the STC would, henceforth, engage itself in the importation of horses?

**Mr Gunness:** The hon. Minister stated that MTPA and other bodies were there. But, can he state whether there was only the logo of the STC or that of MTPA also?

**Mr Gowressoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, there was the logo of the MTPA as well.

**LAND BASED OCEANIC INDUSTRY PROJECT**

(No. B/505) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg)
asked the Minister of Industry, Science and Research whether, in regard to the setting up of the Land-Based Oceanic Industry, he will state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebejaun): Sir, with your permission I will reply to this question. The Land Based Oceanic Industry project is based on the commercial exploitation of deep sea water currents 1000 metres below the surface of the sea, with valuable characteristics, including a constant six degrees temperature, mineral rich and high purity. Potential applications include cold seawater air conditioning, called SWAC, premium bottled mineral water, spa and thalasso therapy, pharmaceutics, cosmetics and aquaculture among others.

An economic and oceanic technical analysis of potential sites for the land based oceanic industrial park was carried out in 2007 by Makai Ocean Engineering Incorporation.

The recommended site is near Flic-en-Flac, in view of the ease of access to the deep-sea current. Negotiations are under way to acquire land to the extent of 312 acres.

A market-sounding exercise, carried out by the Board of Investment, has demonstrated that there is potential demand for the project in the Green IT industry using cold water for cooling of Data Centres. There are currently four operators in the local data centre market, with around 20,000 sq ft rented at full capacity situated in land. There are now 13 new operators who have shown interest to rent an additional 60,000 sq ft in the proposed Green Data Centre Park, and it is estimated that 100,000 sq ft Green Data Centre will be required by the third year of operation and 300,000 sq ft by the fifth year respectively. Expressions of interest for the implementation of the Green Data Centre will be invited by the end of this month.

It is expected that the first phase of the park’s development will principally focus on Green IT sector, which will exploit the low temperature of the water for cooling and incorporation of photovoltaic systems. Unfortunately, the site is not favourable for wind energy development. The other potential applications, such as premium bottled mineral water, are being followed up.

Mr Varma:  Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Deputy Prime
Minister inform the House whether the SIC is being taken on board for this project?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** We are waiting for the expressions of interest. SIC has shown interest, and I hope it will participate.

**Mr Lesjongard:** Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether a study has been carried out on the impact on the tourism industry in that sector?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** Not specifically, but as part of the general study, yes. It will be to the advantage of the industry, should there be an interest to set up hotels and other tourist activities in the surrounding.

**Mr Bérenger:** I did not catch very well what the hon. Deputy Prime Minister said. Has there been a change of venue? Because I am given to understand that, at first, the whole complex was to come out of the ground somewhere in the South East, and now I think I heard the West Coast. Has there been a change of venue? And, if yes, why?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** There was no fixed site chosen. There has been a survey round the island. Three sites were chosen and, then, eventually one was a preferred site. Among the preferred sites, the North West Trou aux Biches area was included.

**Mr Bérenger:** The Deputy Prime Minister gives the impression that there is plenty of potential, and I think there is. Can he tell us how is it that, whereas last year, in the Budget Speech, the land-based oceanic industry was prominently put forward as a key component of the *Maurice Ile Durable* Project. Why has it disappeared from the screen this year and we hear nothing?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, it has not disappeared from the screen. It has been going slowly along. The hon. Leader of the Opposition will appreciate that, when I make a statement, it’s to announce that things are happening, and not that things will happen. As I have said, today, *c’est dans cette question* - things are happening. By the end of this month, we will have expressions of interest, and I hope it will move forward. Initially, we started with the bottling of special water, and we are pursuing this matter.
**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, maybe, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has forgotten. Can I remind him - he says things are happening - that last year, we were told that legislation would be brought within the year concerning this project to move things forward? What has happened to the legislation?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I am told that legislation is not required at this stage for this specific project.

**Mr Ganoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, will there be any bidding process?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** We have asked for expressions of interest. We will see who comes in. It has not been easy, because it is a new technology. There are very few players in the market, but we will see to it that it happens.

**Mr Jugnauth:** Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the bottling of water, since a study has been carried out, can the Deputy Prime Minister say which markets are being targeted?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** Initially, it was the Asian market. But, I understand that it is already saturated from Hawaii and the East. We are looking at the market in the Middle East.

**Mr Varma:** Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House whether it is the University of Mauritius which initially carried out the study on the land-based oceanic industry?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** It is the Mauritius Research Council.

**CHILD ONLINE PROTECTION BILL – INTRODUCTION**

(No. B/506) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Women’s Rights, Child Development & Family Welfare whether, in regard to the protection of children when using the internet, she will state -

(a) where matters stand concerning the proposed introduction of The Child Online Protection Bill, and

(b) how same has been addressed under the information security component of the National Information and Communication Technology Strategic Plan.

**The Minister of Information & Telecommunication**
Technology (Mr A. Dulull): Mr Speaker Sir, with your permission, I wish to reply to this Question.

The Minister of Women’s Rights, Child Development & Family Welfare has, in 2008, published the National Information and Communication Technology Strategic Plan 2007-2011, and one of the issues under the Plan is the safety of children online. The main projects in that area are -

(a) the development of a Child Safety Online Action Plan, and

(b) amendments to be made to the Child Protection Act to cater for issues of child safety online.

The development of a Child Safety Online Action Plan was entrusted to the National Computer Board which set up a Committee, composed of, *inter alia*, representatives of the Prime Minister’s Office, the ICT Authority, the Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development & Family Welfare, State Law Office, Police IT Unit, Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, Ministry of Education, Culture & Human Resources, University of Mauritius, University of Technology, Mauritius, the Internet Child safety Foundation, and the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce & Industry. Government has, on 30 January 2009, agreed to the implementation of the Child Safety Online Action Plan that would promote Child Safety Online at national level. The Child Safety Online Action Plan also includes a provision for the Child Online Protection Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the National Computer Board organised a round table session on the occasion of World Telecommunications and Information Society Day on 14 May 2009, whereby the provisions to be included in the legislation were discussed among stakeholders concerned.

Stakeholders have been invited to submit their proposals by 05 June 2009. Once these proposals are compiled, the drafting instruction for the Child Safety Online Protection Bill would be submitted by my Ministry to the Attorney-General’s Office.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether there is a time frame for the Bill to be introduced in the National Assembly?
Mr Dulull: Once we get all the proposals by 05 June, we will make sure that we can bring it to Parliament as soon as possible.

CITE BALANCE, PLAINE MAGNIEN – EX-CHA HOUSES – LAND PURCHASE

(No. B/507) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to Cité Balance in Plaine Magnien, he will state the number of inhabitants who have purchased the land on which stand their respective ex-CHA houses.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that 93 applications out of 154 owners of Cité Balance ex-CHA housing units in Plaine Magnien, have been received for the purchase of land on which stand the housing units.

Sir, the land on which stands the housing estate is at present under leasehold with Mon Desert and Mon Trésor Ltd., and my Ministry has already initiated procedures for its acquisition from MTMD. Once the exercise is completed, the procedures for the sale of the land on which stand the houses will be undertaken.

PLEIN BOIS – FOOTBALL GROUND

(No. B/508) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Youth & Sports whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a football ground in Plein Bois, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Ritoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has no project in the pipeline for the construction of a football ground at Plein Bois.

However, I am informed that the Forces Vives of the locality of Plein Bois have requested for such a playground, and a site belonging to the Mon Desert Mon Trésor Sugar Estate has been identified in that regard.

I am also informed that, for the time being, footballers of Plein Bois are using the existing football ground of Trois Boutiques, which is situated at about two kilometres from that village.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the land, which has been identified, will be
compulsorily acquired by Government?

Mr Ritoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to consult the Ministry concerned.

CONGOMAH – COMPULSORY ACQUISITION

(No. B/509) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to the compulsory acquisition of a plot of land in the region of Congomah, for the construction of the Blackburn Bridge, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a survey has been carried out by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit regarding the geometrical design of the re-alignment of the road and the bridge at Blackburn Road.

Once precise information to the land required for the project is received, acquisition procedures will be initiated promptly.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that the existing bridge represents a danger to the inhabitants of Congomah, may I appeal to the Government to act promptly and efficiently to construct the new bridge?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is only concerned with acquisition of land. I understand incidentally that Rs10 m. have been earmarked for that bridge. I will transmit the message to my colleague, and will make sure that this is promptly done to avoid any mishap in future.

NTC – BUS SERVICE AFTER 21 HRS

(No. B/510) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he is aware of the problems being faced by the workers, who finish up late at night, following the decision of the National Transport Corporation to stop providing bus services after 2100 hours, and if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, prior to 29 April 2009, the National Transport Corporation (NTC) was providing late night services only along route 170 and 170A, up to 2300 hours. Such services were uneconomical to the extent that the
NTC was incurring important losses.

The NTC’s present financial situation is very fragile, and it cannot afford running its buses against losses. In fact, the NTC is striving hard to cut cost and increase revenue. This aims at stopping the decline. One of the measures targets night services and it has been decided to do away with these services, which were literally draining the financial resources of the Corporation.

The NTC has informed the travelling public, through the press, of the discontinuation of the operation of night services as from 29 April 2009.

I am informed by both NTA and NTC that no official complaint has, so far, been received following this measure.

With regard to remedial action, I wish to point out that clause 26(2) of the Employment Rights Act 2008 stipulates that -

“An employer shall, irrespective of the distance between a worker’s residence and its place of work, provide the worker with free transport from the worker’s residence to his place of work and from the worker’s place of work to his residence, where the worker is required by his employer to attend or cease work at a time when no public bus service is available.”

Therefore, the onus of providing transport to workers who finish late at night rests on the employer.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, Government has been talking a lot about ‘Putting People First'. We can’t, just for the sake of economy, put people’s life at risk. Workers have to walk long distances late at night, which is a risk in itself. Others have to have recourse to auto stop. That is another situation where there is risk, and this has given move to a new generation of “van marron” now. Can I ask the hon. Minister to make an appeal to the NTC so that, instead of stopping the service altogether, it could reduce the number of buses, taking into consideration the human situation?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, hardly a few passengers were travelling at night, after 9.00 p.m., and it is practically impossible for NTC to continue this. You know that the NTC is encountering financial problems. It is difficult for the time being to consider that.
FLIC EN FLAC – INDUSTRIAL LEASE

(No. B/511) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the industrial lease granted to Société Pierre Bleue on Pas Géométriques at Anna, Flic-en-Flac, he will state the date the lease was –

(a) approved, and

(b) signed.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: Time is over! The Table has been informed that PQ Nos. B/477 and B/511 have been withdrawn.

MOTION
SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Sir, I beg to move that all the business on today’s Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER
PROGRAMME-BASED BUDGET ESTIMATES 2009 – DISCREPANCIES

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been a few typing mistakes in the printed version of the Programme-Based Budget Estimates 2009 leading to inversion of figures and some slight variance in
sub-totals which have resulted in discrepancies between the details of a Ministry budget with the sum set out in the Schedule to the Appropriation Bill which are listed as per the document circulated. The corrections made to the Programme-Based Budget Estimates 2009 are now being circulated (Appendix I).

These mistakes have no bearing on the Schedule to the Appropriation 2009 Bill.

Moreover, whilst the overall Revised Estimates for the financial year 2008/2009 are given in the “Statement of Budgetary Central Government Operations”, the details by programme and Ministry have inadvertently not been included in the printed document.

We are now circulating a Table of six pages at Annex I giving those details.

We are also circulating at Annex II the last page of the Revenue Estimates after page 662 which somehow had been omitted at editing and printing stage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, these referenced changes have been circulated. (Appendix II)

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development Bill (No. X of 2009) was read a first time.

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2009) BILL

(NO. IX OF 2009)


Question again proposed.

(3.05 p.m.)
The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger): Mr Speaker, Sir, especially in the present international and local economic context, of course, we agree that saving jobs is a priority. But, it should not be effected at the expense of the purchasing power of the population. Indeed, maintaining the purchasing power of the population is also a priority. The truth is that the laissés-pour-compte of the Budget that we are discussing now are the pensioners, widows, les orphelins, those benefiting from social benefits, small wage-earners and civil servants. That is the truth! They are les laissés-pour-compte du budget que nous discutons actuellement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, you will remember that, in March, the Mauritius Employers’ Federation requested un gel des salaires, a wage freeze, no salary compensation at all this year. When the hon. Minister of Finance replied to a Private Notice Question, which I put on 21 April, he gave clearly the impression -and more than the impression - that he was aligning himself on the request of the Mauritius Employers’ Federation. Indeed, repeatedly, he made reference to other countries, in particular, Singapore, where not only there has been a wage freeze but a wage decrease has been imposed. Therefore, clearly, the impression was that we are going to follow the Singapore route and go by the request of the Mauritius Employers’ Federation. Of course, this raised hell outside; wage-earners in general, pensioners, everybody, including the Opposition. We said ‘no’, we are not Singapore.

The hon. Minister of Finance has gone back on that. I won’t use any word like capituler, céder or whatever. He has gone back on that, and it is a good thing. He is no longer aligning himself with the Mauritius Employers’ Federation, but he is now aligning himself with the NPC, that is, the National Pay Council. And I say that this is insuffisant. He has gone back on the wage freeze idea, but what is being proposed by the NPC is insuffisant, being given that the rate of inflation for the financial year we are considering, 2008/2009, has been 7%. It has been pointed out, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, in France, in the United States and elsewhere, there have been not only Stimulus Packages for business, for banks, for motor companies but there have also been what we could call Stimulus Packages for workers, for employees and for those who pay income tax. There has been a special increase in the lowest paid wages. There has been une diminution de la pression fiscale and this is perceived as fair whereas if it is perceived that only the private sector business is benefiting from a Stimulus Package and not des pensionnés, veuves, orphelins, handicapés and the wage earners, this
can lead us to trouble. Here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to say that the hon. Minister of Finance in order to try and put this idea across that the NPC recommendations sont paroles d'évangile, the hon. Minister of Finance in the press over the last two, three few weeks, has been exaggerating the loss of revenue which would accrue to Government as a result of the International Financial and Economic Crisis and in the same vein he has been exaggerating the budget deficit of Government. I was going through my notes and only a few days ago in “Week-End” he gave a statement - only two weeks ago - that the budget deficit of Government then stood two weeks ago at 7% and, the truth is, when he delivered his speech, it stands at 3.9%. This is not fair. This is management - and I am being generous when I say ‘management’- of public opinion, which is not acceptable. The loss of revenue to Government has - finally figures before us now - been nominal. Therefore, going by the recommendations of the NTC is not reasonable, is not acceptable. The wage compensation offered is 5% whereas the inflation rate has been 7% and there is a cap, no salary earner above Rs12,000 per month is to get any salary compensation. This is not fair, c'est injuste, this is sans précédent, there has never been that case. Of course, right down the years, the big salary earners get proportionally less than the lowest, it has always been like that, but they get something. Now we cap it at Rs12,000. Not only c’est injuste, sans précédent, but it ended the work which the PRB has just done, in the public sector. The PRB went to great pains to look at relativity of jobs, of wages and so on and did a good job. With this cap not only c’est injuste, sans precedent, but it is also doing away with the work which PRB has done. Fausser le travail fait par le Pay Research Bureau! And mind you, when we cap at Rs12,000, I don’t know if the hon. Prime Minister is aware of it, I am sure the hon. Minister of Finance probably is - a lot of simple workers are caught in that. Either right from the beginning or after few years of increments, ordinary workers will get zero salary compensation - drivers in the public sector, watchmen, carpenters, gardeners and I can go on and on like that. All of them either right from the start or after few years of increments go up above Rs12,000. So, they will get no salary compensation. This is not fair. In the private sector also clerical officers, supervisors, foremen will fall above that limit of Rs12000 and as far as les pensionnés, veuves, orphelins, lowest paid wage earners are concerned, I am sure we can afford at least this 2% additional. Otherwise what are we saying that les pensionnés, les veuves, les orphelins et les handicapés have to admit an erosion de leur pouvoir d'achat. Leur pouvoir d'achat est déjà faible. Last year, we went to terrible price increases. Inflation is still hitting us at 7% and we are telling les pensionnés, veuves,
orphelins et les handicapés that they will not get at least 7%, they will get 5%; they will therefore see une érosion de leur pouvoir d'achat, déjà très entamé avec les augmentations des prix de l'année dernière et de cette année.

Therefore, I would appeal to the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance. We must review that figure of 5%, especially for les pensionnés, les veuves, les handicapés et les orphelins, those who get social benefits. Nous pouvons le faire, nous devrions le faire et il n'est pas trop tard and we must also review that Rs12,000 cap. It’s unfair, it hits at ordinary workers, messengers, as I said earlier on. We can afford this extra expenditure, we can afford this extra 2% on pensionnés, veuves, orphelins, handicapés, those getting social benefits in general and we can improve on that Rs12,000 per month cap. That is why, instead of adopter un ton aggressif, dénonçant, etc. it would rather be because c’est faisable, it can be done, it should be done. We moved from the salary freeze, the wage freeze, mais c’est insuffisant. We can and we should go one, two, three steps further as far as this 5% is concerned and the Rs12,000 per month cap is concerned.

My appeal is to the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance. I was looking at the hon. Prime Minister when the hon. Minister of Finance announced that Ministers’ salaries will be cut by Rs10,000 per month. As an afterthought, because otherwise you would, at least, have mentioned the Speaker, the Prime Minister …

(Interruptions)

Yes, I will get to myself, mais je suis bien élevé, I start with others!

As I was saying, the Speaker, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition. Why just Ministers? He does not include the Prime Minister in. I am interested also to know if Ministers are going to have a Rs10,000 cut. Is it going to be Rs10,000 for the hon. Prime Minister? No, it’s not serious! En tout les cas, let me leave that behind. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is perfectly aware que la population out there - as my good friend usually says - n’est pas dupe de ce gimmick. At this point in time, saying, after the massive increase in Ministers’ salaries, Prime Minister’s, due respect, Speaker’s salaries, the recent one…

(Interruptions)

The Leader of Opposition also, of course! I am obliged to follow in that case. I am left with no choice. More seriously, Mr Speaker, Sir, Ministers have just benefited from a massive salary increase which was prescribed by
the PRB. Now, this is not serious _et la population n’est pas dupe_ and then coming to say that the entertainment of advisers will be cut, this is not serious! The advisers’ heads themselves should be chopped, not their entertainment allowance! There is an awful abuse of advisers. An awful abuse! We all know that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Therefore, let's, for example, say that consideration will be given…

_(Interruptions)_

I suppose it is because my good friend is now the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs that consideration will be now given to closing certain Embassies. He said that now, after the Indira Sidaya ‘saga’, we spent so many millions. I agree with the hon. Prime Minister that his nerves would have got very raw if she had stayed around him.

_(Interruptions)_

I can understand that. But that is no reason to open an Embassy at UNESCO, spending millions and now we are going to close not that, we are going to close Embassies. So, that also, I offer you my sympathy, hon. Prime Minister! I hope you will survive her!

_(Interruptions)_

I am sure that the hon. Prime Minister and the others know that _la population n’est pas dupe_, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I want to raise a very serious issue. We are giving a salary compensation which is _insuffisant_, but taking effect as from 01 July 2009. Since we are moving to a calendar year and since our practice, over years and years, have been - we are looking backwards – that we are paying a salary compensation as from 01 July looking backwards to cover the financial year that is behind us. That has always been the practice and is the case now. The 7% inflation is for the year ending end of June. Now, what will happen as from the 01 January next year 2010? Salary earners are entitled to know, because Government is moving to a calendar year. We want to know, we are entitled to know and wage earners are entitled to know whether there will be another salary compensation calculated on a six-six. In the same way, we compare one year to one year, 12 months to 12 months, six months to six months with a salary compensation to start on 01 January. _En passant_, if that does take place - but I will come back to that later on - _l’odeur d’élection générale_ might become stronger! Mind you, now they deserve more, now salary earners deserve at least 7%, I am entitled and the salary earners are entitled to know what is going to happen after the 01
January. Or are we going to be told exceptionally - since we are moving to a calendar year - that there would not be a wage compensation 01 July 2010, because we have moved to a calendar year, there will only be the next salary compensation 01 January 2011? We are entitled to an answer. The wage earners, the workers and the country are entitled to it. There is a wage compensation now as from 01 July 2009. Will there be an interim salary compensation since we are moving to a calendar year 01 January 2010 or which would pénalise les salariés doublement d’une façon inacceptable? If we are told: alright, calendar year coming, we will have the next salary compensation 01 January 2010. This will already have been made clear in the Minister's Speech. There is need to clarify that, it is a very important point. There is need to clarify sans tarder that point and I appeal again before I leave this issue of the salary compensation and the cap thereon. I appeal again to the hon. Prime Minister and to the Minister of Finance. We can and we should improve on the 5% and we should and we can raise that plafond de R 12,000 par mois. My appeal to the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance is in that direction.

Let me move on to the projects and measures contained in the 2009 Budget, as we have been calling it, that is, the Budget we are examining now. Let me say that the measures - and the country already know, I have been surprised, I have been listening, and the country and the population is already aware of what I am saying - and the projects contained in the present Budget should be taken with a huge pinch of salt, avec une énorme pincée de sel. Because most of them have already been mentioned in last year’s Budget on 06 June 2008 or in the Additional Stimulus Package. Most of them had already been announced. But either they never took off or the projects, the measures are en retard and, apart from that, there is no doubt that, as in the past, what is new, or rather a good part of what is new, in this present Budget, will remain as effet d’annonces, as it has been the case on 06 June 2008, as it has been the case with the Additional Stimulus Package, Mr Speaker, Sir. Therefore, yes, we must take all this with a huge pinch of salt, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, the hon. Minister himself says so much. Because in this year’s Budget Speech that is before us and before that in the press, the hon. Minister himself, I take one example, when he addressed the Chambre de Commerce Américaine on 23 April - that is not long ago - he said yes, I agree, implementation is not being done as it should, infrastructure projects are too slow, everything is moving too slowly; he said it. And in his Budget Speech he stressed on the necessity, I quote him in his Budget Speech: “to boost up project realisation capacity”. He went on and
on, on several occasions with that in his Budget Speech. *Et c’est normal*, because this is the truth! They have been very slow in implementing measures announced projects put forward, very slow. There has been massive underspending on capital projects - left, right and centre, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I take a few examples, but I have to take more than a few examples to drive my point home. Let us start with infrastructure precisely, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let us start with *les travaux d’infrastructure* announced last year and announced again, Or *augmenter* in the additional stimulus package. *Il y a unanimité et tout le monde est d’accord qu’il y a eu une lenteur inacceptable* in implementing the projects put forward, the measures announced, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Let me take a few concrete examples. Four years after the last general election, we are still stuck, traffic congestion has deteriorated, and I remember the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Beebeejaun and others saying:”*tini tini six mois trop boucou*”. After the general election of 2005:”*six mois trop boucou*”. Four years later, not only the traffic congestion problem is *entier* but, in fact, it has deteriorated. Mr Speaker, Sir. Two examples, I will tell you *ki nu ti fair ek ki zotte fine touyer par fanatisme politique* - LRT. I will come to that later on, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In terms of traffic congestion, year after year, we have heard of the two projects that are stuck. Dream Bridge is no longer a dream, now it becomes Harbour Bridge. We are so fed up with hearing Dream Bridge. The dream has turned into a nightmare, therefore, now, it is Harbour Bridge. And Ring road, it was going to be *une alliance de mariage entre le nouveau gouvernement et le peuple*, Ring Road, zero, four years later!

Mr Speaker, Sir, I remember - I re-read his speech and so on - with what conviction last year, the hon. Minister of Finance said: No problem, Harbour Bridge and Ring Road are going to start in July 2009 as two PPP - Public Private Sector Projects. I said PPP, *projets pas pou éna*!

One year later, no longer any talk…

(*Interruptions*)

*Projet ine plote!* And that is exactly what has happened! One year later, whereas work was supposed to start on a PPP basis, we no longer talk of PPP. Now, it is worse. Because we are stuck, now we are going to set up a private company under the Companies Act. A Road Development Company! How shocking, *franchement*! We are dead against that. We are going to fight
against that because it is billions of rupees involved. When we set up this Road Development Company under the Companies Act, it means that it is outside the purview of the Central Tender Board - now Central Procurement Board - as a company under the Companies Act as we have been told, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is inacceptable. This is doing a lot of damage out there in the population. That in terms of procurement. I found it rather shocking that the hon. Minister chose to mix that up with procurement issues in general saying that the ceiling of Rs15 m. for Ministries and Departments are not to go to the Central Tender Board - now Central Procurement Board - that this Rs15 m. is going to be raised to Rs50 m. You add these two together, unacceptable explosive.

Therefore, this idea of leaving the RDA - Road Development Authority - behind or creating a company under the Companies Act and, at the same time, raising the ceiling for Ministries and Departments from Rs15 m. to Rs50 m. we are dead against and we should be very careful. J’adresse non seulement un conseil mais une mise en garde au gouvernement : this should not be done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I gave you one example - the PPP projects. It may be half a year ago. I am no longer laughing because it is now from bad to worse, from PPP to company to build roads. We will need billions of rupees not millions. And, as far as infrastructure is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, you would remember Government announced, very proudly - the hon. Minister of Finance announced - that we will move forward because local authorities would be allowed to issue their own securities to finance infrastructure works in the town and villages. I said this is another non-starter, zéro plombage projet! It was always a non-starter. As far as infrastructure is concerned, I can go on and on like that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Let me move to another important project, MID – Maurice Ile Durable. A year ago to move towards the making of Mauritius une île durable, we were told legislation will come forward to set up un observatoire de l’énergie. One year later, it disappeared - not even a reference to it. We were told that there would be an Energy Efficiency Bill. One year later, zero! We were told that there will be another PPP project, - pour faire de l’île Maurice une l’île durable, renewable energy, clean energy - a Wind Energy Project at Bigara to produce between 25 and 40 megawatts - no longer PPP. Again, just like the Dream Bridge and the Ring Road, no longer PPP. Now reference is made one year later to the same project which has never taken off. No longer a PPP project!
Two small hydro units to produce clean energy at Midlands Dam were announced a year ago. One year later, these days, *l'appel d'offres vient d'être renvoyé une troisième fois*. And we talk of clean Mauritius, clean energy! A small project *et c'est une troisième fois que l'appel d'offres a été renvoyé*! Mr Speaker, Sir, now, the hon. Minister informs us that Government is moving forward with the big project this time, a Hundred Mega Watt Power Plant Project with tenders. Good, very good! Tenders have come out and so on, fair enough. A Hundred Mega Watt is a big project. But, at the same time, we are told that Government is going forward with the CT Power Project *sur la côte ouest*. Which is which? There is no room for years and years to come, there is no room for both things. For a dirty filthy CT Power project, 110 mega watt and another 100 mega watt project! Which is which? I think that time has come to say once for all that the CT Power Project *est bien mort*. We have no right - and the hon. Prime Minister knows it and his adviser, Joël de Rosnay, has said it – we, as a country, have no right to talk of *Maurice île durable* if we go ahead with the filthy project, the worse coal technology that you can find on the west coast.

We have taken a stand against the CT Power Project for years now, because there was no tender - *petits copains, gros copains*. It is a dirty coal technology that has been done away with across the world. It is very dangerous to the environment, very dangerous to the Central Electricity Board and consumers would pay at the end of the day. But now, say once and for all that the CT Power Project is dead. They have no credibility when they talk of *Maurice Île Durable*. They come forward in the Minister’s Speech with a new Hundred Mega Watt Power Plant, tenders have been issued already and, at the same time, they refuse to say once and for all that the CT Power Project is dead for good. I think it should come from the Prime Minister himself. We cannot be taken *au sérieux*, if they talk of *Maurice Île Durable* and, at the same time, they persist with this CT Power Project.

One of these days, their special advisor, Joël de Rosnay, who is a respected international scientist, has no axe or coal to grind in Mauritius. He has come out against that project all out. Therefore, I too wish to hear from the hon. Prime Minister himself that this project is dead for good.

Another thing that was announced, I do not know how many times, over the last four years. We are in trouble, we will be in trouble and there will be no real development of renewable energy so long as we will not have a strong Independent Utilities Regulatory Authority. Again, last year, it was
announced; again, one year later nothing has been done, we hear no more about this Independent Utilities Regulatory Authority.

On the same issue of *Maurice Ile Durable* - good initiative to give a subsidy of Rs10,000 per household to install individual solar water heaters. Very good! We approve that. Last year, it was said that it would be time bound until 31 December 2009. And the hon. Minister, in his speech, the other day...

*Interruptions*

He should listen to what I am going to say! *Pas casse ki ine fini! Coquin qui ine commencé!*

*Interruptions*

Yes, listen to me carefully! He said in his speech that the response went beyond expectation. He said that there were 29,000 requests instead of some 20,000, that 14,000 have already been approved. But then he says ‘népli ena casse’. We know that the scheme has been stopped because supposedly there is no money left. Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, let us be serious and I listened carefully. Apart from that passing remark that it went beyond expectation, I expected him to say that we’ll put new funds at the disposable of the Development Bank of Mauritius to move ahead with that project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us be serious! Either it has been a success like the Minister said, beyond expectation, either it has been a success and we must move on, we must provide extra cash or there have been all sorts of *magouilles*, as has been related in the press. There have been all sorts of allegations in the press of *pseudoclients*, *pseudovendeurs*, very cheap products. There have been allegations that some people have obtained Rs10,000, but have purchased maybe unworkable, very low quality, less than Rs10,000 and pocketed the difference. There have been allegations that there have been some *pseudovendeurs* who have obtained very cheap machinery at less than Rs10,000 and pocketed the difference. So, the point is either all this is untrue, either it has been a success and I understand that some foreign donors, who care for the environment, are saying that this is unacceptable, and I say the same thing. Either it has been a success and we must move forward, provide new funds or it stinks, then we must enquire, then we must know the truth, Mr Speaker, Sir. That is why I say I am not convinced at all by the point put forward by the hon. Minister. *Pour moi, c’est un prétexte!* What did he say? He did not say we don’t have money. Billions in the *Maurice Ile Durable* Fund! Billions of Rupees! And he did not say that we don’t have money, he said, no, there must now be a shift
from the scheme that we have where people purchase, they get a subsidy to it, to – let me read that - production, shifting focus to manufacture, produce this machinery. So, in the meantime, we stop, it is a pretext, it is not serious. If it has been a success - and it should have been a success – rétablir immédiatement, donner les millions nécessaires, pas les milliards dont disposent le gouvernement. If it has been a success rétablir le scheme, a full enquiry - and I will come back to that - on whether there has been monkey business and I believe there has been, but a full enquiry and let us, of course, encourage local production of such water heaters. But we don’t stop everything, we say that the results have been beyond expectations and yet we stop, we don’t provide one cent and then we dream about local production for the future. This is not serious at all! And I appeal to Government to give the necessary funds, let’s move forward, with good control; if the control has been inadequate, change the rules of the game, give money, good control, full enquiry, encourage local production of such water heaters. But don’t stop everything in its track! This is wrong and I believe this is not to acknowledge the fact that there are lots of allegations. I think a lot of things have gone wrong. I’ll come back to that in the days to come.

_Maurice Ile Durable_, it’s also ethanol production; ethanol which can be used in cars, not ethanol that we produce to export supposedly, but the required quality of ethanol to be used in cars. _Maurice Ile Durable_, it’s also that. But I am shocked; there is no reference to that at all. _Ine déjà dire : ‘bé pas faire, pé faire là, pé faire.’_ No, Mr Speaker, Sir, _pas pé faire narien!_ The enterprise that was producing low quality ethanol is nearly closing down and, in any way, we were in a situation - this is one of the things that this Government only can do. But some time back, we were selling our raw sugar to the European Union and importing refined sugar and we thought that our European friends would say: “alright, no problem, my friend!” No, you can’t do things like that. Now, we started test, we would have had to import the refined ethanol and here we produce crude, non-refined ethanol which we export. _C’est surréaliste!_ Petty politics have come into that, cheap politics have come into that. The result is that we are stuck. Everything is stuck with the production of refined ethanol massively, not in small units somewhere there, but it is tied up completely with the reform of the sugar industry and cheap politics have come into that. And who is paying the price? Not just the big owners because planters, workers and employees were told that they would be shareholders in these new ethanol plants; planters, workers, wage-earners, _saliérs_ are to gain something.
So, I think we must turn a page on that as far as ethanol is concerned and move ahead. This is very much part of Maurice Ile Durable and, in the meantime, we do nothing concerning ethanol and the hon. Minister of Finance tells us proudly: ‘last year, I brought down by half the customs tariff on hybrid cars. This year, he says:’mo casse paké encore, I’ll bring down by 50% on electrical cars this time.’ I saw my good friend, the hon. Prime Minister, in a hybrid car avec une jolie hôtesse de chaque côté. Of course, this is part of the set up. Therefore, I saw a picture of him, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, you must really encourage them. At the same time, the hon. Minister of Finance, over the past Budgets, has changed customs and other tariffs with the result that the importation of big cars has been facilitated. You can’t contradict yourself like that. You can’t do that! You can’t pretend to be pushing forward hybrid cars, electrical cars and, at the same time, you allow customs and other tariffs to promouvoir les grosses cylindrées.

I am not in a bad mood today. I think that the way forward is donner le bon exemple – surtout donner le bon exemple -, prendre les mesures fiscales et autres is good! You cannot leave that small hybrid car move a hundred yards and sit in an Aston Martin. This is the wrong signal. President Obama has moved forward to bring down the consumption of these big gas guzzlers. Thats the wrong signal. If we are serious, I think the Prime Minister, the Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition, everybody must set an example, must show the way, as far as the use of big cars is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir.

A last point, as far as Maurice Ile Durable is concerned. C’est le comble! There was a Parliamentary Question on that a few minutes ago. Pour moi, le comble c’est le Land-Based Oceanic Industries. A year ago, the hon. Minister of Finance said that going ahead, full steam, with the Land-Based Oceanic Industries is a vital part of the strategy to develop renewable energy, to cut down on polluting energy. We said yes! And he announced that legislation would be passed within a year. This year, not a word in the Budget Speech! Not a word, Mr Speaker, Sir! And, yet, when I was looking at my files this morning, not only did the Minister say a lot things - I kept all these articles – but the gentleman, the learned professional in charge of this Land Based Oceanic Industries, dans ‘L’Express’ du 21 septembre 2008 disait: “On va faire des miracles. We are going to take off like anything!” Not a word in the Budget Speech! It is not serious at all and, yet, I believe that the potential is there. We can do much more. Before coming this morning, I was finalising my speech. We can do so much. These individual solar heaters is a good thing, but individual actions are no
longer sufficient. It is a good thing; let us put more money into it. But, now, it is the States, les gouvernements who are serious about renewable energy, solar or wind, just to mention these two.

This morning I was reading Reuter, AFP, and so on. Two examples, Mr Speaker, Sir. In this morning AFP, it is stated that "La Chine - which is the biggest pollueur with the US, but doing big efforts – prévoit de consacrer quelque 440 milliards de dollars dans les années à venir aux énergies renouvelables". It is a huge country: “440 milliards de dollars dans les années à venir aux énergies renouvelables.” China wants to “tripler la capacité de production d’énergie éolienne” – wind - over a few years, Mr Speaker, Sir. And what is China trying to do? La Chine tente de se dégager de sa dépendance au charbon. They are moving in the right direction; not in the direction of CT Power. This morning also, a group of NGOs, including Greenpeace, said: “Solar power plants in deserts and areas where there is plenty of sun, using mirrors to concentrate the sun rays, have the potential to generate up to a quarter of the world’s electricity by 2050.”

(Interruptions)

I am just quoting that. I am not saying that this will be done. But what I am saying - and I am sure when the hon. Minister of Finance thinks about it, he’ll agree with me – is that much more, in a sustainable way, needs to be done en faveur des énergies renouvelables. We must put our money and our efforts where our mouth is. Maurice Ile Durable, yes, mais on ne se gargarise pas de ce slogan pour ensuite faire le contraire avec CT Power, pour ne pas faire ce qu’on devrait faire concernant solar energy and wind energy, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, my point is that some things are being done, but, as in the case of infrastructure, it is in the case of Maurice Ile Durable. These are my two main examples.

I’ll go rapidly over a number of other projects. Concerning the food security projects, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have been provided with no figures, but the objectives are not being reached. We know that. I hope that, when the Minister of Agriculture speaks, he will give us figures. We have been provided with no figures, in fact, in terms of increasing food production in Mauritius, but we are not meeting our targets, Mr Speaker, Sir. We were promised, last year, that commercial national auction markets would be set up. Nothing has been done! A year later, we don’t even mention it in the Budget Speech. We were told that, to promote cooperation for food production in the region - Madagascar is going through some trouble, and Mozambique no - especially with Mozambique and Madagascar in mind, a
regional food security company would be set up soon. One year later, not only nothing has been done, but no mention again in the Budget Speech. And, at the same time that we are not meeting our targets as far as food security, food production is concerned, la réforme de l’industrie sucrière est en panne pour des raisons bassement politiques. Today, especially, after what has been announced, namely 35% des petits planteurs, des salariés dans les nouvelles unités pour produire de l’éthanol, pour raffiner le sucre, pour produire des sucres spéciaux et l’énergie à partir de la bagasse, user complètement notre bagasse, the whole reform of the sugar industry est en panne, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is holding Mauritius back a lot. I repeat: we must not think of today’s sugar industry as the sugar industry of Balka Saheb; that’s the past. Today, planteurs, laboureurs, artisans are part and parcel. If our sugar industry is going to survive, we must move forward again with the reform of the sugar industry. Otherwise, those who will pay the direst price are planters, labourers, artisans and others in the sugar industry. That brings me to les petits planteurs. Last year, we voted Rs125 m. for planters, labourers and artisans to have a 35% shareholding in these new enterprises: ethanol, refining sugar, and so on. One year later - at page 17 of the Budget Speech - after we had voted a sum of Rs125 m., we are still looking for the appropriate vehicle. One year later! What kind of vehicle is this? Is it hybrid, electricity? One year later, we are still looking for the appropriate vehicle to hold…

(Interruptions)

This is the kind of problem that, if you have la volonté politique, you can solve very rapidly. The proper vehicle is easy to find. So, it is absence de compétence, d’efficacité, mais aussi, probablement, de volonté politique. We know how the planters have been suffering; le prix des fertilisants, le prix de la main-d’œuvre, le prix du diesel. We all know that. We keep saying it. Planters sell their land; the number of small planters is decreasing. Now, the hon. Minister says that if a Food Crop Insurance Scheme will be set up. I am sure the hon. Minister – at least, the Minister of Finance - knows how difficult it is; knows that this idea has been around for years, but it is easier said than done; it must be done. But, he just comes forward and says it, without giving any details, whereas this one is a very tough nut to crack, Mr Speaker, Sir. I feel it a bit unfair to throw that at planters, that there will be a Food Crop Insurance Scheme without giving any details. I find that quite cruel, Mr Speaker, Sir. Government has announced one measure to try and please small planters, because they are angry and hungry out there. One measure - and the Minister mentioned millions - is that small
planters cultivating less than 12 arpents will see their sugar cess contribution decreased by 20%. It's a good thing. But, the small planters have their calculatrice also. They know how many small planters there are. They know what the figure put forward by the Minister amounts to. It is a good thing. But, when le prix des fertilisants augmente par des milliers et des milliers de roupies, the diesel cost and so on, you take this measure which Government presents as temporary - I don't know what is going to happen to the cess. On tourne en rond là aussi - and work it out, it amounts to Rs1,000 per year per planter. It is nearly nothing. Some of the planters worked it out immediately on Friday night. It is a good thing, but not enough at all to help small planters where they are.

I'll move on to the fishers/fishermen. Last year, they were completely forgotten; not a word concerning fishermen. Now, I must say I'm a bit at a loss, and I hope we'll have clarification on that. We are told that an amount of money will be put forward for 35 fishermen and not cooperatives. How are we going to choose that? What is the rationale behind that? Who is going to choose 35? Why 35? There is no explanation at all, but 35 fishermen are going to get a boat each to go and fish off lagoon. There will be five other fishing boats, we are given no details, and I must say the fishermen are not adequately represented on the Board of the Fishermen Investment Trust. If we pretend to act on behalf of the fishermen, they must be heard, they must be on the Board of the Fishermen Investment Trust. And, now, we are told that the Fishermen Investment Trust will do this and that without adequate representation. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister knows that il y a une frustration énorme dans la communauté des pêcheurs. They feel that they have been left behind, that they have been forgotten, qu’ils sont les oubliés du développement, non seulement les oubliés mais les victimes, because fishermen are really hurt. It is inevitable, but they are really hurt by tourism developments all around the island. I wish to stress that la frustration est énorme dans la communauté des pêcheurs. I'll come back onto that in the days to come but, in the meantime, let me appeal to the hon. Prime Minister. He has received representations from la communauté des pêcheurs. They are trying to stand on their own feet. Par exemple, les éleveurs de porcs have managed to stand on their own feet...

(Interruptions)

Government has assisted them, but they have stood on their own feet.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No interruptions, please!
Mr Bérenger: I believe that Government should allow the fishermen community to move along the same way, and it is not fair not to have a full-fledged Ministry, un full-time ministre de la pêche. We talk of Mauritius already becoming a seafood hub. We talk of massive, extensive Exclusive Economic Zone and, yet, we don't have un ministre de la pêche à plein temps. Let me tell the hon. Prime Minister that this hurts the community of fishermen terribly. Ils vivent cela comme un signe de mépris. In the past, they had a full-time ministre de la pêche. I would appeal to the hon. Prime Minister to do that urgently, as a signal, but also to get results. Let us be fair. We have a Food Security Fund. Do we seriously think that a Minister can take care of agriculture, of the sugar industry and, then, when he has time left, he takes care of fisheries? Ce n’est pas humainement possible. No one, avec la meilleure volonté au monde, ne pourra s’occuper de l’agriculture, de l’industrie sucrière et s’occuper en même temps de la pêche. As I said, it is both as a signal of due consideration to la communauté des pêcheurs, but also to get results, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I’ll move on, Mr Speaker, Sir, to SMEs. SMEs have been bearing the brunt of the international financial and economic crisis for months and months. In fact, the hon. Minister of Finance, himself, at a point in his Budget Speech, while stating that most of the enterprises that have been hurt by the international economic crisis are SMEs, says it, and it is the truth. Most of those who have been afflicted, hurt, damaged by the ongoing economic crisis are SMEs, Mr Speaker, Sir. They have not been able to benefit from the additional stimulus package as they had hoped to be able to. They don't even have enough space to operate. They cannot set up buildings and so on. They are crying for additional space. They are crying for genuine help under the additional stimulus package. And, as in the case of fishermen - I am sure the hon. Prime Minister knows - there is une frustration terrible parmi les SMEs – les petites et moyennes entreprises. They feel that they are bearing the brunt of the crisis - and they are! This morning, it was confirmed that ces petites et moyennes entreprises employ nearly half of our labour force. They have been suffering terribly, Mr Speaker, Sir. At a time like that, it is not the time for ce genre de cirque que nous avons vu à la Small Enterprises Handicraft & Development Authority. I consider it vicieux that, at a time when the SMEs need all the assistance, the advice that they can get, we are playing around with the Small Enterprise Handicraft & Development Authority. The General Manager is told to go; he goes; another one comes; he is told to go; the other one comes back!
And, as soon as the ex-manager comes back, c’est la guerre ouverte avec l’association des petits opérateurs. What is this? Is this a way to handle this vital and fragile sector of our economy? I consider what has happened at the Small Enterprises Handicraft & Development Authority shocking. We must put a stop to that. We must have people who are not out on ego trips or to quarrel with anybody who comes along. We must have a Small Enterprise Handicraft & Development Authority or an equivalent, if it is absorbing some other body that really performs. We can’t keep on playing like that. And, now, these small and medium enterprises are promised consultants. I hope Government comes forward with the right consultants; not with double-barrelled consultants - you know what I mean. There should be genuine consultants who do the work and get paid the sum that they should get paid, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, we are told that Government is prepared and is going to guarantee half of the loans, which the petites et moyennes entreprises are going to get from the banks. We will be watching. They need all the help that they can get from consultants, as far as bank loans are concerned. But, we will be watching very carefully. Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what is promised this year! A lot was promised last year! What is one of the main things hurting the petites et moyennes entreprises? Dumping! Last year, the Minister again said “soon”. The word used was “soon”.

(Interjections)

He said “soon”! Let’s be candid about it. He must know what “soon” means! I am sure he knows what “soon” means. But, a year ago, he said there will be an Anti-Dumping Bill soon. And, one year later, we heard the hon. Minister – rightly - say suddenly that the Bill is no longer coming, and that a committee has been set up. Where? In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs! I think they have lost their way. Now, instead of a Bill, we get a committee in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to start looking at the possibility of it. Let’s be serious. We must not waste time quand la survie même des petites et moyennes entreprises is concerned. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance are aware that this sector, c’est l’urgence des urgences. We are already losing, day after day, des petites et moyennes entreprises. L’urgence des urgences, c’est le secteur des petites et moyennes entreprises.

Let me move on to close that chapter. Earlier, I said that when you just throw that at small planters, that there is going to be a Food Crop Insurance Scheme, just like that, raising expectations, without a time frame, I find that cruel. In the same way, I find it cruel that the Minister, in the last
part of his speech, promises a new university campus. Let’s correct what needs to be corrected. Let’s get what should be working, working. I take one example. This year, the Minister says there have been, I think, 120 tertiary students who have lost their parents and have got assistance. That is good. But, that is not what was promised last year. I remember Members applauding, rightly so! What was promised last year, since we are talking of tertiary education? Government said that it would set up a Guarantee Scheme, so that any youngster who wants to go to tertiary education will have a loan from banks, guaranteed by Government. It was said: all students. And this year, it is only students whose parents died or lost their jobs and so on.

(Interruptions)

Of course, ce sont deux choses différentes! But the other one has never taken off! There is no Government Guarantee Scheme of loans from banks. It was promised, and it has not been done. My point is that it is not fair. As in the case of the Small Planters Guarantee Scheme, it is not fair just to throw, on the eve of general election, that there will be a new campus without any time frame.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No interruptions, I said! Order!

Mr Bérenger: I will end up with poverty eradication. I grant the hon. Minister of Finance that the intention is there to eradicate extreme poverty and poverty in general. But, I have to listen to those who care about this issue: l’ancien Président de la République, Cassam Uteem, the NGOs who are specialised in that field. All of them say that, in spite of Government’s limited efforts, we are not succeeding. Figures were put forward by the hon. Minister of Finance this morning. I know it is not an easy nut to crack. But, that is why we should put much more effort into it. The numbers put forward by the hon. Minister himself this morning speak by themselves. On égratigne le problème de la pauvreté malgré les meilleures intentions du monde. On est en train d’égratigner, on passe à la surface, and it is a very, very tough one indeed. J’ai eu un pincement au cœur when I read that part of the speech, where the hon. Minister said proudly that 1,700 poor households have been granted corrugated iron sheets and pieces of wood. To construct what? Ile Maurice, Ile durable! Ile Maurice, le tourisme! How can we do things like that? When you drive on the motorway, you look at these poor families, these corrugated iron sheets with des morceaux de bois, it is terrible! These people cannot afford anything else. They take it, they
deserve it, and they deserve much more! But, we can’t go on like that. We can’t be proud of the fact that 1,700 families have benefited from that, and that’s it! In the name of the environment, of tourism, of humanity – l’humanité tout court –, we can’t go on like that. I remember last year, in the Budget Speech, it was announced that funds are there for the construction of 774 Firinga-type houses in one year. Small houses, but not slums like we are constructing! And these little Firinga-type houses, avec un peu d’effort, avec un peu d’imagination, with plants, trees, gardens and so on, c’est humain, on peut y vivre. Zéro! This year, zéro! I understand that work has not started on a single of these 774 Firinga-type houses that were promised. I could go on and on. Il y a une longue liste des projets annoncés, annoncés une deuxième ou une troisième fois, qui n’ont jamais démarré, qui sont demeurés à l’état d’effet d’annoncesou qui progressent trop lentement.

We will see in the next six months, before the next Budget, whether the project realisation, improvements which the hon. Minister of Finance is after, will have improved or whether things will carry on the same since the last Budget of June 2008 and the Additional Stimulus Package.

I have just mentioned the Additional Stimulus Package, and this brings me to my next point. I don’t like the fact that, in the Budget Speech, there has been no transparency at all, as far as the only new part of the Additional Stimulus Package is concerned, because all the rest was repackaging, infrastructure, PRB and what have you. The only new element in the Additional Stimulus Package was loans from public funds to private firms. I don’t like the fact that there has been no transparency at all in the Budget Speech. We were entitled to know where things stand, how many firms have benefited so far, and how much. We were entitled to that, and I’ll come forward with that, Mr Speaker, Sir. This applies to all the firms that have benefited and not just World Knits. We want to know why, how much, under what conditions. I’ll come back to that. But I repeat that I don’t like the fact that we have been provided with no information as at to date about funds that have been made available either by the Government or the SIC - both.

As far as Rodrigues is concerned, I hope the hon. Prime Minister is aware que le mécontentement gronde, enflé à Rodrigues, and it is very unhealthy. I read carefully statements from the Head of the Regional Assembly, the Regional Government. His last statement is very dangerous. The Prime Minister is looking carefully at me. I won’t go further, but his comment was very dangerous, parce que le mécontentement gronde, le mécontentement enflé. What happens there to the tourism industry will be
proportionately hundred times more important than in Mauritius. If the
tourism industry goes down in Rodrigues, a lot of things will go down, *et
c’est ce qui pend au nez du secteur touristique rodriguais*. They feel
méprisés; they feel that they are not listened to. The Government can tell me
that this is wrong, but we are talking of perception and on what perception
on *peut déboucher*. We must act fast. We must rebuild *un climat entre les
autorités de l’île principale et les autorités de l’île Rodrigues*. They have
made certain requests; they have read and listened to the Budget Speech.
They feel that they have not been listened to, and that there will be
licenciements starting in the tourism industry of Rodrigues very soon, Mr
Speaker, Sir. I’ll come back to that also, addressing myself to the hon.
Prime Minister, but I believe there is need to act urgently, and to do much
more than what has been mentioned in the Budget Speech, Mr Speaker, Sir.

My last point will probably be more political than until now. I believe
that *le gouvernement de l’Alliance Sociale* and the hon. Minister of Finance -
I’ll come back to that later on; *je ne veux pas personnaliser les choses*. I am
going to talk about the team, *le gouvernement de l’Alliance Sociale, l’équipe
actuelle* - have lost credibility. They are no longer crédibles, because of the
way they have behaved towards the international financial and economic
crisis. *Ils ne sont plus crédibles et, aujourd’hui, ils vont à l’autre extrême; ils
cèdent à la panique*, and I’ll say why.

The Government and the hon. Minister of Finance have gone from
one extreme to the other extreme. For months and months, Government and
the hon. Minister of Finance were in what I could describe as a denial mode.
No, we won’t be hurt! No, we are resilient! At one point, I remember that,
my friend, the hon. Minister of Finance, even said - he has probably
forgotten about it - that he had a vaccin.

*(Interruptions)*

That was before he became a doctor!

So, the denial mode was such that, as late as June 2008, my friend, the
hon. Minister of Finance, was predicting a bumper crop. A year ago, after
the international financial and economic crisis had been battering the whole
world, here, we were still expecting in 2009, a bumper crop, Mr Speaker,
Sir. So, we moved from one extreme to the other. When I listen to the hon.
Minister of Finance’s speech, now he quotes all the most pessimistic reports
you can find. I am sure he told his staff to go round, dismiss all the positive
or slightly positive reports and bring up all the most pessimistic ones, and he
quoted one after the other. Before, it was bumper crop, when there was a
major cyclone all around. Now, he quotes the most pessimistic, *alors que certains* - I don’t necessarily share their views - the big brains, big institutions use expressions which the hon. Minister of Finance had been using. Green shoots! I am not saying that I share all his opinion, but this morning Nobel Prize winner, Paul Krugman, says the following -

‘I will not be surprised to see world trade stabilise, world industrial production stabilise, and start to grow two months from now. I will not be surprised to see the move to positive GDP growth in the United States and maybe even in Europe in the second half of the year.'

I don’t necessarily share his opinion, but I am saying that we can’t do that. Last year, we were quoting all the over optimistic reports and views. One year later, we have moved from bumper crop to panic. This is not the way to steer the country en ces temps difficiles, Mr Speaker, Sir. As a result of this denial mode, the fact is that all his main predictions for this year 2009 have gone wrong. It should have been possible not to be blind a year ago, to see that there would be no bumper crop coming. One short year ago, on 06 June, he predicted that GDP would grow by 6.2%. Today, it is 2 to 2.2 %, but I don’t think we’ll reach that. I hope I am proved wrong, but I don’t think we’ll reach that. From 6.2% bumper crop, a year ago - not a year ago, six months ago - to 2 to 2.2%. As far as FDI is concerned, bumper crop again! We were going to get Rs15 billion of FDI this year, 2009.

In his Budget Speech he says:” may go to 5m.” , that is, maximum of, from 15 to less than 5m. What worries me more and I remember at one point the Minister said yes, it is a good point. I have been worried sick over our current account deficit, the deterioration of our current account deficit over the past months. Now we are reaching breaking point. Our current account deficit is now at 12.6% of GDP. This is unsustainable, one of the highest in the world, way above the precautionary figures of the IMF, the World Bank and others. We have been having a Balance of Payment surplus for years now for the first time, we are going with that kind of current account deficit, we are going to move into a Balance of Payment deficit, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the hon. Minister of Finance will agree that je sonne la sonnette d'alarme depuis des mois et des mois concerning our current account deficit and now he warns us in diplomatic language that we might move in the months ahead into a precarious external balance situation. I understand that the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius is even more worried than the hon. Minister of Finance, and we should all be very worried, this is a very, very dangerous situation and that is why we have gone back to the IMF, the so-called flexible line of credit, this new facility. I don't go along with the IMF
and their *haut-parleurs* in Mauritius which present this new facility as *une récompense*; only *les bons élèves* will get this *récompense*. When you go to the IMF either you go with new conditions or you agree to conditions that are already there. As I said this morning, I was a bit surprised nevertheless that in his Budget Speech the hon. Minister of Finance did not make any reference either to the IMF or to this new facility, this flexible line of credit. The point is that the IMF is in trouble, not just the world economy; the IMF no longer knows how to break even, how to lend its money. As I said this morning, October last they came up with a new flexible arrangement – flop - not one taker, *la honte*, not one country across the world came forward to utilise this new flexibility. With a red face the IMF now comes with another facility which, as I said, Turkey described as too expensive. I am a bit surprised that the hon. Minister of Finance, this morning, could not tell me exactly how much we will pay, how much it will cost us in terms of retainer fee. You don't get any loan flexible or not from the IMF for nothing. So, I am bit surprised that we made the request, that it is supposed to be considered by the IMF Board, or the management at this stage, before it goes to the Board, and yet, the hon. Minister of Finance cannot tell me how much it will cost us even if we don't use it, because it is a precautionary facility, but we will pay even if we don't use it. I am very surprised that the hon. Minister of Finance has not been able - I think he should clear that in his summing up or even before that but, at least, at summing up point, he should clear that.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have two last remarks. Of course, everybody has been putting oneself the question: what does that Budget, Action Plan for 18 months, say as far as general election is concerned? We know that the Constitution provides that five years to the day after the last election the Parliament stands dissolve. So, we have to have general election next year. Of course, everybody, including us, tried to read between the lines or the missing lines - I will come to that, because there has got missing lines in that document. What does it say? Well, first of all, there has been clearly a *zig zag de dernière heure*; clearly, the hon. Minister of Finance was going on and on with that *budget de transition*. He even said that he was going to be short. It was quoted in the press as saying it was going to be short, it is a *budget de transition*.

Then I think the hon. Prime Minister came: *ki transition*, Action Plan for 18 months! Why? Why this *zig zag* from transition, *exercice comptable* to action plan for 18 months? You remember what point I raised concerning the salary compensation earlier on. We will see. But why this *zig zagging à
la dernière minute? And what has been the result of this zig zagging, Mr Speaker, Sir? It was un discours très baclé, bits and pieces, un collage, jumping from here to there and then back inevitably because I understand that my friend, the hon. Prime Minister, put his foot on the budget de transition at the last minute. So, the hon. Minister of Finance has to run left, right and centre to faire un collage pour un Action Plan de 18 mois. Il y a une anguille sous roche; il y a clairement une anguille sous roche and I tell you, Mr Speaker, Sir, certainly it is the first time in our history because my friend, the Prime Minister, put his foot on the budget de transition at the last minute, we ended up last Friday without having estimates, first time in the history of Mauritius. But, Mr Speaker, you had to stand up, with due respect, and to say that we have been informed by the Ministry of Finance that estimates ‘naïba’ - you did not say that - words to that effect, Mr Speaker, Sir. And today not adding insult to injury, it is incredible, today we are provided with documents, a dozen pages missing from the estimates, an important document. We discussed that on Monday, and these figures, for us to be able to compare last year to this year, what has been achieved and so on, Ministry per Ministry, we looked all over the place; and the explanation we have it today, it has been circulated but, of course, un bouc émissaire, printing press now, c'est la pression du travail, travail baclé, de dernière minute, estimates not ready, when ready without some parts thereof, Mr Speaker, Sir. Difficult to interpret all that, whether election this year or next year with that proviso what is going to happen to the wage compensation now and possibly in January. I tended to think that the Budget, le budget collage, the Action Plan for 18 months, that it was a sign that election won't come this year.

Apart from the content of the wage compensation and the budget, there are also other things. Whilst the Minister was delivering its Budget Speech, we were watching - the body language, les expressions sur les visages, especially my friend, the hon. Prime Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is the first time in my long career as a Member of Parliament, that I thought at Budget presentation that I was in a veillée mortuaire. First time! The Prime Minister - I don't know what has happened, but terrible. So if you go by the body language, les expressions tout cela, I sympathised with my good friend, hon. Dr. Boolell, five times he tried to …

(Interruptions)

Fizette lor fizette. We will see, but the Prime Minister knows me, he knows that if elections come this year, we will be ready and the country will be ready, I am sure. We are a shining example, as far as the Electoral
Commissioner is concerned and the Electoral Commission is concerned and so on. If it comes, we will be ready. I think, as I said, that the elections would not come this year, but it is possible que l’anguille qui est sous la roche est plus rapprochée que prévue. En tous les cas what I want to say is le pays fait avant tout les frais de l’incompétence du gouvernement de l’Alliance Sociale. Et c’est cette incompétence qui explique the very low implementation of projects and proposals in last year’s Budget, in the Additional Stimulus Package, in this year’s Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I said, I do not wish at all to personnaliser les choses, I think this is unfair. Je parle de l’équipe gouvernementale de l’Alliance Sociale. When we look at non-implementation, when we look at what should be done and is not done, I say that le pays fait les frais de l’incompétence de l’équipe de l’Alliance Sociale. And this Alliance Sociale team is failing the country miserably, Mr Speaker, Sir. Here, we represent an alternative. L’alternatif!

(Interruptions)

En passant, l’honorable ministre des finances...

(Interruptions)

Ine rier, le 1er mai même zotte fine rier! En passant, Mr Speaker, Sir, l’honorable ministre des finances has tried de créer une diversion - that we must present an alternative Budget. There is no country in the world, including the UK! We make proposals - and I will come to that - but it is not the duty of the Opposition to come with a detailed alternative Budget. Nowhere in the world! And they never did it, of course, Mr Speaker, Sir. But we come with proposals and in the course of the speech which I have just made, there are numerous proposals that I have already made Mr Speaker, Sir. What I shall add is what is required above all, is a competent Government team, not only to announce Budget and measures, but to implement them. This is the real question. What is required, what we proposed is a competent team, not only to put forward ideas, but to implement them and not to satisfy itself with effet d’annonces. We need a team that will deliver, as far as infrastructure, Maurice Ile Durable, petites et moyennes entreprises are concerned. What we need - these are amongst our proposals. Qui fait les frais du chaos, de l’incompétence des scandales à la STC, CEB, Air Mauritius, DBM, CNT? All this is hurting Mauritius, is preventing us from developing the way we should and that team is responsible for that. What we propose is to clean toutes ces écuries d’Augias, these different and vital parts of our economy. We have said also que nous allons défaire some of the things which this Government has done:
taxer l’épargne, national residential property tax, retirer certains avantages aux petits planteurs. We propose de revenir sur tout cela, Mr speaker Sir. We propose to come back and complete la réforme de l’industrie sucrière with the planters, the workers, the wage earners in general. We are wasting time, we propose something different. We propose to go back to la démocratisation de l’éducation, as my friend, Steeve Obeegadoo, channeled it through, Mr Speaker, Sir. And, today, I am sure hon. Dr. Bunwaree realises that par fanatisme politique les torts faits et la situation dans laquelle on se retrouve aujourd’hui, la démocratisation de l’économie. We propose to go back to the LRT - Light Rail Transit - system today par fanatisme politique. We had been working with the World Bank for three years step-by-step to get the Light Rail Transit system sur les rails if I may say so, so that one day the LRT would be running from Mahebourg to Goodlands in the north through Port Louis. A lot of effort is put in it aujourd’hui; all the experts, beginning with the Prime Minister’s expert, special adviser, Joel de Rosnay. He says it. Everybody knows that an LRT system is inévitable. We wasted four years; we mean to come back with that. What they have done worth keeping, we will keep. Certainly, nous ne ferons pas preuve du fanatisme politique dont ils ont fait preuve concernant la réforme de l’éducation, la démocratisation de l’économie, le LRT and so many areas where a lot of progress had been made. Beaucoup de chemin a été parcouru. We propose to do all this and, in due course, other measures including budgetary measures. But we are not going today to come with detailed budgetary measures. We will do so when the time comes and, in the meantime, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are making all the proposals, criticisms first, proposals after. Mr Speaker, Sir, in a few months’ time this year or next year, the electorate, la population fera un choix aux élections générales.

I will end up by saying des mois difficiles nous attendent, il y a des mois difficiles devant nous. Ce que je souhaite, je souhaite à la population de faire le moins possible les frais de la crise financière et économique internationale et de l’incompétence de l’équipe gouvernementale actuelle.

Thank you, Mr speaker, Sir.

At 4.48 p.m. the sitting was suspended

On resuming at 5.22 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair

(5.22 p.m.)

The Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as expected, the Leader of the Opposition has criticized the Budget. Of course, it is his role to do so. But,
however, I am afraid to say that I do not think anybody in this country would have really - les bien-pensants - been impressed by the arguments that have been put forward. I do not want to qualify the speech. Je ne veux pas utiliser des qualificatifs parce que j’ai essayé de suivre, car il y a des points qui ont été soulevés, qui ne sont pas bons pour certaines raisons. I must say that, in my opinion, the arguments have remained hollow.

The Opposition is fully aware, at least, must have been fully aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir that the world is going through one of its worse crisis of all times. Sauf à la fin du discours du Leader de l’opposition, je ne l’ai pas entendu parler de la crise financière internationale, aucune analyse, aucun état de situation. Juste à la fin de son discours, j’ai entendu le mot prononcé une fois.

But the Opposition should have been aware - I hope the other Members are not going to enter in the same direction - that the world is going, in fact, to one of the worse crises of all times. And yet, listening to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Opposition seems to be behaving - and listening to other criticisms from outside that I have heard from them - as if everything is normal. Comme si c’est un budget de routine, comme d’habitude, etc. Mais ils n’ont peut-être rien compris ou bien ils font semblant de ne rien comprendre.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, everything is not normal in this present world today. Le Leader de l’opposition a soulevé certains points. Je ne vais pas revenir sur tous parce que de toute façon certains seront repris par mes collègues. Par exemple, il a commencé en parlant de la pension universelle; il a parlé de la compensation salariale, mais il nous demande de faire des choses que lui-même n’a pas fait, soit il n’a pas pu faire ou bien des choses qu’il n’a pas pensé à faire. En 1982, je vous rappelle que j’avais proposé 30% mais lui il n’avait donné que 8%. Donc, je ne vais pas m’attarder là-dessus. C’est juste pour dire que si on vient ici pour dire des choses juste pour le bien de causer, à ce moment là on ne peut pas faire un débat d’un certain niveau. Je m’attendais moi, à ce que le Leader de l’opposition vienne nous dire effectivement quelle est la situation dans le monde, quelle est la situation sur le plan national, quelle est la position de l’opposition, comment ils entrent en l’avenir de l’île Maurice, etc.. Mais, on n’a pas eu de tels arguments.

M. le président, pour aller rapidement sur certaines choses, je pense qu’il a été quand même sobre dans sa position. Donc, il était dans un bon mood comme il a dit et je n’ai pas envie de gâcher ce mood. Mais je dois
dire que j’aurais pu prendre les chiffres des grands paramètres économiques qu’on a l’habitude de prendre en considération au moment de la présentation du budget et puis les comparer. En 2004-2005 - vous étiez avec nous, M. le Deputy Speaker, et vous savez combien on a analysé ce qui se faisait quand ils étaient au pouvoir et nous avions toujours dit - lui-même il l’avait dit - que l’île Maurice était dans un état d’urgence économique. Leur propre gestion était qualifiée par eux-mêmes comme état d’urgence économique. Les paramètres, que ce soit du déficit budgétaire, que ce que soit pour la dette publique - aujourd’hui on nous demande de donner des chiffres absolus, de ne plus comparer ce qui est comparable; le pourcentage du GDP non ça ne les intéresse plus. Alors que la méthode de calcul avait été changée par eux pour que les chiffres paraissent plus à leur avantage - tout ça avait été fait quand ils étaient au pouvoir, M. le Président.

M. le président, j’ai tant de choses à dire sur l’éducation, sur les ressources humaines, sur la culture et des arts que je ne voudrais pas trop entrer dans les détails pour répondre point par point à ces idées qui ont étaient mentionnées. Juste pour vous dire que je n’ai pas compris ou alors j’ai mal entendu. Le Leader de l’opposition a apprécié - je pense - que le salaire des ministres soit diminué par R10,000. Il a dit qu’il va suivre lui aussi, donc j’ai l’impression qu’il y aura un effort de son côté, mais de quel pourcentage ou de quel quantum, je ne sais pas. Je pense que la population s’attend à savoir et peut-être que les autres vont suivre. Que chacun à son tour se mette debout et dise à la Chambre quelle serait leur position là-dessus !

(Interruptions)

Le MSM a déjà dit oui. C’est le Leader de l’opposition qui a mentionné les advisors, etc., il ne faut pas quand même passer dans l’amnésie. Il ne faut pas oublier que pendant les deux ans où lui-même était Premier ministre, il y avait dans les 20 ou 22 advisors à son ministère. Si on revient sur ce que ces advisors récoltaient avec tous les extra boards, etc. on ne finira jamais.

Donc, laissez-moi sortir un peu de ce piège, M. le président, pour venir plus concrètement sur le Budget qui a été présenté, Budget 2009, juillet à novembre/décembre pour dire que, the 2009 Budget has, in fact, been presented, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, against a backdrop of international financial crisis - as I was saying - and world contraction in demand for goods and services.

As an open economy dependant on international trade, Mauritius is hard hit as never before by recession in its major markets in Europe, with the
sharp drops in tourism, and especially textiles; and these two are the major economic locomotive driving force for us. We must admit, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that it is indeed - I have no other word to qualify it - a miracle that we managed to achieve positive growth, thanks largely to the reform programs initiated by this Government on taking office. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment, because he has constantly been explaining the situation to the population since the beginning.

First of all, there is the difficult situation that we inherited, then there were the squelettes dans les placards and we had what was happening on the international front, sur le plan de WTO, etc. On était en plein dans le système et il fallait réagir. He did all he could and, today, in the world worst crisis, this Budget has been presented and, I think, it is our duty to congratulate him for the courageous work that he has done.

At a time, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when some countries - if we follow the news well we would agree - are cutting down on wages, whilst others are reducing the number of working days, the Government has set up a job saving fund to protect the most vulnerable. This is the idea that has to be conveyed to our population. And we, in Government, really believe that protecting a family from the loss of a job, even of at least one member of the family, is the surest way to protect workers and, therefore, alleviate poverty. We fundamentally believe in this principle. Unfortunately, instead of making constructive criticisms, the Opposition is seeking to hold the country to ransom by trying to play on the sentiments of workers to whom the entire truth, I must say, is not being told by them. The Opposition is well aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment manoeuvered in a real whirlwind of financial constraints. And his marge de manoeuvre was extremely limited. Yet, he has been able to do much more than a mere balancing act.

This Budget is indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, well-balanced and has been able to blend economic reforms and economic stimulus measures while providing, in the present circumstances, adequate safety nets to the poorer segments of the population. Of course, we would have liked to do much more avec la compensation salariale. Nous aussi nous avons le même cœur et peut-être mieux encore. On aurait voulu faire le maximum. Moi aussi j’ai été ministre des finances; nous savons très bien qu’au moment de la compensation salariale il faut faire un petit geste en fonction des travailleurs pour voir si on arrive à donner même cinq roupies en plus, ou
dix roupies au maximum. Et quand les experts viennent nous donner des chiffres, à quoi correspondent ces dix roupies sur le plan total ?

(Interjections)

Nous savons comment cela fonctionne. On aurait voulu faire plus, mais c’est la situation qui exige qu’on fasse ce qu’on est en train de faire.

The Opposition, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, merely states - and this is their latest slogan and I have just heard it from the Opposition - Mauritius has to reinvent itself. Pourquoi réinventer? Maurice peut-elle être réinventée ? Réinventer quoi ? Réinventer la roue ! But they have nothing concrete to propose! Le Leader de l’opposition, à la fin de son discours, a fait certaines petites propositions d’intention générale. Mais comment y arriver ? Quel est le modus operandi ? Quel est le système à être utilisé pour faire ce qu’il veut? Rien a été dit à ce sujet. So, what is the alternative in this conjuncture, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? They haven’t the faintest idea!

The Opposition has also accused Government of announcing projects but not implementing them. I, too, have been Minister of Finance. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for someone, who, in the recent past, had been a Minister of Finance, and even a Prime Minister, I think it smacks of a demagogical attitude.

We all know that projects are announced after having been vet out very seriously at the level of experts in the Ministry of Finance and other Ministries and with other experts of other Ministries. When they come to Budget proposals, then there is a whole load of works that goes on. In some cases, projects cannot continue for certain reasons, but in many other cases projects do continue but they take their time, depending on the nature of the projects. Some projects announced today can be implemented maybe in five, six, or ten years later. Alors, ne venez pas nous dire que ce ne sont que des annonces. What is true, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that this Budget provides for some two hundred measures to accelerate development, create the conducive environment and provide safety nets to the vulnerable. While we have in this Budget attended to the immediate needs of the nation in the context of the unprecedented turmoil that has shaken the world economy, we have not ignored the path we need to follow in order to steer the economy to ensure a better, more prosperous and certain future for our fellow citizens.

As the House is aware, we laboured considerable efforts in the past few years to get the economic fundamentals right and put the economy back to the track of recovery. This has permitted the country to withstand the adverse tidal wave of economic slowdown with positive economic growth.
We have weathered the storm, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We have defied the challenges of an erosion of our sheltered market, turned the 36% drop in sugar prices to our advantage by modernising that sector, reducing our production costs and introducing innovative products as well as utilising former waste products to better uses. All these are happening in the era of this Government. Once again, I wish to congratulate the Minister of Finance for this situation today.

Let me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, come to the question of infrastructure. There are so many things in that Budget, but the two things that I would like to dwell upon, one very shortly, because I am sure that my colleague, the Minister of Public Infrastructure, will elaborate more on them. But the second, of course, concerns my Ministry with culture also added to it.

Insofar as infrastructure is concerned, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius suffers from an acute deficit in infrastructure. This is costing us heavily in terms of forgone benefits. However, this clearly did not start with this Government. Successive Governments came, but did not succeed in addressing the thorny issue of adequate infrastructure reflecting the development needs of the country. Fortunately, this Government is addressing the issue. This Budget will launch the largest investment programme ever in the history of Mauritius.

It is, therefore, with great relief that we ought to welcome this long overdue investment in infrastructure. The funds proposed to be allocated for Government-driven infrastructure projects in road construction, harbour and airport developments exceed Rs45 billion for the next three years. This excludes Public Private Partnership Projects which is estimated at some Rs127 billion, of which some Rs100 billion are earmarked for the development of the New Town at Highlands over the next decade. When we aggregate the investment in all these projects, we obtain a colossal sum that will constitute an autonomous expenditure. This injection, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has a very significant multiplier effect on output, income and jobs, and should ensure sustained rapid growth for the years to come.

With this comprehensive investment to make good the deficit in infrastructure, the Social Alliance Government is not catering only for the immediate present, but is laying the foundation for a modern Mauritius for decades ahead, un avenir assuré pour nos enfants.

As in other areas, Government has come with a forward-looking plan that is proactive and takes Mauritius into a future age. It is translating our
vision into reality. That is why the Budget, which perhaps at the start was considered as a transitional Budget, progressed to an action plan because the Government’s vision goes beyond the short-term.

Il ne faut pas oublier, M. le président, que le fait d’avoir un budget pour six mois avait été annoncé depuis plusieurs mois pas le ministre des finances. Il avait déjà annoncé son intention. L’élément important dans tout cela, c’est qu’on veut faire coïncider le budget avec l’année calendaire. Lorsque j’étais ministre des finances, on avait commencé à travailler là-dessus, mais on sentait que le moment n’était pas encore propice. Je pense sûrement que ceux qui sont venus après ont peut-être essayé encore. Maintenant, il faut quand même accepter; il fallait le faire. Le fait d’avoir l’année financière, comme on avait l’habitude, date de l’époque coloniale où l’industrie sucrière était la seule industrie et les recettes du sucre rentraient au pays après le mois de juillet. Donc, le temps est passé, il fallait changer. C’est pour cela qu’on a présenté ce budget. Il y aura un autre budget à la fin de l’année. En même temps, le Leader de l’opposition parlait de la compensation salariale. Nous sommes très conscients qu’à l’arrivée du mois de décembre il y aura un autre budget. Je suis sûr que le ministre des finances va prendre cela en considération et annoncera, en temps et lieu, à la population, quelle sera la situation concernant la compensation salariale qui a déjà été accordée depuis le mois de juillet cette année.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the big advantage with the investment in infrastructure is that in the long-term it will facilitate the production of goods and services, thus earning the country billions of rupees in foreign exchange; it will equally reduce our production costs and will make us more competitive internationally.

The many road projects that this Government will build will bring the country to further shrinking dimension and facilitate both business and social interaction, and eliminating the divide - very important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - between rural and urban areas. It will be transforming Mauritius into a city-State. More importantly, it will further diversify the economy. We all know that it has been said that the construction of the economy is a growth stabiliser. So, I cannot but welcome all the projects concerning the infrastructure of this country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to education. I am deeply pleased that my colleague, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment, has maintained education as having pride of place.
and as among the top priorities of Government action. I am sure we all understand the reason behind this.

The figures speak for themselves where for the entire financial year 2008/2009 - last year’s financial year - the budget allocation was Rs8.3 billion. It has now moved for the next six months to Rs5.3 billion for the half year whereas for last year it was Rs8.3 billion. So, the figures speak for themselves. If we needed any further evidence, we could only bear in mind, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir,

the following three main principles insofar as education is concerned as underlined by this Budget Speech –

“(i) the Budget has assured the perennial necessity of free education, the only guarantee for equity in our system;

(ii) the Budget has also not questioned the provision of free transport - itself a guarantee for facilitating access and give equal chances to all, and

(iii) the Budget has further stimulated the development of a knowledge hub through massive additional investment, especially, in the tertiary sub-sector.”

It could not be otherwise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for Education and Human Resource Development are, in fact, the foundation on which we want to build our future society. We have been saying for years that our people are our best assets. Our educational system in spite of being continually challenged at various levels and sometimes also by various pressure groups, has served the needs of the nation well. However, time is changing and changing fast so that we need to be continually innovating, offering new facilities and developing new instruments which will equip us and, especially, our children to face the daunting challenges on the world arena.

We can take lessons, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from our own past history, we can tap our strengths and fashion resources to the sharp cutting competitive edge. In this respect, the Labour Party always comes with new ideas. We are all aware of the rapid evolution of our economic base which has shifted over the last 50 years from a monocrop agriculture economy in the 1960s to a textile-dominated manufacturing base in the 1970s and a
service economy with heavy emphasis on knowledge, the financial sector and the ICT sector by the turn of the last century.

Government, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now wants the economic base to be broadened further so that the nation becomes more resilient to global changes. With globalisation, the Mauritian economy has no choice but to open up and compete with the economies of other countries, while efforts have to be sustained to make of Mauritius *une île durable*. To make that happen, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has no other solution than to strengthen its capacity to service the region. In fact, if we want the emergence of the knowledge economy, it will call for a re-engineering of our education and HRD systems.

It is in keeping in mind the abovementioned challenges that this Government wishes to bring about fundamental reforms to the Education and Training Sectors. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in November 2008, my Ministry published the Draft Education and Human Resource Strategy (2008-2020). This plan has as overall mission –

- to develop a culture of achievement and excellence;
- to foster innovation and to generate new knowledge, and
- to ensure learning opportunities accessible to all.

We have, in a first instance, collected and studied all observations, proposals and counterproposals which have been obtained from the stakeholders once the plan was made public. I am glad to inform the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we have already embarked on a number of consultations on major issues with stakeholders, with a view to finalising the strategic plan. I must here place on record the determination of all parties concerned to work towards the general good of the learners.

I wish to reassure the hon. Leader of the Opposition that whatever we find good in what is done before us had been maintained. Of course, it is normal; we have to think of the children and the children first. So, this plan takes into consideration whatever has been done before, whatever proposals that were made before and that were good proposals. We are having such consultations with the stakeholders and they are ongoing; and we have targeted the development of an Implementation Plan that is properly coasted and time framed for the month of October, this year. An implementation proper of the plan is scheduled for the beginning of 2010.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me come to the various subsectors in the world of education to give the House an overview of the present functioning
and the plans for the future. Let me start by the pre-primary subsector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Concerning the strategic objectives of this subsector, this Government is moving towards the fourth year of its mandate and under the Government programme we committed ourselves to –

(i) review the role and function of the Pre-School Trust Fund;
(ii) set up a centre for Early Childhood Development, and
(iii) implement a phased-programme to construct pre-primary section in primary schools.

It is our goal, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to ensure that all children in the Republic of Mauritius, aged between three to five years, have the opportunity to develop their individual, intellectual, socio-emotional and psycho-motor skills to the best of their capacity. We need to build the confidence and self-esteem in learning that will not only prepare them for the next level, that is, primary school, but more importantly, lay the foundations for learning that will support them throughout their lifetime.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have come a long way in the last four years. Last year we revisited, as you know, the legal and institutional framework for the pre-primary sector and came forward with the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (ECCEA) which replaced the Pre-School Trust Fund.

This new organisation would contribute to strengthen the foundation of the Early Childhood Care and Education programmes in Mauritius, thereby preparing for the emergence of a ‘Centre of Excellence’ that would serve the region, especially countries that are already engaged in promoting Early Childhood Care and Education as part of what we call “Education for All” goals (EFA). A few measures have been initiated in support of the above, and I’ll mention only three of them -

(a) finalisation of the new National Curriculum Framework (NCF);
(b) development of the Manual of Procedures for the pre-primary sector to address issues pertaining to registration procedures, supervision of pre-primary units in terms of norms and standards, Health & Safety, Pedagogical Best Practices, and also alignment of pre-school services to the principles of the Child Rights Convention (CRC);
participation and involvement in the integrated development project within identified pockets of poverty to address the problem of ‘out-of-school’ children.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to ensure that all poor children of pre-primary ‘schools going age’ attend school. I wish to inform the House that we have this year, to date, ensured the integration of about 415 children who were out of school. The programme ensures the provision of food, school materials, school uniforms, pedagogical materials, free transport facilities and psychological support to these children.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have successfully addressed the issue of equity and access. In the last Budget Speech, attention was drawn to the issue access, whereby some approximately 5,000 three-year and four-year old children (representing about slightly more than 15% of the age group, as per 2007 figures) were not attending pre-primary schools.

On en a entendu parler plusieurs fois, M. le président. Si les enfants – plus de 15% en 2007 – ne vont pas à l’école pré-primaire (maternelle comme on dit) et après deux ans, à l’âge de cinq ans, se retrouvent avec d’autres qui ont été à l’école pré-primaire, ce retard ne pourra jamais être rattrapé.

We had to do something, and you understand the energy I am devoting to this cause. As a result of intensive action taken at the level of my Ministry and by the ECCEA, that is, the authority, and other stakeholders also I must say, we have been able to reduce this deficit from more than 15% to, today, some 7.6% only, in the course of about five to six months. As at date, some 92.4% of the three-year and four-year old children age group are attending a pre-primary school.

The infrastructure is being improved – I am talking of pre-primary - and a phased-programme has been embarked upon to construct pre-primary units in primary schools with focus on some specific and selected areas, especially as L’Avenir, Rivière des Anguilles, Barkly, Palma, and other places. These places have already been earmarked, and this is why I am mentioning them.

We have invested in the training of our human resources. And regional resource centres are also being set up to provide support services to parents, educators, managers of private pre-primary schools, and the community at large.

A number of school-based projects have also, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, seen the light of day. Hence, all the ECCEA pre-primary schools are
being equipped with computers and the current traditional teaching and learning method will be reinforced with new multimedia tools and technologies in the schools, of course, but also – and I stress on that - in the classrooms. We are seeing to it that those pre-primary schools students have the possibility of being taught through multimedia technologies. This, in itself, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is a major breakthrough.

In the context of our strategy for development of the Early Childhood Care and Education, my Ministry, jointly with the ECCEA and with the support of the UNDP, has embarked on an initiative for international networking and partnership. A collaborative programme has been discussed with the Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD) and the Ministry of Education of Norway. It provides prospects for development of collaborative programmes with the University of Oslo, which may provide the technical assistance to set up a “Special Needs Education” Unit for Early Childhood Care and Education.

The question has been raised in this Parliament many times. Parliamentary Questions have been put. Replies have been given, and I said it loud and clear that I was not very much satisfied with this special aspect of special needs for our children and we had to seek expert advice from abroad, which we are doing.

Our country wants to benefit from the Norwegian competence, and associates itself with the NORAD philosophy of promoting equality, development and inclusion of economic rights. The framework for collaboration in the form of an appropriate Memorandum of Understanding between my Ministry and the Ministry of Education of Norway will soon be finalised.

There is also the question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, of securing international consultancy from Norway for the development and setting up of an early childhood hub in Mauritius, based on the UNICEF model; and the organisation of a Winter Institute, which is a training workshop, in collaboration with NORAD, from 13 to 26 July 2009, whereby participants from nine African countries will attend.

Coming, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to the primary subsector, the development of primary education remains high on our agenda, and our strategic objectives are to improve learning outcomes and to emphasise literacy and numeracy, as well as Information Technology. We are, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, also committed, more than ever, to offer all pupils an
education that is in line with real life, and enhance the holistic development of the children through participation in extra and co-curricular activities.

Let me say a word on the ZEP concept first, which we all know about. I won’t be long on that because, at other times, we will certainly have the opportunity of saying what we are doing. In line with our philosophy of reducing inequality between low and high achieving schools, I am proposing to consolidate the ZEP concept and strategy that aims at leaving no child behind. The ZEP Council that has been constituted is mandated to come forward with strategies that aim to reduce absenteeism, and enhance pedagogy in the ZEP schools. Absenteeism is one of the major problems in the ZEP schools. The first pillar of the ZEP strategy is to combat this absenteeism problem through community mobilisation. The rate of absenteeism in ZEP schools was 15.7% in 2007. Our target for 2008, that is, the end of last year, was 14.7%. But, I am glad to announce that absenteeism rate in 2008 reached a record low of 12.9%, which is a good result, and we hope to do better this year and in the years to come.

My Ministry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has been profiling pupils with acute family problems, and teams of dedicated parents called “Parents Flambeaux” are conducting home visits to sensitise parents. Headmasters and teachers are opening the schools to the community to sustain and improve on best scores. The second pillar of the ZEP strategy is to improve on academic performance. The CPE pass rate for all ZEP schools staggered around 36% only in the last two years (36.0% in 2007 and 35.9% in 2008). This is not acceptable and is explained by certain factors -

- poor attendance at school;
- clash between school culture and home culture;
- health, family and social problems, and
- lack of exposure to academics.

We are trying to address all these factors simultaneously. Thanks to the strong important work that is being done at all levels, I am convinced that the success rate will start improving very soon.

A special inspectorate of School Inspectors has been set up since January 2009, and appropriate pedagogies are being devised. In addition, capacity-building programmes have been devised for teachers and cluster meetings are being held.
My Ministry and private partners have initiated a remedial education strategy in many ZEP schools. Further, my Ministry has signed an MoU with the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry to run a Reading Project in ZEP schools on a Public Private Partnership basis. This project will provide further opportunities for our pupils to improve on their literacy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government is committed to give all the children of Mauritius equal opportunities for quality education, including children who are at the risk of being excluded and marginalised.

Our policy and strategy document on the special educational needs of children with disabilities which was published by my Ministry in 2006 - when my colleague, hon. Gokhool, was in charge of the Ministry of Education - provides for several measures for the inclusion of these children in our educational system through appropriate services. Several affirmative actions for this sector to bring children with disabilities at par with their peers in mainstream have since been initiated. These, *inter alia*, include -

- The retrofitting of Primary and Secondary schools, where needed, to facilitate access to mainstream education to those suffering from physical disabilities.

- Bringing special education services closer to those who are in need. Four integrated units have been opened at D. Hurry Government School, Goodlands for the mental and the deaf, Moka Government School for the visually impaired, Jugessur Tiwari Ramsoondur Government School, Solferino, Vacoas for mental cases and the Black River Government School for the deaf.

- In addition, my Ministry is at present examining the possibility of opening two other such units, one in the south and one in the eastern region of the country. This measure will undoubtedly ease the life of those who at present have to travel long distances.

With a view to improving on the existing set up, my Ministry is accordingly exploring ways and means to obtain the required technical assistance through collaborative endeavours with countries such as France, UK and the Nordic Countries.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a common cry, I must tell you, from all parents today, that we are doing a major disservice to our children by making them carry heavy school bags on their back. In the long run, this takes a heavy toll on their physical health and even body structure. This has been a matter of concern for years and, as a medical practitioner, it is my
sacrosanct duty to deal effectively with the whole issue. I view school books as light, user-friendly ones. In this context, as a first step, most of the books for next year will be conceived in such a way that two small volumes of one traditional text will be made available, which will ease, of course, the weight of the bag.

I wish, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to highlight the question of CPE percentage pass rate to end with the primary sector. I wish, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to highlight that through sustained efforts, the CPE percentage pass rate has increased by 1.1% from 66.9 in 2007 to 68.0% in 2008. We are aiming, on the PPB system at 69% this year and 70% in 2010. To be able to achieve these two targets, a series of teaching and learning techniques has been fine-tuned, and educators are encouraged to use ICT across the curriculum to make their teaching pupil friendly.

In this same line, we are increasing the percentage of pupils who need to be conversant with ICT from 70% in 2008 to 75% in 2010. We are also laying emphasis of increasing the percentage pass rate in Essential Learning Competencies in all subjects as well as in Desirable Learning Competencies, thus improving percentage pass rate both in terms of number of passes and level of grades achieved. This is insofar as the primary sector is concerned and it gives an idea of what is being done and what lies ahead of us.

Let us come, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to the secondary subsector. When the EFA goals were first enunciated in the year 2000, strong emphasis was systematically placed by national Governments and development partners on increasing access and equity in the primary subsector. However, more than halfway to the achievement of the EFA, a stronger premium is now being placed on the secondary subsector. It is not simply the inevitable reflection of an improved achievement level from the primary subsector but also serves as the foundation on which the post-secondary and secondary subsectors are to be built.

In Mauritius, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have successfully overcome the problem of access which so many other developing countries are still facing. For us, the greater battle that has to be won is that pertaining to quality improvement. Indeed, we can never really speak of genuine equity in a system when the quality dimension is left unattended.

To this end, we have already taken a number of positive steps. These are many and varied.

First of all, there is a question of broadening the secondary curriculum. A new Secondary Curriculum Framework which is being
finalised by the MIE makes provision for a broadening of the curriculum with the inclusion of such subjects as travel & tourism, physical education and focus on science and technology which are so vital for socio-economic development and innovation.

Much stronger emphasis is being placed on ICT which is intensively being used in teaching of sciences and it is envisaged to extend same to all other subjects.

On the other hand, a Quality Assurance Unit as proposed by the PRB is being set up and Quality Assurance Officers will be recruited to improve the qualitative dimension of our system.

Let us also not forget that our Performance-Based Budget stresses the quality level improvement of performance of students in different subject areas. In this connection, work has already started to improve the overall student performance.

Let me here, take this opportunity, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, to parenthetically place on record my deep appreciation of the efforts put in by our educators who have collaboratively worked with my Ministry officials to achieve the targets set in the PBB. This augurs well for the spreading of the community of practice and the empowerment of educators that my Ministry is working towards.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to something that is really very close to my heart. It is the concept of the overall development of the child. There is urgent need, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to operate and definite changes in the approach towards provision of the education service. This change should lay a lot of focus on the genuine overall holistic development of our students instead of focusing exclusively on examination achievements.

As from January this year, an activity period which is indeed a co-curricular activity period has been introduced in all secondary schools State schools and private schools. The objective behind the introduction of this period is to provide all possible opportunities to our children to become aware of their inherent skills, talents and aptitudes, and be able to express them and, at the end of the day, prepare our school children to be able to face life more efficiently and become better citizens of tomorrow.

This new policy orientation requires that every pupil should be involved in at least three to four co or extra-curricular activities in the course of the academic year. It is also obviously recognised that physical education
and sports play a vital role in the educational system and contribute to ensure an integrated development of the child.

It is in this connection as well that we are promoting the teaching of physical education and sports in schools and the acquisition of life skills through participation in organised physical activities during and after school hours. All these activities have been slotted in the timetable and the House would be pleased to note that, to ensure successful implementation of such activities, my Ministry is currently recruiting a number of Project Coordinators who would have the responsibility of making this happen.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are making an enhanced use of ICT in the education sector, both in terms of hardware and software. You have been partly instrumented to that, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and, at the same time, improving Internet access in schools.

The following measures have been initiated in this regard, which is most important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The Ministry is currently equipping educational institutions with ICT equipment to enhance teaching and learning through the use of computer-aided technologies. Computer labs already exist, at least one, in every secondary school. We are making provision for a second computer lab in each secondary school and, in fact, 38 State Secondary Schools have already been equipped with a second computer lab. The programme is ongoing, and we expect that all State Secondary Schools be equipped with a second computer lab by the end of this year. Laptops and projectors and data logging equipment have been issued to science laboratories of all State Secondary Schools. Training has been done for schools to make best usage of the equipment so as to promote a new learning paradigm and innovative approach to teaching and learning.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, through the International Network for Educational Transformation (INET) initiative, Internet access will be extended to all units of the school environment and interaction will be facilitated, not only between our students and their teachers, but also with their peers on an international platform. We are, thus, preparing each student to become a global citizen, as this is becoming an essential requirement in the increasingly globalised economy.

There is also the design and development of an e-Education Portal to enable the school community to access educational materials on a 24/7 mode. The quality of education and learning in our secondary schools is being enhanced through initiatives, such as NEPAD e-Schools Project, the Microsoft Partners in Learning Programme, that comprises the innovative
schools, innovative teachers and innovative student’s initiatives. Thus, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are ensuring that our students are ready to continue on the path that opens wide the way to higher levels of education and training in the post secondary and tertiary systems.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before I leave the secondary subsector, I wish to say a few words, very briefly, but which is very important, I believe, insofar as discipline at school is concerned. This is another important issue that is constantly getting all my attention. I am mentioning, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the maintaining of school discipline which is, in fact, the concern of everyone. With the help of different stakeholders, such as the Ombudsperson for Children, the Child Development Unit, the Child Protection Unit, the Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs and also the Police, we have introduced a series of measures, such as sensitisation, behaviour tracking, strengthening of support services and counselling units, to ensure that discipline is maintained both inside and outside schools. It is a newly introduced system to take care of cases of indiscipline at school. I wish to give the system all its chances to succeed, and I am closely, regularly and personally monitoring it.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before coming to the other two subsectors, I wish to say a few words on infrastructure, insofar as primary and secondary schools are concerned, because we were being told about effet d’annonces; mention is being made on this and that, and works are not being done. I am sure my colleague, the Minister of Infrastructure, will say it in a more general way for other sectors. Insofar as education is concerned, with regard to infrastructure, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that 100% of the voted Capital Budget will be spent by the end of this financial year, as was the case for financial year 2007/2008 for both primary and secondary sectors.

In the primary sector, a total amount of Rs230 m. is expected to be spent by the end of this financial year –

(a) The amount is made up of Rs55 m. for implementation of maintenance works in more than 150 schools.

(b) Rs175 m. for major infrastructural works, involving construction/innovation of toilets blocks.

When I speak of toilet blocks, I have to add here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we have taken an important decision at the level of the Ministry. All toilet blocks are going to be constructed as from now onwards. We’ll see to it that all facilities are given for handicapped children to use toilets. So,
there will be additional classrooms in 16 schools and major upgrading works in some 80 schools. This sum includes Government’s contribution towards construction of two new primary schools at Albion and Belle Mare, financed by the People’s Republic of China. The one at Albion has been completed and is already operational, while the works at Belle Mare is ongoing and will be completed by end July 2009.

(Interruptions)

Malheureusement, on n’a pas pu l’inviter pour une raison quelconque; ce sera pour la prochaine inauguration.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are making more than half a billion rupees of investment in the infrastructure of the secondary sector by the end of this financial year. Let me mention them, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, so that it goes right in their ears. The works comprise mainly of -

- major upgrading works undertaken in 17 schools at a total cost of Rs75 m.;
- major rehabilitation works undertaken in three schools, with an amount of about Rs35 m. spent by end of June;
- extension works carried out in seven schools, with disbursement to the tune of around Rs80 m.;
- completion of the remaining phases of works concerning nine schools, for which Rs310 m. will be spent, and
- construction of four football grounds currently mobilising funds to the tune of Rs23 m.

With the new increase in devolution from Rs15 m. to Rs50 m., my Ministry will now be responsible for the whole process of a number of school projects which, up to now, were being dealt with at the level of the Central Procurement Board. I can understand what the hon. Leader of Opposition mentioned, namely that they are not for. But, they must understand that when they were in power, they must have been frustrated as we are; sometimes, you have got the money but the work is not done for this and that reason. Of course, we are going to take all the precautions that are necessary, and the advice and duties of the Central Procurement Board will be respected. It is felt that this new arrangement will quicken the processing of those projects and will, hence, contribute positively to the smooth and timely implementation of infrastructural projects in my Ministry. I consider
it my duty, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to have a word, insofar as the infrastructural works are concerned.

Let me come to technical and vocational education. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am the Minister in charge of education, human resources, arts and culture. So, you will have to bear with me for some time. I’ll try to go as quickly as possible. Eradication of poverty, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is one of the top priorities of our Government, and it is now agreed worldwide that the best tool to fulfil this priority is education and training, such that we have the human capital that becomes the main driving force of the Mauritian economy. Only then, can we ascertain the viability and sustainability of our competitiveness as a nation.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, in its 20 years of existence, the IVTB has established a track record both nationally and internationally. Indeed, it has come a long way from being a provider of basic vocational training to its current status as a world class provider of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, generally known as TVET. Its achievements demonstrate a turn-around in customer acceptance and public perception of IVTB and technical education.

Since its inception, it has done a lot in terms of training -

- For the year 2008/2009, the IVTB has provided training to some 10,000 persons.
- Furthermore, it has also conducted tracer studies for both its full-time and apprenticeship courses in order to evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of the training of the needs of the labour market.

However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as our needs change, as the country embarks on a new paradigm, it is now opportune to start a new process of training altogether rendering TVET delivery more relevant, efficient and effective and, at the same time, make ‘Life Long Learning’ a reality.

In that context, my Ministry would be setting up the Mauritius Institute of Training & Development. We had the First Reading a few minutes ago. The MITD would be one central organization which would take over the functions of the IVTB and the Technical School Management Trust Fund. The overall aim of this merger is to optimize resources, avoid duplication and allow for cost-effectiveness. The MITD will have the opportunity, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to debate the Bill, so, I won’t go into further details.
To increase access to TVET, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the IVTB has opened a new Training Centre in Port Louis, namely the Knowledge-Based Training Centre. Today, some 480 trainees are enrolled at the centre in 14 different trades. To increase female enrolment and professionalise training in Hairdressing and Beauty Care, the IVTB will offer internationally recognized qualifications in this trade at the centre in the near future. The centre will further expand by offering seven new Diploma courses as from September 2009.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the IVTB has always worked with different partners and now has added to the list. The recent one signed is the MoU with the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST). This MoU will enable the IVTB to introduce the Canadian SIAST Business Administration Diploma in Mauritius, at an affordable price. This is a passport for a global work opportunity. The SIAST Business Administration Diploma will be offered in both full-time and part-time mode at the IVTB Knowledge-Based Training Centre.

Furthermore, students studying in the SIAST Business Administration diploma programme can concurrently complete the Certified General Accounts Association of Canada program’s foundation-level courses.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the IVTB will also offer a top up degree in the field of Tourism, Hospitality & Leisure Management in collaboration with the University of Mauritius as from September 2009. In the last Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Second Chance Programme was established which aimed at providing basic numeracy and language skills to those who have dropped out of school and orientating these young people to a vocational programme with strong emphasis on life training skills and providing psychological and social back up. The IVTB which is the implementation agency for this Programme has enrolled 220 trainees on the Second Chance Programme in eight centres across the country.

In addition, the IVTB has delivered several training programmes in collaboration with the National Empowerment Fund in the past. This collaboration will further be developed and the IVTB will be called upon to train 2000 SC & HSC holders in IT.

The programme will be given a new dimension and will be enlarged through active collaboration with the Ministry of Business so as to introduce new areas of support for people whose skills have to be refurbished. We shall be starting with “printing” as indicated in the Budget Speech before we move on to other sectors.
Let me come to the Tertiary Sector of Education. The availability of high-level human resources constitutes a determining factor in the progression of Mauritius to the rank of developed countries. As the economy becomes more service and knowledge-oriented, tertiary education as an engine of growth will gain increasing prominence. This Government has given Tertiary Education the importance it deserves as evidenced by the different measures taken over the last few years.

Increasing and widening access to quality tertiary education has been the major preoccupation of this Government since coming into power in 2005. A key indicator for gauging progress with regard to access to tertiary education is what we call the Gross Tertiary Enrolment Rate (GTER). This performance indicator has shown continued and sustained progress during the last few years.

From 28.4% in 2005, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it has risen in 2008 to 42%. This is comparable now with what obtains in countries at similar stages of development as Mauritius. *On a rattrapé beaucoup de retard.* However, there is an urgent need to accelerate this process further so as to reach the target of 72% by 2015.

In this context, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a few measures are being taken. It will be my duty to go very quickly through them. First of all, the setting up of an Open University: The Ministry is working on the establishment of the Open University, Mauritius for Continuing Professional Education and Life-Long Learning that would provide greater opportunity, as well, to those who do not have time to follow full-time or part-time programmes to enrol through the distance education mode.

This new University will thus ensure that access to higher education is even more diversified through new learning methodologies to cater for all social and economic backgrounds including those who cannot attend full-time face to face sessions.

In this context, my Ministry has set up a dedicated Unit with a Project Director recruited to drive the operationalising of the Open University Project.

A new legislation which will give the framework for a modern, flexible University tapping on local and international strengths is being finalized and will be presented to the National Assembly, I believe, very shortly.
With a view to further expand access, the Budget is now making provision for a new purpose built campus will be set up to accommodate some 8,000 students. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this new state-of-art technology campus will give a wider dimension to tertiary education. My Ministry is already working with the SLDC and other partners to this end. Much work has already been done and now that we have the Funds, we are most encouraged to accelerate our procedures and make it happen.

In addition to the above, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, several measures have been taken to consolidate the Tertiary Education Sector in Mauritius, but I prefer to gain time not to go through them, but just to say that at the University of Mauritius, out of 4,846 applicants who were qualified for at least one programme, 4,634, that is, 95.6%, were offered at least one seat. At the UTM all qualified applicants were offered a seat for Tertiary Education, that is, 100%, the 95.6% at the University of Mauritius and the 100% at the UTM. The UTM has in 2008/09 increased – may I remind the House - its intake by 50%.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerning access to tertiary education for those students who are facing severe hardship, I wish to underline - because the Leader of the Opposition had mentioned it – that there was confusion there. Il a parlé des personnes qui devaient avoir des loans alors que le Budget mentionne des personnes qui devaient avoir des bourses. Les deux systèmes fonctionnent, mais la deuxième partie n’a pas été mentionnée dans le Discours du Budget. Je dois attirer l’attention du Leader de l’opposition que les personnes ont le droit de prendre des loans des banques privées et garantis par ce même fonds.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to ensure access to tertiary education to those students who are facing severe hardship, the Human Resource Knowledge and Arts Development Fund has launched the Scholarship Scheme and, as I was saying, there is the Government Guaranteed Student Loan Scheme. Both Schemes are there.

- To date, 120 Scholarships have been awarded.

- Guarantee provided to eight students who have taken loans - only eight, because it depends on the number of students who come forward. I am going to see to it. Maybe, we have to do some media campaign or other types of campaign so that the students be fully aware that this possibility exists there.

- There is an increase threshold for the scholarship scheme from Rs7,500 – which was the case last year - to Rs10,000, as has been
mentioned in this Budget, and I wish to thank the hon. Minister of Finance for having agreed to increase this threshold - will enable a larger proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to benefit from a full scholarship to join a tertiary education institution.

In our quest, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to make Mauritius a Centre of Higher Learning, emphasis is also being laid on quality. In this context, we are constantly revisiting the regulatory framework in line with international best practice. During 2008-2009, two quality audits, for the UTM and the MCA - Mauritius College of the Air - were carried out with the help of independent overseas specialists. At the level of private institutions, a new framework has been put in place to establish institutions with awarding status at the start of the activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with all these measures, Mauritius is now well poised to meet its high level human resource requirements to confront the challenges ahead and position itself as the knowledge hub. We have been speaking about so many years ago in the region, besides taking full advantages of the world recovery when the time comes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is today universally acknowledged that the new economy calls for a human resource development system that satisfies a panoply of needs. My Ministry has prepared the National Human Resource Development Plan, which have got its aims, of course. Here also, I prefer to gain by not going into the details, but if questions are put, we can give the answers. It is good to note that major developments have taken place and capacity-building programmes have also been put into action, namely the training of 2,500 Call Centre Operators and 80 jewellers in the use of platinum; launching of the National Core Skills programme and enlisting the assistance of international experts from Singapore and UK to conduct workshops and the training of trainers programme; promoting job creation through the Ornamental Fish Breeding project; implementation of the project of mentoring for SMEs in collaboration with the MEF-Mauritius Employers’ Federation and the training of 21 trainers in Training Needs Analysis by external experts.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is also the recognition of prior learning - this also is something new, innovative - où beaucoup de personnes ont travaillé, par exemple, comme menuisier ou maçon durant toute une vie, mais qui n’ont jamais été vraiment formés. Alors the recognition of prior learning est un système par lequel on accepte de prendre ces travailleurs en
charge, à les former sur le plan théorique quelque peu puis finalement à leur donner un diplôme pour qu’ils aient plus de dignité dans leur travail et aussi pour qu’ils puissent mieux réussir dans la vie. This project reflects clearly the fact that there are clear overlaps between the academic and technical sectors which we are trying to reduce.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has a critical need for qualified personnel in a whole array of occupations, ranging from the informal sector to IT related services to financial and hospitality sectors. And my Ministry is determined to do all possible to guide the younger generation towards the right career path, to better serve the country. There are some workshops being organised for prior learning. I prefer to pass upon this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and use the very last few minutes to speak a little bit about culture because, as I said, I am also the Minister responsible for Arts and Culture.

With your permission, let me dwell on this subject, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Culture is, as we all know, the essence of life. Arts and Culture are recognised as vital components of our daily life that are worthy of investment and support from the public and private sectors. Today, we have to use creativity and cultural expressions as a force for social justice and the achievements of human needs. The benefits that creative industries bring in economic growth can no longer be underestimated. Culture matters as a foundation for economic growth, human development and good governance. Arts and Culture are, therefore, instrumental to the improvement of the quality of life in an ethnically diverse society like ours.

Our cultural tapestry is so woven that its beauty lies in the different colourful threads making the Mauritian nation. It is a powerful tool for nation building and social engineering and especially unity which is sine qua non at this difficult time when Government is calling for the support and solidarity of one and all to sail out of the tempest.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while upholding our cultural values and heritage, we are also creating appropriate conditions for the smooth development of our cultural industry. During the past decade, I said decade.

(Interruptions)

So, whatever goes at the Government, take it for you, now Opposition. During the past decade, the Arts and Culture sector has been boomed as the number of events and performances has risen significantly. Brilliant young talents are found in a cross section of disciplines, creative writers, visual and performing artists and musicians are regularly presented to the population.
We are now geared towards refinement and the sharpening of our sense of appreciation.

Today, we cannot deny the growing awareness of culture as a fundamental element for sustainable development, mainly in the context of *Maurice Ile Durable*. Culture is viewed, today, as an opportunity for development and we are working on a strategic plan that will put us on the super highway of culture that will carry us through the next decade. It is my strong opinion that Arts and Culture will soon become another pillar of the Mauritian economy.

A survey on the cultural industry of Mauritius has been carried out by the Mauritius Research Council at the request of my Ministry. The findings are being compiled on the status of the cultural industry and the recommendations will be used on a basis for the preparation of another appropriate policy for the development of the Cultural Industry.

As announced, an International Development Grant Scheme in the Budget for performing artists will be established with a view to giving opportunities to upgrade and up-skill their talents. It is also envisaged to market our cultural goods and services. The arts will thus become sustainable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the cultural stability leads to social cohesiveness and helps us to refine our daily encounter with the rich values of our pluriculturalty. Arts and culture bring joy and beauty to life. Last year, this Government set up the Human Resource, Knowledge and Arts Development Fund with a view to providing our creators and performers with the necessary funding for the development of their talents. The funding opportunities include grants, scholarships and other assistance schemes for artists. A total of 25 projects have been approved and are being implemented. Some of the projects are artists of the month, mounting of full-length plays, publication of an Arts and Culture Magazine, training for arts critics, creation of a cultural and artistic website, promotion of the reading culture and arts education in schools. Our colourful artistic and cultural tapestry, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, cannot be left to fade away but must be allowed to shine in its diversity. Even in this global financial turmoil, we are acknowledging that arts and culture are essential in fashioning social peace, harmony, stability, justice and promoting national solidarity.

During the last financial year, my Ministry has undertaken the following projects towards this end. Two new *Centres de Formation Artistique* have been opened at Plaine des Papayes and the other one at
Pointe Canon to meet the needs of the population for training in music, dance, pyrography, theatre and sound and light techniques. With a view to promoting our linguistic heritage, Government established three additional Speaking Unions, namely Marathi, Tamil and Telugu Speaking Unions. New legislation has been introduced for setting up the Centre de Lecture Publique et d’Animation Culturelle.

It is a matter of great pride that for a tiny country as Mauritius to be recognised and acknowledged as the repository of two world heritage sites, namely, the Aapravasi Ghat and the Le Morne Cultural Landscape, we are proud of this.

The National Art Gallery successfully organised its 3rd Triennial and Contemporary Arts last year. The National Art Gallery is moving forward with the promotion of emerging artists and to give a new impetus to artistic creativity and sensitise the population on the soothing effect of a work of art. It is gratifying to note that concrete measures are being taken to give a boost to our artists in the fine art sector. Thus, the promoters of all new buildings amounting to more than Rs50 m. will be recommended to spend a minimum of 1% of the construction cost on artistic works.

A series of activities for the promotion of Islamic Arts and Culture have been mounted by the Islamic Cultural Centre. Emphasis is being laid on the learning of Urdu and Arabic, Islamic calligraphy and Mehendi application. If today Islamic Banking is becoming a reality, we have to be thankful to the Islamic Cultural Centre for the initiative in 2005 by organising the first forum on Islamic Financial Services.

The Nelson Mandela Centre for African Cultural Centre will come up soon, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at La Tour Koenig. Tenders have already been floated for the construction of the centre. It will be another cultural jewel in Port Louis. Furthermore, appropriate funds have been made available to the Tamil, Telugu and Marathi Cultural Centres to become fully operational.

Our Cultural Exchange Programmes have given opportunities to our artists to perform in friendly countries such as India, Pakistan, Egypt and Reunion Island. Mauritian artists were also given opportunities to appreciate artists from the international scene. The Cultural Exchange Programmes promote people to people dialogue.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, many artists have complained on the high-cost involved in the production and staging of plays. To address these, the Human Resource, Knowledge and Arts Development Fund will finance the
rental of theatre hall for three final rehearsals and the gala show to give a
boost to drama performances by local artists. As the number of cultural
performances that are given in hotels is likely to fall in view of the decrease
in the arrival of tourists, a provision of Rs2 m. has been made to operate a
scheme to support our performers. Now that there is a growing awareness in
the population on the importance of our heritage, the National Heritage Fund
is investigating in all intangible heritage and archaeological sites. An
inventory of sacred and religious sites is also envisaged. A directory of these
sites will be prepared to sensitise the population of their importance in our
history. A one-off grant of Rs2 m. is being provided for the rehabilitation of
the Musée de la Photographie.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is acknowledged that the battle of Grand
Port is a landmark in the history of Mauritius. In fact, this is the first battle
won by the French in the Napoleonic era. This is proudly inscribed on the
Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Next year, my Ministry will put at a series of
artistic cultural and educational activities to mark the Bicentenary
Celebration of the Battle of Grand Port. In this context, we are working in
close collaboration with the authorities of Saint Malo to chalk out a
comprehensive list of happenings to mark the single most thrilling moment
of our history. As this is an international historic event, besides the French
Government many other friendly countries are also contributing to make it a
resounding success.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will not be long now, but I must tell you
that the National Archives has received and acquired a series of records.
University students and researchers have been given access to our records
and microfilms during the past year. It is proposed to set up an electronic
archive system with a view to safeguarding documents and allowing
consultations from a PC. The Mauritius Museums Council is on the forefront
for the presentation and preservation of history and heritage. A conservation
laboratory will be constructed at Mahebourg. The National Library is
playing a pivotal role in the planning of library services in Mauritius and it is
proposed to proceed with the construction of a purpose-built complex to
house the National Library, the National Archives and the National Art
Gallery in one and the same place.

The new Films Act, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, provides for the
classification of video films including the VCDs and DVDs. This will help
bring discipline and consumer protection in the video sector. Amendments
will be brought to the Copyright Act to better protect copyright of works and
to be in line with the latest developments in the ICT sector and international
conventions. The fight against piracy is going to be very arduous. Piracy stands as a significant threat to the careers and livelihood of artists. It undermines the possibility of sustainable incomes for creators. We require the participation of the whole population in this fight. In this context, a comprehensive public sensitisation strategy on intellectual property rights is being implemented to fight piracy. The quality of our lives and values of our society, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, depends immensely on the level of importance that we give to arts and culture. This Government is providing full support for the development and promotion of artistic creativity. While keeping pace with the needs and aspirations of our customers, we are also delivering a quality service to the population. Arts and culture, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are the best creation of human beings. We have to sustain them with a view to making our life colourful. The funds allocated and measures taken in this year's Budget will further enhance our aims of giving the population the opportunity to live in peace, harmony and in the pursuit of artistic excellence, cultural stability and sustainable development.

With these words Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to tell you that once the Budget is passed, we all agree that there is need to set up a strong monitoring process to oversee the successful and quick implementation of all the development and other projects we have announced. We need to tackle forcefully all the hurdles we shall encounter and there will be quite a few of them. The nation has great hopes on us. It is their legitimate aspiration to an improved life and to expect that their lots are progressively better. We cannot continue as we have done in the past. I believe this method has to be changed. I think it is high time for every project or related projects, every new sector with potential to create wealth and jobs as well as diversification of the economy be continuously monitored.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, here is a Budget that is forward looking in that it paves the way for enabling the population to tide over difficult times and, at the same time, also makes provision for when the crisis will be behind us. Let us therefore all together, in these special circumstances of unprecedented international financial crisis, wish our country, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, well indeed and for the benefit of our entire nation.

Let me end, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, by thanking specially the hon. Prime Minister for his unflinching support to this budget exercise and the hon. Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance, Dr. Rama Sithanen, for his courage, determination and lucidity in thinking for the future of our country.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.
Mr C. Sayed-Hossen (Fourth Member of Montagne Blanche and GRSE): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are today living in a world the state of which is characterized by what started by being a financial crisis, itself driven by the floundering of the subprime market, the crash of financial markets and then the crisis of the nuts and bolts economy and now what is called the global recession. We did not choose, we did not do anything; we are not responsible in any way for what happened to the world and by ricochet to our country.

In this world in recession, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, here we are, little Mauritius, with a small territory, a small population, a small market, a weak market with weak internal demand and hardly any critical mass to support a self-sustaining economic system. We have a very high level of imports to fulfil our consumption needs and we have a quasi total dependence on export markets for whatever we produce. In spite of that, we have survived, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and weathered out the storm for nearly two years. We have weathered out the violent winds of the global crisis. Now, we are being hit by the contraction in demand for our two main exports, that is, textile and tourism. Of course, in this dire context it cannot be business as usual. This Government - I must say as would any Government in power in these circumstances - is duty-bound to safeguard what we consider to be –

(i) national interest, and

(ii) to prioritise its actions.

National interest, we all agree, is the maintenance of purchasing power as far as possible, is the mitigation of human suffering as far as possible, is the protection of the most vulnerable and planning for the future, especially for tomorrow where certainly, we have no doubt that, the crisis will come to an end and this country will bounce back into progress and positive development.

With its three main dimensions contained in the title of the presentation of the hon. Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance himself: saving jobs, protecting people and preparing for recovery. I have listened very attentively to the hon. Minister of Education and also to the hon. Leader of the Opposition who spoke before me. I would like to make a few remarks about a few of the points which the Leader of the Opposition rose.

To sum up, pour synthétiser comme disent les français, the hon. Leader of the Opposition said that the Opposition also has propositions.
What he did present was actually what we would call les ébauches des propositions.

Secondly, he has said that the Alliance Sociale has lost credibility and he said somewhere that ‘nous avons un mari team économique qui m’impressionne beaucoup’. What a joke, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! If they do have serious proposals, - I would come to that later on - let them come, as we did in the Labour Party prior to the 2005 election, when systematically the Labour Party was coming up in the media with policy proposals and ideas for development. There has not been one single societal proposal in the discourse of the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

At the expense of repeating myself, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must say that I did say that when I made some comments on the Additional Stimulus Package Bill. I said that the Opposition was hit by intellectual bankruptcy and I still maintain that the Opposition is still hit by intellectual bankruptcy. Well, apparently they have a ‘mari team économique’ - we all know that - that used to be what they called between 2000/2005 the economic dream team of the Opposition. Now, that the dream team has undergone, pick and choose, metamorphosis, morphing, mutation into a ‘mari team’ even better. Plus ‘mari’ que cela tu meurs, M. le président. Actually, a team endowed with a razor-sharp intellect or is it a razor-thin vision and judgment so much so that on the edge of the razor their dream can basculer into this country’s nightmare, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - the same nightmare which this country underwent between 2000/2005. Toujours est-il that the now the ‘mari team’, then the ‘dream team’ between 2000/2005, first of all, inherited a vibrant economy and took it to the brink of collapse by 2005, brought down GDP growth from 6% to 2%, lost jobs à une vitesse vertigineuse, dixit hon. Jayen Cuttaree. Skippered or is it too flattering a word? Skippered the nation into a crise sans précédent, dixit the hon. Leader of the Opposition, then Prime Minister. All that to quote the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, all that during a period in an environment when the sky was blue, when the sea was calm but the captain did not know his job, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I just heard a remark from one of the sides of the Opposition, I read that somewhere also: ‘Nous ne voulons pas qu’ils piquent une mesure ça et là; ils ne veulent pas que nous piquions une mesure qu’ils auraient annoncée.’ M. le président, encore faut-il qu’il y ait des mesures pour piquer, encore faut-il y est ait des propositions.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition just spoke about le déraillement des prévisions du ministre des finances, GDP growth rate, current account deficit, foreign direct investment, balance of payment, but I wonder whether
the hon. Leader of Opposition is living in the same world as we are. Did Ireland forecast that it would go from being the most prosperous nation in Europe to be near being the poorest nation in Western Europe at least? Did Iceland forecast that it would go bankrupt within six months? Did China, the new economic giant of the world, the factory of the world indeed, forecast that it would lose 25 million jobs? Did India forecast that it would lose between 11 and 12 million jobs? Management, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has not only to do with planning and strategic thinking but also means adapting to change in the environment.

We heard the hon. Leader of the Opposition lament the fact that Government is aligning itself on the National Pay Council recommendations and recommending only 5% compensation. Many of our friends on the four sides of the House will remember how, in 1982, hon. Paul Bérenger promised 30% compensation to the workers. Inflation rate was 15%, he promised double, not only to compensate but to better the living conditions of the workers. And then when he came to power, he gave 8%, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. He was realistic probably, he was pragmatic, he realised that he couldn't give the 30% that he had promised and only paid 8%. But we never promised anything here.

The hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance did not say that he would give 8%, 10% or 12% compensation. He has always maintained one principle, companies and the State will pay whatever companies and the State can pay. We cannot make companies bankrupt just for the sake of a short-term gain for the workers. If faut être réaliste et responsable, M. le président. Il ne faut surtout pas faire de la démagogie. Everybody knows that the economic situation now is not conducive to higher compensation. And the Leader of the Opposition wants us to believe that he is weeping for the widows, les veuves, les orphelins, les handicapés. His Government, a few years ago, harassed, mentally tortured 125,000 senior citizens by requiring them to fill in a form declaring their assets, froze payment of pensions to them. And it was so shameful that poor hon. Lauthan and the hon. Prime Minister had to go and apologise to the senior citizens of this country.

And it is this Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, who caused to be reinstated full total pension for senior citizens. Just like in 1995, when he came to power, overnight he doubled pensions for senior citizens. This is compassion, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, not only verbiage and bla bla bla to borrow his favourite expression for the past few months indeed. And he is lamenting the condition of workers and employees. This is the very same
person who when he was Minister of Finance systematically avoided to meet the Trade Unions during tripartite negotiations. This is the same Prime Minister who sent the riot Police against workers on strike, further stating that the “Riot Unit pa là pou donne ti baba boire biberon”. And, today, he is trying to teach this Prime Minister lessons in compassion. Il faut être réaliste, M. le président. Il faut surtout être honnête. He was joking most probably.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition commented lengthily on the Additional Stimulus Package, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We have discussed that a few weeks ago while discussing the Additional Stimulus Package Bill. Il n’y a pas à sortir de là. L’assistance directe et indirecte aux entreprises est absolument essentielle si nous voulons les sauver. Si nous avons cette espèce de fausse pudeur qui nous dicte encore faussement que c’est politiquement incorrect de prendre le parti des entreprises, disons au moins qu’il faut sauver les emplois. On ne pourra jamais sauver les emplois si on ne sauve pas les entreprises, parce que ce sont les entreprises qui emploient les gens. L’honorable Leader de l’opposition, lui-même, a fait la démonstration en parlant des petites et moyennes entreprises, où, il a dit que près de la moitié des employés dans le secteur privé - en fait, je crois que le chiffre exact est de 43% - sont employés par les petites et moyennes entreprises.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is another issue here which has nothing to do with the statement by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and I had the opportunity to discuss that with the hon. Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance. We have a situation where the State is playing the role of bankers. Basically, it is not the role of the State to play the role of bankers. In the United States of America, apart from that big exception, where the US Government, under President Obama, used taxpayers’ money to partly bail out the automakers (automakers are so important economically, symbolically, a bit like the sugar cane sector in Mauritius, that I suppose they did not have a choice), money was used to bail out banks, because banks were filled with toxic assets. The job which the US Government did was to irrigate the financial system with cash, so that the financial system, especially the banks, would irrigate the productive and industrial system with cash, so that they can carry out their economic activities, produce/keep jobs, create jobs, export, create wealth and pay taxes to the Government to run the country. There is a major differentiation between the role of the State and the role of banks or bankers.
Le *bottom line* du rôle de l’État, M. le président, c’est la valeur ajoutée humaine. Le *bottom line* du rôle des banques c’est d’assurer le financement des entreprises. C’est pour cela que les banques existent, c’est pour cela que les banques ont des permis et des licences, c’est pour cela que les particuliers et les sociétés - n’importe qui - qui économisent, placent leur argent en banque pour que cet argent serve à financer des entreprises. *But it appears that we are living in a vitiated system, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, probably issued from our traditional plantation economy and what my good friend, hon. Ms Deerpalsing, usually calls l’économie de la rente ou l’économie rentière. I state that banks are not playing fair. We have had reports that, in certain cases, companies addressing banks for loans are being advised by banks: ‘Go to see Enterprise Mauritius and, maybe, you can apply to have money from the Additional Stimulus Package.’*

Another problem again, which is apparently very serious, is that many of the foreign banks in Mauritius refuse to take decisions to help companies which apply for help, in spite of their being viable, in spite of the project being positive, because they will tell you: we cannot make a decision locally, we have to refer to our Head Office, be it London, Johannesburg, Dubai or wherever. And, therefore, la *décision tarde tellement que l’entreprise est obligée d’aller chercher ailleurs.* Ce que je veux dire, M. le président, c’est que nous avons un système qu’il nous faudra revoir peut-être. Mais, c’est un défaut, c’est un shortfall qui est non seulement structurel mais qui m’a l’air d’être culturel aussi. Je demanderai au ministre des finances de bienveillamment considérer, très sérieusement, cette affaire en ce qui concerne le rôle des banques dans la situation actuelle où nous avons besoin de ce circuit de financement.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition also spoke about transparency. Of course, we all want transparency and accountability, and we all want to know how the money, which is being vested in the different Funds of the Additional Stimulus Package, will be used to help companies.

Pour parodier Malcolm de Chazal, M. le président, malheureusement, dans ce pays les préjugés poussent plus haut, plus dense et plus vite que la canne à sucre. En fait, Malcolm de Chazal avait dit: “Dans ce pays, on cultive deux choses: la canne à sucre et les préjugés.” Moi, je dis que les préjugés poussent plus vite, plus haut et plus dense que la canne à sucre. *It is so easy, if we have a total transparency in what companies are being helped, what companies are being assisted, to what extent and for what nature of problems, that can give rise to rumours, à la médisance et peut-être même à l’ignominie. Et tout le monde sait, y compris l’honorable Leader de*
l’opposition, que les entreprises ont besoin de candeur, de sérénité et, surtout, de la protection de leur réputation pour pourvoir opérer correctement.

L’honorable Leader de l’opposition a beaucoup parlé. Il a parlé de ‘zigzag’, de ‘bla-bla-bla’, de ‘budget bâclé’. Il avait dit que l’Additional Stimulus Package était un fourre-tout. Il a aussi dit que ce gouvernement avait perdu toute crédibilité. M. le président, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, of course. Just sit back and think or let us just sit back and think of what happened between 2000 and 2005. We just went through that very, very briefly. Ce budget, M. le président, contient plus de 200 mesures. L’honorable Leader de l’opposition a axé sa critique sur deux axes. Il a dit que, d’un côté il y a des répétitions, et que de l’autre côté, il y a des non-répétitions. Which is which? Je n’ai pas très bien compris, mais j’ai compris, du moins, qu’un exemple de la non-répétition, c’est que le Maurice Ile Durable Fund n’a pas été reconduit dans ce budget-là. L’honorable Leader de l’opposition a lui-même été au poste de commande de l’État pendant quelques années et il sait très bien que certaines mesures prennent du temps à être mises en marche ou à être mises en opération, et parfois même beaucoup plus qu’un an. Je l’ai commencé tout à l’heure, mais malheureusement je n’ai pas eu le temps de le terminer ; un des mes collègues, de ce côté de la Chambre, m’a dit qu’il va le faire, notamment une collation des mesures annoncées dans les budgets depuis 2001 et qui n’ont pas été implemented, et nous verrons à ce moment-là la comparaison. Mais ce qui frappe surtout dans le discours du Leader de l’opposition c’est qu’il fait l’impasse sur de nombreuses mesures qui sont axées sur la protection des citoyens, sur la sauvegarde des emplois, et la préparation du pays pour demain, pour rebondir après la crise. Je vais citer au hasard certaines mesures. Pour les petites et moyennes entreprises, M. le président, R 1 milliard; R 500 millions pour sauver les emplois, c’est-à-dire, assistance directe, et R 500 millions, encore une fois assistance directe, pour le financement des activités. C’est du jamais vu, M. le président! Deuxième exemple: l’expansion du campus de l’Université de Maurice pour pouvoir accommodate encore 8,000 étudiants. Encore une fois, M. le président, du jamais vu! De nombreuses mesures pour aider au développement accéléré de l’agro industrie. J’en cite quelques-unes.

Food Crop Insurance Scheme to cover 27 food crops for some 200,000 small food crop planters. A Potato Seed Purchase Scheme, an Onion Seed Purchase Scheme, the setting up of three dairy farms, the setting up of multiplier farms for genetic goat breeds and funds to finance
appropriate fibreglass boats for fishermen. Of course, besides point number one, which I’ve just mentioned, numerous are the measures to support SMEs, which the hon. Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance has gone through in his speech; and a number of social measures, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, among others, the revamping of NHDC apartments.


In general, Mr Deputy Speaker, this Budget is addressing, across the board, the boosting of the economy. It is assisting enterprises to save jobs; it is protecting the more vulnerable among us and it is preparing the country for the future. It is whipping up economic activity by the relaunching of massive infrastructure projects which is unique and for the first time in the history of this country. The cascading result of these massive infrastructural projects is very simple: creating jobs; when you create jobs, you create the flow of money. Once money flows, you boost consumption. When you boost consumption, you increase demand. When you increase demand, you re-kickstart the economy after the crisis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, on one point, is right, very right actually. There have been omissions. Il y a des choses que le vice Premier ministre, je le regrette, n’a pas dit. Il n’a pas dit qu’il allait augmenter la TVA de 20% - 10% à 12%; il n’a pas dit qu’il allait encore augmenter la TVA de 25% - de 12% à 15% comme eux l’avaient fait; 50% d’augmentation dans un mandat. Le vice Premier ministre n’a pas dit non plus qu’il avait laissé R6 milliards de squelettes dans le placard.

True again, the Leader of the Opposition has made numerous proposals and all these proposals have only one possible result, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and that is increasing Budget deficit. No proposition at all which is revenue generating. And they are right to say ‘que nous piquions les mesures qu’ils proposent’? God forbid! Dieu nous en garde, M. le
président, que nous piquions ce genre de propositions ! Avec la bonne dose de démagogie qui caractérise l’opposition, il n’y a nul doute que, si eux étaient en place, si eux étaient au gouvernement, ces propositions qui augmenteraient le déficit budgétaire - sans augmenter les revenus de l’État - auraient été depuis longtemps converties en mesures politiques. J’ai fait rapidement, tout à l’heure, en l’espace de dix minutes, le calcul de ce qu’aurait coûté les propositions faites par l’honorable leader de l’Opposition. Cela aurait requis l’augmentation de la TVA de 15% à 25%. Un rapide calcul and I challenge anybody in the Opposition to come and challenge these figures….

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, one orator is enough.

Mr Sayed-Hossen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget presented by the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment, and inspired by the hon. Prime Minister, – I have said it already and I will repeat it with pride – double senior citizens’ pension overnight in 1995, introduced in 2005 free transport for schools, colleges, university goers, senior citizens and handicapped people so that every single child in this country could go to school. This Prime Minister, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, immediately adopted in 2008 the PRB award, by giving a 40% increase immediately and in toto. This Prime Minister, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, maintained an increase on all subsidies, on all basic commodities to ensure that everybody in this country may, at least, eat and increase social subsidies so that in a short-term or, at least, in a medium-term, everybody has a roof over his head. And they want to teach this Prime Minister lessons in compassion ! Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this must be a joke. No way, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir!

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am being flagged the yellow card by the acting Chief Whip so, I will end my presentation here. But before doing that, I have to thank and congratulate the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment for the introduction of this Budget which, there is no doubt, and we all concur about that - apart from, of course, a few people that we know - will help this country to weather out the crisis that we are undergoing. This is the Budget that will help us against the buffeting winds that are striking this country right now. This is this Budget which is going to prepare the country to bounce back once this crisis is over, whether it will be the end of this year or next year, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.
I thank you.

(7.17 p.m.)

Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) : Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, être populaire et être populiste. After hearing the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I get this curious feeling that he wanted to adopt être populiste pour être populaire.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to give here a visual analogy. There are two gentlemen, one of them is the Minister of Finance and the second gentleman is the Leader of the Opposition. Both of them are having a cappuccino in a London restaurant, a very expensive place. The Leader of the Opposition says the cappuccino tastes good, but it is costly. The Minister of Finance who was sipping the cappuccino thinks otherwise. He thinks that the price of the cappuccino in a perfectly competitive market is 10 pounds sterling.

(Interjections)

The willingness to pay for this cappuccino is ten pounds fifty. The cappuccino sold is nine, the tax raised in favour of the Government is zero and for the Minister of Finance, since it is a zero tax, he had a project in mind and it was jeopardised. The second scenario that comes to the mind of the Minister of Finance: the coffee bean of Brazil, the harvesters, had experienced bad weather. The farmers of coffee beans in Brazil suffered economically. The whole market supply of the coffee bean was down and the demand was up. The price of the world market goes up. The coffee growers of Tanzania were very happy and they made good money. They start buying aluminium iron sheets and because the demand was high, the price of aluminium went up.

Décider, c’est trancher specially when we are in the Government. It is very complex, because the Minister of Finance has to think in a very holistic way rather than tits and bits. I take this example of salary compensation that the hon. Leader of the Opposition took up. The NPC recommended 5.1% as salary compensation, which is insufficient according to him. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I have done a bit of statistics, and I can make statistics lie. For him, 5.1% was not enough. But he forgets to say that this 5.1% increase in salary compensation will cost Rs1.4 billion to the State, which is indeed a big sum, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The other point that he raised is that the United States and France is doling out money to the American households, and we should do the same.
How can we do it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? In America, people are talking about Ninja loans, that is, you don’t have a job, you don’t have a salary, you don’t have an asset, but still the bank is giving you money. And what follows was a credit crunch, a banking, financial and subprime crisis. In Mauritius, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have none of this. There is no Ninja loan, no credit crunch or banking crisis. I don’t understand the rationale of the hon. Leader of the Opposition that we should dole out money. And if we do it this will be a perfect recipe for crisis, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition cites China. He said that China is investing 440 million dollars in renewable energy. He is not aware that the China Investment Corporation is investing not millions, but 200 billion dollars. It is investing with foreign enterprises mostly from the United States. And these foreign investors cannot invest in the United States because of stringent regulations on environment. They find it nice to come to China and spoil the environment, because there is no legislation. I don’t understand his point that China is doing something great to save the environment. For us, whether the investor is investing in China, polluting its environment, and not polluting the atmosphere of the United States, is the same. They are polluting the mother planet.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will take one last point here. When the hon. Leader of the Opposition was talking of light rail transport, the way he was talking, I thought why he was so energized. I don’t know where that energy was coming from. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I read the Budget Speech of 2003/2004, at page 5, where it is said –

“The Light Rail Transport (LRT) option is on the way of being confirmed.”

Just one line! He was even accusing the Minister of Finance that he is jumping from here and there. The next sentence was –

“The northern part of the island is assured of adequate supply of water with the Midlands Dam now completed.”

This is called jumping, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from LRT to the water supply project in the north. It is not enough, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. If I go to the Budget Speech of 2004/2005 – the next year – there are two lines. They have improved by one line.

“The LRT project remains a solution for traffic decongestion in the long term. I am providing Rs20 m. for detailed studies on that project.”
They are talking of the LRT project in terms of priorities of priorities. They say that we are very slow. But, this is an example of slowness; one line in the Budget Speech of 2003/2004, and another line in 2004/2005 after a lapse of one year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, all Budgets have objectives and determinants. But what is more important is the contextual background of each Budget. In all fairness, if you have a cursory and a fleeting glance of the two last Budgets of the previous regime, that is, 2003/2004 and 2004/2005. Let us look at the backcloth of the 2003/2004 Budget Speech, and I quote –

“This Budget is set against an international climate marred by a succession of disturbing events.”

Let’s see what are those successive events of 2003/2004! War in Iraq, when the price of petrol was the same. They talked of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank God it never came to the shore of Mauritius. They talked of Germany likely to experience a slowdown. They say that Japan remains trapped in recession. They say the outlook of the Asian Tigers remains subdued. And the icing on the cake, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I quote again -

“Another crucial element in the budgetary equation will be the implementation of the Report of Pay Research Bureau, which will weigh heavily on the Budget.”

We all know the story of the PRB, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and how it was paid in a piecemeal basis. Let us see the background of the 2004/2005 Budget, and I quote again –

“The international backdrop to this Budget is one of uncertainty.”

They were talking of uncertainties in 2004, and let’s see what these uncertainties were. Firstly, the price of petrol has risen from US$ 29 to exceed US$ 40 per barrel in the last six months. They were worried about that. Can you imagine the price that we had to pay till August 2008? It was US$ 150. They were very apprehensive again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and I don’t know why. The decrease in the price of sugar will be the direct threat to the sugar industry. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank God the sugar industry is still alive and kicking. They were talking of the Multi-Fibre
Agreement being dismantled. We know that the textile and the clothing sector never flourished like before when we took over as from 2005. They were talking of pressures coming from India and China. At that time, it was India/China, and now it is Chinindia. Textile and clothing industry is something of the past for us. They were talking of AGOA 3. For us, it is a boon and an opportunity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there were the fears and apprehension. This was their belief system. And we have a belief system as negative as uncertainty, fears. Then, there is something like helplessness. And when you are helpless, your potential for action is zero. It is no doubt, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we inherited a financial heritage bordering on insolvency when we took over Government. I don’t have to say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what is the backcloth of this Budget, except to say that this crisis is not confined to a particular segment of financial system. It has brought, in fact, the entire system to the brink of the breakdown, with far reaching consequences for small vulnerable economies like ours. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think “any parliamentary debate, without mentioning this backdrop, will tantamount to hypocrisy, if not heresy. Obviously, hon. Members of the Opposition, the choice is yours! I am not mentioning, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the crystal ball can be muddy. I am not talking about that, except by just mentioning the dangers of adverse climatic changes, the ferocity of which we have already experienced on 28 March 2008. I am not talking about the public health emergency, which can be triggered by the so-called Swine Flu. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in my view, the Additional Stimulus Package is a humane policy response to a human crisis, whose proportion and duration we don’t know. Here, I would like to pay tribute to the visionary and enlightened leadership of our Prime Minister. I would like to pay tribute to the Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance and the two Ministerial Committees, which were appointed in November 2008. To pay homage to the Prime Minister, I shall quote the third part of Henry VI, I quote, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir -

“My crown is in my heart, not in my head. It is not decked with diamonds and Indian stones, nor to be seen. My crown is called content.’

Indeed, the content of this Budget is the crown of the Prime Minister. I have, in the previous Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, paid homage to the Vice-Prime Minister by quoting Thirukural, and I’ll do it again this time.
And there is a very good reason why I’ll do it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Because even people from our side were saying “Rama pé met nous dans trou”. People from our own side. That’s why I want to quote Thirukural once again, and what does Thirukural say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir -

"If those who think to achieve, have a firm and focus mind, they will always realise what they thought of."

Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the firm and focus mind of the Vice-Prime Minister has prepared the nation to cross the desert to the promise land. We are grateful to him. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on this side of the House, we have a plan; we have a roadmap; we have a direction; we have a very strong, strengthened rationale; we have resourceful strategies to save jobs, to protect people and prepare for the future. What about the other side of the House? For sure, they have their own model to reinvent l’île Maurice. I would like to know with bated breath, what does that mean to reinvent l’île Maurice. They are going to propose alternative measures en temps et lieu. Again, we would like to know what does that mean, in a very tangible form. This is not time to wait. This is time for action. They are blaming us. The same people are blaming us. Let me assure, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we don’t play the game of populism. We don’t play for the gallery. Populism is not our breakfast - bacon and eggs. On this side of the House, we have a programme. We have very critical pathways to attend to this global recession. We know that path one is about saving jobs, and the other four paths are about protecting people and preparing after for the recovery. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition says: “nous avons nos propositions; nous avons un mari team économique qui m’impressionne beaucoup”. This is good for him, if people who propose only one proposition, can impress him. We can only wish him well, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Il persiste et signe: « Nous allons venir avec nos mesures détaillées le moment venu ». I can’t believe it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It is the same hon. Member who was telling us ‘too little too late’. For them, “le moment venu” is in the future. For us, the time is now. For us, décider c’est trancher, and when we decide, we don’t take half decision, we do not look for compromise.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are living in an age where change has come with frightening rapidity. Many terms have used: ‘meltdown’, ‘crisis’, ‘slowdown’, ‘downturn’; but it is marked by two things. One is the breathtaking pace of its spread and the second is the ability to undermine and
the ability to shake the economic stability of a country. Here, I'll take the example, Ireland. At one time, it was called the poor man of Europe. Subsequently, it had won the epithet of the Celtic tiger, a shining light of the global economy. Ireland was called the place, people and the profit, because of its sustained economic growth rate of 11%. Now, its economy is falling apart, or already set to crawl.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with globalisation and the free market economy, with this recession, we are sleeping on the same waterbeds. What is happening in Ireland or elsewhere can happen to us. Of course, there are no pipe dreams. There is no pipe dream to mitigate all harmful effects of this economic downturn. But we have two things, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir: we have vision, and the foresight of a dedicated Government team. We have the will and the skill to face headlong this impending crisis. And with this Budget, we are poised to enter another breakthrough, to create another economic velocity, in spite of the recession, and this is a promise to the nation. On this side of the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are conscious. Our economy is set to crawl in 2009, but let's not forget the recent past. We had already faced two semi financial crisis -

(i) the rising in the fuel cost, and
(ii) the rocketing of price of essential goods, food commodities, iron bars, and cement, the backdrop of an old out-race for raw materials by China and India.

There was another crisis, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, but this crisis was home-grown. The development model of the previous Government, which was, once again, addressed successfully and incrementally, since we took power in 2005. This development model of the previous regime is that the economy was in stagnation. It was not free flowing. « L’ascenseur social était en panne, la machine à créer l’emploi était grippée, il y avait l’urgence sociale et économique. » But, somebody has rightly said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir: politics is the art of rendering possible what is necessary, and this Government has rendered possible what was necessary. We have created three years of unprecedented stability and sustainable growth, oscillating around 5%, and this is not an accident. It is the fruit of a very deliberate economic policy and I can say, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, this deliberate economic policy can be used as a template for the Sub-Saharan region. Under the mindset of modernity, we adopted this outward looking orientation. We diversified our economy, which created a very strong wave of job creation. We brought in very healthy and resourceful legislation. We brought about tax reforms, we cut down waste; we even dismantled the
skeleton that was in the cupboard but, more importantly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we provided linkages between the economic and the social objectives in the form of safety nets for the deprived. Our Prime Minister had made good use of his Statesmanship, leadership and diplomacy. He used the geo political position of Mauritius to bring the concept of south-south cooperation. Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am talking about the mega project of Tian Li. Apart from the state-of-art technology, foreign direct investment of 20 billion, this project will give further momentum to job creation. As I said before, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our growth trajectory will decline, no doubt. Our investment may experience a setback, textile and tourism sector are already filling the brunt; the construction sector is only registering 10% of downfall. Job creation and maintenance will suffer a contrecoup, but on a temporary basis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once again, we shall rise to the occasion of meeting this challenge. We shall weather the storm of the crisis. With the Additional Stimulus Package and this Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We shall continue our economic structural reform; we shall implement our programme in good faith, but what is more important again, is that we're going to repeat our attachment to promote the well-being of the nation, especially those who are poor, those who are downtrodden and those who are vulnerable.

Our reform of 2005, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, was like truth. First, it was ridiculed; secondly, it was violently opposed, but what is more important is that now it is finally accepted as something which is self-evident. We did what we set out to do, a very people centred development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, history has taught us the weightage of different systems of Government. Under the visual analogy, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you take a nation, you divide it in two and build up a wall between them, apply on one side the rules of social economy and markets based on entrepreneurship and individual responsibility. On the other side, une économie étatisée, une économie regularisée with heavy doses of prohibitions, restrictions, rules and regulations and collective responsibility. Let it hibernate not for 40 years but for 14 years, break down the wall between the two sides and observe the difference. On one side, the success story of West Germany and, on the other side, the East Germany with all its social and economic turmoil.

The story that we retained, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that the people were the same, they were Germans, but it is not the human beings that are to
be blamed but the rules of the game. The rules of the game, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, have been understood when we took power in 2005, an innovative, creative and entrepreneurial Government with open looking strategies. But, we never lost track that the progress will never come from outside, it must be won by us from inside. In 2005, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we chartered a different path, we took unpopular decisions, sticky decisions; we made hard choices and, once again, in the context of severe economic constraints – global - we have a formidable challenge to redefine our economic backdrop and it will be based on two things, the vision for the future and our inherent values. The vision for the future is a vision of the political leadership at the highest level and our values of reference, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, remains to create a very supportive and conducive environment for initiatives, discipline, responsibility, innovation and entrepreneurship without losing track of equity and social justice. Our structural and deep-seated reform, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has been revolutionary and close-related. We did not deploy any méthode brutale, instead we adopted la médecine douce. The nation has understood that our reform was not a punishment; our reform was a chance to face the challenge of the 21st Century. Looking back, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are ever grateful to the community, to the Mauritian nation, to la majorité silencieuse qui ne descend pas dans la rue, qui ne porte pas de pancarte, qui ne brûle pas les torchons. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government with its successive Budgets, le fil conducteur remains the human development and we are going to strive for that.

On this side of the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, we have been ignited by the vision of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam to eliminate poverty, to eliminate illiteracy, to eliminate ignorance and equality of opportunity and this is our promise to the Nation. We shall continue to strive to provide a secure and enjoyable present and also to look forward for a better future. The current economic crisis we are seeing in the world is a cry out to think and act in a new way. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with this Budget we have taken a formidable challenge to manage this economic downturn. In fact, we are poised to enter the second breakthrough in economic evolution, to save jobs, to protect people and prepare for the recovery. But, this can happen on conditionalities. On one point, I agree with the Leader of the Opposition. The strength and the potentialities of our public institutions need to be further exploited; the bureaucratic monster has to be streamlined. Weak policy frameworks should be taken care of, the policy units of each and
every Ministry needs to be strengthened and the monitoring of each and every project has to be rigorously assessed.

On a concluding note, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to quote Mahatma Gandhi -

“For every action proposed or contemplated should, in its implementation, wipe the tears of the poor and the downtrodden people”.

And he further emphasized –

(…) only when we have wiped the tears from the faces of all, have we truly achieved as a Nation”.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir this is the essence and this is the philosophy of the Budget, we are going to wipe the tears from the faces of all Mauritians.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

At 7.49 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 8.53 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Minister of Industry, Science & Research (Mr D. Gokhool): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me, at the very outset, as the previous orators have done, as per parliamentary convention and tradition, thank the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for the presentation of this fourth Social Alliance Budget in this august Assembly. Let me also place on record the able guidance, leadership and support of the hon. Prime Minister during the preparation of this Budget. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have had the opportunity of listening to four interventions. The Leader of the Opposition, hon. Dr. Bunwaree, hon. Cader Sayed-Hossen and hon. Dr. Mungur. One thing comes out very clearly and this point has been made by orators from this side of the House that when the Leader of the Opposition commented on the Budget, he very conveniently avoided referring to the global financial and economic crisis which is affecting the world economy as well as our economy. In fact this point was forcefully made by orators on this side of the House that when the Leader of the Opposition commented on the Budget, he very conveniently avoided referring to the global financial and economic crisis which is affecting the world economy as well as our economy. In fact this point was forcefully made by orators on this side of the House that when the Leader of the Opposition commented on the Budget, he very conveniently avoided referring to the global financial and economic crisis which is affecting the world economy as well as our economy. In fact this point was forcefully made by orators on this side of the House that when the Leader of the Opposition commented on the Budget, he very conveniently avoided referring to the global financial and economic crisis which is affecting the world economy as well as our economy. In fact this point was forcefully made by orators on this side of the House.
experts, analysts, observers and policymakers and it has been quite difficult to forecast the crisis which we are undergoing. Now, if the Leader of the Opposition says that we failed to forecast, they must have forecast. But in the course of his intervention, he said, he is not here to make proposals. The Opposition is not here to make proposals. I am wondering whether this is the case, or it is just a show because I also know that the MMM is going to set up a dream team of professionals to look at the economic situation and make proposals. A bit too late I thought. There are experienced politicians who could have done the job. So why is it now that the Leader of the Opposition, the MMM is looking for the dream team and headhunting professionals to come and help the MMM to formulate the alternative proposals. That perhaps is an explanation why the Leader of the Opposition has not been able to make proposals. Except for one, and that came from one of the members of MMM, that is selling of gold. I think that was the only proposal that was made and that also did not fit into what needs to be done to tackle this global financial and economic crisis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we all know, and even today, experts to forecast, analysts say it is very difficult to forecast, there is a very low visibility about the problems that we are facing, and what needs to be done. But, initiatives measures are being taken to address the issue. There are different scenarios and certainly we have to analyse and tailor make the decisions for the situation that we are confronting.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we also know that this crisis that we are facing, is linked to circumstances which are external and beyond our control. We know also that most economies have been battered by this economic crisis and there has been slowdown, growth is negative, international trade has shrunk and worst, unemployment is growing. ILO has predicted that there will be some 100 million unemployed as the result of this global financial and economic crisis. But as stated by the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, and true it is, it is the first time in the history of a country that a Government has to present a Budget in such a depressive international context. It is after a very long time that we have such a difficult situation. In fact, this is the backdrop against which we need to examine the present budget. This crisis is bound to redefine the contours of the world economic order. We are heading for a new economic order. As a nation, how do we face such a predicament? How do we prepare for the future? How shall we, as a nation, cope with the challenges of this new economic order. The question we have to ask is: does this Budget respond to these concerns and preoccupations.
Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a Budget is not simply a technical or accounting exercise. A budget is also one of the most important exercises for any Parliament or any democracy. It incarnates the fundamental principles, the vision and the values, the strategies, the goals and objectives that Government intends to accomplish on behalf of the people. It articulates and gives expression to the social contract between the Government and the citizens. Every budget is therefore an opportunity for Government to renew its pledge to the nation. Let me mention that in the Government Programme 2005-2010 these pledges were highlighted, namely to bring change at the various levels of our society, to take all necessary measures to create a society where there are opportunities for all, a more inclusive society, a society where there is equality treatment before the law and by all agencies, whether public or private, to bring in a new economic model through the democratisation of the Mauritian economy, to gear the country towards a future that is prosperous for all where economic success will be equally characterised by equity, ethics and social justice. But, above all, Government’s pledge is to ‘Put People First’ and also to democratise the economy, to ensure that economic success is characterised by equality, ethics and social justice.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these are the pledges of the Social Alliance Government to the people. In our successive budgets, in line with these pledges and commitments, Government has taken steps to ensure that these pledges are fulfilled. We have undertaken major reforms in the economy, focusing on investment facilitation, opening up of the economy, fiscal consolidation, discipline and tax reforms and we have embarked on profound structural reforms of the economy to generate growth, employment and wealth. We have succeeded in arresting the economic decline and turning the economy around. Some of the outcomes through the reforms that we undertook are: unemployment rate declined to reach 7.2% in 2008, GDP growth recorded an average of 5% during these three consecutive years from 2006-2008, FDI shot up from Rs2.8 billion in 2005 to reach Rs11.5 billion in 2008 and public debt was reduced by 18% to reach Rs48.6 billion in 2008.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in short this Government has been able to restore high, robust and sustained growth from which the whole population has benefited immensely. Allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to mention some of the concrete measures taken to share the fruit of growth among the population. First, Government paid the PRB award of 2% of the GDP amounting to Rs5.2 billion in full, in one year without raising VAT and
without increasing budget deficit. We have enhanced the purchasing power by cutting tariffs on a wide range of consumable items. We have maintained subsidies on flour and cooking gas. We have also increased the social transfers by 14% to reach the figure mark of Rs21 billion in 2008.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, all these outcomes, these results showed that we have been consistent with regard to our pledges to the people. Since July 2005, in successive budgets, we have been consistent with our core values, that is, ‘Putting People First’, democratising and modernising the economy. With the present budget, the 2009 Budget, this consistency, as far as the core values are concerned, is being maintained. But we have to agree that we are faced with a new context and unprecedented, unforeseen financial and economic crisis with the risk of a real social and human tragedy. This new context requires therefore a new response. There is need therefore to be innovative, imaginative while upholding the values that form the bedrock of our mandate.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Arnold Toynbee, the renowned historian describing the rise and fall of nations had this to say:

“When a nation is confronted with a challenge, it finds an appropriate and successful response. It then grows and prospers. As time passes, the nature of the challenge changes. We have to change our response. Otherwise, we shall decline and disappear as many cultures and civilizations have.”

This is, indeed, the magnitude and scale of the challenge we are called upon to address – the challenge of change. There is need for a new response in these circumstances. Therefore, does this Budget address these concerns? To my mind, yes, it does and I will elaborate at a later stage how it does. This Budget was bound not only to be innovative and imaginative but also bold, daring and ambitious. It had to be bifocal, that is, face the immediate challenges and also prepare for the future. This Budget looks at the current crisis not only in terms of difficulties and challenges, but also as opportunities. It is both anti-crisis and pro-opportunity. This is the nature of this Budget ‘anticrise et pro reprise’. It is a test for the Mauritian genius to think out the box and to abandon conventional thinking, to be both reactive and proactive and to face up to the new realities of an inter-connected global village.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, by far, according to me, this Budget responds to the new challenge that Mauritius is facing. The most remarkable feature of this budget is that it contains over two hundred measures and mobilizes
over Rs14.2 billion and has a time frame of 18 months, a shorter time frame, that is, instead of 24 months, the time frame is now 18 months. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget therefore aims at transforming our economy and our society. Our economy as we know is becoming more and more integrated to the global economy. We all know that the days of preferences and protection are gone. We have to go for global competitiveness for our survival and for prosperity.

We have to integrate progressively the global value change and we have to prepare the nation, our institutions to reach the global norms and benchmarks. This paradigm shift, therefore, increasingly requires a mind shift. I believe that we have to engage our population to think global. We cannot solve today's problems and tomorrow's problems with the tools and concepts that work under a regime of preferences and protectionism. We have to develop new tools and new concepts to address the problems, the challenges of the new economic order.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, therefore, this Budget, as I said, is bifocal, addressing the immediate problems and challenges, but also preparing for the future. But it is, by far, a powerful vehicle for this transformational challenge. This Budget is a catalyst for a mind shift, for a new order of things. For me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is essentially a transformational Budget, beyond the 3-key and immediate objectives of saving jobs, protecting people and preparing for recovery. If we look at all the projects and many are being implemented and many will be implemented “à travers un vaste chantier de différents projets socio-économiques, ce budget jette les jalons pour une île Maurice moderne.” This Budget lays the foundation for a new forward-looking, confident and united 21st Century Mauritius. This is the task that this Budget is addressing.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have listened, read and heard criticisms from different quarters about this Budget, be it from the Trade Union movement, from media, from employers and from various sides of the Opposition.

Let me respond to some of the criticisms which have been made with regard to this present Budget. One underlying theme in all the criticisms is that not enough is being done for the working class. This is the common theme. The Trade Union movement, the Opposition and certain sections of the media say that not enough protection is being given to the purchasing power of the citizens.
The other criticism is that this Budget is pro-private sector. Of course, the hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned some of the problems relating to implementation, problems which are not new. In every Government, there is a Government Programme, there are Budgets and there are many problems, administrative, legal and financial. You may go for a contract which is awarded, then there is contest, it goes to court; all these things are there. So, they do delay implementation of certain projects and it takes more time. There are certain problems of implementation which, of course, this Government is addressing. True it is that we are also, at times, impatient that some projects are not moving as fast as we would have wished. This is a problem that will be addressed.

I will come to the two criticisms that not enough is done for the working class, there is not enough protection of the purchasing power and the Budget is for pro-private sector. Let me take the first two points that not enough is being done for the working class and we are not protecting the purchasing power of the citizens. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think there is a basic problem in this argumentation. People do not live by bread and butter alone. The income and the salary are important. In fact, Government always tries to balance the interests of the working class with the interests of other segments of the society.

I mentioned the PRB, Rs5.2 billion was paid at one go. We paid the PRB but beyond wages and salaries, Government has taken a wide range of initiatives. I can just name a few of them. In the successive budgets which have been presented before this House, the subsidies which support income have been maintained. It has to be factored in when we talk about the compensation and also the purchasing power. I have just mentioned social transfers, that is, support which is extended to the different socio-economic groups.

If we take a look at the Social Security Statistics, the economic and social indicators for the period 2002/2003, 2007/2008, this is what the report says, I quote –

“Expenditure on social security and welfare increased by 63.1% from Rs7,898,000 in 2002/2003 to Rs12,880,000 in 2007/2008 representing respectively 20.5%, 23% of total Government expenditure.”

And we have a breakdown of all the social transfers. There has been a significant increase of the social transfers.

Let me also mention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that under the grant for casting of roof slabs this also contributes to the income of people at different
levels. In fact, this is meant for lower-income groups, the number of beneficiaries from 2005 to date is 13,175 families and a total of Rs670,215,000 has been disbursed. I can take other examples to illustrate how this Government cares for the citizens. The various schemes for vulnerable groups under the National Empowerment Foundation, the Trust Fund for the Integration of Vulnerable Groups, free transport, income tax reliefs, no increase on VAT, and, of course, the setting up of the Competition Commission, one of its aims being to ensure that there is no malpractices as far as pricing of products are concerned.

I don’t think that it is proper to just isolate wages and salaries and make an argumentation that this Government is not caring for the purchasing power or the income of the citizens. In fact, we have a whole range of schemes and social transfers which help people at different levels.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as pro-private sector is concerned, which private sector are we talking about? Hon. Pravind Jugnauth has been Minister of Finance, Leader of the Opposition, Prime Minister and also Minister of Finance. Can the development of this country have taken place without the partnership between the private and the public sector? In fact, in today’s context when we are confronted with so many challenges on the external front, this partnership has to be reinforced. Of course, we have to ensure that this is a responsible partnership and, in fact, this is what this Government is doing. I mean, the argument is made that we are dishing out public funds to the private sector, but I think this point has been amply canvassed. I don’t know why this argument keeps coming up, because everything can be checked. And we have given the undertaking in this House, and even outside this House, that we will act in a transparent manner. Internationally, whatever is being spent with regard to support, will be made available and it will be done in a very transparent manner.

In any case, the 100 top companies are not looking for support. The banks are not looking for support. The top big ones are not looking for support. While I argued when I was intervening on the Additional Stimulus Package, I put the question: Can we afford to let our industry die, close down? As I argued, it is not only for saving jobs, but it goes beyond saving jobs. America is supporting its industry. It continues to support Chrysler and General Motors. Why? It is very simple. If these big companies/corporations close down, the country is going to lose its industrial know-how which it has built over time. Let me give an example in the sugar sector. We have a sugar industry and now we are going on to make of it a cane industry. If the sugar industry had closed down, would we
have had that industrial know-how? This is the IPR of the economy. Similarly, the hotel industry which is now becoming the hospitality industry and it is looked upon as one of the best in the world. This is also our industrial IPR.

Concerning the textile and apparel sector, we have the best textile firms in Mauritius, with international benchmarks. Can we afford to lose this industrial know-how? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is a fundamental reason why countries like America, Japan or any other part of the world want to support the industrial infrastructure, because if we do not have an industrial infrastructure, the economic development will suffer. That’s another reason why Government needs to support, protect jobs, but also to ensure that we do not destroy and lose the industrial know-how which we have built over so many years.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, the criticisms are not serious. In fact, when I refer to the speeches of the previous Government, when the situation was not so dramatic, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the then Minister of Finance, was making appeals that we have to be patriotic. How in the present conditions, when the priority is ensuring that Government deals with these problems in the larger interest of the population, can the Opposition come with such flimsy criticisms? I think the Opposition has no case. That’s why I do not want to spend too much of my time responding to the Opposition. I know that after I have spoken, when other Opposition Members will take the floor, the same criticism will come; it is worse than that. It will be a repetition. I invite the Opposition, at least, to be imaginative and not go on repeating the old rhetoric of pro-private sector bias that we are not taking care of the working class. On a déjà entendu cela. Let us be serious and come with more solid arguments about how to tackle real problems which face the people and their livelihood. This is the real issue.

There is another thing which I want to mention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. True it is, Government has a responsibility to govern, take measures, introduce policies, but then what is the role of the Opposition? Is it just to oppose and criticise? I mean, is this the role of an Opposition which is aiming at being the alternative Government with so many aspiring Prime Ministers? It is a missed opportunity for the Opposition. They should have taken the opportunity and come to the House and given their own views about how the economy should be managed and convince people about their merit for aspiring to be in the alternative Government. I do think the Opposition has a long way to go.
Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think I will fail in my duty as ex-Minister of Education & Human Resources if I do not take the opportunity to respond to a couple of criticisms with regard to the education sector for which I was responsible for three years. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the reform that we introduced in 2005 was to respond to the situation that was created by the previous Government. Let me say one thing. My predecessor, hon. Obeegadoo, had commissioned a report by UNESCO/BREDA on the primary and secondary school system. When that report came, in fact, I had the choice of not making the report public or making it public. It was commissioned by my predecessor. The report was made public. What came out of it is something that people should revisit. When the reforms started with the previous Government, they changed ranking to grading. And if we look at the empirical data, the performance of pupils at CPE was going down year after year. That was the main objective why we introduced the reform. My colleague has just mentioned that the results are showing an upward trend. This is true. This is number one. Number two, because they asked for it and I have to come back to 2005, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. When we took over, they were talking about building so many schools.

(Interruptions)

But I said it in this House and if my child was in a school at that time, I would have taken that Government to court. Children were admitted to l’école fantôme; schools that were not built.

(Interruptions)

Quatre Bornes SSS, Nouvelle France SSS!

The Deputy Speaker: Order please! Order! Hon. Ms Deerpalsing, please!

Mr Gokhool: And last but not the least. This one, I take the opportunity and say it for hon. Pravind Jugnauth. He has to go back to paragraph 147 of the President’s Address 2005/2010, where it is stated black and white, I quote –

“My Government is committed to carrying out fundamental reforms in education with a view to providing World Class Quality Education to enable young Mauritians to be employable in new sectors of the
economy, to have more fulfilling jobs and also to be competitive at the international level.”

What you have been doing with the hon. Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance - now you are changing - you were targeting him. You did give that to me as well. You targeted me as if I was the person who invented or brought forward the term ‘World Class Quality Education. No, it was in the Government Programme. I, as the Minister responsible, had to implement the programme. It is as simple as that. And I think this type of politics, we should avoid if we are aspiring to high offices. I will not go beyond that. I think I’ll stop because I have answered. I wanted to answer and I have answered.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the key features, some of the highlights of this Budget are aimed at saving jobs, protecting people and preparing for recovery. We have outlined five plans. I am not going to comment on all five: save jobs, project realisation and capacity in public sector. We have the largest public sector investment programme, protection to the population, eradication of poverty and maintaining the expansionary fiscal and monetary policy approach. As I said, there are 200 measures for resources to the tune of Rs14.2 billion in a time frame of 18 months. But what I see as striking in this Budget, and I am going to comment on that. One, this budget is comprehensive and inclusive. I must congratulate the Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance. Very often, people are unfair and criticize, but this time, a wide range of sectors from, of course, the economic operators who have the problem to save jobs, but also almost all sectors of the economy. From women, children, youth, taxi drivers, small contractors, fishers, small planters, potato/onion planters, fruit growers, cattle breeders, dairy farmers, pig breeders, small contractors, small traders, hawkers, to small shop owners and other micro-business operators. They have all been taken care of. That is why I say that this Budget is comprehensive and inclusive.

The second striking feature in this Budget is that it has inbuilt in it the spirit of solidarity. When a country is going through difficulty, sectors which can support should support the economy. And that is why in paragraph 194, with regard to corporate social responsibility, Government will tap the Budget of IRS projects up to Rs50 m. and will provide the matching grant. This money will be used for various projects. In paragraphs 251 and 252, profitable companies in the telecom and banking sectors will be required to contribute to Government efforts. There is the spirit of solidarity which we can find in this Budget. The next striking feature - and I think this is very
important - we are investing in the development of infrastructure, and we know that there is a link between economic growth and the quality of a country's infrastructure. If we upgrade our infrastructure, this is going to contribute to the economic growth. That is why Government is giving priority in terms of upgrading the infrastructure. We know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that there has been a long debate going on about traffic congestion, and how much it costs to the economy, about Rs3 billion. One of the responses is to tackle the problem of traffic congestion, and that is why we are modernising our road network. As regards investing in infrastructural development, this is for the first time that we have such a scale of projects. Let me now comment on what, in my view, is fundamental. When there is a crisis, there is a temptation for costs cutting. We need to have recourse to cross cutting to do away with wastage or restructuring. But what is very striking in this Budget is the efforts Government is making with regard to human resource development, human capital.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to the building of human capacity and we can find numerous examples. This Budget provides some Rs300 m. under the National Empowerment Foundation to run Work cum Training scheme. This is part of the effort to invest in our human capital. In paragraphs 64 and 65, provision has been made for training in the printing sector and other sectors. In paragraph 79, life skill training for supervisors and coachers will improve productivity and capacity. In paragraph 93, the Maritime Training Academy will provide training for fishers in Rodrigues as well as for 50 skippers and 50 mechanics. In paragraph 118, placement of 2,000 School Certificate and Higher School Certificate holders after training for 40 days and Rs21 m. have been provided. In paragraphs 138 to 145, human resource capacity-building for the public sector and Services to Mauritius programme and the employment of newly qualified engineers. On top of that, we know that Government is also implementing the Workfare Programme for those who have lost their jobs. There is also the project *l'Espace Des Métiers*. If we look at all these projects, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is clear that Government is putting a lot of priorities on Human Resource Development Capacity-Building. In fact, as we always say, if Mauritius has made so much progress this is due to our human resources. We don’t have any other resources except our human resources. This philosophy is being continued through this Budget and by this Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the other striking feature, of course, is saving enterprises and saving jobs. As I said, we are saving jobs, but, at the same time, we are promoting the development, the modernisation of the SME
sector. Because in the SME sector, people create their own jobs and they provide employment to others. So, in my view, therefore, in these circumstances, this Budget is responding to the current challenges in the most appropriate manner.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now briefly comment on the initiatives we are taking with regard to the manufacturing sector, in particular, the export-oriented enterprises, which fall under the responsibility of my Ministry and also what we are doing in terms of supporting the economy in its modernisation effort through science and research.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these are, as I said, difficult times and the manufacturing sector, especially the export-oriented enterprises are going through difficult times. That is the reason why in the 2008/2009 Budget, Government introduced the Manufacturing Adjustment and SME Development Fund (MASMED) and this Fund was of a value of Rs500 m. It was set up with a vision of positioning the manufacturing enterprises and SMEs as globally competitive sectors. As I have mentioned and I think there was a PQ during the day about how this Fund is being managed. There are in all 51 projects which have been approved by the Fund and six other projects have been completed. Three of them have been completed, and there are about 25 which are in the process of being implemented. Once a project is being defined, it has to go through tendering, consultants have to be chosen, and it takes some time. But, the projects are being implemented, and there are others that will be implemented in the course of time.

The MASMED Fund is operational, and we have a number of projects. I cannot go through the whole list, but I can just mention a few of them. In the project relating to light engineering sector of Rs2.5 m., 35 firms have been audited and a roadmap will be established to upgrade this sector. Concerning the benchmarking for the textile sector, this project has been completed to a value of Rs500,000, and a validation workshop will be organised to disseminate the findings of the report to operators by the end of June 2009.

Concerning legal advice for the preparation of regulatory measures regarding standards and metrology to the tune of Rs200,000, a project has been completed, and action has been initiated.

Concerning enterprise diagnostics for 150 enterprises, the first phase of this project has been completed. 15 companies have already been diagnosed and reports submitted. And the second phase will be completed by 30 May 2009. We have a range of projects like energy saving audits,
diversification of the textiles and clothing sector, the Technology Diffusion Scheme, the support to upgrading of standards and quality and packaging, innovation and product development studies. In all, there are 51 projects. I can assure the House that there is monitoring. An Evaluation Committee has been set up to follow the progress of these projects month by month. I can inform the House that this Fund is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of my Ministry. I, myself, make it a point to ensure that these projects are being implemented. I give a personal attention to all these projects, because we cannot afford not to implement these projects. My colleague, the Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance, always reminds me whenever he meets me that we must make sure that these projects are implemented. And we are doing the needful. We also know that, in December, the Additional Stimulus Package was introduced, and we raised the contribution of the MASMED Fund by Rs1 billion. And now, with this Budget, this Fund has gone up to Rs3.5 m. to support enterprises, modernise them and make them competitive, to ensure that they do not close down.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, apart from the support which we are providing to ensure that our enterprises remain competitive, that they do not close down, that jobs are saved, we are also taking a number of steps in order to keep this sector dynamic.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the level of my Ministry, I would like to mention a few other measures which we are taking in order to support the export-oriented enterprises. We are in the process of operationalising the Fashion and Design Institute. This is part of the innovative strategy that we are adopting in the industrial/manufacturing sector. We believe that we have to transform the sector into an innovative and creative sector. Fashion and design is bound to become a new industry. It will encompass the Textile and Apparel Industry and other sectors. Just as I have mentioned that the sugar industry is now the cane industry, the hotel industry is the hospitality industry, similarly the textile and apparel and other sectors, because of the decisive aspect of value added products, through creativity and design will become the Fashion and Design Industry. The institute is being operationalised; we have already appointed a project coordinator, and we are in the process of appointing the Chief Executive Officer for this institution. We are running the second Mauritius Business Excellence Award, because we have to motivate enterprises towards continuous improvement. This is a project to encourage enterprises to go for excellence.

With regard to export promotion, we are - together with Enterprise Mauritius, MEXA - working for market diversification from our traditional
markets in UK, Europe and America to other markets in East European countries, India and, of course, Africa. We are putting in place a strategy for market diversification. With regard to the US market, as you know, we obtained the Third Country derogation. We had an AGOA 8, and we are following it up. Enterprise Mauritius has put up a window to help entrepreneurs, and put them in contact with our representatives in the United States. We have a trade representative, and we are now charting out a new strategy to promote exports and to take advantage of the Third Country Fabric derogation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when I look at the Export-Oriented Enterprises sector, I find a mixed picture. Some enterprises are going through a difficult time, while for others, although their chiffres d'affaires may have gone down, they are not making losses. In fact, I find a very interesting situation where large enterprises work on a subcontract system and the subcontractors – there are about 50 or 60 of them – are doing well, and they are even recruiting people. Star Knitwear is recruiting people, and there are so many other enterprises. This is not a situation which is gloomy altogether, but we have to be careful because the market is a depressed one and exports have been coming down. We have to ensure that we maintain our share of market and diversify the markets. This is what we are doing.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, my Ministry is also responsible for science and research. We know that if countries like America, Europe, Japan, India and China have made remarkable economic progress, it is because they have been supported by cutting edge, science technology and innovation. I think this is a weakness in our economic model. And we have to remedy this situation. That is why we will make proposals. First, we are coming with a new industrial strategy document, which will move our enterprises to become globally competitive, environmentally sustainable and socially responsible, supported by science, technology and innovation. In that respect, I think it is imperative that we develop a model of a science, technology and innovation park. We have research-based organisations which work not so much in a coordinated manner. We have to bring them together and create a Mauritian model of a science, technology and innovation park.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in that context, my Ministry is also finalising a framework document for science technology and innovation. Like I mentioned, there is a new industrial strategy document which is being finalised. These are, therefore, two important documents, which will give the new direction to the industrial and manufacturing sector.
Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in a context of globalisation, we are bound to work with international agencies. I am happy to state that we have struck very good partnership with “Agence Française de Développement”. We have signed an agreement to provide a grant of euro 1.5 million for technical assistance under a “Programme de renforcement des capacités commerciales”. The programme has been approved and will involve assistance of many to the parastatals under my Ministry. My Ministry is also working with UNIDO. UNIDO had developed a Mauritius Industrial upgrading and modernisation programme 2009-2014, in the context of the regional SADC industrial and modernisation programme. The Ministry of Industry will be responsible to coordinate the programme and the programme will be directed first to support the upgrading and competitiveness improvement for Agro, food processing, tourism including handicrafts and textile enterprises. Second, strengthen institutional capacities of technical support institutions and third strengthen institutional capacities of Mauritian Ministries responsible for economic and industrial activity. We are working with AFD and also with UNIDO. We are working with all these important agencies in order to revitalise the industrial manufacturing sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like now to conclude by saying that this Budget, as I said, is a transformational Budget. It is laying the foundation for a new modern Mauritius. There will be another Budget in December, but I think the foundation is being laid. We should look to the future with confidence and not in a spirit of gloom and doom as the Opposition and some other stakeholders are doing. We have a bright future. We have to go forward with courage, conviction. I am confident that the Mauritian population will understand the intentions of this Government and will fully support all the projects that we are implementing through this Budget.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr R. Issack (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): M. le vice président, je ne sais pas si je suis le libero ou bien le gardien de but de l'équipe. Je suis tout le temps le dernier à toucher la balle. Ceci dit …

(Interruptions)

Espérons que je vais marquer quelques buts. M. le vice président, le monde est en crise mais ce n’est pas la fin du monde. Il y a une étincelle qui
a provoqué une conflagration et ceci a commencé avec le petit marché de subprimes et, aujourd’hui, nous nous trouvons dans une situation de crise planétaire. It y a Joseph Stiglitz, Prix Nobel de l’économie en 2001, qui a dit ceci : « Les crédits ont agi comme des stéroïdes pour doper la croissance américaine. Mais il y a eu overdose. L’Amérique est aujourd’hui en cure de désintoxication”. L’Amérique éternue et c’est le monde qui est grippé. L’économie est globalisée et tout choc, surtout aux États-Unis, est immanquablement ressenti partout ailleurs, et le marché monétaire est paralysé, et nous faisons face à une crise financière sans précédent. Si Lehman Brothers, la cinquième banque d’affaires des États-Unis, vieille de 150 ans, s’est écroulé, posons-nous la question maintenant : nous, à l’île Maurice, que sommes-nous ? Il y a le président de la Banque Mondiale, Robert Zoellic, qui vient de faire une déclaration dimanche à la presse espagnole. Il a dit notamment ceci : ‘si l’on ne prend pas de mesures, il existe un risque d’arriver à une grave crise humanitaire et sociale, avec des implications politiques très importantes. Les mesures de relance peuvent être déterminantes. Ce qui a commencé comme étant une grande crise financière est devenue une profonde crise économique, et dérive aujourd’hui en une crise du chômage. Si l’on crée des infrastructures et met les gens au travail cela peut être un moyen d’associer le défi à court terme à des stratégies à long terme. A mon avis, dans ce contexte, personne ne sait vraiment ce qui va se passer et le mieux est d’être prêt pour tout imprévu. Le chômage va continuer à augmenter, et nous savons que le chômage et la pauvreté existent à Maurice un peu partout, malheureusement. Et nous savons comment vit un homme qui est au chômage - un père de famille qui a des difficultés. Et nous savons maintenant quelles sont les appréhensions de ces gens qui travaillent et qui craignent de perdre tôt ou tard leur emploi. C’est une peur, c’est une phobie et, ici, le gouvernement justement est en train de tout faire, d’intervenir, de prévenir pour que nous ne vivions pas de telles situations. A Maurice nous avons trois secteurs. Les trois mamelles de l’économie, les trois ‘T’ : la terre, le tourisme, le textile. Ce sont ces trois secteurs notamment que le gouvernement veut sauver, veut stimuler. Et pour cela, il vient avec le Stimulus Package ou Additional Stimulus Package, et quand on parle de Stimulus Package on parle d’argent. Et l’argent du contribuable est sacré, chaque sou est sacré, chaque sou est donc important. On ne doit pas dépenser inutilement. Le gouvernement veut sauver le secteur privé, les entreprises privées pour que les gens par milliers ne perdent pas leur emploi. Mais que dit-on ? Il y a une diabolisation du secteur privé d’une manière en année, year in year out. Dès qu’une mesure est prise en faveur de l’employé qui passe directement par le secteur privé, on crie, on hurle:
« Rama Sithanen c’est l’homme du secteur privé, le gouvernement c’est le secteur privé. » Il n’y a rien de plus faux et de démagogique que cela. Le nombre de familles uniquement - on prend les petites et moyennes entreprises, il y a 240,000 employés. Imaginons un instant qu’aucune aide n’est apportée pour stimuler ces entreprises ? Que se passerait-il ? Combien de gens tomberont sur le pavé ? Combien de familles vont subseqüemment souffrir ? Une entreprise, c’est une entreprise. Le secteur privé ce sont toutes les entreprises. Mais ce matin même, dans une interview accordée à ‘L’express’, le ministre des Finances explique très clairement, qui bénéficie de ce Stimulus Package. Ce n’est pas Ireland Blyth, ce n’est pas Rogers, mais il y d’autres entreprises. Il y a des petites et des moyennes entreprises. Donc, refuser d’aider ces entreprises, c’est mettre le pays sur les rotules. Refuser d’aider ces entreprises, c’est pousser le pays vers le précipice ! Alors il faut bien se dire que ce Stimulus Package, l’aide financière qu'on accorde, ce n'est certainement pas de l'argent offert à gogo, ce n'est pas la manne qui tombe du ciel, et ce n'est pas la fiesta pour toutes les entreprises privées de ce pays. Il y a des conditions évidemment qui sont attachées à cette aide. Mais, en même temps, il faut comprendre qu’à travers ces conditions, il y a une chose qui est claire et nette. On ne subventionne pas la malhonnêteté des entreprises, ni l'entreprise des malhonnêtes. Alors, aider les moyennes et petites entreprises, c'est un besoin, c'est un devoir, si on veut vraiment sauver les petites gens, les moyennes gens, alors c'est une nécessité. Mais, ceci dit, il faut aussi faire référence aux employés qui se trouvent dans la fonction publique, parce que nous ne devons pas oublier que ce budget est aussi le budget de l’effort et le budget de la solidarité. Ce qui importe pour combattre le chômage, les difficultés économiques, ce sont la productivité, la rentabilité et la profitabilité. Il y a quelques années de cela, le Premier ministre d'alors, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, avait fait une remarque très pertinente en ce qu'il s'agit des fonctionnaires. Il avait parlé de certains fonctionnaires qui "ti pé lire roman dan file' et L'Etat n'est pas là pour financer la paresse, il faut que tout le monde, fonctionnaire ou pas, qu'on travaille, qu'on bosse, même les politiciens. Alors il va nous falloir, pour combattre cette mentalité, un apprivoisement psychologique parce que, dans certains secteurs, malheureusement, nous l'avons noté, et nous l'avons déjà dit ici ou ailleurs, in some sectors you have full-time workers who are doing a part-time job but are paid overtime. Alors c'est le budget de tout un chacun, le budget de la solidarité, de l’effort conjugué. Je ne vais pas m'étendre trop sur le budget, mais je voudrais quand même m'appesantir sur la culture, un aspect important de ce budget. Ce matin même j’ai entendu le ministre de l’Education et de la Culture qui disait que, culture is the essence,
c'est l'essence même de notre vie. Alors c'est bien, c'est intéressant, les efforts qu'on fait pour la culture. La culture ce n'est pas seulement la musique mais il y a aussi ces centres culturels Tamoul, Télégou, Islamique et espérions, Marathi, enfin le Centre Nelson Mandela. Il y a tellement de centres, mais espérons que dans l'épanouissement de la culture, parce que parfois la culture est compartimentée à Maurice, chacun vit sa culture et ses traditions alors que nous aurions pu vivre avec l'autre, ensemble, on peut partager la culture. Nous n'importons pas, nous n'échangeons pas, il n'y a pas *inter-exchange of cultures*. Alors, espérons que le ministre, avec les moyens dont il dispose - déjà il a annoncé certaines mesures - nous aurons tous l'occasion de vivre ces cultures ensemble. Mais quand même je souhaite féliciter le ministre des Finances pour avoir pensé au Musée de la Photographie. La photographie c'est la mémoire, c'est tout un passé fixé sur pellicule, et nous savons tous comment notre ami, le responsable du Musée de la Photographie, Tristan Bréville, se démène, se décarcasse pour que nous puissions avoir notre patrimoine fixé sur pellicule. C'est un travail immense. Alors, il faudrait non seulement encourager le Musée de la Photographie mais d'autres musées, d'autres musées d'art et de la culture.

Mais après la culture il y a l'agriculture…

*(Interruptions)*

Et la culture physique - je laisse cela à l’honorable Dr. Burty David. Je lis dans le budget qu’on a dépensé R 250 millions *for the pigs*. Mais l'encouragement de l'agriculture - il y a évidemment les pêcheurs, on essaie de faire beaucoup *for the breeders* mais il faut encourager les gens, la population à planter. Nous dépensons beaucoup dans l'importation des produits vivriers, mais nous devons apprendre non seulement à planter mais encourager les gens à venir à Maurice pour qu'ils encouragent eux-aussi l'agriculture. Ici, je pense à un mauricien établi en Australie. Il est venu à Maurice en six occasions pour ouvrir une école de l'agriculture, et je crois que le ministre, l'honorable Dr. Burty David, l'avait rencontré. Mais justement on pensait, il y a quelques instants, à ces fonctionnaires qui ralentissent, qui freinent tout. Ce monsieur est venu à l'île Maurice en six occasions, uniquement pour son école et, jusqu'à présent, il n'a pas pu ouvrir cette école de l'agriculture qu'il voulait *non profit-making*. Donc, nous devons encourager, nous devons tout faire et nous ne devons pas simplement labialiser, parler du bout des lèvres, il faut qu'il y ait des actions, des actions concrètes. Alors espérons que cette école aura l’appui nécessaire de nos fonctionnaires, du gouvernement, pour qu'elle puisse ouvrir incessamment.
Ce budget est un budget de solidarité nationale aussi, c'est le budget du patriotisme, C'est un budget intelligent, rationnel, réaliste, nationaliste. Mais, malgré les critiques qu'il doit essuyer, il y a une chose que l'on ne devrait pas négliger, ni oublier. Il ne faut pas oublier - on l’a dit ici et ailleurs – que le ministre des Finances est un homme qui a ses racines, qui a un passé, une histoire. Et celui qui n’a pas connu la pauvreté ne pourra jamais combattre la pauvreté. Il l’a connue; il l’a vécue. Et je ne crois pas que c’est un homme qui ne pense pas aux pauvres. Tout gouvernement pense aux pauvres, mais on ne s’adresse pas aux problèmes des pauvres de la même manière. Chacun a sa façon, chacun a son style et le gouvernement du jour a fait preuve, en maintes occasions, de ses sentiments vis-à-vis de la classe pauvre et ouvrière. Et c’est une vision partagée. Je crois que le Premier ministre c’est un peu la vision, la pensée; et l’honorable Dr. Rama Sithanen, c’est la complémentarité.

Pour terminer, M. le président, je souhaite, au nom de tous mes collègues, féliciter le ministre des Finances pour ce budget très difficile et en même temps réaliste et très pratique.

Merci, M. le président.

The Minister of Information & Telecommunication Technology (Mr A. Dulull): Sir, I beg to move for the adjournment of the debate.

Mr Bodha rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Wednesday 27 May 2009, at 11.30 a.m.

Dr. Sithanen rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

At 10.12 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Wednesday 27 May 2009, at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS
HOSPITALS – RECEPTION DESK - OFFICERS

(No. B/512) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the nursing and other officers posted at the reception desk to attend to emergency cases at the casualty departments in the hospitals, he will state the number thereof in each case.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that the setting up of a Reception Desk for Triage with the support of a Triage Nurse and a Health Care Assistant, was introduced in September 2005. This system was put in place in line with our Government Programme 2005-2010 regarding the reform of the Accident & Emergency Department.

To date, a reception desk is operational at each Regional Hospital and it is manned by one Senior Nursing Officer and one Health Care Assistant who act as Triage Nurse. This service is supported by other officers, including the Medical Records Officers and other Nursing Officers in the Accident & Emergency Department prior to the patient being seen by the Medical and Health Officer. In addition, there are Police Officers, Security Guards and Hospital Servants who assist the patients as and when required.

For instance, at Victoria Hospital some 15 such personnel and at SSRN Hospital some 13 such personnel are, respectively, involved in the various processes as from a patient arrives at the hospital until he/she is seen by a doctor. These processes include a service d’accueil and the taking and recording of the vital signs and blood pressure of the patient before the latter is examined by a Doctor.

The Triage Nurses have the responsibility to screen patients attending the Casualty Department between 0800 hours and 2200 hours with a view to ascertaining the urgency of each case. The emergency cases are referred to the Accident & Emergency Department and the other cases are directed to the Unsorted Outpatient Department. Patients attending hospitals between 2200 hours and 0800 hours on the next morning are all seen at the Accident & Emergency Department.

Moreover, a fast track approach has been put in place for children and the elderly. In fact, these two categories of patients are referred immediately by the Reception Desk to the Unit concerned.
VACCINATION PROGRAMME – INFANTS

(No. B/513) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he will state if Government will consider including vaccines against cancer in the Vaccination Programme for infants.

Reply: I am advised that an infant is a child below the age of one year.

I am also informed that there is no vaccine against cancer for infants and, therefore, the question of including vaccines against cancer in the vaccination programme for infants does not arise. However, Hepatitis B vaccine is routinely being given to infants in Mauritius in three doses. This prevents Hepatitis B infection and indirectly decreases the risk of liver cancer during adulthood.

CITÉ JONCTION, PAILLES - BUILDING EXTENSION – PETITION

(No. B/514) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Black River District Council, information as to if it has received a petition from the inhabitants of the Cité Jonction, Pailles, to the effect that the extension of a building is obstructing the view of the drivers coming from Cité Jonction, Pailles, to the main road, and, if so, the measures that will be taken.

Reply: I am informed by the Black River District Council that no complaints have been received from the inhabitants of Cité Jonction, Pailles pertaining to the erection an enclosure of a grotto located at Corner Dahlias and Pailles Road.

EMPLOYEES – LAY-OFFS – COMPENSATION

(No. B/515) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment whether, in regard to the lay-offs that have taken place in the different sectors of the economy for the months of February, March and April 2009, he will, in each case, state –

(a) the number thereof;
(b) the name of the employers, and
(c) the number of employers who have offered compensation to their employees.

Reply: The number of workers who have been laid-off sector wise for the months of February, March and April 2009 is as follows -

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<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of workers laid-off</th>
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<td></td>
<td>February</td>
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<td>Tourism</td>
<td>155</td>
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<td>Construction</td>
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<td>Distributive Trade</td>
<td>04</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>106</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-EPZ Manufacturing</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>Manufacturing Sector for Export</td>
<td>96</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>414</strong></td>
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I would like to draw the attention of the House that in my reply to the Private Notice Question at our sitting of the 31 March 2009, I informed that the number of workers laid-off during the months of February and March 2009, up to 30 March, was 237 and 702 respectively. I wish to point out that there is currently no provision in the Employment Rights Act 2008 for a time limit for an employer to notify my Ministry of the termination of employment of any worker. Consequently, notifications with regard to some termination of employment which occurred in the months of February and March 2009, have been received well after March 2009. Hence, the total number of workers laid-off during the months of February, March and April 2009 is, as at 25 May 2009, 414, 902 and 164 respectively.

I have to inform the House that consideration is being given to amend the Employment Rights Act to provide that every employer shall give notice
of termination of employment of a worker to the Minister on the date of the termination of employment and that any failure to do so shall be an offence.

As regards part (b) of the Question, the House will agree that it is not proper for me to reveal the names of employers who have laid-off their workers.

Insofar as part (c) of the Question is concerned, 21 employers have so far offered compensation to their laid-off employees.

SIR GUY ROZEMONT STADIUM, QUATRE BORNES – RENOVATION

(No. B/516) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the Sir Guy Rozemont Stadium at Quatre Bornes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Tourism Fund, information as to if the renovation thereof has been financed by the Fund, and if so, the reasons therefor.

Reply: As the House is aware, Mauritius is promoted as an upmarket, attractive tourist destination.

To be in line with that image, we need to ensure that all our tourist sites and other popular places visited by tourists are embellished and made as attractive as possible. Indeed, we believe that the whole of Mauritius has tourism potential of one sort or another.

Accordingly, the scope of the Tourism Fund has been enlarged (in October 2007) to finance the implementation of infrastructural facilities, social amenities and projects other than those which are directly related tourism development. As such, our tourism product will be deepened and diversified and, at the same time, this will ensure that the benefits of tourism development are spread to a wider cross-section of the population.

In line with the enlarged scope of the Tourism Fund, the Fund has favourably considered the financing of various project proposals submitted by Ministries, local authorities and other institutions. These proposals include wide ranging projects such as the Provision of handrails and steps at Macondé Viewpoint (Rs695,000), Provision of Platform at Chamarel (Rs1.5 m.), the Development of Balfour Garden at Beau Bassin/Rose Hill (Rs3.5 m.), Fixing of lanterns at Calodyne (Rs99,000) and Construction of drains at Grand’ Baie and Infrastructural works at Grand Gaube (Rs3.4 m.), Upgrading of Cemetery Père Laval (Rs632,000), Upgrading and embellishment works at Cathédral St. Louis (Rs3 m.), Control of Stray
Dogs/Pests/Ravens (Rs7.3 m.), Installation of Poster panels (Rs500,000), Painting of bus-stops (Rs1 m.), Zoning of Lagoon project (Rs21 m.), Nature Trail Development project at Rodrigues (Rs3 m.), Rehabilitation works of La Citadell (Rs15.2 m.) and general cleaning and upliftment of the destination throughout the island (Rs8.3 m.).

In the same vein, the Tourism Fund had agreed to a project proposal from the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes for the embellishment of the Guy Rozemont Stadium, which comprise replacement of the security fencing of a cost of around Rs455,000 and embellishment of the stadium involving an amount of about Rs155,000.

The Guy Rozemont Stadium was not only an eyesore, but it also represented an hazard for the safety and security of spectators who attend sports, cultural and other activities.

I strongly believe that the whole of Mauritius should become a touristic destination, having regard to our vision to make Mauritius the best island destination in the world. We should, therefore, spare no effort to uplift and regenerate our urban as well as rural areas through the eradication of eyesores and the implementation of embellishment projects, especially, on minor projects when not much money is involved.

**BEL OMBRE - HOTELS - TOURISM FUND**

(No. B/517) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the hotels built at Bel Ombre, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Tourism Fund, information as to if it has obtained the total amount of the contributions thereto, indicating if all the projects identified in that region have been completed.

**Reply:** I am informed that the total amount paid to be to the Tourism Fund by the promoters of hotel projects at Bel Ombre is Rs74 m. for Phase I and Rs25 m. for Phase II of the Bel Ombre Integrated Hotel and Leisure Development Project.

I am further informed that two projects had initially been identified under Phase I of the project as follows -

a) the construction of a mini-multipurpose complex for women entrepreneurs, and
b) upgrading of Bel Ombre Public Beach.

However, the projects could not be implemented owing to lack of funds at that time as the funds contributed by the promoters were used up to meet the costs of re-alignment of the Black River/Savanne coastal road amounting to some Rs80 m. which exceeded the amount of contribution received by Rs6 m.

Under the second phase of the project only one promoter has so far signed the lease agreement and we have received an amount of Rs25 m.

Accordingly, this Ministry has had consultations with relevant stakeholders for possible projects that could be implemented and consensus has been reached for the implementation of the construction of a Women Centre at Bel Ombre project, as a priority.

I am informed that an amount of Rs10 m. has accordingly been earmarked by the Tourism Fund for that project. The drawings have already been finalised and tenders are expected to be launched by July 2009. Works are scheduled to start in September 2009 and expected to be completed by May 2010.

On additional funds being received from promoters of Bel Ombre Hotel Projects, my Ministry, through the Tourism Fund, will consider the implementation of other community development projects, namely -

- rehabilitation of Le Battelage, and
- construction of a Youth Centre.

AIR MAURITIUS LTD. – BOARD MEMBERS – DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

(No. B/518) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the Board Members of the Air Mauritius Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Company, information as to if any of them are shareholders of companies dealing with Air Mauritius Ltd.

Reply: I am informed by Air Mauritius Ltd. that in matters pertaining to related party transactions and disclosure of interest, the Company stands guided by the provisions of –

(i) its Constitution;
Accordingly, the Company is bound by law to disclose all information on related party transactions in its annual reports. Such information for the Financial Year ended 31 March 2008 has been provided in the Company’s Annual Report 2007/2008.

I am tabling a copy of the relevant excerpt from the Company’s Annual Report 2007/2008.

**BELLE MARE/POSTE DE FLACQ – HOTEL PROJECTS**

(No. B/519) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether he will state if his Ministry is in presence of any application for hotel projects in the region of Belle Mare and Poste de Flacq and, if so, indicate the names of the promoters.

**Reply (The Minister of Housing & Lands):** The Ministry of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications does receive applications on a regular basis for hotel development projects on coastal regions, including the region of Belle Mare and Poste de Flacq.

In examining the requests for State land for such type of projects consideration is given, *inter alia*, to the following -

(i) Foreign Direct Investment.

(ii) Job creation.

(iii) Social Components of the proposals.

(iv) Environment and energy savings components in the context of *Maurice Ile Durable*.

(v) Compliance with the provisions of the Tourism Strategy.

All criteria relating to the allocation of State land for tourist related projects are posted on the website of my Ministry at the following address -

http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/housing

Where State land is available, and with a view to ensuring development in a planned manner, my Ministry develops a Master Plan as
has been the case, for example, at Bel Ombre, St Félix, and Les Salines, Koenig.

The Ministry of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications is currently in the process of finalising a Master Plan for the region of Palmar. Once a decision to allocate any portion of State land for a hotel project is taken by Government, the main obligations on the beneficiary company are as follows -

(i) contribution to the Tourism Fund, now standing at Rs25 m. for each hotel project;

(ii) compliance with the provisions of the Planning Policy Guidelines and the relevant outline scheme, and

(iii) development to start and completed within a given time frame.

Furthermore, the grant of State land is subject to anti-speculatory measures. In the name of transparency and good governance, I will submit in due course a list of all applications for hotel development projects since the year 2000.

YOUTH CENTRE, CARLOS ROAD, TAMARIN – ACTIVITIES

(No. B/520) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Youth & Sports whether, in regard to the Youth Centre at Carlos Road, Tamarin, he will state -

(a) the activities organized by the centre for the youth of the locality;

(b) the number of staff employed thereat;

(c) the facilities provided thereat, and

(d) if maintenance and repair works will be undertaken thereat.

Reply: The Youth Section of my Ministry organises a wide array of activities/programmes through the various youth centres of the island. These centres are fully equipped and are meant to give maximum opportunities to young people to indulge in healthy leisure, vocational and sports activities.

The activities organised by the Tamarin Youth Centre include outdoor games like basketball, volleyball, petanque and indoor activities such as carom, modern dance, boxing and aerobics amongst others.
Moreover training courses are delivered in the fields of Leadership and Youth & Family Life Management, music and dance, martial arts, literacy, etc.

Other activities organised by the centre comprise *Spéciales Vacances* Programme, Life Skills Training, *Atelier de théâtre*, IT initiation, workshops on prevention of social evils.

With regard to part (b), one Temporary Youth Officer is posted at Tamarin Youth Centre, under the supervision and coordination of one Senior Youth Officer and one Principal Youth Officer, who are based at Bambous Youth Centre.

In addition, there is also an Office Attendant, a general worker and a Security Guard who is on duty when the centre is closed.

With regard to part (c), the facilities provided at the Tamarin Youth Centre are as follows -

1. One multi-purpose hall.
2. Spacious veranda and yard for gatherings and outdoor activities.
4. Petanque court.
5. NET PCs for IT initiation.

Concerning part (d), I am informed that there are no major repair and maintenance works required at Tamarin Youth Centre. However, the lighting system in the yard has been partly damaged due to bad weather.

The Energy Services Division has already effected a survey and remedial works will be carried out soon.

**CEB - PORT VICTORIA POWER STATION - DIESEL POWER GENERATORS – TENDER**

(No. B/521) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities whether, in regard to the launching of the international tender for the installation of three new diesel power generators at the Port Victoria Power Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to -
(a) where matters stand, and

(b) if the Board has resorted to emergency procurement and, if so, indicate –

(i) the reasons therefor;

(ii) if prior approval of Cabinet has been sought and obtained, and

(iii) the Board has resorted to emergency procurement for any other projects since the proclamation of the Public Procurement Act.

Reply: I am informed by the CEB that on 03 April 2009, a contract was awarded to Messrs Burmeister and Wain Scandinavian Contractor (BWSC) for the supply, installation, testing and commissioning of two medium speed diesel generator sets of capacity 15 MW each and not three generators. The contract price is Euro 33,573,900 and Rs252,534,100 equivalent to a total of Rs1.67 billion. Implementation of this project has started on 30 April 2009, and is expected to be completed by October 2010.

With regard to part (b), the CEB has resorted to emergency procurement under Section 21 of the Public Procurement Act 2006 after consultation with the Procurement Policy Office and State Law Office, for the following reasons -

(i) the Fort Victoria project was contemplated in 2006 to meet semi base load generation capacity in replacement of units currently in operation at St. Louis and Fort Victoria Power Stations which have already reached the end of their economic life;

(ii) however, in 2005 and 2006, several electricity generation projects were considered from Gamma Covanta Ltd. (15 MW), Suzlon Energy Ltd. (25 MW), CT Power (100 MW), CT SAV III (15 MW) and FUEL (2x42 MW). Letters of Intent were issued to the first four. These projects were expected to be commissioned by 2008 and 2009 and provide adequate capacity to meet the short to medium-term demand. In this context, the Fort Victoria project was put on hold;
(iii) the Mauritius CT Power and Gamma Covanta projects have not yet been implemented due to a number of factors, which are beyond the control of the CEB;

(iv) the two promoters FUEL and CT SAV III did not proceed with their project proposals pending the outcome of the review of the Independent Power Producers as agreed by the Government and MSPA in April 2008, and

(v) with the delay in the implementation of these projects, under CEB’s Capacity Expansion Plan, the CEB would inevitably face generation constraints over the next two years. The capacity deficit, would, in the absence of Fort Victoria project be of the order of 11 MW and 30 MW in 2009 and 2010 respectively. The capacity deficit may further deteriorate in view of the ageing of the existing generation park. The coming into operation of the two additional units at the Fort Victoria will address the issue of capacity deficit in 2010.

The CEB Board accordingly took the decision in March 2008, to revive the Fort Victoria project and procurement proceedings started in September 2008 with the closing date being 18 December 2008. Six interested parties purchased the tender documents, but only two bids were received at the Central Procurement Board. Recognizing the urgency to implement the project, the Central Procurement Board arranged for the tender evaluation to be carried out from 18 to 23 December 2008 with the assistance of the CEB’s Consultant, Mott MacDonald.

The two bids received were as follows -

(i) Consortium Man Diesel (Germany) Semco Maritime A/S (Denmark) for the sum of Euro 37,873,226.70 and Rs396,871,819.50, and

(ii) Burmeister and Wain Scandinavian Contractor (BWSC) for the sum of Euro 33,855,000 and Rs285,045,000.

Given that the prices quoted by the two bidders were above the estimated price of Rs1.2 billion, the CPB requested both bidders to submit revised financial proposals. Only one bidder MAN/SEMCO submitted a revised bid while BWSC maintained its original bid. According to the CPB, the revised financial bid did not represent value for money and on 05
February 2009, it advised that a fresh tendering exercise be resorted to with revised specifications so as to enhance competition.

On 06 February 2009, CEB referred the matter to its Consultant, who advised that no benefit will accrue from either re-writing the tender specifications or a re-tendering exercise -

(i) due consideration should be given by both the CEB and the CPB to the cost to the Mauritian economy if the project is delayed;

(ii) the price of St. Louis project should not be used as a yardstick for estimating the price of Fort Victoria project. The price of St. Louis was well below market expectations at that time, and

(iii) the prices tendered for the project reflect market prices.

Based on the observations of its Consultant and the urgency to implement the project to avoid any electricity shortage in 2010, CEB decided on 10 February 2009 to avail itself of the provision of section 21 of the Public Procurement Act 2006 Accordingly, CEB negotiated with the lowest bidder and awarded the contract at a reduced price of Euro 33,575,900 and Rs252,534,100 equivalent to a total of Rs1.67 billion.

Regarding part (b) (ii), Cabinet was informed that the CEB would have to resort to emergency procurement procedures.

Regarding part (iii), the CEB has not resorted to any other emergency procurement since the proclamation of the Public Procurement Act because there was no reason to do so.

Finally, I wish to inform the House that the Central Procurement Board, in a letter dated 02 April 2009, informed the CEB that an independent Consultant which it had appointed considered the price quoted by BWSC to be fair and reasonable.

CASINOS – PROPOSED PRIVATIZATION

(No. B/522) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the proposed privatization of the casinos, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation, information as to where matters stand.
Reply: I did inform the House in my reply to PQ No. B/1163, that the SIC Board had, in July 2008, decided to retain a UK based company as the preferred bidder for discussions with a view to finalizing the terms and conditions of a Strategic Partnership.

I am, however, informed that the company has failed to provide critical financial information regarding KYC that was crucial to the progress of discussions, unable to confirm the persons forming its management team, and disclose the its ultimate beneficiary owners.

In the circumstance, on the basis of the advice tendered by the Transaction Advisor and opinion of its Legal Adviser, the SIC Board decided on 10 February 2009, to terminate discussions with the Preferred Bidder.

To proceed further with the exercise, the Transaction Advisor contacted the next best bidder and the latter has re-confirmed its interest in the Casinos with a request for SIC to accept or otherwise its bid by 30 April 2009

I am further informed that on 28 April 2009, SIC Board gave its in-principle acceptance to the offer subject to further discussions and negotiations on the terms and conditions of the Strategic Partnership. I understand that discussions are still being pursued.

EBENE - FILLING STATION – LAND LEASE

(No. B/523) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Information & Communication Technology whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Business Parks of Mauritius Ltd., information as to if a portion of land was given to a promoter for the setting up of a filling station at Ebène and, if so, indicate –

(a) the name of the promoter;
(b) when the application was received;
(c) the extent of land, and
(d) the terms and conditions of the lease.

Reply: I am informed by the Business Park of Mauritius Ltd. (BPML) that it has, on 29 February 2008, received an application from one Mr Mohammad Iqbal Bhayat for the setting up of a filling station at Ebène.
Since the BPML had a surplus plot of land of an extent of 4747 m$^2$ (1.17 acre) located outside the Ebène Cyber Village and the Cybercity, the Board has decided at its meeting on 25 March 2009 to lease that land to the applicant for the purpose applied for.

The lease is for an initial period of 30 years and is renewable for two further periods of 30 years. A fixed one-off payment of Rs4 m. is payable and the annual rental is Rs200,000. These are the terms and conditions that apply to the lease of plots of land in the Cyber City area.

It is to be noted that unlike plots within the Cyber City, the plot in question is not provided with infrastructural services such as water, power supply and telecommunications facilities.

**PETITE RIVIÈRE & ALBION – FOOTBALL GROUNDS**

(No. B/524) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to the new football ground at Maingard Village and the upgrading of the football grounds at Petite Rivière and Albion, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: With regard to the football ground at Maingard village, I wish to inform the hon. Member that shortly our Consultant shall carry the necessary site visits in order to prepare the scope of works and cost estimates and subsequently subject to availability of funds the needful shall be done.

With regard to the football ground at Petite Rivière, I shall request our Consultant to effect a site visit and we shall act on his recommendation.

Finally, as far as the upgrading of Albion football ground is concerned, I understand that the construction of the cloakroom and exterior toilet block, upgrading of football ground and installation of floodlights should be undertaken.

However, I am made to understand that the Consultancy firm Mega Design has already carried out a survey and submitted the design and scope of work to the Ministry of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications for consideration under the Tourism Fund.
CHEMIN DE LA RETRAITE – ROAD TARRING

(No. A/4) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the tarring of Chemin de La Retraite from La Laura to Circonstance, he will state if a way leave as requested from Mon Désert Alma has been obtained and, if so, indicate when same will be implemented.

Reply: I am informed by the Moka/Flacq District Council that being given that Chemin de La Retraite from La Laura to Circonstance is a private road belonging to Mon Desert Alma Sugar Estate, no way leave has been obtained from the latter to declare same public.

NAPOLÉON BRIDGE, L’AVENIR TO MALINGA AND LA LAURA – ROAD CLASSIFICATION

(No. A/5) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he will state if he will consider the advisability of classifying the road leading from the Napoléon Bridge l’Avenir to Malinga, La Laura, and Rivière Baptiste and, if so, indicate when same will be implemented.

Reply: The road from Napoléon Bridge, L’Avenir to La Laura and Malinga is defined as a rural road in the Roads Act and is under the responsibility of the Moka Flacq District Council.

With the setting up of the Land Transport Authority the issue of classification of roads for the whole island will be reviewed and proposals of the hon. Member will be given due consideration.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA CONFERENCE CENTRE - ‘LE SALON DE LA MAISON ET DU JARDIN’ - RENTAL

(No. A/6) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources whether, in regard to the recent holding of ‘Le Salon de la Maison et du Jardin’ at the Swami Vivekananda Conference Centre, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation Ltd., information as to the amount of money received as rent in connection therewith.
Reply: (The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment): We are informed by the State Investment Corporation Ltd that as per its established rental rates, the promoter of ‘Le Salon de la Maison et du Jardin’ at Swami Vivekananda Conference Centre was invoiced an amount of Rs1,841,150 inclusive of VAT and that the promoter has already settled the amount. The Ministry of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications.
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MAURITIUS FOURTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
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Sitting of Tuesday 26 May 2009

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis,
at 11.30 a.m.
The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)
The Prime Minister: Sir, the Papers have been laid on the Table –

A. Prime Minister’s Office -


B. Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment -

The Loan Agreement on Third Trade and Competitiveness Development Policy Loan with Deferred Drawdown Option between the Republic of Mauritius and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (In original).

C. Ministry of Housing and Lands -


D. Ministry of Consumer Protection and Citizens Charter -
ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr Speaker: Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister. The Table has been advised that Parliamentary Question No. B/477 with regard to the Compagnie Thermique du Sud Ltée addressed to the hon. Prime Minister will be replied by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities.

CENTRAL POST OFFICE – PARCEL - STUN GUN

(No. B/476) Mrs M. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if a parcel containing a stun gun was recently found at the Central Post Office and, if so, indicate the name of the recipient, indicating if -

(a) the recipient’s house has been searched and other offensive weapons found, and

(b) an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Monday 06 April 2009, one Mr R. A., a student aged 21, residing at Sanatan Road, Mahebourg, called at the Parcel Post Office with a Custom Assessment and Delivery Advice Card to collect a parcel addressed to him.

Upon verification of the parcel, the Customs Officer found a weapon capable of discharging electric shocks, commonly known as stun gun, and a pair of handcuffs.

As Mr R. A. was not in possession of any import permit in respect of the stun gun or the handcuffs, I suppose, the parcel was retained by the Customs Officer. The addressee undertook to produce a permit on the following day.
He called again at the Post Office on the following day without any permit. He was arrested by the Harbour ADSU and he gave his address then as being Karan Lane, Mahebourg, which is a different address to the original.

On the same day, ADSU personnel searched both premises, that is, Karan Lane and the other one, Sanatan Road, whatever it is, and then at Karan Lane, the following items were secured by the Police, that is, by ADSU. They found -

(a) one computer;
(b) one MCB credit card;
(c) two wooden bars fitted with barbwire which could be used as an offensive weapon;
(d) one hard disk and four compact discs suspected to contain information relevant to the purchase of the stun gun and handcuffs;
(e) 250 millilitres phials containing liquids which were subsequently identified by the Forensic Science Laboratory as Dilute Nitric Acid and Barium Chloride respectively, and
(f) they also found lab glasswares.

At Sanatan Road, nothing incriminating was found.

On 08 April 2009, a provisional charge of “Unlawful Possession of Weapon designed for the discharge of other thing to wit, that is, Electric Shock” in breach of Sections 24(1) and 46(1) of the Firearms Act 2006 was lodged against Mr. R. A. before the Port Louis Division III Court. He was released on bail on the same day after having furnished a surety of Rs10,000 and Rs25,000 as recognizance.

The investigation is still in progress.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Prime Minister say whether it has been ascertained that the stun gun was ordered by Internet?

The Prime Minister: It has been said that it was ordered by Internet from the United States.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the
seriousness of the situation and in view of the fact that facilities are now available and that people can order arms or any other item illegally, does the Prime Minister consider that it is important to amend the appropriate legislation? Because I think, according to the present legislation, there is only an imprisonment of one year and an insignificant fine of around Rs2,000.

The Prime Minister: This is not my reading of the amendment which was brought at some point. I think it says here that on conviction the person shall be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs200,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 15 years.

Mr Dulloo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether, following this seizure, new measures have been adopted to tighten control against smuggling of weapons and drugs at the Central Post Office?

The Prime Minister: In fact, had not the measures been tightened, he could have escaped notice. In fact, because we have tightened, more cases are now being identified.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister to consider also the fact that one case has been caught, does not necessarily mean that the control is tight? Therefore, there have been many cases and one has been caught out of the many. We will have to review, notwithstanding what has been done before the measures that are in place.

The Prime Minister: I think the hon. Member did not understand me, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, I said many cases - not one case - have been caught. If we look at the number of cases which have been caught gradually, they are increasing, because we have tightened the measures.

COMPAGNIE THERMIQUE DU SUD LTÉE – PROJECT – HIGH-POWERED COMMITTEE

(No. B/477) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the High-Powered Committee set up to look into the different aspects and components of the Compagnie Thermique du Sud Ltée project, he will state if the
Committee had submitted a report and, if so, table copy thereof.

_(Withdrawn)_

**BAIL RELEASE – CASES – HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS**

_(No. B/478) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal)_ asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of cases in which the Police has not objected to the release on bail on humanitarian grounds over the past five years.

**The Prime Minister:** I am advised, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there is no provision in the Bail Act for a detainee to be released on humanitarian grounds.

However, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that during the last five years, Police did not resist bail in only four cases on account of the defendant’s or detainee’s physical conditions. These cases concern one detainee for breast feeding her newly born child, two for being physically handicapped and one for medical complications.

**SALE BY LEVY – PUBLIC GATHERING - PROSECUTION**

_(No. B/479) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal)_ asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the cases against the persons who were holding a public gathering in relation to the sale by levy and who were recently arrested, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if the prosecution thereof are being continued with, and if so, the number thereof.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to PQ No. B/352 of 28 April of this year. Therein I mentioned that 36 persons were arrested on 20 April 2009, and a provisional charge of ‘Remaining in an Unlawful Assembly After Warning’ was lodged against them before the District Court of Port Louis. They will appear in Court on 17 June 2009.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Police inquiry into the case against the 36 persons has now been completed.
and is being referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice.

Mr Dulloo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether permission was granted and there was no Police objection that a public gathering be held on that day at that place?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, like all public gatherings, conditions were imposed and permission was given.

PUBLIC GATHERINGS – HOLDING

(No. B/480) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the holding of public gatherings, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the conditions imposed therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the holding of public gatherings is governed by the Public Gathering Act which empowers the Commissioner of Police to impose conditions in that respect, with a view to preventing public disorder, damage to property or disruption of the life of the Community.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that conditions imposed depend on the nature of the gathering which is to be organised. In the case of public meetings, organisers are requested to exercise control over the audience so that the meeting is held in an orderly manner. The organisers and participants should also comply with the following conditions -

(d) the road should be kept clear for easy flow of vehicular traffic and for other road users;

(e) they should not exhibit any writing or slogan that could be prejudicial to public safety or public order, and

(f) they should abide by directives given by the Police on the spot.

As regards the organisation of public processions, the following conditions are imposed on the organisers by the Commissioner of Police -

(e) they are to keep to the left of the road in the direction in which they are proceeding and leave the remaining half on their right free for vehicular traffic and other road
users;

(f) they are to refrain from making noise that is likely to disrupt the normal running of daily activities in the neighbourhood and not to address participants at any stage of the procession with public address system;

(g) they are not to act in a disorderly manner nor exhibit any slogan that could be prejudicial to public safety or public order, and

(h) they are to abide by directives given by the Police and should disperse peacefully after the march without attempting to make any address which may constitute a public meeting.

I am further informed that each request for public gathering is inquired into and specific conditions are imposed depending on the circumstances prevailing at the time the gathering is to be held. In this connection, the Commissioner of Police may request the organisers to change the time, place or itinerary of the gathering.

Mr Bodha: May I ask one supplementary question, Mr Speaker, Sir? May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will consider the fact that, in some cases, permission has been granted to have gatherings or demonstrations in front of the Supreme Court which is, in fact, the symbol of the rule of law? Does he consider this as proper?

The Prime Minister: Personally, I do not have my own views. I do not think it is proper, but this has been granted in the past and it is being followed. If the hon. Member wants me to look into that, we can probably have a look at it.

Mr Bérenger: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether - since the appointment of the present Commissioner of Police - any of his decisions not allowing a public gathering or imposing some conditions, has been challenged before a Judge in Chamber?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that any of his decisions has been challenged except, I think, in the last case of sales by levy where I think a case is in court. I do not know whether he is challenging his arrest or he is challenging because the time has been changed. I am not sure. As far as I know, there is no other case
that I am aware of.

MBC - *PEPSI HUNGAMA PROGRAMME*  
– EXPENSES INCURRED

(No. B/481) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the expenses incurred in connection with the *Pepsi Hungama* Programme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to if -

(b) the Chairperson of the Board thereof has refused to sign cheques pertaining thereto and, if so, the reasons therefor, and

(b) any amount of money has been taken from the Welfare Fund to pay therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director-General of the MBC that the Chairperson of the Board has not signed a few cheques pertaining to the *Pepsi Sega Hungama* Programme as he wants to have additional information on certain items of expenditure and he is still awaiting for additional information.

In the meantime, however, in view of the alleged cases of malpractices reported in the press in connection with expenditure incurred by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation for the organisation of the *Pepsi Sega Hungama* Programme and for the sake of transparency, I have already instructed the Director of the Management Audit Bureau on 27 April 2009 to carry out an investigation into the matter. This, in spite of the fact that the question was, I think, withdrawn previously, but I still went ahead and did this.

I am informed by the Director of the Management Audit Bureau that he expects to submit his report by mid-June.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the Prime Minister has not answered part (b) of my question, that is, whether any amount of money has been taken from the Welfare Fund to pay thereof?

The Prime Minister: Because an investigation is going on, we will know.
Mr Gunness: Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether he has obtained from the MBC the initial budget that was earmarked for that particular show?

The Prime Minister: I know that an amount was earmarked. I think an amount of Rs2,501,705 seems to have been incurred. An amount has been settled and the rest is what is being looked at for additional information.

Mr Gunness: The Prime Minister said that this is what has been incurred up to now. My question was whether the Director of the MBC has given him information about how much that particular show was budgeted?

The Prime Minister: I cannot give that information Mr Speaker, Sir, because there were other sponsors who were involved, who made good their sponsoring. They have given different amounts. I know that there is Quality Beverages Ltd. There are others as well, it appears.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether the local authorities also contributed to the expenses?

The Prime Minister: As far as I remember there were some Municipalities which were involved and District Councils.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether his attention has been drawn that for the organisation of this Pepsi Hungama Programme, cash money was requested by one Mr A. M. of the MBC to several firms and several private sector firms have given cash money and also prizes? Can the MAB be requested to look into the prizes, the gifts which were received? Can we know also whether these gifts were in the custody of that Mr A. M. and several of the gifts have been stocked at his residence?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I have asked the Director of the Management Audit Bureau to look into the whole investigation and action will be taken following that investigation.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm whether there has been a claim of about Rs700,000 for the consumption of food by the participants of the Pepsi Hungama Programme?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, as I have explained the Chairperson of the Board himself is awaiting some
additional information. An investigation is going on and it will not take long; in mid-June, that is, probably three weeks’ time, we will have all the details, then we will be able to have a look.

**Mr Gunness:** Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether he has in his file the contribution of the District Councils and Municipalities? How much in total it amounts to?

**The Prime Minister:** No, I do not have the total. Again, as I have said, Mr Speaker, Sir, all this will come out in the Management Audit Bureau’s investigation.

**Mr Speaker:** Last question!

**Mr Gunness:** Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that the same Mr A. M. whom we are talking about, once the inquiry started, is not in the country, he has been to China? I think that up to now the MAB has not been in touch with that particular person to conduct the whole inquiry.

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure he is not going to bail out, to stay in China for ever, he will have to come back and he will have to face…..

*Interruptions*

Certainly not in China!

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

**POLICE VEHICLES – DAMAGE**

(No. B/482) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the police vehicles which have been damaged in disturbances/riots, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police -

(a) a list thereof, since July 2005 to date, indicating the units to which they were attached;

(b) the number thereof which have been repaired/replaced, and

(c) if Government will consider toughening the law in respect of the persons found guilty of damaging police vehicles.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part
(a) of the question, I am tabling the information requested for by the hon. Member.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that 49 of the damaged vehicles have already been repaired and three have been replaced.

As regards part (c) of the question, I would like to inform the House that any person who damages State property or property not belonging to him, including vehicles, is liable for prosecution under one of several different offences. It will be incumbent on the Director of Public Prosecutions to decide upon which particular provision of the law to prosecute any alleged offender, depending on the particular facts and circumstances of the case.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is to be noted that a severe penalty is already provided for the offence of setting fire to or destroying any State property, namely penal servitude for a maximum term of 30 years under section 65 of the Criminal Code.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that the Judicial Provisions Act, which was passed in December 2008, has stiffened the penalties under the Criminal Code for the offence of “damaging public property, public enterprise or vehicle”. Under section 349, this penalty has been increased from a fine not exceeding Rs3,000 to a fine not exceeding Rs25,000; and from a term of penal servitude not exceeding 10 years to a term not exceeding 20 years.

Furthermore, the penalties for other offences such as “arson”, “damaging property by band” and “damaging goods and chattels” have been similarly toughened.

In addition, Mr Speaker, Sir, I propose to request the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping to give consideration to increasing the penalty under Section 123W of the Road Traffic Act for tampering with motor vehicles.

The question of whether we should treat damaging Police vehicles separately is being looked at, whether we could make this penalty stiffer; this is still being looked at, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm to the House whether any Police officers have been injured in the Police vehicles which have been damaged?
The Prime Minister: There was no specific question to that matter but, as far as I know, yes.

POLICE STATIONS – TELEPHONE LINES

(No. B/483) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Police Stations, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if consideration will be given to provide them with at least two telephone lines.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that in order to respond to the requests of the public in a timely manner and to carry out their policing duties efficiently and effectively, all the 71 Police stations spread throughout the island are already equipped with two telephone lines or even more, but at least two telephone lines.

Furthermore, depending upon the operational exigencies of a station area, the number of telephone lines allocated thereat may be increased accordingly, but already there are two telephone lines in each Police station.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, my information is that in the evening one of these numbers is shifted to the fax, or that the other numbers are shifted to the clerk office or to the C.I. and that there is only one number which is really available to the public.

The Prime Minister: Very often, Mr Speaker, Sir, people have the same number on a fax and a telephone line. But I will look into that and see whether it is, in fact, the case.

Mr Dulloo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether apart from these fixed telephone lines, Police officers, as from a certain rank, are provided with mobile telephones especially those in charge of Police stations?

The Prime Minister: I know, in fact, that some Police officers have mobile telephones.

POLICE OFFICERS – MASTER DEGREE HOLDERS

(No. B/484) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Police officers
who are holders of a Masters degree, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police -

(a) a list thereof, indicating their respective -

(i) grade;
(ii) posting;
(iii) since when, and
(iv) specialization and,

(b) information as to if they are being assigned additional responsibilities and remunerated accordingly.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir with your permission, I am tabling the information asked for by the hon. Member.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the officers who hold a Masters Degree have not been given additional responsibilities over and above the normal duties assigned to them as per their respective postings and their relevant field of specialization.

However, the PRB Report of 2008 provides for payment of incremental credit for additional relevant qualifications to degree holders in the Police Force and monthly allowances to such officers posted in specialized Units. Qualified officers are being paid accordingly.

**Mr Lauthan:** Mr Speaker, Sir, now that the Private Security Services have been regulated, does the hon. Prime Minister have information about whether there is a number of officers who have left for private security companies?

**The Prime Minister:** Well, in the list that I have here - that is why I am not giving it, I am circulating it – there are 25. But, in that list, I do not see any which says that they have left for anything else. Maybe, there are others which do not fall in the list now because they have already left. But, I do not see that otherwise here.

**Mr Lauthan:** May we know if the Disciplined Forces Service Commission will make an effort to see to it that we do not lose those Police officers by giving them the opportunity to leave for private companies, because they are very helpful to the Police Force?

**The Prime Minister:** In fact, as the hon. Member knows, it
was under my previous premiership that it started, precisely because we wanted to have more qualified Police officers and, secondly, in fact, I am the one who did ask that we should find a way, either by giving them additional duties or else if this cannot be done, they should have something additional because they have studied and have got a degree. They should be motivated in having known the success, and therefore, this is why the PRB Report has made this change.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

**Mr Ganoo:** Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether this category of Police officers has to sit for examinations or do they enjoy automatic promotion? Because I know of Police officers with a BSc in Police Studies who still have to sit for examinations? I think they could be given automatic promotion in view of their tertiary studies.

**The Prime Minister:** I think this is taken into account when promotion is looked at. In the past, I know, for example, that this was created precisely to be able to get very good people at the top in the service.

**Mr Soodhun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Prime Minister is aware, we have very few Police officers who have obtained their LLB degrees and are still working as Police officers and now they have to resign. May we know from the hon. Prime Minister whether he could consider having them transferred to another legal Department and that their years of service be maintained?

**The Prime Minister:** As far as I remember, a former Speaker himself was a Police officer; he took his LLB and became a barrister. Now, the hon. Member wants us to refund their money retroactively, they will get plenty of money.

**Mr Ganoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I come back to my question. I know of Police officers who recently hold a degree in Police Studies and who have not been promoted to the rank of Inspector recently. Can the Disciplined Forces Service Commission revisit these cases?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, in fact, one of the reasons - I think there was a question some time back asking me about whether these courses have been stopped - why they have at least been reduced quite dramatically is because there are too many coming in and
getting it. We know what will happen; we will have all the generals and no soldiers if we continue like this.

**WOMEN POLICE CONSTABLES**  
- **TRANSPORT FACILITIES**

(No. B/485) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the transport facilities provided to women Police Constables for the second and last shifts, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if there has been any change in policy.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, it was announced in the Government Programme 2005-2010 that a Special Transport Scheme to enable Police officers to return home after night duty would be implemented.

I would like to inform the House that previously Police officers working on night shifts had to make their own transport arrangements to return home.

Subsequently, the Commissioner of Police – because we have this in our Programme - worked out a Special Transport Scheme for both men and women Police officers working on second and third shifts and which was implemented in February of last year. In line with this scheme, the Transport Guard Room organizes and dispatches four buses daily to transport Police officers over the island.

In addition, in each of the seven Police Divisions, there is one mini bus which transports personnel working in their Divisions.

Therefore, presently, all Police officers who work on night shifts benefit from these arrangements.

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that in certain Police stations, namely at Vacoas Police Station, such measures are not being taken, especially the Women Police Officers who are facing difficulties to travel and they cannot, therefore, attend duties for the second and last shifts? May I ask the Prime Minister to look into the matter and see to it that such measures be implemented in all Police stations.
throughout the island?

The Prime Minister: I do not have the information whether this is not being implemented at the Vacoas Police Station, if I heard the hon. Member right. I do not have indication of this. I will certainly ask the Commissioner of Police to look into that.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ No. B/496 has been withdrawn. Questions addressed to the hon. Ministers! Hon. Jugnauth!

PUBLIC DEBT-

PARASTATAL BODIES & AIR MAURITIUS LTD.

(No. B/486) Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether he will state if the figure of Rs141,524 m. as total public debt as at 31 December 2008 includes –

(a) the domestic and foreign debt of parastatal bodies;
(b) Government guarantees to Air Mauritius Ltd;
(c) the recent Rs3.3 billion debt contracted with the World Bank, and
(d) the sum of Rs6 billion in the Consolidated Sinking Fund, at the time of its abolition.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sitanen) Mr Speaker, Sir, the concept of public debt is no longer used. The definition was too narrow and comprised only the amount owed by Government in a narrow sense, that is, Ministries and Departments. Now, in line with best international practice we instead refer to Central Government Debt which includes extra budgetary units. Strictly speaking, public debt does not include –

(a) the domestic and foreign debt of parastatal bodies, and

(b) Government guarantees to Air Mauritius Ltd.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, these are included in public sector debt as opposed to public debt.

Dr. Sihanen: Concerning part (c), the recent Rs3.3 billion
debt contracted with the World Bank was publicly signed in May 2009 and there is always a lag between signature and disbursement. It is, therefore, not included in debt data at end December 2008.

However, it may be useful to elaborate on the debt situation to explain how the components referred in the question actually fit in the debt profile.

The more relevant concept for answering the question is the public sector debt. Here again, we have modernised and broadened the definition to make it more representative.

Previously public sector debt did not include the domestic debt of parastatals nor domestic guarantees extended to them by Government as in the case of Air Mauritius, but it did include the investments of the Sinking Fund in Government securities. This activity of the Sinking Fund was an anomaly in a modern public finance system as it essentially amounts to Government guaranteeing Government.

The adjustments made to the definition ended practices not useful. In moving to the new definition, Rs6 billion of Government securities held by the Sinking Fund was cancelled leading to an equivalent reduction in public sector debt. However, this was more than offset as stated in the Budget Speech of 2007/2008 by capturing the other liabilities (mainly domestic debt of public corporations) and public sector debt in a new broader definition was Rs10 billion highly than in the previous one, resulting in a net increase in public sector debt of Rs4 billion.

Concerning the absolute debt figure of Rs141,524 m. this figure actually refers to public sector debt and not to public debt which is no longer used nor Central Government debt. It does include the domestic and foreign debt of parastatal bodies as at of 31 December 2008.

Concerning part (b) of the question, an amount of Rs548.9 m. is included in respect of Government guarantees to Air Mauritius.

And I have just addressed parts (c) and (d) in my reply.

Mr Speaker, Sir, whether on the new definition or the old definition, debt as a share of GDP has fallen consistently since 2005 and we have reversed the previous evolution of the debt towards the unsustainable position. In fact, in addition to the positive
developments from our development partners, we have also secured a stable rating from Moody’s.

In fact, total external debt service ratio has been reduced from 8.4% in June 2006 to 4.7% in June 2009. This is well below our targeted external debt service ratio. This significant improvement gives us the room to borrow at attractive rates from our development partners.

Similarly, for overall debt, the debt service relative to total revenue has been reduced from 28.2% in June 2006 to 23.6% in June 2009.

**Mr Jugnauth:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am happy that the Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance has now made the difference between the public debt and the public sector debt. In the written answer that he gave to PQ No. B/161, he only stated total public sector debt as at 31 December 2008. Is he in a position to say, in absolute terms, what is the actual total public sector debt as at March 2009?

**Dr. Sithanen:** It is published in the document that has just been circulated Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me, again, state very clearly that all Ministries of Finance, all Government institutions, all international development partners always use debt as a percentage of GDP. And, in fact, last year, Mr Speaker, Sir, at pages 499, 500 and 501, we did make the distinction between the new definition and the old definition of the debt. In this year’s Budget, we have included the debt up to December 2010.

**Mr Jugnauth:** May we know what is the figure since the Minister has circulated or is tabling a document?

**Dr. Sithanen:** It is in the estimate that we have circulated, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Jugnauth:** But may we know the figure, Mr Speaker, Sir?

**Dr. Sithanen:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I don’t have it with me, but, as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the share of debt to GDP has gone down from 73% in June 2003 to 59.1% in June 2008. As a share of GDP, Government Central debt has come down from 56.1% to 50.9%. But, of course, I know the hon. Member will mention about absolute debt. Nobody speaks about absolute debt, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is always about a share of GDP. Mr Speaker, Sir, for the simple
reason…

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: ... that if you have a deficit of one rupee, the absolute level of debt has to increase. Debt is always calculated as a share of GDP.

Mr Jugnauth: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, may I just refresh the memory of the hon. Vice-Prime Minister because he says that nobody speaks in terms of absolute terms, but in terms of percentage. I have proof here that he has made a number of public statements when he was in the Opposition and he has mentioned so many times, he has made public statements about…

Mr Speaker: Outside!

(Interruptions)

But in order not to leave any doubt, can he confirm that, at that time, he was referring to total public sector debt in absolute terms?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, everybody, the Central Government, the Ministry of Finance, the Bank of England, the IMF…

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: ... everybody uses debt as a percentage of GDP, Mr Speaker, Sir. Just like the deficit, the budget deficit is never calculated in absolute terms, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Member should know this, Mr Speaker, Sir. And let me tell the hon. Member also that we talk of debt on a sustainable level. It is the sustainable level that is important.

Mr Jugnauth: One more question, Mr Speaker, Sir. With regard to the Air Mauritius guarantees that Government has given, I heard the Minister saying that up to now Government has included as debt the amount of Rs548 m. But I see in an answer that the Vice-Prime Minister, hon. Xavier Duval, has given to this House that Government has provided guarantees up to Rs4.5 billion while guarantees for a further Rs1.6 billion were eminent. I can understand that Rs1.6 billion cannot be included, but I am surprised
that Rs4.5 billion were being guaranteed by Government and yet it does not tally with the figure that the Minister has given.

**Dr. Sithanen:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the question of the hon. Member is at 31 December 2008 and the reply that was given by the hon. Vice-Prime Minister is as at April 2009. And most of the guarantees have been given after 31 December 2008. The hon. Member has to be fair. The question is of December 2008.

**Mr Jugnauth:** That is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, I asked the question. In fact, my question related to total public sector debt as at to date, that is March.

**Mr Speaker:** The question that was already put by the hon. Member was in April 2009, I think; it was up to date, that is, up to April, but the answer the hon. Vice-Prime Minister gave was by the end of December.

**Dr. Sithanen:** But I am ready to give the figure to the hon. Member until 30 April 2009. But the question was 31 December 2008. It's a running guarantee, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Jugnauth:** One last question. Can the Minister just name the biggest project that the Government has been able to start during its mandate and completed up to now?

* (Interruptions)*

It relates to debt.

**Dr. Sithanen:** I have not understood, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**QUARTIER MILITAIRE - FOOTBALL GROUND**

(No. B/487) Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the project for the setting up of a football ground in Quartier Militaire, he will state if a plot of land has been earmarked.

**Dr. Kasenally:** Mr Speaker, Sir, according to records available, no request for earmarking any plot of land for the setting up of a football ground in Quartier Militaire has been received at my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that my Ministry had acquired in 1996 three plots of land at Quartier Militaire for the
construction of a football ground. The football ground is now operational and known as Quartier Militaire Stadium.

**BANK OF MAURITIUS – CAPITAL OUTFLOWS**

(No. B/488) Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the study carried out on capital outflows by the Bank of Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank, information as to the outcome thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Bank of Mauritius that it has not carried out any specific study on capital flows.

Moreover, there is no apparent need to do so, since, in fact, our Balance of Payments indicates that we have significant unexplained net inflows rather than an issue with outflows. Indeed, this issue is actually the subject of technical assistance from the IMF Statistics Department, including a recent mission.

Whilst the results are preliminary and still being finalised, the recent technical assistance, working with the Bank of Mauritius and the FSC, has concluded that -

First, the Current Account deficits may be overstated due to unrecorded net exports on the service account. The precise source of such under recording is not yet fully established.

Second, FDI may be understated.

Third, some foreign borrowing by the corporate sector may also be under reported, although the sums involved are very marginal, since the outstanding stock of such debt appears to be below 5 percent of GDP.

The information from the Bank of Mauritius is also corroborated by a review of net inflows of investment into the Stock Exchange of Mauritius (SEM). Before the recession, flows were orderly and positive. Since the crisis struck, outflows have been equally orderly but negative on a net basis, reflecting developments in other emerging markets. However, unlike many worse affected markets, the foreign flows to the Stock Exchange of Mauritius have
been two-way instead of dominated by outflows.

To get a better handle and reduce the unexplained net positive inflows in the Balance of Payments, I understand that the Bank of Mauritius is expected to launch a Foreign Assets and Liabilities Survey (FALS) 2008 survey soon, and the results would be available by the end of the year. FALS 2008 will collect data from resident enterprises on their claims on non-residents and liabilities to non-residents, both cross-border financial flows and stocks for the year ending June 2007 or the nearest financial year.

The survey is expected to improve the coverage of foreign direct investment in Mauritius amongst others.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Vice-Prime Minister aware of the statement that was made by the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius about his concern on capital outflows?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, the question was under study. If anything, there are unexplained inflows that we are trying to disentangle. In fact, I am sure the hon. Member knows that there are net errors that you cannot explain in the Balance of Payment. And, at times, it is a huge figure. I think it is a figure of about Rs5 billion and they think that, probably that, first, the deficit of the current account is overstated and, second, the FDI also is understated.

Mr Jugnauth: Would the hon. Vice-Prime Minister agree that, as a result of the measure that was taken to tax interests on deposits, that has caused an increase in capital outflow?

Dr. Sithanen: This is not borne out by facts, Mr Speaker, Sir. If the hon. Member will take the pain to read the Bank of Mauritius report, there have been more inflows than outflows, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister of Finance as from what date the problem was identified?

Dr. Sithanen: In fact, since a long time, we have had in the Balance of Payment this problem of errors and omissions that we cannot explain. Fortunately for us, it has been positive, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, one of the criteria that we have to meet in order to be eligible for the Flexible Credit Line – there is a question by hon. Bodha on that later on - is the integrity of our statistics on the
Balance of Payment. In fact, there is currently a mission of the IMF to try to identify why we have such a large unexplained inflows in the Balance of Payment.

Mr Bérenger: In relation to the current account and to Foreign Direct Investment, the Minister himself provided figures in the Budget that he has just presented. Therefore, can I know what is the magnitude of the problem? How reliable are those figures put forward by the Minister? What is the margin of error that, we, as Members of Parliament, have to take into consideration?

Dr. Sithanen: This is a very fair question. We have been trying to tackle this for a very long time, Mr Speaker, Sir. The IMF believes that it is due to more inflows coming from the global business. But, because of the way we collect statistics, probably, this is not recorded in the statistics of the Central Bank. The Board of Investment believes, for instance, Mr Speaker, Sir - I speak under their correction - that the inflows of FDI for the first quarter is higher than what is reported by the Bank of Mauritius at Rs1.3 b. But, obviously, we have to rely on the Bank of Mauritius, and they have given Rs1.3b. The Board of Investment believes that part of that difference is basically in errors and omissions. This is precisely what we are trying to sort out with technical assistance from the IMF.

Mr Bérenger: My point was: what is the magnitude of the issue? How seriously are we to take the figures put forward for FDI and current account?

Dr. Sithanen: As I just said, we are trying to find out, Mr Speaker, Sir. There is a team from the Board of Investment, the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Mauritius, to try to minimise completely these errors and omissions, and then to put the figures where they should be. As I said, fortunately, it is a plus as opposed to a minus.

ADDITIONAL STIMULUS PACKAGE — SMES & COMPANIES – FACILITIES

(No. B/489) Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the Additional Stimulus Package, he will state the facilities in real terms, financial and otherwise, provided since December 2008 to
(c) Small and Medium Enterprises, and
(d) companies other than small private companies.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, we kicked off the Additional Stimulus Package in December 2008 by frontloading and accelerating the implementation of projects contained in the Strategic Plan of the Manufacturing Adjustment and SME Development Fund (MASMED). Rs100 m. out of the Rs500 m. of the MASMED Fund was earmarked for direct support to SMEs.

In addition, we provide a mechanism for direct support to help enterprises facing financial difficulties as a result of the international crisis.

There were 51 projects and programmes identified by the MASMED Fund to assist enterprises in the following areas –

- Upgrading of standards, quality and packaging for export readiness.
- Productivity and Competitiveness Improvement.
- Market intelligence and export promotion.
- Equipment Modernisation scheme.
- Market development and marketing.
- Market diversification, and
- Product development.

The support is provided through implementing agencies, which are Enterprise Mauritius, SEHDA, and National Women Entrepreneurs Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, so far, 53 companies have participated in seven market promotion fairs organised by Enterprise Mauritius. They are both large and SMEs, and represent a total financial support of Rs15.1 m.

In addition, Enterprise Mauritius has provided support in respect of the following schemes –

- 37 companies have benefited from the Marketing Trip
Scheme (US$ 1,000 per trip) for a total financial support of Rs6.2 m.

- 37 companies have benefited from financial assistance for the improvement of norms and standards of their products, as well as packaging improvement. The total financial support stands at Rs5.6 m., and

- 18 companies have benefited from financial assistance under the Technology Diffusion Scheme, which represents a total financial support of Rs7.9 m.

Under these three schemes, 54 companies and 144 SMEs have been found eligible. The total financial support is estimated at Rs78.5 m.

The second type of facilities concerning the financial support to companies in difficulty is provided mainly through the Mechanism for Transitional Support to Private Sector (MTSP) under the Additional Stimulus Package. The main objective is to save jobs. Third, our tax cuts and reductions have also contributed to saving jobs.

I am informed that five companies in difficulty have benefited from direct financial support under this scheme. Some 2,700 jobs have directly been saved, and total financial support is Rs152 m., of which Rs95 m. is in the form of debentures, Rs50 m. for acquisition of assets, Rs7 m. as guarantee to banks for facilities. Four of the companies are medium size ones.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in my Budget Speech 2009, on Friday last, we announced the restructuring of the Fund into the Saving Jobs and Recovery Fund, which will have a much broader mandate to cover all the sectors of the economy and enterprises of different sizes. Out of the Rs3.5 billion available to save jobs and prepare for recovery, Rs1 billion will be earmarked to support SMEs for direct support, equipment modernisation, risk-sharing, and equity participation to facilitate access to finance.

Mr Jugnauth: Amongst those who have benefited from direct financial support, would the Minister confirm that one of the companies is World Knits Co. Ltd.?

Dr. Sithanen: Yes, it is.
Mr Jugnauth: May I then ask the hon. Minister whether there has been any acquisition of luxurious cars just after the financial support was given to that company?

Dr. Sithanen: Not by World Knits itself. This question was raised by hon. Ms Deerpalsing, and I’ve asked the committee to look into it, and they have issued a communiqué, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jugnauth: The Minister surely must have inquired into the matter and, as he is saying, a communiqué has been issued. Can he confirm whether there has been purchase of vehicles or not?

Dr. Sithanen: Not by World Knits, Mr Speaker, Sir. The communiqué explained this; that it is another company. In fact, the officers have told me that there is no direct relation between these two companies even though there is cross shareholding. And there is no evidence that the specific money of ASP has been used for the purchase of the car.

Mr Jugnauth: May we know the name of that other company?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know. It was published in the communiqué, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: The question is about finance provided already; approved, spent and committed. Clearly, the general idea is to know what part of that money has been committed, what part has gone to SMEs, and what proportion to non SMEs, that is, bigger firms. Does the Minister have that information?

Dr. Sithanen: I have given the figures, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, I can circulate the answer: how many have gone to small enterprises and how many to non small enterprises. However, I must state, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the definition of where SMEs starts, where MEs starts, and where large enterprises start is a very blurred one. Let me give you an example, and I am sure the hon. Leader of the Opposition and hon. Jugnauth will appreciate that. In Mauritius, some companies use the turnover to classify some use the number of employees and some use of the balance sheet. I was just looking at that this morning. Some commercial banks use Rs40 m. as turnover in order to qualify a company as ‘S’. In fact, it is for this reason that my colleague, the Minister responsible for small business, will introduce shortly a legislation for SMEs to define clearly what is a
SME. Then, the problem becomes what is an ‘M’ and what is a ‘L’. For instance, among those that have benefited Mr Speaker, Sir, there is one company that has more than 1,000 employees; there are two companies that have more than 200 employees. Now, is 200 a medium size company and is 1,000 a large size company? The undertaking that I have made to this Assembly, Mr Speaker, Sir, on a six monthly basis we will publish which firms have benefited; how many jobs have been saved; what have been the instruments used to assist these enterprises.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister, himself, has made repeated statements recently to the effect that a very precise percentage of total employment is to be found in SMEs - Small and Medium Enterprises. He has been very precise and repeated that figure. Can I know from the hon. Minister which definition has been used?

Dr. Sithanen: The definition, which is used by the CSO, Mr Speaker, Sir, is enterprises that have less than 10 employees, and then there are those with more than 10 employees. The statistics provided by the CSO are that 43% of jobs in this country are held by enterprises that employ fewer than 10 people.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the answer given by the hon. Minister regarding World Knits, may I ask whether the inquiry is looking into interrelated party transactions between World Knits and the company of the spouse of the Director of World Knits, which allegedly owes Rs10 m. to World Knits and which company, that is, the spouse’s company, which has bought the luxury vehicles? Is the inquiry going into that direction, and may I know when the inquiry would be completed and the results known to this House?

Dr. Sithanen: The information I have from the people responsible for this is that there is no related party transaction between the two companies, even though there is cross shareholding, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, we will continue the inquiry. Let me also take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, Sir, to say very clearly that this is not money being doled out. This is money given either as a loan, that will have to be reimbursed with interests, or it is equity against which we are going to get dividends, or it is guarantee that is used in order to receive facilities from commercial banks, on which there is a fee. Having said that, I do appreciate the point made by
hon. Ms Deerpalsing. We will continue the inquiry, but the information that I have is that there is no related party transaction.

**Mr Jugnauth:** The hon. Minister is saying that it is money that has to be reimbursed, provided that the company is alive later on, it doesn't go bust. Can the hon. Minister say, in the light of this example, what close monitoring is being done, in order to see to it that funds that have been earmarked for specific purposes in order to help those companies are, in fact, being used for those purposes?

**Dr. Sithanen:** This is a very fair question, Mr Speaker, Sir. All of us are very concerned about the judicious use of public funds, and that is why we have been criticised for not giving money too fast and for not giving too much money. We are sandwiched between the two extremes. Rightly so, hon. Members in this august Assembly want money to be judiciously used whereas, outside, people believe that, as soon as they knock on the door, we should give them money. I am sure hon. Members have listened to the criticisms made, in that we are too slow, we are not giving enough money, the conditions are too difficult. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have said very clearly that, once you apply to the committee, there is a study that has to be carried out to ascertain whether le problème est conjoncturel ou structurel. And, then, there are conditions attached to the support granted. For instance, they will have to bring down their costs of operations; they will have not to pay any dividend; they will have to reimburse this money, and there is also some guarantees given. When the hon. Member says that there is a risk of failure, let me tell him that risk exists everywhere in the world. This is a risk that you have to take. But, in some cases, where people did not have the money, but had assets in terms of building, we have set up a structure at the SIC, where Rs500 m. have been transferred to the SIC. They will do an asset swap, and there is one company Mr Speaker, Sir, that has used this facility. They have given their building to SIC and, against that, SIC has advanced financial resources in order to help ease their liquidity problem. If, tomorrow, they don't refund the money, the SIC has some guarantees. In some cases, there are collaterals; in other cases, some risks have to be taken.

**Mr Gunness:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer to the answer the hon. Minister gave to PQ No. B/27 some time back, where he said -
‘Enterprise Mauritius has committed Rs144.5 m. to 26 SMEs with three projects already completed.’

Can we know what are the projects? Can the hon. Minister circulate the list? Then, he added -

‘In addition, six project financing schemes have been launched, for which 351 applications have been received by the closing date of 25 March.’

Can we know where matters stand with these six project financing schemes? He also added that -

‘SEHDA has also committed Rs122.5 m. for 6 project financing schemes that are already operational and for which 82 applications have been received to date and 14 have been approved for implementation by the National Women Entrepreneurs Council.’

Lastly, he stated that -

‘Small and medium size enterprises in the tourist sector are also covered by the Additional Stimulus Package, and Government is reviewing submissions for five projects with a total project value of Rs15.9 m.’

With these four different categories, where are we?

Dr. Sithanen: If the hon. Member had cared to listen to the reply, he would have seen that I have already given some answers to the two questions that he had asked. With respect to tourism, two projects have been approved and, in fact, we mention it in the Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir. One is to upgrade the standard in small and medium hotels, and the other one is to help them reduce the energy consumption in their hotels. For the rest, I have already given some answers - and I think my colleague, the hon. Minister has given some answers. We will put all these figures together, and we will circulate the answer, Mr Speaker, Sir

Mr Jhugroo: With regard to the question asked by hon. Ms Deerpalsing, can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister confirm that there is no interrelated transaction between these companies?

Dr. Sithanen: I said that there is no related party transaction. This is a specific term that is used in finance. Obviously, there is cross shareholding, which is different, but there is no related party
Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister agree that we are one of the few countries offering stimulus packages, where we are lending money to enterprises where there has been no casualties of banks. Usually banks lend money to enterprises, but here we have Government lending money to enterprises in a case where banks have not collapsed, as in the US and the UK. Therefore, will the monitoring of such money be really strict?

Dr. Sithanen: We will do the monitoring. Mr Speaker, Sir, the problem is that banks have other responsibilities. We have been fighting with banks in order to play their role. The Prime Minister knows how many times we have had to speak to the banks to tell them that. But they state that their primary responsibility is towards the shareholder. In fact, in one particular case, Mr Speaker, Sir, we could not save one company, because the financial companies étaient trop gourmands. We told them there is no way that we can guarantee all the past debts of the financial institutions. And the financial institutions say that they are not going to share burden. So, we told them that we cannot help. This risk exists, but there are many other countries where both are being used, because bank failures have happened primarily in some Anglo Saxon economies; I mean, in the US and in the UK. But, in France and in Belgium, Mr Speaker, Sir, they are helping enterprises.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME
– MONEY SPENT

(No. B/490) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the Poverty Alleviation Programme, he will state the –

(c) amount of money spent as at to date under the present budget, and

(d) Number of persons who have benefited therefrom, indicating the localities in which they reside, including the Constituency No. 14, Savanne and Black River.
The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sitanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to PQ No. B/328 on 21 April 2009, I indicated that one of the main objectives of the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups is to implement projects with a view to providing the vulnerable families with immediate basic needs in terms of housing units, support to school children and micro-credit facilities to increase household income. Such support is aimed at creating the minimum conditions for them to evolve further towards integrating the mainstream of the society.

Furthermore, I highlighted last Friday in the Budget Speech 2009 that the Eradication of Absolute Poverty Programme has focused on the 229 pockets of poverty comprising 7,157 families. This Programme is being implemented in close collaboration with the NGOs, CSR companies and other stakeholders. As I stated, 415 children between three and five years of age, who were not attending schools have now been given access to pre-primary school. They benefit in terms of school material, meal, *accompagnement social* by NGOs, school fees, transport facilities where required, and medical screening. The annual average expenditure per child, excluding transport, amounts to Rs12,000 per child. Additionally, some 600 children have been medically screened and, depending on needs, they will be provided with spectacles, hearing aids, food supplements and other facilities.

By June this year, the EAP will initiate integrated projects in six clusters over the island, covering some 500 households. One of the clusters would cover the deprived regions of Le Morne, Cotteau Raffin and La Gaulette.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that a total of Rs65 m. has already been disbursed. In fact, projects have approved projects for a total amount of around Rs129 m., and funds are being disbursed on progress being made in the implementation of the project.

These include –

First, some 1,700 families who are being provided CIS Housing Units for a total sum of around Rs100.6 m.

Second, some 7,500 children have been provided school materials such as uniforms, shoes, school bags and related items for
a total sum of Rs8.5 m.

Third, some 46 students have benefited from soft loans amounting to Rs3 m. to finance their tertiary education in local institutions.

Fourth, under the micro credit scheme, some 260 persons in Mauritius as well as in Rodrigues have been provided soft loans totalling Rs9.8 m. to start income generating activities.

Fifth, some 4,000 school children have also benefited under the Trust Fund for a total of Rs0.6 m. in terms of provision of reading materials, projector, book shelves and other related facilities in the deprived areas.

Last but not least, the Trust Fund has disbursed a sum of Rs6.4 m. for 1,350 beneficiaries in Rodrigues for financing of Community Based projects, namely provision of water tanks for rain harvesting, provision of school material to children and provision of housing units.

Insofar as part (b) of the question is concerned, I had, in my reply to PQ No. B/49 of 31 March 2009, underlined that NGOs submit projects covering pockets of poverty in their respective localities and not necessarily in terms of constituency delimitations. In fact, these projects may overlap from one constituency to another, depending on the project catchment area.

I am tabling information regarding the number of persons who have benefited from all these different schemes under the programme in the different localities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to the facilities being provided by the Trust Fund, the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF) is implementing an Integrated Social Development Project in Bambous, which is in the constituency of the hon. lady, which is nearing completion. Under this project, some 198 vulnerable families are being empowered through the provision of soft skills to enhance employability, improve educational performance of children, development of family and community life.

The project also makes provision to accommodate these families in a model village at la Valette, Bambous. The overall cost of the project, inclusive of infrastructure costs, amounts to Rs240 m. A first batch of 71 families has already been accommodated in the
model village. As I stated in my Budget Speech, inspired by the success of this project, a second project is being implemented at Cité Lumière, Grand’ Baie, for the benefit of 30 vulnerable families.

Mr Speaker, Sir, apart from what is being implemented by the Trust Fund, the EAP and the NEF, poverty alleviation initiatives are also undertaken under the Decentralised Cooperation Programme. DCP will continue to assist in the capacity building of non State actors, as well as supporting various projects in the provision of basic education, upgrading of social infrastructure and services.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to PQ No. B/49, the Vice-Prime Minister stated that, as a first measure, priority was being given to the fact that no child of pre-primary school from vulnerable families are left out of school. While I concede that this is a very good measure, does the hon. Minister agree that a child who does not have a decent place to sleep, and is vulnerable to all sorts of diseases by virtue of the environment he is living in, can still attend pre-primary school conveniently? Doesn’t he think that, concurrently to that programme, which is being given priority, he should give due consideration to the housing problems?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, if the hon. lady had listened to my answer, I said very clearly that we have a unique experience in an ACP country, which is being commended. This is the Bambous Project which is, in fact, in the constituency of the hon. Member and also in the constituency of hon. Dr. Babajee and hon. Ganoo. It is a unique one, Mr Speaker, Sir, where we are not only providing small children with education, but we have also given a house to their parents, training to their mother and empowerment facility to their father, Mr Speaker, Sir. This type of project has never, never happened in this country.

Secondly, we have given priority to the education of pre-primary children that were denied education which they rightly deserve. But it is not easy, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, I would recommend the hon. lady to read an excellent article in “The Economist” which states –

“Defining poverty is difficult. Fighting it is harder.”

This Government has demonstrated its commitment to fight poverty, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we need to broaden and expand the range of
this programme. We have started in Bambous, we will try to help the families of these kindergarten children regarding training and housing, where it is necessary.

**Mrs Hanoomanjee:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Vice-Prime Minister has just mentioned that Government has been able “to define” poverty or eradication of absolute poverty. Since the question relates to Constituency No. 14, can he say whether areas, such as Les Salines Koenig, Case Noyale and Camp Rodriguais, where there is extreme poverty, have been covered by the programme as yet?

**Dr. Sithanen:** Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make three points. The largest beneficiary in terms of constituency is, in fact, Constituency No. 14, for the simple reason that the Integrated Social Development Programme is located in Bambous. And I have stated very clearly that Rs250 m. have been spent on that project. The initial project value was far less than that. But, because of the humanity of this Government, we have agreed to increase the budget in order to do this Integrated Social Development Programme. I have also indicated, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there are some areas – I think I have mentioned three localities in the constituency of the hon. Member - like Le Morne, Cotteau Raffin and La Gaulette. But as I say, we are not doing it on a constituency basis; we are doing it, Mr Speaker, Sir, on a need basis. Obviously, in many cases, there will be overlapping constituency. We are not going to tell some people that if they straddle two constituencies; we will not give them the facility, because, otherwise, we will not put the figures to give it to Assembly Members. Poverty has to be fought wherever it is.

**Mr Lesjongard:** Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether there has been any recent survey carried out with regard to social housing requirement in the country?

**Dr. Sithanen:** There is an excellent paper that has been written recently, Mr Speaker, Sir, on the social housing needs. But, let me also inform the hon. Member that Mauritius is one of the few upper middle income countries where more than 85% of the population own their house. Of course, we all know that, probably, in one house, there will be more than three or four people and, as you know, we are in the process of a nuclearisation of the system
where we move from an extended family to this new model. But it is one of the highest probably in the world even when compared to advanced developed countries. Having said that, this report has identified where the needs are, and we are trying to answer this problem by the various means that we have, through the NHDC, MHC and also through the Trust Fund for Vulnerable Groups and the NEF.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister, in his reply, has also mentioned about school materials. But, is the Minister aware that, up to now - we are now mid-May - students of primary and secondary schools residing in Rivière Noire and Tamarin have not yet obtained their school materials?

Dr. Sithanen: I am not aware. If the hon. Member would give me the list, I will pass it on to the Trust Fund. We are trying our best, Mr Speaker, Sir, under difficult circumstances. Notwithstanding the difficult economic situation, we have kept our engagement in terms of fighting poverty, Mr Speaker, Sir. Even in the Budget that was presented last week, we have, in fact, redoubled our effort to fight poverty.

Mr Ganoo: The hon. Minister has, on a few occasions, referred to this La Valette Integrated Project. Today, he has given the figure of Rs250 m. Can he confirm whether Medine Sugar Estate has contributed in this particular project as part of its CSR commitment and can he tell us to what extent?

Dr. Sithanen: I am not aware. I have to check. I would say no, with a risk. I’ll have to check. Maybe, they have given the land at a concessionary rate, but I am not aware. We are working with Medine. I must be very fair to Medine; they have a good CSR and, in some areas, they have done well. So, we are working with them, for instance, on identifying a village touristique for that part of the island. But I am not sure about what has happened for La Valette Project. I will check, and let the hon. Member know.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether he could lay on the Table of the Assembly a copy of the concept paper of the ACP he just mentioned, and also a copy of the CSR companies and NGOs involved in the implementation of the project?
Dr. Sithanen: I will try, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guimbeau: The hon. Minister just talked about a report on housing projects in Mauritius. Can he inform the House whether Curepipe/Plaine Wilhems is the area where there is the highest demand for housing?

Dr. Sithanen: I don’t recall the exact detail, but I can find out and let the hon. Member know.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: The Minister has mentioned La Valette Project in his reply as well. Can I inform him that, for La Valette Project, inhabitants of Bambous have not benefited? There are people who have been brought in Bambous. Can the Minister consider that inhabitants of Bambous, who are living in extreme poverty, benefit from the second phase of the project?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make it very clear. Poverty is not linked to a specific area, even though there is a higher incidence in some areas than others. Now, if we have 200 houses, we have to give it to the 200 who are the most deserving, Mr Speaker, Sir, wherever the need is. If people in the vicinity of that particular location pass the test and satisfy the criteria, certainly they will have it. Otherwise, every Member who has been elected in a particular constituency will say that in his constituency also there are poor people, and why don’t give priority to this! Even in our constituency, No. 18, though it has two of the richest wards in the country, there are poor people, Mr Speaker, Sir; less than in others but, obviously, we need to be fair to people on the basis of their personal profile, as opposed to their place of residence.

MÉTAYERS – TECHNICAL COMMITTEE - RECOMMENDATIONS

(No. B/491) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security whether he will state if, following the agreement reached between Government and the Mauritius Sugar Planters Association, a Technical Committee was set up with regard to its implementation and, if so, will he -

(a) state the recommendations made concerning the métayers, and

(b) table copy of the agreement signed with regard to the
Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, métayage is a historic system of land tenure whereby sugar estates and millers lease their land to métayers for a rent based on a share of the sugar accrued and under conditions as determined by a lease contract and provisions of statutory legislation.

In the context of the 36% cut in the price of sugar exported to the EU, to be fully effective as from October this year, it would be very difficult for most of the métayers to remain competitive in sugar cane cultivation.

It is important to mention that métayers are very vulnerable given that they have been and are still cultivating sugar cane on highly marginal lands and have worked very hard to transform such lands into productive lands.

The hon. Prime Minister, concerned by the serious difficulties facing the sugar cane sector in general and the métayers in particular, decided that the métayers issue should also be taken care of in the context of the Sugar Reform. Accordingly, the Agreement reached between Government and the MSPA in December 2007 provides that the most appropriate solutions be defined to ensure that the métayers are also part of the Sugar Reform and the solutions to be considered are –

(i) the possibility of sale of non-strategic land to métayers, and

(ii) the positive review of the rental formula.

As decided in the MSPA/Government agreement, a Technical Committee was set up under the chairmanship of the Director of FARC to make appropriate recommendations. The Committee comprised representatives of the Farmers Service Corporation, Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture, Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment, Mauritius Sugar Authority, MSIRI, MSPA, SIFB, Associations of Métayers and my Ministry. The Committee submitted its report in April 2008 with several recommendations.

Following the submission of the report and at the request of the then Minister, the Commission for the Democratisation of the Economy engaged into negotiations with the MSPA with a view to
reaching a final and global agreement. The Director of FARC and representatives of SIFB, MSA, AREU and SLO (State Law Office) also participated in the working sessions chaired by the Chairperson of the Commission for the Democratisation of the Economy. The agreement which was concluded through exchange of letters provides for the following -

(a) the rent shall be fixed to a single rate of 10% of sugar accruing to the métayers as compared with converted rates between 15% to 24% prior to the agreement;

(b) Formalisation of the “droit de métayage”

The perpetuity of land tenure of métayers is an acquired right. This “Droit de Métayage” is the fundamental asset of the métayers and is quantifiable. This “Droit de métayage” is also considered a tradable asset; I must lay emphasis, Mr Speaker, Sir, on the fact that this particular ‘Droit de métayage’ as a tradable asset did not exist prior to this agreement.

(c) On the issue of sale of land to métayers

The principle of sale of lands to métayers who are occupying the said lands is agreed upon as follows -

Sale of lands by owner estates to métayers will be considered for lands which are not defined as “strategic” by the owner estates;

In case of lands occupied by métayers are considered strategic by the owner estate or estates, there are three possible options opened to the métayers -

First, they can continue to cultivate sugar cane on the same strategic land;

Secondly, they can swap the land for non-strategic land of at least similar value both in terms of agricultural output and quality of locations which they can eventually purchase if they so wish, and

Thirdly, again if they so wish, Mr Speaker, Sir they can sell the ‘Droit de métayage’ to the owner estate against
payment of compensation.

In all the scenarios, prices will be determined by mutual agreement following valuation and cross-valuation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the deal concluded between Government and MSPA in December 2000 provides for the possibility of sale of non-strategic land to métayers. The final agreement reached, goes far beyond this initial provision in that it enables métayers occupying strategic land to swap such land with non-strategic land which he can purchase afterwards. The agreement also allows the land owner to buy back les ‘Droits de Métayage’ from the métayers subject to the latter’s agreement against payment of compensation. The métayers cannot therefore be coerced to move out of strategic land as the security of tenure is guaranteed under the SIE Act and also as per the agreement reached between Government and MSPA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have already indicated, the principle of land swapping has been agreed. Land swapping can also apply in cases of continued leasing in order to allow for regrouping of leased métayers lands into larger portions where derocking and better irrigation and cultivation techniques can be applied, thus allowing the métayers to achieve better yields, whether in sugar cane or other agricultural activities.

In the case of métayers of Bel Ombre, I had a meeting with some of the representatives following which I had instructed the MSA to freeze forthwith all proceedings initiated in view of agreement between métayers and Bel Ombre Sugar Estate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the sake of transparency and for the information of the House, I am tabling copy of the Agreement entered into between Government and the MSPA in December 2000, copy of the Report of Technical Committee chaired by the Director of FARC, and also a copy of the final and global agreement on the métayers issue.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say what motivated the Technical Committee to come with a recommendation to ask the métayers to give back their strategic land and to swap strategic land for non-strategic land against compensation?

Mr Faugoo: If the Member had listened to me carefully Mr Speaker, Sir, there are three options, no one is bound, and no one is
forced to give up the land they can stay on a strategic land if they want to continue cultivating sugar cane as it is provided for under the SIE Act. Secondly if they wish to buy land they have to swap to non-strategic land but provided it is of equal value in terms of cultivation and also in terms of location. So as we say, a right which never existed meaning the land has been given value, it has been given the métayers can sell the right which never existed before. Now it has a value now he can swap he can return to the owner and then claim compensation, compensation which is agreed upon mutually.

**Ms Deerpalsing:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in his answer the hon. Minister has mentioned that he has given the order to freeze all agreements that have been reached prior with the Bel Ombre of Sugar Estate with the métayers. Can the hon. Minister confirmed then that his decision was based on the fact that the Mauritius Sugar Authority has flouted the agreement that the Prime Minister reached with the MSPA and that that decision that had been taken which the Minister has then frozen was actually in disfavour of the métayers and not according to what the Prime Minister had said that the reform had to be juste et equitable and that everybody should be a winner and that this agreement was that the métayers were going to be less well off than they were supposed to be according to the agreement. Can the hon. Minister confirmed that the Mauritius Sugar Authority has flouted the agreement that the Prime Minister reached with the MSPA?

**Mr Faugoo:** After the agreement was reached between the métayers and the MSPA, there were lots of meetings which were held with métayers to explain the pertinent issues in the agreement which was reached between the Government and the MSPA. My colleague the former Minister of Agriculture had gone through all the areas where there are métayers. They were explained, but behind our back, as for the agreement the métayers and Bel Ombre have reached certain decisions. It would appear they have not been given the proper required assistance, Mr Speaker, Sir, and this is where I had to intervene and I have cancelled whatever decision they have reached and we are looking into this.

**Ms Deerpalsing:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of this answer, can the hon. Minister then say whether any disciplinary action can be taken or should be taken with respect to the Mauritius Sugar
Authority people, because I have been crying, it seems, in a desert that Mauritius Sugar Authority is now an agency of the MSPA and is not working in the interests of either the small planters or the métayers in this country. Can the hon. Minister confirm whether very strong disciplinary action will be taken against the director of the MSA?

Mr Faugoo: I hold the same opinion Mr Speaker, Sir, and same will be done.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the Minister holds the same opinion, can he say whether action will be taken against the officer who is still responsible for having changed the decision of the hon. Prime Minister?

Mr Faugoo: The answer is yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, and very soon.

Mr Dulloo: Is the hon. Minister in a position to give an idea to the House as to how many métayers have been able to purchase land from the Estate?

Mr Faugoo: They are still in the process, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has mentioned that the métayers are not being coerced to sell their strategic land. Can I ask the Minister whether he has made an enquiry with the métayers of Bel Ombre as to whether they are being coerced to sell their strategic land and that the Sugar Estates want to have their strategic land back and buy back their ‘Droit de métayage’?

Mr Faugoo: As I said Mr Speaker, Sir, they were not coerced; they entered into an agreement with Bel Ombre Sugar Estate. What I said is they lack information and they have not been given the proper guidance. This is where I am taking action Mr Speaker, Sir.

Ms Deerpalsing: Given the seriousness of this matter, can the hon. Minister envisage going to the MBC and going to the public to inform the métayers that they should not enter into backdoor agreements with the Sugar Estates even if though they have the knife under their throat and whether the Minister will inform all the métayers that they have no agreement to get into with the Sugar
Estates without the supervision of his Ministry?

**Mr Faugoo:** We are already doing so, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we are going to go to all the areas where *métayers* are found.

**Mr Jugnauth:** The hon. Minister has said that the MSPA is doing something behind the back of Government and the deal that was struck between Government and the MSPA and I understand now that the Minister is of the same opinion as hon. Ms Deerpalsing with regard to MSA. What is the Minister contemplating or has done with regard to the MSPA? Because they should also be taken to task.

**Mr Faugoo:** It is not MSPA as such; it is Members of the MSPA, meaning in this case, Bel Ombre. As from now on we are going to ask that any issue on *métayers* has to be in the presence of either the Ministry or the MSA, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mrs Hanoomanjee:** Mr Speaker, Sir, after the Technical Committee had given its recommendations, can we know from the hon. Minister what was the role of his Ministry? Was it left to the MSA or did his Ministry have the role to supervise the whole implementation of the recommendations?

**Mr Faugoo:** As for the implementation is concerned it was the MSA, Mr Speaker, Sir, because we had the role to set up the committee, come up with recommendations and then reach on agreement; once this is done, the MSA is responsible for implementation.

**Mr Bérenger:** Can I know from the hon. Minister as from what date has he and his Ministry been aware that the MSA has been up to no good?

**Mr Faugoo:** When this issue was raised, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was a question in Parliament a couple of weeks or maybe a month ago.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon Members, I understand that an agreement has been reached between the whips that during the whole week debate will be on the Budget Speech and until the Budget is voted we are going to have lunch and dinner for one hour only. So, I suspend for one hour.

*At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.*
On resuming at 2.03 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

ST FELIX SUGAR FACTORY – BLUE PRINT

(No. B/492) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security whether, in regard to the ex-employees of the St. Félix Sugar factory, he will state if those who benefitted from the Blue Print following its closure, have been allotted a plot of land, and, if not, the reasons therefor.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised by the Mauritius Sugar Authority that land of a total extent of 31.41 arpents has been earmarked at Royal Road, Chemin Grenier for allocation to the 144 ex-workers of St Félix sugar factory who retired on 06 December 2007 following the closure of the factory.

In accordance with the provisions of the Blue Print and conditions set out by Government, the cane receiving mill will have to meet all expenses and implement procedures relating to factory closure.

I am informed that SUD, which is the cane receiving mill, is not the owner of the land identified and agreed upon all parties, for allocation to the beneficiaries. SUD has to purchase the land from St Félix Sugar Estate and the acquisition process is still ongoing. On 21 May 2009, the Government Valuation Office which is assessing the value of the land has informed the Mauritius Sugar Authority that the survey of the land has been completed and the valuation exercise is in progress.

In parallel, the clearances of the utilities and service providing institutions are being sought regarding the suitability of the land for housing purpose. The location and site plans have been forwarded to the institutions concerned on 19 February 2009. Once all the views are received, SUD will submit its application for a morcellement permit to the Morcellement Board and thereafter proceed with the development of the site.

My Ministry and the MSA will monitor the situation closely to ensure that there is no undue delay in implementation.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister, in case agreement cannot be reached between SUD and St Felix, whether legal advice has been sought as to the possibility as to
whether it could be constitutional, legal to compulsory acquire?

Mr Faugoo: We need to seek advice but, as at date, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is an agreement which has been reached between the parties. This is why they are going further to find out whether the land in question is suitable for housing purposes.

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF CUREPIPE – STAFF/WORKERS - RECRUITMENT

(No. B/493) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the recruitment of staff and workers at the Municipal Council of Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to if any exercise has been carried out, since July 2005 to date and, if so, indicate for each post -

(a) the date of advertisement;
(b) the number of applications received, and
(c) the number thereof recruited, indicating their -
   (i) names;
   (ii) addresses;
   (iii) age, and
   (iv) qualifications.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that officers in various grades have been recruited by the Local Government Service Commission on behalf of the Municipal Council of Curepipe.

However, with your permission, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the replies I made earlier to PQ Nos. B/796, B/1029 and B/1138 where I informed the House that since appointments and promotions in the Local Government Service fall under the sole responsibility of the Local Government Service Commission which is an independent body, it would not be proper to provide the requested information.

CUREPIPE/MIDLANDS – STATE LAND - LEASE

(No. B/494) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands
whether, in regard to the lease of State land in Constituency No. 17, Curepipe and Midlands, he will state if, since July 2005 to date, there has been any -

(a) lease signed;
(b) letter of reservation sent, and
(c) expression of interest received from potential promoters, indicating in each case -
   (i) the name of the beneficiary;
   (ii) the location and extent of land;
   (iii) the terms and conditions;
   (iv) if the annual rental value reflects the actual market value, and
   (v) the purpose.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, the requested information is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly once the exercise is completed.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just want to know from the hon. Minister, whether there has been any expression of interest received for land at Trou aux Cerfs, Cité Pitôt, Test de Busch and Mangalkan. Can the hon. Minister give this information?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have the current information. As I said, there is a number of questions and all the information requested is so detailed. If I want to give the precise information to the hon. Member, I will have to abide by what I have said, otherwise the information may be erroneous and I don't want to do that.

ERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND
– FLEXIBLE CREDIT LINE

(No. B/495) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the Flexible Credit Line of the International Monetary Fund, he will state the amount thereof Government proposes to solicit from the Fund.
Mr Speaker, Sir, we have not yet agreed on an amount to solicit from the IMF under the Flexible Line of Credit (FCL). To understand how the amount will be determined, it may be useful to explain how this totally novel instrument from the IMF works.

The Flexible Line of Credit, FCL, is part of the response of the IMF to help members whether the crisis and return to sustainable growth. It is a precautionary arrangement reserved exclusively for well performing countries with sound economic policies as recognised by the international community through a positive assessment in the IMF Article IV review. The instrument aims to provide such well managed countries with an insurance policy against adverse developments that hit them as a result of the negative effects from the rest of the World.

In fact the FCL is reserved only for countries with very strong fundamentals, policies and track records of policy implementation. Access to the FCL credit line will be particularly useful for crisis prevention purposes. FCL arrangements will be approved for countries meeting pre-set qualification criteria. Access under the FCL is determined on a case-by-case basis. Disbursements under the FCL would not be phased or conditioned to policy understandings as is the case under a traditional Fund-supported program as standby arrangement.

Because of its nature there is no specific conditionality involved with the FCL unlike all other IMF instruments. The view of the IMF and the international community is that if a country has good policies, but is hit by negative international shocks which it cannot influence, there is no need for it to change policies. Instead it needs to be given the support to meet the external challenges.

Only a few select countries have so far qualified, namely Mexico, Poland and Columbia.

The FCL is first of all a precautionary arrangement, more of an insurance policy against negative developments in the world than actual borrowing.

Flexibility includes -

- Large and upfront access to Fund resources with no
ongoing conditions.

- Renewable credit line, initially for six months or 12 months with a review of eligibility every six months.

- Long repayment period.

- No hard cap on access to Fund resources, which will be assessed on a case-by-case basis draw at any time on the credit line or treat it as a precautionary instrument.

There are three general qualification requirements -

4. Strong economic fundamentals and institutional policy frameworks.

5. Implementing and has a sustained track record of implementing – very strong policies.

6. Remains committed to maintaining such policies in the future.

Drawing from the FCL involves no additional conditionality, but does require continued implementation of strong economic policies. The nine relevant criteria for the purposes of assessing qualification for an FCL are -

(x) a sustainable external position;

(xi) a capital account position dominated by private flows;

(xii) a track record of steady sovereign access to international capital markets at favourable terms;

(xiii) a reserve position that is relatively comfortable;

(xiv) sound public finances;

(xv) sustainable debt position;

(xvi) low and stable inflation;

(xvii) strong and solvent banks – good supervision of banks, and

(xviii) data transparency and data integrity.

The IMF is currently assessing our eligibility according to the above nine criteria. Once this is completed we will be in a better position to agree on the relevant amount of insurance required for our country. However, our resilience to the international crisis is likely to mean we will remain in the lower part of the range of
between 300 percent and 1,000 percent of quota that is offered under the FCL. Moreover, drawing at the lower level of 300 percent of quota are, at close, to concessional rates, but larger amounts are increasingly close to commercial rates. Our quota is SDR 100 million, approximately $150 m.

**Mr Bodha:** May I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether such a decision from him and from Government cannot be interpreted as *le pire est devant nous* as far as the financial crisis is concerned?

**Dr. Sithanen:** No, it is exactly the contrary. I have just stated in my reply Mr Speaker, Sir, that this is available only to countries that have sound economic fundamentals and I have listed the nine economic fundamentals. What the hon. Member is speaking about is an SBA and many countries have gone through SBA - standby arrangement - especially in Eastern Europe; even Seychelles next door has had, unfortunately, to go for an SBA. We are trying to avoid an SBA where conditions are imposed, like they have been imposed in Pakistan, Ukraine, Eastern European countries and in Seychelles. A flexible credit line is basically a precautionary agreement that is given to countries that have sound economic fundamentals, that commits to maintaining these sound fundamentals. And you do not have to use it; you use it only if it is required, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Bodha:** One more question Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the Vice-Prime Minister whether he can name other countries which have had recourse to this Line of Credit?

**Dr. Sithanen:** I just mentioned it, but the hon. Member does not listen!

**(Interruptions)**

Yes, that’s what I said: Mexico, Poland and Colombia, I mentioned it in my answer. Other countries are going for the worst one which I mentioned, the SBA. I think that Peru is being assessed. I think Puerto Rico also - if my memory serves me right - is being assessed.

**Mr Bérenger:** I was going to ask the same question, because in his reply the hon. Minister gave the impression that three only have been granted the facility, but others have applied. He mentioned Puerto Rico; it is not my information. Will he confirm
that, in fact, there are those three countries only that have applied and obtained?

**Dr. Sithanen:** No, no! I think more have applied. I think Peru also has applied, if my memory serves me right. But these three countries have been granted FCL, Mr Speaker, Sir, Mexico, Poland and Colombia.

**Mr Bérenger:** I am sure the hon. Minister is aware that, in fact, this new facility from the IMF has come forward, because a comparable facility put forward last October by the IMF found no takers at all.

**Dr. Sithanen:** There are three facilities, Mr Speaker, Sir. The SBA which is the worst one; then there is one which we call HAPA and then this one which is the FCL. The reason why the second one was not acceded to by many countries is because there were conditionalities. And if there are conditionalities many countries prefer to go straight into an SBA, whereas for FCL there are criteria for admission and this is why, as soon as it has been announced, three countries which have applied, have already benefited from the facility.

**Mr Bérenger:** The Minister said that there were not many countries that applied for the new facility put forward in October. None! There were no takers at all and the IMF had to come back, because they were at a loss on how to lend their money. Is the Minister aware that a country like Turkey has, in fact, turned down that new facility because they find it too costly?

**Dr. Sithanen:** I am not sure about that, Mr Speaker, Sir, because I am not sure whether Turkey is eligible for the FCL. There are many who have applied. But, obviously, as I said, if you are on the lower range of the FCL the interest rate is concessional. If you are in the upper range, I did mention between 300 percent quota to 1,000 percent quota, whereas if you go above a particular range conditions becomes commercial. So, those countries that can go on the commercial market obviously do not have recourse to FCL.

**Mr Bérenger:** Can the hon. Minister inform the House what is the retainer, because this is a precautionary flexible line, but you do not get it free from the IMF. Can we know what it will cost us as a retainer to be in a position to use that, if required?
**Dr. Sithanen:** I think it is a very small amount. I do not have the figures but, obviously, once we finalize that we will become eligible for it. You know, Mr Speaker, Sir, we will submit all the information to Parliament.

**Mr Jugnauth:** In the event that Government would so request for this Flexible Credit Line to the IMF, is the Vice-Prime Minister not worried about the Public Sector Debt to GDP ratio that it would exceed the prescribed limit?

**Dr. Sithanen:** Mr Speaker, Sir, out of the nine criteria that I have mentioned, two of them are sound public finances and sustainable debt. We brought down deficit from 6% of GDP to 3.5% of GDP, ignoring the Rs6 billion that were left in the cupboard.

(Interruptions)

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. Sithanen:** We brought down public sector debt from 71% of GDP to 59% of GDP, Mr Speaker, Sir, without increasing VAT.

(Interruptions)

It hurts, Mr Speaker, Sir! It is because we have managed the economy well that we have brought down the deficit as a share of GDP as stated by the OECD - *pas banne creze craze*!

(Interruptions)

This is why we are eligible for the FLC.

**VICTORIA HOSPITAL**

**INCINERATOR – AIR POLLUTION**

(No. B/496) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the incinerator situated at the back of the Victoria Hospital, Candos, at La Paix Avenue, he will state if his Ministry has received any representation from the inhabitants of the region in relation to air pollution and other inconveniences caused thereby and, if so, indicate the remedial actions that will be taken.

(Withdrawn)
CATAMARAN HIJACKING
– CONTACT WITH MALAGASY AUTHORITIES

(No. B/497) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the hijacking of the catamaran on which Mr J. F. C. was a skipper, he will state if Government is still in contact with the Malagasy authorities in relation to the searches, indicating where matters stand.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the Malagasy Police is still searching the two Mauritian fugitives namely Mr Rishi Luchun and Mr Sunny Ramkissoon, as well as Mr Jean François Cotte, the skipper of the pleasure craft ‘Patrol One’, which was reported missing since 20 December 2008. Investigations are still ongoing and the assistance of the Malagasy authorities has been solicited to trace the whereabouts of the two Mauritian fugitives and the skipper. According to the Malagasy authorities, searches are still being carried out but Mr Cotte and the two fugitives have remained untraceable so far.

For the benefit of the House, I wish to inform further that our Ambassador in Madagascar travelled to Tamatave on 29 December 2008 with a view to extending assistance to Mr Leon Aliphon, the boat helper of the pleasure craft ‘Patrol One’. For this case, a mutual assistance request has been officially lodged with the Malagasy authorities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House may be aware, only Mr Leon Aliphon, the boat helper, was found on the pleasure craft ‘Patrol One’ which was kept under Malagasy police custody for investigation purposes. Mr Aliphon was released on the 29 December 2008 and repatriated to Mauritius on the 30 December 2008.

The skipper of ‘Patrol One’, Mr Jean François Cotte, and the two fugitives are still reported missing by the Malagasy Police. The said vessel reached Mauritius on the 23 March 2009 and was returned to its owner, Mr Patrick Bouic. On arrival in Mauritius, the vessel was examined by the Police forensic experts.

The Mauritius Police authorities are still in contact with their
counterpart in Madagascar in respect of the trimaran “Patrol One”.

Our Ambassador in Antananarivo is in touch with the Malagasy authorities with a view to finding out the whereabouts of Mr Cotte and the two fugitives. Our Ambassador in Madagascar has indicated that there is no new development as at now and that searches are still under way.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister to give us some information as to what the Mauritian Police has been doing? Obviously, to get our friends in Madagascar to do their share we must do ours? Can I know from the hon. Minister whether he has liaised with the Prime Minister and the Commissioner of Police to know what stage the local Police inquiries have reached, because there were local people involved who came and went and there was a local taxi also involved?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, in fact, this morning I talked to the Commissioner of Police and he has relayed certain information to Interpol and Interpol is doing the needful.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, it seems that officers are not in touch with the family. Can I request the hon. Minister to ask his officers to be in constant touch with the family and give the relevant information?

Dr. Boolell: Unfortunately, the information conveyed by my hon. friend is not right. The three MPs of the constituency met Mrs Cotte and, of course, there were some financial resources which were awarded to Mrs Cotte. Over and above that, I am in touch on a regular basis with Mrs Cotte. Mrs Cotte had a meeting with the Adviser of the Prime Minister, Mr Rivalland. I asked the Ambassador himself to stay in touch with Mrs Cotte, which he did, on a regular basis. So, to come and say that we have not responded to her legitimate request and we know the hardship that she is facing, I think it is not fair. We have been responding very positively. The only thing that we would like to see happening is to see events unfolding to know the whereabouts of Mr Cotte.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether the photographs of these fugitives have been published in the newspapers of Madagascar?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, from information obtained, the photos
appeared in the newspapers and all the information are properly disseminated. We are pressing upon the Malagasy authorities to act promptly, but I must say personally I am not too happy.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker Sir, I have not said that at the beginning the officer was not in touch with the family. What I am telling the Minister concerns the past two or three weeks or even one or two months back. The Minister can check with his officers. At least, let an officer be in constant touch, not with political people; the MPs will go, but let one of his officers who is following the file be in touch with the family. Can the Minister ask the officer who is following the file to be in constant touch with the family? The political people and the MPs will go.

Dr. Boolell: I have no problem. In fact, I have even given my own phone number to Mrs Cotte and on a few occasions she has got in touch with me.

NTC - RESTRUCTURATION PLAN

(No. B/498) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether in regard to the National Transport Corporation he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to if it has set up a restructuration plan to overcome its financial difficulties and, if so, give details thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Transport Corporation (NTC) that in the face of the serious financial difficulties it is encountering, it has come up with a Recovery Plan which aims at cost cutting and also at generating extra revenue.

The plan includes the review of route networks to ensure a fair mix of profitable and non-profitable bus routes thus allowing for a good dose of cross-subsidisation. It also provides for a revisit of night services which have so far proved to be uneconomical. Besides, the central workshop will only operate on a schedule based on felt needs. Overtime is being controlled and kept to the bare minimum. The Corporation will also re-engineer its staff structure to promote an optimum use of human resources. Action is also being taken to step up their fight against illegal operations and pilferage.

It is forecast that these measures will reduce costs by some
Rs5 m. and generate extra income of about Rs4 m. each month.

The NTC also intends to request the National Transport Authority to include Student Yellow buses and blue line buses for the purposes of benefiting from the free travel compensation scheme. Furthermore, a variance analysis of kilometres of operation will be carried out to assess actual consumption of diesel and shortfall in receipt of the Bus Compensation Recovery Account over the years from April 2004 to April 2009. This will permit a revision of the formula so that the NTC can be duly compensated for its fuel consumption.

Finally, the Corporation is re-aligning its financial commitments on major projects through structural adjustments, in line with the recommendations of the Deloitte Report, a copy of which has already been laid in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the Minister whether in the restructuration plan there had been an indication as to when all the debts of the CNT will be recouped?

Mr Bachoo: The CNT is highly indebted. It is very difficult for me at this particular stage to exactly forecast what will be the future but, in fact, we are trying our best to economise on so many issues and probably we will be able – let’s say at the end of this month - to economise, at least, Rs5 m. to Rs7 m. In addition to this, we are also trying to increase the revenue of the CNT.

Mr Gunness: I am not asking the Minister, but, at least, the people at the CNT when they prepared the restructuration plan, they must have forecasted according to their revenue, according to their cash flow, how much money they will get with all their savings and what not. So, have they set up a time frame by when they think this debt will be recouped?

Mr Bachoo: No time frame has been set, but for the information of the House I would like to circulate a copy of the recovery plan.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, whilst employees are being asked to reduce their overtime and the public is taking its share, has the Minister asked the Chairperson, as a gesture of solidarity towards the travelling public, whether he can get rid of his jaguar,
his allowances, overtime and petrol allowance? Has this exercise been done?

Mr Bachoo: I will convey the message of the hon. Member.

Mr Bhagwan: The hon. Minister has to take a decision.

Mr Gunness: Can we know from the Minister what decision has been taken concerning the building of the headquarters of the CNT which is being constructed at Ébène?

Mr Bachoo: We are trying to complete the building and once the building is completed, we will have a look at how best we can make use of the building, either we’ll have to sell it or we can utilise the building; at the same time we can rent the building where we can get revenues.

Mr Gunness: Can the Minister reassure the employees of the CNT that there will be no reduction of workforce at the CNT?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, it all depends because many of them are involved in pilferages and until now about 18 have been dismissed. So, if that continues, definitely I’ll have to take action.

Mr Bérenger: I don’t think whether it is linked to the financial situation of the CNT, but I am sure the hon. Minister, like myself, drives around Mauritius on the roads every day. Will he agree with me that there has been a deterioration of smoke pollution in regard to CNT buses recently?

Mr Bachoo: I do admit, Sir, and we are taking steps because we have got many buses which are above 16 years. There is a question on that, I am going to answer. That is the reason why tender exercise is on for procurement of additional new buses.

**NTC – BUS FLEET**

(No. B/499) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether in regard to the bus fleet of the National Transport Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to the number thereof having attained the age of 16 years and due to be renewed, indicating the actions that are being taken.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the National Transport Corporation has a fleet of 520 buses. 36 of them have
reached the age of 16 while 42 have reached the age of 17. They have been duly licensed by the National Transport Authority to operate.

I am further informed that the Corporation has initiated action plan to procure 85 fully built standard buses. The tender exercise is on and the bids are currently being evaluated at the Central Procurement Board.

**Mr Jhugroo**: Can the hon. Minister confirm to the House why all buses over 15 years old are used by CNT to carry school children and very often they get breakdowns?

**Mr Bachoo**: It is not necessarily those buses which are 15 years and above. We have got dedicated student buses and those buses have been authorised by the NTA to carry students on conditions that after every six months they have to undergo examinations and tests.

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun**: I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the 42 buses which he just mentioned were not already out of operation and have been put into operation only recently by the National Transport Corporation?

**Mr Bachoo**: Normally, the average year is 16, but these buses are above 16. The NTA, under special conditions, has allowed those buses to run, and certificates of fitness have been given to them. But when you see those buses, you feel that you have to scrap them out.

**Mr Gunness**: The hon. Minister is talking about the NTA. Is it not the Minister who has to give a waiver when it is above 16 years?

**Mr Bachoo**: But, this is the law. Under regulations, you are authorised. This is what the Member has done in the past; it was so even in the previous Government. This regulation was passed, I think, in 2003.

*(Interruptions)*

Yes, I was the Minister, and the hon. Member was in Government then.

**ANTIVIRAL DRUG TAMIFLU – PURCHASE –**
JULY 2005 TO MAY 2009

(No. B/500) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the antiviral drug Tamiflu, he will state the

(a) number of consignments purchased, since July 2005 to date, indicating in each case the -

   (i) quantity;
   (ii) cost;
   (iii) number thereof having expired;
   (iv) number thereof having been used in hospitals, and

(b) measures taken to avoid any shortage thereof.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker Sir, since July 2005, Oseltamivir phosphate, that is, Tamiflu, has been purchased in three consignments as follows –

- In September 2005, 10,000 capsules of Oseltamivir of 75 mg for an amount of Rs631,280.

- In 2006:
  - 30,000 capsules of Oseltamivir phosphate (75 mg) for an amount of Rs1,386 m.,
  - 270,000 doses of Oseltamivir powder oral mix for an amount of Rs12,474 m., and
  - 48 kg of Oseltamivir phosphate powder for an amount of Rs13,273,920 m.;

- and finally, in 2007, 49 kg of Oseltamivir phosphate powder for an amount of Rs17,191,350 m.

The expiry of the three consignments of drugs is 2011.

I wish to inform the House that WHO has, on 13 May 2009, donated to the Government of Mauritius drugs for the treatment of 1,056 patients.

As regards part (a) (iv) of the question, as at now, there has been no use of Oseltamivir phosphate, that is, Tamiflu, in our
hospitals.

Regarding part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the present stock of Tamiflu can cater for the treatment of about 13% of the population. In line with WHO guidelines, the stock is being increased to cover, at least, 25% of the population. Action has already been initiated to procure the additional amount of Oseltamivir phosphate.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether the expiry date of these drugs is on the containers of the Tamiflu?

Dr. Jeetah: The hon. Member knows about the process of reviewing the expiry date of drugs. Can I just give some additional information, Mr Speaker, Sir? It is common practice for laboratories to retest samples of active pharmaceutical ingredients already mixed and finished products before expiry dates. In this particular case, since we are required to stockpile Tamiflu; retesting will be done before expiry in 2011 and expiry, eventually, extended to 2014. I understand also that retesting will be done again in 2014 and, if positive, extended to 2017. I would like to assure the House that this is a commitment that has been taken globally, and it has been validated by WHO, FDA and EMEA, that is, Food and Drugs Administration of the US and European Medicine Evaluation Agencies.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister if he has the dates on which the orders were placed with regard to the Tamiflu that we received in 2006 and 2007?

Dr. Jeetah: I do not have the date, but I can state that it was in September 2005, 2006 and 2007. I do not have the information with regard to the ordering, but these are when Tamiflu was received.

Mr Naidu: Can the hon. Minister inform the House of the specific actions which are being taken to increase the stock from 13% to 25%?

Dr. Jeetah: We have gone through an emergency procurement process, and the closing date for the tenders is 27 May 2009. Then, we will take a decision.

Mr Jhugroo: With regard to swine flu, can the hon. Minister confirm whether all retail pharmacies and private clinics have been
informed by the Government pharmacist to sell Tamiflu only on prescription?

**Dr. Jeetah:** I have personally met the press, and I have informed them. But, if this is not the case, we will write to everybody. I know that the Chief Medical Officer has been talking to all the stakeholders. I have personally held six meetings with all the stakeholders, and I would be surprised if somebody does not know, but we will ensure that everybody is aware.

**Mr Jhugroo:** Can the hon. Minister inform the House why the same procedure was not followed during the Bird flu?

**Dr. Jeetah:** The hon. Member ought to know that I am only in charge of human beings. He has to address the question to the substantive Minister.

**Mr Jhugroo:** The same drug is concerned. Previously, there was no need to sell on prescription but, this time, being given it is for Swine Flu, we need prescription. So, I want to know why.

**Dr. Jeetah:** The hon. Member needs to know that, at the moment, we have a very severe strain of this flu, that is, AH1/N1. This is a combination of three species, that is, the bird, human being and pork, and there is the only molecule available locally that can treat it effectively. So, it is very important to make sure that people do not grow resistance against this drug. If one was to misuse this drug, there would not be any cure at the time that I am speaking.

**AGALEGA – AIRPORT – PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION**

(No. B/501) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the proposed construction of an airport in Agalega, he will state where matters stand.

**Dr. David:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the proposed construction of an airport at Agalega, as envisaged following the tourism project submitted by IBL in year 2004, is not on our agenda for the short term. However, taking into consideration the bad state of the runway, approval has been obtained for the rehabilitation of the airstrip, and the Ministry of Finance & Economic Empowerment has committed appropriate funds for that
purpose in Estimates 2009.

I am also informed that the OIDC is in the process of recruiting a Project Coordinator to oversee the execution of works, and that tenders for the construction works would then be launched.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister confirm to the House whether the Dornier is still using the existing airfield for landing and taking off and, if so, is it safe?

Dr. David: Yes, the Dornier is still flying, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is why we are rehabilitating the airstrip, because we find that it is in a bad state.

Mr Jhugroo: Is it safe for the Dornier?

Dr. David: The Dornier, so far, has effected - I think - 10 sorties to Agalega, Mr Speaker, Sir.

SALE BY LEVY – PROPERTIES
- JULY 2005-MAY 2009

(No. B/502) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Attorney-General whether, in regard to the properties sold by levy, since July 2005 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number thereof, indicating –

(d) the size and location thereof;
(e) the names and addresses of the -
   (iii) buyers;
   (iv) sellers, and

(f) the sale value of each property.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am waiting for the reply from the hon. Master and Registrar, and same will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

MAURITIUS TELECOM - CALL SERVICES - LINE “150” - TARIFF CHARGED

(No. B/503) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Information and Communication Technology whether, in regard to the call services provided on line “150”, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain
from the Mauritius Telecom, information as to the tariff charged therefor, indicating the amount collected for each of the last five years

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Telecom that the service “150” provides local directory information to the public, and that the tariff for the service is published in the Telecom's Directory, and is publicly available and accessible. The current tariff for the “150” service is as follows -

Insofar as the last part of the Question is concerned, as the House is aware, Mauritius Telecom is a registered company and offers a variety of services, either by itself or through subsidiaries.

Mauritius Telecom, being a registered company, it is not customary in the House to disclose commercially sensitive pieces of information that pertain to its business activities, particularly in a competitive environment.

Further, Mr Speaker, Sir, the pieces of information requested are published in each of its annual audited financial statements and are publicly accessible.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, if it is published, why it that the hon. Minister cannot give figures to the House? He just said that the figures are published.

Mr Speaker: The Minister has said that the information is available in the audited account of the company and, according to our Standing Orders, the question is inadmissible.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the published accounts, it is not stated how much the ‘150’ line brings to the Government. It mentions the total revenue. Can we know from the hon. Minister how much the ‘150’ line brings?

Mr Dulull: The hon. Member has to read the notes to the account.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, when we dial ‘150’, we spend a lot of time listening to the music, which means that this department is understaffed. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he can see to it that there is a better staff?

Mr Dulull: Can the hon. Member repeat this question?

Mr Guimbeau: When we dial the ‘150’, we get music, and
this is not the purpose of the ‘150’. The ‘150’ is supposed to give service to a customer. This is why I have been asking the question, Mr Speaker, Sir. What I am asking the hon. Minister has to see to it that there is proper staff in this department, so that customers do not have to wait all this time and pay all that money.

Mr Dulull: We will look into it to reduce the queue.

**STC - MUMBAI – HORSE RACING ACTIVITIES**

(No. B/504) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Business, Enterprise & Co-operatives whether he has received representations from the Secretary General of the Association des Consommateurs de l’île Maurice, regarding the involvement of the State Trading Corporation in horse racing activities in Mumbai, India, and the use of its logo at the hippodrome of Maha Laksmi, on 29 March 2009 and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to if –

(c) the Board had approved same;

(d) its General Manager assisted the meeting and, if so, on whose invitation.

Mr Gowreesoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has received a letter dated 07 May 2009 from the Secretary-General of the Association des Consommateurs de l’île Maurice. However, before a reply could be made, the contents of the letter were published in ‘L’Express’ newspaper of 08 May 2009. Same information was aired on the radio on 08 May 2009. At my request, the General Manager of STC intervened on the radio and explained that he had been on a private visit to India and that he had attended the horseracing event on 29 March 2009. He also explained that there was no cost incurred by the STC, and one of the horse races was sponsored by the Gujadhur family and co-sponsored by Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd.

Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd. has been involved in transportation of petroleum products on behalf of STC since August 2006 to date, and has, therefore, publicised the logo of STC as the latter is one of its clients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Managing Director of Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd had invited the General Manager of
STC to attend the event, where Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd. was one of the co-sponsors. The General Manager had also received an invitation from the Mauritian organiser, Mr Naresh Gujadhur, as there was one race to be run under the Rajcoomar Gujadhur Memorial Trophy.

There has been no expense incurred by STC, and the General Manager of STC had himself footed his airways bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that, for the events of that day, there were the presence of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA), Naiade Resorts Limited, Board of Investment (BOI), Mauritius Turf Club (MTC), and the Gujadhur family who promoted their organisations all through India across the media. STC has been able also to promote itself across India without any cost. This is to the advantage of the STC, as the latter has strong commercial links with India through STC India, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd. (MRPL) and Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd.

It is a matter of prestige for displaying the logo of STC across India, and it was an opportunity not to be missed.

Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, all firms engaged in business do use advertising and promoting firms image across the globe. The business mindset has changed, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the STC has followed the path.

Since then, Mr Speaker, Sir, several new firms have conveyed their interest to work with the STC – I am tabling a list thereof.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the question of Board approval does not arise, as it did not involve any fund from STC.

It was not a meeting but an event, to which the General Manager of STC attended through a personal visit.

The event also coincided with the 41st Anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius.

**Mr Bhagwan:** The hon. Minister has stated that there is no point of asking authority by the Board to use the logo. Can we understand that the logo of STC can be used everywhere, on every occasion, without any authorisation by anybody?

(Interruptions)
Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform the House, whether it is the practice of the STC to use the logo anywhere, everywhere, without any authorisation?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have said in my reply, today, to do business, we must do marketing in a proper way, so that we can get more clients. Regarding the logo of the STC, it is because Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd. is our transport carrier for STC petroleum products.

Mr Bhagwan: Has the hon. Minister inquired or taken upon the word of the General Manager that he has settled his bill? Is the Minister aware that the airfares of the General Manager have been settled by Pratibha Shipping Company Ltd?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said in my reply that it is the General Manager who has footed the bill.

Mr Bhagwan: Has the hon. Minister any proof of that? Is there any receipt, any proof?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no need to inquire.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister inform the House how many times the logo of the STC has been displayed all over India or across India?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as I know, it is the first time.

Mr Gunness: The STC is getting into different activities, namely diamonds etc. Can I know if, in the future, they will be getting in horse racing activities also?

Mr Gowressoo: No, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jugnauth: From the answer that the hon. Minister has given to the House, would he confirm - because it seems to be now a new principle from this Government - that any officer, who would be going on private visit abroad, would be entitled to use the name of the Corporation or parastatal body in order to promote Mauritius? Is that a new policy now?

Mr Gowressoo: It is not like this, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is because of that Mauritian Event, that is, the 41st anniversary of
Independence. That event was organised by a Mauritian organiser, Mr Speaker, Sir, and that’s why STC was concerned.

Mr Bhagwan: Do I understand from the Minister that the STC would, henceforth, engage itself in the importation of horses?

Mr Gunness: The hon. Minister stated that MTPA and other bodies were there. But, can he state whether there was only the logo of the STC or that of MTPA also?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, there was the logo of the MTPA as well.

LAND BASED OCEANIC INDUSTRY PROJECT

(No. B/505) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Industry, Science and Research whether, in regard to the setting up of the Land-Based Oceanic Industry, he will state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Sir, with your permission I will reply to this question. The Land Based Oceanic Industry project is based on the commercial exploitation of deep sea water currents 1000 metres below the surface of the sea, with valuable characteristics, including a constant six degrees temperature, mineral rich and high purity. Potential applications include cold seawater air conditioning, called SWAC, premium bottled mineral water, spa and thalasso therapy, pharmaceutics, cosmetics and aquaculture among others.

An economic and oceanic technical analysis of potential sites for the land based oceanic industrial park was carried out in 2007 by Makai Ocean Engineering Incorporation.

The recommended site is near Flic-en-Flac, in view of the ease of access to the deep-sea current. Negotiations are under way to acquire land to the extent of 312 acres.

A market-sounding exercise, carried out by the Board of Investment, has demonstrated that there is potential demand for the project in the Green IT industry using cold water for cooling of Data Centres. There are currently four operators in the local data centre market, with around 20,000 sq ft rented at full capacity situated in land. There are now 13 new operators who have shown interest to
rent an additional 60,000 sq ft in the proposed Green Data Centre Park, and it is estimated that 100,000 sq ft Green Data Centre will be required by the third year of operation and 300,000 sq ft by the fifth year respectively. Expressions of interest for the implementation of the Green Data Centre will be invited by the end of this month.

It is expected that the first phase of the park’s development will principally focus on Green IT sector, which will exploit the low temperature of the water for cooling and incorporation of photovoltaic systems. Unfortunately, the site is not favourable for wind energy development. The other potential applications, such as premium bottled mineral water, are being followed up.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister inform the House whether the SIC is being taken on board for this project?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We are waiting for the expressions of interest. SIC has shown interest, and I hope it will participate.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether a study has been carried out on the impact on the tourism industry in that sector?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Not specifically, but as part of the general study, yes. It will be to the advantage of the industry, should there be an interest to set up hotels and other tourist activities in the surrounding.

Mr Bérenger: I did not catch very well what the hon. Deputy Prime Minister said. Has there been a change of venue? Because I am given to understand that, at first, the whole complex was to come out of the ground somewhere in the South East, and now I think I heard the West Coast. Has there been a change of venue? And, if yes, why?

The Deputy Prime Minister: There was no fixed site chosen. There has been a survey round the island. Three sites were chosen and, then, eventually one was a preferred site. Among the preferred sites, the North West Trou aux Biches area was included.

Mr Bérenger: The Deputy Prime Minister gives the impression that there is plenty of potential, and I think there is. Can
he tell us how is it that, whereas last year, in the Budget Speech, the land-based oceanic industry was prominently put forward as a key component of the *Maurice Ile Durable* Project. Why has it disappeared from the screen this year and we hear nothing?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, it has not disappeared from the screen. It has been going slowly along. The hon. Leader of the Opposition will appreciate that, when I make a statement, it's to announce that things are happening, and not that things will happen. As I have said, today, *- c’est dans cette question* - things are happening. By the end of this month, we will have expressions of interest, and I hope it will move forward. Initially, we started with the bottling of special water, and we are pursuing this matter.

**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, maybe, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has forgotten. Can I remind him - he says things are happening - that last year, we were told that legislation would be brought within the year concerning this project to move things forward? What has happened to the legislation?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I am told that legislation is not required at this stage for this specific project.

**Mr Ganoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, will there be any bidding process?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** We have asked for expressions of interest. We will see who comes in. It has not been easy, because it is a new technology. There are very few players in the market, but we will see to it that it happens.

**Mr Jugnauth:** Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the bottling of water, since a study has been carried out, can the Deputy Prime Minister say which markets are being targeted?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** Initially, it was the Asian market. But, I understand that it is already saturated from Hawaii and the East. We are looking at the market in the Middle East.

**Mr Varma:** Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House whether it is the University of Mauritius which initially carried out the study on the land-based oceanic industry?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** It is the Mauritius Research
CHILD ONLINE PROTECTION BILL – INTRODUCTION

(No. B/506) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Women’s Rights, Child Development & Family Welfare whether, in regard to the protection of children when using the internet, she will state -

(a) where matters stand concerning the proposed introduction of The Child Online Protection Bill, and

(b) how same has been addressed under the information security component of the National Information and Communication Technology Strategic Plan.

The Minister of Information & Telecommunication Technology (Mr A. Dulull): Mr Speaker Sir, with your permission, I wish to reply to this Question.

The Minister of Women’s Rights, Child Development & Family Welfare has, in 2008, published the National Information and Communication Technology Strategic Plan 2007-2011, and one of the issues under the Plan is the safety of children online. The main projects in that area are -

(c) the development of a Child Safety Online Action Plan, and

(d) amendments to be made to the Child Protection Act to cater for issues of child safety online.

The development of a Child Safety Online Action Plan was entrusted to the National Computer Board which set up a Committee, composed of, inter alia, representatives of the Prime Minister’s Office, the ICT Authority, the Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development & Family Welfare, State Law Office, Police IT Unit, Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, Ministry of Education, Culture & Human Resources, University of Mauritius, University of Technology, Mauritius, the Internet Child safety Foundation, and the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce & Industry. Government has, on 30 January 2009, agreed to the implementation of the Child Safety Online Action Plan that would promote Child Safety Online at national level. The Child Safety Online Action Plan also includes a provision for the Child Online Protection Bill.
Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the National Computer Board organised a round table session on the occasion of World Telecommunications and Information Society Day on 14 May 2009, whereby the provisions to be included in the legislation were discussed among stakeholders concerned.

Stakeholders have been invited to submit their proposals by 05 June 2009. Once these proposals are compiled, the drafting instruction for the Child Safety Online Protection Bill would be submitted by my Ministry to the Attorney-General’s Office.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether there is a time frame for the Bill to be introduced in the National Assembly?

Mr Dulull: Once we get all the proposals by 05 June, we will make sure that we can bring it to Parliament as soon as possible.

CITE BALANCE, PLAINE MAGNIEN – EX-CHA HOUSES – LAND PURCHASE

(No. B/507) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to Cité Balance in Plaine Magnien, he will state the number of inhabitants who have purchased the land on which stand their respective ex-CHA houses.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that 93 applications out of 154 owners of Cité Balance ex-CHA housing units in Plaine Magnien, have been received for the purchase of land on which stand the housing units.

Sir, the land on which stands the housing estate is at present under leasehold with Mon Desert and Mon Trésor Ltd., and my Ministry has already initiated procedures for its acquisition from MTMD. Once the exercise is completed, the procedures for the sale of the land on which stand the houses will be undertaken.

PLEIN BOIS – FOOTBALL GROUND

(No. B/508) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Youth & Sports whether,
in regard to the proposed construction of a football ground in Plein Bois, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Ritoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has no project in the pipeline for the construction of a football ground at Plein Bois.

However, I am informed that the *Forces Vives* of the locality of Plein Bois have requested for such a playground, and a site belonging to the Mon Desert Mon Trésor Sugar Estate has been identified in that regard.

I am also informed that, for the time being, footballers of Plein Bois are using the existing football ground of Trois Boutiques, which is situated at about two kilometres from that village.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the land, which has been identified, will be compulsorily acquired by Government?

Mr Ritoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to consult the Ministry concerned.

**CONGOMAH – COMPULSORY ACQUISITION**

(No. B/509) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to the compulsory acquisition of a plot of land in the region of Congomah, for the construction of the Blackburn Bridge, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a survey has been carried out by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit regarding the geometrical design of the re-alignment of the road and the bridge at Blackburn Road.

Once precise information to the land required for the project is received, acquisition procedures will be initiated promptly.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that the existing bridge represents a danger to the inhabitants of Congomah, may I appeal to the Government to act promptly and efficiently to construct the new bridge?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is only concerned with acquisition of land. I understand incidentally that Rs10 m. have been earmarked for that bridge. I will transmit the message to my colleague, and will make sure that this is promptly
done to avoid any mishap in future.

NTC – BUS SERVICE AFTER 21 HRS

(No. B/510) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he is aware of the problems being faced by the workers, who finish up late at night, following the decision of the National Transport Corporation to stop providing bus services after 2100 hours, and if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, prior to 29 April 2009, the National Transport Corporation (NTC) was providing late night services only along route 170 and 170A, up to 2300 hours. Such services were uneconomical to the extent that the NTC was incurring important losses.

The NTC’s present financial situation is very fragile, and it cannot afford running its buses against losses. In fact, the NTC is striving hard to cut cost and increase revenue. This aims at stopping the decline. One of the measures targets night services and it has been decided to do away with these services, which were literally draining the financial resources of the Corporation.

The NTC has informed the travelling public, through the press, of the discontinuation of the operation of night services as from 29 April 2009.

I am informed by both NTA and NTC that no official complaint has, so far, been received following this measure.

With regard to remedial action, I wish to point out that clause 26(2) of the Employment Rights Act 2008 stipulates that -

“An employer shall, irrespective of the distance between a worker’s residence and its place of work, provide the worker with free transport from the worker’s residence to his place of work and from the worker’s place of work to his residence, where the worker is required by his employer to attend or cease work at a time when no public bus service is available.”

Therefore, the onus of providing transport to workers who finish late at night rests on the employer.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, Government has been talking
a lot about 'Putting People First'. We can’t, just for the sake of economy, put people’s life at risk. Workers have to walk long distances late at night, which is a risk in itself. Others have to have recourse to auto stop. That is another situation where there is risk, and this has given move to a new generation of “van marron” now. Can I ask the hon. Minister to make an appeal to the NTC so that, instead of stopping the service altogether, it could reduce the number of buses, taking into consideration the human situation?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, hardly a few passengers were travelling at night, after 9.00 p.m., and it is practically impossible for NTC to continue this. You know that the NTC is encountering financial problems. It is difficult for the time being to consider that.

SOCIETE PIERRE BLEUE, PAS GEOMETRIQUES, FLIC EN FLAC – INDUSTRIAL LEASE

(No. B/511) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the industrial lease granted to Société Pierre Bleue on Pas Géométriques at Anna, Flic-en-Flac, he will state the date the lease was –

(a) approved, and

(b) signed.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: Time is over! The Table has been informed that PQ Nos. B/477 and B/511 have been withdrawn.

MOTION
SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebejaun): Sir, I beg to move that all the
business on today's Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

PROGRAMME-BASED BUDGET ESTIMATES 2009 – DISCREPANCIES

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been a few typing mistakes in the printed version of the Programme-Based Budget Estimates 2009 leading to inversion of figures and some slight variance in sub-totals which have resulted in discrepancies between the details of a Ministry budget with the sum set out in the Schedule to the Appropriation Bill which are listed as per the document circulated. The corrections made to the Programme-Based Budget Estimates 2009 are now being circulated (Appendix I).

These mistakes have no bearing on the Schedule to the Appropriation 2009 Bill.

Moreover, whilst the overall Revised Estimates for the financial year 2008/2009 are given in the “Statement of Budgetary Central Government Operations”, the details by programme and Ministry have inadvertently not been included in the printed document.

We are now circulating a Table of six pages at Annex I giving those details.

We are also circulating at Annex II the last page of the Revenue Estimates after page 662 which somehow had been omitted at editing and printing stage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, these referenced changes have been circulated. (Appendix II)

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development Bill (No. X of 2009) was read a first time.

Second Reading
**THE APPROPRIATION (2009) BILL**  
(NO. IX OF 2009)

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Appropriation (2009) Bill (No. IX of 2009).*

*Question again proposed.*

(3.05 p.m.)

**The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger):** Mr Speaker, Sir, especially in the present international and local economic context, of course, we agree that saving jobs is a priority. But, it should not be effected at the expense of the purchasing power of the population. Indeed, maintaining the purchasing power of the population is also a priority. The truth is that the *laissés-pour-compte* of the Budget that we are discussing now are the pensioners, widows, *les orphelins*, those benefiting from social benefits, small wage-earners and civil servants. That is the truth! They are *les laissés-pour-compte du budget que nous discutons actuellement.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, you will remember that, in March, the Mauritius Employers’ Federation requested *un gel des salaires*, a wage freeze, no salary compensation at all this year. When the hon. Minister of Finance replied to a Private Notice Question, which I put on 21 April, he gave clearly the impression -and more than the impression - that he was aligning himself on the request of the Mauritius Employers’ Federation. Indeed, repeatedly, he made reference to other countries, in particular, Singapore, where not only there has been a wage freeze but a wage decrease has been imposed. Therefore, clearly, the impression was that we are going to follow the Singapore route and go by the request of the Mauritius Employers’ Federation. Of course, this raised hell outside; wage-earners in general, pensioners, everybody, including the Opposition. We said ‘no’, we are not Singapore.

The hon. Minister of Finance has gone back on that. I won’t use any word like *capituler, céder* or whatever. He has gone back on that, and it is a
good thing. He is no longer aligning himself with the Mauritius Employers’ Federation, but he is now aligning himself with the NPC, that is, the National Pay Council. And I say that this is insuffisant. He has gone back on the wage freeze idea, but what is being proposed by the NPC is insuffisant, being given that the rate of inflation for the financial year we are considering, 2008/2009, has been 7%. It has been pointed out, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, in France, in the United States and elsewhere, there have been not only Stimulus Packages for business, for banks, for motor companies but there have also been what we could call Stimulus Packages for workers, for employees and for those who pay income tax. There has been a special increase in the lowest paid wages. There has been une diminution de la pression fiscale and this is perceived as fair whereas if it is perceived that only the private sector business is benefiting from a Stimulus Package and not des pensionnés, veuves, orphelins, handicapés and the wage earners, this can lead us to trouble. Here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to say that the hon. Minister of Finance in order to try and put this idea across that the NPC recommendations sont paroles d’évangile, the hon. Minister of Finance in the press over the last two, three few weeks, has been exaggerating the loss of revenue which would accrue to Government as a result of the International Financial and Economic Crisis and in the same vein he has been exaggerating the budget deficit of Government. I was going through my notes and only a few days ago in “Week-End” he gave a statement - only two weeks ago - that the budget deficit of Government then stood two weeks ago at 7% and, the truth is, when he delivered his speech, it stands at 3.9%. This is not fair. This is management - and I am being generous when I say ‘management’- of public opinion, which is not acceptable. The loss of revenue to Government has - finally figures before us now - been nominal. Therefore, going by the recommendations of the NTC is not reasonable, is not acceptable. The wage compensation offered is 5% whereas the inflation rate has been 7% and there is a cap, no salary earner above Rs12,000 per month is to get any salary compensation. This is not fair, c’est injuste, this is sans précédent, there has never been that case. Of course, right down the years, the big salary earners get proportionally less than the lowest, it has always been like that, but they get something. Now we cap it at Rs12,000. Not only c’est injuste, sans précédent, but it ended the work which the PRB has just done, in the public sector. The PRB went to great pains to look at relativity of jobs, of wages and so on and did a good job. With this cap not only c’est injuste, sans precedent, but it is also doing away with the work which PRB has done. Fausser le travail fait par le Pay Research Bureau! And mind you, when we cap at Rs12,000, I don’t know if the hon. Prime
Minister is aware of it, I am sure the hon. Minister of Finance probably is - a lot of simple workers are caught in that. Either right from the beginning or after few years of increments, ordinary workers will get zero salary compensation - drivers in the public sector, watchmen, carpenters, gardeners and I can go on and on like that. All of them either right from the start or after few years of increments go up above Rs12,000. So, they will get no salary compensation. This is not fair. In the private sector also clerical officers, supervisors, foremen will fall above that limit of Rs12000 and as far as les pensionnés, veuves, orphelins, lowest paid wage earners are concerned, I am sure we can afford at least this 2% additional. Otherwise what are we saying that les pensionnés, les veuves, les orphelins et les handicapés have to admit an erosion de leur pouvoir d'achat. Leur pouvoir d'achat est déjà faible. Last year, we went to terrible price increases. Inflation is still hitting us at 7% and we are telling les pensionnés, veuves, orphelins et les handicapés that they will not get at least 7%, they will get 5%; they will therefore see une érosion de leur pouvoir d'achat, déjà très entamé avec les augmentations des prix de l'année dernière et de cette année.

Therefore, I would appeal to the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance. We must review that figure of 5%, especially for les pensionnés, les veuves, les handicaps et les orphelins, those who get social benefits. Nous pouvons le faire, nous devrions le faire et il n'est pas trop tard and we must also review that Rs12,000 cap. It’s unfair, it hits at ordinary workers, messengers, as I said earlier on. We can afford this extra expenditure, we can afford this extra 2% on pensionnés, veuves, orphelins, handicapés, those getting social benefits in general and we can improve on that Rs12,000 per month cap. That is why, instead of adopter un ton aggressif, dénonçant, etc. it would rather be because c’est faisable, it can be done, it should be done. We moved from the salary freeze, the wage freeze, mais c’est insuffisant. We can and we should go one, two, three steps further as far as this 5% is concerned and the Rs12,000 per month cap is concerned.

My appeal is to the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance. I was looking at the hon. Prime Minister when the hon. Minister of Finance announced that Ministers’ salaries will be cut by Rs10,000 per month. As an afterthought, because otherwise you would, at least, have mentioned the Speaker, the Prime Minister …

(Interruptions)

Yes, I will get to myself, mais je suis bien elevé, I start with others!
As I was saying, the Speaker, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition. Why just Ministers? He does not include the Prime Minister in. I am interested also to know if Ministers are going to have a Rs10,000 cut. Is it going to be Rs10,000 for the hon. Prime Minister? No, it’s not serious! En tout les cas, let me leave that behind. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is perfectly aware que la population out there - as my good friend usually says - n'est pas dupe de ce gimmick. At this point in time, saying, after the massive increase in Ministers’ salaries, Prime Minister’s, due respect, Speaker's salaries, the recent one…

(Interruptions)

The Leader of Opposition also, of course! I am obliged to follow in that case. I am left with no choice. More seriously, Mr Speaker, Sir, Ministers have just benefited from a massive salary increase which was prescribed by the PRB. Now, this is not serious et la population n'est pas dupe and then coming to say that the entertainment of advisers will be cut, this is not serious! The advisers’ heads themselves should be chopped, not their entertainment allowance! There is an awful abuse of advisers. An awful abuse! We all know that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Therefore, let's, for example, say that consideration will be given…

(Interruptions)

I suppose it is because my good friend is now the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs that consideration will be now given to closing certain Embassies. He said that now, after the Indira Sidaya ‘saga’, we spent so many millions. I agree with the hon. Prime Minister that his nerves would have got very raw if she had stayed around him.

(Interruptions)

I can understand that. But that is no reason to open an Embassy at UNESCO, spending millions and now we are going to close not that, we are going to close Embassies. So, that also, I offer you my sympathy, hon. Prime Minister! I hope you will survive her!

(Interruptions)

I am sure that the hon. Prime Minister and the others know that la population n’est pas dupe, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I want to raise a very serious issue. We are giving a salary compensation which is insuffisant, but taking effect as from 01 July 2009. Since we are moving to a calendar year and since our practice, over years
and years, have been - we are looking backwards – that we are paying a salary compensation as from 01 July looking backwards to cover the financial year that is behind us. That has always been the practice and is the case now. The 7% inflation is for the year ending end of June. Now, what will happen as from the 01 January next year 2010? Salary earners are entitled to know, because Government is moving to a calendar year. We want to know, we are entitled to know and wage earners are entitled to know whether there will be another salary compensation calculated on a six-six. In the same way, we compare one year to one year, 12 months to 12 months, six months to six months with a salary compensation to start on 01 January. En passant, if that does take place - but I will come back to that later on - l’odeur d’élection générale might become stronger! Mind you, now they deserve more, now salary earners deserve at least 7%, I am entitled and the salary earners are entitled to know what is going to happen after the 01 January. Or are we going to be told exceptionally - since we are moving to a calendar year - that there would not be a wage compensation 01 July 2010, because we have moved to a calendar year, there will only be the next salary compensation 01 January 2011? We are entitled to an answer. The wage earners, the workers and the country are entitled to it. There is a wage compensation now as from 01 July 2009. Will there be an interim salary compensation since we are moving to a calendar year 01 January 2010 or which would pénalise les salariés doublement d’une façon inacceptable? If we are told: alright, calendar year coming, we will have the next salary compensation 01 January 2010. This will already have been made clear in the Minister’s Speech. There is need to clarify that, it is a very important point. There is need to clarify sans tarder that point and I appeal again before I leave this issue of the salary compensation and the cap thereon. I appeal again to the hon. Prime Minister and to the Minister of Finance. We can and we should improve on the 5% and we should and we can raise that plafond de R 12,000 par mois. My appeal to the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance is in that direction.

Let me move on to the projects and measures contained in the 2009 Budget, as we have been calling it, that is, the Budget we are examining now. Let me say that the measures - and the country already know, I have been surprised, I have been listening, and the country and the population is already aware of what I am saying - and the projects contained in the present Budget should be taken with a huge pinch of salt, avec une énorme pincée de sel. Because most of them have already been mentioned in last year’s Budget on 06 June 2008 or in the Additional Stimulus Package. Most of
them had already been announced. But either they never took off or the projects, the measures are *en retard* and, apart from that, there is no doubt that, as in the past, what is new, or rather a good part of what is new, in this present Budget, will remain as *effet d’annonces*, as it has been the case on 06 June 2008, as it has been the case with the Additional Stimulus Package, Mr Speaker, Sir. Therefore, yes, we must take all this with a huge pinch of salt, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, the hon. Minister himself says so much. Because in this year’s Budget Speech that is before us and before that in the press, the hon. Minister himself, I take one example, when he addressed the *Chambre de Commerce Américaine* on 23 April - that is not long ago - he said yes, I agree, implementation is not being done as it should, infrastructure projects are too slow, everything is moving too slowly; he said it. And in his Budget Speech he stressed on the necessity, I quote him in his Budget Speech: “to boost up project realisation capacity”. He went on and on, on several occasions with that in his Budget Speech. *Et c’est normal*, because this is the truth! They have been very slow in implementing measures announced projects put forward, very slow. There has been massive underspending on capital projects - left, right and centre, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I take a few examples, but I have to take more than a few examples to drive my point home. Let us start with infrastructure precisely, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let us start with *les travaux d’infrastructure* announced last year and announced again, Or *augmenter* in the additional stimulus package. *Il y a unanimité et tout le monde est d’accord qu’il y a eu une lenteur inacceptible* in implementing the projects put forward, the measures announced, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Let me take a few concrete examples. Four years after the last general election, we are still stuck, traffic congestion has deteriorated, and I remember the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Beebejaun and others saying:” *tini tini six mois trop boucou*”. After the general election of 2005:”*six mois trop boucou*”. Four years later, not only the traffic congestion problem is *entier* but, in fact, it has deteriorated. Mr Speaker, Sir. Two examples, I will tell you *ki nu ti fair ek ki zotte fine touyer par fanatisme politique* - LRT. I will come to that later on, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In terms of traffic congestion, year after year, we have heard of the two projects that are stuck. Dream Bridge is no longer a dream, now it becomes Harbour Bridge. We are so fed up with hearing Dream Bridge. The dream has turned into a nightmare, therefore, now, it is Harbour Bridge. And
Ring road, it was going to be *une alliance de mariage entre le nouveau gouvernement et le peuple, Ring Road, zero*, four years later!

Mr Speaker, Sir, I remember - I re-read his speech and so on - with what conviction last year, the hon. Minister of Finance said: No problem, Harbour Bridge and Ring Road are going to start in July 2009 as two PPP - Public Private Sector Projects. I said PPP, *projets pas pou éna!*

One year later, no longer any talk…

*(Interruptions)*

*Projet ine plote!* And that is exactly what has happened! One year later, whereas work was supposed to start on a PPP basis, we no longer talk of PPP. Now, it is worse. Because we are stuck, now we are going to set up a private company under the Companies Act. A Road Development Company! How shocking, *franchement*! We are dead against that. We are going to fight against that because it is billions of rupees involved. When we set up this Road Development Company under the Companies Act, it means that it is outside the purview of the Central Tender Board - now Central Procurement Board - as a company under the Companies Act as we have been told, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is unacceptable. This is doing a lot of damage out there in the population. That in terms of procurement. I found it rather shocking that the hon. Minister chose to mix that up with procurement issues in general saying that the ceiling of Rs15 m. for Ministries and Departments are not to go to the Central Tender Board - now Central Procurement Board - that this Rs15 m. is going to be raised to Rs50 m. You add these two together, unacceptable explosive.

Therefore, this idea of leaving the RDA - Road Development Authority - behind or creating a company under the Companies Act and, at the same time, raising the ceiling for Ministries and Departments from Rs15 m. to Rs50 m. we are dead against and we should be very careful. *J'adresse non seulement un conseil mais une mise en garde au gouvernement*: this should not be done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I gave you one example - the PPP projects. It may be half a year ago. I am no longer laughing because it is now from bad to worse, from PPP to company to build roads. We will need billions of rupees not millions. And, as far as infrastructure is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, you would remember Government announced, very proudly - the hon. Minister of Finance announced - that we will move forward because local authorities would be allowed to issue their own securities to finance infrastructure works in the town and villages. I said this is another non-starter, *zéro plombage projet!* It
was always a non-starter. As far as infrastructure is concerned, I can go on and on like that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Let me move to another important project, *MID – Maurice Île Durable*. A year ago to move towards the making of Mauritius *une île durable*, we were told legislation will come forward to set up an *observatoire de l’énergie*. One year later, it disappeared - not even a reference to it. We were told that there would be an Energy Efficiency Bill. One year later, *zero*! We were told that there will be another PPP project, - *pour faire de l’île Maurice une l’île durable*, renewable energy, clean energy - a Wind Energy Project at Bigara to produce between 25 and 40 megawatts - no longer PPP. Again, just like the Dream Bridge and the Ring Road, no longer PPP. Now reference is made one year later to the same project which has never taken off. No longer a PPP project!

Two small hydro units to produce clean energy at Midlands Dam were announced a year ago. One year later, these days, *l’appel d’offres vient d’être renvoyé une troisième fois*. And we talk of clean Mauritius, clean energy! A small project *et c’est une troisième fois que l’appel d’offres a été renvoyé*! Mr Speaker, Sir, now, the hon. Minister informs us that Government is moving forward with the big project this time, a Hundred Mega Watt Power Plant Project with tenders. Good, very good! Tenders have come out and so on, fair enough. A Hundred Mega Watt is a big project. But, at the same time, we are told that Government is going forward with the CT Power Project *sur la côte ouest*. Which is which? There is no room for years and years to come, there is no room for both things. For a dirty filthy CT Power project, 110 mega watt and another 100 mega watt project! Which is which? I think that time has come to say once for all that the CT Power Project *est bien mort*. We have no right - and the hon. Prime Minister knows it and his adviser, Joël de Rosnay, has said it – we, as a country, have no right to talk of *Maurice Île Durable* if we go ahead with the filthy project, the worse coal technology that you can find on the west coast.

We have taken a stand against the CT Power Project for years now, because there was no tender - *petits copains, gros copains*. It is a dirty coal technology that has been done away with across the world. It is very dangerous to the environment, very dangerous to the Central Electricity Board and consumers would pay at the end of the day. But now, say once and for all that the CT Power Project is dead. They have no credibility when they talk of *Maurice Île Durable*. They come forward in the Minister’s Speech with a new Hundred Mega Watt Power Plant, tenders have been issued already and, at the same time, they refuse to say once and for all that
the CT Power Project is dead for good. I think it should come from the Prime Minister himself. We cannot be taken au sérieux, if they talk of *Maurice Ile Durable* and, at the same time, they persist with this CT Power Project.

One of these days, their special advisor, Joël de Rosnay, who is a respected international scientist, has no axe or coal to grind in Mauritius. He has come out against that project all out. Therefore, I too wish to hear from the hon. Prime Minister himself that this project is dead for good.

Another thing that was announced, I do not know how many times, over the last four years. We are in trouble, we will be in trouble and there will be no real development of renewable energy so long as we will not have a strong Independent Utilities Regulatory Authority. Again, last year, it was announced; again, one year later nothing has been done, we hear no more about this Independent Utilities Regulatory Authority.

On the same issue of *Maurice Ile Durable* - good initiative to give a subsidy of Rs10,000 per household to install individual solar water heaters. Very good! We approve that. Last year, it was said that it would be time bound until 31 December 2009. And the hon. Minister, in his speech, the other day…

*(Interruptions)*

He should listen to what I am going to say! *Pas casse ki ine fini!* *Coquin qui ine commencé!*

*(Interruptions)*

Yes, listen to me carefully! He said in his speech that the response went beyond expectation. He said that there were 29,000 requests instead of some 20,000, that 14,000 have already been approved. But then he says ‘népli ena casse’. We know that the scheme has been stopped because supposedly there is no money left. Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, let us be serious and I listened carefully. Apart from that passing remark that it went beyond expectation, I expected him to say that we’ll put new funds at the disposable of the Development Bank of Mauritius to move ahead with that project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us be serious! Either it has been a success like the Minister said, beyond expectation, either it has been a success and we must move on, we must provide extra cash or there have been all sorts of *magouilles*, as has been related in the press. There have been all sorts of allegations in the press of *pseudoclients, pseudovendeurs*, very cheap products. There have been allegations that some people have obtained
Rs10,000, but have purchased maybe unworkable, very low quality, less than Rs10,000 and pocketed the difference. There have been allegations that there have been some pseudovendeurs who have obtained very cheap machinery at less than Rs10,000 and pocketed the difference. So, the point is either all this is untrue, either it has been a success and I understand that some foreign donors, who care for the environment, are saying that this is unacceptable, and I say the same thing. Either it has been a success and we must move forward, provide new funds or it stinks, then we must enquire, then we must know the truth, Mr Speaker, Sir. That is why I say I am not convinced at all by the point put forward by the hon. Minister. Pour moi, c’est un prétexte! What did he say? He did not say we don’t have money. Billions in the Maurice Ile Durable Fund! Billions of Rupees! And he did not say that we don’t have money, he said, no, there must now be a shift from the scheme that we have where people purchase, they get a subsidy to it, to – let me read that - production, shifting focus to manufacture, produce this machinery. So, in the meantime, we stop, it is a pretext, it is not serious. If it has been a success - and it should have been a success – rétablir immédiatement, donner les millions nécessaires, pas les milliards dont disposent le gouvernement. If it has been a success rétablir le scheme, a full enquiry - and I will come back to that - on whether there has been monkey business and I believe there has been, but a full enquiry and let us, of course, encourage local production of such water heaters. But we don’t stop everything, we say that the results have been beyond expectations and yet we stop, we don’t provide one cent and then we dream about local production for the future. This is not serious at all! And I appeal to Government to give the necessary funds, let’s move forward, with good control; if the control has been inadequate, change the rules of the game, give money, good control, full enquiry, encourage local production of such water heaters. But don’t stop everything in its track! This is wrong and I believe this is not to acknowledge the fact that there are lots of allegations. I think a lot of things have gone wrong. I’ll come back to that in the days to come.

Maurice Ile Durable, it’s also ethanol production; ethanol which can be used in cars, not ethanol that we produce to export supposedly, but the required quality of ethanol to be used in cars. Maurice Ile Durable, it’s also that. But I am shocked; there is no reference to that at all. Ine déjà dire : ‘bé pas faire, pé faire là, pé faire.’ No, Mr Speaker, Sir, pas pé faire narien! The enterprise that was producing low quality ethanol is nearly closing down and, in any way, we were in a situation - this is one of the things that this
Government only can do. But some time back, we were selling our raw sugar to the European Union and importing refined sugar and we thought that our European friends would say: “alright, no problem, my friend!” No, you can’t do things like that. Now, we started test, we would have had to import the refined ethanol and here we produce crude, non-refined ethanol which we export. C’est surréaliste! Petty politics have come into that, cheap politics have come into that. The result is that we are stuck. Everything is stuck with the production of refined ethanol massively, not in small units somewhere there, but it is tied up completely with the reform of the sugar industry and cheap politics have come into that. And who is paying the price? Not just the big owners because planters, workers and employees were told that they would be shareholders in these new ethanol plants; planters, workers, wage-earners, salariés are to gain something.

So, I think we must turn a page on that as far as ethanol is concerned and move ahead. This is very much part of Maurice Ile Durable and, in the meantime, we do nothing concerning ethanol and the hon. Minister of Finance tells us proudly: ‘last year, I brought down by half the customs tariff on hybrid cars. This year, he says:’mo casse paké encore, I’ll bring down by 50% on electrical cars this time.’ I saw my good friend, the hon. Prime Minister, in a hybrid car avec une jolie hôtesse de chaque côté. Of course, this is part of the set up. Therefore, I saw a picture of him, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, you must really encourage them. At the same time, the hon. Minister of Finance, over the past Budgets, has changed customs and other tariffs with the result that the importation of big cars has been facilitated. You can’t contradict yourself like that. You can’t do that! You can’t pretend to be pushing forward hybrid cars, electrical cars and, at the same time, you allow customs and other tariffs to promouvoir les grosses cylindréés.

I am not in a bad mood today. I think that the way forward is donner le bon exemple – surtout donner le bon exemple -, prendre les mesures fiscales et autres is good! You cannot leave that small hybrid car move a hundred yards and sit in an Aston Martin. This is the wrong signal. President Obama has moved forward to bring down the consumption of these big gas guzzlers. That’s the wrong signal. If we are serious, I think the Prime Minister, the Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition, everybody must set an example, must show the way, as far as the use of big cars is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir.

A last point, as far as Maurice Ile Durable is concerned. C’est le comble! There was a Parliamentary Question on that a few minutes ago. Pour moi, le comble c’est le Land-Based Oceanic Industries. A year ago,
the hon. Minister of Finance said that going ahead, full steam, with the Land-Based Oceanic Industries is a vital part of the strategy to develop renewable energy, to cut down on polluting energy. We said yes! And he announced that legislation would be passed within a year. This year, not a word in the Budget Speech! Not a word, Mr Speaker, Sir! And, yet, when I was looking at my files this morning, not only did the Minister say a lot things - I kept all these articles – but the gentleman, the learned professional in charge of this Land Based Oceanic Industries, *dans ‘L’Express’ du 21 septembre 2008 disait: “On va faire des miracles. We are going to take off like anything!”* Not a word in the Budget Speech! It is not serious at all and, yet, I believe that the potential is there. We can do much more. Before coming this morning, I was finalising my speech. We can do so much. These individual solar heaters is a good thing, but individual actions are no longer sufficient. It is a good thing; let us put more money into it. But, now, it is the States, *les gouvernements* who are serious about renewable energy, solar or wind, just to mention these two.

This morning I was reading Reuter, AFP, and so on. Two examples, Mr Speaker, Sir. In this morning AFP, it is stated that "*La Chine - which is the biggest pollueur with the US, but doing big efforts – prévoit de consacrer quelque 440 milliards de dollars dans les années à venir aux énergies renouvelables*." It is a huge country: “*440 milliards de dollars dans les années à venir aux énergies renouvelables.*” China wants to “*tripler la capacité de production d’énergie éolienne*” – wind - over a few years, Mr Speaker, Sir. And what is China trying to do? *La Chine tente de se dégager de sa dépendance au charbon.* They are moving in the right direction; not in the direction of CT Power. This morning also, a group of NGOs, including Greenpeace, said: “Solar power plants in deserts and areas where there is plenty of sun, using mirrors to concentrate the sun rays, have the potential to generate up to a quarter of the world’s electricity by 2050.”

(Interruptions)

I am just quoting that. I am not saying that this will be done. But what I am saying - and I am sure when the hon. Minister of Finance thinks about it, he’ll agree with me – is that much more, in a sustainable way, needs to be done *en faveur des énergies renouvelables*. We must put our money and our efforts where our mouth is. *Maurice Ile Durable*, yes, *mais on ne se gargarise pas de ce slogan pour ensuite faire le contraire avec CT Power, pour ne pas faire ce qu’on devrait faire concernant* solar energy and wind energy, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, my point is that some things are being done,
but, as in the case of *infrastructure*, it is in the case of *Maurice Ile Durable*. These are my two main examples.

I’ll go rapidly over a number of other projects. Concerning the food security projects, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have been provided with no figures, but the objectives are not being reached. We know that. I hope that, when the Minister of Agriculture speaks, he will give us figures. We have been provided with no figures, in fact, in terms of increasing food production in Mauritius, but we are not meeting our targets, Mr Speaker, Sir. We were promised, last year, that commercial national auction markets would be set up. Nothing has been done! A year later, we don’t even mention it in the Budget Speech. We were told that, to promote cooperation for food production in the region - Madagascar is going through some trouble, and Mozambique no - especially with Mozambique and Madagascar in mind, a regional food security company would be set up soon. One year later, not only nothing has been done, but no mention again in the Budget Speech. And, at the same time that we are not meeting our targets as far as food security, food production is concerned, *la réforme de l’industrie sucrière est en panne pour des raisons bassement politiques*. Today, especially, after what has been announced, namely *35% des petits planteurs, des salariés dans les nouvelles unités pour produire de l’éthanol, pour raffiner le sucre, pour produire des sucres spéciaux et l’énergie à partir de la bagasse, user complètement notre bagasse*, the whole reform of the sugar industry *est en panne*, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is holding Mauritius back a lot. I repeat: we must not think of today’s sugar industry as the sugar industry of Balka Saheb; that’s the past. Today, *planteurs, laboureurs, artisans* are part and parcel. If our sugar industry is going to survive, we must move forward again with the reform of the sugar industry. Otherwise, those who will pay the direst price are planters, labourers, artisans and others in the sugar industry. That brings me to *les petits planteurs*. Last year, we voted Rs125 m. for planters, labourers and artisans to have a 35% shareholding in these new enterprises: ethanol, refining sugar, and so on. One year later - at page 17 of the Budget Speech - after we had voted a sum of Rs125 m., we are still looking for the appropriate vehicle. One year later! What kind of vehicle is this? Is it hybrid, electricity? One year later, we are still looking for the appropriate vehicle to hold...

(Interruptions)

This is the kind of problem that, if you have *la volonté politique*, you can solve very rapidly. The proper vehicle is easy to find. So, it is *absence de compétence, d’efficacité, mais aussi, probablement, de volonté politique.*
We know how the planters have been suffering; le prix des fertilisants, le prix de la main-d’oeuvre, le prix du diesel. We all know that. We keep saying it. Planters sell their land; the number of small planters is decreasing.

Now, the hon. Minister says that if a Food Crop Insurance Scheme will be set up. I am sure the hon. Minister – at least, the Minister of Finance knows how difficult it is; knows that this idea has been around for years, but it is easier said than done; it must be done. But, he just comes forward and says it, without giving any details, whereas this one is a very tough nut to crack, Mr Speaker, Sir. I feel it a bit unfair to throw that at planters, that there will be a Food Crop Insurance Scheme without giving any details. I find that quite cruel, Mr Speaker, Sir. Government has announced one measure to try and please small planters, because they are angry and hungry out there. One measure - and the Minister mentioned millions - is that small planters cultivating less than 12 arpents will see their sugar cess contribution decreased by 20%. It’s a good thing. But, the small planters have their calculatrice also. They know how many small planters there are. They know what the figure put forward by the Minister amounts to. It is a good thing. But, when le prix des fertilisants augmente par des milliers et des milliers de roupies, the diesel cost and so on, you take this measure which Government presents as temporary - I don't know what is going to happen to the cess. On tourne en rond là aussi - and work it out, it amounts to Rs1,000 per year per planter. It is nearly nothing. Some of the planters worked it out immediately on Friday night. It is a good thing, but not enough at all to help small planters where they are.

I’ll move on to the fishers/fishermen. Last year, they were completely forgotten; not a word concerning fishermen. Now, I must say I’m a bit at a loss, and I hope we’ll have clarification on that. We are told that an amount of money will be put forward for 35 fishermen and not cooperatives. How are we going to choose that? What is the rationale behind that? Who is going to choose 35? Why 35? There is no explanation at all, but 35 fishermen are going to get a boat each to go and fish off lagoon. There will be five other fishing boats, we are given no details, and I must say the fishermen are not adequately represented on the Board of the Fishermen Investment Trust. If we pretend to act on behalf of the fishermen, they must be heard, they must be on the Board of the Fishermen Investment Trust. And, now, we are told that the Fishermen Investment Trust will do this and that without adequate representation. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister knows that il y a une frustration énorme dans la communauté des pêcheurs. They feel that they have been left behind, that they have been forgotten, qu’ils sont les oubliés
du développement, non seulement les oubliés mais les victimes, because fishermen are really hurt. It is inevitable, but they are really hurt by tourism developments all around the island. I wish to stress that la frustration est énorme dans la communauté des pêcheurs. I'll come back onto that in the days to come but, in the meantime, let me appeal to the hon. Prime Minister. He has received representations from la communauté des pêcheurs. They are trying to stand on their own feet. Par exemple, les éleveurs de porcs have managed to stand on their own feet…

(Interruptions)

Government has assisted them, but they have stood on their own feet.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No interruptions, please!

Mr Bérenger: I believe that Government should allow the fishermen community to move along the same way, and it is not fair not to have a full-fledged Ministry, un full-time ministre de la pêche. We talk of Mauritius already becoming a seafood hub. We talk of massive, extensive Exclusive Economic Zone and, yet, we don't have un ministre de la pêche à plein temps. Let me tell the hon. Prime Minister that this hurts the community of fishermen terribly. Ils vivent cela comme un signe de mépris. In the past, they had a full-time ministre de la pêche. I would appeal to the hon. Prime Minister to do that urgently, as a signal, but also to get results. Let us be fair. We have a Food Security Fund. Do we seriously think that a Minister can take care of agriculture, of the sugar industry and, then, when he has time left, he takes care of fisheries? Ce n'est pas humainement possible. No one, avec la meilleure volonté au monde, ne pourra s'occuper de l'agriculture, de l'industrie sucrière et s'occuper en même temps de la pêche. As I said, it is both as a signal of due consideration to la communauté des pêcheurs, but also to get results, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I’ll move on, Mr Speaker, Sir, to SMEs. SMEs have been bearing the brunt of the international financial and economic crisis for months and months. In fact, the hon. Minister of Finance, himself, at a point in his Budget Speech, while stating that most of the enterprises that have been hurt by the international economic crisis are SMEs, says it, and it is the truth. Most of those who have been afflicted, hurt, damaged by the ongoing economic crisis are SMEs, Mr Speaker, Sir. They have not been able to benefit from the additional stimulus package as they had hoped to be able to. They don't even have enough space to operate. They cannot set up buildings and so on. They are crying for additional space. They are crying for genuine
help under the additional stimulus package. And, as in the case of fishermen - I am sure the hon. Prime Minister knows - there is une frustration terrible parmi les SMEs – les petites et moyennes entreprises. They feel that they are bearing the brunt of the crisis - and they are! This morning, it was confirmed that ces petites et moyennes entreprises employ nearly half of our labour force. They have been suffering terribly, Mr Speaker, Sir. At a time like that, it is not the time for ce genre de cirque que nous avons vu à la Small Enterprises Handicraft & Development Authority. I consider it vicieux that, at a time when the SMEs need all the assistance, the advice that they can get, we are playing around with the Small Enterprise Handicraft & Development Authority. The General Manager is told to go; he goes; another one comes; he is told to go; the other one comes back!

And, as soon as the ex-manager comes back, c’est la guerre ouverte avec l’association des petits opérateurs. What is this? Is this a way to handle this vital and fragile sector of our economy? I consider what has happened at the Small Enterprises Handicraft & Development Authority shocking. We must put a stop to that. We must have people who are not out on ego trips or to quarrel with anybody who comes along. We must have a Small Enterprise Handicraft & Development Authority or an equivalent, if it is absorbing some other body that really performs. We can’t keep on playing like that. And, now, these small and medium enterprises are promised consultants. I hope Government comes forward with the right consultants; not with double-barrelled consultants - you know what I mean. There should be genuine consultants who do the work and get paid the sum that they should get paid, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, we are told that Government is prepared and is going to guarantee half of the loans, which the petites et moyennes entreprises are going to get from the banks. We will be watching. They need all the help that they can get from consultants, as far as bank loans are concerned. But, we will be watching very carefully. Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what is promised this year! A lot was promised last year! What is one of the main things hurting the petites et moyennes entreprises? Dumping! Last year, the Minister again said “soon”. The word used was “soon”.

(Interruptions)

He said “soon”! Let’s be candid about it. He must know what “soon” means! I am sure he knows what “soon” means. But, a year ago, he said there will be an Anti-Dumping Bill soon. And, one year later, we heard the hon. Minister – rightly - say suddenly that the Bill is no longer coming, and that a committee has been set up. Where? In the Ministry of Foreign
Affairs! I think they have lost their way. Now, instead of a Bill, we get a
committee in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to start looking at the
possibility of it. Let’s be serious. We must not waste time quand la survie
même des petites et moyennes entreprises is concerned. I am sure the hon.
Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance are aware that this sector,
c’est l’urgence des urgences. We are already losing, day after day, des
petites et moyennes entreprises. L’urgence des urgences, c’est le secteur des
petites et moyennes entreprises.

Let me move on to close that chapter. Earlier, I said that when you
just throw that at small planters, that there is going to be a Food Crop
Insurance Scheme, just like that, raising expectations, without a time frame,
I find that cruel. In the same way, I find it cruel that the Minister, in the last
part of his speech, promises a new university campus. Let’s correct what
needs to be corrected. Let’s get what should be working, working. I take
one example. This year, the Minister says there have been, I think, 120
tertiary students who have lost their parents and have got assistance. That is
good. But, that is not what was promised last year. I remember Members
applauding, rightly so! What was promised last year, since we are talking of
tertiary education? Government said that it would set up a Guarantee
Scheme, so that any youngster who wants to go to tertiary education will
have a loan from banks, guaranteed by Government. It was said: all
students. And this year, it is only students whose parents died or lost their
jobs and so on.

(Interruptions)

Of course, ce sont deux choses différentes! But the other one has never
taken off! There is no Government Guarantee Scheme of loans from banks.
It was promised, and it has not been done. My point is that it is not fair. As
in the case of the Small Planters Guarantee Scheme, it is not fair just to
throw, on the eve of general election, that there will be a new campus
without any time frame.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No interruptions, I said! Order!

Mr Bérenger: I will end up with poverty eradication. I grant the hon.
Minister of Finance that the intention is there to eradicate extreme poverty
and poverty in general. But, I have to listen to those who care about this
issue: l’ancien Président de la République, Cassam Uteem, the NGOs who
are specialised in that field. All of them say that, in spite of Government’s
limited efforts, we are not succeeding. Figures were put forward by the hon.
Minister of Finance this morning. I know it is not an easy nut to crack. But, that is why we should put much more effort into it. The numbers put forward by the hon. Minister himself this morning speak by themselves. On égratigne le problème de la pauvreté malgré les meilleures intentions du monde. On est en train d’égratigner, on passe à la surface, and it is a very, very tough one indeed. J’ai eu un pincement au cœur when I read that part of the speech, where the hon. Minister said proudly that 1,700 poor households have been granted corrugated iron sheets and pieces of wood. To construct what? Ile Maurice, Ile durable! Ile Maurice, le tourisme! How can we do things like that? When you drive on the motorway, you look at these poor families, these corrugated iron sheets with des morceaux de bois, it is terrible! These people cannot afford anything else. They take it, they deserve it, and they deserve much more! But, we can’t go on like that. We can’t be proud of the fact that 1,700 families have benefited from that, and that’s it! In the name of the environment, of tourism, of humanity – l’humanité tout court -, we can’t go on like that. I remember last year, in the Budget Speech, it was announced that funds are there for the construction of 774 Firinga-type houses in one year. Small houses, but not slums like we are constructing! And these little Firinga-type houses, avec un peu d’effort, avec un peu d’imagination, with plants, trees, gardens and so on, c’est humain, on peut y vivre. Zéro! This year, zéro! I understand that work has not started on a single of these 774 Firinga-type houses that were promised. I could go on and on. Il y a une longue liste des projets annoncés, annoncés une deuxième ou une troisième fois, qui n’ont jamais démarré, qui sont demeurés à l’état d’effet d’annonces qui progressent trop lentement.

We will see in the next six months, before the next Budget, whether the project realisation, improvements which the hon. Minister of Finance is after, will have improved or whether things will carry on the same since the last Budget of June 2008 and the Additional Stimulus Package.

I have just mentioned the Additional Stimulus Package, and this brings me to my next point. I don’t like the fact that, in the Budget Speech, there has been no transparence at all, as far as the only new part of the Additional Stimulus Package is concerned, because all the rest was repackaging, infrastructure, PRB and what have you. The only new element in the Additional Stimulus Package was loans from public funds to private firms. I don’t like the fact that there has been no transparence at all in the Budget Speech. We were entitled to know where things stand, how many firms have benefited so far, and how much. We were entitled to that, and I’ll come forward with that, Mr Speaker, Sir. This applies to all the firms
that have benefited and not just World Knits. We want to know why, how much, under what conditions. I’ll come back to that. But I repeat that I don’t like the fact that we have been provided with no information as at to date about funds that have been made available either by the Government or the SIC - both.

As far as Rodrigues is concerned, I hope the hon. Prime Minister is aware que le mécontentement gronde, enfle à Rodrigues, and it is very unhealthy. I read carefully statements from the Head of the Regional Assembly, the Regional Government. His last statement is very dangerous. The Prime Minister is looking carefully at me. I won’t go further, but his comment was very dangerous, parce que le mécontentement gronde, le mécontentement enfle. What happens there to the tourism industry will be proportionately hundred times more important than in Mauritius. If the tourism industry goes down in Rodrigues, a lot of things will go down, et c’est ce qui pend au nez du secteur touristique rodriguais. They feel méprisés; they feel that they are not listened to. The Government can tell me that this is wrong, but we are talking of perception and on what perception peut déboucher. We must act fast. We must rebuild un climat entre les autorités de l’île principale et les autorités de l’île Rodrigues. They have made certain requests; they have read and listened to the Budget Speech. They feel that they have not been listened to, and that there will be licenciements starting in the tourism industry of Rodrigues very soon, Mr Speaker, Sir. I’ll come back to that also, addressing myself to the hon. Prime Minister, but I believe there is need to act urgently, and to do much more than what has been mentioned in the Budget Speech, Mr Speaker, Sir.

My last point will probably be more political than until now. I believe that le gouvernement de l’Alliance Sociale and the hon. Minister of Finance - I’ll come back to that later on; je ne veux pas personnaliser les choses. I am going to talk about the team, le gouvernement de l’Alliance Sociale, l’équipe actuelle - have lost credibility. They are no longer crédibles, because of the way they have behaved towards the international financial and economic crisis. Ils ne sont plus crédibles et, aujourd’hui, ils vont à l’autre extrême; ils cèdent à la panique, and I’ll say why.

The Government and the hon. Minister of Finance have gone from one extreme to the other extreme. For months and months, Government and the hon. Minister of Finance were in what I could describe as a denial mode. No, we won’t be hurt! No, we are resilient! At one point, I remember that, my friend, the hon. Minister of Finance, even said - he has probably forgotten about it - that he had a vaccin.
(Interruptions)

That was before he became a doctor!

So, the denial mode was such that, as late as June 2008, my friend, the hon. Minister of Finance, was predicting a bumper crop. A year ago, after the international financial and economic crisis had been battering the whole world, here, we were still expecting in 2009, a bumper crop, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, we moved from one extreme to the other. When I listen to the hon. Minister of Finance’s speech, now he quotes all the most pessimistic reports you can find. I am sure he told his staff to go round, dismiss all the positive or slightly positive reports and bring up all the most pessimistic ones, and he quoted one after the other. Before, it was bumper crop, when there was a major cyclone all around. Now, he quotes the most pessimistic, alors que certains - I don’t necessarily share their views - the big brains, big institutions use expressions which the hon. Minister of Finance had been using. Green shoots! I am not saying that I share all his opinion, but this morning Nobel Prize winner, Paul Krugman, says the following -

‘I will not be surprised to see world trade stabilise, world industrial production stabilise, and start to grow two months from now. I will not be surprised to see the move to positive GDP growth in the United States and maybe even in Europe in the second half of the year.'

I don’t necessarily share his opinion, but I am saying that we can’t do that. Last year, we were quoting all the over optimistic reports and views. One year later, we have moved from bumper crop to panic. This is not the way to steer the country en ces temps difficiles, Mr Speaker, Sir. As a result of this denial mode, the fact is that all his main predictions for this year 2009 have gone wrong. It should have been possible not to be blind a year ago, to see that there would be no bumper crop coming. One short year ago, on 06 June, he predicted that GDP would grow by 6.2%. Today, it is 2 to 2.2 %, but I don’t think we’ll reach that. I hope I am proved wrong, but I don’t think we’ll reach that. From 6.2% bumper crop, a year ago - not a year ago, six months ago - to 2 to 2.2%. As far as FDI is concerned, bumper crop again! We were going to get Rs15 billion of FDI this year, 2009.

In his Budget Speech he says:’’ may go to 5m.’’, that is, maximum of, from 15 to less than 5m. What worries me more and I remember at one point the Minister said yes, it is a good point. I have been worried sick over our current account deficit, the deterioration of our current account deficit over the past months. Now we are reaching breaking point. Our current account deficit is now at 12.6% of GDP. This is unsustainable, one of the highest in
the world, way above the precautionary figures of the IMF, the World Bank and others. We have been having a Balance of Payment surplus for years now for the first time, we are going with that kind of current account deficit, we are going to move into a Balance of Payment deficit, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the hon. Minister of Finance will agree that je sonne la sonnette d’alarme depuis des mois et des mois concerning our current account deficit and now he warns us in diplomatic language that we might move in the months ahead into a precarious external balance situation. I understand that the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius is even more worried than the hon. Minister of Finance, and we should all be very worried, this is a very, very dangerous situation and that is why we have gone back to the IMF, the so-called flexible line of credit, this new facility. I don't go along with the IMF and their haut-parleurs in Mauritius which present this new facility as une récompense; only les bons élèves will get this récompense. When you go to the IMF either you go with new conditions or you agree to conditions that are already there. As I said this morning, I was a bit surprised nevertheless that in his Budget Speech the hon. Minister of Finance did not make any reference either to the IMF or to this new facility, this flexible line of credit. The point is that the IMF is in trouble, not just the world economy; the IMF no longer knows how to break even, how to lend its money. As I said this morning, October last they came up with a new flexible arrangement – flop - not one taker, la honte, not one country across the world came forward to utilise this new flexibility. With a red face the IMF now comes with another facility which, as I said, Turkey described as too expensive. I am a bit surprised that the hon. Minister of Finance, this morning, could not tell me exactly how much we will pay, how much it will cost us in terms of retainer fee. You don't get any loan flexible or not from the IMF for nothing. So, I am bit surprised that the hon. Minister of Finance has not been able - I think he should clear that in his summing up or even before that but, at least, at summing up point, he should clear that.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have two last remarks. Of course, everybody has been putting oneself the question: what does that Budget, Action Plan for 18 months, say as far as general election is concerned? We know that the Constitution provides that five years to the day after the last election the
Parliament stands dissolve. So, we have to have general election next year. Of course, everybody, including us, tried to read between the lines or the missing lines - I will come to that, because there has got missing lines in that document. What does it say? Well, first of all, there has been clearly a zig zag de dernière heure; clearly, the hon. Minister of Finance was going on and on with that budget de transition. He even said that he was going to be short. It was quoted in the press as saying it was going to be short, it is a budget de transition.

Then I think the hon. Prime Minister came: ki transition, Action Plan for 18 months! Why? Why this zig zag from transition, exercice comptable to action plan for 18 months? You remember what point I raised concerning the salary compensation earlier on. We will see. But why this zig zagging à la dernière minute? And what has been the result of this zig zagging, Mr Speaker, Sir? It was un discours très baclé, bits and pieces, un collage, jumping from here to there and then back inevitably because I understand that my friend, the hon. Prime Minister, put his foot on the budget de transition at the last minute. So, the hon. Minister of Finance has to run left, right and centre to faire un collage pour un Action Plan de 18 mois. Il y a anguille sous roche; il y a clairement anguille sous roche and I tell you, Mr Speaker, Sir, certainly it is the first time in our history because my friend, the Prime Minister, put his foot on the budget de transition at the last minute, we ended up last Friday without having estimates, first time in the history of Mauritius. But, Mr Speaker, you had to stand up, with due respect, and to say that we have been informed by the Ministry of Finance that estimates ‘naïba’ - you did not say that - words to that effect, Mr Speaker, Sir. And today not adding insult to injury, it is incredible, today we are provided with documents, a dozen pages missing from the estimates, an important document. We discussed that on Monday, and these figures, for us to be able to compare last year to this year, what has been achieved and so on, Ministry per Ministry, we looked all over the place; and the explanation we have it today, it has been circulated but, of course, un bouc émissaire, printing press now, c'est la pression du travail, travail baclé, de dernière minute, estimates not ready, when ready without some parts thereof, Mr Speaker, Sir. Difficult to interpret all that, whether election this year or next year with that proviso what is going to happen to the wage compensation now and possibly in January. I tended to think that the Budget, le budget collage, the Action Plan for 18 months, that it was a sign that election won't come this year.
Apart from the content of the wage compensation and the budget, there are also other things. Whilst the Minister was delivering its Budget Speech, we were watching - the body language, les expressions sur les visages, especially my friend, the hon. Prime Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is the first time in my long career as a Member of Parliament, that I thought at Budget presentation that I was in a veillée mortuaire. First time! The Prime Minister - I don't know what has happened, but terrible. So if you go by the body language, les expressions tout cela, I sympathised with my good friend, hon. Dr. Boolell, five times he tried to …

(Interruptions)

Fizette lor fizette. We will see, but the Prime Minister knows me, he knows that if elections come this year, we will be ready and the country will be ready, I am sure. We are a shining example, as far as the Electoral Commissioner is concerned and the Electoral Commission is concerned and so on. If it comes, we will be ready. I think, as I said, that the elections would not come this year, but it is possible que l’anguille qui est sous la roche est plus rapprochée que prévue. En tous les cas what I want to say is le pays fait avant tout les frais de l’incompétence du gouvernement de l’Alliance Sociale. Et c’est cette incompétence qui explique the very low implementation of projects and proposals in last year’s Budget, in the Additional Stimulus Package, in this year’s Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I said, I do not wish at all to personnaliser les choses, I think this is unfair. Je parle de l’équipe gouvernementale de l’Alliance Sociale. When we look at non-implementation, when we look at what should be done and is not done, I say that le pays fait les frais de l’incompétence de l’équipe de l’Alliance Sociale. And this Alliance Sociale team is failing the country miserably, Mr Speaker, Sir. Here, we represent an alternative. L’alternatif!

(Interruptions)

En passant, l’honorable ministre des finances…

(Interruptions)

Ine rier, le 1er mai même zotte fine rier! En passant, Mr Speaker, Sir, l’honorable ministre des finances has tried de créer une diversion - that we must present an alternative Budget. There is no country in the world, including the UK! We make proposals - and I will come to that - but it is not the duty of the Opposition to come with a detailed alternative Budget. Nowhere in the world! And they never did it, of course, Mr Speaker, Sir. But we come with proposals and in the course of the speech which I have just made, there are numerous proposals that I have already made Mr
Speaker, Sir. What I shall add is what is required above all, is a competent Government team, not only to announce Budget and measures, but to implement them. This is the real question. What is required, what we proposed is a competent team, not only to put forward ideas, but to implement them and not to satisfy itself with effet d’annonces. We need a team that will deliver, as far as infrastructure, Maurice Île Durable, petites et moyennes entreprises are concerned. What we need - these are amongst our proposals. Qui fait les frais du chaos, de l’incompétence des scandales à la STC, CEB, Air Mauritius, DBM, CNT ? All this is hurting Mauritius, is preventing us from developing the way we should and that team is responsible for that. What we propose is to clean toutes ces écuries d’Augias, these different and vital parts of our economy. We have said also que nous allons défaire some of the things which this Government has done: taxer l’épargne, national residential property tax, retirer certains avantages aux petits planteurs. We propose de revenir sur tout cela, Mr speaker Sir. We propose to come back and complete la réforme de l’industrie sucrière with the planters, the workers, the wage earners in general. We are wasting time, we propose something different. We propose to go back to la démocratisation de l’éducation, as my friend, Steeve Obeegadoo, channeled it through, Mr Speaker, Sir. And, today, I am sure hon. Dr. Bunwaree realises that par fanatisme politique les torts faits et la situation dans laquelle on se retrouve aujourd’hui, la démocratisation de l’économie. We propose to go back to the LRT - Light Rail Transit - system today par fanatisme politique. We had been working with the World Bank for three years step-by-step to get the Light Rail Transit system sur les rails if I may say so, so that one day the LRT would be running from Mahebourg to Goodlands in the north through Port Louis. A lot of effort is put in it aujourd’hui; all the experts, beginning with the Prime Minister’s expert, special adviser, Joel de Rosnay. He says it. Everybody knows that an LRT system is inévitable. We wasted four years; we mean to come back with that. What they have done worth keeping, we will keep. Certainly, nous ne ferons pas preuve du fanatisme politique dont ils ont fait preuve concernant la réforme de l’éducation, la démocratisation de l’économie, le LRT and so many areas where a lot of progress had been made. Beaucoup de chemin a été parcouru. We propose to do all this and, in due course, other measures including budgetary measures. But we are not going today to come with detailed budgetary measures. We will do so when the time comes and, in the meantime, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are making all the proposals, criticisms first, proposals after. Mr Speaker, Sir, in a few months’ time this year or next year, the electorate, la population fera un choix aux élections générales.
I will end up by saying des mois difficiles nous attendent, il y a des mois difficiles devant nous. Ce que je souhaite, je souhaite à la population de faire le moins possible les frais de la crise financière et économique internationale et de l’incompétence de l’équipe gouvernementale actuelle.

Thank you, Mr speaker, Sir.

At 4.48 p.m. the sitting was suspended

On resuming at 5.22 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair (5.22 p.m.)

The Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as expected, the Leader of the Opposition has criticized the Budget. Of course, it is his role to do so. But, however, I am afraid to say that I do not think anybody in this country would have really - les bien-pensants - been impressed by the arguments that have been put forward. I do not want to qualify the speech. Je ne veux pas utiliser des qualificatifs parce que j’ai essayé de suivre, car il y a des points qui ont été soulevés, qui ne sont pas bons pour certaines raisons. I must say that, in my opinion, the arguments have remained hollow.

The Opposition is fully aware, at least, must have been fully aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir that the world is going through one of its worse crisis of all times. Sauf à la fin du discours du Leader de l’opposition, je ne l’ai pas entendu parler de la crise financière internationale, aucune analyse, aucun état de situation. Juste à la fin de son discours, j’ai entendu le mot prononcé une fois.

But the Opposition should have been aware - I hope the other Members are not going to enter in the same direction - that the world is going, in fact, to one of the worse crises of all times. And yet, listening to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Opposition seems to be behaving - and listening to other criticisms from outside that I have heard from them - as if everything is normal. Comme si c’est un budget de routine, comme d’habitude, etc. Mais ils n’ont peut-être rien compris ou bien ils font semblant de ne rien comprendre.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, everything is not normal in this present world today. Le Leader de l’opposition a soulevé certains points. Je ne vais pas revenir sur tous parce que de toute façon certains seront repris par mes collègues. Par exemple, il a commencé en parlant de la pension universelle; il a parlé de la compensation salariale, mais il nous demande de faire des choses que lui-même n’a pas fait, soit il n’a pas pu faire ou bien des choses
qu’il n’a pas pensé à faire. En 1982, je vous rappelle que j’avais proposé 30% mais lui il n’avait donné que 8%. Donc, je ne vais pas m’attarder là-dessus. C’est juste pour dire que si on vient ici pour dire des choses juste pour le bien de causer, à ce moment là on ne peut pas faire un débat d’un certain niveau. Je m’attendais moi, à ce que le Leader de l’opposition vienne nous dire effectivement quelle est la situation dans le monde, quelle est la situation sur le plan national, quelle est la position de l’opposition, comment ils entretiennent l’avenir de l’île Maurice, etc. Mais, on n’a pas eu de tels arguments.

M. le président, pour aller rapidement sur certaines choses, je pense qu’il a été quand même sobre dans sa position. Donc, il était dans un bon mood comme il a dit et je n’ai pas envie de gâcher ce mood. Mais je dois dire que j’aurais pu prendre les chiffres des grands paramètres économiques qu’on a l’habitude de prendre en considération au moment de la présentation du budget et puis les comparer. En 2004-2005 - vous étiez avec nous, M. le Deputy Speaker, et vous savez combien on a analysé ce qui se faisait quand ils étaient au pouvoir et nous avions toujours dit - lui-même il l’avait dit - que l’île Maurice était dans un état d’urgence économique. Leur propre gestion était qualifiée par eux-mêmes comme état d’urgence économique. Les paramètres, que ce soit du déficit budgétaire, que ce que soit pour la dette publique - aujourd’hui on nous demande de donner des chiffres absolus, de ne plus comparer ce qui est comparable; le pourcentage du GDP non ça ne les intéresse plus. Alors que la méthode de calcul avait été changée par eux pour que les chiffres paraissent plus à leur avantage - tout ça avait été fait quand ils étaient au pouvoir, M. le Président.

M. le président, j’ai tant de choses à dire sur l’éducation, sur les ressources humaines, sur la culture et des arts que je ne voulrais pas trop entrer dans les détails pour répondre point par point à ces idées qui ont été mentionnées. Juste pour vous dire que je n’ai pas compris ou alors j’ai mal entendu. Le Leader de l’opposition a apprécié - je pense - que le salaire des ministres soit diminué par R10,000. Il a dit qu’il va suivre lui aussi, donc j’ai l’impression qu’il y aura un effort de son côté, mais de quel pourcentage ou de quel quantum, je ne sais pas. Je pense que la population s’attend à savoir et peut-être que les autres vont suivre. Que chacun à son tour se mette debout et dise à la Chambre quelle serait leur position là-dessus !

(Interruptions)
Le MSM a déjà dit oui. C’est le Leader de l’opposition qui a mentionné les advisors, etc., il ne faut pas quand même passer dans l’amnésie. Il ne faut pas oublier que pendant les deux ans où lui-même était Premier ministre, il y avait dans les 20 ou 22 advisors à son ministère. Si on revient sur ce que ces advisors récoltaient avec tous les extra boards, etc. on ne finira jamais.

Donc, laissez-moi sortir un peu de ce piège, M. le président, pour venir plus concrètement sur le Budget qui a été présenté, Budget 2009, juillet à novembre/décembre pour dire que, the 2009 Budget has, in fact, been presented, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, against a backdrop of international financial crisis - as I was saying - and world contraction in demand for goods and services.

As an open economy dependant on international trade, Mauritius is hard hit as never before by recession in its major markets in Europe, with the sharp drops in tourism, and especially textiles; and these two are the major economic locomotive driving force for us. We must admit, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that it is indeed - I have no other word to qualify it - a miracle that we managed to achieve positive growth, thanks largely to the reform programs initiated by this Government on taking office. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment, because he has constantly been explaining the situation to the population since the beginning.

First of all, there is the difficult situation that we inherited, then there were the squelettes dans les placards and we had what was happening on the international front, sur le plan de WTO, etc. On était en plein dans le système et il fallait réagir. He did all he could and, today, in the world worst crisis, this Budget has been presented and, I think, it is our duty to congratulate him for the courageous work that he has done.

At a time, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when some countries - if we follow the news well we would agree - are cutting down on wages, whilst others are reducing the number of working days, the Government has set up a job saving fund to protect the most vulnerable. This is the idea that has to be conveyed to our population. And we, in Government, really believe that protecting a family from the loss of a job, even of at least one member of the family, is the surest way to protect workers and, therefore, alleviate poverty. We fundamentally believe in this principle. Unfortunately, instead of making constructive criticisms, the Opposition is seeking to hold the country to ransom by trying to play on the sentiments of workers to whom the entire truth, I must say, is not being told by them. The Opposition is well aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the Minister of Finance & Economic
Empowerment manoeuvered in a real whirlwind of financial constraints. And his marge de manoeuvre was extremely limited. Yet, he has been able to do much more than a mere balancing act.

This Budget is indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, well-balanced and has been able to blend economic reforms and economic stimulus measures while providing, in the present circumstances, adequate safety nets to the poorer segments of the population. Of course, we would have liked to do much more avec la compensation salariale. Nous aussi nous avons le même cœur et peut-être mieux encore. On aurait voulu faire le maximum. Moi aussi j’ai été ministre des finances; nous savons très bien qu’au moment de la compensation salariale il faut faire un petit geste en fonction des travailleurs pour voir si on arrive à donner même cinq roupies en plus, ou dix roupies au maximum. Et quand les experts viennent nous donner des chiffres, à quoi correspondent ces dix roupies sur le plan total?

(Interruptions)

Nous savons comment cela fonctionne. On aurait voulu faire plus, mais c’est la situation qui exige qu’on fasse ce qu’on est en train de faire.

The Opposition, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, merely states - and this is their latest slogan and I have just heard it from the Opposition - Mauritius has to reinvent itself. Pourquoi réinventer? Maurice peut-elle être réinventée? Réinventer quoi? Réinventer la roue! But they have nothing concrete to propose! Le Leader de l’opposition, à la fin de son discours, a fait certaines petites propositions d’intention générale. Mais comment y arriver? Quel est le modus operandi? Quel est le système à être utilisé pour faire ce qu’il veut? Rien n’a été dit à ce sujet. So, what is the alternative in this conjuncture, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? They haven’t the faintest idea!

The Opposition has also accused Government of announcing projects but not implementing them. I, too, have been Minister of Finance. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for someone, who, in the recent past, had been a Minister of Finance, and even a Prime Minister, I think it smacks of a demagogical attitude.

We all know that projects are announced after having been vet out very seriously at the level of experts in the Ministry of Finance and other Ministries and with other experts of other Ministries. When they come to Budget proposals, then there is a whole load of works that goes on. In some cases, projects cannot continue for certain reasons, but in many other cases projects do continue but they take their time, depending on the nature of the projects. Some projects announced today can be implemented maybe in
five, six, or ten years later. Alors, ne venez pas nous dire que ce ne sont que des annonces. What is true, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that this Budget provides for some two hundred measures to accelerate development, create the conducive environment and provide safety nets to the vulnerable. While we have in this Budget attended to the immediate needs of the nation in the context of the unprecedented turmoil that has shaken the world economy, we have not ignored the path we need to follow in order to steer the economy to ensure a better, more prosperous and certain future for our fellow citizens.

As the House is aware, we laboured considerable efforts in the past few years to get the economic fundamentals right and put the economy back to the track of recovery. This has permitted the country to withstand the adverse tidal wave of economic slowdown with positive economic growth. We have weathered the storm, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We have defied the challenges of an erosion of our sheltered market, turned the 36% drop in sugar prices to our advantage by modernising that sector, reducing our production costs and introducing innovative products as well as utilising former waste products to better uses. All these are happening in the era of this Government. Once again, I wish to congratulate the Minister of Finance for this situation today.

Let me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, come to the question of infrastructure. There are so many things in that Budget, but the two things that I would like to dwell upon, one very shortly, because I am sure that my colleague, the Minister of Public Infrastructure, will elaborate more on them. But the second, of course, concerns my Ministry with culture also added to it.

Insofar as infrastructure is concerned, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius suffers from an acute deficit in infrastructure. This is costing us heavily in terms of forgone benefits. However, this clearly did not start with this Government. Successive Governments came, but did not succeed in addressing the thorny issue of adequate infrastructure reflecting the development needs of the country. Fortunately, this Government is addressing the issue. This Budget will launch the largest investment programme ever in the history of Mauritius.

It is, therefore, with great relief that we ought to welcome this long overdue investment in infrastructure. The funds proposed to be allocated for Government-driven infrastructure projects in road construction, harbour and airport developments exceed Rs45 billion for the next three years. This excludes Public Private Partnership Projects which is estimated at some
Rs127 billion, of which some Rs100 billion are earmarked for the development of the New Town at Highlands over the next decade. When we aggregate the investment in all these projects, we obtain a colossal sum that will constitute an autonomous expenditure. This injection, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has a very significant multiplier effect on output, income and jobs, and should ensure sustained rapid growth for the years to come.

With this comprehensive investment to make good the deficit in infrastructure, the Social Alliance Government is not catering only for the immediate present, but is laying the foundation for a modern Mauritius for decades ahead, *un avenir assuré pour nos enfants*.

As in other areas, Government has come with a forward-looking plan that is proactive and takes Mauritius into a future age. It is translating our vision into reality. That is why the Budget, which perhaps at the start was considered as a transitional Budget, progressed to an action plan because the Government’s vision goes beyond the short-term.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the big advantage with the investment in infrastructure is that in the long-term it will facilitate the production of goods and services, thus earning the country billions of rupees in foreign exchange; it will equally reduce our production costs and will make us more competitive internationally.
The many road projects that this Government will build will bring the country to further shrinking dimension and facilitate both business and social interaction, and eliminating the divide - very important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - between rural and urban areas. It will be transforming Mauritius into a city-State. More importantly, it will further diversify the economy. We all know that it has been said that the construction of the economy is a growth stabiliser. So, I cannot but welcome all the projects concerning the infrastructure of this country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to education. I am deeply pleased that my colleague, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment, has maintained education as having pride of place and as among the top priorities of Government action. I am sure we all understand the reason behind this.

The figures speak for themselves where for the entire financial year 2008/2009 - last year’s financial year - the budget allocation was Rs8.3 billion. It has now moved for the next six months to Rs5.3 billion for the half year whereas for last year it was Rs8.3 billion. So, the figures speak for themselves. If we needed any further evidence, we could only bear in mind, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir,

the following three main principles insofar as education is concerned as underlined by this Budget Speech –

“(i) the Budget has assured the perennial necessity of free education, the only guarantee for equity in our system;

(ii) the Budget has also not questioned the provision of free transport - itself a guarantee for facilitating access and give equal chances to all, and

(iii) the Budget has further stimulated the development of a knowledge hub through massive additional investment, especially, in the tertiary sub-sector.”

It could not be otherwise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for Education and Human Resource Development are, in fact, the foundation on which we want to build our future society. We have been saying for years that our people are our best assets. Our educational system in spite of being continually challenged at various levels and sometimes also by various pressure groups,
has served the needs of the nation well. However, time is changing and changing fast so that we need to be continually innovating, offering new facilities and developing new instruments which will equip us and, especially, our children to face the daunting challenges on the world arena.

We can take lessons, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from our own past history, we can tap our strengths and fashion resources to the sharp cutting competitive edge. In this respect, the Labour Party always comes with new ideas. We are all aware of the rapid evolution of our economic base which has shifted over the last 50 years from a monocrop agriculture economy in the 1960s to a textile-dominated manufacturing base in the 1970s and a service economy with heavy emphasis on knowledge, the financial sector and the ICT sector by the turn of the last century.

Government, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now wants the economic base to be broadened further so that the nation becomes more resilient to global changes. With globalisation, the Mauritian economy has no choice but to open up and compete with the economies of other countries, while efforts have to be sustained to make of Mauritius *une île durable*. To make that happen, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has no other solution than to strengthen its capacity to service the region. In fact, if we want the emergence of the knowledge economy, it will call for a re-engineering of our education and HRD systems.

It is in keeping in mind the abovementioned challenges that this Government wishes to bring about fundamental reforms to the Education and Training Sectors. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in November 2008, my Ministry published the Draft Education and Human Resource Strategy (2008-2020). This plan has as overall mission –

- to develop a culture of achievement and excellence;
- to foster innovation and to generate new knowledge, and
- to ensure learning opportunities accessible to all.

We have, in a first instance, collected and studied all observations, proposals and counterproposals which have been obtained from the stakeholders once the plan was made public. I am glad to inform the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we have already embarked on a number of consultations on major issues with stakeholders, with a view to finalising the strategic plan. I must here place on record the determination of all parties concerned to work towards the general good of the learners.
I wish to reassure the hon. Leader of the Opposition that whatever we find good in what is done before us had been maintained. Of course, it is normal; we have to think of the children and the children first. So, this plan takes into consideration whatever has been done before, whatever proposals that were made before and that were good proposals. We are having such consultations with the stakeholders and they are ongoing; and we have targeted the development of an Implementation Plan that is properly coasted and time framed for the month of October, this year. An implementation proper of the plan is scheduled for the beginning of 2010.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me come to the various subsectors in the world of education to give the House an overview of the present functioning and the plans for the future. Let me start by the pre-primary subsector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Concerning the strategic objectives of this subsector, this Government is moving towards the fourth year of its mandate and under the Government programme we committed ourselves to –

(iv) review the role and function of the Pre-School Trust Fund;
(v) set up a centre for Early Childhood Development, and
(vi) implement a phased-programme to construct pre-primary section in primary schools.

It is our goal, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to ensure that all children in the Republic of Mauritius, aged between three to five years, have the opportunity to develop their individual, intellectual, socio-emotional and psycho-motor skills to the best of their capacity. We need to build the confidence and self-esteem in learning that will not only prepare them for the next level, that is, primary school, but more importantly, lay the foundations for learning that will support them throughout their lifetime.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have come a long way in the last four years. Last year we revisited, as you know, the legal and institutional framework for the pre-primary sector and came forward with the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (ECCEA) which replaced the Pre-School Trust Fund.

This new organisation would contribute to strengthen the foundation of the Early Childhood Care and Education programmes in Mauritius, thereby preparing for the emergence of a ‘Centre of Excellence’ that would serve the region, especially countries that are already engaged in promoting Early Childhood Care and Education as part of what we call “Education for
All” goals (EFA). A few measures have been initiated in support of the above, and I’ll mention only three of them -

(d) finalisation of the new National Curriculum Framework (NCF);
(e) development of the Manual of Procedures for the pre-primary sector to address issues pertaining to registration procedures, supervision of pre-primary units in terms of norms and standards, Health & Safety, Pedagogical Best Practices, and also alignment of pre-school services to the principles of the Child Rights Convention (CRC);
(f) participation and involvement in the integrated development project within identified pockets of poverty to address the problem of ‘out-of-school’ children.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to ensure that all poor children of pre-primary ‘schools going age’ attend school. I wish to inform the House that we have this year, to date, ensured the integration of about 415 children who were out of school. The programme ensures the provision of food, school materials, school uniforms, pedagogical materials, free transport facilities and psychological support to these children.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have successfully addressed the issue of equity and access. In the last Budget Speech, attention was drawn to the issue access, whereby some approximately 5,000 three-year and four-year old children (representing about slightly more than 15% of the age group, as per 2007 figures) were not attending pre-primary schools.

On en a entendu parler plusieurs fois, M. le président. Si les enfants – plus de 15% en 2007 – ne vont pas à l’école pré-primaire (maternelle comme on dit) et après deux ans, à l’âge de cinq ans, se retrouvent avec d’autres qui ont été à l’école pré-primaire, ce retard ne pourra jamais être rattrapé.

We had to do something, and you understand the energy I am devoting to this cause. As a result of intensive action taken at the level of my Ministry and by the ECCEA, that is, the authority, and other stakeholders also I must say, we have been able to reduce this deficit from more than 15% to, today, some 7.6% only, in the course of about five to six months. As at date, some 92.4% of the three-year and four-year old children age group are attending a pre-primary school.

The infrastructure is being improved – I am talking of pre-primary - and a phased-programme has been embarked upon to construct pre-primary
units in primary schools with focus on some specific and selected areas, especially as L’Avenir, Rivière des Anguilles, Barkly, Palma, and other places. These places have already been earmarked, and this is why I am mentioning them.

We have invested in the training of our human resources. And regional resource centres are also being set up to provide support services to parents, educators, managers of private pre-primary schools, and the community at large.

A number of school-based projects have also, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, seen the light of day. Hence, all the ECCEA pre-primary schools are being equipped with computers and the current traditional teaching and learning method will be reinforced with new multimedia tools and technologies in the schools, of course, but also – and I stress on that - in the classrooms. We are seeing to it that those pre-primary schools students have the possibility of being taught through multimedia technologies. This, in itself, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is a major breakthrough.

In the context of our strategy for development of the Early Childhood Care and Education, my Ministry, jointly with the ECCEA and with the support of the UNDP, has embarked on an initiative for international networking and partnership. A collaborative programme has been discussed with the Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD) and the Ministry of Education of Norway. It provides prospects for development of collaborative programmes with the University of Oslo, which may provide the technical assistance to set up a “Special Needs Education” Unit for Early Childhood Care and Education.

The question has been raised in this Parliament many times. Parliamentary Questions have been put. Replies have been given, and I said it loud and clear that I was not very much satisfied with this special aspect of special needs for our children and we had to seek expert advice from abroad, which we are doing.

Our country wants to benefit from the Norwegian competence, and associates itself with the NORAD philosophy of promoting equality, development and inclusion of economic rights. The framework for collaboration in the form of an appropriate Memorandum of Understanding between my Ministry and the Ministry of Education of Norway will soon be finalised.

There is also the question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, of securing international consultancy from Norway for the development and setting up
of an early childhood hub in Mauritius, based on the UNICEF model; and the organisation of a Winter Institute, which is a training workshop, in collaboration with NORAD, from 13 to 26 July 2009, whereby participants from nine African countries will attend.

Coming, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to the primary subsector, the development of primary education remains high on our agenda, and our strategic objectives are to improve learning outcomes and to emphasise literacy and numeracy, as well as Information Technology. We are, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, also committed, more than ever, to offer all pupils an education that is in line with real life, and enhance the holistic development of the children through participation in extra and co-curricular activities.

Let me say a word on the ZEP concept first, which we all know about. I won’t be long on that because, at other times, we will certainly have the opportunity of saying what we are doing. In line with our philosophy of reducing inequality between low and high achieving schools, I am proposing to consolidate the ZEP concept and strategy that aims at leaving no child behind. The ZEP Council that has been constituted is mandated to come forward with strategies that aim to reduce absenteeism, and enhance pedagogy in the ZEP schools. Absenteeism is one of the major problems in the ZEP schools. The first pillar of the ZEP strategy is to combat this absenteeism problem through community mobilisation. The rate of absenteeism in ZEP schools was 15.7% in 2007. Our target for 2008, that is, the end of last year, was 14.7%. But, I am glad to announce that absenteeism rate in 2008 reached a record low of 12.9%, which is a good result, and we hope to do better this year and in the years to come.

My Ministry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has been profiling pupils with acute family problems, and teams of dedicated parents called “Parents Flambeaux” are conducting home visits to sensitise parents. Headmasters and teachers are opening the schools to the community to sustain and improve on best scores. The second pillar of the ZEP strategy is to improve on academic performance. The CPE pass rate for all ZEP schools staggered around 36% only in the last two years (36.0% in 2007 and 35.9% in 2008). This is not acceptable and is explained by certain factors -

- poor attendance at school;
- clash between school culture and home culture;
- health, family and social problems, and
- lack of exposure to academics.
We are trying to address all these factors simultaneously. Thanks to the strong important work that is being done at all levels, I am convinced that the success rate will start improving very soon.

A special inspectorate of School Inspectors has been set up since January 2009, and appropriate pedagogies are being devised. In addition, capacity-building programmes have been devised for teachers and cluster meetings are being held.

My Ministry and private partners have initiated a remedial education strategy in many ZEP schools. Further, my Ministry has signed an MoU with the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry to run a Reading Project in ZEP schools on a Public Private Partnership basis. This project will provide further opportunities for our pupils to improve on their literacy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government is committed to give all the children of Mauritius equal opportunities for quality education, including children who are at the risk of being excluded and marginalised.

Our policy and strategy document on the special educational needs of children with disabilities which was published by my Ministry in 2006 - when my colleague, hon. Gokhool, was in charge of the Ministry of Education - provides for several measures for the inclusion of these children in our educational system through appropriate services. Several affirmative actions for this sector to bring children with disabilities at par with their peers in mainstream have since been initiated. These, *inter alia*, include -

- The retrofitting of Primary and Secondary schools, where needed, to facilitate access to mainstream education to those suffering from physical disabilities.

- Bringing special education services closer to those who are in need. Four integrated units have been opened at D. Hurry Government School, Goodlands for the mental and the deaf, Moka Government School for the visually impaired, Jugessur Tiwari Ramsoondur Government School, Solferino, Vacoas for mental cases and the Black River Government School for the deaf.

- In addition, my Ministry is at present examining the possibility of opening two other such units, one in the south and one in the eastern region of the country. This measure will undoubtedly ease the life of those who at present have to travel long distances.

With a view to improving on the existing set up, my Ministry is accordingly exploring ways and means to obtain the required technical
assistance through collaborative endeavours with countries such as France, UK and the Nordic Countries.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a common cry, I must tell you, from all parents today, that we are doing a major disservice to our children by making them carry heavy school bags on their back. In the long run, this takes a heavy toll on their physical health and even body structure. This has been a matter of concern for years and, as a medical practitioner, it is my sacrosanct duty to deal effectively with the whole issue. I view school books as light, user-friendly ones. In this context, as a first step, most of the books for next year will be conceived in such a way that two small volumes of one traditional text will be made available, which will ease, of course, the weight of the bag.

I wish, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to highlight the question of CPE percentage pass rate to end with the primary sector. I wish, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to highlight that through sustained efforts, the CPE percentage pass rate has increased by 1.1% from 66.9 in 2007 to 68.0% in 2008. We are aiming, on the PPB system at 69% this year and 70% in 2010. To be able to achieve these two targets, a series of teaching and learning techniques has been fine-tuned, and educators are encouraged to use ICT across the curriculum to make their teaching pupil friendly.

In this same line, we are increasing the percentage of pupils who need to be conversant with ICT from 70% in 2008 to 75% in 2010. We are also laying emphasis of increasing the percentage pass rate in Essential Learning Competencies in all subjects as well as in Desirable Learning Competencies, thus improving percentage pass rate both in terms of number of passes and level of grades achieved. This is insofar as the primary sector is concerned and it gives an idea of what is being done and what lies ahead of us.

Let us come, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to the secondary subsector. When the EFA goals were first enunciated in the year 2000, strong emphasis was systematically placed by national Governments and development partners on increasing access and equity in the primary subsector. However, more than halfway to the achievement of the EFA, a stronger premium is now being placed on the secondary subsector. It is not simply the inevitable reflection of an improved achievement level from the primary subsector but also serves as the foundation on which the post-secondary and secondary subsectors are to be built.

In Mauritius, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have successfully overcome the problem of access which so many other developing countries are still
facing. For us, the greater battle that has to be won is that pertaining to quality improvement. Indeed, we can never really speak of genuine equity in a system when the quality dimension is left unattended.

To this end, we have already taken a number of positive steps. These are many and varied.

First of all, there is a question of broadening the secondary curriculum. A new Secondary Curriculum Framework which is being finalised by the MIE makes provision for a broadening of the curriculum with the inclusion of such subjects as travel & tourism, physical education and focus on science and technology which are so vital for socio-economic development and innovation.

Much stronger emphasis is being placed on ICT which is intensively being used in teaching of sciences and it is envisaged to extend same to all other subjects.

On the other hand, a Quality Assurance Unit as proposed by the PRB is being set up and Quality Assurance Officers will be recruited to improve the qualitative dimension of our system.

Let us also not forget that our Performance-Based Budget stresses the quality level improvement of performance of students in different subject areas. In this connection, work has already started to improve the overall student performance.

Let me here, take this opportunity, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, to parenthetically place on record my deep appreciation of the efforts put in by our educators who have collaboratively worked with my Ministry officials to achieve the targets set in the PBB. This augurs well for the spreading of the community of practice and the empowerment of educators that my Ministry is working towards.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to something that is really very close to my heart. It is the concept of the overall development of the child. There is urgent need, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to operate and definite changes in the approach towards provision of the education service. This change should lay a lot of focus on the genuine overall holistic development of our students instead of focusing exclusively on examination achievements.

As from January this year, an activity period which is indeed a co-curricular activity period has been introduced in all secondary schools State schools and private schools. The objective behind the introduction of this
period is to provide all possible opportunities to our children to become aware of their inherent skills, talents and aptitudes, and be able to express them and, at the end of the day, prepare our school children to be able to face life more efficiently and become better citizens of tomorrow.

This new policy orientation requires that every pupil should be involved in at least three to four co or extra-curricular activities in the course of the academic year. It is also obviously recognised that physical education and sports play a vital role in the educational system and contribute to ensure an integrated development of the child.

It is in this connection as well that we are promoting the teaching of physical education and sports in schools and the acquisition of life skills through participation in organised physical activities during and after school hours. All these activities have been slotted in the timetable and the House would be pleased to note that, to ensure successful implementation of such activities, my Ministry is currently recruiting a number of Project Coordinators who would have the responsibility of making this happen.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are making an enhanced use of ICT in the education sector, both in terms of hardware and software. You have been partly instrumented to that, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and, at the same time, improving Internet access in schools.

The following measures have been initiated in this regard, which is most important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The Ministry is currently equipping educational institutions with ICT equipment to enhance teaching and learning through the use of computer-aided technologies. Computer labs already exist, at least one, in every secondary school. We are making provision for a second computer lab in each secondary school and, in fact, 38 State Secondary Schools have already been equipped with a second computer lab. The programme is ongoing, and we expect that all State Secondary Schools be equipped with a second computer lab by the end of this year. Laptops and projectors and data logging equipment have been issued to science laboratories of all State Secondary Schools. Training has been done for schools to make best usage of the equipment so as to promote a new learning paradigm and innovative approach to teaching and learning.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, through the International Network for Educational Transformation (INET) initiative, Internet access will be extended to all units of the school environment and interaction will be facilitated, not only between our students and their teachers, but also with their peers on an international platform. We are, thus, preparing each student
to become a global citizen, as this is becoming an essential requirement in the increasingly globalised economy.

There is also the design and development of an e-Education Portal to enable the school community to access educational materials on a 24/7 mode. The quality of education and learning in our secondary schools is being enhanced through initiatives, such as NEPAD e-Schools Project, the Microsoft Partners in Learning Programme, that comprises the innovative schools, innovative teachers and innovative student’s initiatives. Thus, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are ensuring that our students are ready to continue on the path that opens wide the way to higher levels of education and training in the post secondary and tertiary systems.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before I leave the secondary subsector, I wish to say a few words, very briefly, but which is very important, I believe, insofar as discipline at school is concerned. This is another important issue that is constantly getting all my attention. I am mentioning, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the maintaining of school discipline which is, in fact, the concern of everyone. With the help of different stakeholders, such as the Ombudsperson for Children, the Child Development Unit, the Child Protection Unit, the Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs and also the Police, we have introduced a series of measures, such as sensitisation, behaviour tracking, strengthening of support services and counselling units, to ensure that discipline is maintained both inside and outside schools. It is a newly introduced system to take care of cases of indiscipline at school. I wish to give the system all its chances to succeed, and I am closely, regularly and personally monitoring it.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before coming to the other two subsectors, I wish to say a few words on infrastructure, insofar as primary and secondary schools are concerned, because we were being told about effet d’annonces; mention is being made on this and that, and works are not being done. I am sure my colleague, the Minister of Infrastructure, will say it in a more general way for other sectors. Insofar as education is concerned, with regard to infrastructure, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that 100% of the voted Capital Budget will be spent by the end of this financial year, as was the case for financial year 2007/2008 for both primary and secondary sectors.

In the primary sector, a total amount of Rs230 m. is expected to be spent by the end of this financial year –
(a) The amount is made up of Rs55 m. for implementation of maintenance works in more than 150 schools.

(b) Rs175 m. for major infrastructural works, involving construction/innovation of toilets blocks.

When I speak of toilet blocks, I have to add here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we have taken an important decision at the level of the Ministry. All toilet blocks are going to be constructed as from now onwards. We’ll see to it that all facilities are given for handicapped children to use toilets. So, there will be additional classrooms in 16 schools and major upgrading works in some 80 schools. This sum includes Government’s contribution towards construction of two new primary schools at Albion and Belle Mare, financed by the People’s Republic of China. The one at Albion has been completed and is already operational, while the works at Belle Mare is ongoing and will be completed by end July 2009.

(Interruptions)

Malheureusement, on n’a pas pu l’inviter pour une raison quelconque; ce sera pour la prochaine inauguration.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are making more than half a billion rupees of investment in the infrastructure of the secondary sector by the end of this financial year. Let me mention them, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, so that it goes right in their ears. The works comprise mainly of -

- major upgrading works undertaken in 17 schools at a total cost of Rs75 m.;
- major rehabilitation works undertaken in three schools, with an amount of about Rs35 m. spent by end of June;
- extension works carried out in seven schools, with disbursement to the tune of around Rs80 m.;
- completion of the remaining phases of works concerning nine schools, for which Rs310 m. will be spent, and
- construction of four football grounds currently mobilising funds to the tune of Rs23 m.

With the new increase in devolution from Rs15 m. to Rs50 m., my Ministry will now be responsible for the whole process of a number of school projects which, up to now, were being dealt with at the level of the Central Procurement Board. I can understand what the hon. Leader of
Opposition mentioned, namely that they are not for. But, they must understand that when they were in power, they must have been frustrated as we are; sometimes, you have got the money but the work is not done for this and that reason. Of course, we are going to take all the precautions that are necessary, and the advice and duties of the Central Procurement Board will be respected. It is felt that this new arrangement will quicken the processing of those projects and will, hence, contribute positively to the smooth and timely implementation of infrastructural projects in my Ministry. I consider it my duty, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to have a word, insofar as the infrastructural works are concerned.

Let me come to technical and vocational education. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am the Minister in charge of education, human resources, arts and culture. So, you will have to bear with me for some time. I’ll try to go as quickly as possible. Eradication of poverty, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is one of the top priorities of our Government, and it is now agreed worldwide that the best tool to fulfil this priority is education and training, such that we have the human capital that becomes the main driving force of the Mauritian economy. Only then, can we ascertain the viability and sustainability of our competitiveness as a nation.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, in its 20 years of existence, the IVTB has established a track record both nationally and internationally. Indeed, it has come a long way from being a provider of basic vocational training to its current status as a world class provider of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, generally known as TVET. Its achievements demonstrate a turn-around in customer acceptance and public perception of IVTB and technical education.

Since its inception, it has done a lot in terms of training -

- For the year 2008/2009, the IVTB has provided training to some 10,000 persons.

- Furthermore, it has also conducted tracer studies for both its full-time and apprenticeship courses in order to evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of the training of the needs of the labour market.

However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as our needs change, as the country embarks on a new paradigm, it is now opportune to start a new process of training altogether rendering TVET delivery more relevant, efficient and effective and, at the same time, make ‘Life Long Learning’ a reality.
In that context, my Ministry would be setting up the Mauritius Institute of Training & Development. We had the First Reading a few minutes ago. The MITD would be one central organization which would take over the functions of the IVTB and the Technical School Management Trust Fund. The overall aim of this merger is to optimize resources, avoid duplication and allow for cost-effectiveness. The MITD will have the opportunity, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to debate the Bill, so, I won’t go into further details.

To increase access to TVET, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the IVTB has opened a new Training Centre in Port Louis, namely the Knowledge-Based Training Centre. Today, some 480 trainees are enrolled at the centre in 14 different trades. To increase female enrolment and professionalise training in Hairdressing and Beauty Care, the IVTB will offer internationally recognized qualifications in this trade at the centre in the near future. The centre will further expand by offering seven new Diploma courses as from September 2009.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the IVTB has always worked with different partners and now has added to the list. The recent one signed is the MoU with the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST). This MoU will enable the IVTB to introduce the Canadian SIAST Business Administration Diploma in Mauritius, at an affordable price. This is a passport for a global work opportunity. The SIAST Business Administration Diploma will be offered in both full-time and part-time mode at the IVTB Knowledge-Based Training Centre.

Furthermore, students studying in the SIAST Business Administration diploma programme can concurrently complete the Certified General Accounts Association of Canada program’s foundation-level courses.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the IVTB will also offer a top up degree in the field of Tourism, Hospitality & Leisure Management in collaboration with the University of Mauritius as from September 2009. In the last Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Second Chance Programme was established which aimed at providing basic numeracy and language skills to those who have dropped out of school and orientating these young people to a vocational programme with strong emphasis on life training skills and providing psychological and social back up. The IVTB which is the implementation agency for this Programme has enrolled 220 trainees on the Second Chance Programme in eight centres across the country.
In addition, the IVTB has delivered several training programmes in collaboration with the National Empowerment Fund in the past. This collaboration will further be developed and the IVTB will be called upon to train 2000 SC & HSC holders in IT.

The programme will be given a new dimension and will be enlarged through active collaboration with the Ministry of Business so as to introduce new areas of support for people whose skills have to be refurbished. We shall be starting with “printing” as indicated in the Budget Speech before we move on to other sectors.

Let me come to the Tertiary Sector of Education. The availability of high-level human resources constitutes a determining factor in the progression of Mauritius to the rank of developed countries. As the economy becomes more service and knowledge-oriented, tertiary education as an engine of growth will gain increasing prominence. This Government has given Tertiary Education the importance it deserves as evidenced by the different measures taken over the last few years.

Increasing and widening access to quality tertiary education has been the major preoccupation of this Government since coming into power in 2005. A key indicator for gauging progress with regard to access to tertiary education is what we call the Gross Tertiary Enrolment Rate (GTER). This performance indicator has shown continued and sustained progress during the last few years.

From 28.4% in 2005, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it has risen in 2008 to 42%. This is comparable now with what obtains in countries at similar stages of development as Mauritius. On a rattrapé beaucoup de retard. However, there is an urgent need to accelerate this process further so as to reach the target of 72% by 2015.

In this context, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a few measures are being taken. It will be my duty to go very quickly through them. First of all, the setting up of an Open University: The Ministry is working on the establishment of the Open University, Mauritius for Continuing Professional Education and Life-Long Learning that would provide greater opportunity, as well, to those who do not have time to follow full-time or part-time programmes to enrol through the distance education mode.

This new University will thus ensure that access to higher education is even more diversified through new learning methodologies to cater for all social and economic backgrounds including those who cannot attend full-time face to face sessions.
In this context, my Ministry has set up a dedicated Unit with a Project Director recruited to drive the operationalising of the Open University Project.

A new legislation which will give the framework for a modern, flexible University tapping on local and international strengths is being finalized and will be presented to the National Assembly, I believe, very shortly.

With a view to further expand access, the Budget is now making provision for a new purpose built campus will be set up to accommodate some 8,000 students. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this new state-of-art technology campus will give a wider dimension to tertiary education. My Ministry is already working with the SLDC and other partners to this end. Much work has already been done and now that we have the Funds, we are most encouraged to accelerate our procedures and make it happen.

In addition to the above, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, several measures have been taken to consolidate the Tertiary Education Sector in Mauritius, but I prefer to gain time not to go through them, but just to say that at the University of Mauritius, out of 4,846 applicants who were qualified for at least one programme, 4,634, that is, 95.6%, were offered at least one seat. At the UTM all qualified applicants were offered a seat for Tertiary Education, that is, 100%, the 95.6% at the University of Mauritius and the 100% at the UTM. The UTM has in 2008/09 increased – may I remind the House - its intake by 50%.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerning access to tertiary education for those students who are facing severe hardship, I wish to underline - because the Leader of the Opposition had mentioned it – that there was confusion there. Il a parlé des personnes qui devaient avoir des loans alors que le Budget mentionne des personnes qui devaient avoir des bourses. Les deux systèmes fonctionnent, mais la deuxième partie n’a pas été mentionnée dans le Discours du Budget. Je dois attirer l’attention du Leader de l’opposition que les personnes ont le droit de prendre des loans des banques privées et garantis par ce même fonds.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to ensure access to tertiary education to those students who are facing severe hardship, the Human Resource Knowledge and Arts Development Fund has launched the Scholarship Scheme and, as I was saying, there is the Government Guaranteed Student Loan Scheme. Both Schemes are there.

- To date, 120 Scholarships have been awarded.
- Guarantee provided to eight students who have taken loans - only eight, because it depends on the number of students who come forward. I am going to see to it. Maybe, we have to do some media campaign or other types of campaign so that the students be fully aware that this possibility exists there.

- There is an increase threshold for the scholarship scheme from Rs7,500 – which was the case last year - to Rs10,000, as has been mentioned in this Budget, and I wish to thank the hon. Minister of Finance for having agreed to increase this threshold - will enable a larger proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to benefit from a full scholarship to join a tertiary education institution.

In our quest, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to make Mauritius a Centre of Higher Learning, emphasis is also being laid on quality. In this context, we are constantly revisiting the regulatory framework in line with international best practice. During 2008-2009, two quality audits, for the UTM and the MCA - Mauritius College of the Air - were carried out with the help of independent overseas specialists. At the level of private institutions, a new framework has been put in place to establish institutions with awarding status at the start of the activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with all these measures, Mauritius is now well poised to meet its high level human resource requirements to confront the challenges ahead and position itself as the knowledge hub. We have been speaking about so many years ago in the region, besides taking full advantages of the world recovery when the time comes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is today universally acknowledged that the new economy calls for a human resource development system that satisfies a panoply of needs. My Ministry has prepared the National Human Resource Development Plan, which have got its aims, of course. Here also, I prefer to gain by not going into the details, but if questions are put, we can give the answers. It is good to note that major developments have taken place and capacity-building programmes have also been put into action, namely the training of 2,500 Call Centre Operators and 80 jewellers in the use of platinum; launching of the National Core Skills programme and enlisting the assistance of international experts from Singapore and UK to conduct workshops and the training of trainers programme; promoting job creation through the Ornamental Fish Breeding project; implementation of the project of mentoring for SMEs in collaboration with the MEF-Mauritius Employers’
Federation and the training of 21 trainers in Training Needs Analysis by external experts.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is also the recognition of prior learning - this also is something new, innovative - où beaucoup de personnes ont travaillé, par exemple, comme menuisier ou maçon durant toute une vie, mais qui n’ont jamais été vraiment formés. Alors the recognition of prior learning est un système par lequel on accepte de prendre ces travailleurs en charge, à les former sur le plan théorique quelque peu puis finalement à leur donner un diplôme pour qu’ils aient plus de dignité dans leur travail et aussi pour qu’ils puissent mieux réussir dans la vie. This project reflects clearly the fact that there are clear overlaps between the academic and technical sectors which we are trying to reduce.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has a critical need for qualified personnel in a whole array of occupations, ranging from the informal sector to IT related services to financial and hospitality sectors. And my Ministry is determined to do all possible to guide the younger generation towards the right career path, to better serve the country. There are some workshops being organised for prior learning. I prefer to pass upon this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and use the very last few minutes to speak a little bit about culture because, as I said, I am also the Minister responsible for Arts and Culture.

With your permission, let me dwell on this subject, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Culture is, as we all know, the essence of life. Arts and Culture are recognised as vital components of our daily life that are worthy of investment and support from the public and private sectors. Today, we have to use creativity and cultural expressions as a force for social justice and the achievements of human needs. The benefits that creative industries bring in economic growth can no longer be under estimated. Culture matters as a foundation for economic growth, human development and good governance. Arts and Culture are, therefore, instrumental to the improvement of the quality of life in an ethnically diverse society like ours.

Our cultural tapestry is so woven that its beauty lies in the different colourful threads making the Mauritian nation. It is a powerful tool for nation building and social engineering and especially unity which is sine qua non at this difficult time when Government is calling for the support and solidarity of one and all to sail out of the tempest.
Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while upholding our cultural values and heritage, we are also creating appropriate conditions for the smooth development of our cultural industry. During the past decade, I said decade.

(Interruptions)

So, whatever goes at the Government, take it for you, now Opposition. During the past decade, the Arts and Culture sector has been boomed as the number of events and performances has risen significantly. Brilliant young talents are found in a cross section of disciplines, creative writers, visual and performing artists and musicians are regularly presented to the population. We are now geared towards refinement and the sharpening of our sense of appreciation.

Today, we cannot deny the growing awareness of culture as a fundamental element for sustainable development, mainly in the context of Maurice Ile Durable. Culture is viewed, today, as an opportunity for development and we are working on a strategic plan that will put us on the super highway of culture that will carry us through the next decade. It is my strong opinion that Arts and Culture will soon become another pillar of the Mauritian economy.

A survey on the cultural industry of Mauritius has been carried out by the Mauritius Research Council at the request of my Ministry. The findings are being compiled on the status of the cultural industry and the recommendations will be used on a basis for the preparation of another appropriate policy for the development of the Cultural Industry.

As announced, an International Development Grant Scheme in the Budget for performing artists will be established with a view to giving opportunities to upgrade and up-skill their talents. It is also envisaged to market our cultural goods and services. The arts will thus become sustainable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the cultural stability leads to social cohesiveness and helps us to refine our daily encounter with the rich values of our pluriculturality. Arts and culture bring joy and beauty to life. Last year, this Government set up the Human Resource, Knowledge and Arts Development Fund with a view to providing our creators and performers with the necessary funding for the development of their talents. The funding opportunities include grants, scholarships and other assistance schemes for artists. A total of 25 projects have been approved and are being implemented. Some of the projects are artists of the month, mounting of full-length plays, publication of an Arts and Culture Magazine, training for arts
critics, creation of a cultural and artistic website, promotion of the reading culture and arts education in schools. Our colourful artistic and cultural tapestry, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, cannot be left to fade away but must be allowed to shine in its diversity. Even in this global financial turmoil, we are acknowledging that arts and culture are essential in fashioning social peace, harmony, stability, justice and promoting national solidarity.

During the last financial year, my Ministry has undertaken the following projects towards this end. Two new Centres de Formation Artistique have been opened at Plaine des Papayes and the other one at Pointe Canon to meet the needs of the population for training in music, dance, pyrography, theatre and sound and light techniques. With a view to promoting our linguistic heritage, Government established three additional Speaking Unions, namely Marathi, Tamil and Telugu Speaking Unions. New legislation has been introduced for setting up the Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle.

It is a matter of great pride that for a tiny country as Mauritius to be recognised and acknowledged as the repository of two world heritage sites, namely, the Aapravasi Ghat and the Le Morne Cultural Landscape, we are proud of this.

The National Art Gallery successfully organised its 3rd Triennial and Contemporary Arts last year. The National Art Gallery is moving forward with the promotion of emerging artists and to give a new impetus to artistic creativity and sensitise the population on the soothing effect of a work of art. It is gratifying to note that concrete measures are being taken to give a boost to our artists in the fine art sector. Thus, the promoters of all new buildings amounting to more than Rs50 m. will be recommended to spend a minimum of 1% of the construction cost on artistic works.

A series of activities for the promotion of Islamic Arts and Culture have been mounted by the Islamic Cultural Centre. Emphasis is being laid on the learning of Urdu and Arabic, Islamic calligraphy and Mehendi application. If today Islamic Banking is becoming a reality, we have to be thankful to the Islamic Cultural Centre for the initiative in 2005 by organising the first forum on Islamic Financial Services.

The Nelson Mandela Centre for African Cultural Centre will come up soon, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at La Tour Koenig. Tenders have already been floated for the construction of the centre. It will be another cultural jewel in Port Louis. Furthermore, appropriate funds have been made
available to the Tamil, Telugu and Marathi Cultural Centres to become fully operational.

Our Cultural Exchange Programmes have given opportunities to our artists to perform in friendly countries such as India, Pakistan, Egypt and Reunion Island. Mauritians were also given opportunities to appreciate artists from the international scene. The Cultural Exchange Programmes promote people to people dialogue.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, many artists have complained on the high-cost involved in the production and staging of plays. To address these, the Human Resource, Knowledge and Arts Development Fund will finance the rental of theatre hall for three final rehearsals and the gala show to give a boost to drama performances by local artists. As the number of cultural performances that are given in hotels is likely to fall in view of the decrease in the arrival of tourists, a provision of Rs2 m. has been made to operate a scheme to support our performers. Now that there is a growing awareness in the population on the importance of our heritage, the National Heritage Fund is investigating in all intangible heritage and archaeological sites. An inventory of sacred and religious sites is also envisaged. A directory of these sites will be prepared to sensitise the population of their importance in our history. A one-off grant of Rs2 m. is being provided for the rehabilitation of the Musée de la Photographie.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is acknowledged that the battle of Grand Port is a landmark in the history of Mauritius. In fact, this is the first battle won by the French in the Napoleonic era. This is proudly inscribed on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Next year, my Ministry will put at a series of artistic cultural and educational activities to mark the Bicentenary Celebration of the Battle of Grand Port. In this context, we are working in close collaboration with the authorities of Saint Malo to chalk out a comprehensive list of happenings to mark the single most thrilling moment of our history. As this is an international historic event, besides the French Government many other friendly countries are also contributing to make it a resounding success.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will not be long now, but I must tell you that the National Archives has received and acquired a series of records. University students and researchers have been given access to our records and microfilms during the past year. It is proposed to set up an electronic archive system with a view to safeguarding documents and allowing consultations from a PC. The Mauritius Museums Council is on the forefront
for the presentation and preservation of history and heritage. A conservation laboratory will be constructed at Mahebourg. The National Library is playing a pivotal role in the planning of library services in Mauritius and it is proposed to proceed with the construction of a purpose-built complex to house the National Library, the National Archives and the National Art Gallery in one and the same place.

The new Films Act, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, provides for the classification of video films including the VCDs and DVDs. This will help bring discipline and consumer protection in the video sector. Amendments will be brought to the Copyright Act to better protect copyright of works and to be in line with the latest developments in the ICT sector and international conventions. The fight against piracy is going to be very arduous. Piracy stands as a significant threat to the careers and livelihood of artists. It undermines the possibility of sustainable incomes for creators. We require the participation of the whole population in this fight. In this context, a comprehensive public sensitisation strategy on intellectual property rights is being implemented to fight piracy. The quality of our lives and values of our society, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, depends immensely on the level of importance that we give to arts and culture. This Government is providing full support for the development and promotion of artistic creativity. While keeping pace with the needs and aspirations of our customers, we are also delivering a quality service to the population. Arts and culture, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are the best creation of human beings. We have to sustain them with a view to making our life colourful. The funds allocated and measures taken in this year's Budget will further enhance our aims of giving the population the opportunity to live in peace, harmony and in the pursuit of artistic excellence, cultural stability and sustainable development.

With these words Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to tell you that once the Budget is passed, we all agree that there is need to set up a strong monitoring process to oversee the successful and quick implementation of all the development and other projects we have announced. We need to tackle forcefully all the hurdles we shall encounter and there will be quite a few of them. The nation has great hopes on us. It is their legitimate aspiration to an improved life and to expect that their lots are progressively better. We cannot continue as we have done in the past. I believe this method has to be changed. I think it is high time for every project or related projects, every new sector with potential to create wealth and jobs as well as diversification of the economy be continuously monitored.
Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, here is a Budget that is forward looking in that it paves the way for enabling the population to tide over difficult times and, at the same time, also makes provision for when the crisis will be behind us. Let us therefore all together, in these special circumstances of unprecedented international financial crisis, wish our country, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, well indeed and for the benefit of our entire nation.

Let me end, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, by thanking specially the hon. Prime Minister for his unflinching support to this budget exercise and the hon. Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance, Dr. Rama Sithanen, for his courage, determination and lucidity in thinking for the future of our country.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(6.47 p.m.)

Mr C. Sayed-Hossen (Fourth Member of Montagne Blanche and GRSE): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are today living in a world the state of which is characterized by what started by being a financial crisis, itself driven by the floundering of the subprime market, the crash of financial markets and then the crisis of the nuts and bolts economy and now what is called the global recession. We did not choose, we did not do anything; we are not responsible in any way for what happened to the world and by ricochet to our country.

In this world in recession, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, here we are, little Mauritius, with a small territory, a small population, a small market, a weak market with weak internal demand and hardly any critical mass to support a self-sustaining economic system. We have a very high level of imports to fulfil our consumption needs and we have a quasi total dependence on export markets for whatever we produce. In spite of that, we have survived, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and weathered out the storm for nearly two years. We have weathered out the violent winds of the global crisis. Now, we are being hit by the contraction in demand for our two main exports, that is, textile and tourism. Of course, in this dire context it cannot be business as usual. This Government - I must say as would any Government in power in these circumstances - is duty-bound to safeguard what we consider to be –

(iii) national interest, and
(iv) to prioritise its actions.

National interest, we all agree, is the maintenance of purchasing power as far as possible, is the mitigation of human suffering as far as possible, is the protection of the most vulnerable and planning for the future, especially for
tomorrow where certainly, we have no doubt that, the crisis will come to an end and this country will bounce back into progress and positive development.

With its three main dimensions contained in the title of the presentation of the hon. Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance himself: saving jobs, protecting people and preparing for recovery. I have listened very attentively to the hon. Minister of Education and also to the hon. Leader of the Opposition who spoke before me. I would like to make a few remarks about a few of the points which the Leader of the Opposition rose.

To sum up, pour synthétiser comme disent les français, the hon. Leader of the Opposition said that the Opposition also has propositions. What he did present was actually what we would call les ébauches des propositions.

Secondly, he has said that the Alliance Sociale has lost credibility and he said somewhere that ‘nous avons un mari team économique qui m’impressionne beaucoup’. What a joke, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! If they do have serious proposals, - I would come to that later on - let them come, as we did in the Labour Party prior to the 2005 election, when systematically the Labour Party was coming up in the media with policy proposals and ideas for development. There has not been one single societal proposal in the discourse of the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

At the expense of repeating myself, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must say that I did say that when I made some comments on the Additional Stimulus Package Bill. I said that the Opposition was hit by intellectual bankruptcy and I still maintain that the Opposition is still hit by intellectual bankruptcy. Well, apparently they have a ‘mari team économique’ - we all know that - that used to be what they called between 2000/2005 the economic dream team of the Opposition. Now, that the dream team has undergone, pick and choose, metamorphosis, morphing, mutation into a ‘mari team’ even better. Plus ‘mari’ que cela tu meurs, M. le président. Actually, a team endowed with a razor-sharp intellect or is it a razor-thin vision and judgment so much so that on the edge of the razor their dream can basculer into this country’s nightmare, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - the same nightmare which this country underwent between 2000/2005. Toujours est-il that the now the ‘mari team’, then the ‘dream team’ between 2000/2005, first of all, inherited a vibrant economy and took it to the brink of collapse by 2005, brought down GDP growth from 6% to 2%, lost jobs à une vitesse vertigineuse, dixit hon. Jayen Cuttaree. Skippered or is it too flattering a
word? Skippered the nation into a *crise sans précédent*, dixit the hon. Leader of the Opposition, then Prime Minister. All that to quote the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, all that during a period in an environment when the sky was blue, when the sea was calm but the captain did not know his job, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I just heard a remark from one of the sides of the Opposition, I read that somewhere also: ‘Nous ne voulons pas qu’ils piquent une mesure çà et là; ils ne veulent pas que nous piquions une mesure qu’ils auraient annoncée.’ M. le président, encore faut-il qu’il y ait des mesures pour piquer, encore faut-il y est ait des propositions.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition just spoke about *le déraillement des prévisions du ministre des finances*, GDP growth rate, current account deficit, foreign direct investment, balance of payment, but I wonder whether the hon. Leader of Opposition is living in the same world as we are. Did Ireland forecast that it would go from being the most prosperous nation in Europe to be near being the poorest nation in Western Europe at least? Did Iceland forecast that it would go bankrupt within six months? Did China, the new economic giant of the world, the factory of the world indeed, forecast that it would lose 25 million jobs? Did India forecast that it would lose between 11 and 12 million jobs? Management, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has not only to do with planning and strategic thinking but also means adapting to change in the environment.

We heard the hon. Leader of the Opposition lament the fact that Government is aligning itself on the National Pay Council recommendations and recommending only 5% compensation. Many of our friends on the four sides of the House will remember how, in 1982, hon. Paul Bérenger promised 30% compensation to the workers. Inflation rate was 15%, he promised double, not only to compensate but to better the living conditions of the workers. And then when he came to power, he gave 8%, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. He was realistic probably, he was pragmatic, he realised that he couldn't give the 30% that he had promised and only paid 8%. But we never promised anything here.

The hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance did not say that he would give 8%, 10% or 12% compensation. He has always maintained one principle, companies and the State will pay whatever companies and the State can pay. We cannot make companies bankrupt just for the sake of a short-term gain for the workers. *If faut être réaliste et responsable, M. le président. Il ne faut surtout pas faire de la démagogie.* Everybody knows that the economic situation now is not conducive to higher compensation. And the Leader of the Opposition wants us to believe that he is weeping for
the widows, les veuves, les orphelins, les handicapés. His Government, a few years ago, harassed, mentally tortured 125,000 senior citizens by requiring them to fill in a form declaring their assets, froze payment of pensions to them. And it was so shameful that poor hon. Lauthan and the hon. Prime Minister had to go and apologise to the senior citizens of this country.

And it is this Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, who caused to be reinstated full total pension for senior citizens. Just like in 1995, when he came to power, overnight he doubled pensions for senior citizens. This is compassion, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, not only verbiage and bla-bla-bla to borrow his favourite expression for the past few months indeed. And he is lamenting the condition of workers and employees. This is the very same person who when he was Minister of Finance systematically avoided to meet the Trade Unions during tripartite negotiations. This is the same Prime Minister who sent the riot Police against workers on strike, further stating that the “Riot Unit pa là pou donne ti baba boire biberon”. And, today, he is trying to teach this Prime Minister lessons in compassion. Il faut être réaliste, M. le président. Il faut surtout être honnête. He was joking most probably.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition commented lengthily on the Additional Stimulus Package, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We have discussed that a few weeks ago while discussing the Additional Stimulus Package Bill. Il n’y a pas à sortir de là. L’assistance directe et indirecte aux entreprises est absolument essentielle si nous voulons les sauver. Si nous avons cette espèce de fausse pudeur qui nous dicte encore faussement que c’est politiquement incorrect de prendre le parti des entreprises, disons au moins qu’il faut sauver les emplois. On ne pourra jamais sauver les emplois si on ne sauve pas les entreprises, parce que ce sont les entreprises qui emploient les gens. L’honorable Leader de l’opposition, lui-même, a fait la démonstration en parlant des petites et moyennes entreprises, où, il a dit que près de la moitié des employés dans le secteur privé - en fait, je crois que le chiffre exact est de 43% - sont employés par les petites et moyennes entreprises.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is another issue here which has nothing to do with the statement by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and I had the opportunity to discuss that with the hon. Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance. We have a situation where the State is playing the role of bankers. Basically, it is not the role of the State to play the role of bankers. In the United States of America, apart from that big exception, where the US
Government, under President Obama, used taxpayers’ money to partly bail out the automakers (automakers are so important economically, symbolically, a bit like the sugar cane sector in Mauritius, that I suppose they did not have a choice), money was used to bail out banks, because banks were filled with toxic assets. The job which the US Government did was to irrigate the financial system with cash, so that the financial system, especially the banks, would irrigate the productive and industrial system with cash, so that they can carry out their economic activities, produce/keep jobs, create jobs, export, create wealth and pay taxes to the Government to run the country. There is a major differentiation between the role of the State and the role of banks or bankers.

Le bottom line du rôle de l’État, M. le président, c’est la valeur ajoutée humaine. Le bottom line du rôle des banques c’est d’assurer le financement des entreprises. C’est pour cela que les banques existent, c’est pour cela que les banques ont des permis et des licences, c’est pour cela que les particuliers et les sociétés - n’importe qui - qui économisent, placent leur argent en banque pour que cet argent serve à financer des entreprises. But it appears that we are living in a vitiated system, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, probably issued from our traditional plantation economy and what my good friend, hon. Ms Deerpalsing, usually calls l’économie de la rente ou l’économie rentière. I state that banks are not playing fair. We have had reports that, in certain cases, companies addressing banks for loans are being advised by banks: 'Go to see Enterprise Mauritius and, maybe, you can apply to have money from the Additional Stimulus Package.'

Another problem again, which is apparently very serious, is that many of the foreign banks in Mauritius refuse to take decisions to help companies which apply for help, in spite of their being viable, in spite of the project being positive, because they will tell you: we cannot make a decision locally, we have to refer to our Head Office, be it London, Johannesburg, Dubai or wherever. And, therefore, la décision tarde tellement que l’entreprise est obligée d’aller chercher ailleurs. Ce que je veux dire, M. le président, c’est que nous avons un système qu’il nous faudra revoir peut-être. Mais, c’est un défaut, c’est un shortfall qui est non seulement structurel mais qui m’a l’air d’être culturel aussi. Je demanderai au ministre des finances de bienveillamment considérer, très sérieusement, cette affaire en ce qui concerne le rôle des banques dans la situation actuelle où nous avons besoin de ce circuit de financement.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition also spoke about transparency. Of course, we all want transparency and accountability, and we all want to
know how the money, which is being vested in the different Funds of the Additional Stimulus Package, will be used to help companies.

Pour parodier Malcolm de Chazal, M. le président, malheureusement, dans ce pays les préjugés poussent plus haut, plus dense et plus vite que la canne à sucre. En fait, Malcolm de Chazal avait dit: “Dans ce pays, on cultive deux choses: la canne à sucre et les préjugés.” Moi, je dis que les préjugés poussent plus vite, plus haut et plus dense que la canne à sucre. It is so easy, if we have a total transparency in what companies are being helped, what companies are being assisted, to what extent and for what nature of problems, that can give rise to rumours, à la médisance et peut-être même à l’ignominie. Et tout le monde sait, y compris l’honorable Leader de l’opposition, que les entreprises ont besoin de candeur, de sérénité et, surtout, de la protection de leur réputation pour pourvoir opérer correctement.

L’honorable Leader de l’opposition a beaucoup parlé. Il a parlé de ‘zigzag’, de ‘bla-bla-bla’, de ‘budget bâclé’. Il avait dit que l’Additional Stimulus Package était un fourre-tout. Il a aussi dit que ce gouvernement avait perdu toute crédibilité. M. le président, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, of course. Just sit back and think or let us just sit back and think of what happened between 2000 and 2005. We just went through that very, very briefly. Ce budget, M. le président, contient plus de 200 mesures. L’honorable Leader de l’opposition a axé sa critique sur deux axes. Il a dit que, d’un côté il y a des répétitions, et que de l’autre côté, il y a des non-répétitions. Which is which? Je n’ai pas très bien compris, mais j’ai compris, du moins, qu’un exemple de la non-répétition, c’est que le Maurice Ile Durable Fund n’a pas été reconduit dans ce budget-là. L’honorable Leader de l’opposition a lui-même été au poste de commande de l’Etat pendant quelques années et il sait très bien que certaines mesures prennent du temps à être mises en marche ou à être mises en opération, et parfois même beaucoup plus qu’un an. Je l’ai commencé tout à l’heure, mais malheureusement je n’ai pas eu le temps de le terminer ; un des mes collègues, de ce côté de la Chambre, m’a dit qu’il va le faire, notamment une collation des mesures annoncées dans les budgets depuis 2001 et qui n’ont pas été implemented, et nous verrons à ce moment-là la comparaison. Mais ce qui frappe surtout dans le discours du Leader de l’opposition c’est qu’il fait l’impasse sur de nombreuses mesures qui sont axées sur la protection des citoyens, sur la sauvegarde des emplois, et la préparation du pays pour demain, pour rebondir après la crise. Je vais citer au hasard certaines mesures. Pour les petites et moyennes entreprises, M. le président, R 1
milliard; R 500 millions pour sauver les emplois, c’est-à-dire, assistance directe, et R 500 millions, encore une fois assistance directe, pour le financement des activités. C’est du jamais vu, M. le président! Deuxième exemple: l’expansion du campus de l’Université de Maurice pour pouvoir accommodate encore 8,000 étudiants. Encore une fois, M. le président, du jamais vu! De nombreuses mesures pour aider au développement accéléré de l’agro industrie. J’en cite quelques-unes.

Food Crop Insurance Scheme to cover 27 food crops for some 200,000 small food crop planters. A Potato Seed Purchase Scheme, an Onion Seed Purchase Scheme, the setting up of three dairy farms, the setting up of multiplier farms for genetic goat breeds and funds to finance appropriate fibreglass boats for fishermen. Of course, besides point number one, which I’ve just mentioned, numerous are the measures to support SMEs, which the hon. Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance has gone through in his speech; and a number of social measures, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, among others, the revamping of NHDC apartments.


In general, Mr Deputy Speaker, this Budget is addressing, across the board, the boosting of the economy. It is assisting enterprises to save jobs; it is protecting the more vulnerable among us and it is preparing the country for the future. It is whipping up economic activity by the relaunching of massive infrastructure projects which is unique and for the first time in the history of this country. The cascading result of these massive infrastructural projects is very simple: creating jobs; when you create jobs, you create the flow of money. Once money flows, you boost consumption. When you boost consumption, you increase demand. When you increase demand, you re-kickstart the economy after the crisis.
Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, on one point, is right, very right actually. There have been omissions. Il y a des choses que le vice Premier ministre, je le regrette, n’a pas dit. Il n’a pas dit qu’il allait augmenter la TVA de 20% - 10% à 12%; il n’a pas dit qu’il allait encore augmenter la TVA de 25% - de 12% à 15% comme eux l’avaient fait; 50% d’augmentation dans un mandat. Le vice Premier ministre n’a pas dit non plus qu’il avait laissé R6 milliards de squelettes dans le placard.

True again, the Leader of the Opposition has made numerous proposals and all these proposals have only one possible result, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and that is increasing Budget deficit. No proposition at all which is revenue generating. And they are right to say ‘que nous piquions les mesures qu’ils proposent’? God forbid! Dieu nous en garde, M. le président, que nous piquions ce genre de propositions ! Avec la bonne dose de démagogie qui caractérise l’opposition, il n’y a nul doute que, si eux étaient en place, si eux étaient au gouvernement, ces propositions qui augmenteraient le déficit budgétaire - sans augmenter les revenus de l’État - auraient été depuis longtemps converties en mesures politiques. J’ai fait rapidement, tout à l’heure, en l’espace de dix minutes, le calcul de ce qu’aurait coûté les propositions faites par l’honorable leader de l’Opposition. Cela aurait requis l’augmentation de la TVA de 15% à 25%.

Un rapide calcul and I challenge anybody in the Opposition to come and challenge these figures… .

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, one orator is enough.

Mr Sayed-Hossen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget presented by the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment, and inspired by the hon. Prime Minister, – I have said it already and I will repeat it with pride – double senior citizens’ pension overnight in 1995, introduced in 2005 free transport for schools, colleges, university goers, senior citizens and handicapped people so that every single child in this country could go to school. This Prime Minister, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, immediately adopted in 2008 the PRB award, by giving a 40% increase immediately and in toto. This Prime Minister, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, maintained an increase on all subsidies, on all basic commodities to ensure that everybody in this country may, at least, eat and increase social subsidies so that in a short-term or, at least, in a medium-term, everybody has a roof over his head. And they want to teach this Prime Minister lessons
in compassion! Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this must be a joke. No way, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir!

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am being flagged the yellow card by the acting Chief Whip so, I will end my presentation here. But before doing that, I have to thank and congratulate the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment for the introduction of this Budget which, there is no doubt, and we all concur about that - apart from, of course, a few people that we know - will help this country to weather out the crisis that we are undergoing. This is the Budget that will help us against the buffeting winds that are striking this country right now. This is this Budget which is going to prepare the country to bounce back once this crisis is over, whether it will be the end of this year or next year, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

I thank you.

(7.17 p.m.)

Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) : Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, être populaire et être populiste. After hearing the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I get this curious feeling that he wanted to adopt être populiste pour être populaire.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to give here a visual analogy. There are two gentlemen, one of them is the Minister of Finance and the second gentleman is the Leader of the Opposition. Both of them are having a cappuccino in a London restaurant, a very expensive place. The Leader of the Opposition says the cappuccino tastes good, but it is costly. The Minister of Finance who was sipping the cappuccino thinks otherwise. He thinks that the price of the cappuccino in a perfectly competitive market is 10 pounds sterling.

(Interruptions)

The willingness to pay for this cappuccino is ten pounds fifty. The cappuccino sold is nine, the tax raised in favour of the Government is zero and for the Minister of Finance, since it is a zero tax, he had a project in mind and it was jeopardised. The second scenario that comes to the mind of the Minister of Finance: the coffee bean of Brazil, the harvesters, had experienced bad weather. The farmers of coffee beans in Brazil suffered economically. The whole market supply of the coffee bean was down and the demand was up. The price of the world market goes up. The coffee growers of Tanzania were very happy and they made good money. They
start buying aluminium iron sheets and because the demand was high, the price of aluminium went up.

*Décider, c’est trancher* specifically when we are in the Government. It is very complex, because the Minister of Finance has to think in a very holistic way rather than bits and bits. I take this example of salary compensation that the hon. Leader of the Opposition took up. The NPC recommended 5.1% as salary compensation, which is insufficient according to him. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have done a bit of statistics, and I can make statistics lie. For him, 5.1% was not enough. But he forgets to say that this 5.1% increase in salary compensation will cost Rs1.4 billion to the State, which is indeed a big sum, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The other point that he raised is that the United States and France is doling out money to the American households, and we should do the same. How can we do it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? In America, people are talking about Ninja loans, that is, you don’t have a job, you don’t have a salary, you don’t have an asset, but still the bank is giving you money. And what follows was a credit crunch, a banking, financial and subprime crisis. In Mauritius, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have none of this. There is no Ninja loan, no credit crunch or banking crisis. I don’t understand the rationale of the hon. Leader of the Opposition that we should dole out money. And if we do it this will be a perfect recipe for crisis, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition cites China. He said that China is investing 440 million dollars in renewable energy. He is not aware that the China Investment Corporation is investing not millions, but 200 billion dollars. It is investing with foreign enterprises mostly from the United States. And these foreign investors cannot invest in the United States because of stringent regulations on environment. They find it nice to come to China and spoil the environment, because there is no legislation. I don’t understand his point that China is doing something great to save the environment. For us, whether the investor is investing in China, polluting its environment, and not polluting the atmosphere of the United States, is the same. They are polluting the mother planet.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will take one last point here. When the hon. Leader of the Opposition was talking of light rail transport, the way he was talking, I thought why he was so energized. I don’t know where that energy was coming from. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I read the Budget Speech of 2003/2004, at page 5, where it is said –
“The Light Rail Transport (LRT) option is on the way of being confirmed.”

Just one line! He was even accusing the Minister of Finance that he is jumping from here and there. The next sentence was –

“The northern part of the island is assured of adequate supply of water with the Midlands Dam now completed.”

This is called jumping, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from LRT to the water supply project in the north. It is not enough, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. If I go to the Budget Speech of 2004/2005 – the next year – there are two lines. They have improved by one line.

“The LRT project remains a solution for traffic decongestion in the long term. I am providing Rs20 m. for detailed studies on that project.”

They are talking of the LRT project in terms of priorities of priorities. They say that we are very slow. But, this is an example of slowness; one line in the Budget Speech of 2003/2004, and another line in 2004/2005 after a lapse of one year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, all Budgets have objectives and determinants. But what is more important is the contextual background of each Budget. In all fairness, if you have a cursory and a fleeting glance of the two last Budgets of the previous regime, that is, 2003/2004 and 2004/2005. Let us look at the backcloth of the 2003/2004 Budget Speech, and I quote –

“This Budget is set against an international climate marred by a succession of disturbing events.”

Let’s see what are those successive events of 2003/2004! War in Iraq, when the price of petrol was the same. They talked of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank God it never came to the shore of Mauritius. They talked of Germany likely to experience a slowdown. They say that Japan remains trapped in recession. They say the outlook of the Asian Tigers remains subdued. And the icing on the cake, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I quote again -

“Another crucial element in the budgetary equation will be the implementation of the Report of Pay Research Bureau, which will weigh heavily on the Budget.”
We all know the story of the PRB, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and how it was paid in a piecemeal basis. Let us see the background of the 2004/2005 Budget, and I quote again –

“The international backdrop to this Budget is one of uncertainty.”

They were talking of uncertainties in 2004, and let’s see what these uncertainties were. Firstly, the price of petrol has risen from US$ 29 to exceed US$ 40 per barrel in the last six months. They were worried about that. Can you imagine the price that we had to pay till August 2008? It was US$ 150. They were very apprehensive again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and I don’t know why. The decrease in the price of sugar will be the direct threat to the sugar industry. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank God the sugar industry is still alive and kicking. They were talking of the Multi-Fibre Agreement being dismantled. We know that the textile and the clothing sector never flourished like before when we took over as from 2005. They were talking of pressures coming from India and China. At that time, it was India/China, and now it is Chinindia. Textile and clothing industry is something of the past for us. They were talking of AGOA 3. For us, it is a boon and an opportunity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there were the fears and apprehension. This was their belief system. And we have a belief system as negative as uncertainty, fears. Then, there is something like helplessness. And when you are helpless, your potential for action is zero. It is no doubt, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we inherited a financial heritage bordering on insolvency when we took over Government. I don’t have to say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what is the backcloth of this Budget, except to say that this crisis is not confined to a particular segment of financial system. It has brought, in fact, the entire system to the brink of the breakdown, with far reaching consequences for small vulnerable economies like ours. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think “any parliamentary debate, without mentioning this backdrop, will tantamount to hypocrisy, if not heresy. Obviously, hon. Members of the Opposition, the choice is yours! I am not mentioning. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the crystal ball can be muddy. I am not talking about that, except by just mentioning the dangers of adverse climatic changes, the ferocity of which we have already experienced on 28 March 2008. I am not talking about the public health emergency, which can be triggered by the so-called Swine Flu. Mr Deputy Speaker. Sir, in my view, the Additional Stimulus Package is a humane policy response to a human
crisis, whose proportion and duration we don’t know. Here, I would like to
pay tribute to the visionary and enlightened leadership of our Prime
Minister. I would like to pay tribute to the Vice-Prime Minister & Minister
of Finance and the two Ministerial Committees, which were appointed in
November 2008. To pay homage to the Prime Minister, I shall quote the
third part of Henry VI, I quote, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir -

“My crown is in my heart, not in my head. It is not decked with
diamonds and Indian stones, nor to be seen. My crown is called
content.’

Indeed, the content of this Budget is the crown of the Prime Minister. I
have, in the previous Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, paid homage to the
Vice-Prime Minister by quoting Thirukural, and I’ll do it again this time.
And there is a very good reason why I’ll do it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.
Because even people from our side were saying “Rama pé met nous dans
trou”. People from our own side. That’s why I want to quote Thirukural
once again, and what does Thirukural say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir -

"If those who think to achieve, have a firm and focus mind, they will
always realise what they thought of."

Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the firm and focus mind of the Vice-
Prime Minister has prepared the nation to cross the desert to the promise
land. We are grateful to him. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on this side of the
House, we have a plan; we have a roadmap; we a have a direction; we have a
very strong, strengthened rationale; we have resourceful strategies to save
jobs, to protect people and prepare for the future. What about the other side
of the House? For sure, they have their own model to reinvent l’île Maurice.
I would like to know with bated breath, what does that mean to reinvent l’île
Maurice. They are going to propose alternative measures en temps et lieu.
Again, we would like to know what does that mean, in a very tangible form.
This is not time to wait. This is time for action. They are blaming us. The
same people are blaming us. Let me assure, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we
don’t play the game of populism. We don’t play for the gallery. Populism is
not our breakfast - bacon and eggs. On this side of the House, we have a
programme. We have very critical pathways to attend to this global
recession. We know that path one is about saving jobs, and the other four
paths are about protecting people and preparing after for the recovery. Mr
Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition says: “nous avons nos
propositions; nous avons un mari team économique qui m’impressionne beaucoup”. This is good for him, if people who propose only one proposition, can impress him. We can only wish him well, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Il persiste et signe: « Nous allons venir avec nos mesures détaillées le moment venu ». I can’t believe it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It is the same hon. Member who was telling us ‘too little too late’. For them, “le moment venu” is in the future. For us, the time is now. For us, décider c’est trancher, and when we decide, we don’t take half decision, we do not look for compromise.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are living in an age where change has come with frightening rapidity. Many terms have used: ‘meltdown’, ‘crisis’, ‘slowdown’, ‘downturn’; but it is marked by two things. One is the breathtaking pace of its spread and the second is the ability to undermine and the ability to shake the economic stability of a country. Here, I’ll take the example, Ireland. At one time, it was called the poor man of Europe. Subsequently, it had won the epithet of the Celtic tiger, a shining light of the global economy. Ireland was called the place, people and the profit, because of its sustained economic growth rate of 11%. Now, its economy is falling apart, or already set to crawl.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with globalisation and the free market economy, with this recession, we are sleeping on the same waterbeds. What is happening in Ireland or elsewhere can happen to us. Of course, there are no pipe dreams. There is no pipe dream to mitigate all harmful effects of this economic downturn. But we have two things, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir: we have vision, and the foresight of a dedicated Government team. We have the will and the skill to face headlong this impending crisis. And with this Budget, we are poised to enter another breakthrough, to create another economic velocity, in spite of the recession, and this is a promise to the nation. On this side of the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are conscious. Our economy is set to crawl in 2009, but let's not forget the recent past. We had already faced two semi financial crisis -

(iii) the rising in the fuel cost, and

(iv) the rocketing of price of essential goods, food commodities, iron bars, and cement, the backdrop of an old out-race for raw materials by China and India.

There was another crisis, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, but this crisis was homegrown. The development model of the previous Government, which was, once again, addressed successfully and incrementally, since we took power
in 2005. This development model of the previous regime is that the economy was in stagnation. It was not free flowing. «L’ascenseur social était en panne, la machine à créer l’emploi était grippée, il y avait l’urgence sociale et économique.» But, somebody has rightly said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir: politics is the art of rendering possible what is necessary, and this Government has rendered possible what was necessary. We have created three years of unprecedented stability and sustainable growth, oscillating around 5%, and this is not an accident. It is the fruit of a very deliberate economic policy and I can say, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, this deliberate economic policy can be used as a template for the Sub-Saharan region. Under the mindset of modernity, we adopted this outward looking orientation. We diversified our economy, which created a very strong wave of job creation. We brought in very healthy and resourceful legislation. We brought about tax reforms, we cut down waste; we even dismantled the skeleton that was in the cupboard but, more importantly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we provided linkages between the economic and the social objectives in the form of safety nets for the deprived. Our Prime Minister had made good use of his Statesmanship, leadership and diplomacy. He used the geo political position of Mauritius to bring the concept of south-south cooperation. Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am talking about the mega project of Tian Li. Apart from the state-of-art technology, foreign direct investment of 20 billion, this project will give further momentum to job creation. As I said before, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our growth trajectory will decline, no doubt. Our investment may experience a setback, textile and tourism sector are already filling the brunt; the construction sector is only registering 10% of downfall. Job creation and maintenance will suffer a contrecoup, but on a temporary basis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once again, we shall rise to the occasion of meeting this challenge. We shall weather the storm of the crisis. With the Additional Stimulus Package and this Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We shall continue our economic structural reform; we shall implement our programme in good faith, but what is more important again, is that we're going to repeat our attachment to promote the well-being of the nation, especially those who are poor, those who are downtrodden and those who are vulnerable.

Our reform of 2005, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, was like truth. First, it was ridiculed; secondly, it was violently opposed, but what is more important is that now it is finally accepted as something which is self-evident. We did what we set out to do, a very people centred development.
Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, history has taught us the weightage of different systems of Government. Under the visual analogy, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you take a nation, you divide it in two and build up a wall between them, apply on one side the rules of social economy and markets based on entrepreneurship and individual responsibility. On the other side, une économie étatisée, une économie regularisée with heavy doses of prohibitions, restrictions, rules and regulations and collective responsibility. Let it hibernate not for 40 years but for 14 years, break down the wall between the two sides and observe the difference. On one side, the success story of West Germany and, on the other side, the East Germany with all its social and economic turmoil.

The story that we retained, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that the people were the same, they were Germans, but it is not the human beings that are to be blamed but the rules of the game. The rules of the game, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, have been understood when we took power in 2005, an innovative, creative and entrepreneurial Government with open looking strategies. But, we never lost track that the progress will never come from outside, it must be won by us from inside. In 2005, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we chartered a different path, we took unpopular decisions, sticky decisions; we made hard choices and, once again, in the context of severe economic constraints – global - we have a formidable challenge to redefine our economic backdrop and it will be based on two things, the vision for the future and our inherent values. The vision for the future is a vision of the political leadership at the highest level and our values of reference, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, remains to create a very supportive and conducive environment for initiatives, discipline, responsibility, innovation and entrepreneurship without losing track of equity and social justice. Our structural and deep-seated reform, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has been revolutionary and close-related. We did not deploy any méthode brutale, instead we adopted la médecine douce. The nation has understood that our reform was not a punishment; our reform was a chance to face the challenge of the 21st Century. Looking back, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are ever grateful to the community, to the Mauritian nation, to la majorité silencieuse qui ne descend pas dans la rue, qui ne porte pas de pancarte, qui ne brûle pas les torchons. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government with its successive Budgets, le fil conducteur remains the human development and we are going to strive for that.

On this side of the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, we have been ignited by the vision of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam to eliminate poverty,
eliminate illiteracy, to eliminate ignorance and equality of opportunity and this is our promise to the Nation. We shall continue to strive to provide a secure and enjoyable present and also to look forward for a better future. The current economic crisis we are seeing in the world is a cry out to think and act in a new way. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with this Budget we have taken a formidable challenge to manage this economic downturn. In fact, we are poised to enter the second breakthrough in economic evolution, to save jobs, to protect people and prepare for the recovery. But, this can happen on conditionalities. On one point, I agree with the Leader of the Opposition. The strength and the potentialities of our public institutions need to be further exploited; the bureaucratic monster has to be streamlined. Weak policy frameworks should be taken care of, the policy units of each and every Ministry needs to be strengthened and the monitoring of each and every project has to be rigorously assessed.

On a concluding note, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to quote Mahatma Gandhi -

“For every action proposed or contemplated should, in its implementation, wipe the tears of the poor and the downtrodden people”.

And he further emphasized –

(...) only when we have wiped the tears from the faces of all, have we truly achieved as a Nation”.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir this is the essence and this is the philosophy of the Budget, we are going to wipe the tears from the faces of all Mauritians.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

At 7.49 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 8.53 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Minister of Industry, Science & Research (Mr D. Gokhool): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me, at the very outset, as the previous orators have done, as per parliamentary convention and tradition, thank the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for the presentation of this fourth Social Alliance Budget in this august Assembly. Let me also place on record the able guidance, leadership and support of the hon. Prime Minister during the preparation of this Budget. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have had the opportunity of listening to four interventions. The Leader of the Opposition,
hon. Dr. Bunwaree, hon. Cader Sayed-Hossen and hon. Dr. Mungur. One thing comes out very clearly and this point has been made by orators from this side of the House that when the Leader of the Opposition commented on the Budget, he very conveniently avoided referring to the global financial and economic crisis which is affecting the world economy as well as our economy. In fact this point was forcefully made by orators on this side of the House, but the Leader of the Opposition did refer to forecast that we failed to make about the crisis. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I see a paradox. When the Leader of the Opposition spoke, he avoided to discuss the global financial and economic crisis that the world is experiencing in the context of this Budget, one of the worst economic and financial crisis since the 1930s. But he also mentioned that we failed to forecast. We know that there are experts, analysts, observers and policymakers and it has been quite difficult to forecast the crisis which we are undergoing. Now, if the Leader of the Opposition says that we failed to forecast, they must have forecast. But in the course of his intervention, he said, he is not here to make proposals. The Opposition is not here to make proposals. I am wondering whether this is the case, or it is just a show because I also know that the MMM is going to set up a dream team of professionals to look at the economic situation and make proposals. A bit too late I thought. There are experienced politicians who could have done the job. So why is it now that the Leader of the Opposition, the MMM is looking for the dream team and headhunting professionals to come and help the MMM to formulate the alternative proposals. That perhaps is an explanation why the Leader of the Opposition has not been able to make proposals. Except for one, and that came from one of the members of MMM, that is selling of gold. I think that was the only proposal that was made and that also did not fit into what needs to be done to tackle this global financial and economic crisis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we all know, and even today, experts to forecast, analysts say it is very difficult to forecast, there is a very low visibility about the problems that we are facing, and what needs to be done. But, initiatives measures are being taken to address the issue. There are different scenarios and certainly we have to analyse and tailor make the decisions for the situation that we are confronting.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we also know that this crisis that we are facing, is linked to circumstances which are external and beyond our control. We know also that most economies have been battered by this economic crisis and there has been slowdown, growth is negative, international trade has shrunk and worst, unemployment is growing. ILO has predicted that
there will be some 100 million unemployed as the result of this global financial and economic crisis. But as stated by the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, and true it is, it is the first time in the history of a country that a Government has to present a Budget in such a depressive international context. It is after a very long time that we have such a difficult situation. In fact, this is the backdrop against which we need to examine the present budget. This crisis is bound to redefine the contours of the world economic order. We are heading for a new economic order. As a nation, how do we face such a predicament? How do we prepare for the future? How shall we, as a nation, cope with the challenges of this new economic order. The question we have to ask is: does this Budget respond to these concerns and preoccupations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a Budget is not simply a technical or accounting exercise. A budget is also one of the most important exercises for any Parliament or any democracy. It incarnates the fundamental principles, the vision and the values, the strategies, the goals and objectives that Government intends to accomplish on behalf of the people. It articulates and gives expression to the social contract between the Government and the citizens. Every budget is therefore an opportunity for Government to renew its pledge to the nation. Let me mention that in the Government Programme 2005-2010 these pledges were highlighted, namely to bring change at the various levels of our society, to take all necessary measures to create a society where there are opportunities for all, a more inclusive society, a society where there is equality treatment before the law and by all agencies, whether public or private, to bring in a new economic model through the democratisation of the Mauritian economy, to gear the country towards a future that is prosperous for all where economic success will be equally characterised by equity, ethics and social justice. But, above all, Government’s pledge is to ‘Put People First’ and also to democratise the economy, to ensure that economic success is characterised by equality, ethics and social justice.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these are the pledges of the Social Alliance Government to the people. In our successive budgets, in line with these pledges and commitments, Government has taken steps to ensure that these pledges are fulfilled. We have undertaken major reforms in the economy, focusing on investment facilitation, opening up of the economy, fiscal consolidation, discipline and tax reforms and we have embarked on profound structural reforms of the economy to generate growth, employment and wealth. We have succeeded in arresting the economic decline and
turning the economy around. Some of the outcomes through the reforms that we undertook are: unemployment rate declined to reach 7.2% in 2008, GDP growth recorded an average of 5% during these three consecutive years from 2006-2008, FDI shot up from Rs2.8 billion in 2005 to reach Rs11.5 billion in 2008 and public debt was reduced by 18% to reach Rs48.6 billion in 2008.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in short this Government has been able to restore high, robust and sustained growth from which the whole population has benefited immensely. Allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to mention some of the concrete measures taken to share the fruit of growth among the population. First, Government paid the PRB award of 2% of the GDP amounting to Rs5.2 billion in full, in one year without raising VAT and without increasing budget deficit. We have enhanced the purchasing power by cutting tariffs on a wide range of consumable items. We have maintained subsidies on flour and cooking gas. We have also increased the social transfers by 14% to reach the figure mark of Rs21 billion in 2008.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, all these outcomes, these results showed that we have been consistent with regard to our pledges to the people. Since July 2005, in successive budgets, we have been consistent with our core values, that is, ‘Putting People First’, democratising and modernising the economy. With the present budget, the 2009 Budget, this consistency, as far as the core values are concerned, is being maintained. But we have to agree that we are faced with a new context and unprecedented, unforeseen financial and economic crisis with the risk of a real social and human tragedy. This new context requires therefore a new response. There is need therefore to be innovative, imaginative while upholding the values that form the bedrock of our mandate.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Arnold Toynbee, the renowned historian describing the rise and fall of nations had this to say:

“When a nation is confronted with a challenge, it finds an appropriate and successful response. It then grows and prospers. As time passes, the nature of the challenge changes. We have to change our response. Otherwise, we shall decline and disappear as many cultures and civilizations have.”

This is, indeed, the magnitude and scale of the challenge we are called upon to address – the challenge of change. There is need for a new response in these circumstances. Therefore, does this Budget address these concerns? To my mind, yes, it does and I will elaborate at a later stage how it does. This
Budget was bound not only to be innovative and imaginative but also bold, daring and ambitious. It had to be bifocal, that is, face the immediate challenges and also prepare for the future. This Budget looks at the current crisis not only in terms of difficulties and challenges, but also as opportunities. It is both anti-crisis and pro-opportunity. This is the nature of this Budget ‘anticrise et pro reprise’. It is a test for the Mauritian genius to think out the box and to abandon conventional thinking, to be both reactive and proactive and to face up to the new realities of an inter-connected global village.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, by far, according to me, this Budget responds to the new challenge that Mauritius is facing. The most remarkable feature of this budget is that it contains over two hundred measures and mobilizes over Rs14.2 billion and has a time frame of 18 months, a shorter time frame, that is, instead of 24 months, the time frame is now 18 months. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget therefore aims at transforming our economy and our society. Our economy as we know is becoming more and more integrated to the global economy. We all know that the days of preferences and protection are gone. We have to go for global competitiveness for our survival and for prosperity.

We have to integrate progressively the global value change and we have to prepare the nation, our institutions to reach the global norms and benchmarks. This paradigm shift, therefore, increasingly requires a mind shift. I believe that we have to engage our population to think global. We cannot solve today's problems and tomorrow’s problems with the tools and concepts that work under a regime of preferences and protectionism. We have to develop new tools and new concepts to address the problems, the challenges of the new economic order.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, therefore, this Budget, as I said, is bifocal, addressing the immediate problems and challenges, but also preparing for the future. But it is, by far, a powerful vehicle for this transformational challenge. This Budget is a catalyst for a mind shift, for a new order of things. For me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is essentially a transformational Budget, beyond the 3-key and immediate objectives of saving jobs, protecting people and preparing for recovery. If we look at all the projects and many are being implemented and many will be implemented “à travers un vaste chantier de différents projets socio-économiques, ce budget jette les jalons pour une île Maurice moderne.” This Budget lays the foundation for a new forward-looking, confident and united 21st Century Mauritius. This is the task that this Budget is addressing.
Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have listened, read and heard criticisms from different quarters about this Budget, be it from the Trade Union movement, from media, from employers and from various sides of the Opposition.

Let me respond to some of the criticisms which have been made with regard to this present Budget. One underlying theme in all the criticisms is that not enough is being done for the working class. This is the common theme. The Trade Union movement, the Opposition and certain sections of the media say that not enough protection is being given to the purchasing power of the citizens.

The other criticism is that this Budget is pro-private sector. Of course, the hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned some of the problems relating to implementation, problems which are not new. In every Government, there is a Government Programme, there are Budgets and there are many problems, administrative, legal and financial. You may go for a contract which is awarded, then there is contest, it goes to court; all these things are there. So, they do delay implementation of certain projects and it takes more time. There are certain problems of implementation which, of course, this Government is addressing. True it is that we are also, at times, impatient that some projects are not moving as fast as we would have wished. This is a problem that will be addressed.

I will come to the two criticisms that not enough is done for the working class, there is not enough protection of the purchasing power and the Budget is for pro-private sector. Let me take the first two points that not enough is being done for the working class and we are not protecting the purchasing power of the citizens. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think there is a basic problem in this argumentation. People do not live by bread and butter alone. The income and the salary are important. In fact, Government always tries to balance the interests of the working class with the interests of other segments of the society.

I mentioned the PRB, Rs5.2 billion was paid at one go. We paid the PRB but beyond wages and salaries, Government has taken a wide range of initiatives. I can just name a few of them. In the successive budgets which have been presented before this House, the subsidies which support income have been maintained. It has to be factored in when we talk about the compensation and also the purchasing power. I have just mentioned social transfers, that is, support which is extended to the different socio-economic groups.
If we take a look at the Social Security Statistics, the economic and social indicators for the period 2002/2003, 2007/2008, this is what the report says, I quote –

“Expenditure on social security and welfare increased by 63.1% from Rs7,898,000 in 2002/2003 to Rs12,880,000 in 2007/2008 representing respectively 20.5%, 23% of total Government expenditure.”

And we have a breakdown of all the social transfers. There has been a significant increase of the social transfers.

Let me also mention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that under the grant for casting of roof slabs this also contributes to the income of people at different levels. In fact, this is meant for lower-income groups, the number of beneficiaries from 2005 to date is 13,175 families and a total of Rs670,215,000 has been disbursed. I can take other examples to illustrate how this Government cares for the citizens. The various schemes for vulnerable groups under the National Empowerment Foundation, the Trust Fund for the Integration of Vulnerable Groups, free transport, income tax reliefs, no increase on VAT, and, of course, the setting up of the Competition Commission, one of its aims being to ensure that there is no malpractices as far as pricing of products are concerned.

I don’t think that it is proper to just isolate wages and salaries and make an argumentation that this Government is not caring for the purchasing power or the income of the citizens. In fact, we have a whole range of schemes and social transfers which help people at different levels.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as pro-private sector is concerned, which private sector are we talking about? Hon. Pravind Jugnauth has been Minister of Finance, Leader of the Opposition, Prime Minister and also Minister of Finance. Can the development of this country have taken place without the partnership between the private and the public sector? In fact, in today’s context when we are confronted with so many challenges on the external front, this partnership has to be reinforced. Of course, we have to ensure that this is a responsible partnership and, in fact, this is what this Government is doing. I mean, the argument is made that we are dishing out public funds to the private sector, but I think this point has been amply canvassed. I don’t know why this argument keeps coming up, because everything can be checked. And we have given the undertaking in this House, and even outside this House, that we will act in a transparent manner. Internationally, whatever is being spent with regard to support, will be made available and it will be done in a very transparent manner.
In any case, the 100 top companies are not looking for support. The banks are not looking for support. The top big ones are not looking for support. While I argued when I was intervening on the Additional Stimulus Package, I put the question: Can we afford to let our industry die, close down? As I argued, it is not only for saving jobs, but it goes beyond saving jobs. America is supporting its industry. It continues to support Chrysler and General Motors. Why? It is very simple. If these big companies/corporations close down, the country is going to lose its industrial know-how which it has built over time. Let me give an example in the sugar sector. We have a sugar industry and now we are going on to make of it a cane industry. If the sugar industry had closed down, would we have had that industrial know-how? This is the IPR of the economy. Similarly, the hotel industry which is now becoming the hospitality industry and it is looked upon as one of the best in the world. This is also our industrial IPR.

Concerning the textile and apparel sector, we have the best textile firms in Mauritius, with international benchmarks. Can we afford to lose this industrial know-how? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is a fundamental reason why countries like America, Japan or any other part of the world want to support the industrial infrastructure, because if we do not have an industrial infrastructure, the economic development will suffer. That’s another reason why Government needs to support, protect jobs, but also to ensure that we do not destroy and lose the industrial know-how which we have built over so many years.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, the criticisms are not serious. In fact, when I refer to the speeches of the previous Government, when the situation was not so dramatic, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the then Minister of Finance, was making appeals that we have to be patriotic. How in the present conditions, when the priority is ensuring that Government deals with these problems in the larger interest of the population, can the Opposition come with such flimsy criticisms? I think the Opposition has no case. That’s why I do not want to spend too much of my time responding to the Opposition. I know that after I have spoken, when other Opposition Members will take the floor, the same criticism will come; it is worse than that. It will be a repetition. I invite the Opposition, at least, to be imaginative and not go on repeating the old rhetoric of pro-private sector bias that we are not taking care of the working class. On a déjà entendu cela. Let us be serious and come with more solid arguments about how to
tackle real problems which face the people and their livelihood. This is the real issue.

There is another thing which I want to mention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. True it is, Government has a responsibility to govern, take measures, introduce policies, but then what is the role of the Opposition? Is it just to oppose and criticise? I mean, is this the role of an Opposition which is aiming at being the alternative Government with so many aspiring Prime Ministers? It is a missed opportunity for the Opposition. They should have taken the opportunity and come to the House and given their own views about how the economy should be managed and convince people about their merit for aspiring to be in the alternative Government. I do think the Opposition has a long way to go.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think I will fail in my duty as ex-Minister of Education & Human Resources if I do not take the opportunity to respond to a couple of criticisms with regard to the education sector for which I was responsible for three years. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the reform that we introduced in 2005 was to respond to the situation that was created by the previous Government. Let me say one thing. My predecessor, hon. Obeegadoo, had commissioned a report by UNESCO/BREDA on the primary and secondary school system. When that report came, in fact, I had the choice of not making the report public or making it public. It was commissioned by my predecessor. The report was made public. What came out of it is something that people should revisit. When the reforms started with the previous Government, they changed ranking to grading. And if we look at the empirical data, the performance of pupils at CPE was going down year after year. That was the main objective why we introduced the reform. My colleague has just mentioned that the results are showing an upward trend. This is true. This is number one. Number two, because they asked for it and I have to come back to 2005, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. When we took over, they were talking about building so many schools.

(Interruptions)

But I said it in this House and if my child was in a school at that time, I would have taken that Government to court. Children were admitted to l’école fantôme; schools that were not built.

(Interruptions)

Quatre Bornes SSS, Nouvelle France SSS!
The Deputy Speaker: Order please! Order! Hon. Ms Deerpalsing, please!

Mr Gokhool: And last but not the least. This one, I take the opportunity and say it for hon. Pravind Jugnauth. He has to go back to paragraph 147 of the President’s Address 2005/2010, where it is stated black and white, I quote –

“My Government is committed to carrying out fundamental reforms in education with a view to providing World Class Quality Education to enable young Mauritians to be employable in new sectors of the economy, to have more fulfilling jobs and also to be competitive at the international level.”

What you have been doing with the hon. Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance - now you are changing - you were targeting him. You did give that to me as well. You targeted me as if I was the person who invented or brought forward the term ‘World Class Quality Education. No, it was in the Government Programme. I, as the Minister responsible, had to implement the programme. It is as simple as that. And I think this type of politics, we should avoid if we are aspiring to high offices. I will not go beyond that. I think I’ll stop because I have answered. I wanted to answer and I have answered.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the key features, some of the highlights of this Budget are aimed at saving jobs, protecting people and preparing for recovery. We have outlined five plans. I am not going to comment on all five: save jobs, project realisation and capacity in public sector. We have the largest public sector investment programme, protection to the population, eradication of poverty and maintaining the expansionary fiscal and monetary policy approach. As I said, there are 200 measures for resources to the tune of Rs14.2 billion in a time frame of 18 months. But what I see as striking in this Budget, and I am going to comment on that. One, this budget is comprehensive and inclusive. I must congratulate the Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance. Very often, people are unfair and criticize, but this time, a wide range of sectors from, of course, the economic operators who have the problem to save jobs, but also almost all sectors of the economy. From women, children, youth, taxi drivers, small contractors, fishers, small planters, potato/onion planters, fruit growers, cattle breeders, dairy farmers, pig breeders, small contractors, small traders, hawkers, to small shop owners and other micro-business operators. They
have all been taken care of. That is why I say that this Budget is comprehensive and inclusive.

The second striking feature in this Budget is that it has inbuilt in it the spirit of solidarity. When a country is going through difficulty, sectors which can support should support the economy. And that is why in paragraph 194, with regard to corporate social responsibility, Government will tap the Budget of IRS projects up to Rs50 m. and will provide the matching grant. This money will be used for various projects. In paragraphs 251 and 252, profitable companies in the telecom and banking sectors will be required to contribute to Government efforts. There is the spirit of solidarity which we can find in this Budget. The next striking feature - and I think this is very important - we are investing in the development of infrastructure, and we know that there is a link between economic growth and the quality of a country's infrastructure. If we upgrade our infrastructure, this is going to contribute to the economic growth. That is why Government is giving priority in terms of upgrading the infrastructure. We know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that there has been a long debate going on about traffic congestion, and how much it costs to the economy, about Rs3 billion. One of the responses is to tackle the problem of traffic congestion, and that is why we are modernising our road network. As regards investing in infrastructural development, this is for the first time that we have such a scale of projects. Let me now comment on what, in my view, is fundamental. When there is a crisis, there is a temptation for costs cutting. We need to have recourse to cross cutting to do away with wastage or restructuring. But what is very striking in this Budget is the efforts Government is making with regard to human resource development, human capital.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to the building of human capacity and we can find numerous examples. This Budget provides some Rs300 m. under the National Empowerment Foundation to run Work cum Training scheme. This is part of the effort to invest in our human capital. In paragraphs 64 and 65, provision has been made for training in the printing sector and other sectors. In paragraph 79, life skill training for supervisors and coachers will improve productivity and capacity. In paragraph 93, the Maritime Training Academy will provide training for fishers in Rodrigues as well as for 50 skippers and 50 mechanics. In paragraph 118, placement of 2,000 School Certificate and Higher School Certificate holders after training for 40 days and Rs21 m. have been provided. In paragraphs 138 to 145, human resource capacity-building for the public sector and Services to Mauritius programme and the employment of newly qualified engineers. On
top of that, we know that Government is also implementing the Workfare Programme for those who have lost their jobs. There is also the project *l’Espace Des Métiers*. If we look at all these projects, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is clear that Government is putting a lot of priorities on Human Resource Development Capacity-Building. In fact, as we always say, if Mauritius has made so much progress this is due to our human resources. We don’t have any other resources except our human resources. This philosophy is being continued through this Budget and by this Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the other striking feature, of course, is saving enterprises and saving jobs. As I said, we are saving jobs, but, at the same time, we are promoting the development, the modernisation of the SME sector. Because in the SME sector, people create their own jobs and they provide employment to others. So, in my view, therefore, in these circumstances, this Budget is responding to the current challenges in the most appropriate manner.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now briefly comment on the initiatives we are taking with regard to the manufacturing sector, in particular, the export-oriented enterprises, which fall under the responsibility of my Ministry and also what we are doing in terms of supporting the economy in its modernisation effort through science and research.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these are, as I said, difficult times and the manufacturing sector, especially the export-oriented enterprises are going through difficult times. That is the reason why in the 2008/2009 Budget, Government introduced the Manufacturing Adjustment and SME Development Fund (MASMED) and this Fund was of a value of Rs500 m. It was set up with a vision of positioning the manufacturing enterprises and SMEs as globally competitive sectors. As I have mentioned and I think there was a PQ during the day about how this Fund is being managed. There are in all 51 projects which have been approved by the Fund and six other projects have been completed. Three of them have been completed, and there are about 25 which are in the process of being implemented. Once a project is being defined, it has to go through tendering, consultants have to be chosen, and it takes some time. But, the projects are being implemented, and there are others that will be implemented in the course of time.

The MASMED Fund is operational, and we have a number of projects. I cannot go through the whole list, but I can just mention a few of them. In the project relating to light engineering sector of Rs2.5 m., 35 firms have been audited and a roadmap will be established to upgrade this
sector. Concerning the benchmarking for the textile sector, this project has been completed to a value of Rs500,000, and a validation workshop will be organised to disseminate the findings of the report to operators by the end of June 2009.

Concerning legal advice for the preparation of regulatory measures regarding standards and metrology to the tune of Rs200,000, a project has been completed, and action has been initiated.

Concerning enterprise diagnostics for 150 enterprises, the first phase of this project has been completed. 15 companies have already been diagnosed and reports submitted. And the second phase will be completed by 30 May 2009. We have a range of projects like energy saving audits, diversification of the textiles and clothing sector, the Technology Diffusion Scheme, the support to upgrading of standards and quality and packaging, innovation and product development studies. In all, there are 51 projects. I can assure the House that there is monitoring. An Evaluation Committee has been set up to follow the progress of these projects month by month. I can inform the House that this Fund is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of my Ministry. I, myself, make it a point to ensure that these projects are being implemented. I give a personal attention to all these projects, because we cannot afford not to implement these projects. My colleague, the Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance, always reminds me whenever he meets me that we must make sure that these projects are implemented. And we are doing the needful. We also know that, in December, the Additional Stimulus Package was introduced, and we raised the contribution of the MASMED Fund by Rs1 billion. And now, with this Budget, this Fund has gone up to Rs3.5 m. to support enterprises, modernise them and make them competitive, to ensure that they do not close down.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, apart from the support which we are providing to ensure that our enterprises remain competitive, that they do not close down, that jobs are saved, we are also taking a number of steps in order to keep this sector dynamic.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the level of my Ministry, I would like to mention a few other measures which we are taking in order to support the export-oriented enterprises. We are in the process of operationalising the Fashion and Design Institute. This is part of the innovative strategy that we are adopting in the industrial/manufacturing sector. We believe that we have to transform the sector into an innovative and creative sector. Fashion and design is bound to become a new industry. It will encompass the Textile and
Apparel Industry and other sectors. Just as I have mentioned that the sugar industry is now the cane industry, the hotel industry is the hospitality industry, similarly the textile and apparel and other sectors, because of the decisive aspect of value added products, through creativity and design will become the Fashion and Design Industry. The institute is being operationalised; we have already appointed a project coordinator, and we are in the process of appointing the Chief Executive Officer for this institution. We are running the second Mauritius Business Excellence Award, because we have to motivate enterprises towards continuous improvement. This is a project to encourage enterprises to go for excellence.

With regard to export promotion, we are - together with Enterprise Mauritius, MEXA - working for market diversification from our traditional markets in UK, Europe and America to other markets in East European countries, India and, of course, Africa. We are putting in place a strategy for market diversification. With regard to the US market, as you know, we obtained the Third Country derogation. We had an AGOA 8, and we are following it up. Enterprise Mauritius has put up a window to help entrepreneurs, and put them in contact with our representatives in the United States. We have a trade representative, and we are now charting out a new strategy to promote exports and to take advantage of the Third Country Fabric derogation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when I look at the Export-Oriented Enterprises sector, I find a mixed picture. Some enterprises are going through a difficult time, while for others, although their chiffres d'affaires may have gone down, they are not making losses. In fact, I find a very interesting situation where large enterprises work on a subcontract system and the subcontractors – there are about 50 or 60 of them – are doing well, and they are even recruiting people. Star Knitwear is recruiting people, and there are so many other enterprises. This is not a situation which is gloomy altogether, but we have to be careful because the market is a depressed one and exports have been coming down. We have to ensure that we maintain our share of market and diversify the markets. This is what we are doing.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, my Ministry is also responsible for science and research. We know that if countries like America, Europe, Japan, India and China have made remarkable economic progress, it is because they have been supported by cutting edge, science technology and innovation. I think this is a weakness in our economic model. And we have to remedy this situation. That is why we will make proposals. First, we are coming with a new industrial strategy document, which will move our
enterprises to become globally competitive, environmentally sustainable and socially responsible, supported by science, technology and innovation. In that respect, I think it is imperative that we develop a model of a science, technology and innovation park. We have research-based organisations which work not so much in a coordinated manner. We have to bring them together and create a Mauritian model of a science, technology and innovation park.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in that context, my Ministry is also finalising a framework document for science technology and innovation. Like I mentioned, there is a new industrial strategy document which is being finalised. These are, therefore, two important documents, which will give the new direction to the industrial and manufacturing sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in a context of globalisation, we are bound to work with international agencies. I am happy to state that we have struck very good partnership with “Agence Française de Développement”. We have signed an agreement to provide a grant of euro 1.5 million for technical assistance under a “Programme de renforcement des capacités commerciales”. The programme has been approved and will involve assistance of many to the parastatals under my Ministry. My Ministry is also working with UNIDO. UNIDO had developed a Mauritius Industrial upgrading and modernisation programme 2009-2014, in the context of the regional SADC industrial and modernisation programme. The Ministry of Industry will be responsible to coordinate the programme and the programme will be directed first to support the upgrading and competitiveness improvement for Agro, food processing, tourism including handicrafts and textile enterprises. Second, strengthen institutional capacities of technical support institutions and third strengthen institutional capacities of Mauritian Ministries responsible for economic and industrial activity. We are working with AFD and also with UNIDO. We are working with all these important agencies in order to revitalise the industrial manufacturing sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like now to conclude by saying that this Budget, as I said, is a transformational Budget. It is laying the foundation for a new modern Mauritius. There will be another Budget in December, but I think the foundation is being laid. We should look to the future with confidence and not in a spirit of gloom and doom as the Opposition and some other stakeholders are doing. We have a bright future. We have to go forward with courage, conviction. I am confident that the Mauritian population will understand the intentions of this Government and
will fully support all the projects that we are implementing through this Budget.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr R. Issack (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): M. le vice président, je ne sais pas si je suis le libero ou bien le gardien de but de l’équipe. Je suis tout le temps le dernier à toucher la balle. Ceci dit …

(Interruptions)

Espérons que je vais marquer quelques buts. M. le vice président, le monde est en crise mais ce n’est pas la fin du monde. Il y a une étincelle qui a provoqué une conflagration et ceci a commencé avec le petit marché de subprimes et, aujourd’hui, nous nous trouvons dans une situation de crise planétaire. Il y a Joseph Stiglitz, Prix Nobel de l’économie en 2001, qui a dit ceci : « Les crédits ont agi comme des stéroïdes pour doper la croissance américaine. Mais il y a eu overdose. L’Amérique est aujourd’hui en cure de désintoxication”. L’Amérique éternue et c’est le monde qui est grippé.

L’économie est globalisée et tout choc, surtout aux Etats-Unis, est immanquablement ressenti partout ailleurs, et le marché monétaire est paralysé, et nous faisons face à une crise financière sans précédent. Si Lehman Brothers, la cinquième banque d’affaires des Etats Unis, vieille de 150 ans, s’est écroulé, posons-nous la question maintenant : nous, à l’île Maurice, que sommes-nous ? Il y a le président de la Banque Mondiale, Robert Zoellic, qui vient de faire une déclaration dimanche à la presse espagnole. Il a dit notamment ceci : ‘si l’on ne prend pas de mesures, il existe un risque d’arriver à une grave crise humanitaire et sociale, avec des implications politiques très importantes. Les mesures de relance peuvent être déterminantes. Ce qui a commencé comme étant une grande crise financière est devenue une profonde crise économique, et dérive aujourd’hui en une crise du chômage. Si l’on crée des infrastructures et met les gens au travail cela peut être un moyen d’associer le défi à court terme à des stratégies à long terme. A mon avis, dans ce contexte, personne ne sait vraiment ce qui va se passer et le mieux est d’être prêt pour tout imprévu.

Le chômage va continuer à augmenter, et nous savons que le chômage et la pauvreté existent à Maurice un peu partout, malheureusement. Et nous savons comment vit un homme qui est au chômage - un père de famille qui a des difficultés. Et nous savons maintenant quelles sont les appréhensions de ces gens qui travaillent et qui craignent de perdre tôt ou tard leur emploi.
C'est une peur, c'est une phobie et, ici, le gouvernement justement est en train de tout faire, d'intervenir, de prévenir pour que nous ne vivions pas de telles situations. A Maurice nous avons trois secteurs. Les trois mamelles de l'économie, les trois ‘T’ : la terre, le tourisme, le textile. Ce sont ces trois secteurs notamment que le gouvernement veut sauver, veut stimuler. Et pour cela, il vient avec le Stimulus Package ou Additional Stimulus Package, et quand on parle de Stimulus Package on parle d’argent. Et l’argent du contribuable est sacré, chaque sou est sacré, chaque sou est donc important. On ne doit pas dépenser inutilement. Le gouvernement veut sauver le secteur privé, les entreprises privées pour que les gens par milliers ne perdent pas leur emploi. Mais que dit-on ? Il y a une diabolisation du secteur privé d’année en année, year in year out. Dès qu’une mesure est prise en faveur de l’employé qui passe directement par le secteur privé, on crie, on hurle: « Rama Sithanen c’est l’homme du secteur privé, le gouvernement c’est le secteur privé. » Il n’y a rien de plus faux et de démagogique que cela. Le nombre de familles uniquement - on prend les petites et moyennes entreprises, il y a 240,000 employés. Imaginons un instant qu’aucune aide n’est apportée pour stimuler ces entreprises ? Que se passerait-il ? Combien de gens tomberont sur le pavé ? Combien de familles vont subésquemment souffrir ? Une entreprise, c’est une entreprise. Le secteur privé ce sont toutes les entreprises. Mais ce matin même, dans une interview accordée à ‘L’express’, le ministre des Finances explique très clairement, qui bénéficie de ce Stimulus Package. Ce n’est pas Ireland Blyth, ce n’est pas Rogers, mais il y d’autres entreprises. Il y a des petites et des moyennes entreprises. Donc, refuser d’aider ces entreprises, c’est mettre le pays sur les rotules. Refuser d’aider ces entreprises, c’est pousser le pays vers le précipice ! Alors il faut bien se dire que ce Stimulus Package, l’aide financière qu’on accorde, ce n’est certainement pas de l’argent offert à gogo, ce n’est pas la manne qui tombe du ciel, et ce n’est pas la fiesta pour toutes les entreprises privées de ce pays. Il y a des conditions évidemment qui sont attachées à cette aide. Mais, en même temps, il faut comprendre qu’à travers ces conditions, il y a une chose qui est claire et nette. On ne subventionne pas la malhonnêteté des entreprises, ni l'entreprise des malhonnêtes. Alors, aider les moyennes et petites entreprises, c’est un besoin, c’est un devoir, si on veut vraiment sauver les petites gens, les moyennes gens, alors c’est une nécessité. Mais, ceci dit, il faut aussi faire référence aux employés qui se trouvent dans la fonction publique, parce que nous ne devons pas oublier que ce budget est aussi le budget de l’effort et le budget de la solidarité. Ce qui importe pour combattre le chômage, les difficultés économiques, ce sont la productivité, la rentabilité et la profitabilité. Il y a quelques années de cela, le Premier
ministre d'alors, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, avait fait une remarque très pertinente en ce qu'il s'agit des fonctionnaires. Il avait parlé de certains fonctionnaires qui "ti pé lire roman dan file' et L'Etat n'est pas là pour financer la paresse, il faut que tout le monde, fonctionnaire ou pas, qu'on travaille, qu'on bosse, même les politiciens. Alors il va nous falloir, pour combattre cette mentalité, un apprivoisement psychologique parce que, dans certains secteurs, malheureusement, nous l'avons noté, et nous l'avons déjà dit ici ou ailleurs, in some sectors you have full-time workers who are doing a part-time job but are paid overtime. Alors c'est le budget de tout un chacun, le budget de la solidarité, de l'effort conjugué. Je ne vais pas m'étendre trop sur le budget, mais je voudrais quand même m'appesantir sur la culture, un aspect important de ce budget. Ce matin même j'ai entendu le ministre de l'Education et de la Culture qui disait que, culture is the essence, c'est l'essence même de notre vie. Alors c'est bien, c'est intéressant, les efforts qu'on fait pour la culture. La culture ce n'est pas seulement la musique mais il y a aussi ces centres culturels Tamoul, Télégou, Islamique et espérons, Marathi, enfin le Centre Nelson Mandela. Il y a tellement de centres, mais espérons que dans l'épanouissement de la culture, parce que parfois la culture est compartimentée à Maurice, chacun vit sa culture et ses traditions alors que nous aurions pu vivre avec l'autre, ensemble, on peut partager la culture. Nous n'importons pas, nous n'échangeons pas, il n'y a pas inter-exchange of cultures. Alors, espérons que le ministre, avec les moyens dont il dispose - déjà il a annoncé certaines mesures - nous aurons tous l'occasion de vivre ces cultures ensemble. Mais quand même je souhaite féliciter le ministre des Finances pour avoir pensé au Musée de la Photographie. La photographie c'est la mémoire, c'est tout un passé fixé sur pellicule, et nous savons tous comment notre ami, le responsable du Musée de la Photographie, Tristan Bréville, se démène, se décarcasse pour que nous puissions avoir notre patrimoine fixé sur pellicule. C'est un travail immense. Alors, il faudrait non seulement encourager le Musée de la Photographie mais d'autres musées, d'autres musées d'art et de la culture.

Mais après la culture il y a l'agriculture…

(Interruptions)

Et la culture physique - je laisse cela à l'honorable Dr. Burty David. Je lis dans le budget qu'on a dépensé R 250 millions for the pigs. Mais l'encouragement de l'agriculture - il y a évidemment les pêcheurs, on essaie de faire beaucoup for the breeders mais il faut encourager les gens, la population à planter. Nous dépensons beaucoup dans l'importation des produits vivriers, mais nous devons apprendre non seulement à planter mais
encourager les gens à venir à Maurice pour qu'ils encouragent eux-aussi l'agriculture. Ici, je pense à un mauricien établi en Australie. Il est venu à Maurice en six occasions pour ouvrir une école de l'agriculture, et je crois que le ministre, l'honorable Dr. Burty David, l'avait rencontré. Mais justement on pensait, il y a quelques instants, à ces fonctionnaires qui ralentissent, qui freinent tout. Ce monsieur est venu à l'île Maurice en six occasions, uniquement pour son école et, jusqu'à présent, il n'a pas pu ouvrir cette école de l'agriculture qu'il voulait non profit-making. Donc, nous devons encourager, nous devons tout faire et nous ne devons pas simplement labialiser, parler du bout des lèvres, il faut qu'il y ait des actions, des actions concrètes. Alors espérons que cette école aura l’appui nécessaire de nos fonctionnaires, du gouvernement, pour qu'elle puisse ouvrir incessamment.

Ce budget est un budget de solidarité nationale aussi, c'est le budget du patriotisme, C'est un budget intelligent, rationnel, réaliste, nationaliste. Mais, malgré les critiques qu'il doit essuyer, il y a une chose que l'on ne devrait pas négliger, ni oublier. Il ne faut pas oublier - on l’a dit ici et ailleurs – que le ministre des Finances est un homme qui a ses racines, qui a un passé, une histoire. Et celui qui n’a pas connu la pauvreté ne pourra jamais combattre la pauvreté. Il l’a connue; il l’a vécue. Et je ne crois pas que c’est un homme qui ne pense pas aux pauvres. Tout gouvernement pense aux pauvres, mais on ne s’adresse pas aux problèmes des pauvres de la même manière. Chacun a sa façon, chacun a son style et le gouvernement du jour a fait preuve, en maintes occasions, de ses sentiments vis-à-vis de la classe pauvre et ouvrière. Et c’est une vision partagée. Je crois que le Premier ministre c’est un peu la vision, la pensée; et l’honorable Dr. Rama Sithanen, c’est la complémentarité.

Pour terminer, M. le président, je souhaite, au nom de tous mes collègues, féliciter le ministre des Finances pour ce budget très difficile et en même temps réaliste et très pratique.

Merci, M. le président.

The Minister of Information & Telecommunication Technology
(Mr A. Dulull): Sir, I beg to move for the adjournment of the debate.

Mr Bodha rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Wednesday 27 May 2009, at 11.30 a.m.
Dr. Sithanen rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

At 10.12 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Wednesday 27 May 2009, at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

HOSPITALS – RECEPTION DESK - OFFICERS

(No. B/512) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Lucchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the nursing and other officers posted at the reception desk to attend to emergency cases at the casualty departments in the hospitals, he will state the number thereof in each case.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that the setting up of a Reception Desk for Triage with the support of a Triage Nurse and a Health Care Assistant, was introduced in September 2005. This system was put in place in line with our Government Programme 2005-2010 regarding the reform of the Accident & Emergency Department.

To date, a reception desk is operational at each Regional Hospital and it is manned by one Senior Nursing Officer and one Health Care Assistant who act as Triage Nurse. This service is supported by other officers, including the Medical Records Officers and other Nursing Officers in the Accident & Emergency Department prior to the patient being seen by the Medical and Health Officer. In addition, there are Police Officers, Security Guards and Hospital Servants who assist the patients as and when required.

For instance, at Victoria Hospital some 15 such personnel and at SSRN Hospital some 13 such personnel are, respectively, involved in the various processes as from a patient arrives at the hospital until he/she is seen by a doctor. These processes include a service d’accueil and the taking and recording of the vital signs and blood pressure of the patient before the latter is examined by a Doctor.
The Triage Nurses have the responsibility to screen patients attending the Casualty Department between 0800 hours and 2200 hours with a view to ascertaining the urgency of each case. The emergency cases are referred to the Accident & Emergency Department and the other cases are directed to the Unsorted Outpatient Department. Patients attending hospitals between 2200 hours and 0800 hours on the next morning are all seen at the Accident & Emergency Department.

Moreover, a fast track approach has been put in place for children and the elderly. In fact, these two categories of patients are referred immediately by the Reception Desk to the Unit concerned.

VACCINATION PROGRAMME – INFANTS

(No. B/513) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he will state if Government will consider including vaccines against cancer in the Vaccination Programme for infants.

Reply: I am advised that an infant is a child below the age of one year.

I am also informed that there is no vaccine against cancer for infants and, therefore, the question of including vaccines against cancer in the vaccination programme for infants does not arise. However, Hepatitis B vaccine is routinely being given to infants in Mauritius in three doses. This prevents Hepatitis B infection and indirectly decreases the risk of liver cancer during adulthood.

CITÉ JONCTION, PAILLES - BUILDING EXTENSION – PETITION

(No. B/514) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Black River District Council, information as to if it has received a petition from the inhabitants of the Cité Jonction, Pailles, to the effect that the extension of a building is obstructing the view of the drivers coming from Cité Jonction, Pailles, to the main road, and, if so, the measures that will be taken.

Reply: I am informed by the Black River District Council that no complaints have been received from the inhabitants of Cité Jonction, Pailles
pertaining to the erection an enclosure of a grotto located at Corner Dahlias and Pailles Road.

EMPLOYEES – LAY-OFFS – COMPENSATION

(No. B/515) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment whether, in regard to the lay-offs that have taken place in the different sectors of the economy for the months of February, March and April 2009, he will, in each case, state –

(a) the number thereof;

(b) the name of the employers, and

(c) the number of employers who have offered compensation to their employees.

Reply: The number of workers who have been laid-off sector wise for the months of February, March and April 2009 is as follows -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of workers laid-off</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive Trade</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-EPZ Manufacturing</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing Sector for Export</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>414</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I would like to draw the attention of the House that in my reply to the Private Notice Question at our sitting of the 31 March 2009, I informed that
the number of workers laid-off during the months of February and March 2009, up to 30 March, was 237 and 702 respectively. I wish to point out that there is currently no provision in the Employment Rights Act 2008 for a time limit for an employer to notify my Ministry of the termination of employment of any worker. Consequently, notifications with regard to some termination of employment which occurred in the months of February and March 2009, have been received well after March 2009. Hence, the total number of workers laid-off during the months of February, March and April 2009 is, as at 25 May 2009, 414, 902 and 164 respectively.

I have to inform the House that consideration is being given to amend the Employment Rights Act to provide that every employer shall give notice of termination of employment of a worker to the Minister on the date of the termination of employment and that any failure to do so shall be an offence.

As regards part (b) of the Question, the House will agree that it is not proper for me to reveal the names of employers who have laid-off their workers.

Insofar as part (c) of the Question is concerned, 21 employers have so far offered compensation to their laid-off employees.

SIR GUY ROZEMONT STADIUM, QUATRE BORNES – RENOVATION

(No. B/516) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the Sir Guy Rozemont Stadium at Quatre Bornes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Tourism Fund, information as to if the renovation thereof has been financed by the Fund, and if so, the reasons therefor.

Reply: As the House is aware, Mauritius is promoted as an upmarket, attractive tourist destination.

To be in line with that image, we need to ensure that all our tourist sites and other popular places visited by tourists are embellished and made as attractive as possible. Indeed, we believe that the whole of Mauritius has tourism potential of one sort or another.

Accordingly, the scope of the Tourism Fund has been enlarged (in October 2007) to finance the implementation of infrastructural facilities, social amenities and projects other than those which are directly related tourism development. As such, our tourism product will be deepened and
diversified and, at the same time, this will ensure that the benefits of tourism development are spread to a wider cross-section of the population.

In line with the enlarged scope of the Tourism Fund, the Fund has favourably considered the financing of various project proposals submitted by Ministries, local authorities and other institutions. These proposals include wide ranging projects such as the Provision of handrails and steps at Macondé Viewpoint (Rs695,000), Provision of Platform at Chamarel (Rs1.5 m.), the Development of Balfour Garden at Beau Bassin/Rose Hill (Rs3.5 m.), Fixing of lanterns at Calodyne (Rs99,000) and Construction of drains at Grand’ Baie and Infrastructural works at Grand Gaube (Rs3.4 m.), Upgrading of Cemetery Père Laval (Rs632,000), Upgrading and embellishment works at Cathédral St. Louis (Rs3 m.), Control of Stray Dogs/Pests/Ravens (Rs7.3 m), Installation of Poster panels (Rs500,000), Painting of bus-stops (Rs1 m.), Zoning of Lagoon project (Rs21 m.), Nature Trail Development project at Rodrigues (Rs3 m.), Rehabilitation works of La Citadel (Rs15.2 m.) and general cleaning and upliftment of the destination throughout the island (Rs8.3 m.)

In the same vein, the Tourism Fund had agreed to a project proposal from the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes for the embellishment of the Guy Rozemont Stadium, which comprise replacement of the security fencing of a cost of around Rs455,000 and embellishment of the stadium involving an amount of about Rs155,000.

The Guy Rozemont Stadium was not only an eyesore, but it also represented an hazard for the safety and security of spectators who attend sports, cultural and other activities.

I strongly believe that the whole of Mauritius should become a touristic destination, having regard to our vision to make Mauritius the best island destination in the world. We should, therefore, spare no effort to uplift and regenerate our urban as well as rural areas through the eradication of eyesores and the implementation of embellishment projects, especially, on minor projects when not much money is involved.

BEL OMBRE - HOTELS - TOURISM FUND

(No. B/517) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the hotels built at Bel Ombre, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from
the Tourism Fund, information as to if it has obtained the total amount of the contributions thereto, indicating if all the projects identified in that region have been completed.

Reply: I am informed that the total amount paid to be to the Tourism Fund by the promoters of hotel projects at Bel Ombre is Rs74 m. for Phase I and Rs25 m. for Phase II of the Bel Ombre Integrated Hotel and Leisure Development Project.

I am further informed that two projects had initially been identified under Phase I of the project as follows -

c) the construction of a mini-multipurpose complex for women entrepreneurs, and
d) upgrading of Bel Ombre Public Beach.

However, the projects could not be implemented owing to lack of funds at that time as the funds contributed by the promoters were used up to meet the costs of re-alignment of the Black River/Savanne coastal road amounting to some Rs80 m. which exceeded the amount of contribution received by Rs6 m.

Under the second phase of the project only one promoter has so far signed the lease agreement and we have received an amount of Rs25 m.

Accordingly, this Ministry has had consultations with relevant stakeholders for possible projects that could be implemented and consensus has been reached for the implementation of the construction of a Women Centre at Bel Ombre project, as a priority.

I am informed that an amount of Rs10 m. has accordingly been earmarked by the Tourism Fund for that project. The drawings have already been finalised and tenders are expected to be launched by July 2009. Works are scheduled to start in September 2009 and expected to be completed by May 2010.

On additional funds being received from promoters of Bel Ombre Hotel Projects, my Ministry, through the Tourism Fund, will consider the implementation of other community development projects, namely -

- rehabilitation of Le Battelage, and
- construction of a Youth Centre.
AIR MAURITIUS LTD. – BOARD MEMBERS – DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

(No. B/518) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the Board Members of the Air Mauritius Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Company, information as to if any of them are shareholders of companies dealing with Air Mauritius Ltd.

Reply: I am informed by Air Mauritius Ltd. that in matters pertaining to related party transactions and disclosure of interest, the Company stands guided by the provisions of –

(iv) its Constitution;
(v) the Listing Rules of the Stock Exchange of Mauritius, and
(vi) the Companies Act 2001.

Accordingly, the Company is bound by law to disclose all information on related party transactions in its annual reports. Such information for the Financial Year ended 31 March 2008 has been provided in the Company’s Annual Report 2007/2008.

I am tabling a copy of the relevant excerpt from the Company’s Annual Report 2007/2008.

BELLE MARE/POSTE DE FLACQ – HOTEL PROJECTS

(No. B/519) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether he will state if his Ministry is in presence of any application for hotel projects in the region of Belle Mare and Poste de Flacq and, if so, indicate the names of the promoters.

Reply (The Minister of Housing & Lands): The Ministry of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications does receive applications on a regular basis for hotel development projects on coastal regions, including the region of Belle Mare and Poste de Flacq.

In examining the requests for State land for such type of projects consideration is given, *inter alia* to the following -

(vi) Foreign Direct Investment.
(vii) Job creation.
(viii) Social Components of the proposals.
(ix) Environment and energy savings components in the context of *Maurice Ile Durable*.
(x) Compliance with the provisions of the Tourism Strategy.

All criteria relating to the allocation of State land for tourist related projects are posted on the website of my Ministry at the following address -
http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/housing

Where State land is available, and with a view to ensuring development in a planned manner, my Ministry develops a Master Plan as has been the case, for example, at Bel Ombre, St Félix, and Les Salines, Koenig.

The Ministry of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications is currently in the process of finalising a Master Plan for the region of Palmar. Once a decision to allocate any portion of State land for a hotel project is taken by Government, the main obligations on the beneficiary company are as follows -

(iv) contribution to the Tourism Fund, now standing at Rs25 m. for each hotel project;
(v) compliance with the provisions of the Planning Policy Guidelines and the relevant outline scheme, and
(vi) development to start and completed within a given time frame.

Furthermore, the grant of State land is subject to anti-speculatory measures. In the name of transparency and good governance, I will submit in due course a list of all applications for hotel development projects since the year 2000.

**YOUTH CENTRE, CARLOS ROAD, TAMARIN – ACTIVITIES**

(No. B/520) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Youth & Sports whether, in regard to the Youth Centre at Carlos Road, Tamarin, he will state -

(a) the activities organized by the centre for the youth of the locality;
(b) the number of staff employed thereat;
(c) the facilities provided thereat, and

(d) if maintenance and repair works will be undertaken thereat.

Reply: The Youth Section of my Ministry organises a wide array of activities/programmes through the various youth centres of the island. These centres are fully equipped and are meant to give maximum opportunities to young people to indulge in healthy leisure, vocational and sports activities.

The activities organised by the Tamarin Youth Centre include outdoor games like basketball, volleyball, petanque and indoor activities such as carom, modern dance, boxing and aerobics amongst others.

Moreover training courses are delivered in the fields of Leadership and Youth & Family Life Management, music and dance, martial arts, literacy, etc.

Other activities organised by the centre comprise Spéciales Vacances Programme, Life Skills Training, Atelier de théâtre, IT initiation, workshops on prevention of social evils.

With regard to part (b), one Temporary Youth Officer is posted at Tamarin Youth Centre, under the supervision and coordination of one Senior Youth Officer and one Principal Youth Officer, who are based at Bambous Youth Centre.

In addition, there is also an Office Attendant, a general worker and a Security Guard who is on duty when the centre is closed.

With regard to part (c), the facilities provided at the Tamarin Youth Centre are as follows -

1. One multi-purpose hall.
2. Spacious veranda and yard for gatherings and outdoor activities.
4. Petanque court.
5. NET PCs for IT initiation.

Concerning part (d), I am informed that there are no major repair and maintenance works required at Tamarin Youth Centre. However, the lighting system in the yard has been partly damaged due to bad weather.
The Energy Services Division has already effected a survey and remedial works will be carried out soon.

CEB - PORT VICTORIA POWER STATION -
DIESEL POWER GENERATORS – TENDER

(No. B/521) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities whether, in regard to the launching of the international tender for the installation of three new diesel power generators at the Port Victoria Power Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to -

(a) where matters stand, and

(b) if the Board has resorted to emergency procurement and, if so, indicate –

   (iv) the reasons therefor;

   (v) if prior approval of Cabinet has been sought and obtained, and

   (vi) the Board has resorted to emergency procurement for any other projects since the proclamation of the Public Procurement Act.

Reply: I am informed by the CEB that on 03 April 2009, a contract was awarded to Messrs Burmeister and Wain Scandinavian Contractor (BWSC) for the supply, installation, testing and commissioning of two medium speed diesel generator sets of capacity 15 MW each and not three generators. The contract price is Euro 33,573,900 and Rs252,534,100 equivalent to a total of Rs1.67 billion. Implementation of this project has started on 30 April 2009, and is expected to be completed by October 2010.

With regard to part (b), the CEB has resorted to emergency procurement under Section 21 of the Public Procurement Act 2006 after consultation with the Procurement Policy Office and State Law Office, for the following reasons -

   (i) the Fort Victoria project was contemplated in 2006 to meet semi base load generation capacity in replacement of units currently in operation at St. Louis and Fort
Victoria Power Stations which have already reached the end of their economic life;

(ii) however, in 2005 and 2006, several electricity generation projects were considered from Gamma Covanta Ltd. (15 MW), Suzlon Energy Ltd. (25 MW), CT Power (100 MW), CT SAV III (15 MW) and FUEL (2x42 MW). Letters of Intent were issued to the first four. These projects were expected to be commissioned by 2008 and 2009 and provide adequate capacity to meet the short to medium-term demand. In this context, the Fort Victoria project was put on hold;

(iii) the Mauritius CT Power and Gamma Covanta projects have not yet been implemented due to a number of factors, which are beyond the control of the CEB;

(iv) the two promoters FUEL and CT SAV III did not proceed with their project proposals pending the outcome of the review of the Independent Power Producers as agreed by the Government and MSPA in April 2008, and

(v) with the delay in the implementation of these projects, under CEB’s Capacity Expansion Plan, the CEB would inevitably face generation constraints over the next two years. The capacity deficit, would, in the absence of Fort Victoria project be of the order of 11 MW and 30 MW in 2009 and 2010 respectively. The capacity deficit may further deteriorate in view of the ageing of the existing generation park. The coming into operation of the two additional units at the Fort Victoria will address the issue of capacity deficit in 2010.

The CEB Board accordingly took the decision in March 2008, to revive the Fort Victoria project and procurement proceedings started in September 2008 with the closing date being 18 December 2008. Six interested parties purchased the tender documents, but only two bids were received at the Central Procurement Board. Recognizing the urgency to implement the project, the Central Procurement Board arranged for the tender evaluation to be carried out from 18 to 23 December 2008 with the assistance of the CEB’s Consultant, Mott MacDonald.

The two bids received were as follows -
Given that the prices quoted by the two bidders were above the estimated price of Rs1.2 billion, the CPB requested both bidders to submit revised financial proposals. Only one bidder MAN/SEMCO submitted a revised bid while BWSC maintained its original bid. According to the CPB, the revised financial bid did not represent value for money and on 05 February 2009, it advised that a fresh tendering exercise be resorted to with revised specifications so as to enhance competition.

On 06 February 2009, CEB referred the matter to its Consultant, who advised that no benefit will accrue from either re-writing the tender specifications or a re-tendering exercise -

(iv) due consideration should be given by both the CEB and the CPB to the cost to the Mauritian economy if the project is delayed;

(v) the price of St. Louis project should not be used as a yardstick for estimating the price of Fort Victoria project. The price of St. Louis was well below market expectations at that time, and

(vi) the prices tendered for the project reflect market prices.

Based on the observations of its Consultant and the urgency to implement the project to avoid any electricity shortage in 2010, CEB decided on 10 February 2009 to avail itself of the provision of section 21 of the Public Procurement Act 2006 Accordingly, CEB negotiated with the lowest bidder and awarded the contract at a reduced price of Euro 33,575,900 and Rs252,534,100 equivalent to a total of Rs1.67 billion.

Regarding part (b) (ii), Cabinet was informed that the CEB would have to resort to emergency procurement procedures.

Regarding part (iii), the CEB has not resorted to any other emergency procurement since the proclamation of the Public Procurement Act because there was no reason to do so.

Finally, I wish to inform the House that the Central Procurement Board, in a letter dated 02 April 2009, informed the CEB that an
independent Consultant which it had appointed considered the price quoted by BWSC to be fair and reasonable.

**CASINOS – PROPOSED PRIVATIZATION**

(No. B/522) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Riviére) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the proposed privatization of the casinos, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation, information as to where matters stand.

**Reply:** I did inform the House in my reply to PQ No. B/1163, that the SIC Board had, in July 2008, decided to retain a UK based company as the preferred bidder for discussions with a view to finalizing the terms and conditions of a Strategic Partnership.

I am, however, informed that the company has failed to provide critical financial information regarding KYC that was crucial to the progress of discussions, unable to confirm the persons forming its management team, and disclose the its ultimate beneficiary owners.

In the circumstance, on the basis of the advice tendered by the Transaction Advisor and opinion of its Legal Adviser, the SIC Board decided on 10 February 2009, to terminate discussions with the Preferred Bidder.

To proceed further with the exercise, the Transaction Advisor contacted the next best bidder and the latter has re-confirmed its interest in the Casinos with a request for SIC to accept or otherwise its bid by 30 April 2009.

I am further informed that on 28 April 2009, SIC Board gave its in-principle acceptance to the offer subject to further discussions and negotiations on the terms and conditions of the Strategic Partnership. I understand that discussions are still being pursued.

**EBENE - FILLING STATION – LAND LEASE**

(No. B/523) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Riviére) asked the Minister of Information & Communication Technology whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Business Parks of Mauritius Ltd., information as to if a portion of land was given to a promoter for the setting up of a filling station at Ebène and, if so, indicate –

(a) the name of the promoter;
(b) when the application was received;
(c) the extent of land, and
(d) the terms and conditions of the lease.

Reply: I am informed by the Business Park of Mauritius Ltd. (BPML) that it has, on 29 February 2008, received an application from one Mr Mohammad Iqbal Bhayat for the setting up of a filling station at Ebène.

Since the BPML had a surplus plot of land of an extent of 4747 m² (1.17 acre) located outside the Ebène Cyber Village and the Cybercity, the Board has decided at its meeting on 25 March 2009 to lease that land to the applicant for the purpose applied for.

The lease is for an initial period of 30 years and is renewable for two further periods of 30 years. A fixed one-off payment of Rs4 m. is payable and the annual rental is Rs200,000. These are the terms and conditions that apply to the lease of plots of land in the Cyber City area.

It is to be noted that unlike plots within the Cyber City, the plot in question is not provided with infrastructural services such as water, power supply and telecommunications facilities.

PETITE RIVIÈRE & ALBION – FOOTBALL GROUNDS

(No. B/524) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to the new football ground at Maingard Village and the upgrading of the football grounds at Petite Rivière and Albion, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: With regard to the football ground at Maingard village, I wish to inform the hon. Member that shortly our Consultant shall carry the necessary site visits in order to prepare the scope of works and cost estimates and subsequently subject to availability of funds the needful shall be done.

With regard to the football ground at Petite Rivière, I shall request our Consultant to effect a site visit and we shall act on his recommendation.

Finally, as far as the upgrading of Albion football ground is concerned, I understand that the construction of the cloakroom and exterior
toilet block, upgrading of football ground and installation of floodlights should be undertaken.

However, I am made to understand that the Consultancy firm Mega Design has already carried out a survey and submitted the design and scope of work to the Ministry of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications for consideration under the Tourism Fund.

**CHEMIN DE LA RETRAITE – ROAD TARRING**

(No. A/4) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the tarring of Chemin de La Retraite from La Laura to Circonstance, he will state if a way leave as requested from Mon Désert Alma has been obtained and, if so, indicate when same will be implemented.

Reply: I am informed by the Moka/Flacq District Council that being given that Chemin de La Retraite from la Laura to Circonstance is a private road belonging to Mon Desert Alma Sugar Estate, no way leave has been obtained from the latter to declare same public.

**NAPOLÉON BRIDGE, L’AVENIR TO MALINGA AND LA LAURA – ROAD CLASSIFICATION**

(No. A/5) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he will state if he will consider the advisability of classifying the road leading from the Napoléon Bridge l’Avenir to Malinga, La Laura, and Rivière Baptiste and, if so, indicate when same will be implemented.

Reply: The road from Napoléon Bridge, L’Avenir to La Laura and Malinga is defined as a rural road in the Roads Act and is under the responsibility of the Moka Flacq District Council.

With the setting up of the Land Transport Authority the issue of classification of roads for the whole island will be reviewed and proposals of the hon. Member will be given due consideration.

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA CONFERENCE CENTRE - ‘LE SALON DE LA MAISON ET DU JARDIN’ - RENTAL**
(No. A/6) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources whether, in regard to the recent holding of ‘Le Salon de la Maison et du Jardin’ at the Swami Vivekananda Conference Centre, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation Ltd., information as to the amount of money received as rent in connection therewith.

Reply: (The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment): We are informed by the State Investment Corporation Ltd that as per its established rental rates, the promoter of ‘Le Salon de la Maison et du Jardin’ at Swami Vivekananda Conference Centre was invoiced an amount of Rs1,841,150 inclusive of VAT and that the promoter has already settled the amount. The Ministry of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications.