

No. 20 of 2010



FIFTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

**FIRST SESSION
MONDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2010**

CONTENTS

QUESTION (*Oral*)

MOTION

BILL (*Public*) - **The Appropriation (2011) Bill (No. XVII of 2010)**

ADJOURNMENT

*Members**Members***THE CABINET****(Formed by Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam)**

Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, GCSK, FRCP	<i>Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications</i>
Dr. the Hon. Ahmed Rashid Beebeejaun, GCSK, FRCP	<i>Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities</i>
Hon. Charles Gaëtan Xavier-Luc Duval, GCSK	<i>Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment</i>
Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	<i>Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development</i>
Hon. Anil Kumar Bachoo	<i>Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping</i>
Dr. the Hon. Arvin Boolell	<i>Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade</i>
Dr. the Hon. Abu Twalib Kasenally, FRCS	<i>Minister of Housing and Lands</i>
Hon. Mrs Sheilabai Bappoo, GOSK	<i>Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare</i>
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Dr. the Hon. Vasant Kumar Bunwaree	<i>Minister of Education and Human Resources</i>
Hon. Satya Veyash Faugoo	<i>Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security</i>
Hon. Showkutally Soodhun	<i>Minister of Industry and Commerce</i>
Hon. Devanand Virahsawmy, GOSK	<i>Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development</i>
Dr. the Hon. Rajeshwar Jeetah	<i>Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology</i>
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Hon. Louis Hervé Aimée	<i>Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands</i>
Hon. Mrs Santi Bai Hanoomanjee	<i>Minister of Health and Quality of Life</i>
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Hon. Tassarajen Pillay Chedumbrum	<i>Minister of Information and Communication Technology</i>
Hon. Louis Joseph Von-Mally, GOSK	<i>Minister of Fisheries and Rodrigues</i>
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Hon Shakeel Ahmed Yousuf Abdul Razack Mohamed	<i>Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment</i>
Hon Yatindra Nath Varma	<i>Attorney General</i>
Hon John Michaël Tzoun Sao Yeung Sik Yuen	<i>Minister of Business, Enterprise, Cooperatives and Consumer Protection</i>

*Members**Members*

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

<i>Mr Speaker</i>	Purryag, Hon. Rajkeswur, GCSK, GOSK
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MAURITIUS

Fifth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 20 of 2010

Sitting of Monday 29 November 2010

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis

at 11.30 a.m.

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION**SMALL PLANTERS (SUGAR CANE) - TAX EXEMPTION**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether in regard to the re-introduction of the tax exemption on the first 60 tonnes of sugar for small planters with less than 15 hectares of land and who rely solely on sugar income, as announced in the Budget Speech 2011, he will state -

- (a) the present number of planters with less than 15 hectares of land, indicating the number thereof who rely solely on sugar income, and
- (b) if consideration will be given for the tax exemption to be extended to all the small planters with less than 15 hectares of land.

The vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr P. Jugnauth): Mr Speaker, Sir, it is important to situate each budget measure in its proper context instead of looking at it in isolation. Moreover, this Budget and its measures have been built on the basis of extensive consultation. This is the background to the measures for small sugar planters.

First, Mr Speaker, Sir, during the pre-budget consultations, small sugar cane planters have pointed out the negative impact on sugar prices from the end of the sugar protocol as from October 2009 and the decline of the euro. Prices that they receive have declined from Rs15,000 per tonne to Rs12,700. Moreover, their costs for transportation, cutting and loading and fertiliser have gone up.

As a result they have requested a package of measures, some of which are an extension of the 15 measures already announced in the ERCP.

The Budget Speech introduces over a dozen additional measures. The reintroduction of the tax exemption on the first 60 tonnes of sugar for small planters with less than 15 hectares of land and who rely solely on sugar income is thus only one in a more comprehensive package.

An important part of this measure is to reduce the costs of compliance with the MRA by eliminating the requirement to submit a tax return.

Also, the term “solely” needs to be interpreted in the policy context. To support the restructuring of the sugar sector, this will be applicable to those who benefit from our FORIP and

the Fair Trade measures destined to raise productivity and income and thus improve viability and the incentive to continue with sugar cane growing activities. This is expected to apply to about 7,000 small planters with another 8,000 expected to eventually benefit.

Moreover, 'solely' would not include ancillary passive income such as from pensions, interest and rental. However, such passive income should not exceed 20 percent of total income.

According to the SIFB, in 2009, there were 21,357 sugar planters with less than 15 hectares of land. It should also be pointed out that normally small sugar planters would have been limited to those with less than 10 hectares, but we have raised the threshold to 15 hectares to allow for possible variations in yields.

The other measures in the package include -

- Abolishing the 15 percent income tax on the surplus generated from sugar operations by Cooperative Credit Societies (CCS).
- Loans up to Rs25,000 given by CCS to their members that will attract a concessionary fixed fee of Rs200 on registration and inscription of the documents.
- Providing Rs310 m. for the Field Operations, Re-grouping and Irrigation project to cover another 1,300 hectares of land in 2011. Providing Rs15 m. to maintain the incentives regarding the Fair Trade Initiative. By 2012, small and medium planters will get the benefit on some 40,000 tonnes.
- Increasing the price of molasses for planters sold for producing potable alcohol. This will result in additional revenue of Rs300 per tonne of sugar.
- The actuarial review of the Sugar Insurance Fund has started. The recommendations purporting to enhance the viability of sugar producers will be implemented, *inter alia*, through amendments to the Sugar Insurance Fund Act.
- Extending the 80 percent advance scheme applicable to the 2010 sugar crop to the 2011 sugar crop.
- Taking appropriate steps to ensure that the VAT benefits currently provided to medium and large exporters of sugar will also be available to small planters.
- Re-establishing full duty-free facility on all types of double cab vehicles (4x4) for eligible small planters and others.
- Facilitating the conversion of the land of small planters of an extent not exceeding 2 hectares where planning guidelines so permit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the measures on the 60 tonnes of sugar would naturally be targeted at assisting small planters who depend on sugar income. This is part of our package to provide incentives for such planters to continue in cane growing by ensuring that this remains a gainful activity. Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, such measures are imperative, as the number of planters with less than 15 hectares of land has gone down by some 7,000 from 2000 to 2009. Also, the sugar accruing to this group has fallen by some 27,000 tonnes, almost 25 percent over the same period.

Regarding those who are not primarily planters but may also have agriculture as a side activity, the Budget has also provided additional relief. It has eliminated the NRPT and the tax on interest and provides additional deductions for mortgage interest for first time home owners and to finance the education of children in both Mauritius and abroad.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have listened to the population. We have responded in a balanced and responsible manner that caters for both the needs of economic growth and social justice.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am glad that the word 'solely' is being removed and that it is not only the small planters who rely solely on their sugar income who will benefit from the tax exemption on the first 60 tonnes of sugar being reintroduced. I tried to listen carefully to the hon. Minister of Finance and he has said that – if I heard him correctly - income from three different sources will not disqualify small planters. Will he kindly repeat so that I know what will be considered to disqualify planters? What are the three – if I heard him correctly – exceptions, if I can call that, which will not disqualify small planters?

Mr Jugnauth: First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, the word 'solely' is not being removed. It is a matter of interpretation and, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows, the measures that have been announced in the Budget are, in fact, concretely translated into action in the Finance Bill, and it is in the Finance Bill that the details of each of the measures are explicit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to what revenue will not be included, I think that I have just mentioned the ancillary passive income – this is what we describe – will include pensions, interests and rental, not exceeding 20% of total income. Again, I would tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition that when the Finance Bill will be circulated, the details of that will also be made known.

Mr Bérenger: Solely means solely in any dictionary. So, now, we are provided with three cases where revenue therefrom will not disqualify planters, but I heard the hon. Minister of

Finance say: 'amongst others'. Can he, at this point in time, tell us what other revenue from what other sources will not disqualify the planters?

Mr Jugnauth: I have replied, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said that the Finance Bill will be circulated. In fact, when the Finance Bill would have been circulated, by that time everybody would have known about the exemption that is being given and what are the criteria that are being laid down. This, again, applies also for, what we call the ancillary passive income.

Mr Bérenger: We can't make policy as we move along, Mr Speaker, Sir. The word 'solely' was used and it means 'solely'. Now, we have moved some distance, but the Minister of Finance cannot tell us what other sources will not disqualify small planters. Can I ask him whether, for example, employment or part employment will disqualify small planters?

Mr Jugnauth: I have already replied to this question. Probably, the Leader of the Opposition is in haste, he wants to know beforehand.

(Interruptions)

Be patient! We are moving ahead. This Government is moving ahead and this is a clear demonstration of the consideration that we are giving to the small planters and we will continue to support the small planters in their plight.

Mr Bérenger: He knows, Mr Speaker, Sir, that policies are spelt out in the Budget Speech. Then, implementation of policies, figures and so on are spelt out in the Finance Bill. So, let us not be arrogant! The word 'solely' was wrongly used. It is now out. But we are entitled to know. For example, if I ask the hon. Minister: does he know how many small planters are civil servants and, yet, are genuine small planters? How many have part employment? How many get some revenue from past investments *quand les temps étaient meilleurs*? Will all these qualify?

Mr Jugnauth: I have replied, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me repeat, again, how many will qualify under this exemption that Government is giving. Some 7,000 small planters right now and those who, we believe, will regroup through the FORIP exercise and will come under the Fair Trade Initiative, there are approximately an addition of 8,000 small planters.

Mr Bérenger: Does the hon. Minister really think that it is fair to put a cut-off point at 20% of total income? We are in a new situation. Small planters are moving out of sugar cane plantation. I take it that the whole purpose of this exercise, amongst others, is not just to increase revenue of the small planters, which is important, otherwise they will continue leaving, but it is

to make it financially interesting for them to stay in sugar cane. Why put a ceiling? Why small planters have stayed in sugar? Some have part employment; some are civil servants and so on. Why put this ceiling that will encourage those falling over that ceiling to leave, in growing numbers, sugar cane plantations? Why this ceiling?

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is talking about fairness. I have the figure for 2009...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, now! Let the hon. Minister explain! He is explaining his policy.

Mr Jugnauth: I have the figure of the number of small planters for 2009: 21,369. Surely, the number has decreased till today. How many are going to benefit under this scheme? 7,000 right now, plus 8,000 in the near future! 15,000 small planters, out of a number of, let's say, slightly less than 21,369! If this is not fair, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wonder what is fair!

Mr Bérenger: My point is the following, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is unfair to penalise those *qui se sont débrouillés* to stay in sugar. Small planters have had to find other sources already to stay in sugar and some are losing money in sugar; therefore, they do little jobs, *les ti boulots*, employment and so on. Now, we come with a ceiling which will penalise *ceux qui se sont débrouillés*, those who have found other sources of revenue to stay in sugar. Therefore, why not do away with that ceiling to encourage all small planters who are still genuinely in sugar cane cultivation to stay - not with that ceiling which will encourage some to go?

Mr Jugnauth: This is purposely why we took the number of measures, including this one, to encourage small planters to remain in the sugar cane business.

Mr Speaker: I think we'll have to move on because when the Finance Bill will come to the House, the Leader of the Opposition will have time to discuss and propose amendments if he needs to.

Mr Bérenger: From what has been said today, I would like to know from the hon. Minister how he has arrived at this figure of 20% of total income. What is the definition of total income here and why 20%?

Mr Jugnauth: Well, I have replied. We'll clarify in the Finance Bill.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: It is the first time we are in that kind of situation where a Minister of Finance says solely...

Mr Jugnauth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir. I heard hon. Mrs. Labelle, from a sitting position, treating me as *crétin*. I would like the hon. Member to withdraw this word.

Mr Speaker: Yes, a point of order has been taken. Hon. Mrs Labelle, you have heard what the hon. Minister of Finance said. I know you very well. I would request you, if you have said so, to withdraw, otherwise I will have to suspend the sitting and listen to the recordings.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have never...

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, I raise on a point of order that we suspend and you go and listen.

Mr Speaker: I have just made a point.

(Interruptions)

Order! Order! Please! Hon. Mrs Labelle, please!

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to substantiate on what the vice-Prime Minister has just mentioned. I have heard hon. Mrs Labelle say '*crétin*'.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, you proposed to suspend and go and listen. She cannot *usurper le rôle du secrétariat*. You made a point. I think we should go along it.

Mr Speaker: I must inform the House that sometimes when a Member is making certain remarks from a sitting position, it is difficult to hear; it is difficult to record. I am asking her if she has said it to please withdraw it.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, this word was not addressed to the vice-Prime Minister.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Being given that the word was not first of all.....

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member is saying that the word was not addressed to the Minister of Finance. Fair enough! We have to accept it, but I will have to remind hon. Members that the word should not be used in the House. All right! Carry on!

Mr Bérenger: I asked a question, Mr Speaker, Sir. What is the definition of total income which has been referred to today and why that figure of 20%? The hon. Minister was going to answer.

Mr Jugnauth: I have answered, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: Shame!

Mr Jugnauth: It is a shame on the hon. Member.

Mr Bérenger: It is a shame; I can't use the word I can't use, Mr Speaker, Sir! It is a real shame. It is *sans précédent* what we are seeing. *Absolument sans précédent!* We have been given figures - and this is the main concern, small planters moving out of sugar cane cultivation - of 21,000 at a given point in time and I think I heard the Minister confirm that the trend is unfortunately ongoing, that is, more and more small planters are leaving cultivation of sugar cane. Does the hon. Minister confirm that the trend is like that?

Mr Jugnauth: Yes, from the figures I have given.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask why there also needs to be *continuité*? The former Minister of Finance was an expert at announcing something and then *reprendre de l'autre main*. I take the example of the 4 x 4. They all clapped when he said he was introducing duty-free facilities on 4 x 4, but when you look at the fine print it was on this and that condition. Why has the Minister of Finance felt that it should be again *continuité* in that kind of behaviour, saying that he is reintroducing and then putting all sorts of conditions?

Mr Jugnauth: What am I reintroducing? I don't understand the question.

Mr Speaker: It is very difficult. I am at a pain to follow the questions that are being put by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. The question must be direct. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has already talked on the Budget; the Finance Bill will be in front of the House. I think we are debating this particular issue now. I think questions must be asked to get information. He is getting the necessary information. He may use that information when the Finance Bill will be in front of the House to make his point.

Mr Bérenger: But I am getting information bit by bit.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: What we heard was exclude 'solely'. Then, we were given three sources. Then, reference is made to amongst other sources. So, I am trying to get the information, but

surely, Mr Speaker, Sir, to arrive at a figure, he has said supposedly that 7,000 small planters will benefit from that measure. Well, to arrive at that figure, he must have used – if he has in mind already - what are the sources of revenue that disqualify planters. So, all I am trying to get is: he has come with the figure of 7,000, tell us all the sources of revenue that will disqualify planters?

Mr Speaker: Unfortunately, I will have to intervene again. Questions have been put. As we all know, according to our Standing Orders, the Minister has answered. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition is not satisfied, when the Bill comes, the hon. Leader of the Opposition will have the opportunity to discuss and propose amendments. I think that will be the best opportunity that the Leader of the Opposition will have. He can, as from now on, having received all the information, make his point outside and canvass.

Mr Bérenger: I have just received all the information.

Mr Speaker: No, but the hon. Leader of the Opposition will have to make his point when the Bill comes to the House. Yes, does the hon. Member have any question?

(Interruptions)

Ms Deerpalsing: No, I was just listening to the exchange between you and the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in his answer, the hon. vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance talked about other income. I would like to know from the hon. Minister of Finance whether small planters, who also plant, for example, vegetables to compensate for their income, would have to fill in tax forms. I mean the tax compliance burden on a small planter who is 60 years old and is planting vegetables. Is that going to apply?

Mr Speaker: Excuse me, the hon. Minister of Finance has explained that when the Bill will come, he will explain. Then, the hon. Member will have the opportunity to put whatever questions she wants to put. Hon. Li Kwong Wing!

Mr Li Kwong Wing: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister of Finance confirm to the House whether the 7,000 small sugar cane planters that he referred to as qualifying under his new definition of “solely”, would be those sugar cane planters who are participating in the Fair Trade Labelling Initiative only?

Mr Jugnauth: I have just replied, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me clarify again!

Mr Speaker: Yes, please!

Mr Jugnauth: Those 7,000 small planters are already either under the FORIP Scheme or some of them, probably, under the Fair Trade Initiative. So, under those two schemes, there are, right now, eligible for this exemption 7,000 and we foresee that there are going to be some 8,000 if either they group themselves under the FORIP exercise or they come under the Fair Trade Initiative by regrouping themselves into cooperatives or they can be both of them also.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister whether a survey has been effected and whether he has the figures of small planters who have been engaged in either vegetables or flowers?

Mr Jugnauth: I think the question is about small planters of sugar cane. The hon. Member is talking about flowers and vegetables.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Hon. Bhagwan, you have put a question, let the hon. Minister answer! Whatever you are saying now, you will have an opportunity to say it when the Bill is presented to this House. Hon. Li Kwong Wing!

Mr Li Kwong Wing: My question is that the 7,000 planters who seem to be qualifying under this new definition of “solely” would be only those who are under the FORIP and the Fair Label Schemes. But there are many other small planters who have not yet participated, will they qualify in this income year?

Mr Jugnauth: It is probably very difficult for the hon. Member to understand. I said ...

(Interruptions)

Difficult to understand!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Hon. vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, please! Just explain your policy again, please!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Jugnauth: I am repeating myself, Mr Speaker, Sir. I said 7,000 are already under FORIP and the Fair Trade Initiative. This is where I got the figure.

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr Jugnauth: Where would I get the figure? The hon. Leader of the Opposition is asking: how did I come to 7,000? 7,000 already qualified right now! They are already registered under FORIP and Fair Trade Initiative. Now, the hon. Member is asking how many will come. This is what we foresee: 8,000 will benefit in the near future provided they regroup themselves under the FORIP exercise and they come under the Fair Trade Initiative. I think it cannot be more than crystal clear.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Bérenger: I have two last questions, if you will allow me. One is, I, like hon. Bhagwan and hon. Ms Deerpalsing, wanted to know whether a small planter who is part-employed, is a civil servant, who receives dividends or who gets income from cultivating vegetables or flowers apart from the sugar cane cultivation, we are perfectly entitled to know that.

Mr Speaker: But the hon. Minister has said that the Bill will take care!

Mr Bérenger: Then my last question will be: we were told that planters, who receive Rs1 or one cent from any source apart from sugar, will disqualify. Solely from sugar! Now this has changed. See how much it will keep on changing! I would like to know why on earth the original proposal was put forward that all those who have one cent of income from outside sugar would disqualify. Why on earth?

Mr Jugnauth: Of course, why we did not come with the original? I heard the hon. Leader of Opposition saying: the original measure. Do you know what the original measure was? All sugar producers were benefitting from exemption of first 60 tonnes of sugar. Whom did that include? It included all the sugar estates, all the big planters and all those big *palto* that I call ...

(Interruptions)

...that is the purpose ...

(Interruptions)

...why we have ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Jugnauth: ...limited this measure to only the small planters ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Jugnauth: ...with criteria that they grow up to 15 hectares of land. This Government

...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Jugnauth: ...did not want those who are the very fortunate and those who have always been benefitting, to benefit further.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Time is over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Prime Minister: 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 Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2011) BILL

(No. XVII of 2010)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Appropriation (2011) Bill (No. XVII of 2010).

Question again proposed.

(12.03 p.m.)

The Minister of Industry and Commerce (Mr S. Soodhun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to, first of all, avail myself of this opportunity to congratulate and convey my appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, under whose enlightened leadership the first Budget of *l'Alliance de l'Avenir* has been presented.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the sixth time that I am representing the Constituency No. 15, La Caverne and Phoenix in this Parliament. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is the third Prime Minister with whom I am working. I have worked with Sir Anerood Jugnauth under whose leadership Mauritius achieved economic success. He followed along the path of the Father of the Nation. I also worked under the Prime Minister who is the present Leader of the Opposition and now, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have the privilege of working under the leadership of Dr. the hon. Navin Ramgoolam, who is the *rassembleur*. He has encouraged solidarity and unity. He never loses any opportunity to pull together all the components of our society. I wish to assure the hon. Prime Minister that we will spare no efforts to put our competence, sincerity and loyalty at the disposal of the team that he is leading and reiterate our commitment for the continued support for the economic and social progress of our beloved country. My warmest thanks and appreciation equally go to the hon. vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development, hon. Pravind Jugnauth, who has undoubtedly proved to everyone that he has at heart the well-being of the Mauritian population at large.

Mr Speaker, Sir, once I was agreeable to the former Leader of Opposition, when he was the Prime Minister, I did appreciate; I can tell you that he was a nice man. I have nothing to say. But he has never changed till now. This is very sad.

(Interruptions)

When we were together in Government, then he was nice towards the vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. He mentioned rightly - I will never forget in my life - that hon. Pravind Jugnauth is '*une étoile montante, mon petit frère, celui qui va me remplacer comme Premier ministre.*' This was mentioned.

(Interruptions)

This is the arrangement that we had in 2005: three years and two years. *Coup d'essai, coup de maître!* These are the fantastic words which have already been *gravés dans le Hansard* in this august Parliament. Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget lays the foundation to realise our dream for a just, inclusive, prosperous and modern society where everyone will have the opportunity to develop his potential.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the first Budget of this Government has been acclaimed by the population. It does not happen very often that a Budget receives general approbation from all quarters. But this Government has done it because we have presented a Budget which addresses the main concerns of the population, education, housing, eradication of absolute poverty, improving quality of life and addressing forcefully the problem of gaming, crime, drug abuse and alcohol consumption. This is, *M. le président, vraiment un budget de proximité*. Obviously, Mr Speaker, Sir, we cannot expect from the hon. Members of the Opposition to compliment the Minister of Finance and the Government, even if there are visible signs of satisfaction everywhere.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it must be recognised that unlike some European economies, such as UK and France where drastic measures have been taken to reduce employment in the public sector and freeze increases in salaries and social benefits, my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance has come up with a Budget that provides compensation above the prevailing inflation rate to workers at the lowest rung of the ladder.

All social benefits have been increased over and above the inflation rate. The public officers will obtain their increments as from January instead of April 2011. Mr Speaker, Sir, the country needs an economic orientation that builds on growth, underpinned by efficiency in all sectors, while promoting social justice. It is in this context that this Government has presented a Budget that revolves around three main thrusts -

- first, rebalancing growth;
- second, harnessing productivity, and
- third, consolidating social justice.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the economic success of our Mauritius has, for years, depended excessively on the euro-zone countries. The Global Economic Crisis has demonstrated to what extent that euro-centric strategy is risky and can drag our economy into recession.

We have to diversify our markets. We have to adapt to the global economic shifts with the emergence of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) as new economic powers. Measures announced in the 2011 Budget to rebalance growth will create more opportunities for our business community to explore new markets, move to high value production, diversify their product range and shift to new technologies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Budget creates greater space for economic sectors to boost productivity, fuel growth and create employment. This strategic orientation to leverage on productivity as a catalyst for economic growth will place Mauritius among the league of countries which have built their economic success on intangible assets. I am here referring to countries like Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea. We need to emulate these countries in our economic development if we want to achieve *per capita* income of USD 20,000 by 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we need innovative ideas to promote our interest internationally. There are immense opportunities in the global business environment for a small island State like Mauritius. It is time that we capitalise on the opportunities that stem from the emergence of new economic powers now called the BRIC countries. We are all aware that these countries will be the future drivers of global trade. We have to seize the opportunities. The only way is to put in place the appropriate structures to link foreign policy with our domestic economy and reap the benefits of economic diplomacy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House of my personal experience during my last visit to India in November this year. Various stakeholders met me prior to my departure and discussed about import barriers concerning, amongst others, non-basmati rice, pulses and raw cotton. The Government of India has, in fact, put restrictions for the export of these commodities and there was no way individual entrepreneurs could procure these from India.

Thanks to the personal relationship of our Prime Minister with his counterpart and the excellent friendly understanding between the two countries, I was able to obtain a special derogation for the import of raw cotton. If not, today, as we are aware there is a scarcity of raw cotton in Africa and our factory depends on this raw cotton, especially for our spinners and for the non Basmati rice for STC. A working relationship has also been found between STC India and STC Mauritius for the sourcing of pulses in future.

Concerning the port of Mahebourg, Mr Speaker, Sir, the feasibility study on a new port at Mahebourg is a laudable initiative. We can study the possibility for setting up an oil farm in the port area. An old farm in the south and near the airport has many benefits –

- (1) proximity to airport will result into savings in the transport of Jet fuel;
- (2) new opportunities for bunkering additional airlines;
- (3) diversification of storage point for security of supply;
- (4) cost savings through distribution of petroleum products in the southern part of the island;

- (5) storage of strategic reserves;
- (6) new businesses opportunities for inhabitants in the surrounding, and
- (7) reduction of traffic congestion on our main roads.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is committed to build an all-inclusive society. Over the past years, Government has initiated various measures to eradicate absolute poverty and to support the vulnerable groups. The setting up of a Ministry of Social Integration bears testimony to this Government's commitment to promote social justice. The hon. Prime Minister has also found in my friend, the vice-Prime Minister, hon. Xavier Duval, the right man in the right place at the Ministry. He is a man of proximity, he is someone whom we have witnessed and we have no doubt that he is going to deliver.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we firmly believe that empowering people is the best antidote to poverty. This is the only way of helping the poor to get out of the vicious circle of poverty. In this Budget, concrete measures have been announced to support and empower the poor, the needy and weaker sections of the population. This is reflected through the improvement of SC and HSC examination fees scheme, women empowerment through the gender mainstreaming, social housing for various segments of income levels, welfare of children from vulnerable groups and eradication of absolute poverty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to briefly highlight the performance of the manufacturing sector in this context of unprecedented economic turmoil. Mr Speaker, Sir, the manufacturing sector has, over the years, contributed significantly in the economic transformation of the Mauritius economy. This sector accounts for the 19% of the GDP and provides 114,000 jobs. Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the crisis, the manufacturing sector registered a positive growth rate of 1.1% in 2009 and this year, the growth rate is expected to be around 2%. The growth rate of the export-oriented enterprises is expected to exceed 2% in 2010 compared to 0.5% in 2009.

Mr Speaker, Sir, after recording a peak of Rs37.8 billion in 2007, exports dropped to Rs35.1 billion in 2008 and in 2009 the value of exports picked up to reach Rs36.1 billion. In 2010, the direct export is projected to reach a record figure of Rs39 billion. This growth momentum is expected to be sustained in 2011.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the Members of the House to the fact that today, we have two major non-textile sectors, namely seafood and jewellery, that are

performing very positively. It is expected that these sectors would expand further in the year 2011.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the statistics clearly demonstrate that the manufacturing sector, particularly our export-oriented enterprises, have displayed resilience by recovering well from the impact of the global financial crisis. However, we still need to provide the sector with adequate support to overcome the euro zone crisis. The ERCP will continue to provide such assistance to the sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that our enterprises have to struggle with challenges arising from both the domestic and international environment. At the national level, the enterprises are facing challenges relating to -

- (i) low level of productivity associated with inadequate technology, skill shortage, and weak management ability;
- (ii) increased competition from the cheap imported goods;
- (iii) weak financial structure, exposing our enterprises to distress in time of crisis, and
- (iv) narrow product range and heavy reliance on European markets.

At international level, Mauritian enterprises are confronted with -

- fiercer competition from low-cost producing countries;
- erosion of trade preferences;
- fast changing consumer preferences and retailing practices;
- increasing demand for eco-friendly products, and
- compliance with norms relating to workers' rights, good governance, and corporate social responsibility.

Side by side, Mr Speaker, Sir, the challenges also represent hidden opportunities for our enterprises -

- (i) economic globalisation has created new competitors, but also greater opportunities to access various new markets, state-of-the-art technology and knowledge needed to build lasting competitive advantage;
- (ii) globalisation has provided opportunity for greater access to IT that can be deployed to reduce costs, foster economies of scale, and improve product design, marketing and communication;

- (iii) better exploitation of untapped and underserved markets will open new windows of opportunities for our enterprises, which possess adequate level of skills, technology and production flexibility;
- (iv) greater market access with expanding global output, which is expected to increase by 4.2% in 2011, and
- (v) the regional market of COMESA and SADC, with a total population of about 400 million, represents tremendous business opportunities that have not yet been fully tapped.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to give a new impetus to the industrial sector, various policy measures will be implemented over the next three years by my Ministry. Among the other measures taken, there will be -

- A re-orientation of our support institution.
- A review of our export promotion strategy.
- A new Export Development Plan will be formulated along with BOI and Enterprise Mauritius.
- Market diversification will be a key thrust of the strategy in order to reduce dependence on euro markets.

Mr Speaker, Sir, information is the lifeblood of an organisation. Business operators need relevant, accurate, and timely information for effective decision-making and tap on hidden opportunities earlier than their competitors to capitalise on the first mover advantage. In this context, an '*observatoire de l'industrie*' will be set up to provide operators with the latest information and data on new technology, market trends, investment flows, profile of competitors, and trade agreements.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a strategy focusing on innovation will be devised to promote production of differentiated and high value added products. Government will support enterprises to develop branded, quality and innovative products that can carve out niches in the upper market segments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, finally my Ministry, jointly with the BOI, will formulate an action plan to attract FDI in the manufacturing sector. A strategy will be devised to attract to Mauritius

medium-sized high-tech enterprises that are in the process delocalising. Economic diplomacy will be deployed to identify and attract those potential investors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have no doubt that these policy measures will greatly contribute towards the long term sustainability of our industrial sector and create a new generation of entrepreneurs. I want to assure all stakeholders in the industrial sector that a permanent dialogue will be established between the Ministry, the support institutions and themselves.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning petroleum products, the State Trading Corporation is also contributing to the *Maurice Ile Durable* endeavour. As part of its effort to curb harmful emissions, STC has, since August 2010, started to import gas oil with a lower sulphur content of 500 ppm compared to 2500 ppm before. Soon, gas oil of 300 ppm will be introduced on the market. Discussions were held last month with our supplier in India for STC to import 50 ppm gas oil as from next year. I would like to place on record that it's my friend, hon. Lormus Bundhoo, who initiated this idea in 2009.

The State Trading Corporation is currently working on a new formula to manage and stabilise the price of petroleum products over a long period. This formula will ensure predictability, and eliminate the stress that price fluctuations create for consumers, business operators and me also. This will also enable businesses to better plan their production and price structure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House is fully aware that Government continuously contributed to ensure that the price of LPG for domestic purposes is kept at an affordable rate. Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, some people are taking undue advantage to the subsidised rate of this product, and using the cylinders meant for domestic purposes for use in their commercial enterprises. In fact, we are told that some people have even replaced their commercial cylinders of bigger capacity by multiples of smaller domestic ones. We will explore the best ways to deal with such malpractices in due course.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite this fact, we have decided that we should not penalise the population at large because of the wrongdoings of some '*petits malins*'. In fact, the price of LPG for domestic use, that is, cylinder of 6 kgs and 12 kgs, will be maintained at its present level, unless there is a sharp increase of LPG price on the international market.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the rice market is liberalised. At present, STC is handling only ration rice. Ration rice represents less than one fifth of the total volume of about 100,000 tons of rice consumed today. We are all aware that a good part of it gets diverted to other ends for which the subsidy was not intended. While the price of basic food does need to be maintained at levels accessible to the economically weak, we all agree that we cannot continue to tolerate such a practice which is an offence to the dignity of our people. STC is actively reviewing its rice supply strategy. It will continue to offer the ration rice at an affordable price. However, it will very soon offer better rice products, better milled, clean and hygienically packed for sale without subsidy, but at the lowest possible price. This will provide an alternative to anyone who is prepared to pay a little more, but cannot afford the higher price at which luxury rice and Basmati fetch in our shops today. This brings me to Basmati rice, Mr Speaker, Sir. It has been observed that Basmati rice available on the local market is not always of genuine quality and is being sold at a relatively high price.

Very often the consumers are being taken for granted by the importers who resort to mixing of different grades of rice. I have requested the Mauritius Standards Bureau to work out a standard for Basmati rice with a view to ensuring better control over the quality of rice being sold on the local market. These standards are being finalised very soon, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must inform this House that we have just embarked on a review of the role and the functioning of the State Trading Corporation. The work has already started and in the new financial year, we will focus our attention on measures to enhance its effectiveness. Petroleum products and staple food supplies are the prime areas of intervention of the STC. These products are subjected to inescapable factors such as political conflicts, adverse weather conditions, accident, etc. in all production areas.

We will further have to look into the strategic levels of storage of these products and eventually, consideration of our involvement in this area also. Mr Speaker, Sir, we cannot afford to continue to run this institution with a legal framework that dated back to 1982. We will have to look at modern management tools and techniques to enable sound and efficient monitoring of the corporation and enable it play on a level playing field with other players in the world market.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House is fully aware of the prevailing crisis in the world due to the increase of demand in newly emerging economies and shortage of supplies because of various

calamities, especially in countries producing staple food. These prices sometimes reach unaffordable levels and we must be able to buy the right product at the right time and at the right price.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are also unfortunate, facing price increase by local manufacturers who are taking pretext of budgetary measures to pass on certain costs to the consumers. This is being done on products on which price control had been removed. This is totally unacceptable, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I have, today, called for an urgent meeting to look into the measures that can be taken to ensure that the population at large is not unnecessarily penalised and, if necessary, we will have to intervene in the market or to reluctantly introduce price controls once again. This is no time for party politics, Mr Speaker, Sir. I wish to assure the House that with the blessings of the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance and support of all my colleagues in this House, I will do my level best to ensure that price of all staple food and basic food items are kept under constant check and maintained at the lowest possible prices.

In this context, I wish to inform the House that unless there is a further sharp increase in the international prices, we have taken all appropriate measures to maintain at its present level all prices of basic items such as LPG as the domestic purposes, cement, ration rice, bread and flour. We will also very soon aim at intervening on the prices of other commodities to ensure that there is a stability of prices in the market, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the whole, the measures announced in the 2011 Budget, clearly demonstrate the determination of *l'Alliance de l'Avenir* to propel the country to a brighter future with social and economic stability and better prospect for the coming generation. This Budget lays the foundation for the realisation of our dream to become an economic power and a major and strong player in the Indian Ocean.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget emphasises consolidation of social justice. We want to show to the world that poverty can be a relic of the past and the future is based on solidarity and equity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget is sowing the seeds for a more prosperous future for our younger generations where equity, social justice and opportunities for all prevail.

Before I resume my seat, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me quote what Swett Marden, American author and founder of the Success Magazine said. I quote –

“Don't wait for extraordinary opportunities. Seize common occasions and make them great. Weak men wait for opportunities; strong men make them.”

And, of course, this is what we are doing, Mr Speaker, Sir, in this Budget.

Thank you for your attention.

(12.37 p.m.)

Mrs P. K. Bholah (First Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me start by congratulating our vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, hon. Pravind Jugnauth, for the remarkable job he has done in presenting such a widely acclaimed Budget at a difficult time when a recession of enormous proportion is raging across the world. Our tribute also goes to the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, for his guidance, support and trust.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is no secret that we are living in a globally unstable economic situation with the euro crisis and no eminent economists, up to now, have been able to predict the end of this crisis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are two types of people: “those who create the future and those who live in a future created by others.”

At this moment, the leaders of *l'Alliance de l'Avenir* have been inspired to present a Budget which will rebalance growth, consolidate social justice and drive Mauritius further on the road of modernisation. A Budget that has taken on board people from all walks of life, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure will bear its fruit. Government is creating a bright and ambitious future for our children by laying the foundations for a socially equitable and prosperous nation.

Whilst there has been a positive response amongst the population at large including those who were not convinced of our course of action, *l'opposition est abasourdie, désorientée et déconcertée.*

(Interruptions)

In true, the hon. Members from the other side of the House have raised objection that have no substance.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, I know they don't have the courage to accept the proposal. So, let me go through the Budget Speech, now.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our Prime Minister has rightly commented as follows –

“C’est un budget bien équilibré dans un contexte international fragile.”

At a time when all of Europe is reeling under the euro crisis, Mauritius has succeeded in sustaining shock after shock. Some months after his nomination as vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, hon. Pravind Jugnauth came with the ERCP. *C’était un ballon de sauvetage pour les entreprises locales.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, the projection of making greater use of economic diplomacy so as to open new markets and reducing dependencies on the euro zone countries, is a way forward to prevent stagnation of the Mauritian economy. This Government is determined to steer our economy clear out of the global economic crisis. In the same vein, Mr Speaker, Sir, the attraction of tourists from the Asian and Russian States shall bring a balance into the tourism promotion. Sufficient funds have been earmarked in this Budget to enable all stakeholders to carry out the necessary events.

The construction of the new airport, with the aim to ease the air traffic, shall bring in more tourists, as it is expected to host around two million of them by the year 2015. I pledge, Mr Speaker, Sir, to make it my duty to harness all opportunities in my constituency, for further dynamism in the tourist sector and for better economic growth.

Side by side, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget has made adequate provision for franchising more international brands shopping paradise. I would like to mention here the example of India, which, in the recent past five years, has transformed its shopping policy from the usual crowded commercial bazaar into gigantesque shopping malls. The world, today, is familiar with names of Indian shopping, to name a few, such as Saket in Delhi, Gurgaon and Noida, where you can find all international brands of high quality products. I have no doubt, Mr Speaker, Sir, that duty-free Mauritius will be a success, no less than Dubai and Singapore.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wholeheartedly support the Minister's initiatives in re-introducing tax exemption on the first 60 tonnes of sugar for sugar cane planters with less than 15 hectares of land, and the duty-free facilities for their double cab vehicles. Fishermen, farmers and SMEs

shall all be encouraged to work towards the establishment of a guaranteed food security. Now is the time opportune to convert cow breeding into an industry and encourage hydroponic cultivation. All these measures will definitely help my constituents.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I praise the hon. Minister for his effort in increasing tertiary enrolment for local students and to increase foreign students to Mauritius. I will support this initiative by encouraging establishment of a tertiary institution in my constituency and making our country a centre for educational excellence. This will also gear towards making a Global African Student Population, just like the European Union. Mr Speaker, Sir, education made free by the Father of the nation, late Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, has been enhanced by the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, through his free transport policy. Education is being disseminated to the population at large, leaving no stone unturned in giving every child whatever educational tools are required to have access to learning.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the increase in the number of scholarships proposed in this Budget has brought new inspiration in students who want to strive harder to reach their educational goals. The dream of our Prime Minister to have a graduate in every family on an average is bound to become a reality, Mr Speaker, Sir. The support for needy students in the payment of examination fees, the upgrading of primary schools, the creation of sport facilities at secondary level and the assistance in setting up of campuses at the tertiary level have summed up to a massive budget of Rs11.6 billion, and it is no joke, Mr Speaker, Sir. Those who will catch this train of educational development will rise high and those who will turn their back will cry at their destiny. Then, the Opposition will come and shout that this Government did not care for the needy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, an educated population is a healthy population, but health risks have to be catered for through an adequate health care system of good hospitals and trained medical personnel. By earmarking Rs8.6 billion in the health sector, Government is making provision to bring quality health care closer to the population. There are now increased opportunities for medical studies both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. With an international reputation in the field of tourism, Mauritius has all the necessary ingredients to become a leading medical hub in the region, and a destination for a *voyage médical*. This will also create thousands of direct as well as indirect jobs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our desperate childless couples will find a ray of hope with the upcoming assisted human reproductive technologies for the *in vitro* fertilisation. The Institute for Women's Health indicates Government's commitments to the health and well-being of women.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, some social *fléaux* have no remedy in hospitals and they need to be treated socially by rigorous means, such as -

- doubling taxation on alcoholic drinks;
- controlling the selling time of such drinks;
- putting a ban on the issue of permits to sale points;
- but above all, through an active campaign against the abusive use of these alcoholic drinks.

En faisant cela, M. le président, le ministre des finances a mis le doigt sur les quatre plaies qui rongent la société mauricienne: l'alcoolisme, le tabagisme, les jeux et la violence domestique. Nous espérons que ces mesures dissuasives pourront éviter des victimes parmi les nouvelles générations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget has not forgotten the importance of culture in our society. The enhancement of the basic mother tongues through the creation of their cultural centres, the creation of public libraries with cultural animation in villages such as Pailles, Flic-en-Flac, Mare Tabac and Fond du Sac - where I was born - is a concrete proof of the commitment of this Government towards maintaining unity in cultural diversity. The creation of an environment for film production is a major encouragement to artists in this field.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while we talk of human resources, women cannot be forgotten. I had pledged in my maiden speech, in this august Assembly, to see that women are treated on equal footing as men in our country. Empowered women provide tremendous support and strength to men. They do not overpower them. It has always been the wish of our Prime Minister to see more women in the National Assembly, while Jawaharlal Nehru had said, I quote -

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women”.

And, in the meantime, more women are integrating the public as well as the private business sector, especially the SMEs, through the Women Entrepreneurship Programme put in place.

Concrete examples of such good deeds by this Government are the various training programmes actually being held in my Constituency, Piton and Rivière du Rempart. By providing a budgetary provision of Rs98 m., this Government has given a real *reconnaissance* to women at large, thanks to my male colleagues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, no country can boast to be a tourist attraction in the absence of sufficient modern means of transportation. While crossing Port Louis, it takes almost an hour; tourists get bored in their coaches, looking at the traffic jam, mainly during peak hours. This Budget has made its full commitment in relieving traffic congestion in the cities. The Rs33 m. earmarked for the next three years in the Budget shall lay a milestone in the infrastructural landscape of Mauritius. Visible construction works have already started as we move towards the north of Port Louis, but, as we all know, Rome was not built in a day. The construction of these modern highways, bypasses in the crowded villages and the harbour bridge which is known as the Dream Bridge will take some of our patience.

Talking of infrastructure, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a reality that several projects are being implemented in various constituencies to name Piton, Rivière du Rempart where drain works, new roads and traffic lights are being installed at dangerous junctions to enhance security. It is budgeted for the next three years that several multi-purpose complexes, modern markets in various towns and villages shall see light and this will bring a plus to social life.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while much development is taking place through our country, protecting our environment is of prime importance. Strengthening our riverbanks, safeguarding our beaches from pollution and climatic changes are among some of the actions initiated and supported by this Budget. Latest of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am happy to learn that the village of Panchavati in Constituency No. 7 has been chosen for retrofitting as an eco-village which will transform completely its environmental landscape and its social status. Congratulations to my colleague Minister Dev Virahsawmy. All such actions towards making a *Maurice Ile Durable* is the vision of our Prime Minister in preserving our small Island State and hats off to him for having solicited the expertise of Professor de Rosnay, a *filis du sol*, in this endeavour.

Likewise, Mr Speaker, Sir, a lot of human energy is being spent to safeguard our existing sources of energy and to generate renewable power. Research on using wind energy to produce

electricity, converting our solid waste into usable energy; converting solar energy into electricity are some of the concrete actions that this Government has started under the MID Programme.

Government has, through this Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, provided for many considerations in improving our water catchment, reducing water losses, protection of our groundwater from pollution, promote our water demand, expand irrigation capacity and promote efficient waste water management. Because it is unimaginable, Mr Speaker, Sir, that having so much rain in our country, yet we suffer from water cuts in so many regions and it is unconceivable to allow so much of our run-offs to flow towards the sea. It is foreseen that if there would be a third World War, it would be about fighting for water rights instead of petrol like the Iraq war. God forbid no such thing will happen in our little paradise island.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is our prime duty to eradicate poverty, provide respite and protection to the deprived and excluded population. Government's commitment to provide social aids, decent housing for those without a roof or procure a plot of land for residential purpose are bearing fruits. We can now see many new constructions in various regions. Likewise, Mr Speaker, Sir, the schooling and training facilities provided under the National Empowerment Programme shall see our marginalised population emerge into a work-class and entrepreneurial nation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, homage must be paid to our elders not only through our budgetary actions, but by personal affection, love and care. This Budget is providing the necessary increase in the old age pension and more recreational centres in other parts of the country to facilitate those who cannot travel too far due to their age and health status. It is my earnest request to the younger generation not to abandon their elders in homes and always look after them. Government is committed to cater for other measures in the absence of homely care, but let us not allow our elders to weep silently when they are brought in centres by their own children.

While concluding, Mr Speaker Sir, it is to be noted that the fiscal measures of this Budget, the various exemptions for taxpayers, the facilities for housing loans, the basic and retirement pensions, the abolition of the NRPT and tax on interest, the intrusion of duty-free facilities for utility vehicles, the various new provisions for major infrastructural projects, including those for enhancing safety and security in the country, amongst many others, have

been welcomed and have received positive response from famous economists, consulting firms, big businesses, newspapers and the public in general.

I have nothing else to add for now, Mr Speaker, Sir, but to pay ovation to the hon. Minister of Finance and his team to have produced this ambitious Budget 2011 and the Public Sector Investment Programme from 2011 to 2013. This is just the beginning. We have four and more years ahead.

Thank you, Mr Speaker Sir.

At 12.56 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.15 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as this is my maiden speech, I will pray for your indulgence and I will make some preliminary comments before going into the Budget Speech proper.

I would like, first of all, to congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker and I would like you to convey my congratulation to Mr Speaker. I would also like to congratulate all the Members of this Assembly, in particular, those, who like me, have been elected for the first time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am humbled and deeply moved to be addressing this august Assembly, exactly 34 years after my father made his maiden speech in this very same House, which, 16 years later, were to elect him as the President of our Republic. I cannot boast myself to be stepping into his shoes, but I shall strive to follow the example he and many other hon. Members set in maintaining a proper sense of decorum in this House.

Having, in the oath which I took, pledged my loyalty to the State and to my countrymen, allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to pay tribute to my party, my constituents and those - parents and friends - who have helped me get elected to this House. I would perhaps not have joined politics if my brother, Dr. Oomar Uteem, who stood as an MMM candidate in Constituency No. 2 for the 2005 general election, was still among us. His premature demise, followed by the insistence of his loyal friends and supporters in that constituency, drew me into the political cauldron and I fully benefited from the work which my brother did in that constituency.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we live in a democratic society committed to the values of tolerance, cooperation and compromise. On this side of the House, we intend to play fully our role as an effective and responsible Opposition without fear or favour. We were not elected to be *une opposition loyale*. We will be a constructive Opposition inside and outside Parliament. Just like we recognise and respect the authority of the elected Government, we expect Members on the other side of the House to recognise and respect our right to speak, to dissent, to criticise and to hold the Government accountable for its acts and omissions without imputing any motives on our part.

I will now turn to the Budget Speech. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in his Budget Speech, the hon. vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance spoke about the Mauritian dream. But what he has delivered may well turn out to be a nightmare; a nightmare, first of all, to our elders. The hon. vice-Prime Minister, at page 64 of his speech, recognises the contribution of our elders, and I quote –

“The wealth we are creating today, the prosperity we are enjoying also bear the indelible footprints of their hard work.”

Yet, he is raising their pension by not even Rs100. To rub it in, he adds that the 3.2% compensation and I quote –

“(...) is well above the full compensation for inflation (...).”

But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we all go to supermarkets, we all know how much the prices of these basic foodstuffs have risen over the past year. Yesterday, I went to the supermarket, the price of a packet of Kraft cheese is more than Rs75 and my friend, hon. Jhugroo, who is not here, can confirm that the price of medicines over the past year has increased by more than 3.2%. With this type of compensation, the old pensioners will be even poorer.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I spoke about nightmare because the increase in expenditure proposed in this Budget will be financed massively through indirect taxation, that is, by consumers. Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, out of the Rs7.5 billion required to finance the increase in expenditure, more than Rs5 billion will come from taxes on goods and services. In other words, 70% of the increase in the expenditure will be financed through the most inequitable form of raising revenue. Rs2.1 billion, almost half of it, will come from additional value added tax, that is, from the pockets of consumers of this country. The hon. vice-Prime

Minister is very careful not to emphasise this point. Instead, at page 71 of his speech, this is what he said –

“I am taking steps to deal with anomalies and deviations from international best practice in our VAT legislation.”

What are these anomalies and deviations? No input tax will be allowed for a series of foodstuffs ranging from wheat to yogurt. Tell the public the truth! The price of bread, roti and chapatti will increase. The price of milk, dhol pourri, yogurt, ghee, meat and vegetables will increase. The price of oil has already increased. What will the workers do with their miserable 3.2% compensation? But this is not all. There are more increases to come. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. vice-Prime Minister has increased the excise duty on petroleum products by 10% and the MID levy also. With prices of petroleum products going up, it is inevitable that prices of public transport will also go up. Bus owners will want to have an increase in the bus fare. And who will bear the increased costs? Once again, the poor consumers “out there” as my friend, hon. Dr. Arvind Boolell would say. Did the Government have a choice? Of course, we always have choices in life. Government could have chosen to make those who have the most money, finance the increase in expenditure. This would have been fairer. This would have led to a redistribution of income, a more equitable sharing of the national cake. But instead, Government has decided to continue with its policy which results in the poor of this country becoming poorer and rich becoming richer. This is what we call a budget of continuity. No wonder why the big guys from the private sector have not been criticising this Budget. Rama Sithanen may be gone; they now have a new champion in the vice-Prime Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these are not vain words, these are not unfounded allegations. I have figures to back my statement. Unfortunately, my friend, hon. Ms Deerpalsing is not here, but hon. Cader Sayed-Hossen, the Government champion of the democratisation of the economy, must know how much additional revenue will be raised from companies and body corporate to finance the increase in expenditure. After all, companies and corporate bodies are the one who are going to benefit the most from the Government expenditure in infrastructure and measures to increase productivity. How much additional funds will come from these body corporates? And remember that out of the Rs7 billion of additional expenditure, Rs5.1 billion is coming from indirect taxes through the pockets of the consumer. How much additional fund will come from the companies? Zero! Not a cent! Worse! According to the Estimates, the expected tax

revenue from body corporates will actually go down by Rs50 m. compared to 2010. Why? Because the Government cares! It is a caring Government. They care for the rich; they don't care so much for those who don't have, but they care for those who have.

My friend, hon. Assirvaden spoke, a few days ago, about the friends of the Opposition. Never in the whole history of Mauritius has a Government been more generous to the *gros capital* as this Government has been since 2005. They have reduced corporate tax from 25% to 15% and as a consequence of their policy, it is now the middle class and the working class of this country that are bearing the burden of Government expenditure.

(Interruptions)

What about the solidarity income tax? Higher income earners will be charged 10% on their exempt income. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while going through the list of exempt income, I couldn't help but smile. I know the saying that *l'exemple vient d'en haut*. But I wonder whether the hon. Minister of Finance really meant to tax the remuneration of the President and vice-President of this country because this is the consequence of a literal reading of his speech.

Individuals who earn more than Rs2 m. including exempt income, will now have to pay a solidarity tax of 10% on exempt income which means that the President of the Republic who earns more than Rs2 m. will have to pay 10% tax on remuneration which is otherwise exempt. The hon. Prime Minister, the vice-Prime Minister and other Ministers will also fall within that category and despite the announcement that tax on interest has been exempt, they will have to pay tax on interest and on dividends, if they have investment. And what about the rich and the others! I am sorry! Any person will tell you that these people will very easily get around this by some good tax planning. And I remember reading one of the comments of the Director of the four big accounting firms saying that with this Budget we are back to the golden age of tax planning. But more seriously, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if nothing is done to plug the loopholes in our Income Tax Act, you will see capital flight and higher income earning people moving their capital to offshore jurisdiction where they will not have to pay any tax.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. vice-Prime Minister told us about his vision of increasing GDP to one trillion and per capita income to US\$20,000 by 2020s. As a patriot, I honestly hope that we achieve this target. But how are we going to achieve this? We are talking about an annual growth rate of approximately 8 percent, which is double the growth rate that we

are enjoying today and which we have estimated for next year. True, the hon. vice-Prime Minister announced a series of measures and policies to address the new challenges and threats. Some of these measures are welcome, but are they sufficient? I am afraid, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am quite sceptical. We have been hearing the same rhetoric for the past five years. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have heard the term 'economic diplomacy' so many times. We already have trade counsellors; what are their *bilans*? How much have they contributed to growth so far? We all know they are just political appointees. It is just job for the boys. What we need is new engines of growth; we need to identify new sectors of activity which can help us take this great leap forward. We need product innovation, product diversification. Unfortunately, the Budget Speech is seriously lacking in that respect.

But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is one sector which has consistently, over the past decade, enjoyed a double digit growth and this is the financial sector. Yet, despite the importance of this sector, only two measures are announced in this Budget. First, they will increase the perpetuity period for non-charitable purpose trusts. Second, category 1 Global Business companies will be allowed to invest locally. But, category 1 Global Business companies are already permitted to invest in Mauritius with the consent of the Financial Services Commission. They are already investing here and some of them are even listed on the Stock Exchange. This is what, in our good old Creole, we call *pe defonce enn la porte ouverte*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the fact that there are no new measures to revamp the offshore sector is no coincidence. For the past five years, Government has completely neglected the offshore sector and paid no heed to their plight. Under the MSM/MMM Government, there was a dedicated Ministry and Minister for that sector. Now, Financial Services is not even mentioned in the description of the title of any Minister. We are talking here about a sector that generates double digit growth. We used to have a dedicated authority for the promotion of financial services in the form of the Financial Services Promotion Agency. This agency also used to do road shows and provide training, even this has been scrapped. The Board of Investment does not even have a full time dedicated Senior Manager to head the financial services cluster.

Yet, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the financial sector is going through unprecedented challenges. Not too long ago, I drew the attention of the hon. vice-Prime Minister through a Parliamentary Question on the alarming number of Category 2 Global Business companies

which are winding up or migrating elsewhere. Not only has the requested information still not been tabled in the Library, but it is also clear that the Government is not proposing to do anything to stop the exodus.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in its proposed direct tax code, the Indian Government is introducing a general anti-avoidance tax provision. If India goes ahead with this provision, this will no doubt have a significant negative impact on our offshore sector. This is a real concern to the industry. It is urgent and necessary that we diversify our products and our markets.

In 2005, the Financial Services Commission asked me to draft an Investment Limited Partnership Bill. Limited partnership is the preferred investment vehicle for private equity funds for US investors and all other financial centres which compete against us have limited partnership vehicles. The Bill was circulated, commented upon by stakeholders and was ready to be adopted. But, nothing happened. Last year, it was taken from a drawer and the Chief Executive of the Financial Services Commission, at an international conference, announced that the introduction of this Bill was imminent. After one and a half years, still nothing, we are still waiting! Can you imagine our credibility? That conference was attended by international investment fund managers. We promised to give them a vehicle through which they could structure their investment and we did not deliver. If Government does not care about their demand, do you think that these investment managers will care about coming to Mauritius? We need to attract fund managers. We need to attract the big names, the big merchant banks, the big players. Those who will not only create value added services and employment, but also enhance our reputation as an international financial centre. Yet, nothing, once again, is being done to attract them, no fiscal incentives and no road shows.

We currently have an over reliance on India; we have excellent double taxation treaties with other countries. We need to diversify our markets. We need to become the gateway to Africa. We need to capture the petrodollars and service the high net worth individuals in the Middle East. We can do it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Yes, we can do it. But we need the vision and the political will. We have the talent and the resources. We need a dedicated promotion agency for financial services. We need to enter into more double taxation treaties. We need to do more road shows. Unfortunately, this Government, once again, is neglecting the financial

services. I urge the Government to give to the financial sector all the seriousness it deserves as it can play a very significant role in the economic growth of the country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister and his Government seem to have discovered a new Messiah to save us and lead us to the path of growth: Singapore. The Budget is full of reference to Singapore. We want to be a duty-free shopping paradise like Singapore. We want to have an efficient transport system like Singapore. We want to have new national ID card like Singapore. We have a problem in water retention, management and distribution, who do we turn to? Singapore. A country which hardly has any rainfall and which, if I am not mistaken, has only one small reservoir and which relies utterly on Malaysia for all its source of water supply.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have lived and worked in Singapore and I agree that we have many lessons to learn from them, but the fundamental reason why Singapore has achieved such economic prosperity is because of ethics, integrity and good governance. If we want double digit growth, we should have a policy of zero tolerance on corruption, nepotism, abuse of power and political interference. The procurement process should be fair and transparent. Any successful appeal to the Independent Review Panel must be carefully examined and sanctions need to be taken wherever necessary. If we want to have double digit growth, we should adopt a policy of meritocracy in appointment and promotion. Vacancies should be filled promptly. Workers should be motivated. Efforts should be rewarded. This can only be achieved if people have faith in the recruitment process. It is precisely for this reason, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the powers of the Public Service Commission to appoint public officers are entrenched in the Constitution and so it should remain. There should be no attempt to dilute the power of the PSC in appointment, recruitment and promotion exercises.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are all politicians; we all know the rules of the game, and we all know the pressures for political appointments. However, reward for loyalty should not be at the expense of efficiency and transparency. We need competent people in decision-making position. We are talking about public funds here. We are still suffering from hedging losses due to mismanagement. The criticism of the Director of Audit should not fall into deaf ears. If we want to have double-digit growth, if we want to realise the Mauritian dream, we need to change our mindset.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am glad that, at long last, the Government is coming up with a housing policy to assist the poor and first time buyers. Better late than never! But it serves nothing to build houses or finance their construction if the allocation is not made in a fair and transparent manner. I know of a man in my constituency who has been on the waiting list of NHDC for more than 15 years, who has been contributing to PEL account and he is still waiting for a house. I know families where parents, children and grandchildren are living in one room. I hope the Government will give priority to these people.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, housing is an acute problem in my constituency. Out of sheer desperation, having no one else to turn to, having nowhere else to go and also because the Government has failed to provide them with houses, many people have squatted State lands and, sometimes, private land in Vallée Pitot and Tranquebar areas in particular. These are genuine cases, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir and I pray Government that priority in housing allocation be given to these genuine cases.

I also take this opportunity, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to make an appeal again, on behalf of those families in Vallée Pitot and Tranquebar, to Government not to destroy their home for the sake of constructing a ring road. I know, in the past, the hon. Prime Minister did not go ahead with the construction of a road to protect the natural habitat of endemic flora and fauna in Vallée de Ferney. I hope that the Government will show the same sympathy, which it had shown towards flora and fauna, towards human beings living in Vallée Pitot and Tranquebar, and not uproot them from their natural habitat. There are alternative routes. Recently, Mr Rivet, who came up with the idea of the ring road several decades ago, came up with a new road map, which would result in less families being displaced. I appeal to the Government, once again, to revisit its decision.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, several families in my constituency...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member is going to contribute to the debate at some later stage.

Mr Uteem: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, several families in my constituency live in absolute poverty. They live in inhumane condition. They don't have basic necessities. They don't have a

proper roof. They don't have electricity. They don't have water. There is no hygiene. They do not send their children to school because they are ashamed to send them with an empty stomach. It is no coincidence that last year only five children got through the CPE in Guy Rozemont Government School. These people have been let down and forgotten by the Republic. They are the very same people who came to see me after my brother passed away and asked me to stand up as their candidate. These people couldn't care less about the religious preference of the candidates in their constituency, or if they wear a *tika* or lit a *chirag*. They just feel that no one cares about them and nothing has been done to improve their living conditions. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am proud to be representing these people in this House. A few months ago, I drew the attention of the House to their lot, but nothing has been done to help them so far. I make a humble request to the vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Social Integration to integrate the remote areas of Nazareth, Bangladesh, Camp Manna and Vallée Pitot in his social plans.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before I end my speech, I would like to welcome the decision of the Government to increase the number of additional scholarships and reintroduce the scheme for the exemption of SC and HSC fees.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Please continue! Order, please! No cross-talking, please! Hon. Hossen and hon. Bhagwan, please!

Mr Uteem: Education is the key to development; education is the key to get out of the poverty trap. We invest a lot in the education of our children and in the creation of our elite. Many of us in this House have children and relatives studying abroad, but how many of our laureates come back home? How many of our relatives and children studying abroad come back to Mauritius? How many of us will tell our children to leave a lucrative job abroad to come back to Mauritius? How many times haven't we heard them say '*ki pou vinn faire dan Maurice?*'

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our young professionals are discouraged and frustrated. They don't want to come back to Mauritius and after having massively invested in them through free education, free health care, we simply cannot afford to let them go. Recruitment agencies are mushrooming and I know of dozens of professionals who are migrating or about to migrate to countries like Canada, Ireland and elsewhere. We spend billions of rupees sowing the seeds, growing the trees, but it is other countries that are reaping the fruits. Yet, nothing is being

proposed in this Budget to prevent this brain drain. Can we afford to lose such talents? We would be well advised, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to act now and stop the policy of nepotism, favouritism and *lev paké aller*. Let us give our young people a fair chance, an equal opportunity to compete on the basis of qualifications and merit. Let us give them the proper incentives. Let us give them the excuse they are dying for to come back and serve their country because, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, without them, there will be no Mauritian dream.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(2.43 p.m.)

The Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr S. Faugoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me, first of all, congratulate the vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development for the first Budget of the Labour/MSM/PMSD Alliance, *l'Alliance de l'Avenir*, that he presented earlier to the House and the nation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I also congratulate the Prime Minister for his strong leadership, his vision, his wisdom and his commitment towards the people of Mauritius, which are equally enshrined in the present Budget.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a well thought, a well conceived, and a well balanced Budget, with a perfect mix of economic and social measures. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in every Budget, there is always room for improvement. We can always say 'give some little more here, and give some little more there.' This is, however, dictated by the economic situation of the country. This Budget is the best that we could have achieved in view of all the unprecedented international crises, which the world experienced and which also impacted on Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not, by any means, a standalone Budget. It indeed requires more than one budget to address the major challenges, be it economic or otherwise and to ensure a fair distribution of income. This Budget, in fact, reflects the continuous and persistent perseverance of the Government since 2005 and also results of the bold reforms that we have initiated and successfully implemented in the last five years. Today, the Budget witnesses a renewal of that perseverance, with yet more vigour and insight.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, things do not remain the same. Situations keep evolving and changing. Today, things have changed for the better, albeit not to the degree that we would all

wish for. But the present Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is a proof in itself of good governance, a proof of good management of public finance, a proof of our capacity to ride over the worst ever economic downturn, unprecedented food crisis, energy crisis, dismantlement of the Multi-Fibre Agreement and the sugar protocol without forgetting the 36% cut in the price of sugar exported to Europe.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, had these crises not been properly managed, it would have been impossible to come up with a budget which not only does social justice to the people, but further strengthens the economic resilience of the country. We are responsive to the needs and aspirations of the population, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The abolition on tax on interest and the abolition of the NRPT are concrete examples of this responsiveness. When the need was felt, circumstances forced this course of action. Today, if we are abolishing the NRPT and the tax on interest, it clearly shows that we are responsive to the prevailing circumstances of today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The conditions have changed and Government feels that we need to recognise and reward the sacrifice made by the people when the need was most felt.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish, at this stage, to set the record straight. It is not a question of the MSM undoing what the previous Government had done. Not at all! Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is no question of MSM on its own or the Labour party on its own. There is only one team, all looking in the same direction. This is an Alliance with the people and for the people. There is no room for petty politics, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

This, we leave it for the other side, the MMM, because this is what they are best at. Year in year out, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we hear the same tune: *'budget la fade'*; 2006/2007: cut and paste; again 2006/2007: a non-event, *bla-bla-bla*; 2007/2008: *décevant et fade*. So *'fade'* is nothing new, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. 2008/2009: *bla-bla-bla*; 2009, the six-month Budget which was presented last year in May, again, *bla-bla-bla*. He even ran out of words, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget, in fact, reflects the vision of this Government and translates its work programme. It is also a reflection of the capacity of a reinforced team with a new partner, but with the same capable and visionary Leader. With this Budget, we are honoring our pledge we made to the population before the general elections of May. It also depicts and

gives a crystal clear vision of what, as a responsible Government, we want to achieve and what is achievable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget answers the expectation of the population. This is why it has been well received and well accepted by the population. Today, we are faced with a Leader of the Opposition who is *KO* - I must say - and the MMM is in complete disarray. They still have not recovered from the shock of their disastrous and ruinous defeat, though predictable, in the last general elections, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

The shameful tactics they applied before the elections found their way even after the elections, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. They failed in their first duty as an Opposition elected to be the constitutional watchdog in a democratic system, of Government, by deciding first to boycott the Presidential Address and also by deciding not to participate in the debates on the Government Programme, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The people of this country are entitled to ask why this boycott, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Once again, they have proved by their behaviour that they are in complete dismay and have neither anything worth to say nor to contribute

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Faugoo: They are running short of ideas and imagination, as usual. They are, in fact, bankrupt of ideas, I must say. There is nothing new, no alternatives, no counter proposals, no programme and no plan except a dream to come back to power, but, unfortunately, they still have not found the winning formula - they are looking for so long – nor the dream team. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out by a citizen of this country - this is interesting – I quote:

“If at all they had an iota of intelligence - referring, of course, to the Opposition - they could have sat down, shut up, listened and pretended to look intelligent.”

But, even this, they can't do! *Hélas!* Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, *fidèles à leurs habitudes*, their negative attitude ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please! Continue!

Mr Faugoo: *Fidèles à leurs habitudes...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because of their negative attitude and their unconstructive nature, they never see any good thing happening. Yet, Mauritius is considered as a showcase and an icon, not only in the region but for the outside world. The truth hurts, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

You see their reaction, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This is the truth and their reaction confirms same.

Let me mention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what has been said by so many important international figures on the performance of Mauritius. I quote -

“Mauritius may be a small country, but it has the potential to make a big impact, both in contributing to Africa’s overall prosperity and by showing the way, providing an example of how other nations can stimulate growth by setting clear and fair rules for the benefit of those who wish to do business in Mauritius”.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these are not the words of a Member from this side of the House. These are the words of Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of State. What better recognition can we expect! What do we expect from the hon. Member who intervened just before me? If this comes from Hillary Clinton, do we have to learn lessons from the hon. Member who just took the floor before me?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, just last Sunday, Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim was interviewed while he was attending the prestigious MO Ibrahim Foundation meeting, here, in Mauritius. And in reply to a question from the press that if he had to pick up a single country which can serve as a model for good governance, which country he would pick up. He said the following, I quote –

“I do not select the best country for the MO Ibrahim Index of good governance. It is done on the basis of a set of indicators that are accepted internationally and the indicators cover such disciplines as good governance, poverty alleviations, social security, environment, education and health”.

He laughed and said this is a very easy question: Mauritius ranks 1st in the African continent and not only this time, but for the last three consecutive years.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have a tendency to forget, it is good that we refresh our memory. Let me remind the House, again, of what Baroness Ashton said during her visit to Mauritius in October last. I quote -

‘Disbursement under MAAS by EU has been made possible as Mauritius successfully implemented reforms and achieved strategic targets in the public finance, sugar, education, empowerment and wastewater sectors’.

It is widely recognised that Mauritius has done extremely well in all spheres. Mauritius has done extremely well in a very short span of time despite all the unprecedented difficult economic conditions. I am convinced that without the economic reforms undertaken over recent years, the country would have been in much more difficulty, if not in precarious situation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, how do we compare what is actually happening outside and in many industrialised countries? The international context is not very bright. Countries like UK, Greece, Ireland and even Portugal and Spain are badly shaken up by the global financial crisis.

Let us have a closer look at what is happening in Europe, which is our principal economic partner. In fact, our economy is strongly linked with Europe since 80% of our exports go to European markets and 90% of the sugar proceeds originate from Europe and nearly 70% of tourists visiting Mauritius come from Europe.

- Recession is widespread in Europe.
- Social measures are curtailed and even frozen in some countries.
- Rate of unemployment has flared up; jobs are being cut in the public service.
- Austerity measures are being adopted; there is a shrink in public expenditure.

In Ireland, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the situation is even worse. EU and IMF had to bail it out. Public sector expenditure has been reduced drastically. Filling of vacancies in the public sector has been frozen.

In the UK –

- Government has taken drastic measures to reduce budget deficit;
- It has decided to reduce public workforce by 30%;
- Social measures like support to university students have been reduced resulting an unprecedented student riots;

- Child benefits and social aid have been curtailed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, how do we compare what is happening in Europe, UK and Ireland? What is the situation here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? We also felt the pangs of the global financial crisis. Contrary to what we have witnessed in the EU and in other parts of the world, our economy has shown resilience due to the bold decisions we have taken and the timely implementation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

We have not eliminated welfare provisions. In fact, we have consolidated and added new ones like facilities for purchase of water tanks, solar heaters and incentives for first time home buyers and many others.

In fact, the overall budget for health, education, social security and housing has increased. Moreover, the subsidy on staples, rice and flour and domestic gas has been increased to Rs1.2 billion in this Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Income support to some 13,000 families in the vulnerable groups has been kept untouched. The point is that, as a caring Government, even if we are going through difficult times, we still have the population at heart and continue to ensure that everybody enjoys a reasonable standard of living and quality of life.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I listened carefully to the hon. Leader of the Opposition and I must say that he was - I will use his own words - really '*fade*', to say the least. However, he was not '*fade*' at all when he intervened - when he was Prime Minister - on the budget for the year 2004-2005 and 2005-2006.

If I may, I have a copy of Hansard here. I heard my friend, hon. Soodhun citing a few things. Let me quote what he had to say when he intervened as Prime Minister on the Appropriation Bill of 2005-2006 –

“But let me talk about the budget. Last year, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance presented his first budget and I wish to remind the House of the words which I used on that occasion, a year ago, to describe his first budget – '*coup d'essai, coup de maître*'. This is how I described it and that is what it was.”

He believed that this is what it was one year after: '*coup d'essai, coup de maître*.'

“The expression that I will use this year is to describe his second budget – '*un chef-d'œuvre*'. *C'est pourquoi je dis mille fois bravo au vice-Premier ministre et ministre des finances.*”

(Interruptions)

Il va encore plus loin, M. le président –

«Bravo, sincère et réfléchi» - it was not any bravo, bien sûr, 'd'un grand frère à un jeune frère. Mais qui, comme je l'ai dit, has come into his own, est monté en puissance en quelques années, d'une façon admirable mais, en même temps, je lui dis merci d'avoir mis en chaos de ce qui reste de l'opposition en face.»

And who is there today, Mr Speaker, Sir?

“Avant tout, Mr Speaker, Sir, un chef-d'œuvre équilibré”.

So, this is what he had to say for the second Budget. If I continue to read, they will fall. So, I might as well stop here. It would be good also that I refer to the first Budget which was presented by the then Minister of Finance, he says –

“L'arrogance du numéro 2 de l'opposition ne peut pas être décrite; l'arrogance, le manque de manière et surtout quand on s'adresse à quelqu'un qui a toujours fait preuve de beaucoup d'humilité, qui a sa personnalité à lui.”

Has he changed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? They have changed! If there is anybody who has changed it's on the other side of the House.

“Mais ce que notre jeune collègue a réussi en trois ans et demi, d'abord comme ministre de l'agriculture - I must say bla-bla-bla - tout le monde le sait sauf ceux qui ne veulent rien entendre, rien comprendre et rien voir dans les rangs de l'opposition. Ce budget est très bien reçu par la population et le budget a mis chaos à l'opposition.»

(Interruptions)

So, I was telling, *'budget fade, collé et recollé, décollé'*, I don't know; so many clichés, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I won't refer to his own budgets when he was Minister of Finance. I had referred to two budgets which were presented by the actual Minister of Finance. He was also then Minister of Finance, the vice-Prime Minister. So, how do we conclude? What is the conclusion to be drawn? What must the population draw from this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? So, he has one language when he is here and another language when he is there, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. One language in the House and yet another language when he is outside.

(Interruptions)

Not even belong, they have gone further now.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they lack credibility and they are always speaking of Triolet. Let's talk of Mauritius and all the twenty constituencies, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Let's talk of the results; let's talk of what the majority of the people of the country decided. This is why we represent stability. We represent a team...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Faugoo: ...who can work in the interest of this country, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This is why we are here.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order, please!

Mr Faugoo: As I said, when you listen to them, it is as if nothing is happening.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Hossen, please!

Mr Faugoo: And yet when we look at the opinions of so many credible people outside, Statesmen, public figures, we don't have to listen to them to decide what Mauritius is, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. So, as I said, they have one language when they are here. In two days - this is, unfortunately, 2004 - if you give them two days, they can talk one language in the morning and another one in the afternoon, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Two hours maybe, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! Enough is enough!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me address the House on issues and priorities of my Ministry.

(Interruptions)

Last week, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the European Union, signed an agreement for the disbursement of Rs6 billion under the accompanying measures for Mauritius. Mauritius has successfully implemented the reform programme so far and the decision of the EU to disburse this second '*tranche*' is based on this performance. In fact, it witnesses the good work that has been done by the Government.

To that effect, I wish to quote the comments made by the Head of the EU delegation in Mauritius, Mr Manriani –

“The new grant (€139.6 m.) has been disbursed ‘in recognition of the good progress made by Mauritius in its economic reform programme, which also includes the restructuring of the sugar sector into a sugar cane cluster, and the country, including the private sector and civil society’. Mauritius has performed very well in the first phase of the Accompanying Measures for Sugar protocol countries.”

The House will recall that since 2005, the sugar sector was badly hit by the 36% reduction of the price of sugar coupled with the phasing out of the sugar protocol. We were at a crossroad. We had to make a decision: either to do away with sugar industry altogether, like some countries chose to do or to bring deep and bold reforms to make the sector more viable and competitive. In fact, we opted for the latter, that is, we did not choose the easy way out, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir; we chose the difficult path, that of bold reforms.

Today, I am proud to say that the reform has been successful and the EU has been congratulating Mauritius for the successful implementation of the reform and, as I said earlier, has even disbursed the second *tranche* of Rs6 billion on 23 November. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is the first country of the ACP to bring reform and to earn such disbursement. Now, the EU is taking Mauritius as a showcase for the rest of the ACP countries.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the key objective of the Multi Annual Adaptation Strategy is to transform the sugar industry into a cane cluster moving from raw sugar to a situation where the industry produces several types of refined and special sugars. The other objective is to render the sector competitive, viable and sustainable while, at the same time, fulfilling our trade commitments.

We have already moved to refined white sugar. Two refineries, Omnicane and FUEL, are already producing and exporting white sugar to Europe. It is indeed pertinent to note that the Mauritius Sugar Syndicate has a contract with Sudzucker for the supply of 400,000 tonnes of refined sugar for period 2009-2015.

In respect of VRS 2, immediately after the historic deal of December 2007, the machinery was set on to implement the scheme. Today I can say that we have gone beyond the set target. In fact, to date, 6682 employees have accepted VRS 2 and ERS; 1500 of them have

received training and 800 have either been redeployed or are self-employed. Cash compensation disbursed in this regard amounts to some Rs3.4 billion, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

As far as centralisation is concerned, the process is on. St Felix, Mon Trésor Mon Desert and Riche En Eau have already closed. Union St Aubin has made an application for closure which is being processed; that of Beau Champ will follow. The closure of Mon Loisir is *sub judice*. Ultimately, we will have only four factories as provided for in the MAAS. The centralisation process will allow economies of scale and will bring down the cost of production while, at the same time, produce refined sugar instead of being limited to raw sugar.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, another component of the MAAS is the Field Operations, Regrouping and Irrigation Project (FORIP). FORIP was launched in order to regroup small planters and to modernise their cultural practices so as to render them to be more productive, increase their yield and reduce the cost of production. Some 12000 hectares are concerned with this project. As at June 2009, 2400 hectares were prepared. For July 2009 and 2010, 1600 hectares are targeted. The project is on track and key performance indicators have been satisfied.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister should try to make it in ten minutes as from now.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the MAAS makes special provision for small planters for them to maintain their productivity and sustainability. I have earlier spoken about the FORIP project. Unfortunately, the 36% cut in the price of sugar and the euro zone crisis have dramatically reduced their revenue from sugar. The small planters are the worst hit by this situation whereby the revenue from sugar has gone down from Rs17000 per tonne of sugar in 2007 to an estimated price of Rs12700 for crop 2010. It is very interesting to know that the breakeven price of one tonne of sugar is Rs15000 whereas they are only getting Rs12700 per tonne, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Under these circumstances, the small planters will not survive if not properly supported. It is in this context that measures have been announced in the ERCP in their favour.

However, we have a real challenge facing us with regard to small planters, especially those in difficult areas and having very small plots. Some small planters, despite all the support they may receive, may have to cease sugar cane production and may have to diversify. To enable

them to shift to more viable economic activities, we are now conducting a study on this particular category of planters in order to advise them on the way forward.

As for the case of *métayers*, as we well know, the Prime Minister has, on several occasions, insisted that in any reform process in the sugar industry, the interest of all stakeholders should be taken on board, be it the corporate sector, the miller planter, the small planters, the *métayers*, labourers and artisans and this is what exactly we have done as far as *métayers* are concerned. We have had a Memorandum of Understanding signed between my Ministry and MSPA which is being implemented. This is to the satisfaction of most of the *métayers*, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

A mid-term review of the MAAS has also been conducted this year as provided for in the MAAS. The mid-term review of the MAAS has concluded that overall the implementation of the MAAS has been successful. Government took note of the mid-term review and has agreed that the FORIP Project should be somehow strengthened.

Turning to food security, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that provision for relaunch of the food sector was made in the Budget 2008/2009 under the Food Security Fund. For its disbursement, a strategic plan had to be prepared. Indeed the 3-year strategic plan was launched in January 2009 and is being implemented.

I need to stress here on the fact that the money earmarked is not meant to be dished out without planning and targeting. It cannot be business as usual. We are taking action on the basis of our capacity and as per the strategic plan, and we have achieved a lot. The figures speak for themselves, except for those who are blind and who refuse to see. Let me give some examples of what has been happening and what is happening, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Let me start with the case of potato. The House may recall that we were producing only 12,000 tonnes, that is, 60% of our national consumption in 2005. The target set under the Food Security Fund was to produce 20,000 tonnes of potato by 2012. With the schemes that we have put in place, the CSO Digest of Agricultural Statistics indicates that we reached 19,800 tonnes last year and this year the forecast is 23,000 tonnes.

We have for the first time ever been able to release, this year, a variety of potato that is 100% Mauritian, namely Belle Isle variety. It has a higher yield compared to the imported

varieties and the quality is well appreciated by consumers. We are also producing some 150 tonnes of potato of this particular variety this year.

The Economic and Social Indicators issue No. 855 published by the CSO indicates that during the first half of 2010, the production of beef from live cattle reached 996 tonnes which is 10% higher than the corresponding figure of last year. Indeed local beef production in 2009 went up by 147.6% from a mere 21 tonnes to 52 tonnes and this is again attributed to the schemes of the Food Security Fund.

We note a similar increasing trend in the fresh milk sector. The annual production rose from 2.2 million litres, representing only 2% of self-sufficiency to more than 8.0 million litres, that is, 11% of self-sufficiency.

Indeed, the Digest of Agricultural Statistics 2009 clearly reports that the production of foodcrops last year raised from 93,000 tonnes in 2008 to 113,000 tonnes in 2009, that is, an increase of 22.5%, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

We have successfully implemented the hybrid rice seed project and now we are expanding the area under rice, not only for hybrid rice seed, but also for consumption purposes.

Concerning the pig sector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am proud to announce that the relaunch of the pig sector has been a complete success. This is a clear case of how we can transform challenges into opportunities. The House will recall that the population of pig was depleted in October 2007 because of the outbreak of the African swine fever. We have to date increased the number of heads from 18000 in 2007 to 23000 currently. Here, again, we have to take a very difficult decision to give compensation to the breeders and close down business or to undertake deep and bold reforms to put the sector back on track, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We provided income support to the pig breeders, grants and loans; imported quality breeds from South Africa; relocated the breeders at Saint Martin and Bassin Requin and provided training in order to modernise the sector and allow the breeders to operate in a more professional manner. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House will no doubt appreciate that the resources that Government mobilised, the schemes that we have put in place, have made a significant contribution towards this increase.

I earlier mentioned that the measures under the Food Security Fund are being implemented since January 2009. The Opposition Members are under the wrong impression that the funds have not been disbursed adequately. It is, therefore, pertinent for me to highlight that

we are dealing with public finance and we have to make judicious use of the fund within the parameters of good financial discipline and in all transparency. The funds are not for mere distribution or assistance to whoever applies for it. We are a responsible Government and want to make sure that the funds are allocated to those who can produce results. Applications received from planters, breeders and fishers are evaluated by a technical team. Only those who satisfy the set criteria are eligible and these are recommended for consideration by the respective banks, namely the Mauritius Post and Cooperative Bank Ltd and the DBM that managed the schemes. A further financial evaluation is conducted prior to disbursement. The process may be lengthy, but is important to maintain financial discipline and to ensure that it is going to the right stakeholder who can produce results, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

I am now proposing to review the Food Security Unit within my Ministry with a view to strengthening its capacity to deliver and to operate as a full-fledged department of my Ministry. This Unit will be fully dedicated to implement actions and campaigns to enhance our food security. It will be responsible to mobilise all operators and stakeholders to contribute towards enhancing our food production and also towards changing our food consumption habits so that we all consume more of what we produce locally.

The Food Security Unit will also manage the agricultural land bank that my Ministry has already set up. It will make sure that all agricultural lands are used optimally and will facilitate access of privately owned abandoned lands to planters, breeders and investors wishing to undertake agricultural activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now elaborate on the measures proposed in this Budget for the agricultural community. Sugar cane is known to be the crop *par excellence* to face the climatic adversity, but it is now proving to be an excellent crop as it is adaptive and nimble to our economy when confronted with tough external challenges. With the bold measures that we have been implementing since 2005, the sugar industry has been transformed from a sunset industry to a multi-product sector on a new growth platform with a renewable role in the development of our economy. The measures that this Government is proposing will no doubt accelerate this process of rebalancing the industry.

Accordingly, the 15 measures that were announced under the ERCP in August of this year are being implemented and these include the decision to reduce the global cess. We are

responding to the wish of small planters by reintroducing the tax exemption on the first 60 tonnes of sugar for small planters with less than 15 hectares of land and who rely solely on sugar income. Hence, they will not be required to submit a tax return. Second, we are abolishing the 15% income tax on the surplus generated from sugar operations by Cooperative Credit Societies. Third, loans up to Rs25,000 given by CCS to their members will attract a concessionary fixed fee of Rs200 on registration and inscription of the documents. Fourth, we are providing Rs310 m. for the Field Operations, Re-grouping and Irrigation Project, project to cover another 1300 hectares of land in 2011. Fifth, we are providing Rs15 m. to maintain the incentives regarding the Fair Trade Initiative. By 2012, small and medium planters will get the benefit on some 40,000 tonnes of sugar. Sixth, the price of molasses sold for producing potable alcohol will be increased by an amount equivalent to Rs10 per litre of absolute alcohol. This will represent additional revenue of some Rs300 per tonne of sugar for every planter. Seventh, the actuarial review of the Sugar Insurance Fund has started. The recommendations purporting to enhance the viability of sugar producers will be implemented *inter alia* amendments to the Sugar Insurance Fund Act. Eighth, the 80% advance scheme applicable to the 2010 sugar crop will also apply to the 2011, meaning next year crop. Ninth, appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that the VAT benefits currently provided to medium and large exporters of sugar will also be available to small planters. Tenth, Government is re-establishing full duty-free facility on all types of double cab vehicles for eligible small planters, farmers, fishermen, cooperative societies and qualified SMEs. This measure will help this category of operators to do business better and be more efficient.

Our agriculture has to be modernised to meet the emerging challenges in the agricultural sector. Recourse to biotechnology is now a necessity and, for this purpose, a National Agricultural Biotechnology Institute will be set up to fully tap the benefits of hi-tech development in the domains of agriculture, agro-industry and fisheries. Biotechnology products have to conform to bio security norms and standards. For this purpose, enforcement of local legislations and compliance to our international obligations on food safety has become necessary. Government is providing Rs15 m. for the multipurpose containment facility for safe movement and handling of living organisms. Two hydroponics villages will be set up as pilot projects for small planters in the non-sugar sector to modernise their activities. The House will recall that one such village has been set up at Cluny and more entrepreneurs have expressed the wish to undertake hydroponics. This production system is more productive, both in terms of

yield and quality and is efficient to mitigate the adverse effects of climate. Food Security is still high on the agenda of this Government. Indeed, the Director-General of FAO, Dr. Jacques Diouf, who was on mission last week, admonished that all countries including Mauritius should maintain, if not consolidate, the Food Security Programme and actions. Government is thus earmarking Rs105 m. to accelerate the Food Security Programme.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House will appreciate that these measures will further consolidate the resilience of our agricultural sector and the national economy at large. These measures are well in line with those in the Government Programme. These measures respond clearly to the aspirations of the agricultural community in this particular context. These measures are in tune with the vision of creating *une société moderne, équitable et durable* which is the vision of the Prime Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we started a task in 2005 under the leadership of a Prime Minister who has a clear vision and the goal that he has set is to charter a new path, a path that will be more acceptable to our people and that will bring prosperity to the greatest number.

Let me conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the following quote from the Global Cooperation for a Better World, I quote -

“A vision without a task is but a dream.

A task without a vision is but drudgery.

A vision with a task can change the world.”

I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(3.28 p.m.)

Mrs M. Martin (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue): M. le président, c’est avec un sentiment de grande fierté que je me mets debout, cet après-midi, dans cette Chambre pour discourir sur le premier budget présenté il y a un peu plus d’une semaine par l’honorable Pravind Jugnauth pour le compte du gouvernement de l’Alliance de l’Avenir.

Selon l’usage, M. le président, permettez-moi, tout d’abord, de féliciter le vice-Premier ministre pour ce budget que je trouve courageux et responsable, un budget dont il a gratifié le pays. Je tiens aussi à remercier particulièrement le *Leader* de l’Alliance de l’Avenir parce que,

M. le président, il est clair - et le ministre des finances l'a dit lui même à plusieurs reprises – que personne ne peut venir présenter un budget sans être soutenu par son Premier ministre. Ainsi c'est le soutien indéfectible du docteur Navinchandra Ramgoolam qui a permis la naissance et la lecture des 429 paragraphes de ce budget, un budget dans lequel sont énoncées une série de mesures qui viennent tracer un nouvel avenir pour ce pays.

M. le président, je ne compte pas m'appesantir sur toutes les clauses du discours de l'honorable ministre des finances, il y aurait trop à dire et le temps qui m'est imparti est limité. Toutefois, mon discours sera axé sur trois questions auxquelles je m'efforcerai d'apporter des éléments de réponses pour information générale pour la population et, en particulier, pour les honorables membres de l'opposition qui semblent ne trouver dans ce budget que répétitions et promesses en l'air. Cela ne m'étonne pas, M. le président, même si cette mauvaise foi est navrante.

Je me contenterai, M. le président, de souligner trois aspects -

Premièrement, what exactly is this Budget about?

Secondly, how this Budget can help to change the life of our fellow citizens?

And lastly, how, we, as a team, truly feel that this Budget announces the dawn of a new beginning for our country?

What is exactly this Budget about, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

This Budget is about resilience and continuity, change, vision and creativity. It is about stabilising our economy in a world where economic turmoil is ever threatening. Others have said it before, but it seems that the hon. Members, on the Opposition side, did not hear it. The economic crisis is not yet over. Mauritius, as many other countries, has been affected and is still being affected by it. But thanks to the vision of our Leader, hon. Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, the Mauritian people have fared much better than some in other parts of the world.

My colleague and friend, hon. Assirvaden gave, in his speech the other day, many examples of countries where economic crisis has affected and is still greatly affecting the population. And he is right! Countries not only in Europe, but in other parts of the world as well. The world truly is a global village in that sense, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that decision and problems of some affect others. In this context, this Budget is courageous because it takes on

major issues. It examines our path up till now and readjusts the trajectory so that our economic strategy can be given a new boost. It aims at rebalancing and strengthening economic growth.

M. le président, ce n'est pas pour rien que nous voulons nous éloigner d'un modèle économique trop centré sur l'euro. Cela ne sert à rien de prôner le *status quo* dans un monde où l'évolution des réalités économiques et sociales se fait à une vitesse vertigineuse. Le changement d'orientation contenu dans ce budget fait crier l'opposition. En même temps, ils fustigent les mesures qui, disent-ils, restent inchangées. *Which is which ?* On a l'impression que dans cette opposition on ne sait pas vraiment ce qu'on veut.

Je suis d'accord avec eux sur une chose. Le changement pour le changement ne veut rien dire, mais changer pour réformer, changer pour sauvegarder nos acquis, pour améliorer la qualité de vie de notre population, telle que nous le faisons, cela est significatif. Et puis, M. le président, il est le propre de l'homme d'évoluer. Et selon le dicton, M. le président, nous savons qui sont les seuls qui ne changent pas. Si on n'avance pas, on meurt.

Juste pour donner un exemple. Ce n'est pas pour rien que nous voulons orienter notre politique économique vers d'autres pays aux économies à potentiel. Notre volonté à vouloir, notamment dans le domaine du tourisme, nous diriger vers des marchés tels que l'Inde, la Russie et la Chine est un exemple de notre vision. Ces indiens, russes et chinois voyagent de plus en plus, M. le président. Ils constituent un marché très prometteur avec un pouvoir d'achat conséquent. Ce sont des gens qui dépensent des sommes importantes pour se payer des vacances et si Maurice arrive à augmenter sa part de ce marché, cela constituera une avancée énorme pour notre économie. M. le président, le Premier ministre le sait, le ministre des finances y accorde une importance particulière et le ministre du tourisme s'attèle à atteindre cet objectif. C'est un travail d'équipe, M. le président. Et c'est ce que l'opposition ne comprend pas. Ce n'est qu'un exemple pris au hasard lors de ma lecture du discours budget. Il y en a d'autres et j'y viendrai un peu plus tard. Mais il est important de souligner que pour chaque ministère, c'est ainsi que nous le concevons. Un travail d'équipe!

J'en viens maintenant, M. le président, à la deuxième partie de mon discours. *How can this Budget help to change the life of our fellow citizens?*

Pour ceux qui - comme moi - ont lu ce budget attentivement et avec un esprit non partisan, on l'a vu, c'est un budget à fort caractère social et dans chaque mesure énoncée

transparaît directement, sinon en filigrane, le désir de ce gouvernement de tracer de manière responsable et durable, l'avenir du peuple mauricien. Ces phrases du ministre des finances au paragraphe 11 du discours-budget ne sont pas anodines. Laissez-moi vous les lire –

“(...) successful development is not only about creating value. It is also about values. We know that not everything that counts can be counted. There must be an abiding commitment to the values of our society - compassion, kindness and generosity (...)”

A chaque mesure, c'est le bien-être du peuple qui a été pris en compte. L'Alliance de l'Avenir et son *Leader*, à travers la voix de son ministre des finances, pensent au peuple à chaque étape. A la communauté des planteurs, quand elle réintroduit l'exemption sur les premières 60 tonnes de sucre, les faveurs accordées aux coopératives, sociétés de crédit, le rétablissement des facilités *duty-free* pour les 4x4 et j'en passe.

Nous pensons au peuple quand nous investissons massivement dans l'éducation: aux familles dans le besoin qui n'ont pas les moyens de se payer les frais de SC et de HSC pour leurs enfants, maintenant le taux d'éligibilité a été rehaussé; à travers la création de nouvelles unités pré-primaires dans divers endroits de l'île pour encourager les mères à envoyer leurs enfants à l'école dès la maternelle.

Nous pensons aux plus méritants quand nous augmentons le nombre de bourses d'État de manière si conséquente et que nous faisons de la place pour les étudiants de familles démunies. Nous pensons au peuple quand nous disons aussi que les lauréats sous ce système ont l'option de travailler pour leur pays.

Nous pensons au peuple lorsque malgré une conjoncture économique peu favorable, nous investissons massivement dans la modernisation et la création de nouvelles infrastructures pour le bon développement du pays. Car nous savons, M. le président, que l'un des facteurs de la pauvreté, c'est aussi la difficulté d'accès aux infrastructures de base. Notre engagement pour faire de Maurice une île durable, M. le président, se transcrit de manière claire dans les mesures qui ont été énoncées.

Nous pensons au peuple lorsque nous mettons autant d'argent dans le domaine de la santé: R 8 milliards pour de nombreuses mesures qui incluent l'amélioration d'hôpitaux existants, la création d'un hôpital gériatrique et des études pour la mise sur pied de structures pouvant accueillir femmes et enfants malades.

Nous pensons au peuple lorsque nous nous battons pour préserver et valoriser l'art et la culture: en boostant les facettes de notre riche héritage culturel, en la faisant connaître auprès des touristes et des producteurs de films. C'est une aubaine d'avoir un beau pays tel que le nôtre. Une aubaine que nous voulons saisir à pleines mains. Car outre leur valeur morale et spirituelle, l'art et la culture de Maurice ont un énorme potentiel générateur d'emplois, donc, source de revenus supplémentaires pour le peuple et pour le pays.

Nous pensons au peuple lorsque nous disons que notre mémoire, celle de tous les mauriciens, sera préservée. Conscient de ce fait, le ministre des finances n'a pas hésité à allouer 100 millions de roupies pour la digitalisation de nos archives qui datent du début du 18^e siècle.

Nous pensons au peuple également lorsque nous oeuvrons pour créer de nouvelles *Speaking Unions*. Il s'agit là d'une opportunité additionnelle pour nos compatriotes de se former, en maîtrisant une langue de plus. Une richesse personnelle qui peut aussi se transformer en richesse économique. Pourquoi pas? On dit toujours que connaître une langue c'est une richesse, parce que sa maîtrise permet l'accès à la culture du pays et favorise l'ouverture d'esprit. Je vais même plus loin. Dans un monde qui est aujourd'hui un village global, parler une langue étrangère ouvre de nombreuses portes et opportunités. Ce gouvernement l'a compris et s'y attèle pour que chaque mauricien ait une chance supplémentaire de s'épanouir davantage.

Nous pensons aux plus pauvres lorsque nous dotons le ministère de l'honorable Xavier-Luc Duval de facilités qui lui permettront d'œuvrer pour soulager le sort des plus démunis. M. le président, le Premier ministre, le ministre des finances et chacun d'entre nous de ce côté de la Chambre - et j'ose espérer que de l'autre côté de la Chambre également - sommes conscients de la nécessité impérative de soulager la souffrance du petit peuple. Lorsque nous offrons aux familles à faible revenu des facilités pour obtenir des réservoirs d'eau, des panneaux solaires, pour l'achat d'une maison, d'un terrain, nous pensons au peuple avant tout, M. le président, à ceux qui sont au bas de l'échelle, ceux qui se retrouvent entre les plus pauvres et la classe moyenne, et même ceux qui sont qualifiés comme étant de classe moyenne, mais qui peinent à avancer pour diverses raisons.

Je prends l'exemple de ma circonscription, M. le président, Port Louis Nord/Montagne Longue. Au niveau des infrastructures de base, il y a tellement à faire ! Il existe des endroits où les habitants n'ont accès ni à l'eau ni à l'électricité. Nous ne sommes pas trop de trois pour

essayer d'apporter un soulagement à nos mandants. Avec les ministres concernés, tels que l'honorable Xavier-Luc Duval, l'honorable Anil Bachoo, mes collègues et moi-même œuvrons activement pour aider ces personnes. Nous sommes trois maintenant. Il s'agit là d'un engagement que nous avons pris envers eux et que nous tiendrons, autant que cela nous sera possible.

De même, ce budget n'est certes pas parfait, mais il contient de nombreux germes de bonne volonté. C'est le fruit abouti d'une réflexion qui a pris en compte toutes les strates sociales du pays. Il apporte des mesures concrètes qui permettront au pays d'avancer en ces temps difficiles. Il vient aussi consolider la confiance soldée le 06 mai dernier entre le peuple et l'Alliance de l'Avenir.

M. le président, que n'avions nous pas entendu avant la publication du discours budget ? Nos détracteurs avaient essayé de monter une cabale contre l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth, en alimentant l'appréhension populaire qui précède tout budget. C'est une honte, M. le président ! Et je n'ai pas peur de le dire. Le défi a été relevé de fort belle manière, et nous sommes fiers et solidaires du budget présenté. Le peuple nous a fait confiance ; le Premier ministre nous a fait confiance, et c'est une confiance que nous ne trahisons pas, M. le président. Et c'est pour cela que j'en viens à dire que *we, as a team, truly feel that this Budget announces the dawn of a new beginning for our country.*

Dans beaucoup de cas, c'est un nouveau départ, un nouvel élan que nous prenons, et la population en général l'a compris. Dehors, le peuple comprend le sens dans lequel ce budget a été conçu. Il comprend que la bonne volonté n'exclut pas la responsabilité quand il faut prendre certaines mesures. Il reconnaît que l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth a présenté un budget qui contribuera à faire avancer le pays, en apportant un certain soulagement au peuple car cette vision réorientée, conforme au manifeste électoral que nous avons présenté au peuple lors de la campagne de 2010, n'a qu'un seul but : le bien-être de la population.

C'est un budget responsable, M. le président. Taxer sévèrement les fléaux comme la cigarette, le jeu et l'alcool n'aura peut-être pas l'effet dissuasif que certains voudraient voir se produire auprès des victimes de ces fléaux. Mais, pour moi, c'est un autre débat. Il faudra voir comment nous pouvons attaquer cette réalité. Mais taxer ces secteurs, pour moi, cela vaut mieux

que taxer la classe des travailleurs et des citoyens qui luttent pour gagner leur vie de manière responsable ! Cela vaut mieux que d'augmenter la TVA !

M. le président, avec l'Alliance de l'Avenir, c'est toute une équipe solidaire que le peuple a votée le 06 mai dernier. C'est une équipe qui, sous la férule du Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, n'aura de cesse de travailler pour le bien-être de la population. Je pense que ce budget le prouve amplement. Le ministre des finances a agi de manière responsable, et dans la durée. Et comme il le dit lui-même : c'est un premier budget ; il y en aura d'autres. Car pour ceux qui ne l'auraient pas compris, gouverner c'est prévoir. Et nous prévoyons de rester encore longtemps au pouvoir, M. le président, parce que nous avons une vision pour l'île Maurice de demain. Nous voulons d'une île Maurice fière et solidaire, prospère et courageuse. C'est cet élan qui lui a été donné à nouveau dans ce budget. Et c'est avec cette confiance renouvelée que nos frères et sœurs peuvent envisager l'avenir du pays.

Merci, M. le président.

(3.45 p.m.)

Mr R. Issack (Fourth Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): M. le président, s'il m'était possible, j'aurais repris le discours de l'honorable Paul Bérenger en 2004 pour le relire. Cela aurait été le mien mais, malheureusement, je refuse le plagiat. Et même si j'avais pris ou bien repris ce discours, il m'aurait été très difficile d'être aussi hyperbolique, panégyriste, pour dire que c'est un budget mirobolant, un chef-d'œuvre, un coup de maître. Mais permettez-moi quand même de reprendre deux mots. Vraiment c'est un budget bien fait ; c'est un coup de maître ; c'est un chef-d'œuvre. En deux mots, j'ai résumé le discours de l'honorable Paul Bérenger. J'aurais peut-être eu le plaisir de relire ce discours, mais vu l'intensité, comment il avait amplifié, il avait gonflé à bloc le ministre des finances d'alors, je n'ose pas, parce qu'on ne croit pas aux flatteurs. D'ailleurs, La Fontaine avait parlé de la flatterie dans 'Le Corbeau et le Renard'. Aujourd'hui, le renard est devenu corbeau ; le corbeau est devenu renard.

M. le président, un budget, c'est un planning. On planifie le budget de l'État. Le budget, c'est aussi un budget familial. C'est comme un père de famille, comme un couple qui planifie le budget familial. On cherche des revenus, et puis on va préparer les dépenses. Qui est ce père de famille ou cette mère de famille qui va préparer un budget pour faire souffrir ses enfants ? Cela n'existe pas. Dans aucun pays au monde, un ministre des finances, ou bien un gouvernement, va

préparer un budget intentionnellement pour faire du tort à une population ; cela n'existe pas. Et quand on prépare un budget, évidemment il y a certaines mesures qui sont difficiles à prendre, mais il faut les prendre. Alors l'opposition a parlé du 'Sithanen' sans 'Sithanen'. Oui, c'est du 'Sithanen' sans 'Sithanen' ! Oui, c'est la continuité ! Oui, c'est la même philosophie ramgoolamienne ! Oui, c'est la même philosophie travailliste ! Oui, c'est le même militantisme ensoleillé et mandaté par le peuple ! Un budget cordial !

(Interruptions)

M. le président, quand votre mandant vient se plaindre à vous...

(Interruptions)

C'est vrai qu'on avait applaudi, qu'on avait tapé sur la table, quand le ministre Sithanen avait présenté ses budgets, parce que c'était des budgets osés, présentés par un ministre des finances compétent ; tout aussi compétent que celui-là. On ne fait pas de différence. C'était la même philosophie. On n'avait pas applaudi quand on avait imposé, si j'ose dire, la NRPT, parce qu'on n'a applaudit pas quand on doit taxer ; nous, on l'avait fait. C'était courageux ! Mais c'était fait dans un contexte donné, et après il faut reconnaître aussi le courage de ce gouvernement d'avoir écouté la voix du peuple ; le courage de ce gouvernement, l'humilité de ce gouvernement.

(Interruptions)

Même après cinq ou dix ans, quand on reconnaît que quelque chose n'est pas satisfaisant et qu'on accepte de le retirer, c'est ça ce qu'on appelle écouter le peuple.

(Interruptions)

Rendons à César ce qui appartient à César ! Les membres de l'Opposition ont tenu jusqu'ici plusieurs discours. Acceptons, ce sont des discours de haute facture. Vous avez tenu de très bon discours. Vous avez été quelque part honnêtes car vous avez reconnu certaines mesures.

(Interruptions)

Mais, malheureusement...

(Interruptions)

...par moment, leurs discours étaient dopés d'irréalisme. Des discours avec leur dose habituelle de démagogie. J'ai écouté l'honorable Madame Françoise Labelle, une femme très perspicace.

(Interruptions)

Elle a parlé sur la pauvreté. Nous n'avons pas inventé la pauvreté. L'humanité est née nue, dans la pauvreté. On ne pourra jamais régler le problème de la pauvreté. Aujourd'hui, les riches sont pauvres. La pauvreté existe dans les pays les plus riches du monde. On n'a pas pu éradiquer la pauvreté mais, au moins, reconnaissons que ce gouvernement a aujourd'hui un ministère pour l'Intégration Sociale ; un ministère réservé exclusivement à l'exclusion, un ministère pour s'occuper des pauvres. Même après dix ou vingt ans, au moins nous l'avons fait.

(Interruptions)

Mais vous, pendant vingt cinq ans, vous ne l'avez jamais fait !

(Interruptions)

Puisqu'on parle de la pauvreté, reconnaissons ce qu'était l'île Maurice avant l'indépendance. C'était quoi ? C'était la stricte, l'absolue pauvreté. Aujourd'hui, on a parcouru un chemin. Aujourd'hui, on marche et on progresse avec le temps. Les pauvres ne sont pas aussi pauvres qu'ils l'étaient. Il faut qu'on soit honnête là-dessus.

(Interruptions)

Jamais un gouvernement ne s'est occupé des pauvres comme on le fait maintenant. Dans tous les secteurs, on essaye de tout faire pour leur venir en aide: transport, éducation, etc. On est en train de se plaindre de la pension de vieillesse avec une petite augmentation, mais c'est toujours quelque chose. Malheureusement, l'honorable Reza Uteem n'est pas là. En l'écoutant, on constate qu'il dresse une image assez apocalyptique, noire et sombre. Déjà il prédit une augmentation en cascade des prix, mais les prix ont toujours augmenté, et c'est ça la vie. Les prix continueront à augmenter.

M. le président, aujourd'hui le prix de l'huile a augmenté. Mais il ne faut pas oublier qu'il y a des facteurs exogènes qui influent sur notre économie et sur notre budget. Nous sommes un pays sans ressources. Notre seule ressource c'est nous. Alors, venir décrire tout en noir, je ne dirais pas que c'est malhonnête, mais c'est très injuste.

Est-ce qu'on parle de la pauvreté à la circonscription No. 2 ? L'honorable docteur Rashid Beebeejaun, le vice-premier ministre, est un peu le père de cette circonscription.

(Interruptions)

Il a donné de l'eau aux pauvres de la circonscription. Il a donné de l'électricité aux pauvres de la circonscription - *wastewater sewerage*. On a construit des rues et ruelles et on leur donne des chemins et des hôpitaux. Il faut être honnête et reconnaître ce qui est bien. Comme nous, nous reconnaissons quand vous dites des choses qui sont correctes, on dit que c'est acceptable. Mais reconnaissez ce qu'on a fait, par exemple, pour la circonscription No. 2. Il y a un grand hôpital qu'on est en train de construire. Il y a une medi-clinique qui a été construite. Il y a des jardins d'enfants et des espaces verts.

(Interruptions)

On ne néglige pas, mais on ne peut pas tout faire tout le temps. On ne peut pas donner tout à tout le monde tout le temps.

Pour revenir au budget, c'est une histoire anecdotique mais authentique. Il y a des journalistes qui sont en haut et je vois un collègue, M. Iqbal Oozageer, qui peut le confirmer. Avant que le budget ne soit lu, toutes les rédactions sont en ébullition. Alors, dans un bureau de journal, on a donné une responsabilité à un journaliste, pas n'importe lequel, un journaliste chevronné. On lui a dit: «voilà ce que tu vas faire, on n'aura pas le temps parce qu'aujourd'hui c'est vendredi. Alors il va falloir aller vite, mais on va simplifier ta tâche. Tu vas dresser deux colonnes, *the plus points and the minus points*. Tu vas mettre tout ce qui est bon et tout ce qui n'est pas bon. Quand on le rencontre, il ne vient qu'avec une colonne. On lui dit pourquoi? *Pena même seki pas bon*. Allez demander à la population ce qu'elle pense du budget ! Allez demander à la femme ce qu'elle pense du budget !

(Interruptions)

On dit que la femme est l'avenir de l'homme. La femme est le miroir de l'homme.

(Interruptions)

Allez demander aux ménagères, aux mamans ce qu'elles pensent de ce budget ! Nous avons un ministre des finances qui a fait d'une pierre quatre coups.

(Interruptions)

Pas quatre cents coups, mais quatre coups !

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Please! Order!

Mr Issack: La cigarette, l'alcool et le jeu, trois fléaux qui sont en train de miner la société. Le ministre des finances a taxé ces trois fléaux tout en faisant entrer de l'argent dans la caisse.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Please! Order!

Mr Issack: M. le président, ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, please!

(Interruptions)

Mr Issack: Vous savez, M. le président, tout le temps on a dit que le MMM ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Issack: L'honorable Rajesh Bhagwan, écoutez-moi. On a toujours dit pour le MMM, au No. 19, *MMM li dormi li élu*, et c'est *seki monn faire. Monn dormi monn rentré*.

(Interruptions)

Et laissez-moi vous dire ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Issack: Est-ce que je pourrais faire *enn révélation*, M. le président?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Please!

Mr Issack: L'honorable Rajesh Bhagwan est un homme honnête. Laissez-moi faire une révélation. J'espère qu'il ne m'en voudra pas parce que c'est un ami, c'est un mandant. Vous savez ce qu'il avait dit: si c'était possible, j'aurais tellement voulu voter pour toi. Mais seulement il a été honnête avec son parti. Je ne sais pas maintenant, il y avait quand même ...

(Interruptions)

L'honorable Dr. Satish Boolell, je l'ai bien écouté, il a fait un excellent discours. Il a raison de parler des services de la santé, des services qu'on offre à l'hôpital. Puisqu'on parle justement de mon sommeil qui m'a emmené au parlement, je voudrais faire ressortir une chose. Malheureusement, j'étais malade pendant la campagne électorale, j'avais été admis à l'hôpital. Cela a été une occasion pour moi de comprendre beaucoup de choses. Vous savez, comme journaliste, on a tendance à critiquer, mais on ne peut pas critiquer ce qu'on a vécu. C'est la vérité. L'hôpital nous fournit un service impeccable. Nous avons, aujourd'hui, en l'honorable Madame Maya Hanoomanjee, une très bonne ministre de la santé. Parce qu'elle a écouté, elle essaye, elle fait de son mieux pour améliorer nos services de santé.

(Interruptions)

Avec charme! Il fait son charme, Madame.

(Interruptions)

J'aurai souhaité qu'il reste. Je vais parler de la MBC après.

(Interruptions)

Nous avons un service de santé performant. C'est vrai, les remarques faites par l'honorable Dr. Satish Boolell, sont vraies et pertinentes. On l'admet. Il y a des équipements qui sont défectueux, il n'y a pas de maintenance, tout cela c'est vrai. Mais c'est aussi vrai que nous avons des médecins, des infirmiers, des infirmières, nous avons des *Health Care Assistants, from the top to the bottom*, ce sont des gens qui travaillent avec passion pour venir en aide aux malades. J'ai été témoin et aujourd'hui je tiens à rendre hommage à ces gens-là.

Il faut critiquer quand il faut critiquer, mais il faut être honnête dans ce qu'on fait et surtout quand on est membre d'un parlement. Vous êtes des icônes, des symboles. On ne peut pas dire n'importe quoi de n'importe quelle façon. Il faut être responsable de ce qu'on dit. C'est peut-être un peu pour cela que tout ce que nous disons est sujet à interprétation.

L'honorable Madame Arianne Navarre-Marie – j'ai entendu le Premier ministre à la télévision mentionner son nom – vous savez, si demain je dis: ceux qui sont de la Plaine Verte n'auront pas de boulots ou n'ont pas de boulots ou sont ostracisés. A qui vous pensez? Il y a une interprétation, je ne dis pas que c'est comme cela, mais il y a des gens qui peuvent interpréter. Mais il ne faut pas oublier une chose.

(Interruptions)

Non, écoutez, évidemment j'ai dit - on n'accuse pas - c'est sujet à interprétation.

Dans le passé, dans d'autres circonscriptions, il y a eu des commentaires et jusqu'à maintenant il y a des commentaires que l'on fait. Mais nous devons être très conscients parfois de ce que nous avançons. Malheureusement, l'honorable Rajesh Bhagwan n'est pas là. Nous sommes de toutes les communautés dans cette Chambre; nous représentons toute l'île Maurice dans cette Chambre.

(Interruptions)

Certainement! M. le président, c'est vrai, lorsque le ministre de ce gouvernement, l'honorable Aimée, avait, par boutade, je ne sais pas, mais il avait prononcé un mot que je n'avais pas apprécié. Je m'étais exprimé là-dessus. On s'exprime librement, c'est cela la démocratie. Nous sommes dans un pays libre et nous représentons toutes les communautés dans cette Chambre.

(Interruptions)

L'honorable Xavier Duval avait, un jour, dit ici même qu'il est fier d'être créole. Moi, je suis fier d'être musulman, mais je suis fier d'être mauricien. Vous, M. le président, vous êtes fier d'être hindou, mais vous êtes fier d'être mauricien. Vous, Madame Arianne Navarre-Marie, vous êtes fière d'être chrétienne mais vous êtes fière d'être mauricienne. Monsieur Sik Yuen est fier d'être de la population générale.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Please! Hon. Lesjongard, please!

(Interruptions)

Mr Issack: M. le président, pour venir au discours, ce que j'ai voulu faire comprendre, c'est que nous vivons dans un creuset. Nous sommes un peuple heureux. Dans la population

elle-même, nous avons un vivre ensemble exceptionnel, unique au monde. Et nous devons maintenir cela et le budget c'est aussi une harmonisation sociale. Toutes les communautés sont traitées à part égale. Quand on donne l'éducation gratuite, c'est à tout le monde. Le transport, c'est pour tout le monde. Nous vivons et nous devons vivre pleinement notre mauricianité.

C'est justement là où je devais parler de la MBC. Notre ami, l'honorable Rajesh Bhagwan, parlait l'autre jour d'Hilter. Non, il n'y a pas d'Hilter à la MBC. Au contraire, la MBC est en train de jouer un rôle important dans la construction de la nation. Je suis contre l'*overexposure*. Je suis contre l'*overdose*. Je suis contre la propagande, mais reconnaissons quand même qu'il y a plusieurs chaînes de la télévision qui aident à consolider ce pluralisme que nous avons. L'île Maurice est un pays multiculturel, pluriel, multicolore et c'est à nous de donner l'exemple de ce prisme. Vous savez quand toutes les couleurs se mélangent, elles deviennent blanches. Alors, nous devons contribuer, chacun à sa manière, parce que je suis sûr que les membres de l'opposition sont très mauriciens dans l'âme tout comme nous le sommes ici. Mais nous devons être très prudents dans ce que nous avançons.

Pour conclure, je voudrais revenir sur ce que mon ami, Ashock Jugnauth - l'honorable Ashit Gungah, excusez-moi. Il avait parlé de scorpion, *Ashock Jugnauth, scorpion inn pik li depi longtemps*. Pour revenir à notre ami, l'honorable Ashit Gungah – excusez-moi pour ce lapsus - il avait raconté une histoire du scorpion et de la tortue. J'ai entendu l'honorable Baloomoody, lui, qu'est-ce qu'il disait? *Gouvernement torti!*

(Interruptions)

Implicitement, il l'a accepté. Mais quand il parle de *gouvernement torti*, il a certainement voulu parler de la lenteur. Oui, j'admets. Mais le gouvernement actuel, c'est un gouvernement éléphant, lent, lourd, mais il laisse toujours ses empreintes et des empreintes indélébiles.

(Interruptions)

Ce n'est pas le gouvernement qui écrase l'Opposition, c'est le peuple qui a écrasé cette Opposition !

(Interruptions)

Heureusement que nous avons une Opposition qui nous fait rire quand même.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Issack: M. le président, seulement une phrase pour terminer.

(Interruptions)

Il y a un seul point maintenant en commun entre nous et l'Opposition: le budget de l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth est un chef-d'œuvre.

Merci, M. le président.

(4.12 p.m.)

Mrs L. Ribot (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like today to talk about the place - I am happy to come just after my friend, hon. Reza Issack - or rather what should have been the place of the Mauritian women in the Budget 2011 which is anything but a gendered one *et je voudrais rassurer l'honorable Issack que mon discours ne sera pas miné d'irréalités.*

First of all, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what is the social profile of the Mauritian women in 2010? She is the one who suffers the most from poverty. The figures indeed show that there is a feminisation of illiteracy, unemployment and poverty. Whereas she had the hope and expectancy that the annual compensation could have helped her to catch up over *la perte du pouvoir d'achat* and get out of that poverty, what does she see? Those at the bottom of the ladder get a compensation of 3.2% which is equivalent to Rs98. In what way do Rs98 help to take those women out of poverty? What can they afford to buy with Rs98? A pack of cheese at Rs76, a loaf of bread at Rs2.60 daily, a pack of butter at Rs70, a pound of milk powder at Rs85! A woman being what she is and a mother being what she is, she will care about the welfare of her children before her own. The burden and the stress of feeding her family lie upon her shoulders. With Rs98 that woman cannot even afford to drink a glass of milk, eat yoghurt or eat cheese daily. I would like to point out, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that I am not mentioning luxurious goods, but only basic dairy products so essential for the well-being of each and every one, but, more specifically, for a woman. Those poor women, being unable to afford the basic essential dairy products, will surely wonder what the hon. Minister of Finance means by the Mauritian dream.

That same woman going to the doctor because she feels pain in the joints and has difficulty in moving around and doing household chores will not dare answer the doctor's usual

questions as to whether she feeds herself well, whether she drinks enough milk and eats enough yogurt and cheese.

Ces questions, M. le président, tournent le couteau dans sa plaie. Should we be surprised to learn the findings of a research done through the Anlene Bone Health Check Programme between 2004 and 2009? Two women out of five are at risk of getting osteoporosis, a condition in which bones become brittle, light and fragile and in which the victims are more liable to get hip fractures and we know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the burden a victim of hip fracture is for her family. The silence on osteoporosis is frightening, the more so since the World Health Organisation has identified it as a major public health issue and refers to it as the silent killer. The main cause of osteoporosis has been identified as being the lack of calcium. In paragraph 114 of his Budget Speech, the hon. Minister of Finance writes –

‘We should not overlook the need to promote healthy consumption habits’.

Intention utopique, serait-on tenté de dire au vu du coût des aliments de base essentiels et on parle de Mauritian Dream, M. le président?

Speaking of women’s health, I would like to talk about the alarming number of breast cancer cases among the Mauritian women. Last Tuesday, the hon. Minister of Health herself confirmed the alarming increase of 45%. None of us is surprised at the increase as we live it in our everyday life, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We all know a relative, a friend, a colleague, a sister or a mother suffering or having died from breast cancer. What is even more alarming is the young age of victims of cancer. Not later than last Friday, many Members of this august Assembly attended the funeral of a 38-year old mother who left behind a four-year old child and, at the time I am speaking, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of my past pupils aged 23 is desperately fighting against breast cancer.

As much as we welcome the measures spelt out by the hon. Minister of Health last week, we cannot deplore the delay with which the appropriate steps are being taken. What has been done during the last five years? How is it that so much time has been wasted? How is it that we are still at the stage of carrying out ‘a study for the setting up of an institute for women’s health’, as mentioned in paragraph 113? How long is that study going to take place? What is the time frame? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, nowadays, there is only one centre for all types of cancer in Mauritius. Not only do the cancer patients have to travel from all parts of the island to go to

Victoria Hospital, but when they reach there, the place is so overcrowded that some patients have to undergo their chemotherapy seated on a chair. We find it shocking that no provision has been made in the Budget for another cancer centre or even centres in the island and we dare talk about the Mauritian Dream.

I would now like to address the issue of the personnel of the Cancer Centre. Some are so rough and so inhuman that patients often come out of there in tears. More than any other department, the authorities - and I am making an appeal to the hon. Minister of Health - should ensure that the personnel of the Cancer Centre has the appropriate training, the appropriate psychology and the appropriate dedication. *Il est choquant et révoltant, M. le président, que des patients se fassent malmener, voire insulter si jamais ils ont des vomissements. Et Dieu seul sait, combien la chimiothérapie peut provoquer des vomissements chez certains patients.* The personnel of the cancer wards should know that. *Ce n'est sûrement pas de gaieté de cœur que quelqu'un s'y rend.* A wide sensitisation campaign should be carried out among our young girls.

(Interruptions)

I think they will have time to reply later!

And the issue of the explosive cocktail made out of the mixture of contraceptives, smoking and alcohol should be addressed. Moreover, we firmly believe that a most urgent and serious study should be carried out about the correlation between the abuse of pesticides and cancer.

I would also like to refer to another type of cancer from which the Mauritian woman is suffering. It is the cervical cancer. This issue of vaccination against cervical cancer has been raised in Parliament since 2006 and, last week, the hon. Minister of Health announced that there has been no increase in the number of cases of cervical cancer. Questions that I would like to leave to this august Assembly are: should “no increase” mean “no action”? Should we wait till we reach a 45% increase to start acting? Should we not, at least, start administering vaccines to high risk girls, that is, those whose mothers died from cancer?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, more and more people are now suffering from lupus, an autoimmune disease that affects women ten times more than men. These days, 520 lupus patients are following treatment at Victoria Hospital and about 500 more patients are being

followed either in other public hospitals or by private doctors. About 15 lupus patients - known cases only - pass away every year. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are we here also going to wait for an increase of 45% in the number of cases before acting?

As far as domestic violence is concerned, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the situation is more than alarming. The figures speak for themselves. Only for the first ten months of the year, there have been 1,890 reported cases and we all know that cases of domestic violence increased towards the end of the year. Not only has there been an increase, but the degree of violence is becoming more and more shocking. We must not lose sight of the suffering that domestic violence causes, not only to the direct victim but also to the family at large and to the children, some of whom find themselves orphans. True, a Government cannot be held responsible for men who batter their wives, but it bears responsibility if not all appropriate measures are taken to prevent the number from going up. Research has proved that, like a tree which has not grown straight, it is difficult to change and rehabilitate a violent 45-year old man. Effort should, therefore, be concentrated on the young adults, adolescents and why not on young children? In paragraph 11, the hon. Minister of Finance has written –

“(...) successful development is not only about creating value. It is also about values. We know that not everything that counts can be counted. There must be an abiding commitment to the values of our society - compassion, kindness and generosity.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we should, perhaps, add to this list values such as respect, love and tolerance. Then, is it not high time to reintroduce citizenship education in the school curriculum and thus try to make our youth of today better adults of tomorrow? We learnt, not later than last week, about the findings of a social research carried out by the University of Mauritius together with the Mauritius Research Institute. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, domestic violence costs to the State the sum of Rs1.4 billion per year. This is an estimation of the cost before the financial year 2008/2009 and the cost must have gone up now. As goes the saying, *Mieux vaut prévenir que guérir*. Let us, therefore, use that money rather not only for the setting up of more family support units and shelters for battered women, but also, and more, for sensitisation campaigns and for preventive measures.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to talk about what my friend, hon. Dr. Satish Boolell, has called *la maladie durable*, that is, alcoholism. On the one hand, women are the

silent victims of the alcoholism of their husband, brother and father. Many cases of crimes, domestic violence, loss of employment and larceny are related to alcoholism. On the other hand, young girls and young female students are known to indulge into drinking habits since a very young age and this curtails many other serious problems. For example, quite a few cases of rape or of teenage pregnancy have taken place because the girl was simply under the influence of alcohol. We have known cases of children who died out of the negligence of their drunken mother. And, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some figures are most alarming; 24% of the female alcoholics at Brown Sequard Hospital are between 30 and 39 years old; 37% between 40 and 49 years old; and 20% between 50 and 59 years old. 71% of the women patients in detox have relapsed *et la sonnette d'alarme a été tirée, M. le président, sur l'alcoolisme chez les femmes enceintes et, plus particulièrement, sur les conséquences, sur les enfants à naître, connu comme le syndrome d'alcoolisation fœtale dont des troubles de développement et de comportement.* And, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is the Mauritian Dream!

M. le président, c'est avec beaucoup de tristesse, voire de colère, que nous avons vu que l'honorable ministre des finances n'a pas pipé mot sur le problème de la drogue, rien sur la prévention et rien sur la réhabilitation! No commitment at all on the part of this Government to address seriously the issue of drug. Je ne dis pas, ici, que les femmes sont les seules à être concernées par le problème de la drogue. Mais c'est un fait, M. le président, que la femme est celle qui souffre le plus du problème de la drogue. C'est vrai que les femmes aussi se droguent, volent et se prostituent pour se droguer mais aussi, afin que l'homme puisse se payer de la drogue, c'est la femme qu'on agresse en chemin ou chez elle pour lui voler son sac et son porte-monnaie ou sa chaîne. C'est la mère ou l'épouse, réticente de donner l'argent du ménage, que le drogué malmène. C'est la mère qui, par peur, est forcée de soutirer son fils ou sa fille droguée.

Je voudrais parler d'une autre cause de souffrance de la Mauricienne en 2010. Je veux dire la discrimination à son égard. Alors que ces cas de discrimination étaient référés à la *Sex Discrimination Division* de la Commission des Droits de l'Homme, cette instance payée des fonds publics, celle-ci n'est pas opérationnelle depuis mars 2009 car il n'y a pas eu de nomination en bonne et due forme. La cause principale étant qu'on attend toujours l'*Equal Opportunities Act* qu'on ne voit nullement venir. La discrimination à l'égard de la femme est encore plus flagrante dans le secteur professionnel. Par exemple, au niveau des infirmières, pour

être promues charge nurses, celles-ci doivent impérativement suivre et réussir leur cours de *midwifery* alors qu'aucune condition n'est attachée pour qu'un infirmier soit promu.

Discrimination also exists at the level of the non promotion of women, of the non recognition of the women unpaid jobs, of the exploitation of Mauritian and foreign female workers in a few factories, of the non integration of the Rodriguan female migrants in the Republic of Mauritius. Plus d'efforts devraient être faits pour qu'elles se sentent comme des citoyennes à part entière.

Je ne vais pas m'étendre plus longtemps sur la question de discrimination à l'égard de la femme mais je tiens quand même à exprimer mon indignation devant la manière dont les femmes sont traitées dans notre station nationale. Après les cas de Madame Ameer et de Madame Patten qui ont laissé insensible plus d'un du côté de la majorité gouvernementale, à l'exception du ministre du travail, que je salue, ne voilà-t-il pas que la fille même du trésorier du Parti Travailleuse fait les frais de la politique de terreur qui y règne. Est-ce que cette demoiselle, de par son *pedigree*, aura plus de chance que ses deux collègues ? L'avenir nous le dira et, si oui, ne devrait-on pas alors revoir les deux autres cas précédents et, dans la même foulée, mettre un bon ordre à la MBC ?

Before ending, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to talk about an issue which concerns not only women of my own constituency, but Mauritian women at large. I mean the shortage of water supply. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can we, for a second, imagine the life of a woman who has to manage the shortage of water supply? She has to wake up earlier than usual, collect water in all the utensils and pails she can find, whether she lives on the ground floor or on the fourth floor. She has to wait for the *camion citerne* which, unfortunately, often comes at most inappropriate and erratic moments. She has to manage with that water for all purposes. I know cases of old women living in NHDC apartments in my constituency who have to pay Rs15 to Rs25 to young boys to take the pail of water up for them. It is from that famous Rs98 compensation that those old ladies are paying for their water, and we dare talk of Mauritian dream!

In paragraph 272, the hon. Minister of Finance says -

'We will support low income families who need a water tank. Government will give a cash grant of Rs3,000 to families with a monthly income below

Rs10,000 and with restricted water supply to purchase a water tank. (...) This will support the purchase of 40,000 water tanks on a first come first serve basis.'

A series of questions come to my mind. Has there been a study of the low income families who need a water tank? How many more than those 40,000 families are implied? What is restricted water supply? Does this depend on the number of hours a family gets water supply daily? If water is that restricted, will pumps be supplied to take the water into the tank? How is it - and that's the most shocking part - that a social measure is going to be carried out on a first come first serve basis? What about the others? Don't they qualify for that? And this forms part of what the Minister of Finance calls "consolidating social justice"?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it has been foretold that the next war the world will have to face will be the war of water. If we want to avoid it and sustain peace in our country, we have no other choice than to rapidly develop a water security plan for the whole nation.

Pour terminer M. le président, je voudrais me référer à quelques commentaires de certains de mes prédécesseurs. L'honorable Cader Sayed-Hossen pense que *only two categories are unhappy with that Budget: cigarette smokers and alcohol drinkers*. L'honorable Mahen Jhugroo lui a dit: '*Kot passer dimounn dir enn mari budget sa*'.

(Interruptions)

Wait for the end! L'honorable Patrick Assirvaden est d'avis que les habitants ont tous accueilli le budget avec appréciation et l'honorable Gungah est certain que le budget est un *pro-people Budget*. Je m'arrêterai là. A ces messieurs, M. le président, je ne dirai qu'une chose. Ne portez pas de visières parce que vous êtes de l'autre côté de la Chambre. Si vous aviez tendu une oreille attentive vers les femmes de votre circonscription, vous auriez entendu autre chose. Vous auriez eu une meilleure idée de la réalité de chaque jour et vous auriez compris leur souffrance et leur misère. Et à l'honorable Reza Issack qui, malheureusement, est sorti et qui pense qu'il n'y a pas de pauvreté, je voudrais simplement l'inviter à m'accompagner dans ma circonscription, qui se trouve à être aussi sa circonscription.

En guise de conclusion, je dirai deux choses, M. le président. Je fais un pressant appel aux autorités pour que les allocations des ONGs s'occupant vraiment et sérieusement du bien-être de la santé, de la réhabilitation de la femme, de l'accompagnement de la femme battue, alcoolique, droguée ou malade soient revues à la hausse. Deuxièmement, les problèmes touchant

les femmes de ce pays devraient être placés *beyond party politics*. Et je fais un pressant appel à mes collègues femmes de l'autre côté de la Chambre pour qu'ensemble nous trouvions une solution à ces problèmes.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

At 4.37 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.14 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Dr. A. Boolell): Mr Speaker, Sir, I know you are a very learned man and read a lot almost avidly, and I am sure you would recall the words of one famous General, namely General Douglas MacArthur, and, today, his quotation is cited the world over -

“I have returned and I shall return.”

This Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, has returned with a clear mandate. In fact, we have two successive mandates. We have returned to honour our obligations to every single Mauritian and to fulfil their rights. The vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development was right to state at paragraph 425, and I quote -

“Government has an ambitious development agenda – one that responds to the aspirations of our people and that matches the determination of our citizens.”

He has conveyed a message, loud and clear to all of us. And make no mistake. The vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has delivered, and he has delivered much to the ‘unexpectedness’ of the Opposition. But he has delivered and lived up to the expectations of the nation. He has conveyed a very strong message; one of solidarity in the face of adversity, and in the light of events unfolding on international change, which is constantly changing the landscape, so much so to the extent that you don’t know whether, for certain, the new economic model will adapt to the changing circumstances.

What are the legitimate ambitions? I will say it in all humility, because our success hinges upon our humility, Mr Speaker, Sir. What is the message? One is of solidarity and, second, we need to turn this country into a multifocal hub, Mr Speaker, Sir; a duty-free island; an island in the sun; island poise; poised to be the star and key of the Indian Ocean. As we would say, just to take on board the symbol of the party of the Leader of the *Parti Mauricien Social*

Démocrate, ‘the cock that will crow late at night and early morning’, because this country will have to work on a 24/7 day basis, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This is the reality which our friends on the opposite side refused to acknowledge. If we want Mauritius to shine, we need to look at our threshold of ambition, and we need to constantly raise that threshold, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is what the vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has done. He has raised the threshold and he has created an ambition; a tall order indeed: that we are going to triple our income *per capita* by threefold in the year 2020. It is indeed a very tall order, but then, Mr Speaker, Sir, we can do it, we believe in it. Unlike the Opposition, we never run away from our responsibilities when the handle of the cauldron becomes too hot to handle. We have assumed our responsibility; we do not shy away from our responsibility, irrespective sometimes of short-term public outcry. We are here to stay, we are here to convey strong signals, we are here to take bold and decisive measures and we are here to turn the economy round, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is a legitimate ambition. And when you have a leader who has strong secular credentials - I lay emphasis upon the words ‘secular credentials’. You shine the torch upon many leaders and when you shine the torch, the naked truth stares you in the face. There is only one leader, Mr Speaker, Sir, the leader of the *l’Alliance de l’Avenir* who has secular credentials.

(Interruptions)

A credential largely due to social trust with the community, Mr Speaker, Sir! This is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, when he walks, he walks tall and people believe in his policy. A leader is constantly redefining his leadership because the challenges are very daunting. It is true to say that there is a silver lining in every cloud, the challenges of this new world economic order is very daunting. But then, when your leadership is deeply rooted in the principles and values of the Labour Party, Mr Speaker, Sir, you are bound to convey strong message and your policy is one of pragmatism and you have to be practical. This is why the programme of a Government, not only is friendly-user, but the measures announced are going to be implemented. We have to agree, today access to information is no longer privileged, it is a right and you cannot fool people, Mr Speaker, Sir. They all know that the days of a free lunch are over, that we are moving from preferences to global competitiveness, Mr Speaker, Sir. Any responsible leader does not make unsolicited comments. Of course, I am not going to refer to *lanatte* in sugar. No,

Mr Speaker, Sir! I am not going to refer to *situation alarmante, perte d'emploi à une vitesse vertigineuse*, nor am I going to remind the treatment meted out to women working in the EPZ, where the beautiful lady was standing for the rights of women. Where is she? I seek her here, I seek her there, but she is nowhere. Where is the beautiful lady, Mrs Ribot? The one who claimed that she is a champion of women's rights, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make it quite clear that there is no need to create a state of psychosis. I must say some of the interventions coming from our friends on the Opposition bench were fair. Fair comments! They have to have their say and they need to level criticisms. We will have our way, but we are mindful of the things they say. Sometimes, they say good things. We will take them on board, Mr Speaker, Sir. The fact is, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there is a crisis and we are not yet out of the wood. There is a crisis in euro zone countries. We do not need Risk Analyst Specialist, Mr Speaker, Sir, to tell us that however remote it is, there is a risk of double-dip recession. We know what is happening. Sovereign debt, Mr Speaker, Sir, can peg on sub-prime crisis and we know that there is a risk, however remote it is, that we may have a double-dip recession and a crisis which may be far worse than the 1930 recession.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we had the visit of the Director of the FAO. He has told us in no uncertain terms, because of increased consumption in Brazil, China, Indonesia and India, the price of food commodity is going to go up, consumption is increasing, the price of fuel will go up and the price of animal feed will go up. This is why we say, loud and clear to our friends, this is a Government which has a vision and it is preparing for the worse and is hoping for the best, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is what is spelt out in the Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir.

What have we done since 2005? We took bold and courageous measures to turn the economy round, Mr Speaker, Sir. We introduced a new economic model, we adopted prudent macroeconomic policies and we created the fiscal space and ushered in, Mr Speaker, Sir, mixed policy which allowed this Government to save 4,000 jobs. Had we not saved those jobs, there would have descent into social chaos, Mr Speaker, Sir! And we know what it means to have descent into social chaos. We put a lot of premium upon safety of workers, because Labour Party was born from the ribs of workers. This is the Labour Party that we cherish; this is the Labour Party which is in Government together with our allies. This is the Labour Party which has crystal clear vision, Mr Speaker, Sir. But what if you had gone with what they have

proposed? Going on a spending spree, Mr Speaker, Sir, spend, spend, spend and adopt reckless policies! What would have been the outcome? Wildcat strikes which they are used to! If you go into the history of the MMM, Mr Speaker, Sir, they almost brought this country on its bended knees. This is what we do not want. This is why we are going to act responsibly and there is no act of folly on this side of the House, Mr Speaker, Sir. When our friends were and, they are still in Opposition, Mr Speaker, Sir, what was the Leader of the Opposition saying? And not a week went by, what was he saying? That the Government would collapse, that there would be a snap election. Yet, Mr Speaker, Sir, the writing was on the wall. Here today, here to stay and we have a full mandate, because we have the trust of the electorate vested in us. It is a social trust which is not given to everybody and not to anybody but to a leader, who is dedicated to a cause, Mr Speaker, Sir, 'Putting people First!' I will tell you, we delivered on promises made: free public transport to 400,000 people in this country. Ever heard of? Never heard of! But we did it our way, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Housing units, owners of CHA dwellings, against a payment of a token fee, have become owners of their houses. Who did it? We did it our way, Mr Speaker, Sir. If you compute the value that has been given to the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, those who can put an additional floor to the house, *ce qu'on appelle la surélévation*, do you know the amount that this can reach? We are talking of Rs6 billion.

If I have to remind you of our total commitment to wage war on poverty, do you know of any better Government waging war on poverty than this Government, Mr Speaker, Sir? We have created a Ministry of Social Integration, Mr Speaker, Sir, the powers entrusted to a dedicated person who knows what it means to wage war on poverty to reach out to the people. Our policy is one of hands up and not hands out, Mr Speaker, Sir! That's the difference between them and us, a vast difference, Mr Speaker, Sir, deeply rooted in social values.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I can go on. Who came to the rescue of the pig breeders? Who came with the rescue package, not only to save, but to empower the pig breeders? Who are the ones, Mr Speaker, Sir, who took all those social measures to empower the weak, the poor and the vulnerable? But did we increase the Value Added Tax by 50%, Mr Speaker, Sir? No! But what did we do? In fact, we went a long way, we relieved 36,000 income earners out of the tax net

and in the midst of this crisis, in the euro zone this year, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are expecting 11 billion of Foreign Direct Investment. This is the trust that people have in us, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me highlight what the hon. Minister spelt out in his Budget to rebalance growth, to consolidate social justice and to make the great leap forward on productivity. Today, 19,000 students will benefit from full or 50% grant for payment of examination fees. We have done away with National Residential Property Tax and I congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance. I recall the battle waged by the Chief Whip together with other friends to have this National Residential Property Tax removed. But we assume our responsibility fully, Mr Speaker, Sir. But when you have a leader who is willing to pay heed and the advice does not fall upon deaf ears, then, Mr Speaker, Sir, what choice do you have, but to say that yes, he commands respect, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to ask oneself one specific question. I listened to the beautiful lady, hon. Mrs Ribot, whom I have invited to come with me on Sunday down to Rose Belle and I will hold her by the hands and give her accompanying measures.

(Interruptions)

Who are those who are complaining? The Tina Wala, not Nita Wala. The Tina Wala are complaining. Why, Mr Speaker, Sir?

(Interruptions)

No, I don't hold their hands. I stare them in their face. Why? Because most of them officially draw a salary of Rs25,000! But, unofficially, the amount of dividends they reap to swell their pockets to the extent that they will end up, I feel like saying, with a double hernia and probably you will need a wheelbarrow to carry that double hernia, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is a fact. And when the hon. Minister decides to impose taxes on dividends and capital gains, who are those who are going to cry? Those who are going to cry will not hail from any *résidence, cité*, urban or any rural area. We have to issue a note of caution to them, that they don't wage a sinister campaign against Government. This, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a time when we need to be true patriots, when we need to convey strong signals and to constantly build the image of Mauritius. And I say, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a Government which is not going to sit back, relax and enjoy armchair comfortability, but it is going to re-energise policy. But it is good to remind ourselves

of what the US Secretary of State stated – “Africa should make Mauritius their showcase and learn from Mauritius.” Donald Kaberuka, President of the African Bank of Development, Mrs Ngosi from the World Bank and my good friend, the FAO Director, what did they say? Full of praise for Mauritius! But had we not turned things round, had we not been bold to take decisive measures, where would we have been, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Let us compare ourselves with many Small Island Developing States which, also like Mauritius, have high vulnerability index to external forces. Where would we have been? But because of the new economic model, because of the decision we took, we not only turned things round, today we have become a showcase. And let us look at institutions, Mo Ibrahim Foundation ranked Mauritius first for two consecutive years on good governance. I have never heard of Mo Ibrahim Foundation placing Mauritius first from year 2000 to 2005. I have never heard so. The BBC, on the issue of branding, ‘*Maurice c’est un plaisir*’, first, Mr Speaker, Sir! Mauritius is ranked sixth in the World Environmental Index, better than I did in examinations, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with our human capital, under the stewardship of our Prime Minister, Mauritius has moved from an overcrowded barracoon to take the centre stage of development and next year Mauritius will chair ECOSOC. We are one of the lead negotiators in Geneva. We are playing a prominent role in respect of Interim Economic Partnership Agreement with EU. Yet, what do we have in this country, but our human capital? And we have every moral, legal and financial obligation to skill and re-skill our people. We have, Mr Speaker, Sir! And we are taking all those poor people who are lagging behind. This is a Government which is not devoid of feelings. I would advise my friend, who is a learned friend, to take stock of the measures taken by this Government to redress the situation in poor, vulnerable and at risk areas. These are things which they have never done before, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, a country which has no oil, gold or diamond, but only human capital, we are constantly shifting the paradigm and inculcating new values in the minds of our people. We want them to be more productive and more committed because, as I have stated, the days of free lunch are over. We have no choice but to move from global preferences to global competitiveness, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is true that the buzzword is ‘Go east, young man’. But we have to tread cautiously. It is not that we should not go east. In fact, we should! But we have to

make sure that we take calculated risks. We have to make sure that these countries have the resilience. Of course, I am not talking of Brazil, Russia, India and China. But despite the crisis in euro zone, despite the fact that the bubble has burst, they have resilience and there is certainty and predictability. It is true that in respect of our exports, 70% of export go to EU, 56% to euro zone and 70% of tourists come from Europe. There is a saying that you cannot put all your eggs in one and the same basket. You need to spread your risks when you take on board what is going on in the euro zone crisis. In Ireland, 10,000 people, almost on a weekly basis, want to leave Ireland. In Greece, there are pension cuts and cuts in wages. In UK, 500,000 people are going to be made redundant in the public sector. Let alone the private sector, Mr Speaker, Sir. In Spain, cranes on construction sites have come to a standstill. And like Oliver Twist without Fagin, Mr Speaker, Sir, the PIGS are all going to the IMF and European Central Bank begging for more and more. Give us money; bail out from the IMF and the European Central Bank irrespective of whether the loans are not going to be cheap, whether interests are going to be very high, Mr Speaker, Sir. And they have no interest to invest in sovereign foreign funds, Mr Speaker, Sir, to secure pensions for intergenerational security.

What has this Government done? What is the priority of this Government? What is the top agenda? Debt Management is a top priority. Responsible fiscal stewardship is imperative and we need to inculcate the values of restraint in our people. We cannot live beyond our means, Mr Speaker, Sir. The buzzword should be MUDA, eliminate wastage and we have to make sure that we do away with red-tapism. Of course, Government is called upon to take decisions, cess funding institutions are being restructured and public sector management is on. What is it that we want to do? We want to make sure that we do not crowd out investment, that we release investment for productive sectors of the economy. Hence, the reason, as to why we are going for merger institutions, is because those parastatal bodies and quangos have served the purpose and they cannot respond to our needs in this 21st century, Mr Speaker, Sir. But we need to release money for productive sectors and this is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, had it not been the crisis, today our total public debt as a percentage would have been less than 57%. This is the time for us to borrow and there is no shame in borrowing because loan, under the circumstances, Mr Speaker, Sir, is cheap. They are denominated in dollars and this is the time because we know that US, with its quantitative easing, is making the loan cheaper. But, at the same time, when the Bank of Mauritius is dishing out loan to the weak and vulnerable without any fear of the loan being

reimbursed, they are granting loan to the planters through two windows –the banks and the Sugar Syndicate. So, the question of toxic loan does not arise as was raised by the Leader of the Opposition. We are talking of Rs1.5 billion, Mr Speaker, Sir, which the banks have lent to the Sugar Syndicate from the Central Bank.

The Bank of Mauritius is called upon in moments of crisis to review its policy and I am glad that we are going to have a fresh look at the monetary policy; we are going to probably appoint a consultant to look at our exchange rate policy. Year in year out, we cannot have the private sector coming up to Government and saying that we need to allow the rupee to slide when the emphasis, Mr Speaker, Sir, should be on productivity and re-skilling of our people. Let me also tell our friends that on the issue of sovereign debt, we have to ensure that we mop up excess liquidity and that there is proper control of exchange rate and that we bring parity of esteem, which is a good thing.

Sovereign fund, Mr Speaker, Sir, is important. When we talk of sovereign fund, of course, we take on board governance, expertise, sound investment. Oil producing countries are using sovereign funds to secure their future. We do not have oil. There are countries which use sovereign fund to prepare for the worse when there are calamities or emergencies. There are countries which use sovereign fund for short term gains and to exercise control in respect of foreign exchange, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the issue of Global Business Licence Category 1, it is a good thing to allow them to conduct business on shore because we are sending strong signals to the OECD and to India that we are a transparent and clean jurisdiction, that this Government is putting emphasis upon services sector. We are going to launch the International Arbitration Centre and Mauritius is poised to become a regional financial centre which can use Mauritius as a springboard for forward and ongoing investment in Africa and from Europe to Asia and vice-versa, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to issues relating specifically to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade. Let me highlight and inform the House – probably some of our friends are not aware - that the first Minister of Foreign Affairs, after independence, was Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. Mr Speaker, Sir, thanks to him, the parameters for a credible foreign policy was laid. Thanks to him, we look at partners on whom

we can rely. Today, I had a delegation of women from People's Republic of China and when we told them that Mauritius was amongst the first countries to recognise the One-China policy, Mr Speaker, Sir, they acknowledged the vision of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. What did he do? He placed foreign policy at the centre fold of development and took advantage of our geographical position and historical legacy. We leveraged our ancestral and cultural values to conclude trade agreements. I do not have to remind people of Jin Fei, Neo Town, I do not have to remind our friends of the presence of India and People's Republic of China in our physical landscape which is so visible, Mr Speaker, Sir. Had we not had vision, where would we have been?

When I talk of vision, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind our friends that we have travelled a long way. Though it is still a long way to Tipperary - Dr. Boolell would say - before we kiss the Blarney stone, but from Yaoundé to Lomé, from Cotonou to Economic Partnership Agreement, from African Growth and Opportunity Act to Free Trade Agreement with non-traditional partners, from our political alliance with Africa, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the consolidation of our relations with India, we have indeed travelled a long way. Now, we are talking of COMESA, the Indian Ocean Commission, the Indian Ocean Rim, Association for Regional Cooperation and the Tripartite Initiative regrouping the COMESA and SADC with the Eastern African Community. We have exercised judicious choices and taken necessary diplomatic initiatives with a view to propelling the country. But it is good again to remind ourselves and to travel down memory lane to remind Members of the House the importance and relevance of Sugar Protocol to our economy. It is good to remind ourselves what Sir Satcam Boolell, the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated in this very House on 05 July. I quote –

“Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam and myself, with our friends of the West Indies, Fiji and Swaziland waged a relentless battle at Lancaster House to persuade our British friends of the dire necessity of ensuring a guaranteed market for our sugar in the European market after the lapse of the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement. In 1974, after several days and night sessions, we signed the sugar protocol. By this single act, the result of a long protracted political battle, we saved the sugar industry from ruin. Imagine what would have happened if we had to rely on the declining world market price to sell our sugar!”

What did they do, Mr Speaker, Sir? They opted for long term security instead of short term gains. Had they opted for short term gains, they would have been lynched by members of the planting community, by people from the Sugar Syndicate, but that was the vision of our

leaders then, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is good to highlight what our Prime Minister had done when it comes to the accompanying measures. Had it not been for the personal intervention of the hon. Prime Minister, that 15% cut on allocation would never have been waived. Today, under the second *tranche*, Mauritius has obtained the largest share given by EU to ACP countries beneficiaries of these measures. As the hon. Prime Minister remarked, this is the result of efficient economic diplomacy practised by this Government. Should we remind the House of the numerous benefits accruing to our industrialists in the textile and garment sector when we impressed upon our friends in the Ways and Means Committee of the Senate and Congress that we need to have third country fabric.

Where would we have been, Mr Speaker, Sir, if we would not have obtained the third country fabric? It is easy to talk about vertical integration and they would have embarked us upon a disaster, Mr Speaker, Sir. Where would we have been, had we not signed the interim Economic Partnership Agreement? Today, the single transformation, we export duty-free, quota free to EU, Mr Speaker, Sir. There is a remunerative market; there is the element of predictability and reliability. There is clarity and certainty, Mr Speaker, Sir, notwithstanding the fact that we are the first to say that we need to diversify our market, that we should not put all our eggs in one and the same basket. This is what we are doing. We are going to turn this country with the objectives that we have into a multifocal hub, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Challengers are there. They want to extend the preferences to least developing countries, to Laos, to Bangladesh and to Pakistan. With the calamity that hit Pakistan, Mr Speaker, Sir, they want to extend this facility as an additional stimulus to Pakistan, but we put on a brave fight. In Washington, we put across the case of least developing countries and developing countries, members of AGOA. We stood by the side of Madagascar to defend the interest of Madagascar, but we know what the outcome had been, Mr Speaker, Sir. What trust do we have to go east, consolidate existing markets, capture new markets, leverage of our cultural and ancestral values, Mr Speaker, Sir, to forge ahead with our policy and to turn this country into a duty-free island? Let us not look too far away. Africa, Mr Speaker, Sir, where the lions are moving at an incredible speed, it holds a lot of promises. If you refer to the report, prepared and submitted by McKinsey, you will learn of the potential in Africa. Let us turn our gaze towards Africa, Mr Speaker, Sir. Here we come, Mr Africa. I am trying to recall the song of that beautiful lady at the World Cup. What was it?

(Interruptions)

Waka Waka, Mr Speaker, Sir, time for Africa! Time for *Waka Waka*, Mr Speaker, Sir! So, what have we done, Mr Speaker, Sir? We have an African policy. We have set up a special desk at the Ministry and we have an African policy.

Mauritius has been the first at the Kigali Conference; we have stated, in no uncertain terms, that we need to have a Pan-Africa. We are going to move our goods from Port Louis to Cairo, but then we need to make sure that we disaggregate our African policy. Let us look at countries, engaged with them, at the level of SADC, COMESA; let us look at triangular approach, Congo, Mauritius, Singapore and Mozambique. In Mozambique, we have invested heavily and had it not been for the Prime Minister, where would have been the Marrumeo Consortium. I recall we had to intervene with the Minister of Finance of Mozambique, who is now the Executive Secretary of SADC. The Prime Minister had personally intervened with Chissano, to impress upon him of the importance of being earnest as Mauritian investors and we did conquer. We did conquer, Mr Speaker, Sir, and thanks to us, there was social and economic upliftment, but, of course, they've decided to pull out. But we have credibility on the African continent. What we want, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a Pan-African Free Trade Area Agreement.

We are looking at COMESA market. If only we can have a toehold – today SADC in respect of its import, COMESA – SADC US\$150 billion. Unfortunately, we are exporting only Rs6 billion worth of export. COMESA same thing, why? Yet, we create the enabling environment. We create the facilities. We want our small and medium size entrepreneurs to grasp the opportunities, hence the reason as to why the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance will co-chair a meeting with all the stakeholders. We are going to identify the constraints and shortcomings. We will see what needs to be done to empower the entrepreneur. The market is there and reaching out to them, so we have to reach out to small and medium size entrepreneurs, Mr Speaker, Sir. Only a toehold! I talked of Pan-Africa, Mr Speaker, Sir, but then we need to look at issues, which are impediments to competitiveness and trade, non-tariff barriers. We are addressing those issues at senior officials. We have travelled a long way, Mr Speaker, Sir, but we have further miles to go.

We have clarity in our policy. We have a vision, Mr Speaker, Sir and Africa is on the move. There are opportunities and when we conclude a deal at the level of the Trade Ministerial

Committee, we are going to look at the services sector, which is vital for our multifocal hub, Mr Speaker, Sir, in education, health, medical hub, ICT parks which we are going to construct. But, then Africa needs human resources. With the support of IMF, the Africa Technical Assistance and the Regional Multi-Disciplinary Centre for Excellence, we are going to dispense training, look at our level of preparedness, and release the energy in our human resources, develop our human capital and supply Africa with the human resources it needs, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This is what we are doing in the Sugar Industry sector, which will turn into a sugar cane. We have earned respect, Mr Speaker, Sir, and it was not thrust upon us, we have earned it through hard work, diligence and professionalism. We can do it, Mr Speaker, Sir - a sector which is growing and which will be continuously growing. This is why we need to tell our young people: invest in education where we can respond to your needs, at domestic level, at regional level and at international level. This is what we are doing at the level of the tertiary education, pre-primary, primary and secondary education, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have to compete and we should not have prejudice or there should be no fear when it comes to competition. If today, we have been able to stay ahead of the curve, it is largely due to our system of education. We have to pay tribute to the father of the nation who has widened our vista of knowledge, who has enabled us to take the social rung and today we have achieved social and economic mobility in every field of economic and social activities. This is our ambition. We nurture this ambition and there is a tradition that we are not going to move from, Mr Speaker, Sir, that is the value of working hard. If we have to work harder 24-hour day, 7-day a week, we shall do it. There is no looking back because no one owes us a living, Mr Speaker, Sir. We don't sell dreams, but we will turn our dreams into realities, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the other day, my good friend the Chief Whip put a question to me on Free Trade Agreements with European Free Trade areas. In the reply which I gave, I told him about the potential of Turkey. We are about to conclude a Free Trade Agreement with Turkey; Turkey which is strategically located between Russia and Middle East; Turkey which is a member of the Customs Union of EU; Turkey which has become the China of Europe. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is why I said that we have a vision, a vision of capturing new markets, but where is the element of predictability and reliability? Of course, we need to go east and south and we hope that the DOHA Development Round would be concluded, because the best Stimulus Package that can be given to a developing country, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the conclusion

of the DOHA Development Round. We know what was the outcome of the meeting at G-20, what was stated. And, today, Mauritius, through our Ambassador in Geneva, amongst 14 ambassadors, has been asked to converge policies towards a conclusion of the Doha Development Round. This is Mauritius, on the centre stage, taking decisions on behalf of Government. This is the shining Mauritius, without forgetting the weak and the vulnerable, Mr Speaker, Sir; everybody on board, everybody into the economic mainstream. We want a Mauritius incorporated, where we are going to widen the circle of opportunities, where we are going to bring everybody into the economic mainstream, where every citizen of this country can proudly say: 'we have our rights', and these rights are entrenched in the Equal Opportunities Bill which was introduced by Dr. the hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

Mr Speaker, Sir, of course, we are a small country with a high vulnerability index. We are a net food importing country. We have to make our sea a safe way, and we know the problem of piracy in the region; piracy is in our exclusive economic zone. We have to be careful, the reason as to why we convened the second regional conference on piracy. We know the commitment given by EU; we know the reason as to why we have engaged with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, to ensure that training is dispensed to our people when it comes to evidence handling, arrest and transfer. But, at the same time, this is a problem that not only concerns Mauritius, Seychelles and Kenya. It is precisely because of the political will today from neighbouring coastal island countries that we have forged a Regional Strategic Plan and that we are working together with our friends from the European Union, China, India and many other countries. We have to ward off the threats because it will have an impact upon the food that we import, upon our export to those markets, which are existing markets, and markets we want to capture.

Mr Speaker, Sir, piracy has had a big dent on the economy of Seychelles, to the extent that it has lost 4% of its GDP. We had no choice but to put up a common front, to converge our thoughts, to define policies, and to ward off the threats. *Il faut Somaliser le problème* and the United Nations has its role to play. Pledges made for resources to be disbursed have to be released. Prisons have to be constructed in Somaliland and Portland. It is the responsibility of the international community to act in unison and not only leave the problem to a few countries. This is the message that we have conveyed loud and clear.

On the issue of Chagos, Mr Speaker, Sir, the other day, your former colleague, the Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa, Dr. Frene Ginwala, had the privilege of talking to me and she has sent all the documents to us. Now, as members - together with South Africa - of the AU Nuclear Commission, established under the Pelindaba Treaty, the whole African Union, together with Non-Aligned Member States, we are watching very closely how events are taking place in our territory; where we need to exercise fully our sovereign rights, and I have in mind Diego Garcia, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are considering very seriously, together with all countries, to prepare our case and lodge it against the United States; to make an appeal, invite inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency to assume their role fully.

You can understand the exasperation of the Prime Minister. We are exploring all the avenues and, together with a united Mauritius, with our brothers and sisters from the Chagos Mauritian community, we are going to fight tooth and nail, to exercise our rights of sovereignty, our legitimate rights and, on 14 December, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the UN Declaration 1514, and we will use this platform to put the case of Mauritius across very forcefully; even amongst the EU Member States there are many States that are fully supportive of the legitimate cause of Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir. Enough is enough, Mr Speaker, Sir! When somebody comes to your home, when somebody visits your country, you need not only have good bedside manners, but you need to behave as free citizens, as champions of democracy. This, we never stoop to conquer, but we will highlight facts.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before I conclude, let me inform the House that the Ministry has already prepared a strategic plan in the light of measures spelt out in the Budget; plan which will enable us to make the quantum leap. But then, to make the quantum leap, we have to make sure that resources are released, because to cater for all the Foreign Direct Investment that will flow into this country, we need land. Mention has been made of the Land Productivity Enhancement Programme. The concerns of small planters are going to be taken on board, the possibility given to planters to leverage their asset, and those who have good agricultural land can use their conversion right to plough money into their land. Of course, our ambition is to be like Singapore, but not a copycat of Singapore. We need to have our own specificity, Mr Speaker, Sir, where emphasis is put upon tradition, upon ancestral values, upon the relevance of staying united, upon the relevance and importance of unity in diversity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we shall overcome. Thank you very much.

(6.08 p.m.)

Mr D. Kamajeet (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and also the hon. vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for the tremendous effort made in the presentation of the Budget of 2011 two weeks ago.

As at now, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Budget presented has been widely accepted by the population. This Budget has undoubtedly re-energised a feel good factor in the country. At the presentation of any budget, there is an apprehension about what it will contain for the common people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, after the presentation of the Budget, wherever I have been in the island, people have given a positive response to it. Of course, they expected some few things to be added for their benefits, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the first Budget of this mandate for *l'Alliance de l'Avenir* and these can still be addressed in the coming budgets.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in May this year, *l'Alliance de l'Avenir* had presented an electoral manifesto to the Mauritian population. This Budget bears testimony in almost all of the promises made during the electoral campaign, although we still have four and a half years to accomplish in our succeeding budgets to do more for the citizens of the Republic of Mauritius.

We must not forget, Mr Speaker, Sir, the global constraints facing the various countries in the world. But, this Government, under the leadership of Dr. the hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, has been able to overcome the various challenges of the society with brilliance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we must not forget that many economic and social institutions have referred to Mauritius as a model, both in Africa and the rest of the world and, again, the credit goes to the strong leadership of our hon. Prime Minister because he was able to take the right decision despite the world economic and financial crisis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, had the hon. Prime Minister not taken these bold decisions, Mauritius would not have been a reference internationally. The hon. Prime Minister sometimes never hesitated to take unpopular measures, but, the population at large, understood that they were taken in the utmost interest of the country and that made him even more popular. The Opposition misinterpreted those decisions and presented them negatively for political gains.

Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, the intelligent population understood that the Opposition was taking them for a ride, that too, a bumpy one, and they did not follow them blindly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during our last mandate, the slogan “Putting People First” was not a slogan “*creux*”. But, in his wisdom, the hon. Prime Minister demonstrated that in his decision-making, the interest of the poor and needy people was given the first priority whatever be the circumstances.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister did his part of pilgrimage in all nooks and corners of the country, especially when we were in the Opposition. During that time, he sensed the real needs of the people, their aspirations, their hopes, they wanted another vision of the country and they could see that only in the eyes of the one and only Dr. the hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam. They started tilting the balance of power by giving him a sweeping victory in the by-election of Piton/Rivière du Rempart, where hon. Dr. Rajesh Jeetah was elected. Two years later, Mr Speaker, Sir, we won the 2005 general election. Mr Speaker, Sir, he came as Leader of the Labour Party, as Leader of the House and as Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, with a totally new mindset, thus changing the course of the history of Mauritius, taking the country towards modernity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the road to modernity is not an easy one. During 2005-2010, we have witnessed and faced various obstacles on our way, such as record increase in oil prices; record increase in food prices; the price of sugar went down by 36%; the world worst economic meltdown and financial crisis. On top of that, Mr Speaker, Sir, we had the H1N1 worldwide threat. More so, Mr Speaker, Sir, we had *Chikungunya* affecting adversely our tourism sector and the population. We must not also forget the natural calamities which hit us. Lastly, Mr Speaker, Sir, we also had to face and adjust to the new world economic order and compete with emerging economies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite all the recipients for disasters that I just mentioned, Government stayed focused and effective measures were taken –

1. To avoid job losses.
2. Keeping inflation rate at a reasonable level.
3. To avoid austerity.
4. Increasing the inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

5. Maintaining our competitive edge on the world market;
6. Consolidating the Welfare State;
7. Keeping the economy on a positive growth.
8. Lastly, on top of that, Mr Speaker, Sir, paying the PRB *in toto*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if this is not strong leadership shown by the hon. Prime Minister, what is strong leadership? If this is not a caring Government, what is a caring Government then, Mr Speaker, Sir? The actions speak louder than words.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has now a visibility, internationally, not only for our beautiful beaches, nice weather or luxurious hotels, but because we have done tremendous effort to position ourselves in this part of the world as a credible nation with a democratic climate, political stability, hardworking and blended with a strong sense of patriotism. We have positioned ourselves as a serious business centre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the severe recession and decline in global economic activity, our economy has shown resilience. We have been successful to establishing Mauritius as a business gateway to Africa for countries like China and India. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have stimulated business by achieving a successful reform, establishing good governance which today reflects in our ranking internationally –

- the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance ranks us first in governance for two consecutive years 2008-2009;
- the Economic Freedom Index of the Wall Street Journal ranks us 12th;
- the Africa Competitiveness Report ranks us 4th, and
- the “World Bank Doing Business Report 2011” ranks us 20th.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to now come and say that this Government is not serious is too much far-fetched. Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government means business, and we are forging ahead to continue to work harder to improve our ranking, thus making us fully confident in our abilities and maintaining our credibility internationally.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in this present Budget, Government has secured the right balance between economic growth and social justice. As a responsible Government, this Budget is not looking only at the current year but for the next ten years to come.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to continue modernisation of any country, the infrastructure needs constant upgrading and renewal so as to face the various challenges in the development process. This Budget has made a provision of a staggering Rs250 billion for infrastructural purposes for the next ten years. Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a colossal sum, but this Government has the plan and ambition to change the Mauritian landscape.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one cannot keep on crying over spilt milk and say that road congestion is costing the country a fortune. This Government has taken the bull by the horns and is working seriously to address this problem which has been affecting the country for more than a decade. Mr Speaker, Sir, massive investment is being made in various projects that have already started in many parts of Mauritius.

One can say that we are over-ambitious, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, one who is not ambitious will achieve nothing. This world belongs to those who have a dream, a vision and dynamism to face challenges after challenges. The hon. Prime Minister and his team have all the necessary qualities just mentioned. I do not need to enumerate all the projects as everyone in this House is already aware of what projects I am referring to.

Mr Speaker, Sir, education is the most indispensable factor to bring economic prosperity and social stability in a country. It is of paramount importance for only through it that we can combat the problem of exclusion and poverty. Investment in human resources will lead to a skilled labour force harnessing productivity and standard of living.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the figure of Rs11.6 billion allocated only to the educational sector speaks for itself. The aim of this Government is to produce, at least, one graduate per family in order to realise the dream of making Mauritius a knowledge hub and a knowledge centre of excellence. Mr Speaker, Sir, many countries have already expressed their wish to enrol in the different universities in Mauritius. Actually, we have about 600 foreign students and with this ambitious plan, we intend to significantly increase this number in the near future and, at the same time, become the gateway of education for Africa.

Mr Speaker, Sir, besides the tertiary sector, Government is also massively investing in upgrading the existing infrastructures at both primary and secondary levels. In the same breath, Mr Speaker, Sir, the re-introduction of subsidies on examination fees for SC and HSC is another laudable measure. This will definitely alleviate many families with low income. Being a

responsible Government caring for its people at all levels, the threshold for eligibility has been extended from Rs7,500 to Rs14,500. Not only that, Mr Speaker, Sir, a family earning income between Rs14,501 to Rs20,000 will also be eligible for a subsidy of 50% on their examination fees, again reducing their economic burden.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in spite of the economic and financial crisis, taking the positive measures already mentioned above, this Government is maintaining free transport facilities to all students up to university level at the cost of nearly Rs1 billion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government understood the hardship of parents to send best students to universities. Competition to secure a seat for needy students is very much intense. Thus, this Budget, in its endeavour to facilitate entry to tertiary education, is enlarged, increasing the number of laureates to 50. Again, that shows the good intention of this Government to give access to a wider number of students, especially to people found at the foot of the ladder.

Continuing on the positive measures for the needy people, Mr Speaker, Sir, the *l'Alliance de l'Avenir* Government has not forgotten our senior citizens. We have to pay tribute to all of them for their hard work and contribution to make Mauritius what it is today. They have toiled very hard day and night to give a decent education to all of us and to shape the careers of so many who today enjoy a sense of pride and respect. They have sacrificed their life and suffered throughout to mould the destiny of this generation, who are undoubtedly enjoying the fruits of their hard work.

This Government, under the leadership of Dr. the hon. Prime Minister, has again not forgotten them. Let me remind the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in any Government led by our Prime Minister, the senior citizens have always been given due respect and consideration. Not to fail to the tradition, in this Budget they have again been favourably considered.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the old age pension has been increased. Two new recreational centres will be constructed at Pointe aux Piments and Riambel to add to the two existing centres found at Belle Mare and Pointe aux Sables. To use these facilities, henceforth they will only contribute Rs250 instead of Rs500 which they were contributing previously thereby indicating a decrease of 50%.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a caring Government, besides the elderly, the handicapped, the disabled and the widows have not been forgotten. Medical facilities would now be offered to handicapped people by doctors visiting them at their residence. More so, in this Budget, provision has been made for the exemption of tax on lump sum at the age of retirement from Rs1 m. to Rs1.5 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister has a vision to transform Mauritius into a medical hub. 10,500 foreign patients have already received medical treatment in our hospitals this year. This Government has in mind to improve and enhance the quality of life of our citizens. In this respect, Mr Speaker, Sir, our hospitals are being renovated and more qualified human resources are being recruited to improve the existing quality of services. Several projects under this Ministry like specialised hospitals for women as well as for children are in the pipeline. These above measures, Mr Speaker, Sir, are genuine evidence that this Government is not sparing any effort in offering a decent health service in our public hospitals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I may run out of time, but I must say that this Budget contains many positive and interesting measures for the welfare of the citizens. But I may not be able to enumerate all of them. However, I wish to highlight that the vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has made extra effort to bring important measures for the construction of different types of houses for various income groups. To their credit, even our friends in the Opposition have acknowledged that this morning. We all know that many people have the dream to have their own house and provision has been made accordingly in this Budget. It could be said that this is the first time that a budget contains so many positive measures for the housing sector and the people in need of same welcome them favourably.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in light of the above, this Budget will definitely revolutionise all sectors of our economy. This Budget has created a positive climate of security, confidence and sense of belonging to our population and also to foreign investors. Even hon. Members from the Opposition have felt it and have shown it by their body language. I am sure, had they been in the Government, they would not have done better than this present Budget.

Mr Speaker, Sir, some people watch things happen, some people make things happen and some people wonder what happened. The Right hon. Prime Minister inspires the confidence to make things happen for our beloved country where peace, harmony and justice prevail.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(6.30 p.m.)

The Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me start by congratulating the vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for the presentation of the Budget for the year 2011. To be honest, Mr Speaker, Sir, considering the ongoing world financial crisis, I had some apprehensions that this Budget would have been burdened with harsh measures, but the Minister of Finance has gone far beyond my expectations for a Budget which would both tackle the reeling crisis and provide for salvaging measures for those at the lower rungs of the social ladder. A Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I would qualify as responsible, courageous and compassionate.

Au cours de ces jours qui ont suivi la présentation du budget, j'ai noté une multitude de réactions allant des éloges les plus flatteurs aux habituels cris de mécontentements. Dans l'ensemble, M. le président, il ne fait pas de doute que la population est satisfaite que les mesures prises aillent à la fois dans l'intérêt des forces productives que dans la protection des plus faibles sans oublier, cette fois-ci, M. le président, la classe moyenne.

Ce qui est quand même vrai c'est qu'avant la présentation de chaque budget, il y a des attentes, des attentes quelquefois démesurées, un véritable *crisis of expectations*. M. le président, certains s'attendent à ce que cet exercice, avant tout comptable, devienne le sac des étrennes du Père Noël. D'aucuns s'attendent à ce qu'il soit une révolution de la politique économique que l'on change le temps d'un discours, une politique économique décidée à partir d'un programme gouvernemental soumis à la population et sanctionné par un vote populaire.

Le gouvernement en place, M. le président, a reçu un mandat clair et net en mai dernier pour mettre en œuvre son projet de société clairement défini dans notre discours-programme gouvernemental. D'ailleurs, le programme électoral de l'Alliance de l'Avenir avait déjà donné le ton. Il est évident que du côté opposé de la Chambre, certains n'arrivent toujours pas à digérer cet état des faits et essaient contre vents et marées à coup d'arguments usés et rengaines de semer la zizanie entre les partenaires de l'Alliance de l'Avenir. Ils ne réussiront pas. Je suis d'accord.

(Interruptions)

M. le président, si je peux me permettre un conseil aux membres de l'opposition, je leur dirais de ne plus essayer de nous diviser, mais de tourner vers l'avenir. Et ce budget, n'en déplaise aux membres de l'opposition, contient bien évidemment des lignes directeurs qui ne changent pas à savoir qu'il faut se serrer les coudes contre des conditions externes découlant d'une part des effets de la crise financière qui perdurent et ne sont pas prêts de disparaître à court terme et d'autre part, d'un rééquilibrage des forces économiques.

M. le président, quant aux commentaires de l'opposition sur le budget, ils sont, pour paraphraser l'euphémisme de mon honorable collègue de l'éducation, complètement décousus. Et moi, j'irais plus loin, M. le président, pour dire que ces commentaires sont l'expression de la confusion totale qui règne dans ce parti.

Je dois dire, M. le président, qu'ils m'ont choqué. Je ne comprends pas qu'ils ne puissent voir que ce budget va changer le quotidien des mauriciens. N'est aveugle que celui qui ne veut pas voir, M. le président. Je fais référence aux propos de l'honorable Madame Navarre-Marie qui semblait ne pas voir comment le quotidien de nos concitoyens s'améliorera avec ce budget. Ce budget, M. le président, fait la part belle au social. Je me permets de citer quelques mesures. D'abord, il y a une vraie révolution en ce qu'il s'agit du logement social. Pour la première fois, tous les mauriciens sans exception, peuvent prétendre à la possession d'un toit. En enlevant le dépôt et les frais d'enregistrement, le ministre des finances vient de retirer les derniers obstacles qui empêchaient les plus démunis à accéder à une maison. Pour la première fois, la politique du logement vise non seulement ceux au bas de l'échelle, mais aussi la classe moyenne qui en a autant besoin, M. le président.

Ensuite venons au chapitre de l'éducation! Il y a plusieurs mesures fortes qui consolident notre investissement dans nos enfants, c'est-à-dire dans l'avenir de ce pays et nous savons tous que l'accès à l'éducation reste le moyen incontournable pour gravir les échelons sociaux: l'augmentation des bourses d'études de 24 à 50 pour les élèves de la HSC; la possibilité de déduire de la taxe une somme de R 80,000 pour les dépenses sur les frais d'études des enfants au tertiaire à Maurice et de R 125,000 pour ceux étudiant à l'étranger; la réintroduction des subsides, indépendamment du nombre d'enfants sur les frais des examens de la SC et de la HSC tout en élevant le plafond de R 7,500 à R 14,500. Il y aura ainsi plus de 19,000 bénéficiaires au lieu de 8,000, M. le président.

M. le président, j'inviterais ces honorables membres à prendre l'exemple sur le secrétaire général du parti du MMM qui aura eu, lui, le mérite de ne pas tomber dans une diatribe stérile et haineuse pour souligner les mesures positives qu'il n'aura pas manquées de relever dans ce budget. L'honorable Obeegadoo, contrairement à ses collègues, n'a pas rougi pour dire que les mesures du budget sont positives et qu'elles vont dans le sens du progrès social pendant que son *leader* n'a trouvé mieux de dire que le budget appauvrira davantage le peuple.

M. le président, vous réaliserez qu'avec ces mesures, les jeunes de ce pays pourront avoir accès à l'éducation plus aisément. Le Premier ministre l'a dit clairement que le gouvernement a pour but la démocratisation de l'accès à l'éducation tertiaire. D'ailleurs, nous avons aujourd'hui un ministère pour l'éducation tertiaire. En révisant la formule des subsides sur les frais d'examens et en révisant à la hausse les bourses d'études pour les élèves de la HSC, le ministre des finances assurait que le nombre de jeunes qui accéderont aux universités augmentera davantage. Si les honorables membres de l'opposition possédaient ne serait-ce qu'une once de l'honnêteté du secrétaire général de leur parti, ils reconnaîtraient que les mesures comme l'abolition de la NRPT, l'abolition de la taxe sur les intérêts sur l'épargne, les taxes sur les maisons de jeux relèvent non seulement de la parole donnée avant et pendant la campagne électorale, mais il s'agit bien de la différence d'approche dans l'appréhension des solutions pour engranger les revenus de l'État. S'il y a continuité dans la nécessité d'une gestion saine et sérieuse, il y a définitivement rupture dans l'approche sociale.

M. le président, l'hypocrisie de l'opposition sur les maisons de jeux, sur la taxe sur les cigarettes et les boissons alcoolisées me rend perplexe. Venir me dire que les taxes sur la cigarette et l'alcool sont des mesures qui vont à l'encontre de l'intérêt des citoyens, c'est à se désespérer, M. le président et, de surcroît, venant de l'honorable membre qui a été elle-même ministre des droits de la femme et de la protection des enfants! M. le président, c'est vraiment déplorable! Nous savons tous les dégâts de l'alcool sur la famille sans parler de la violence domestique. Elle n'oserait pas, je suis sûre, M. le président, me contredire.

Les maisons tant décriées par le peuple et l'opposition sont maintenant lourdement taxées. On aurait cru que l'opposition aurait applaudi cette mesure, mais, à ma grande surprise, il semblerait que ce n'est pas le cas. Bien sûr le but, M. le président, est de décourager l'émergence de ces maisons de jeux et aussi de réduire le *gambling*. C'est ça la différence dans l'approche du

ministre des finances. Et venir souligner aujourd'hui que les parents ne pourront subvenir aux besoins de leurs enfants parce qu'ils auront à payer plus cher l'alcool qu'ils consomment, M. le président, ce n'est pas sérieux! On parle de responsabiliser les parents dans ce pays. On parle de la responsabilisation du citoyen et il faudrait quelque part tirer la marge et décider qu'est-ce qu'on veut réellement. Un pays d'alcooliques, un pays de parents qui n'arrivent pas à comprendre qu'est-ce qui est mieux pour son enfant – l'alcool ou le lait que l'honorable Madame Ribot parlait tout à l'heure.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, now!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: M. le président, c'est de l'hypocrisie et c'est inacceptable venant des gens qui ont été élus par le peuple pour les représenter dans cette Assemblée. M. le président, je dois dire que la confusion dans les rangs de l'opposition est vraiment intense. Dans sa tentative démagogique, le *Leader* de l'opposition s'égare quand il déclare que la TVA augmente. Il faut bien reconnaître que le *Leader* de l'opposition est la seule personne, non seulement dans ce Parlement mais aussi dans toute l'île Maurice, à avoir entendu ou lu que la TVA augmente. C'est d'autant plus regrettable de la part d'un ancien ministre des finances.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: M. le président, j'aurais préféré qu'on m'écoute parce que j'ai eu la décence d'écouter les autres quand ils ont pris la parole.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, now!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: La contradiction, dans les discours de l'opposition, n'est pas seulement dans les comptes mathématiques. Il se trouve aussi dans l'incohérence des propos quand on ose dire qu'il n'y a pas un mot - *not a word* - sur le gaspillage. Or, le gaspillage ne va pas disparaître en écrivant le mot dans le discours ni en le clamant avec force dans les travées de l'Assemblée nationale. Ce gouvernement, M. le président, est déterminé à mettre de l'ordre dans ce secteur et si au lieu de pousser des cris d'orfraie, le *Leader* de l'opposition avait étudié les

mesures annoncées pour, entre autres, améliorer l'environnement des affaires, il aurait vu qu'il y a une volonté de se débarrasser de la bureaucratie lourde, inefficace et source de gaspillage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the rationalisation of the different authorities dealing with water in Mauritius is a measure dealing with reduction of wastage. For a more efficient tapping and distribution of water in Mauritius, there is a dire need to have a supra-authority which will coordinate these different bodies. Our annual headache for water scarcity can continue no more. This is a situation which affects not only the residential supplies but also the various industries. For a more coherent and efficient management of water resources, be it potable, for agricultural or industrial purposes or a single national authority is more than a must.

M. le président, l'opposition n'en est pas à une contradiction près.

Ces commentaires sur le CSR sont tout simplement incohérents. Il laisse entendre, en connaissance de cause sans doute, que les fonds du CSR ne sont pas attribués aux bénéficiaires désignés et s'élève contre le fait que le gouvernement choisisse de s'attribuer le 50% de ces fonds à des problèmes prioritaires comme le logement, le bien-être des enfants venant des groupes vulnérables et l'éradication de la pauvreté absolue. Qu'y-a-t-il de mal en cela ? Le gouvernement le fait déjà. Qu'y-a-t-il de mal s'il est demandé au secteur privé d'apporter sa contribution au nom de la solidarité nationale ?

En tenant ce discours, M. le président, est-ce que l'opposition ne fait qu'apporter de l'eau au moulin de ceux qui depuis longtemps lui prêtent des connivences avec le capital mauricien ? Ces mêmes critiques ont également été dirigées vers l'ancien ministre des finances. Ceci explique sans doute cela.

M. le président, ce qui est consternant dans les commentaires des membres de l'opposition c'est la référence constante et élogieuse à l'ancien ministre des finances. On dirait presque qu'il était le ministre des finances du MMM. Je ne peux que plaindre les Li Kwong Wing, les Lutchmeenaraidoo et autres. Ils ont un autre rival sérieux pour le poste de *Shadow Finance Minister*.

Quant à l'arrogance supposée du vice-Premier ministre que lui prête les membres de l'opposition, voilà sans doute le commentaire le plus malvenu qui soit. Je voudrais bien savoir en quoi le discours du ministre des finances relève de l'arrogance.

L'honorable ministre des finances est sans doute moins *show man* que nombre de ses prédécesseurs. C'est son style. Pour autant que l'on sache, le sérieux ne rime pas avec l'arrogance.

M. le président, ce budget est un budget révolutionnaire qui jette les bases d'une nouvelle vision de l'île Maurice. Le ministre des finances a clairement laissé entendre que le paradigme économique bouge maintenant vers les pays émergents du sud et non pas seulement vers l'est, comme l'ont compris certains membres de l'opposition.

Il ne s'agit pas pour autant, comme veut le faire accroire l'honorable membre, de laisser les pays avec lesquels nous avons toujours entretenu des relations économiques, politiques et culturelles étroites. Il s'agit de se positionner pour faire face aux nouvelles données de sorte à ce que nous ne nous retrouvons pas dépourvus le jour où ces marchés traditionnels ne pourront plus sustenter à nos besoins et de prendre avantage des nouvelles opportunités avant qu'elles ne soient prises par d'autres pays sur les marchés émergents.

Cela relève tout simplement du bon sens économique, M. le président. Ces petits entrepreneurs mauriciens, et maintenant des grandes entreprises également, sont déjà en train de commercer avec les pays comme la Chine et l'Inde mais aussi avec le Brésil, le Chili, l'Argentine pour ne citer que quelques-uns. Il est important que nous allions maintenant prospecter ces marchés afin d'offrir, à notre tour, ce que notre République peut leur offrir.

M. le président, l'autre projet qui montre une future vision relève de la sécurité alimentaire. Il est intéressant, au moins à court et moyen termes, de voir comment notre agro-industrie peut nous amener vers la sécurité alimentaire. Les villages hydroponiques pilotes sont un investissement qui pourrait à la fois réussir cela pour donner aux petits planteurs une autre perspective après le sucre.

La troisième mesure qui trace la voie vers le futur est celle qui vise à transformer Maurice en un centre d'éducation d'excellence, un *knowledge hub*, qui pourrait accueillir des milliers d'étudiants. Déjà nous avons environ 600 étudiants étrangers qui fréquentent nos institutions tertiaires. La qualité de l'enseignement à Maurice commence à être reconnue et même le FMI envisage d'installer son centre de formation pour la région dans notre île. Ce n'est pas peu dire. Le Premier ministre a déjà mentionné l'exemple de Singapour pour les différents secteurs et l'éducation pourrait également bénéficier de l'expertise Singapourienne.

M. le président, je voudrais aussi parler de l'étude pour faciliter la recherche sur les cellules souches à Maurice. C'est peut-être une mesure qui est passée relative inaperçue. Cette mesure fait partie d'une série qui vise à faire de Maurice un *medical hub*. Nous commençons déjà à nous positionner dans le secteur du tourisme médical et viser ce palier supérieur ne peut que s'inscrire dans une vision à long terme.

Je pourrais encore parler d'autres mesures comme l'investissement dans la culture ou dans les ressources marines, mais les contraintes de temps me dictent plutôt de parler du volet social du budget.

M. le président, le modèle social-démocrate dont s'inspire notre politique de justice sociale se heurte aujourd'hui à de nouveaux défis. Avec l'augmentation de l'espérance de vie, le traitement de la solidarité est appelé à connaître des changements dans son financement.

Je me réjouis certes que le ministère de la sécurité sociale, de la solidarité nationale et des institutions réformatrices soit toujours le mieux doté de tous les ministères. Pour autant, cela démontre que l'île Maurice continuera à garder sa politique de soutien aux plus vulnérables. Le gouvernement a créé un nouveau ministère consacré à l'intégration sociale. Cela démontre aussi notre engagement pour combattre la pauvreté.

M. le président, je félicite encore une fois le courage du ministre des finances de positionner une partie du *CSR* dans le souci de pourvoir à ses besoins. Le *CSR* n'est quand même pas la panacée de nos questions d'argent. L'État continue à pourvoir aux besoins de nos concitoyens les plus démunis. L'investissement dans la formation des personnes pour augmenter la chance de trouver un travail relève de ce mode. Il s'agit d'aller vers l'autonomisation de ces personnes. Le *National Empowerment Foundation* fait déjà un travail formidable et, à cet égard, je me réjouis que le budget fasse provision de manière conséquente pour cela en triplant sa dotation.

A entendre, mon ami, l'autre membre de l'opposition, l'honorable Madame Françoise Labelle, il est clair qu'à défaut de trouver des arguments on nous fait plutôt un procès d'intention. Tout ce que l'honorable Madame Labelle a trouvé à dire c'est qu'elle ne croit pas en la bonne foi de ce gouvernement. Elle préjuge de la portée des actions annoncées. C'est dommage! Mais passons-en, M. le président!

Je voudrais plutôt m'attarder sur d'autres formes de consolidation de la justice sociale. Sur ce registre, le ministre des finances a encore tenu ses promesses énoncées dans le discours-programme et contrairement à ce que veut faire accroire l'opposition, il ne concerne pas seulement le *NRPT*, l'élimination de la taxe sur l'intérêt sur l'épargne ou les exemptions pour les petits planteurs.

La construction d'un centre récréatif à l'intention des personnes âgées à Pointe aux Piments et un autre bientôt à Riambel, rappelle l'engagement du gouvernement auprès des citoyens qui ont trimé toute une vie et à qui nous devons l'amélioration de la qualité de notre vie aujourd'hui. Qui est plus l'accès à ces centres est désormais revu à la baisse de 50%.

Le budget de la *Senior Citizens Council* a doublé, passant en 2011 à R 6 millions. Nous sommes en train de revoir toute notre politique sur les personnes âgées. Il nous faut non seulement permettre ces personnes âgées de continuer leur train de vie et de leur donner l'autonomie qu'il leur faut mais il faut aussi leur pourvoir de facilités pour qu'elles puissent rester actives jusqu'au dernier moment. Le *Senior Citizens Council* a été doté d'un budget plus important. Il est de même pour l'*Ilois Trust Fund* comme l'avait promis le Premier ministre.

M. le président, le ministère a, comme partenaires privilégiés, les ONG. Les ONG aident le ministère dans la mise en application de tous ses projets, que ce soit dans le secteur des personnes âgées, des enfants qui ont besoin d'être réhabilités ou même dans les institutions réformatrices. Le *NGO Trust Fund* qui opère sous l'égide du ministère verra son budget passé de R 15 millions à R 17 millions. Le budget de la *MACOSS* passe, pour sa part, à R 4 millions.

Toujours au niveau du ministère de la sécurité sociale, nous nous réjouissons que les visites domiciliaires jusqu'ici réservées aux personnes âgées de plus de 90 ans et celles alitées entre 75 à 89 ans soient maintenant étendues aux enfants souffrant d'handicaps sévères. Le budget alloué passe à R 40 millions.

M. le président, dans le discours-programme, vous vous rappellerez peut-être que nous avons fait mention de l'extension du seuil d'éligibilité pour une famille à recevoir un remboursement de 100% des frais d'examens de la SC et de la HSC à R 11,500. Je suis très heureuse que le ministre des finances soit allé au-delà de cette limite jusqu'à R 14,500 et que, par ailleurs, des familles touchant entre R 14,500 et R 20,000 vont bénéficier d'une aide à la hauteur

de 50% des frais alors qu'une famille touchant jusqu'à R 11,000 n'aura plus de frais pour un second enfant prenant part aux mêmes examens.

Mais la solidarité et la justice sociale ne sont pas seulement une question d'argent, M. le président. Il s'agit aussi de veiller à ce que l'égalité des chances soit étendue à tous et particulièrement à ceux et celles qui sont désavantagés économiquement ou physiquement. C'est ainsi que mon ministère s'est engagé dans la construction de rampes d'accès dans quelques 300 écoles du pays. Près de la moitié en sont déjà pourvues.

Il s'agit là d'un projet qui vise à l'inclusion et à l'intégration des enfants handicapés dans le circuit scolaire normal. D'autre part, je suis heureuse d'annoncer que le projet en collaboration avec le ministère de l'éducation et l'APEIM d'avoir une salle de classe pour les enfants handicapés à l'école de Montagne Ory est en bonne voie et se concrétisera à la rentrée prochaine.

Toujours au chapitre de l'intégration, nous sommes fiers d'annoncer que les jeunes handicapés qui ont réussi une formation dans la filière vocationnelle mais également dans le circuit académique traditionnel et ce jusqu'à l'université auront la chance de rencontrer des employeurs potentiels demain lors d'une rencontre au *Freeport Operations Mauritius* de Mer Rouge. Voilà un autre exemple de la consolidation de la justice sociale dont nous pouvons nous enorgueillir.

Le ministère de l'intégration sociale travaille en étroite collaboration avec mon ministère afin de faciliter l'embauche des personnes ayant un handicap. Mais nous voulons atteindre le public le plus large possible. La justice sociale envers les faibles, et particulièrement les handicapés, doit être dans le vécu quotidien. C'est ainsi qu'après avoir ratifié la convention des droits des personnes handicapées au début de cette année, nous nous attendons maintenant à travers le comité national à sa mise en œuvre. Le comité national va veiller à ce que les articles de la convention soient connus de tous et que les obstacles qui surgissent à travers des personnes handicapées soient enlevés le plus vite possible.

Du côté des institutions réformatrices, il est bon de signaler que le *community service* prendra un nouvel essor et que mon ministère va travailler en étroite collaboration avec le ministère des administrations régionales pour qu'on puisse mettre sur pied un mécanisme permettant le service communautaire sous la supervision du *Probation and Aftercare*

Department de mon ministère. Et cela, M. le président - il est bon de souligner - va aider à décongestionner le *overcrowding* qui existe actuellement dans les prisons. Cela va aussi réduire d'une façon conséquente la somme dépensée pour garder les prisonniers dans nos institutions.

M. le président, il y a aussi l'idée de réinsertion des gens. Non seulement, nous voulons parler de réinsertion des jeunes qui doivent être réhabilités mais il nous faut aussi parler de la réinsertion des prisonniers en général. Et cela va dans l'idée de l'intégration et l'inclusion dans notre société.

M. le président, nous avons un *leadership* fort et déterminé en la personne du Dr. Navin Ramgoolam et autour de lui une équipe d'hommes et de femmes de conviction, capables et soudés pour mener à bien sa vision.

Le vice-Premier ministre et ministre des finances a résumé de fort belle manière l'action gouvernementale qui vise à consolider la justice sociale. En tant que ministre de la sécurité sociale, j'ai essayé de donner les mesures qui s'insèrent dans le cadre de cette politique. Il importe que tout un chacun y aille de son petit geste pour que le rêve d'une île Maurice plus juste soit une réalité. J'ose espérer que nous tous présents ici pourrons nous élever au dessus de nos clivages pour donner cette opportunité à nos enfants et aux générations futures.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: How long will the hon. Member take?

Dr. Sorefan: Half an hour, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Alright, carry on!

(6.56 p.m.)

Dr. R. Sorefan (Fourth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like to thank all the hon. Members who have intervened so far, and also to thank the hon. vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for reading the Appropriation (2011) Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will try to contain myself within the proposals made by the hon. Minister of Finance. My first point is that I find it very difficult to grasp the philosophy of this Budget. Is there any ultimate reality, serenity or calmness? No, Mr Speaker, Sir! This Budget is a continuity of the past with hardly any realities. Is this the Mauritian dream mentioned on page

3, a reality in 2020? No, Sir! A GDP of Rs1 trillion and an income *per capita* of USD20,000 and higher is unrealistic because, right now, the income *per capita* is about USD7,000 which used to be higher the years before. How, in ten years, can we achieve such an income *per capita* of USD20,000? This notion of dreaming is presently, Mr Speaker, Sir, inculcated in the mind of the low income group by the gaming houses and lottery national. Every Saturday night, gamblers of *lottotech* are at the MBC/TV dreaming that their numbers will come out. I think, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister of Finance got contaminated with this notion of dreaming. This is why he wants the whole population of Mauritius to be dreamers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister of Finance is saying that there are three main trusts, namely: rebalancing growth, a great leap forward on productivity and consolidating social justice. Mr Speaker, Sir, rebalancing growth would not be easy, if not difficult, as the hon. Minister of Finance has himself said in his speech. The international backdrop has not improved. The world economy is still fraught with uncertainty. The hon. Minister of Finance is strongly hoping for a 4.2% growth rate for 2011. If this is not achieved, I think the growth rate may be around 3.8% because all major international economies are on the pessimistic thinking, but honestly, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am praying and will pray that the dream of 4.2% growth rate will be realistic and the population at large will benefit. That's for the population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I welcome this new idea of economic diplomacy, but what worries me is that those trade councillors would be, to my opinion, political people with boots licking expertise.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should not use that kind of words, please!

Dr. Sorefan: I withdraw the words "boots licking".

Mr Speaker: Thank you!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Sorefan: Regarding tourists from the east, it is a very good idea. But what have we got to offer to these tourists, Mr Speaker, Sir? Will they be interested with our blue sea? I don't think so. We must study what are the interests of tourists in Mauritius, and act accordingly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding sugar cane tax exemption on the first 60 tonnes of sugar for small planters who rely solely - but this morning, the word 'solely' has lost its value - on the sugar income, I won't repeat what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has said. Hon. Seeruttun and hon. Cader Sayed-Hossen have both praised the Leader of the Opposition and have begged the hon. Minister of Finance to amend this section so that all small planters may benefit from this tax exemption. By the way, may I tell these two hon. Members and others who said that we, on this side of the House, do not have any proposition that I leave it to the House to conclude on this issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Cader Sayed-Hossen concurred with the Leader of the Opposition that the DBM merging issue should be revisited. Paragraphs 140-144 on page 26 regarding double cab full duty-free vehicles for eligible small planters won't be of interest. Duty is only 10 percent, if I am not mistaken. Hon. Cader Sayed-Hossen has enumerated, in his speech, various...

(Interruptions)

...unbearable costs for their sugar plantation and a double cab will further burden their finance. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask if duty-free cab will enjoy interest free loan for the purchaser from DBM?

For rebalancing growth in the financial industry, I am quite sceptic on the issue to allow Category 1 Global Business licence to extend their operation to domestic economy. I am only hoping that no black illegal foreign currencies are legalised in Mauritius.

On the issue of 'Knowledge Centre of Excellence', Mr Speaker, Sir, foreign students coming to Mauritius are mostly welcome, but allowing them to work on a part-time basis will create competition to our local university students. The idea of foreign students to come to Mauritius to study is to bring foreign currency to the maximum. Mr Speaker, Sir, paragraph 94 on page 17 says –

“For the academic staff in institutions registered by TEC, BOI will handle their Occupation Permits regardless of their income level.”

I think it is contradictory to paragraph 234 where it says –

“(...) the threshold for BOI to issue Occupation Permits for professionals will be lowered from Rs70,000 to Rs45,000 per month.”

In medical teaching institutions, Mr Speaker, Sir, teaching staffs are professionals. I wonder how this will be treated. Paragraph 110 should be amended to read –

“(...) other than medical, dental and nursing (...).”

This is just an amendment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the issue of alcohol and cigarette consumption, the excise duty is raised to 20 percent for alcoholic products, and 25 percent for cigarette and tobacco products ‘to discourage consumption’, as said by the hon. Minister of Finance. Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no evidence that increasing the price of these harmful commodities will reduce consumption. In the medical field, we always rely on evidence-based conclusion. This measure, Mr Speaker, Sir, is nothing than to bring more income to the treasury.

Mr Speaker, Sir, increasing the number of scholarships is more than welcomed from 12 to 50, and out of the 38 new awards, 24 will be reserved for students from families with modest income. Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, what is the definition of modest income? What mechanism will be set up to evaluate these new 24 laureates? Will it be on grades? I am really at a lost. What really worries me the most in this Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, is paragraph 201 on page 36, which I quote –

“The proposed schemes will be implemented as from academic year 2011/12.”

The phrase which continues, Mr Speaker, Sir, really worries me, and I quote -

“The enhancements will be financed from revenues from the National Lottery.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a Muslim Member of Parliament of this House, I can’t approve the above, because it is against the Islamic *Sharia*. It is unlawful, as *les jeux de hasard* are not permitted in the Koran. So, how can a Muslim laureate accept that his or her studies be financed by such National Lottery revenues? Is there a hidden agenda to discourage Muslim students to compete for this award? I am sure, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. the hon. Rashid Beebeejaun; the Minister of Housing and Lands, Dr. the hon. Abu Kasenally; the Minister of Industry and Commerce, hon. Showkutally Soodhun; the Minister of Labour, hon. Shakeel Mohamed; hon. Reza Issack; hon. Cader Sayed-Hossen; hon. Abdullah Hossen and others will agree with me that revenues from National Lottery can’t be used to finance Muslim laureates for

further studies. Not only Muslims, but many other people of different religious belief, who are dead against *les jeux de hazard*, will never accept that their sons' or daughters' studies be financed by such lottery revenue. It is mandatory to amend this paragraph as it is our right to compete for scholarships within the Mauritian democracy with respect to people's right.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on health matters, my colleague, Dr. the hon. Satish Boolell, has elaborated many pertinent issues that Members on both sides of the House acclaimed after his speech. I will just add that the fifth floor of the Registrar building needs some new blood, if not transfused blood, so as to welcome some innovative ideas such as instead of buying new hi-tech equipment, which most of the time are broken, why not go for the leasing of new equipment with contractual servicing and repairs. Everyone will benefit health wise and not corruptive moneywise. Our health service is more curatively orientated than preventive. We need a proper, well-organised preventive institution that will cater for all aspects of health by professionals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the issue of reforming the public sector to shore up its performance, water sector forms a major part of this section. I won't elaborate on this issue, but I will call the attention of hon. Patrick Assirvaden when, in his speech, he said that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has said that the Budget hardly made any mention of the CWA. May I ask him to have the decency to read page 96 of Hansard of Tuesday 23 November 2010 about the Budget debates, and be honest to himself? I am sure, he did not ...

Mr Speaker: Sorry, I am guiding the hon. Member. He cannot ask somebody to be honest to himself as it implies dishonesty.

(Interruptions)

Does the hon. Member want trouble? Keep quiet!

Dr. Sorefan: I am sure that he did not read the speech of the Leader of the Opposition. Probably, the economic bulbs that were sold 3 bulbs for Rs40, when he was the Chairman of the CEB, are not lighting anymore for him to read in his office. Those bulbs we were told to have a shelf life of more than 10 to 20 years, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, to our surprise, they last only 10 to 20 months! Probably, I am too generous on the months because some last only five months, Mr Speaker, Sir.

On the issue of clean greener safer Mauritius ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: This is my last call for warning to the hon. Member. If he continues to disturb the House, he will know what is going to happen to him.

Mr Assirvaden: I am not the only one talking, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Don't! I am asking the hon. Member to keep quiet!

Dr. Sorefan: Mr Speaker, Sir, on the issue of clean greener safer Mauritius, I would like to elaborate on paragraph 292, where mention is made about PET bottles, plastic bags and cans. Excise duty on these three items has doubled, Mr Speaker, Sir, from one to two rupees. I would humbly ask the hon. Minister of Finance to reconsider the excise duty on the low side, especially for PET bottles for water, because Mauritians do not drink enough water per day. One to two litres per day is a requisite. Increasing the cost will discourage people to drink their daily water requirement, leading to various diseases, among which renal stones, a cost burden on the Ministry of health, etc. By the way, how many of us, here, in this House, drink tap water? At lunch time, we all drink bottle water.

Mr Speaker, Sir, paragraph 345 speaks of five schemes under the Housing with Good Living Programme.

Several schemes have been enumerated with different monthly income. Scheme 1, for absolute poor, 7,000 units will be provided. Outright grant from CSR money, how much, we do not know. Full cost of land by Government, 50% on site infrastructure will be provided. Very good!

Scheme 2, same advantage, except to have a 10% deposit! For Scheme 3, no mention is made for onsite infrastructure. Will they be exempted, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Let me talk about our elders. What a compensation, if I can use the term compensation, Mr Speaker, Sir! A compensation of Rs90 per month, Mr Speaker, Sir! We all know how much foodstuffs and especially medicine that the very old people need daily have gone up. I humbly ask the Minister of Finance to consider subsidies on medicines for the elderly poor people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we heard, in the recent past, about revisiting free transport for the elderly. Nothing is mentioned in this Budget about what formula the Government will come for the elder people to benefit from the free transport. Bus owners only are benefitting. Only about Rs700 m. is mentioned in the Budget for free travel for students.

Mr Speaker, Sir, about fiscal duties, lots have been said by my friend, hon. Reza Uteem, only to add that dividend will be taxed twice through the Solidarity Tax.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to say a few words on the Decongestion Programme of this Government. Presently, we are losing about Rs2 billion to Rs3 billion on congestion of traffic to Port Louis and, in the 2011 Budget, only Rs4 billion have been earmarked for the Decongestion Programme. The Ministry is implementing various road projects to decongest the traffic, but they are doing it wrongly. For example, the M1 road, they should have started from Caudan roundabout and go to St Jean and not the reverse, because enlarging M1 from St Jean to Caudan is creating a bottleneck.

Traffic congestion is and will stay the same with this issue. The problem of congestion is not the road, but the City of Port Louis, which is over-saturated with offices and people migrating from other regions to come to work. We must take bold actions to decongest Port Louis itself.

Regarding M1 enlargement, we were made to believe that there will be three-lane traffic, but, as it is, we see only two lanes, Mr Speaker, Sir. Probably, as I see it, the third lane will be for the Bus Transit System when the NTA will be privatised. I am also convinced that the Light Rail System is in the *frigo*, because there is a strong lobby from a company that is buying some of the lucrative business, it is very active for Bus Transit System.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I asked a question to the hon. Minister of Housing and Lands on 09 November regarding land being compulsorily acquired for construction of road. The reply was –

“The requested information is being compiled and will be placed in the Library as soon as the exercise is completed.”

Do I take it that there are many compulsory acquisitions that are still being negotiated and filed in court, after having already signed the contract for certain road constructions? If this is so, Mr Speaker, Sir, the project value will soar up because contractors will file for damages for

preventing them to finish their work as per the contract. Is that what hon. Dr. Kasenally meant in his speech on the Budget? I quote –

“Success of a country is judged among others (...) well-planned, well-organised and well-executed project”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Road Decongestion Programme has many drawbacks. To come to justify what hon. Dr. Kasenally said, Mr Speaker, Sir, one major issue that we must always consider is to make provision for pedestrians, provide pavements and consider more on human safety rather than how fast a car will enter Port Louis.

Regarding Quatre Bornes, where I was the mayor and councillor, I can't digest the idea of transferring the market to Candos Stadium at La Louise, which is an extra busy *carrefour*. Solving the traffic problem is a real *casse-tête* over there. A market there will be really a big unsolvable problem. In most cities of the world, if there is a market inside the city, the planning department moves the market in the periphery of the city, not in the centre of the town.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I thank all hon. Members present here without forgetting yourself, Mr Speaker, Sir. We must always have evidence when we want to include projects in the Budget. Sometimes putting the ox in front of the cart can make the cart move, but putting the ox on the cart, *on bouge en place*, like the Decongestion Programme and other projects.

Mr Speaker, Sir, may I make a humble request – from what I have observed today - to provide tables and chairs for our Police officers and other officers for taking tea, as they were taking tea in a standing position on the ground floor. They are having tea and other food standing there, it is not good for their health and it is not humane.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I pray God to help us in this House for good health and happiness. Probably, I won't be in the country; I take this opportunity to wish all of you Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: I must draw the attention of the hon. Member who just spoke that if he was referring to the Police officers working in Parliament, there is a House Committee which has been constituted. There is a Chairman, and the hon. Member could have raised the matter with

the Chairman of the House Committee, who is the Deputy Speaker, to look into it. I am just guiding the hon. Member for next time.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

(7.20 p.m.)

Mr J. Seetaram (Second Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I would wish to send my warmest congratulations to the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam and to the vice-Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth for the commendable Budget with unprecedented measures.

This Budget where growth has been rebalanced and social justice consolidated firmly, it is a Budget which comes with all common sense and logic. There was an electoral manifesto for *l'Alliance de l'Avenir* before the election and in that manifesto, *l'Alliance de l'Avenir*, as a party challenging the election, did put forward those proposals and the same proposals went through with flying colours, with distinction and we passed the test of the general election. This Government obtained a crystal clear and resounding victory with a resounding mandate. You cannot challenge the voice of the people, like we say *vox populi vox dei* and this is the wish of the people.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Seetaram: The manifesto obviously becomes, in other terms, when we are in Government, *le discours-programme* and measures from the *discours-programme* are the very measures which went through in the Budget. So, this is a common sense with no nonsense and such measures are rightly respected by hon. Pravind Jugnauth, vice-Prime Minister.

There have been more measures concerning law and order. Works at Melrose prison have already started. We have more measures concerning ID cards, the Laureate Scheme, SC and HSC fees and tertiary education. All electoral promises are being executed, '*parole donnée, parole sacrée, parole respectée*'. And those major points that have been canvassed by the Prime Minister and the vice-Prime Minister, more specifically fees for SC and HSC and waiving off interest on savings concern all income groups.

The NRPT was removed. And what has the Opposition got to say? *'Enn mauvais budget'*! No constructive criticism at all! Strictly politically motivated objectives to create sensation! And hearing speeches from the Opposition bench, only some peripheral remarks were made about the Budget; nothing in substance and it clearly shows that the MMM would not have done any better. No concrete proposal came before us. Of course, my friend, hon. Dr. Satish Boolell did make one proposal or two and a vague attempt, making a proposal which obviously shows the lack of imagination of the MMM. He stated: why not include one dry day per month? But one dry day per month, this would further go and make people drink more the day before that dry day and he himself says: if you put more taxes on alcohol, it does not prevent that person from drinking. But if you put a dry day, obviously they are going to drink more and the next day they are going to compensate for it and drink more again.

(Interruptions)

Obviously, it is a criticism; we welcome it. There is also a second proposal. I want to be fair and talk about any proposal that was made. I can remember only of two and it came from hon. Dr. Satish Boolell.

Secondly, the view that specialists should not be from Mauritius, it should be from their country of origin, that is, doctors who are going to be specialists should be from the country of origin of that very university. Well, it is the practice here to encourage students in all sectors to gain knowledge as a basis. We are encouraging undergraduate and postgraduate students in this country and this country has put forward so much investments and is continuing, in this Budget, to put much more to have a fair distribution of knowledge among our locals and it is only fair that our locals do get a fair share of knowledge and they do get a fair share of being professionals and of being specialists.

I have also heard the remark made by hon. Dr. Sorefan who just stated that apparently the money from the national lottery cannot be given or cannot be used by one section of the community, but let me remind you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that such money is public money. When someone goes to the hospital to get treatment and when you obtain the treatment and you are under treatment, would you go and see where does that money come from? Does it come from tax on alcohol or cigarettes? No! This is public money; it comes from a consolidated fund, we don't go and choose, this money comes from there; this has been taxed on articles. This is

pure demagogy and this is despicable because public money from a consolidated fund cannot be divided or be given a name, where does it come from. This is pure demagogy from the Opposition.

Further, I would go on some measures in the Budget Speech where, I think, a real commendable effort has been entertained in those measures. Firstly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the river, lakes and marine economic zone have been given a very well-thought plan and there is a new scheme for off-lagoon fishing in Mauritius and Rodrigues for fishers who group together. Also for those fishers, there is a 20% grant on the purchase of sub-industrial boats. The unprecedented measure is for the financing of a research centre for the Mauritius Oceanography Institute at Albion at the cost of Rs100 m. Why I commend such a measure? It is because it is most crucial for our aquamarine '*richesse*', for our seabed, because our aquamarine, our corals and our seabed are our assets, our resources and our pride, and it is the pride of our tourism industry as well.

The second measure concerns education. There has been a revolutionary measure. If one looks at the measure, obviously, the objectives have been in fourfold: promote the reward for good academic performance; use education as a ladder to enable students from poor families to come out of poverty - this is the getaway passport, out of poverty, which is education, and such a measure has been given such an importance in this Budget. And I commend such a measure. Further, to extend scholarships to postgraduate studies and significantly increase the number of laureates from 12 to 50. An increase of 38 laureates – *là aussi, mauvais budget!* Still *budget fade!* From the 38 new laureates, 24 will be reserved for students from families with modest income. This is an opportunity for families of low income group. And they still call it *un mauvais budget!*

Concerning the threshold, it was under that scheme that a second child taking examinations in a family was entitled to a grant of 50% for an income which is no less than Rs11,000. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they will, henceforth, benefit from 100% payment of fees. The threshold has also been increased. There is a new benefit for families with monthly income between Rs14,500 and Rs20,000. They will receive a grant of 50% of the examination fees regardless of the number of children taking examinations. Still, *budget fade!* These new schemes would benefit some 19,000 students in contrast to some 8,000 presently. Our students

will benefit immensely from such a measure. I don't think this is a *budget fade*. Our students will get further support, obviously, from the Employees Welfare Fund with loan facilities at a very low interest rate from 10% to 5%.

Coming to the next measure which concerns the public sector, we have this kind of culture and habit of always criticising the public sector, but, here, it gives the public sector *les lettres de noblesse* and this measure, in relation to reform of the public sector to show off its performance, has been one extremely exceptional measure which concerns the unfair asymmetry in financial dealings with public that has been put to an end. Let me explain! When the public, as has been explained by the vice-Prime Minister, owes money to the Government, a deadline is set for that payment and if you don't pay you have huge penalties on your head, whereas now this is not necessarily the case. When Government owes money and makes delayed payment, henceforth, all money owed by Government will be paid on time and any payment not made on time will carry interest on amount for the period delayed. Here, I am referring to mostly big sums of money which are put when you have court cases, more specifically, bail money. When you have accused parties who are released on bail, there are several amounts, it can be Rs20,000, Rs30,000 or Rs50,000. The procedure for that money to be obtained back, when the case has been struck out or completed, is quite lengthy and such a measure is very much welcome inasmuch as individuals from the lower end of the ladder who are usually at the worst end of it.

Another measure concerns the water sector. I also commend that measure where you have an amalgamation of all the authorities, that is, the Central Water Authority, the Irrigation Authority, the Water Resources Unit and the Wastewater Management Authority into one single authority. Such a measure of all authorities being centralised would obviously improve our efficiency, reduce water losses, protect underground water from pollution and promote water demand management. Such a measure, obviously, is very much welcome in our circumstances as we have such a varying climate in our country.

As far as water is concerned, we have to commend the measure concerning the cash grant of Rs3,000 to families with a monthly income below Rs10,000 for the purchase of a water tank as we have restricted water supply. I have to add here that such a measure has been, in fact, put in that Budget for lower income groups. The remark made by Members on the Opposition bench was: '*pena de l'eau, ki pou faire are tank!*' But we have to see that in this country the climate

does vary. We have a particular climate in summer, in December, February, April and June. So, we live in this country and we do know about the realities here. This is a reality and it is as if some Members do not understand realities of the climate in this country, and they still consider it is a *mauvais budget*.

Most importantly, I consider the environmental policies, where I do commend an earmarking of Rs30 m. for the development of eco-villages in Trou d'Eau Douce, Pointe aux Piments, Vuillemin and Rodrigues. I shall say it is a measure where Government is discouraging PET bottles, plastic bags and cans, these being such a nuisance to the environment. A plastic bag can cause such a nuisance because if one throws a plastic bag in the green or anywhere around the globe, it takes *des siècles et des siècles* for it to disintegrate, that is, for it to turn to ashes. This measure comes as a hope. Further, to enhance and to promote other types which are substitutes to plastic products, that is, to promote paper products; products which are *biodegradable*. Such a promotion will, obviously, help in our environment because this is a hard battle. It is an uphill climb and we have to fight it with both hands. Such a measure is commendable. I would also propose that we encourage plastic producers to shift towards paper production and to promote recycling of plastic products. This is a measure which, I think, we are agreeable on both sides of the House. Further, if we can earmark areas in every nook and corner of the country where a bin for plastic products may be put up.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member will conclude now.

Mr Seetaram: I won't be that long. I would rapidly go through the other measures. I would also commend the measure for housing. It is a fabulous scheme and I hope this would *soulage les problèmes de logement à Maurice*.

I would finish on the Judiciary. The Judiciary has a significant role to ensure that all persons are able to live safely under the rule of law and to protect life and property. I commend the fact that we have eight more Judges and the introduction of the e-filing system, electronic case lodging and management system has been introduced inasmuch as we know very well, how long court cases do take and, obviously, it is a prejudice caused to parties. I would refer to John Grisham, in his novel "The Chamber", who says that 99% of litigation is waiting and only 1% is taken into court. Let's reduce the 99% of waiting in our courts and I shall say if the Opposition

bench still thinks that it is a *mauvais budget*, I shall now conclude and refer to the story of the « Red Riding Hood » où le *petit chaperon rouge* avait dit au *vieux méchant loup* -

« *Vous avez de grands yeux.* »

Et le méchant loup a répondu –

« *C'est pour mieux vous voir, ma fille.* »

«*Vous avez de grandes oreilles.* »

«*C'est pour bien vous écouter, ma fille.* »

«*Vous avez de belles dents.*»

Et le vieux méchant loup a répondu –

«*C'est pour mieux vous croquer, ma fille !* »

Alors ne nous laissons pas croquer ! Let us commend the Budget because it is an unprecedented one.

Many thanks, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(7.43 p.m.)

Mr S. Moutia (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I won't take much of your time. I know my hon. friends are hungry and dinner is ready there. Just bear with me for some fifteen minutes, not more than that.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to begin with, let me first congratulate the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, under whose guidance the hon. vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, hon. Pravind Jugnauth, presented such a well-balanced and good Budget acclaimed by the majority of the population.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, over the past days, I believe, almost everything has been said regarding the 2011 Budget both in terms of appreciation and criticisms. Nevertheless, I wish to add my humble voice to underline certain aspects some chose deliberately to occult.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, today, I am proud to be part of this Government. We are consolidating our realisation in this country against all odds and we are giving back to our citizens the fruit generated by the participation in the economy. It is a Budget, a plan of action, to drive the country ahead in this part of the world and even among many countries. We are a nation vulnerable because of the size and its insularity, but we have the courage and the will to

turn this adversity to our advantage. We are making smallness an advantage and we are providing for all segments of the population to all the different sectors of the economy. This Budget is a clear vision of where we would like to be in ten years. We should be grateful to the people of this country who have made a very clear choice to return hon. Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam as Prime Minister of this country with *l'Alliance de l'Avenir*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as a small developing economy, we are much exposed to strenuous conditions over which we have hardly any control. While we are left at the altar in the international economic turmoil that has brought larger and stronger States that drove us by the importance and size nearly to the brink of bankruptcy, while many States are struggling to survive, we, in Mauritius, thanks to the vision of the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, and thanks to the series of bold and innovative measures taken over the past years to address new challenges caused very often by unpredictable conditions, are doing fairly well at international standard, having shown our resistance to face new threats and economic conditions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the new Budget consolidates these measures along with innovative ones. On the economic front, the present Budget, through a series of measures, seeks precisely to strengthen our capacity to maintain and indeed cheer up our ability to ensure sustainable development while, at the same time, ambitiously charter the way for greater achievements in the economic field that would open the way for the creation of additional revenues to help upgrade the standard of life which remains one of the vowed primary targets of the present Government.

Prior to every Budget, expectations are invariably high among workers and consumers; aspiration, very often, seems to ignore our economic resources. No Minister of Finance, worthy of that name, can afford to play Father Christmas in a way that will jeopardise the very foundation of our economic structure. We must all be glad that the Minister of Finance did not succumb to the temptation of populist measures, but rather shows his pragmatism by announcing measures to open the way for greater economic achievements by buttering the pillars of our economy and consolidating our competitiveness.

Economic development is an ongoing process and any one single Budget cannot address and tackle every issue that confronts us, but it is always a time for readjustment, consolidating to

prepare to face the future contingencies and emerging challenges. In that context, the Minister of Finance, took a number of innovative measures that give us cause to be optimistic for the future.

Moreover, social measures figure preeminently in the Budget with a series of steps in favour of the less fortunate while the fight against poverty is still decisively on. The present Government resolves to gradually eliminate social inequalities and injustices while affording the poor the opportunity to integrate the mainstream of economic and social upliftment. This too is an ongoing process, but already tangible results are seen in the fight against absolute poverty the elimination of which remains a priority target in the Government's Programme. The recent creation of a Ministry of Social Integration and the means put at its disposal under the present Budget confirms such intention.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the abolition of the NRPT and waiving off interest on savings are indeed bold measures. There is hardly any need for me to go into details over each of the measures the new Budget contains. Apart from the heavy economic measures announced, this Budget also addresses such issues as law and order, education, health, protection of environment, water distribution, construction of new houses, upgrading of our infrastructures, in short, measures made to upgrade the quality of life and to maintain the country on a path of modernisation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with this Budget, the Government is walking many additional miles and here my thought goes to those families who believe in education as *avenue par excellence* to rise the social ladder and who would not compromise on anything in the quest for their children's education. In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, most of us in this House come from such families who may have skipped meals to ensure that we go to school and they were right on all counts. People who have the privilege not to have a short memory would concur with us as they are conscious that each time the Labour Party has been in power, education has been our focus. We need not go to archives or history or books of self-proclaimed historians. Free education, on a universal principle, was introduced by the Labour Party and the first generation of generalised State secondary schools bears testimony to the commitment of the Father of the nation, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam towards education. Many of us, just as I said, like myself, belong to that generation. When I was at school - in those days, I was in a private secondary school - very often, at the end of the month, it was very difficult to pay the school fees and many

times, we were sent home because we could not pay the school fees. So, the greatest thing the Labour Party and the Father of the nation did was free education in January 1977. The best investment that the Labour Party and Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam gave to this country is free education. This is what we call invest in people.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are a Government which values education and this Budget confirms our sincerity of purpose, our commitment. We are ensuring, through the extensive provision in this Budget, that the child of this country will not be deprived of the opportunity to sit for the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate examinations. We are, at the same time, increasing the amount of disposable income at the level of some 19,000 families who would not have to spend thousands of rupees on examination fees and can use it for the welfare of their families. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our wish is that poverty should not be a cause for children to miss their terminal examination at secondary level. The people are conscious that we are really rolling the welfare carpet much further while maintaining all other provisions in the Budget, especially free bus transport to students.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are going further. After having regionalised secondary school education, we are now providing access to scholarship to ensure that children from modest families and from all parts of the country have a fair chance. We are, in fact, democratising access to education and we are convinced that the people of this country will not pay the least attention *aux discours démagogiques* of certain people. *Le monde nous suit de très près, M. le président.* Many among us, our partners on this international scene, are dumbfounded in the face of extensiveness of our welfare provisions. While maintaining free access to the University of Mauritius, we are also creating an environment conducive for the entry of many service providers in the field of education, many international bodies desiring joint ventures with local operators and investors to invest in the tertiary education programmes. The children of this country will have an increasingly wider choice and families would not have to spend their whole life's savings or stake the future standards of living because of the cost of education in foreign countries.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government is conscious that we should spare no effort to turn the human resource of this country into resourceful humans who are the most important assets of economy. In fact, we are full swing in a knowledge-based economy and the human

capital is the most important factor of production that has a defining role in retaining our competitive edge as far as possible in all the different pillars of the economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are not neglecting the poorest segment of our population. We are making comprehensive provisions to ensure that children from the vulnerable groups would have an equal access and chance to pursue education. We are making provision for *un encadrement rapproché* to all those students who do not succeed in the academic field. We value the other potential and the country needs their skills and competencies. On this side of the House, we are walking the talks and we appeal to families to join the thoughts of Government and to devote much attention to the education of their children. Welfare is a concern for both family and Government and together we will succeed to generate the right human resource for the needs of our economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government is also proposing multi-pronged approach in the housing sector. We are not only consolidating the NHDC slab grant scheme by increasing the amount to Rs65,000, but we are also providing the construction of houses for the most vulnerable families while offering options to those families a little higher on the social ladder. This Government is giving a very strong signal to many families who have the will to do their best as the Government will do the rest.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to help the senior citizens of this country, we have contributed enormously to the economy of this country. This Government has promised it is going to construct two new recreational centres at Pointe aux Piments and Riambel. While maintaining all provisions in pension, we are providing further facilities to the people and the senior citizens of this country. We must not forget that this Government has further reduced the contribution that they have to pay to take advantage of the residential facilities at the recreational centres. Free transport has also been maintained for the senior citizens of this country. We are not raising VAT nor are we further taxing normal consumption. We are giving back to the people who sincerely deserve. It is only when you are inspired by a sense of profound socialism that you go that far in State welfare provisions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are succeeding in sustaining and further consolidating welfare provision in this Budget. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are continuing to do such miracle in this country when many countries are encountering much hardship to rise after having been

carried away by their economic downturn at the global level. This is possible because our citizens concur with us and trust our management. They are collaborating with Government and we all value peace and stability. This is also possible for we have an able Prime Minister at the head of this country, a Prime Minister loved by one and all, *un Premier ministre qui a la confiance de la population, un Premier ministre qui est à l'écoute de la population, un Premier ministre qui se retrouve successivement à la tête du gouvernement et qui a le privilège de diriger son gouvernement avec la meilleure combinaison d'hommes et de femmes à assumer les immenses responsabilités pour mener ce pays au bon port.*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government has succeeded in having a grip on inflation and is providing a consistent social wage in the form of multiple welfare provisions. I am sure the different social partners in the country do recognise the efforts demonstrated by this Government to improve the quality of life of our citizens through the comprehensive package without compromising, in any way, the major infrastructural development programmes across the country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, speaking on infrastructural development in our country, I would like to say a few words on my constituency which is Constituency No. 11 – Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle, which is represented in this august Assembly by my newly elected friend, hon. Mahen Seeruttun and a *vieux routier* in the person of hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell. Hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell is one of the rare MPs in this House who has represented the constituency of Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle for six consecutive elections, one after another. Very few MPs, especially when they are in Government, can do such, I'll say, a miracle in itself and I am proud to be by his side and through his advice and guidance, we are doing an excellent job in the constituency of Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle together with my friend, hon. Mahen Seeruttun.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, ongoing projects in Constituency No. 11, ongoing building and civil works up and down the country have transformed the whole island into a construction site, to such an extent that the demand for professionals, including civil engineers, bricklayers and skilled workers in the construction industry, keeps increasing, and such workers are gradually becoming scarce.

To substantiate the above, I would like to cite a few examples with regard to Constituency No. 11, Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle. Roads, drains, football grounds and other sports infrastructural projects actually being undertaken by the National Development Unit have been estimated at approximately Rs56 m., Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Drain works are in progress at New Grove, Nouvelle France, Grand Sable, Gros Billot and other parts of the constituency. For the past years, I have been talking in this House about the construction of multi-purpose buildings at Rivière des Créoles and Old Grand Port. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am glad to announce that the multi-purpose buildings in these two villages are nearly in completion now, and will be inaugurated shortly. The Local Infrastructure Fund financed these projects to the tune of Rs16 m., which are being implemented by the Grand Port District Council.

Another major project, financed by the LIF, is the market fair at Rose Belle. Here, I must thank the Government, most particularly, the Prime Minister, my friends, Dr. the hon. Arvin Boolell and Dr. the hon. Rajeshwar Jeetah who were there in 2005, for their unflinching support for the realisation of this project, which was long overdue. I used to say that three times the laying of foundation stone ceremony was carried out there without success, but the fourth one was the good one, and the modern biggest market fair in Mauritius is now operational as from January of this year.

Concerning the Cardiac Centre, hon. Dr. Rajeshwar Jeetah was the Minister of Health at that time and he opened the Cardiac Centre at the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, and the University is coming in the constituency of Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle.

Concerning road works in the constituency, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a stretch of 4.5 km of main road from Bois des Amourettes to Bambous Virieux is being upgraded by the Road Development Authority, at an estimated cost of Rs13.6 m. On the whole, only in Constituency No. 11, works are now in progress for a total value of Rs150 m.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, during heavy rainfall, the existing bridge at Ferney in the region of Old Grand Port gets flooded, thus cutting off traffic flow from Flacq towards Mahebourg and *vice versa* for hours at times. During my intervention on the Budget and Government Programme, I made an appeal to hon. Bachoo, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping if funds could be made available for the construction of the Ferney Bridge. I must, on behalf of my two colleagues, hon. Dr. Arvin

Boolell and hon. Mahen Seeruttun, as well as the people of our constituency and the country at large thank Government and hon. Minister Bachoo, for not only having made funds available, but works for the construction of the Ferney Bridge have already started. The Road Development Authority has awarded a contract of approximately Rs65 m. to Transinvest for the construction of the new bridge, and a new stretch of road measuring 570 metres long and 70 metres wide, with a hard shoulder of 1.5 metres wide on each side of the road. The new bridge will be raised by 1.5 metres above the existing road to contain the large volume of water passing through it. Three twin box culverts are also included in the project to cater for water flowing across the existing rivulets. In fact, the new stretch of road has been rerouted so as to make it larger, with fewer bands, thus making traffic flow more fluid and less accident prone even during rainy weather. Works have started since the beginning of November and are expected to be completed in six months' time. Here again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is another case to illustrate that this Government is a caring one, and always 'Put People First'.

The Deputy Speaker: Conclude now, please!

Mr Moutia: Two minutes more! Development does not stop here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. People in other regions of my constituency are impatiently waiting for long overdue projects to come. For instance, a multi-purpose building project at St. Hilaire/St. Hubert has been conceived in the past, but postponed due to lack of funds. I would here earnestly appeal to Government and to the hon. Minister of Finance to make necessary provision for funds so that the projects may be implemented in the near future.

Having witnessed dramatic events following torrential rains, we cannot overlook the importance of drains, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. 15 to 20 drain projects need to be promptly executed in the Old Grand Port/Rose Belle region before the forthcoming rainy season to avoid tragic incidents as in the recent past.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to keep people fit and healthy, a jogging track project at Gros Billot/New Grove is being processed to be implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development at an estimated cost of Rs4 m. Tender documents are being prepared and will be shortly awarded.

The inhabitants of New Grove are badly in need of a proper cremation ground. It is expected that same will be constructed at Gros Billot in the near future by the National Development Unit. The actual cremation ground of New Grove is in a very deplorable state.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to say a few words on a problem of ground movement at Quatre Soeurs/Deux Frères. Following torrential rains over the last few years, the south-east coastal region from Bois des Amourettes to Deux Frères has witnessed significant ground movement problem, resulting in apparent landslide around Jummah Street, Quatre Soeurs and soil erosion at Deux Frères. Residential buildings situated at the above localities have been seriously damaged. Structural cracks on walls, beam columns, roof slabs and floors have been observed in, at least, 10 houses at Quatre Soeurs and seven at Deux Frères. In order to ensure the safety of the inhabitants, potentially affected by these phenomena, a Crisis Committee has been set up by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping. The Ministry of Housing and Lands has been requested to carry out a feasibility study to relocate the inhabitants to a safe place in the vicinity. A warning system for the evacuation of the inhabitants in case of emergency will be set up in due course. Hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell, hon. Mahen Seeruttun and I had a recent gathering with the people of Quatre Soeurs and Deux Frères to sensitise them about the potential impending risk and to reassure them that Government strongly intends to do everything it can to get them out of this critical, traumatic and stressful situation. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the above risk assessment exercise, involving various authorities, has been initiated, following a Cabinet decision. It is a clear indication that this Government's policy of 'Putting People First' is really being put into practice, irrespective of the reported problem being located in an urban or a rural area.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for bearing with me.

Mr Pillay Chedumbrum: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Mr Ritoo rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 30 November 2010 at 11.30 a.m.

The vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr P. Jugnauth) rose and seconded.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

At 8.08 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 30 November 2010 at 11.30 a.m.