



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

FRIDAY 17 JUNE 2022

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Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology
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Hon. Avinash Teeluck

Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage

Hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal

Minister of Public Service, Administrative
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 15 of 2022

Sitting of Friday 17 June 2022

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis, at 3.00 p.m.

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Papers have been laid on the Table.

A. Prime Minister's Office**Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications****Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity**

- (a) Certificate of Urgency in respect of the The Food Bill (No. X of 2022). (In Original)
- (b) The Civil Aviation (Hadj 2022 Pilgrims) (Exemption) Order 2022. (Government Notice No. 145 of 2022)
- (c) The Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation for the year ended 30 June 2021.

B. Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities

- (a) The Electricity (Safety, Quality and Continuity) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 141 of 2022)
- (b) The Electricity (Metering, Billing and Collection) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 142 of 2022)
- (c) The Electricity (Licensing, Registration and Fees) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 143 of 2022)
- (d) The Electricity (Transitional Licence) Regulations 2022. (Government Notice No. 144 of 2022)

C. Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage

The Annual Report of the Mauritius Telugu Cultural Centre Trust for the year July 2019 - June 2020.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

**DRUG SEIZURES - PERSONS PROSECUTED & CONVICTED - PERIOD 2017
TO MAY 2022**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the persons prosecuted and convicted, if any, with regard to drug seizures of street value greater than Rs1 billion since year 2017 to date, including the seizure of –

- (a) heroin in 6 cylinders of Rs1.8 billion street value in March 2017;
- (b) 100 kgs of heroin on a speed boat of Rs1.5 billion street value in October 2018;
- (c) 95 kgs of cocaine in a *tractopelle* of Rs1.4 billion street value in July 2019, and
- (d) 243 kgs of heroin and 26 kgs of hashish in Pointe aux Cannoniers of Rs3.6 billion street value in May 2021.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first refer the hon. Leader of the Opposition to my comprehensive reply to PQ B/624 at our Sitting of 17 May 2022 in regard to arrests and seizures of drugs carried out since January 2015 to 12 May of this year, and I gave a list thereof and indicated the number of financial audit trails carried out in each case and the outcome thereof.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is pertinent to remind the House that for the period 2017 to May 2022, 17,556 drug cases have been detected and 15,571 persons arrested. The street value of the drugs seized is estimated around Rs13.7 billion. That proves, Mr Speaker, Sir, the sustained and successful crusade that we have been leading against drugs.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, after receiving credible information to the effect that dangerous drugs were imported in a container onboard vessel MSC IVANA, sailing from South Africa, the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit and the Mauritius Revenue Authority personnel searched the vessel on 09 March 2017.

As a result of this search exercise, 118 packets of drugs suspected to be heroin, weighing 135 kgs, worth two billion and twenty-five million rupees were secured from 6 sand blasting metal cylinders in which they were concealed.

The exhibits were brought to ADSU Headquarters for photographic exercise by the Scene of Crime Officers and subsequently sent to the Forensic Science Laboratory for analysis.

Eight suspects have been arrested during the course of the enquiry. So far, two of them have been prosecuted and convicted to undergo 3 years' imprisonment by the Intermediate Court for 'Money Laundering' respectively on 29 November 2018 and 17 January 2020. Five of them are provisionally charged with the offence of 'Drug Dealing with Aggravating Circumstances'.

I am also informed that one suspect is so far untraceable. Given that the investigation is complex and has international ramifications, enquiry into the case is proceeding. I wish to inform the House that mutual legal assistance was sought from South African and United Kingdom authorities since 2017 and 2018 respectively. Reports have been obtained from South Africa in August 2021 and from the United Kingdom in February 2022. Further reports are being sought from the office of the Interpol of South Africa.

As at now, the enquiry has reached an advanced stage and is expected to be completed shortly.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 30 October 2018, three individuals were arrested, one nautical mile away from Gunners Coin Island on a speed boat. Five raffia bags, each containing 20 parcels of heroine of a total weight of 100 kgs, were seized. During the course of the enquiry, eight other persons were also arrested in connection with the case.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that, amongst others, the following documents are being awaited to expedite progress of the enquiry –

- (a) additional documents from commercial banks and money changers following Judge's Order;
- (b) additional itemized bills from telephone operators following Judge's Order, and
- (c) report from Interpol in respect of foreign telephone numbers.

In this case also, it is expected that the enquiry will be completed by the end of this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (c) of the question, I wish to refer the hon. Leader of the Opposition to PQs B/317 and B/327 of our Sitting of 19 April 2022. The House was informed that, following a request made on Wednesday 10 July 2019, about 16 20 hours, by the

Service Manager of Scomat Ltd. situated at Grewals Lane, Pailles, a team from the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit (ADSU) proceeded there.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that –

- (i) the ADSU Officers were informed by the Manager of the company that on the same day, at around 15 30 hours, whilst two employees were inspecting the engine of a wheel loader imported by the company from Brazil, they found three black kit bags which were concealed in the engine compartment near the exhaust muffler of the said vehicle. The bags were handed over for safekeeping to the Store Supervisor, who, whilst checking the three bags, came across several rectangular parcels, each containing suspicious substances;
- (ii) the three bags were handed over to ADSU Officers who opened them in the presence of the employees present at the moment, and the contents thereof were suspected to be dangerous drugs. An enquiry into the matter was immediately initiated by the ADSU and the exhibits were secured and sent to the Forensic Science Laboratory for analysis;
- (iii) in the course of the enquiry, the drugs secured from the three bags were identified as cocaine. The total weight of the drugs seized is 85.1668 kgs of a street value amounting to Rs1.4 billion, and
- (iv) to date, statements from 18 persons, including employees of Scomat Ltd., have been recorded by ADSU Officers. So far, no evidence has been obtained that could lead to the arrest of any person and that could also re-orientate the investigation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that Police enquiry was also to determine the itinerary of the wheel loader from the port of embarkation to its destination. According to intelligence from the Interpol, the vehicle was embarked in Brazil for Mauritius. The wheel loader was off-loaded in Morocco and re-embarked for shipment to Mauritius. No information of evidential nature which could help in the progress of the investigation was obtained.

I am also informed that ADSU liaised with the Brazilian and Moroccan authorities for further intelligence that would provide a lead in the enquiry.

In view of the complexity of the investigation of this case, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that an interim report has been sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (d) of the question, I refer the hon. Leader of the Opposition to the reply I made to Parliamentary Question B/384 at the Sitting of Tuesday 18 May 2021.

Following the seizure of 26 kilograms of Cannabis Resin and 243.45 kilograms of Heroin of an approximate total street value of Rs3.4 billion, the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit started an enquiry with a view to identifying and apprehending all those persons suspected to be involved in this drug trafficking case.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, as at date, eight persons have been arrested in connection thereto, six of whom have been remanded to jail and two are detained in Police cell.

I am also informed by the Commissioner of Police that, in the course of the investigation, 75 persons have been interviewed. Despite the complex nature of this case and its international ramifications, Police is expected to complete the enquiry by end of this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since 2014, we have launched a crusade against drug trafficking and the drug mafia.

Consistently and with unparalleled determination, we are dismantling the drug networks. The exceptional results in terms of arrests and drug seizures, I have mentioned earlier, are testimony to the colossal work ongoing to clean our country from the drug scourge. We will not stop that crusade until we unearth the drug peddlers from whatever den they are operating their death business. They will be brought to justice and put behind bars, which is the only place where they deserve to be.

I reaffirm once again my personal unflinching commitment and that of my Government to do whatever it takes to protect our society, our youth in particular, from the devastating effects of illicit drugs.

Thank you.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, given the much greater amount of drugs presently in the country and the number of users, it is not surprising that the seizures now are much more than previously. I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he does not think it extremely worrying - I have taken the four biggest, by far, drug seizures for the last five years, and none of these enquiries for drug dealing are complete and none have been prosecuted. But I have gone further, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have looked at 120 cases of major drug seizures since 2017 to 2020, and the House would be sad to know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that only three cases of these 120 major cases have been tried, and some judgements are still awaited. So, my question to the Prime Minister is: what is wrong? Seizure is one thing, but, surely, we need to identify the perpetrators, prosecute them and convict them, and put them behind bars.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the fact that there have been those very important seizures of that amount of drug really worth billions of rupees is itself testimony of the determination, first of all, of the Police, and of the Government to deal with and to dismantle the drug traffickers' network.

The Leader of the Opposition is now saying that he has carried out an exercise, and he mentioned some figures, which I need to check because I do not have all the figures with me. But I have also done an exercise, expecting that he would make such a comment. I have a list here, Mr Speaker, Sir, of the number of cases from, let us say, 2000 to nearly today. And I can mention dozens and dozens of cases, if I start from the time when the hon. Leader of the Opposition, himself, was part of the Labour-PMSD Government since 2005. And I have the list where no person has even been prosecuted and convicted before a Court. I am not going to take the time of the House, but I can, of course, at an ulterior date give a list of those cases. There are dozens and dozens of those cases.

As I have mentioned, the Police have been able to arrest people. In one case I mentioned, two persons have already been convicted. For the others, the enquiry is ongoing, because the Police must be able to gather maximum evidence, and evidence which is likely to convince a court of law to convict those people.

It does happen that, in some cases, the Police have not even been able to get a suspect. The case I have mentioned is the 95kgs of cocaine in a *tractopelle*. Unfortunately, so far, the Police have not been able to arrest any person and even to have a suspect. So, we must look at the whole picture, and I hope that the Leader of the Opposition will acknowledge the fact that,

for quite some time, - at least I can say because I have the list, since we have been in Government - there has been a number of major seizures of drugs.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, my point this afternoon is not to go tit for tat with the Prime Minister. I have also gone through the 2005 and beyond. I note Siddick Islam, Veeren Peroomal, and they were all put behind bars during that particular Labour-PMSD regime, Mr Speaker, Sir.

What I am saying to the Prime Minister is this: there is no doubt that it cannot be right for an enquiry to go on for five years, witnesses will forget, witnesses will disappear; it is not right to do so. The Lam Shang Leen Drug Commission recommended the doing away with ADSU and the setting up of the National Drugs Investigation Commission so that not just the seizure - the seizure is one thing - but the investigation, the prosecution and the conviction of these people can be expedited and done professionally and expeditiously. So, the best that I can say to the Prime Minister is that it does not get any better. I would like it to get much better than whatever it was before.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we, as a Government, always have to see to it that we improve the way in which the Police operates, the way in which it carries out its investigation, and the way in which evidence is collected and be brought before a court of justice. I can say that from the remarks of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking. Of course, apart from the recommendation that has been made, the Commission had also commended mainly the two Units for having played their part, either alone or jointly, in ensuring that many drug traffickers and dealers be successfully prosecuted. They were referring to ADSU and the Customs of the Mauritius Revenue Authority. But I am indeed aware that the Commission of Inquiry has recommended that we have another institution, another unit, another body – whatever you call it - in place, to replace ADSU and Customs.

We have looked at this recommendation very carefully and we are not yet convinced that it should be implemented. In fact, the reason that has been put forward by the Commission is that the Unit of the Police is seriously underequipped, whether in terms of manpower, expertise and skills, technology and equipment. And this is why from that time we have, in fact, increased the budget not only of the Police but also of the ADSU itself.

In terms of equipment, I have the information, but, again, I shall not take the time of the House to say how much money has additionally been spent to acquire new equipment. I know

that the personnel of ADSU has been increased quite a lot, and in terms of expertise and skills also, there are training programmes which are made available to them. So, we are addressing and we shall continue to address the reasons that have been put forward by the Commission to justify the setting up of another Unit.

Not to be too long, I shall say this. We have to be careful. You know, Mr Speaker, Sir, the work of the Customs is also very specialised in the detection of illicit drugs. But it is going to be difficult. When we look at what obtains in other countries also, they have within their customs a specialised unit to deal with narcotics. And that is why, we, in Government, as at now, are not yet convinced that there should be a merger of those two Units into one separate body. We should not also forget that ADSU does not operate on its own. ADSU operates within the framework of the Police, and in quite a number of cases we have seen, especially recently, when we see those mafias themselves start to use force, violence against the Police. ADSU, then, mobilises the other Units of the Police, namely the SMF, for example, to assist it in undertaking its mission.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, given the length of the reply, I do not mind, but I hope you will give me some additional time to be fair also to the Opposition.

Mr Speaker, Sir, ADSU is still complaining about the equipment, I must tell you. I will now talk about third parties dealing with ADSU. I looked at the list again, and in it, Mr Speaker, Sir, you will be surprised to see that there are 22 cases which have been referred to the Forensic Science Laboratory over the last three years; the last one dating 2019. And these exhibits have still not been examined by the Forensic Science Laboratory. I understand that there are proposals, legislative proposals in particular, by the FSL to be able to speed up things, and Government is dragging its feet on this.

The Prime Minister: I would have expected the hon. Leader of the Opposition to have, at least, included in his question, one paragraph concerning these cases which he is now mentioning ...

Mr X. L. Duval: I will come back.

The Prime Minister: ...that have been referred to the FSL. I welcome another PNQ, specific on this issue. As I have answered, by getting all the information from the Police, I would have got the information from the FSL. I am not, of course, in a position to give any information.

But, again, hon. Leader of the Opposition, you are saying that it is taking time and so on. If I take only one example, there was a case which was reported on 11 February 2005...

Mr X. L. Duval: It is not the point.

The Prime Minister: ...with regard to seizure of 1,295.7g of heroin that was concealed in 14 parcels and so on and so forth. You know, that enquiry is from 2005, since you were in Government, and it is still pending. The enquiry is still pending! 2005! Why is it that from 2005 to 2014, this case could not be resolved? At least people could have been arrested and prosecuted! I have a list of cases; dozens and dozens of cases like that. So, when you say it is not tit for tat, this is what you are doing! You are telling me why is it that those cases have not yet been resolved, and when you were in the Labour-PMSD Government, there are so many cases which have not been resolved.

I acknowledge that that there are cases which have not yet been resolved. I am not denying that fact. But there are quite a number of cases, especially very, very serious, important cases, and major seizures which have been subjected to enquiries which are underway.

Mr X. L. Duval: I fail to see how bringing 2005 into this PNQ helps to elucidate the question. The question was that there are long delays and Forensic Laboratory is aware of 2005, but the Prime Minister is not aware that there are such delays under his mandate. I am telling him this now: the same thing happens with Judge's Order, and there are lots of delays in Judge's Orders being issued.

This must be addressed by the Government with the Judiciary. And the third delay that the ADSU Officers - if you care to speak to them, hon. Prime Minister - will tell you is that the itemised bills that come from the Telecom companies often take months and years. These are three issues. Forget about 2005! These are three live issues which are being put to you, and we are asking you, as an Opposition, to have a look at it so that we come to a better situation than 3 cases out of the 120 prosecuted over these years, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Prime Minister: One of the specific issues that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has mentioned is the itemised bill of the service providers. I am not aware. Of course, I need to gather information, but this is what I was told. You are saying that it takes a long time to get a Judge's Order. I do not know whether it is a criticism against the Court! But I shall find out why it is so, if indeed it is taking a long time, and who is responsible for that.

Mr X. L. Duval: That is why I am asking you to find out things as they are today and to forget about 2005.

The Prime Minister: How can I forget?

Mr X. L. Duval: That is another issue. Mr Speaker, Sir, now, I am going to ask the hon. Prime Minister about Mr Kistnah. Is he now a star witness? That was in the main question. So, you will have the answer. Is he now a star witness, and for what reason is he now no longer being prosecuted but a witness? Is that the case? Part (a) of the question.

The Prime Minister: Yes, you have asked me, but I have not asked for the names because the question is about information as to the persons prosecuted. I have not asked for the names of those people who are involved in those cases. Mr Kistnah is still a suspect, not a witness.

(Interruptions)

He is still a suspect, not a witness!

Mr X. L. Duval: That is not my information, but okay. Let us see what is right or what is wrong. I am going to ask you now about this *tractopelle* that was imported. Has the Customs changed their procedures in any way now or improve their procedures so that we hope that such imports of drugs are not allowed to go through? Because it was not something that was seized by the Police; it was something that was remitted to the Police by the mechanics, etc., of Scomat. Have they improved their procedures since that time? Are you satisfied with that?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, especially in the light of such kind of case, the ADSU, the authorities have to review the way in which they proceed in order to detect illicit drugs. Of course, I admit that in this case - and this is the fact of the case - it was only the personnel of this company who had got into contact with the ADSU - I have given this information - and then they were able to seize this drug.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition says 'forget about the past', as if let us judge the Government only on what is happening today. But we have to look at the past also. Will he not acknowledge that in the past, there have been cases where the authorities were not able to detect the drug, and it was only when somebody had reported a matter to the Police that they were then able to seize the drug? So, there are cases, and I do not deny that. But the point, of course, is that we have to see to it that we improve the net that we have so that no drug is able to pass through that net.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Last question? It is a difficult one. Mr Speaker, Sir, in terms of equipment for ADSU, which you have raised just now, the ADSU says that the MRA Customs are far better equipped than them, that the MRA has onsite equipment to test drugs, whether it is a drug or not a drug, that they have all sorts of high-tech equipment to be able to do their work, whereas ADSU is a bit of the *parent pauvre*, they do not have the proper cameras. Even that was raised by the Lam Shang Leen Report, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I am going to ask the Prime Minister what he is going to do. He says he is giving more money, but my information, which is live, is that the ADSU Officers are very unsatisfied with the equipment, the treatment that they get also, obviously, in terms of promotion, etc., but mostly the equipment that is at their disposal to do their work.

The Prime Minister: If I can remember - I hope I am not mistaken - it is not correct to say that the Lam Shang Leen Report is saying that they get more money than the ADSU.

Mr X. L. Duval: No! He said that they are badly equipped.

The Prime Minister: Yes, they say that, but the Lam Shang Leen Report also says that a budget is allocated to the Narcotics Division of Customs and a budget to ADSU. This is why he recommended that the two units be merged into one body. But it is not correct to say that ADSU is not getting the necessary resources. As I said, I had the details of how many resources were being allocated to ADSU, and again, if we compare the past - I am sure you will say 'forget about the past' - what is the budget that was allocated to ADSU compared to...

Mr X. L. Duval: In rupees, it is worthless.

The Prime Minister: Well, rupees worthless...

Mr X. L. Duval: Remember!

The Prime Minister: Look at the resources! We are not only talking, Mr Speaker, Sir; we also act. Later on, I shall provide the information on how many more resources have been allocated to ADSU. Since 2018, Rs78 m. worth of equipment only, but in terms of personnel...

Mr X. L. Duval: Peanuts!

The Prime Minister: Peanuts! But you were not even giving the peanuts!

So, if you describe it as peanut, well, people will see; people will be able to judge. But I can say that, in terms of personnel, in terms of equipment, and also in terms of training. But, again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not saying that we are just satisfied and content with what we are

giving to ADSU. Obviously, we need to give more. So, in 2014, there were 350 Officers; in 2022, there were 456 Officers. But, if there is a need for, and if we are able to provide them with more Officers, and with better equipment, of course, we shall do so.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman, time is over by 5 minutes! Don't grieve.

Mr Juman: Can I?

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I 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 seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Food Bill (No. X of 2022) was read a first time.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Supplementary Appropriation (2020-2021) (No. 3) Bill (No. VII of 2022) was read the third time and passed.

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2022-2023) BILL 2022

(NO. IX OF 2022)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the Appropriation (2022- 2023) Bill 2022 (No. IX of 2022).

Question again proposed.

(3.39 p.m.)

Ms N. Ramyad (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first and foremost, thank you for the opportunity to intervene on the Budget

2022/2023 and at the same time congratulate the Government and in particular, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for the presentation of a Budget based on social justice, compassion and innovation.

The current Budget Speech delivered by the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has been without doubt one of the toughest and most challenging Budget that any Government of the Republic of Mauritius has had to prepare during the last 20 to 30 years. While the world economy is still experiencing the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the breakout of Russo/Ukrainian war has added further complication and challenges, both economically and geopolitically. The current geopolitical situation has once again taught us, just like the COVID-19 did a couple of years back, that no matter how much planning a Government could lay out, economic factors could still remain quite volatile.

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, despite not being a world war in the military sense, has had such an effect on the economy of every country in such a way that it could be labelled as a global war. The state of the global economy has been hit on a level unseen since the time of the oil crisis of 1973, causing a major disruption in trade between countries, a shortage in the supply chain of food and foodstuffs, along with a sharp and continuous rise in the price of food, oil and gas, and other basic commodities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when the world has been stricken with two major crises since the early 2020, we had to overcome the economic, social, moral and emotional aspect of COVID-19, and now, the Russo/Ukrainian war. The war has induced another challenge to the management of funds and the economy as we are again sailing in an unknown territory where each and every day brings along a new economic threat, a new economic web, a new economic model that we have to overcome. Crises bring along challenges, but at the same time, it shows resilience, it shows unity, it shows strength and cooperation.

The Mauritian population has been the biggest asset and force in these testing times. Many a time, they have had questions, they have been scared, they have assumed, presumed, and have had doubts, but they never lost hope and their spirit of positivity. They have shown solidarity, walk hand in hand to help neighbours, friends, and families, and have followed protocols, instructions and regulations, leaving aside their personal belief but abide to the collective benefit and collective responsibilities. To this discipline and exemplary Mauritian

unity, I say hats off, and I lay my gratitude and evoke my pride. Our nation has always shown that as one people and as one nation, we have and we will achieve and face all challenges together “*la main dan la main.*”

However, much to our chagrin, it seems that the Members of the Opposition have been living under a rock for the past few years. They have deliberately tried to downplay the effect of an ongoing globalised conflict together with a constantly changing geopolitical world, and are desperately trying to shift the blame on the Government regarding the resulting effect on our economy. However, much to their distain, this Government has been able to come up with the best possible Budget in such a difficult context.

Today, it looks that it hurts. It hurts sharply on the other side of the House. It hurts because we should have failed to overcome in the management of COVID-19. We should have failed in assisting the population. We should have failed in bringing reforms and our planning for the future. We should have failed on the economic and emotional front. And what hurts most is we did not fail. We succeeded in managing an unknown strike and this success was not once, it is coming up repeatedly. We see difficulties arising from international setups, but we rise up stronger because we act and think as a team. And we have a very strong, resilient and hardworking leadership in the person of the Prime Minister who walks the talk.

I know it hurts on the other side that is why, the only recourse is demagogy, rumours, gossips, and lastly I just saw a very new pronounced strategy, that is, of decontextualizing facts and figures, by forcefully repeating half information without a proper background. Let me remind you that half a truth is often a great lie. Having recourse to lies may work for a very short time, but the population is wise enough to screen the truth from the lies but what hurts more on the other side is that we succeeded. We stood up to the expectation of the population and at no moment, we stopped listening or walking along with them. We are a Government driven by only one philosophy - That of “*working for and with the people*”.

Mr Speaker Sir, I would now refer to the speech made by the Second elected Member of Constituency No.6, unfortunately he is not here, Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or. He was an ex colleague from the Mahatma Gandhi Institute where we both have been educators at some point of time. It is one experience that I am sure we both would cherish all throughout our lives as there is a very strong belief that states –

“Once an educator, always an educator.”

I strongly believe in this principle because engaging oneself in teaching, moulding a kid’s life to make him think and act independently is a noble job. To be constantly engaged in forging a kid’s emotional, academic, artistic intelligence is a pledge we all take and work upon constantly.

It is with deep regret and concern when I saw this hon. Member leave the House, excuse himself from the House to condemn someone based on allegations, an allegation that has not been proved yet. Is it not unfair to judge, condemn and punish someone on unfounded grounds? Mr Speaker, Sir, if we would have all, as teachers, indulged in such doings, then no teacher or no student would have ever stayed in a class.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another thing that I would also take up in the education system is the education system at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute. We are all constantly driven by the Gandhian principle and try to inculcate his values in our teachings and learnings. Am I not right, Sir? Unfortunately, he is not here. The basic principle of Gandhi is that of *Ahinsa*; meaning non-violence.

The verbal violence displayed yesterday by this hon. Member, even going to the extent of not respecting a deceased politician who has been the Prime Minister and President of the Republic, without hesitation and shame, is astounding. The deceased gentleman cannot even defend; only any defence from his side. Is it not hitting below the belt, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Through my experience as a teacher, I opted to teach constructive criticisms to differentiate between facts and figures and gossips, that is, to check your facts right. Not to hit below the belt or indulge in a tit for tat game, that is, “an eye for eye will make the world go blind” as Gandhiji so rightly said.

To give the full context and to give the full, raw information instead of selecting information or decontextualizing them for personal gains even if it amounts to political gains, to discuss ideas and not people personal acts or choice.

I leave the rest to your enlightened conscience. I just hope that students will not fear the hypocrisy of politics that some politicians practice and used as tools to devalue, denigrate and humiliate. I will end this part on the quote of Ralph Waldo Emerson who so rightly says –

“People are very inclined to set moral standards for others.”

Let me now come, Mr Speaker, Sir, to the Budget. What should be retained from this Budget is when we choose to do a Budget; it is all about “making choices”. Making and setting up priorities.

The Government chose to invest in people. It chose to put the population as its core and prime focus. For this, I commend the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. We have never foregone our pledge and objective following our election, that is, to stand by and with the population.

Time of crisis is very difficult to live, but it helps to unveil the truth, the dedication and the perseverance. It shows that our mission has remained unflinching and our vision to bring along modernity and a full dose of creativity in doing things remains as the foundation of our actions and thoughts.

My speech today is a simple and short one addressed directly to Mauritian families, to the working class, the youth and those seeking to be pro-active within a dynamic and a competitive set-up.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what should be retained from the content of this Budget entitled “With the People, For the People”. What are the measures taken to ensure the realization of the vision of this Government in the short, medium and long-term and what does this Budget offer on a micro-economic and on a macro-economic level and what are the incentives in this Budget to encourage young people to believe in the future of this country?

“With the People, For the People”. Those are not just some vain words. This Government has proven that with every step taken and every proposed policy measure, the priority is to first and foremost ensure the future of the country and to put the welfare of the Mauritian people at the core of this Budget.

Let us start by noting that a particular attention has been given to motivate our young people and to facilitate their participation as major actors in economic activities. This Government has come up with exceptional measures to ensure that our young population, in particular the graduates, the skilled and those with a vision and wishing to be their own bosses have all the support they would need to create their start-ups from scratch.

This is a Budget that emphasises on innovation and entrepreneurship, while giving the opportunity to young people, and all those who wish to take risks and innovate, to participate economically in the food security program, by helping them invest in the agro-industry sector.

It is true that the same Budget states that the Government will offer 8,353 jobs in the public sector to absorb skilled and unskilled workers, graduates and post graduates. At the same time, this Budget enables the younger generation to think about entrepreneurship, becoming their own boss and using their knowledge, skills and attitude to sail in the world of innovation, creativity and using new technologies to invest in our core sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction, ICT, events and arts management, creative and entertainment industry and the financial sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with this, let me highlight some of the measures taken in this Budget regarding small and medium agro-industrial entrepreneurship. For too long, the agricultural and farming sector has unfortunately been relegated to the rank of a non-glamorous industry, unworthy of being undertaken by the highly educated or academically qualified work force. This Budget provides incentives to each and everyone to explore the agricultural industry and the fisheries sector.

Let me go directly on how someone can practically undertake this challenge. A university graduate, be it from the law and management faculty, the science faculty, the economics and accounting departments, the arts faculty, and the engineering and agricultural faculty can make a cluster of professionals. They will easily be able to register a company or a cooperative, all of which have been made easier by the various Ease of Doing Business incentives in the Budget. They shall obtain the appropriate support and mentoring from institutions like the EDB, SME (Mauritius), FAREI, Mauritius Research and Innovation Institute, Ministry of Agriculture or Fisheries, the National Cooperative College, the Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives. Landscape Mauritius and the Rose Belle Sugar Estate are institutions accredited for agricultural land lease, and financial institutions such as the DBM offer funding, grants, subsidies and other financial incentives.

Budget propositions such as the increase in grants to boost local production through subsidies on fruit and vegetables, livestock, apiculture, fertilizers and composting materials, will reduce the financial burden on start-ups given the price hikes on imported inputs. The budgeted

sum of Rs3 billion mobilised for farmers, planters, breeders and fishers are examples of some of the interesting initiatives to bolster our primary sector output and the food processing parks will generate added value to the local food industry.

As stated in paragraph 52 of the Budget, the Government through the Development Bank of Mauritius, will be investing in two food security clusters at a cost of Rs200 m. each, namely an agro-processing park at Henrietta and a fruit-processing cluster at Rivière du Rempart are very interesting incentives to the start-ups.

An income tax holiday of 8 years for planters engaged in innovation and sustainable agricultural practices is without a doubt an encouraging measure that will attract the younger generation and lead to the professionalisation of this sector. Self-sufficiency in food can only be attained by the modernisation and transformation of the agricultural sector and by attracting young and skilled talents. This Budget provides the perfect gateway to attaining this objective. The same applies for the livestock breeding sector.

The livestock industry has an important role to our food security strategy regarding the local meat and dairy production sector. The increase on subsidy on animal feed, investment in livestock zones, extension of the Cattle Breeding Scheme to importers of cattle, grants to purchase calves aged less than 1 year, subsidies on the purchase of equipment, goat farming scheme for cooperatives are real time measures for increasing interest, exploration, trial and implementation among the young workforce. Who does not want to probe and explore a world full of potential, possibilities and challenge, if you are a young, dynamic and active individual?

I will now add a personal touch to this dynamic thinking. Apiculture has been given a special focus in this Budget when elaborating on the different incentives in the agricultural sector. For that, I commend both the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security and the Minister of Finance on this important fact. Mauritius is the appropriate place to develop a full-fledged apiculture industry not only for the local market but also to emerge on the international market. We have the appropriate climate, the appropriate grounds and the right set-up to promote apiculture among Mauritians. Beekeepers can either operate on a very small scale or on a larger scale and still be able to derive profits from their investment. The 1980's Agricultural Youth Club has helped in creating many apiculture entrepreneurs. Measures such as a subsidy of Rs500 per bee queen, beeswax at an affordable price and new mellifluous plants can be considered as a

form of appropriate technical support to beekeepers, whilst a one-off grant of Rs150 per beekeeper and the scheme for acquisition of CCTV cameras to secure their breeding grounds are well-thought measures. I am sure the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security along with FAREI will accompany individuals through youth clubs, cooperatives to succeed in the field.

As we talk about the transformation of the sector through mechanisation, innovation and sustainability, I have to point out the Micro-Propagation and Seed Production Scheme which are being introduced. There is no food production without seed cultivation. This Scheme will benefit both existing and new planters to create a home nursery. The Rs500,000 earmarked for seeds sustainability is a commendable one. Incentives on fertilizers, bio-fertilizers and composts are also important component in sustaining crop cultivation and initial investment and motivation to engage in agricultural fields.

It has been found that almost all start-ups registered within the sector also opt to be part of a cooperative. The Budget promotes the formation and the sustainability of cooperatives by giving various incentives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to include the blue economy and fishery measures in my speech, both as a marine biologist and as someone who believes that the blue economy provides loads of opportunities and potential. For a country which has an Exclusive Economic Zone of 1,284,997 square kilometres, it is of concern that two-thirds of our country's fish and seafood consumption, are of imported origin. We have the potential to drastically reduce our reliance on imports. For this to happen, we need to review our blue economic model in order to optimise on our resources and to provide mentoring support and initiatives to further capitalize on this vast and under-utilised potential.

I will here again point out on the need of clustering university freshers, graduates or trainees, technically trained workforce from the MITD and fishers and inhabitants of the coastal regions, within cooperatives, with the aim of exploring, investing and emerging as economic players in this field. For this to happen, we shall need a full-fledged mentoring program with the EDB, the Ministry of Agro-Industry and, Blue Economy, the Maritime Trainee Academy and private partners as well as international expertise, and here I am thinking of countries such as Norway or Japan, who have a worldwide reputation in this field.

Those start-ups, to which I am referring, will need our continuous monitoring and support, right from the conception of their business plan. However, I shall make an appeal to the young generations to probe the possibilities and to engage themselves in this measured-risk taking endeavour. This Budget provides the following well devised incentives. I shall refer to paragraph 83, –

- where the Ministry intends to make 6 barachois available for the production of crabs;
- 4 sites have also been allocated for off-lagoon aquaculture.

Paragraph 84 also mentions that –

- a new concession framework will be introduced in the maritime zones to allow for in-lagoon pearl oyster and algae culture;
- the additional hatchery at the Albion Fisheries and Research Centre to increase the production of fingerlings will also be beneficial to the start-ups;
- stock assessment on the Saya de Malha bank to identify small pelagic species for local consumption will also help increase the market potential to have a greater return on investment, and
- above all, I welcome the grant given by the Government for the acquisition of semi-industrial fishing vessels by registered cooperatives to a threshold of Rs6 m., and the rest will be financed through loans by the MauBank.

Mr Speaker, Sir, amongst the various measures in the Budget to encourage the dynamic young talents to think outside the box, I will also like to state the opportunities that start-ups may look for in the construction sector as well. Paragraph 107 states that public contracts below Rs20 m. for small contractors. This could encourage young civil, structural and electrical engineers, quantity surveyors, skilled and qualified electricians and plumbers, to collaborate and undertake such projects as construction entrepreneurs.

Talking about arts and culture as an industry, I commend the Artist Incubator Scheme to nurture and develop new talents. The National Arts Centre, the *Centre de Formation Artistique*, the Mauritius Arts Expo and other similar platforms are important launchers that would help create and promote the arts and culture industry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before concluding I would like to offer my gratitude to the Minister of Finance for my constituency No. 11 –

- *un portefeuille de R 501 millions pour construire les drains ;*
- *des milliards de roupies pour le coastal refurbishment entre Rivière des Créoles et Deux Frères sont deux mesures que je ne puisse mentionner dans mon discours du budget.*

With the advent of climate change and sea level rise, our south east coast is being impacted by beach erosion leading to shoreline degradation and putting amenities at risk. And the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change has really done a very good consultancy project and came up with a full-fledged coastal protection rehabilitation programme since 2019. Presently, the coastal protection works are over a total length of approximately 5.4 km and it extends from Pointe aux Feuilles to Grand Sable, Petit Sable to Bambous Virieux, Bambous Vireux to Anse Jonchée, Providence to Vieux Grand Port, Bois des Amourettes and works progress is now expected to be completed by the third quarter of 2022.

Here, I would also stress on the consideration that the Ministry of Finance as well as the Minister of Environment gave to our request for a waterfront project at Deux Frères. It is now a reality; the consultancy service for this project is ongoing for design of works. Implementation of works on site is expected to start in January 2023 and this Budget allocates the necessary funds. Following the MV Wakashio oil spill, Rivière des Créoles and Vieux Grand Port were mostly affected and accordingly, these sites have also been earmarked for coastal protection, landscaping and rehabilitation works. The tender for recruitment of a Consultant for these sites have already been floated. So, I had to lay down officially my gratitude to the Minister of Finance for being *à l'écoute des mandants de la circonscription et en même temps remercier le Premier ministre qui a toujours eu une écoute spéciale, une écoute affectionate*, as we term it for the constituency. *Merci, M. le Premier ministre.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall conclude on this note. This Budget is one that offers a whole lot of opportunities, mainly to the younger people and to those persons who believe in innovation and risk-taking. The Government has laid out the ground work for the creation of those opportunities. The Budget reflects the realities. We speak the truth and we believe in the truth. We are not building sand castles but we are laying the foundation of a future based on

opportunities, and are building on our strengths by investing in people and forging a unified force where each and every citizen becomes a partner in sharing and caring.

This Budget has rightly identified the policy change that Mauritians should engage in the coming years. Measures for reducing our carbon footprint, creating the right ecosystem to achieve greater food security independence, transitioning towards a greener economy with a deeper utilisation of renewable energy will not only ignite growth opportunities for Mauritius but also structurally repair the state of our public accounts.

This Government is also resolved to equip the country with the right regulatory policy regime to protect the most precarious segment of the population but also engage, encourage job creation, confirming mild or lower taxation at large. It demonstrates that this Government is yet again, favouring labour driven activities instead of pure tax subsidised capital intensive driven programmes.

I end my speech by again reiterating my belief that walking hand-in-hand with the population will favour personal, economic and social growth. Together we will climb through difficulties. These are what define this Budget; 'For the People, With the People'.

Thank you.

(4.20 p.m.)

Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget is a lost opportunity. I will start by asking the very basic question. Where are resilience, recovery and sustainability to build back better? Our friends will say that Government is Government, and Government so decides. And it has decided in favour of the corporate sector. It has decided to exempt corporate sector from its massive land tax obligation. It has decided to turn its back on people who think everything is allowed and everything goes. I am sure the hon. Minister of Education has taken cognizance of what has recently happened at the MES in relation to paper being leaked. I think this is a very serious matter. And I would have expected a statement to be made by the hon. Minister of Education because we are talking of so many families who are concerned. And, of course, that has created not only a climate of uncertainty, but there is no trust in an institution which conducts exams. And what is being done, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, to reassure parents, teachers and students? One suspension does not solve the

problem. It is the very foundation of education that has been shaken and stirred, and I expect Government to come and react and take appropriate measure. So, when there is erosion of confidence, how can we build a nation, Mr Speaker, Sir, and help recovery, give resilience and sustainability to build back better?

Mr Speaker, Sir, the regime is a mere tenant and living on borrowed time, and if fundamentals are not addressed, Government will continue to allow the rupee to depreciate for tax buoyancy and growth, except that it is not real growth and will lead to descent into social chaos.

Under the MSM Government, the economy is like a cockpit of a crashing airliner where the dashboard lights are all flashing red. It is precisely because it is heading for a crash that the Minister announced a breaking news yesterday on radio. Government has decided to partially privatise Metro Express Limited. Now, if this is management of economy by the best Minister of Finance of Africa, then there is deep-seated concern. One may say it's the economy, stupid.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Budget is not with the people and for the people. Putting an inflated price before people is not shared prosperity. It is shared poverty. 40% of the poorest section of the population is being let down. The climate of uncertainty and unpredictability also contributes to the high prevalence of anxiety and depression in the population.

I grant you, Mr Speaker, Sir, our situation is a far cry from Sri Lanka, which has a huge external debt, and unlike Pakistan, which has an import cover of two months. In Sri Lanka, civil servants are given a day off to plough the land in an effort to produce more of what we eat and to eat what we produce, to reduce the import bill. In Pakistan, people are urged to drink fewer cups of tea to keep the country's economy afloat. It is an important bill for them and is as high as USD 600 million for tea.

As a net food-feed-fuel and fertiliser importing country, if there is no sound economic management of public debt, external debts will escalate and will impact upon our investment grade. External stability is threatened by worsening trade and current account imbalances. Consequently, the rupee is being weakened and foreign exchange reserves are being depleted, and it will accentuate with the rise in the interest rate of the US dollar. Mr Speaker, Sir, we must never lose sight that we are one notch above junk. As we say, although it is a long, long way to Tipperary, we are not too far either from the Sri Lankan pogrom.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these budget proposals come from the weakest Government that this country has known since Independence. You want me to say it again? These budget proposals come from the weakest Government that this country has known since Independence. It is a web of bluff. Economists have rung the alarm bell and remind the regime that we are living on borrowed time, borrowed money, as if there is no tomorrow, and we are inching closer to the brink of an economic collapse. Minister of Finance, either you reverse policy or you maintain the trend, and we know what the consequences would be on the weak, the poor and the restless, Mr Speaker, Sir, because at the end of the day, people need money to buy basic commodities.

We are pinning great expectations on tourists' arrival. Unfortunately, the tourism rage travel might be affected given the slowdown in our main markets coupled with rising interest rate. The rise of the interest rate in the US will impact on our balance of payment and currency, and rupee is on the constant decline.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the time when we would have expected Government to switch gear and move towards a more focused and structured investment programme. But, year in, year out, public sector investment programme is on the downtrend in relation to massive shortfall, and this is what happens year in, year out. The root causes of delayed project are due to arbitrary and selective choice of contractors.

Yesterday, I was quite surprised in relation to the question put by the Leader of the Opposition to the Minister responsible for National Infrastructure. He was unwilling to disclose basic information to the community in relation to an acquisition of land. Access to information regarding flood prone areas or natural drainage path is a right. I still cannot understand why the reply was not forthcoming, and why the Minister concerned felt that the information is sensitive, and he was indifferent to the appeal made by the Leader of the Opposition. Why? Who are the special beneficiaries of this privileged information? Information is knowledge and power, unless the information is disclosed to the cronies to speculate on land. But, you know, when there is opacity and non-transparency, it is a guaranteed downfall. The focus of the Budget is on land speculation; the right of those who have residence permits to acquire property subject to contribution of 10% to solidarity levy. Mr Speaker, Sir, at a later stage, I will come to the *festival de la terre*.

At a time when poverty is rampant, why have they eliminated the 4.8 billion subsidies on basic commodities? It is inappropriate, and I still cannot understand. I hope the Minister has not cowed down to big importers and traders who have threatened to disrupt the supply. *À qui profite le crime?* It's a *lèse-majesté*, and the outcome is to make the poor poorer. There is a big price to pay for misleading the information. I have, here, an interview given by the President of the *Association pour la Protection de l'Environnement et des Consommateurs* who stated very clearly "*l'allocation de R 1,000 sur les salaires partira en fumée.*" Indeed, the Rs1,000 dispensed as financial support has already been sucked into the vortex of inflation, which is a tax without legislation, first and foremost, on the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the widows, the orphans, the unemployed and the middle class.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the inflation is a spit fire dragon that has to be slain. It is not because almost 70% of our inflation is imported that it would be difficult to mitigate. The Bank of Mauritius cannot be the errand boy of the Minister of Finance. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have said right from the outset that the cure is worse than the disease. I was shocked to hear from several Members on the Government bench that the raid on the Bank of Mauritius was justified, irrespective if the internal reserves of the Bank run dry. This Government is a proponent of high fiscal deficit, and the more financing from the Bank of Mauritius will plunge the economy deeper into inflationary spiral. It is like pouring fuel to a roaring fire.

Mr Speaker, Sir, not a single week goes by that the rupee is not depreciated; inflation is 12% and food inflation of 18% is a tax, as I have stated, without legislation, which hit the poor, the vulnerable and the middleclass harder. Poverty and cost of living crisis is a living reality. There are people eating not more than a meal a day, and it has become a treat for many.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since 2015, their policy has been one of depreciation of the rupee. They never prepare for the worse and hope for the best. They forget that there is no free lunch. They have put sound economic management on the back-burner. In the face of world crisis, the Minister opted for the easy option. This is the reason why the regime raided the Bank, not of a one-off of Rs60 billion, but a total amount of 158 billion, which is indeed a super bonanza for the raiders. The raid, Mr Speaker, Sir, has not stopped for the Financial Year 2021-2022; an additional of 25 billion was transferred from the Bank of Mauritius to the account of Government via the MIC.

The regime snubbed the recommendations of the IMF, which stressed in the name of governance that the Bank of Mauritius should stop financing fiscal expenditure. The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance earlier explained the relevance and importance of being delisted, of course, from the EU black list and the Financial Action Task Force, and there are lessons to be drawn from this. That is why the Bank of Mauritius cannot be the errand boy of the Ministry of Finance, and the demarcation line between fiscal and monetary policy has to be clear.

We must not be indifferent and insensitive to World Bank, IMF and Moody's Credit Ratings as we are under their constant watch. The role of the Bank of Mauritius is to stabilise the currency and make it available without delays accruing. As of now, there is a tacit measure of foreign exchange control by the Bank of Mauritius. Mr Speaker, Sir, the vault of the Bank has been raided, and it is not Members of the Opposition who are saying it. That was clearly spelt out by the former Governor of the Central Bank, Mr Basant Roi. And you are not going to say that he is a demagogue or anti-patriot. His concern is inflation, the precursor to the cost of living crisis. Mr Speaker, Sir, where is the stabilisation account of the State Trading Corporation? Ripped apart by the Minister of Finance as part of the rip-off policy of the regime. I agree part of the profits of State-owned enterprises should be credited to the Consolidated Fund but not at the expense of the stabilisation account or pension scheme. I see no reason why the price of petroleum products could not have come down by at least Rs3. The charges for the construction of a storage tank and the cost of vaccine in the price structure no longer arise.

The price of fuel is a triggering variable in the economy of Mauritius. The price of any mass consumed products is indexed to the price of fuel. And reducing the latter would have caused a snowball effect on related products, liberating additional income for the household and business, thus mitigating the loss of purchasing power due to inflation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coupled with the Rs1,000 income support, this would have brought some fresh air to the suffocating population. Let me tell inflation loving regime, patience of the population is wearing thin. In April of this year, it was announced that CEB finances are on the red, and one can expect an increase in tariff of up to 12%, if not more. Besides increase in tariff, I hope the CEB Staff Association realises that the pension of its staff is at risk.

Mr Speaker, Sir, those at the helm, after squandering Rs18 billion on BAI and the Rs6 billion on Betamax and raiding the Bank of Mauritius of Rs158 billion, cannot get away with murder. The next vault is the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*. After the raid on the Central Bank, its pension scheme for workers, which is under siege, and the fiscal deficit of the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, which is a tax, means that those who are 45 years old today will find it hard to have their full entitlement on retirement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, under the Labour Government, the Labour Government never raided the Bank of Mauritius, never trimmed off the profits of State-owned enterprises, or tampered with Nation Savings Fund or National Pensions Fund in the face of crisis. Crisis was never a justifiable reason, be it during the oil and energy crisis of 1979, 1982, and the global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008.

Even under force majeure, clear policies and guidelines have to be established by Central Bank. Reserve Bank of India was a pacemaker during the pandemic, an example which the Bank of Mauritius could have emulated. A one-off is a one-off; even then, it is a loan and not a grant. That is why IMF has impressed upon Government for unutilised MIC money to be returned to the Central Bank. Ask yourself one simple question. Why will the regime of hon. Pravind Jugnauth not return the unutilised MIC Fund to the Bank of Mauritius? It is a war chest for their bonanza. Of course, the Minister will say it is the business of the Bank of Mauritius. It is big business, indeed.

The Mauritius Investment Corporation, a company wholly owned by the Bank of Mauritius, has recently been involved in a property deal worth over Rs4.5 billion. Just for comparison sake, the famous Illovo deal was a mere Rs1.6 billion. MIC is the be-all and end-all of *le festival de la terre*; bail out of toxic companies and quasi participation in entities like hotels, Airports of Mauritius, at exorbitant prices. It acquired 427 acres of Omnicane land at overvalued price of Rs10.5 billion an acre and acquired land from Medine Sugar Estate, near pig farming at La Chaumière, at more than Rs4.2 m. per acre, Mr Speaker, Sir.

We are talking of 144 acres for Rs620 m. The land has poor drainage and wastewater accumulates. It is amazing that Mauritius Investment Corporation was not diligent to find out about the suitability of the land. Where are the findings of Domah Report on flood-prone areas?

Mr Speaker, Sir, who will bail out the distressed small plot owners of sugarcane mired in debts? MIC reserve for the privileged members who will line up the pockets and the war chest of our friends on the other side! The CEC, Mr Speaker, Sir, the upper class exclusive club, this is what MIC is all about. Yes, we know that small planters are desperate to be fairly remunerated on the sale of a ton of sugar. On the other hand, the corporate is exempted from tax payment on land transaction. But who will exempt the small land owners? Never has there been such a scandalous transaction, sold five times the actual market price. Why has the Chief Government Valuer kept at arm's length in the past when the Bank of Mauritius had compulsorily acquired property in its vicinity? The valuation was conducted by the then Chief Government Valuer, and on one occasion, there was a departure from the then Governor of the Bank, Late Mr Ramphul who had to convey an apology, and corrective measure was taken. Where is accountability and transparency?

At a time when the public coffers are empty and Government is desperately scrambling to lace hand on funds to meet its commitments, the public has a right to know and to put the right question on the mega deal. Why did MIC spend such a colossal sum in buying properties for which the MIC is clueless as to what to do with the land? How are the prices determined? Does it represent the real market value of the land? Did MIC seek the advice of a competent, experienced valuer or that of the Government Valuation Department on the true value of the land before embarking on such a massive acquisition? If the answer is yes, can the expert's report be made public, or did MIC merely rely on the price asked by Medine Ltd and Omnicane, no doubt based on the sugar estates expert opinion?

Mr Speaker, Sir, a cursory look at the Ominicane sale indicates that the prices paid by MIC are grossly inflated. Some years back, you know very well that the Sugar Insurance Fund Board (SIFB) bought land at Trianon for Rs110 m., and following a public outcry, a Fact Finding Committee, under Judge Aujayeb, concluded that SIFB paid an inflated price for the land. Several officials had to resign, and charges of corruption were laid against them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the sum involved in the Sugar Insurance Fund Board is indeed peanuts compared to that of the MIC. Finally, whenever a person sells land, he has to pay land transfer tax at 5% of the price. On the price of Rs4.5 billion, the tax due to Government by Medine and Omnicane is Rs225 m., and both Medine and Omnicane Ltd were exempted from payment of the

tax, Mr Speaker, Sir, and did not pay a cent as tax. Mr Speaker, Sir, the public has the right to know why they have been exempted when this tax spares nobody. Whether you sell land to settle a debt or meet medical expenses or for the education of your children, the tax is inescapable.

In addition, an unlucky 20,000 of sellers are subsequently claimed additional tax and penalty for the so-called under declaration value by the Registrar General. The Minister of Finance has an obligation to enlighten the public, and in view of the colossal sum of public funds involved, light should be shed in the name of transparency and accountability. This scandal of ethnic proportion calls for a Commission of Inquiry. Mr Speaker, Sir, tax is a tax and the corporate has to pay its taxes. They always take and always find excuses to avoid paying taxes or if they pay, it is minimum taxes that are being paid.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a weak Government continuously plagued by scandals, each one more damning than the previous one. Government is politically obscene, a flagship of fraud and corruption. And it does not give a damn about negative outlook as long as the loot is shared. The broker who obtained Rs26 m. for 18 days of work is loitering in the corridor, waiting to be appointed as Transaction Manager for the sale of Rs22 billion worth of assets. Time will tell if the Rs22 billion of proposed equity sale to reduce public debt will ease off the nearly 100% of GDP as of June 2023.

Unless there is wide discussion at the bar of public of opinion, they have no right to dispose of the heirloom of the nation. Who will be the broker? Your guess is as good as gold. It is good to recall the appointment as Independent Commissioner on the Britam Commission of Inquiry while Mr H.A. was at the same time providing services against fees in favour of NIC and the National Property Fund Limited and also negotiated his payment of Rs26 m. for 18 days of work, which was previously refused prior to 2017. After 2017, for reasons which were obvious, the world became his oyster. Now you understand who the preferred broker of the regime is. They call it let us share the loot.

For the 22 billion revenue, they will put up anything and everything for sale. The broker will have a field day with the sale of the century. And what's up for sale? NIC, Port Services, Mauritius Telecom, perhaps SICOM, and the National property Fund Limited. Maubank, I have been told, will be a giveaway in any shady deal because it is worth almost nothing. But, then,

who will buy? The first to run, to offer and to meet the request of Government would be, of course, MIC and the Bank of Mauritius with its printing machine. MIC, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, this is the integrity and democratisation in the parlance of the MSM, and the Prime Minister will chair the Committee to fast track the submission of projects.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if you pass by the door of the Committee Room when meeting is on, lower your mask, take a deep breath, and you will feel the whiff of money, Mr Speaker, Sir. As Machiavelli said –

“He who controls the fears controls the soul”

But the regime had a dose of its bitter pill from Camp Le Vieux to Plaine Magnien. Beware of the silent majority. They are from the main street, the side street, the backstreet and *cul-de-sac* or dead end. That’s their dead end and the errand boys and girls of Pravind Jugnauth MSM should know; when the tide recedes, the naked truth will be revealed. There is no escape.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a weak Government which keeps oppressing our population with unnecessarily harsh Police practices and unduly severe penalties. It is continuously raiding the population through COVID-19 Prevention and Sanitary Measures Regulations 2021. Appendix A of the Budget Speech shows that the raised revenue from fines, penalty and forfeits was 100 million more than 2021-2022 Budget of Estimates and is expected to increase by 5% in the Fiscal Year 2022-2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a Government which politics is one of basic instincts, verging on hate and hell bent to strike with vengeance, the rise of the cronies and blatant statements made by Ministers with underlying communal overtones highlight the frailty of a regime. Ethnic democracy and autocracy give a false sense of hope and illusion of power. The power belongs to the people and the people will stand united against McMafia politics, money politics, fake news, and manipulation of public opinion. ‘Obey and comply’ is the dominant philosophy of this regime.

Sadly, Government backbenchers have to bend backwards to pay lip service to the Leader of the House. Where is the freedom to express without fear or prejudice? Recent Freedom in the World report notes a declining trend in the index of political rights and civil rights since 2014. The shouting brigade of the MSM, if it has an iota of conscience and justice, should stand with

the people, for the people, and not allow the corporate to have a field day. Those one who are not lackeys should join us to wage war on fraud and corruption and to empower the poor.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if you look at the highlights of Cabinet Decision since the scandalous public disclosure of the horrible torture video, the Council of Ministers has remained totally silent on the unacceptable, inhuman treatment inflicted on a number of our citizens, and I will comment on this at a later stage.

On page 54 of the Budget Speech, the Minister has claimed that he is providing Rs10.9 billion in the Police Force in upholding law and order for one and all. In any civilized country, in the wake of the disclosure of scandalous torture video, showing inhuman and degrading treatment being inflicted on individuals, the allocation of the budget of the Police Force would also have contained provisions to ensure the proper policing of Police Officers because law and order is a matter for the people and the authorities.

Yet, at paragraphs 309 to 323 – the Budget Speech dealing with law and order, the Minister has provided no budget whatsoever for the policing of Officers or for the protection of suspects from inhuman and degrading treatment, and from torture.

This omission gives the impression that the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development and the minority and weak Government, to which he belongs, have no interest in preventing breaches and violation of human rights.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what have we seen instead? We have seen a Commissioner of Police who is reported to have said, as follows, at the end of last month, on *Top FM* –

« Mo kategorik lor la, osito ki nou gagn tou ban prev nou pou ouver ene lanket e mo promet ki ban coupab pou fer fasse a ban sanctions et mo penser nou pou avoy ene signal tres fort ki lezot na pas pou emboite le pa. »

At the end of May 2022, therefore, while the Minister was carrying out his pre-budgetary consultation, the Commissioner of Police did not apparently know that the horrifying torture video had already been remitted to his predecessors two years ago, and here lies another budgetary measure that Government has lamentably failed to take. Indeed, until last year, a Code of Ethics prepared by Transparency Mauritius for policemen used to be remitted to every Police Officer upon his being sworn in, but the Government has stopped this practice.

They did not think that Police Officers should have a copy of that Code of Ethics or maybe they did not even think that Police Officers need a code of ethics. What could you expect of a Government which has itself demonstrated, on several occasions, that it has no ethos? Therefore, I invite the Minister to make budgetary provisions for the reinstatement of Code of Ethics prepared by Transparency International, which explains to Police Officers in detail the behaviour and attitude which they should have towards the public and also for reprinting the Police Instructions book, a practice and procedure manual which was so useful to Police Officers in older days. Indeed, it is time to bring in the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In the same radio broadcast, on *Top FM*, the Commissioner of Police is reported to have stated as follows –

“et maintenant mo p osi dire ban dimounes ki ti ena en zot possession sa video la, zot aussi coupab, pli coupab meme ki sa ban soi disan policier ki fin fair sa la. Kifer zot pan fin denoncer a lepok.”

Police Inspector, Siva Coothen, the spokesperson at the Police Press Office had been remitted a pen drive of the torture video since two years back. *Kisanla ki pli coupab?*

The other Officer in the know is CCID Jangi. Should the budget provisions 2022-2023 not make provisions for efficient working CCTV cameras everywhere in the Police Station?

Mr Speaker, Sir, who has left the Tasers and illegal weapon at the Station? Who had access to them? Members of the Squad had never denied that this prohibited weapon was not used as an instrument of torture and poked at the genitarrial and perineal areas of the victims. Notwithstanding physical and psychological torture, the person will, of course, be wrecked.

How is it that the Prime Minister was kept in the dark? The CP who is the holder of a constitutional post meets the Prime Minister every day. Then, if this is so, heads have to roll. I have known many CPs and they are too diligent, and far from being *flics en délire*, not to share this matter of grave concern with a Prime Minister. I have worked closely with one Prime Minister and several Acting Prime Ministers. It is too serious to accept at face value that there had been dereliction of duties. Why is the IPCC waiting to call the spokesperson and the Head of

the CCID? The Independent Police Complaints Commission is and remains a toothless bulldog and the Act has to be revisited to ensure its independence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, U.S. Secretary of State, Mrs Clinton, at the AGOA meeting in Nairobi in 2009 hailed Mauritius as a model of democracy, rule of law. All those who thump the chest to sing the glory of Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, what is it that you are going to say to the victims and their kin? Our security and safety has been compromised. Our reputation as a safe destination has taken a leap setback. The wreck of Wakashio was not only an ecological disaster but has shown our vulnerability and exposure from attacks, and I hope not terrorism attacks from the sea. Our seabed is a thorn for drug trafficking. The Prime Minister cannot always plead ignorance on safety and security. He cannot react tardily, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, quite obviously...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell, you have how many more minutes for your debate?

Dr. Boolell: I have 30 minutes more.

Mr Speaker: 30 minutes?

Dr. Boolell: 21 minutes!

Mr Speaker: Would you like to break?

Dr. Boolell: Okay, we will break.

Mr Speaker: So, I suspend the Sitting for 30 minutes.

At 4.59 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.48 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, before the break, I was saying that I found it very strange that the Prime Minister was kept in the dark over the safety and security. Strange because I would have expected that the Security Adviser would have apprised him of this issue in relation to the horrible torture video. Now, not quite obviously, there is and it appears that there will be nothing to tie the Prime Minister to this horrible torture video which will haunt the country for years to come. And Police Officers, *et non des moindres*, will come and state that the torture

video was never brought to the Prime Minister's attention. However, if the current Commissioner could come to the radio at the end of last month and state that a Police enquiry will be opened when one had already started in 2020, one cannot be surprised that the Prime Minister said, at the beginning of the month, I quote –

“mo fek pran konesans sa video la.”

What should a decent Prime Minister do? This is a serious matter, the gravity of which cannot be underestimated. We are talking of compromising on the safety of our State. It is security which is at risk and, of course, security has been jeopardized, and yet, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence, Minister of Home Affairs has been kept in the dark, has been ignorant, or either he was informed or then he had a loss of memory. But I expect the Prime Minister to come and make a formal statement. We are talking of security and safety of the country, and I expect also the Adviser to live up to the expectation of a nation. We are very worried over this issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now turn to food diplomacy or the cost of living crisis. And India is the leading player in food diplomacy and, as a major supplier of wheat and rice, is the powerbroker and reliable partner of Africa to wage war on famine. The drought in Somalia and the whole of Africa is making life difficult. Mr Macky Sall, Chairman of AU, flew to Russia to plead for a ceasefire and allow Ukraine to export wheat, seed and rare elements from Ukraine. Our food bill is Rs45 billion and we need to revisit policies, harness our best resources to turn things round. No one owes us a living and as an ocean State, with micro climactic conditions, we have to adapt to the suitability of our land to produce what we eat and eat what we produce.

There is unanimous agreement amongst the planting community and representative of Agro-industry that we need to have coherent policies on food security. Mr Speaker, Sir, I listened to Mr Beekharry of Curepipe and Miss Sauzier highlighting the relevance and importance of agro-industry and what measures need to be taken to address shortcomings and, of course, there is plenty of room for improvement. Now, I make a plea to the Minister. Let us put an end to encroachment on prime agricultural land and demarcate the agricultural zone for smart agriculture and agro-industry. We have to make sure that the slogan ‘produce what we eat and eat what we produce’ should not be a vain slogan but should be a total commitment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no shortage of strategic reports on agricultural diversification. An agricultural policy analysis unit and all relevant services have to deliver. We are at war, waging war on food insecurity. The cost of living is escalating. But one question that begs an answer: where are the 1,000 hectares of promised land made by the Minister to set up cluster of diversification? State Land Development Co. Ltd has entrusted more than 2,500 of acres of land to the controversial Landscape, and many acres are being abandoned. It had a cane production of 60,000 tons for several years. Not only have several acres been abandoned but parcels of land have been distributed without any Expression of Interest. Mr Speaker, Sir, I consider this to be a scandal, a sell-off and a loot and wasted opportunity for economies of scale or regrouping for productivity and competitiveness.

State Land Development Co. Ltd was renting interline and rotation of crop for potato production to cooperative societies and individual planters. It was also producing more than 500 tons of seed potato at one time. I consider it an opportunity to exploit land for more remunerative agricultural and agribusiness purpose, but Landscape has failed lamentably in its food security policy. And lastly, I appeal to the regime to send an SOS to a proud son of our land, Mr Roy, an expert in venture capital, to dispense sound advice on investment in modern agriculture. That is what he does and he is solicited by business entrepreneurs who are keen to invest in agribusiness on the African continent in a big way. Even our cross-border investment in food security has to be redeemed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the sector, as I say, needs to be reinvented, and there is plenty of room to report progress. Today, we talk of smart agriculture with computer controlled-release of fertilizers, herbicides, water, etc. We have gone beyond what we call Technology Introduction and Diffusion Scheme and today we have to allow ideas to mature through research and development and add commercial value to it.

Let me add to what hon. Paul Bérenger stated on the Extended Continental Shelf, which, when I was Minister of Foreign Affairs, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Seychelles, we signed the agreement before the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. And he is right to talk of the potential of Saya de Malha as a carbon sink and potential for trade emission. But it is also good to report that, recently, Seychelles and Mayotte have signed a fisheries

agreement for fisheries in the region and also to harvest tuna, as it is still a very lucrative business, not to forget that we have to subscribe to sustainable development.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when we were in Government - I am not saying it is always easy - Mauritius used to export rice, low glycaemic rice. The gentleman who used to produce the rice has moved to Tanzania because of economies of scale. But we have tremendous potential. It is a question of getting our act together, bringing the resourceful person and have clear, coherent policies. Either we do it now or we forget about it. I grant you the investment can be heavy, but the commitment has to be full.

Now, as far as livestock is concerned, I would invite Government to seek advice from Fonterra of New Zealand, and draw from its expertise in livestock and milk production. But, you know, livestock is not always eco-friendly; New Zealand announced a plan to tax sheep and cow burps to address one of its bigger sources of greenhouse gases. The country had been criticised for not including agriculture in its Emission Trading Scheme when almost half of its emission, mainly methane, comes from this sector.

There is an issue which, of course, is of concern, and it relates to C26 in the Annex to the Budget Speech. It relates to an amendment to the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority Act, and if this amendment is brought, it may mean the demise of the sugarcane industry. I ask the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security to ponder wisely and come back to better senses. Mauritius Sugar Syndicate is an established body with a reputation second to none. There is no room for a third party or another authority because, what it will do, it will weaken the comparative and competitive advantage which Sugar Syndicate has at a time when sales of sugar depend on value addition to capture the remunerative market. I would appeal to the Minister not to spoil the broth; even the World Bank has praised the unique marketing position of the Sugar Syndicate whose marketing of sales, a committee comprised of three millers and two independent planters. It is a transparent Syndicate and its Director has got a good reputation among sugar organisations at the international level. I hope this amendment will not be moved. There was a time when Omnicane was exercising undue pressure to sell special sugar to specific buyers in UK, but realised it was being misled. The issue will provoke a backlash within the industry. I appeal to the Minister not to try to make politics on such a sensitive issue. The sale of sugar is sweet with the Sugar Syndicate and we cannot make it bitter. If it is working, do not fix it! It markets our sugar,

especially special sugars, and the Sugar Syndicate is not only the bastion of corporate and small planters but the marketing Syndicate, the representative of the sugarcane planting community. I sincerely hope we will have the support of former Ministers, especially hon. Seeruttun, and I am sure he will not remain indifferent or insensitive. His father, by the way, was the first Chairman of the Sugar Syndicate as far back as 1979.

Mr Speaker, Sir, instead of tampering, I would advise the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority not to make life difficult and to address issues which are relevant in relation to the Ethanol Framework, which has to be updated, and the Biomass, as was stated by hon. Osman Mahomed and Patrick Assirvaden. They need to sort out the mess on renewable energy. Mr Speaker, Sir, the World Bank has released a report on reform of the sugarcane industry and it is nothing that we do not know of. So, we have to make sure that proceeds from the sale of sugar obtained over the years, from the sweat and tears of planters and workers of the sugar industry, have to consolidate the sector. In fact, we have used the proceeds to widen the economic base and today we are reaping the benefits of the outcome of this base, which has been enlarged. King Sugar, indeed, has a multifunctional dimension: best carbon dioxide cleanser; biomass to the IPP is not sought after for a multitude of by-products, including the famous cane juice rum. It prevents soil erosion and runoff on sloppy areas, especially on coastal areas.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope the Minister will give serious attention to the letter forwarded by the Mauritius Cooperative Agricultural Federation in relation to the payments that have to be effected to planters. And I am sure this appeal will not fall on deaf ears, and in relation to molasses, bagasse and bottlers' fees, the Minister will lend a sympathetic ear, because this is an outstanding issue and it has to be resolved.

Let me now come to the Financial Services Sector. I did ask the Minister of Financial Services to pay heed to what he announced because he did not comment in relation to paragraph 136 of the Budget Speech which stated that 'to continue the overhauling of the financial services sector, Government will adopt its legislative framework to converge the domestic and global business regime'. This is a sector where there is no rent seeker but a sector of brainpower, and we have, as Opposition and Government, to be fully committed to this sector. But people are worried because this has been mooted for some time, the convergence of the domestic and global business regime, but still not clear whether the convergence of both domestic and global business

regime will mean the establishment of a unified integrated sector; whether we will have different regimes for each sector but with convergence on some aspect of regulatory framework. I can understand the pressures being borne upon us by OECD for harmonised tax regime for both types of companies, but we have the appeal made by operators that we still need separate regimes. So, I leave it to the Minister to give a thorough explanation to operators, and I am sure they will have good interactive sessions because this matter needs to be resolved; it is a matter of urgency, and I am sure it will be addressed forcefully and in a meaningful manner.

This is a sector which is fragile, but competition is fierce and there is no shortage of competitors. Competition is becoming fierce; Rwanda and Gujarat International Finance Tec are two promising centres and with the end of grandfathering, global business companies can place their investment in other low-tax jurisdictions. Besides, the G7 decision was taken to prevent tax avoidance by multinationals through Base Erosion and Profit Shifting, and Mauritius will face the consequences of that decision. Usually, the multinationals pay minimum tax level on the amount generated on their income in each of the jurisdictions where it operates. It has indeed to reinvent and we cannot just be content with being a back office; the time is ripe to implement the findings of McKinsey report to add value to wealth and asset management.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have travelled a long way since the days we relied only on one export. We have used the proceeds to widen the economic base and, today, there is more resilience, but nothing can be taken for granted. I expect Government to live up to our expectation. We cannot be a country which thrives on growth simply from consumption. We want positive growth; growth not based on inflation and a tax buoyancy which is the outcome of inflation. Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to reinvent, to reengineer, to address, to face daunting challenges, but to turn those challenges into opportunities. On the Opposition bench, we have made some valuable suggestions; we have been very forceful and persuasive in our arguments to rebut the arguments put forward by our friends on Government bench.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the country belongs to all of us, but on cross-matter issues, I always make an appeal that we need to come together as one nation. No one owes us a living and the days of preferences are over. We have to be more imaginative, bolder, and we have to reskill and upskill. Time to set our differences on cross-cutting issues, but we are ready to face them in the next election. And we are ready; more than ever ready. And they will be taken aback in relation

to the people who are going to be fielded to be candidates at the next election. As an Opposition, we will come together. The country is calling upon us to come together as one Opposition, and you can rest assured, we will live up to the expectation of the people because the people are sick...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Ministers!

Dr. Boolell: ... and tired of a...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Ministers, please!

Dr. Boolell: The people are sick and tired of a regime which is mired in corruption, which is decadent and filthy, and we have to put an end to McMafia politics, to money politics, to manipulation and management of information, which certainly will cause this country to take a backseat. We want to be in the vanguard of development, and time as to come together, and Opposition will live up, as I say, to the expectation of the people and we shall deliver.

Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Collendavelloo!

(6.08 p.m.)

Mr I. Collendavelloo (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. “A lost opportunity”, exclaimed the Parliamentary Leader of the Labour Party. He knows what he is talking about. In a crisis, there are two ways of dealing with it. We will not go into the detail of Ukraine and COVID; many of us have talked about it.

First of all, there is the Labour Party-PMSD way, the one that was adopted, the one that they are on record. What did they do? Stimulus package; hon. Seeruttun talked about it, I will not repeat what he said. Stimulus package to boost the economy and they were themselves saying it; the population will get the crumbs, *les miettes*, that is, job creation and some money will be distributed. What happened? All that money was squandered. I will not give names but we all know. The one in the financial services sector, he had a BPO, a Business Processing Office.

Aston Martin, Rolex watches distributed to his friends in politics, in the Labour Party which the hon. Dr. Boolell leads now in Parliament.

The second one: German *berline*; *faillite* after six months. Another one in the East, took the money, in millions - and, then, closed down – *faillite*! We do not know where the money went. The last one, a great friend of the Labour Party took millions, close down. And in my Constituency, a *domaine* has been constructed with that money. A lost opportunity indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, because that is the opportunity they wanted to have, take money in times of crisis; *profiter de la crise*. That has been the history of the Labour Party in power and they dare talk of lost opportunities?

And not enough, hon. Lesjongard went down list. To finance these people, they took money from the poor - the tax, the bread, all that hon. Lesjongard mentioned. Taking money from the poor to give to the rich - *Robin des Bois à l'envers*! That is one way of dealing with the crisis. Perhaps it is true, its Chicago Boys politics, which works in a dictatorship but in a democracy like ours, we have a second way; the one which the alliance has been proposing since 2015 and which is now being put into practice for the last seven years now. What do we do? Sound management and that increases growth rates; use money advisedly; boost crucial sectors of the economy in order to get additional revenue and therefore give additional benefits to the people and make the population feel *à l'aise*. It is true that the international context is affecting our population but at least, now, we see how we do the maximum to alleviate the effects of the international crisis for the benefit of our population.

Additional sectors apart from tourism, financial services, all these very ably-managed sectors; we have agriculture. Can I just respond to what hon. Lobine said on macadamia nuts? And not 'macademia; macadamia nuts! Well, of course, in 2017, I think it was hon. Seeruttun who announced the start in macadamia nuts. I have looked it up and it takes at least ten years before you get one nut; and two nuts are also ten years. And that is a thriving sector, Hawaii being the first one. And it is going to happen, we hope, because it is a good productive sector.

Second sector I want to mention is the one mentioned by the hon. Chief Whip, it is Apiculture. Yes, honey is a promising sector. I have been impressed by the quality of honey made in Mauritius. Very expensive, but with increased production, the prices will go down. But, a word of warning, fake honey made on the basis of syrup and chemical substances, we must not

allow the reputation of our honey to be threatened by people who are using fake production on our market and I have noted, and I will read impatiently the Food Bill which is going to be introduced, but already we have adequate legislation to deal with these matters.

Use of artificial intelligence in agriculture as well, which has not been mentioned, which I think is interesting because internationally, in China especially, artificial intelligence is being used for many things, like calculating water resources, the water needs of the plantations, calculating the growth rate and the *récolte*, and all this is done now at home or in the office.

We will have to work on it in order to increase our production.

There is, therefore, no magic in this. It is just hard work, sound management, good thinking, that is giving these results. We are result-oriented not blah, blah, blah! That is the point which must be made. But at the same time, we have given incentives to industry. The Wage Support Scheme during the COVID lockdown, what was it, if not a way to keep the tourism industry alive at a time that it should have died. Or else, it would have been taken over by vultures. We saved that industry, and that is a good point for our country.

The MIC has been the subject of half criticisms by the parliamentary leader of the Labour Party but we have got to understand. The Bank of Mauritius has reserves, where do these reserves come from? From the population! It is the population that has accumulated the wealth in the reserves. Isn't it right that at the time that the population is in need that we should help? And that is what MIC is doing.

I am sure the Minister of Finance will talk in a more learned way that I can ever do on MIC. But all over the world, except for the US, this is what Central Banks have been doing. The Bank of England is lending directly to firms and enterprises; the Bank of England, the oldest Central Bank apart from the Swedish Central Bank. What is *Banque de France* doing? All these European Central Banks, they have to help their country. Do they sleep with a stash of money and wait for the country to collapse? I do not know why out of the blue, I do not know whether it was a passing mistake or what, hon. Dr. Boolell talks ill of the Illovo Deal. Get your notes well. Your favourite partner, what will he think of what you have just said of the Illovo Deal. The Illovo Deal turned land into what it is today, of course, not with the 100% success rate that we would have expected. But thousands and thousands of young Mauritians are actively engaged in the Cybercity. Yes, the MMM and the MSM together, late Sir Anerood Jugnauth and Paul

Bérenger, pulled their resources, their thinking, and yes, they bought land from the Sugar Industry. What is the problem from buying land from Omnicane and Medine, if it is for development purposes? I do not know the details but, of course, if hon. Dr. Boolell is saying something which leads people into inquiry, of course, an inquiry must be done, but I do not believe that this is so.

Mr Speaker, Sir, COVID will end. The war will come to a stop one day, and all this will be behind us. But there is one thing that is irreversible. We can slow it down but we cannot stop it, and some of my colleagues on both sides of the House have referred to it, it is climate change. That is the problem, and is not only a national issue, but an international issue. A universal approach is being required to fight climate change. We cannot do much but whatever we can do, we have to do. We have passed the Climate Change Act. The department of climate change, the Climate Change Committee are structures which are here to help us fight climate change, but we cannot fight climate change through institutions.

The whole population, Opposition, Government, together must fight climate change and try to change our culture and our habits. We have obligations under the Kyoto Protocol as amended in Doha, the Paris Agreement when we had just been in office, but let us not forget the population, and the NGOs. In our law, section 19 imposes on Government departments the duty to undertake public consultations when developing strategies and policies in respect of climate change. The burden cannot be only on Government departments, the burden is a shared burden with the public, with NGOs and we have got to participate together. I hope that the department of climate change is able to instil and convince the NGOs that they need to work together in order to combat climate change. Much more difficult than Ukraine or COVID, much more difficult because it is irreversible. We are playing with our lives, and no amount of increase in pensions will be able to cure climate change.

I now come to a matter that has shocked many people, and that has been the subject of preoccupations, I thought that I would spend some time, with your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, on that shocking revelation for some, but no facts for most of us, that is, the torture by Police Officers of suspects in order either to repress or punish, but more often to extort confessions. Before I come to torture by rogue Police Officers, let me talk a little bit on state torture, which has been in history. We can go back to the Roman Empire, the middle ages, when the king of

France wanted to exterminate the order of the Templars in the fourteen century, 1307. He had got all these monks and priests with the complicity of the Pope, at that time, to be tortured into confessing things just to be able to lay hands on their fortune. That is now a historical fact. It was torture within the legal system. The eighteenth century saw an end to the torture, but then, in latest 70 or 100 years, it has resurfaced.

We have had the Gestapo which has amazing techniques of torture after the war, maybe of the Vichy Police who were enrolled in the Police in Algeria and we know how they tortured with not to the complicity, under the directives of the Minister of Interior himself who then became President of the Republic twenty years later. But the State of France participated in the torture of Algerian freedom fighters at that time and it was part of the legal system of America, the United States, President Bush signed a presidential decree allowing the use of torture on prisoners in Guantánamo. So, State torture is very much a preoccupation in spite of all the conventions on torture that has been signed. But in Mauritius also, there has existed State torture.

It is good that I recall in the 1970s, when the state of emergency was proclaimed, in March 1972, the MMM Members were arrested under emergency rules, thrown in Beau Bassin Prison and no provisional charge, - I will come back to this later - not sent to Court to be able to complain. And then, on 16 June 1972, 50 years to the day, today we are 17 June, 50 years almost exactly taken from Beau Bassin Prison because in Beau Bassin, they were exercising too much freedom in the prison - can you imagine - and sent to special political cells reserved for political detainees. Among the MMM Members, there were two, Virahsawmy, Hervé Masson and a third one who is present in the House today, hon. Bérenger. The three were the target of what has been termed mental torture. No need to go into the details, I talked about this when in 2003, the Criminal Code Amendment Bill was discussed in this House. But suffice it to quote what Dr. Yip Tong wrote in a report at that time when he went to Court.

“It is my opinion that no human being should be required to live under these conditions of almost total sensory deprivation. It is indeed surprising that they have not broken down mentally having been kept under these conditions for as long as six weeks.”

That was State torture under the Labour Party-PMSD Government of the 1970s and it is good that we be reminded of this. Some people may have forgiven but no one has the right to forget because that must live in our history books so that we always are reminded, there is always the

danger. And they talk of democracy! They talk of the threat to democracy! And they complained Virahsawmy and Masson went to the Supreme Court and hon. Bérenger was a witness in the case to describe to the Judges what mental torture they were suffering and you know what Government defence was? That mental torture was admissible because they had not been bodily tortured. And it was in 2003 that Anerood Jugnauth and Kader Bhayat were counsels in the case. It was in 2003 that Anerood Jugnauth and hon. Paul Bérenger passed the Criminal Code Amendment Bill in order that mental torture be also prohibited. And I urge my colleagues to go and see and read the Hansard of 2003 and the revelations that are contained in there because of time constraints I am not going to go into it.

Now, today and since 2003, the penalty is the fine of Rs150,000 and 10 years imprisonment. I heard the Leader of the Opposition say he thought it was Rs25,000, but never mind. But, of course, it is not the severity of the punishment that counts, it the certainty of punishment and what is the problem? The problem is that these rogue Police Officers have a culture of impunity. They are protected by their hierarchy. I hear that in a Police Station, the first floor, they were beating up prisoners and torturing them, but what about Police Officers in the ground floor? Weren't they hearing what is happening? They didn't denounce. I take it well that it is a minority who are torturing but what about those who remained silent. They are as culpable. Yes, hon. Dr. Boolell has mentioned those who got the pen drive or the USB. Yes, perhaps, the inquiry will reveal what has happened, who knew what and who didn't know what. But for the moment, we know, we have had confessions of retired Police Officers and Police Officers in office who said: of course, we cannot take a suspect and give him a cup of tea and some *laddoo*. No one asked you to give *laddoo* to suspects. We only ask to respect the human rights of people and there is a problem with this torture business. You torture somebody into confessing a crime. He goes in Court and if he has got some good evidence, he will be found not guilty, he will be acquitted. Do you realise that if he is guilty, you have allow by your torture a guilty person to escape from punishment and if he is not guilty and that he is being tortured into a false confession, you have allowed the guilty person to be scot-free and still be roaming about. How many offences we know where this has happened? So, this goes to the basic fabric of our society and of law and order.

The Leader of the Opposition has suggested a Commission of Inquiry. As the hon. Prime Minister said, first of all, you can't use evidence adduced before a Commission of Inquiry. It will

be a waste of time and of money because it costs a lot. But never mind the money, but the time which will be wasted whereas the institutions which are there, the Independent Police Complaints Commission which is chaired by an ex-Judge of the Supreme Court. I hear people talking against the IPCC. Well, we have appointed lawyers and an ex-Judge on that Commission. They have to do their job, of course. They have to enquire and it is not a Commission of Inquiry that is going to do the job. Then I heard hon. Uteem and hon. Lobine cry out -

“Abolish the provisional charge.”

Well, in 1970, that is precisely what Labour Party and PMSD did, abolish the provisional charge. That gives ample time to the Police to torture persons without having to present them before a Court and that is the basic protection of our citizens. The Police, when they arrest somebody, must bring him before a Court without undue delay and when that suspect comes before the Court, it can have access to this lawyer which they did not have in 1970. In 1972, they were in Line Barracks; even the mother, the wife could not come, the sister could not come to see them and the provisional charge is what enables the suspect and his lawyer to make his complaint so. And, hon. Uteem cited the Law Reforms Commission's Report which says - replace the provisional charge by a custody officer. A police officer within the station is going to afford the protection which a magistrate is supposed to give? I am sorry. I am against the abolition and what provisional charge are we talking about? The provisional charge does not exist in our law of criminal procedure. What exists is our Constitution which tells that when a suspect is brought before a court, the court then decides what to do with him; either to send him back to jail or to release him unconditionally or under conditions after hearing the case. That is what the Magistrate does. A custody officer, a police sergeant, is going to decide this? My liberty? So many people, here in this House, have been able to have access to the Judiciary after having been unduly arrested because the Police will do excesses, but that is not a reason to abolish the provisional charge.

I will always be against this Bill. The people who have suggested it, they don't have criminal law practice. I have been doing this for 40 years and I know how it happens in everyday life before our Courts and I repeat it, provisional charge is a mere administrative expediency because when a suspect is brought before the Magistrate, he or she has got to note down

something in the Court of record. Where is he or she going to note it down? He or she opens a file and what is he/she going to call the file?

We devised, ages and ages passed, a term called the provisional information, but that is only a term. What is essential is that a person's rights should not be affected as the Opposition is claiming, by the abolition of the provisional charge. Of course, we can reform. We can give the Magistrate more extensive powers of enquiry. We can try and see, enhance the powers. I have seen that Rs14.4 m. are allocated to the IPCC.

We can see whether they should be revamped, have more equipment, more investigative tools. That is another matter; but don't abolish something just because lawyers in the Law Reform Commissions have said abolish this. The key to the matter is proper training of Law Enforcement of Police Officers. Article 10 of the Convention against Torture enjoins all State parties including Mauritius to give adequate training to Law enforcement officials and to all those persons who may be in contact with suspects or prisoners. The key is therefore education of our police officers because these people, they work under stress, they want to deliver results and they use the shortcut of torture because they want to produce a suspect to their boss.

It is there that we need to educate, we need to keep track of the movements of people who have been arrested. We need to insist on proper record keeping and all this requires training but let me say that I was personally very pleased when the new Commissioner of Police was appointed.

Well, first of all, he has never been part of the CID and that is a plus mark. His hands are not tainted. Secondly, he has experience; he was posted for two or three years to monitor the training of police officers in South-East Asia, the Philippines and all these countries. So he has actual experience. He worked for the International Red Cross.

We hope that this new Commissioner of Police will be able to put his experience; his knowledge to good end and that will go a long way. Therefore, torture must be very high on our agenda. These videos have helped to shock the Nation and it is good because there was too much of talk saying

“Well you have got to beat these people up but not too much, etc...”

“Ah yes, they went too far with the Tasers”

There is not going too far or going too near. Torture is unacceptable by whatever means used and therefore we hope that this matter has shocked the Nation as it should. Let me say a word on what hon. Bhagwan had said. First of all, he talked of my Constituency No.19. Let me remind him and the people of our Constituency, Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo and myself and of hon. Nagalingum who, I must say, although we are in the Opposition, we are good partners in the Constituency, all three of us, because we need to work for the people, the inhabitants of the region and not spend our time fighting each other. It is very good.

Hon. Bérenger does not take part too much but he is an MP, he is a good MP. He goes to his Constituency, etc. We are not here to fight, *querelles de clocher* among the four Members of the Constituency. This is why I cannot accept the criticism of hon. Bhagwan, Rs250 m. - renovation of Plaza, Camp Le Vieux - Rs70 m. in the gymnasium, the Mediclinic in Stanley, la Ligne Berthaud.

Since 2000, the candidates were promising Ligne Berthaud, we have delivered Ligne Berthaud! It was difficult. Hon. Nagalingum makes a meal out of the state of the roads. The roads are being redone. Hon. Bhagwan also talked about it. Rs109 m. by the Municipality of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill for resurfacing of roads, excluding what the CWA is going to do. The Trèfles sports complex - I know people of Trèfles are watching me on their big screen now - renovated; drains, Rs60 m.; renovation of Quorum gymnasium.

When in 2014, we won the election, hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo knows, hon. Nagalingum and hon. Bérenger also know that Rose Hill was a desolate place. Today, we have put life back into Rose Hill. And let me remind hon. Bhagwan, hon. Quirin and hon. Mrs Foo Kune- Bacha, who probably is too new in the constituency, - hon. Bhagwan looks after my Constituency, let me look after his now –

- The Mediclinic in Coromandel, us!
- The sports complex in Mont Roches, us!
- The sports complex in Barkly, us!
- Chebel Kosovo sports complex, us!
- Jardin Balfour - what was Jardin Balfour in 2015? Today, go near Jardin Balfour every Sunday and see how you do not have a parking space because it is the

favourite leisure spot of the inhabitants of Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière, of No. 20. This is what we have done!

And hon. Bhagwan, I am sorry, I do not like doing that sort of politics, but I have to do it because I cannot be provoked and let provocation be unpunished. He talks of percentage? He talks of our votes in Rose Hill, the bastion! We do not need to do that sort of politics.

The elections were challenged. When it was apparent that there were arithmetical mistakes, I told my lawyers to not raise technical points, consent to the recount. Those were instructions I gave to my lawyers, and we told that to the court and there was the recount. The recount was held. After the recount was held, one or two persons in the MMM said we are going to appeal, we do not agree, but they lost a candidate. The appeal was overboard. I am sorry but I do not agree with insults given to the candidate who was my opponent. It is not true. I know certainly how she was motivated, but that is another story not to be put in public. But then, when hon. Bhagwan talks of percentages.

- No. 7 - *Mouvement Militant Mauricien*: 6.502 %;
- No. 8 - 8% difference between *Parti Malin* and *Mouvement Militant Mauricien*;
- No. 9 - an ex-MMM, hon. Nuckcheddy scored 47.234% and the MMM candidate 7.408%,
- No. 19 – I hear Mr Bhagwan talk of our percentages repeatedly. The leader of the MMM, in his *bastion* pulled 51% of the votes in your *bastion* in 2019 and 2014.

An hon. Member: *Tonn blie 2014!*

Mr Collendavelloo: Do not make me talk of 2014! You just shut up! Do not make me talk of 2014!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Hon. Balgobin!

Mr Collendavelloo: 6%. 1% between hon. Nagalingum and myself, and 2 % between hon. Mrs Jeewa Daureeawoo and hon. Nagalingum. There is no problem on this. But do not come and look for trouble on percentages. Look at yourself in the mirror first!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Collendavelloo: And *la grosse cerise sur le gâteau*: No. 20 *bastion* – 46.251%, less than half percent of the votes for hon. Bhagwan! So, you discuss percentages with me? I have my percentages and I can give you more than that! We have never said that. I have never gone into this. But it is good because if you look for it, you are going to get it! Same constituency, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Collendavelloo: After I have said 46.251% for hon. Bhagwan, just draw your own conclusion. Hon. Quirin - 32.609%. How is this big difference? 32.609 % against 46.251%. The answer is so obvious!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Allow the speaker...

Mr Collendavelloo: And we will see for the next municipal elections. I hope we get it sooner than later because we will see when they come and bring Dr. Ramgoolam in the towns, then we will see what answer the citizens will give them.

I am done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Thank you very much.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Ameer Meea: M. le président, avant de commencer, j'aurais aimé confirmer avec vous le temps qui m'est alloué. Est-ce bien une heure de temps ?

An hon. Member: 50 minutes.

Mr Ameer Meea: 50 minutes. Okay, c'est bon. Merci.

Mr Speaker: *Je n'ai rien compris.* That was a point of order?

Mr Ameer Meea: I was confirming the time that has been allocated to me. Is it 50 minutes?

Mr Speaker: No. this is a question the Whips will...

Mr Ameer Meea: No, just in case you interrupt me.

Mr Speaker: But do not embarrass me!

Mr Ameer Meea: I am asking you. You have...

Mr Speaker: No. But I cannot answer! Please, do not embarrass me!

Mr Ameer Meea: Okay. So, even if I talk for one hour, you won't be aware? That's good.

Mr Speaker: You finished your speech, hon. Collendavelloo?

Mr Collendavelloo: Yes.

Mr Speaker: So, who is the next orator?

(6.57 p.m.)

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): M. le président, avant de commencer mon discours, laissez-moi répondre quand même – enfin ce n’était pas prévu, mais laissez-moi répondre quand même à deux items que l’orateur précédent a soulevés par rapport au *recount* du no.19. Il nous a donné sa version mais il a subtilement oublié de mentionner que 73 bulletins étaient manquants ! 73 bulletins étaient marquants quand on a fait le *recount* ! Et on a eu un bulletin de la circonscription no.1 dans la même boîte du no.19.

(Interruptions)

Ça, il a subtilement oublié de faire rappeler à la Chambre et à la population. Si on n’a pas traficoté avec ces boîtes, c’est quoi, M. le président ?

(Interruptions)

Et puis, il a oublié, je suis vraiment étonné, pour quelqu’un qui a été révoqué ! Révoqué par son Premier ministre !

(Interruptions)

Savez-vous ce qu’est une révocation ? C’est une motion de blâme contre vous ; contre votre personne ! Et il est là, en train de défendre le gouvernement et ce Premier ministre et avec toute sa haine contre le MMM. Nous n’avons aucune leçon à prendre de quelqu’un qui a été révoqué, M. le président !

(Interruptions)

M. le président, maintenant permettez-moi de commencer en rappelant à la population qu’en 2015 ce gouvernement a présenté une vision 2030 ; aujourd’hui, ce dernier budget nous rappelle brutalement que le gouvernement n’a aucune vision et qu’il a même échoué lamentablement à mettre en œuvre les bonnes mesures qui auraient façonné le paysage économique à long terme de notre pays. Un diagnostic de la situation économique actuelle

indique clairement une économie toujours en difficulté. Pour comprendre où nous en sommes, permettez-moi de remonter dans le temps et de broser un tableau macro-économique.

La croissance économique a été en moyenne inférieure à 4 % au cours des cinq dernières années avant que la pandémie de Covid ne frappe. Le chômage est resté constamment élevé autour des 7 % et malheureusement, ça va repartir de plus belle. Et la dette publique à 97 % du PIB en 2021 soit de l'ordre de R 456 milliards le *public sector gross debt*. Sur le front extérieur, le déficit commercial s'est considérablement aggravé pour atteindre un déficit de plus de R 125 milliards en 2021 ; cela est principalement dû à la hausse des importations et à la baisse des exportations au fil du temps.

Malheureusement, ce budget n'a pas de philosophie et ne s'attaque pas aux problèmes économiques qui prévalent. Au lieu de résoudre nos problèmes économiques, et de définir une vision claire pour l'avenir, ce budget a une portée limitée et myope car il ne dénonce aucune vision pour l'avenir. Au lieu de cela, il se concentre presque exclusivement sur l'objectif de maximisation de vote de ce gouvernement. Les problèmes structurels dans le secteur de l'agriculture, de l'industrie manufacturière, du tourisme et d'autres secteurs ont tous été ignorés. Dans la vision 2030 l'industrie manufacturière devait atteindre 25 % du PIB mais aujourd'hui elle est à peine à 15 % du PIB.

Pire encore, aucune enveloppe n'est prévue dans ce budget pour relancer un nouveau secteur économique. Je relève que cela est une grosse lacune qui aura des conséquences désastreuses à l'avenir sur le plan économique. Une telle désinvolture dans la gestion des affaires de l'État est répréhensible et condamnable pour dire le moins. Comme quoi, ce gouvernement ne fait que dépendre, dans une large mesure, de la consommation afin de générer plus d'argent en termes de la taxe à valeur ajoutée, la TVA. Et là encore, les gens sont prudents pour dépenser davantage.

De nouveaux secteurs promis pour être le fer de lance de la croissance économique telle que le centre éducatif, le centre médical, le parc pharmaceutique, l'économie verte et l'économie océanique n'ont jamais émergé. Des mesures spécifiques et claires pour faire face au problème du chômage, de l'inégalité des revenus et du changement climatique sont inexistantes. Les problèmes fondamentaux auxquels est confronté le secteur des PME et qui contribuent à la démocratisation de l'économie mauricienne n'ont pas été abordés. Les mesures simplistes du

régime de financement des PME ne font rien pour résoudre les problèmes structurels du secteur. La mise en place d'incubateurs de PME pour un suivi plus étroit des PME combinés à un financement progressif tout en améliorant l'accès au marché auraient été une meilleure mesure pour stimuler ce secteur.

Je m'en voudrais de ne pas parler également de la dette publique qui ne cesse d'augmenter. Je tiens à dénoncer cette attitude désinvolte et irresponsable du gouvernement à cet égard ; une attitude qui équivaut au dicton –

« Après moi, le déluge ».

Nos enfants et la génération qui suit auront à payer ces largesses injustifiées du régime.

M. le président, au-delà de n'avoir pas mis en œuvre des mesures bien pensées qui auraient stimulés la croissance économique, ce gouvernement a ouvert la boîte de pandore en utilisant les fonds des réserves spéciales de la banque de Maurice. Cette décision met non seulement en péril l'indépendance de la banque centrale mais constitue également une preuve limpide de l'incapacité de ce gouvernement à générer des revenus grâce à une croissance plus forte. Dans la même veine, il faut aussi fustiger la *MIC, Mauritius Investment Corporation*, qui continue à dilapider les fonds de la banque de Maurice sans aucune transparence et encore moins de responsabilités.

M. le président, les mesures de ce budget pour les différents secteurs de l'économie mauricienne sont fragmentaires et superficielles. Et aucune mesure n'a été introduite pour s'attaquer aux problèmes structurels qui sous-entendent le chômage et l'inégalité économique. Certaines mesures spécifiques auraient été la réintroduction d'un régime d'imposition progressif pour résoudre le problème à long terme de l'inégalité croissante des revenus.

M. le président, ce budget n'a pas réussi une fois de plus à introduire des mesures économiques audacieuses et radicales qui sont décisives pour Maurice alors qu'elle cherche à se libérer du piège des revenus intermédiaires et à passer à un pays à revenu élevé au XXI^e siècle. On note également que ce discours du budget fait abstraction des mesures pour la relance de notre économie. Il est malheureux de constater que ce discours pêche par un manque flagrant d'un plan de relance pour inciter à la consommation car un pouvoir d'achat qui rétrécit telle une peau de chagrin ne favorise pas la consommation ; il freine même l'envie de consommer. Bref,

aucun plan de relance n'est prévu or une politique de relance économique s'avère nécessaire lorsqu'un pays passe dans des circonstances difficiles comme c'est le cas par le temps qui court. Parallèlement, la dépréciation de la roupie n'arrange guère les choses ; elle a un impact déterminant sur le prix de nos articles de consommation car les importateurs de ces produits qui sont en demande régulière ne font que répercuter le surplus du coup aux malheureux consommateurs.

Je viens maintenant à la cherté de la vie. Faut-il rappeler que les gens souffrent du coût de la vie qui ne cesse de prendre l'ascenseur ? Ils sont de plus en plus mal à équilibrer leur budget familial et subvenir comme il se doit aux besoins de leur famille. La cause principale de cette situation qui a tendance à perdurer c'est évidemment la dépréciation de la roupie ou plutôt je dirais même de la dévaluation de la roupie – quand on le prend en pourcentage – ce qui explique les prix exorbitants des carburants tels que l'essence et le diesel mais aussi les prix des denrées alimentaires de base dans les supermarchés. Aujourd'hui, les gens n'achètent que l'essentiel pour faire bouillir la marmite. Fini les temps où pour faire plaisir aux enfants au moins une fois par mois on pouvait se permettre le luxe de mettre deux paquets de biscuits ou de fruits dans les caddies.

Parlons maintenant des prix des médicaments les plus nécessaires dans les pharmacies pour la population. Nous avons en tête surtout les personnes âgées et celles qui doivent ménager une santé défaillante d'autant qu'elles souffrent de la maladie non-transmissible dont le diabète et l'hypertension. Les gens qui doivent prendre des médicaments au quotidien ne cessent de se plaindre des coûts exorbitants de certains médicaments. Ils sont obligés de déboursier entre R 2,000 à R 3,000 par mois uniquement pour les budgets de santé.

Par conséquent, eu égard à la cherté de la vie, une augmentation de R 1,000 à R 2,000 sur le montant de la pension passe pour un leurre quand la valeur réelle est bien moins vue que les prix ont augmenté davantage, peu importe la provenance de leur pays d'origine. Et le discours du Budget ne fait pas état d'un contrôle de dépenses dans le secteur public, un aspect décrié maintes fois par le Directeur de l'Audit.

Par ailleurs, M. le président, pour corser cette situation aux allures de morosité ambiante, on fait l'impasse sur la productivité. Ne sait-on pas qu'on peut générer la croissance économique grâce aux gains découlant de la productivité? Mais comment peut-on espérer stimuler la

croissance sans encourager une meilleure efficacité des facteurs de production ? Dans la même foulée, faut-il rappeler que lorsque l'argent est consommé, il augmente la croissance? Or, les ménages au bas de l'échelle sociale peinent à joindre les deux bouts. Même des produits alimentaires de base sont laissés sur les étagères. Ceux et celles qui font les courses au supermarché doivent constamment revoir leur priorité. Lorsqu'on ne prévoit pas une gamme de mesures pour redynamiser la productivité, la croissance économique prend du retard.

M. le président, il y a une question que tout le monde se pose et j'espère que le ministre des Finances va nous répondre lors de son *summing up*, c'est-à-dire, l'argent qu'il va distribuer pour les augmentations, comme il l'a annoncé dans le Budget, proviendrait du fonds du CSG (Contribution Sociale Généralisée). Mais cet argent était destiné à payer les pensions pour les prochaines années; mais il puise déjà dans ce fonds. Donc, ce fonds prévu pour demain est utilisé aujourd'hui. Donc, on est en droit de savoir où est-ce qu'il va tirer de l'argent pour financer ces engagements futurs ? Est-ce qu'une hausse de la CSG sera inévitable dans les années à venir ? On se pose la question, M. le président, et j'espère que le ministre des Finances va nous répondre lors de son *summing-up*.

Je note aussi que ce présent discours du Budget tout comme ce fut le cas lors des deux derniers discours du budget, nous offre du réchauffé. Le ministre des Finances aurait-il le secret de renouveler l'emballage tout en présentant le même contenu ? Est-il devenu maître dans l'art de la tromperie sur la marchandise ? Mais le peuple n'est pas dupe, M. le président. Je m'explique. Cette année encore, on constate que beaucoup de projets déjà annoncés dans le passé, lors d'un exercice similaire, n'ont pas été réalisés. La liste est longue mais je ne citerai entre autres quelques-uns seulement notamment le fameux Rivière des Anguilles *Dam*, mais aussi dans ma circonscription, le Canal Anglais. Je ne sais pas combien de fois j'ai soulevé le problème de Canal Anglais dans cette Chambre pendant des années à travers des *PQs* et à l'ajournement. Et je me souviens à un certain moment même le Premier ministre était venu à la Chambre pour faire un statement par rapport au Canal Anglais. Et j'étais ravi parce que j'avais espoir que finalement les travaux allaient être faits il y a des années de cela. Mais finalement rien n'a été fait et aujourd'hui on retrouve ça dans le Budget. J'ose espérer que cette fois-ci, ce sera la bonne. Entre autres, de temps en temps, on nous rebat les oreilles en évoquant des projets qui coûteraient des sommes faramineuses même s'ils n'ont pas été concrétisés.

M. le président, la Covid-19, qui a pesé sur la tête de la population comme une épée de Damoclès, a paradoxalement joué en faveur de ceux qui ont tiré de gros profits. Des contrats ont été alloués dans la plus grande opacité. Tous ceux qui se sont approchés du dossier lié au *procurement* se sont fait brûler les mains. Personne n'osera en parler au risque de disparaître dans la circulation sans laisser de traces. Le rapport de l'audit, tout comme le rapport du *Public Accounts Committee*, ont fait état mais comme toujours *dilo lor bred sonz !*

Comme si pour corser la situation financière de notre économie, les scandales d'une ampleur que nous n'avons jamais connue auparavant se suivent. Ils sont même de plus en plus graves. Pendant le premier confinement de 2020, pour contrecarrer la gravité de la situation, eu égard à la propagation de la Covid-19, le gouvernement a eu recours à l'achat des médicaments et des équipements. Mais, là où le bât blesse, c'est que les prix de ces médicaments ont été majorés par cinq à six fois, voir même à dix fois de leur valeur réelle. Certains commerçants véreux avec l'aide de certains, ont profité de l'aubaine pour s'enrichir grâce à la complicité des puissants en haut lieu. Ainsi, en ce qui concerne le Molnupiravir, par exemple, le prix est passé de R 9 à R 79 l'unité. Rien d'étonnant, donc, que de telles pratiques malveillantes ont été sévèrement blâmées par le Directeur de l'Audit dans son rapport annuel. Une enquête a été instituée, certes, pour situer les responsabilités, mais jusqu'à maintenant on ne sait toujours pas si cette enquête progresse ou pas ou si des conclusions ont été renvoyées aux calendes grecques. On attend toujours, M. le président.

M. le président, permettez-moi maintenant de venir à la politique de logement du gouvernement ; de terre et logement dont je suis le porte-parole au MMM, je voudrais aborder la politique de logement du gouvernement. Je considère que cette politique a été une faillite totale pour ce gouvernement. Je vais m'expliquer et je vais donner à la Chambre les chiffres et je vais citer tous les différents budgets annoncés depuis 2015. Je ne vais pas parler à la légère et j'ose espérer avoir des réponses plus tard. On continue d'utiliser des subterfuges et des effets d'annonce concernant la construction des unités de logement surtout pour la classe des défavorisés de notre société. Pourquoi la politique de logement a été une faillite? Je vais démontrer à la Chambre et à la population qui nous regarde comment année après année, ils ont été bernés par ce gouvernement à travers les différents discours du budget ayant trait aux logements sociaux depuis 2015 à ce jour.

Là, maintenant, M. le président, permettez-moi de citer les paragraphes ayant trait au *land and housing* de différents budgets, à commencer par 2015 à 2016 –

“First, we are providing funds to the Ministry of Housing and Lands for the construction of 1,000 low cost housing units for families whose monthly income is below Rs 10,000.

Third, we are providing funds for the construction of 700 housing units in the next two years for vulnerable families under the National Empowerment Foundation.”

Ça c’était pour 2015-2016.

2016-17 –

“In the context of the Marshall Plan, we are launching a programme of decent shelters for the absolute poor that will comprise the construction of at least 800 housing units over the next three years.”

Il y a différents paragraphes, mais je vais citer les plus importants –

“Rs1 billion for the construction and completion of 1,900 units”

Là on passe à une étape supérieure parce qu’on parle de *1 billion* ; on est dans les milliards maintenant –

“Rs1 billion for the construction and completion of 1,900 units of up to 50 square meters each, on 16 sites across the island”

Ça c’était pour l’année 2016-2017. Et dans cette même année, *“Rs 700 m. for social housing in the context of the Marshall Plan.”* Tout cela, ce sont les annonces budgétaires.

Maintenant, je viens à l’année 2017-2018 –

“I am allocating from the Government of India’s financial support to the construction of social and low income housing unit.”

Je me souviens très bien de cela parce que j’avais posé une question à l’époque. C’était un *grant*, je l’avais dit au Parlement, c’était un *grant* du gouvernement de l’Inde. Ce n’était pas un *line of credit*. C’était un *grant* du gouvernement de l’Inde ; *1.8 billion from the Government of India’s financial support*.

In addition, Government is earmarking 5 billion for the next three years to the housing sector from the Budget. Je le redis encore, M. le président, cela ne me fait pas plaisir, mais les faits sont là. Tout ce qui a été annoncé depuis 2016, 2017, 2018. Maintenant, je viens à 2018-2019.

“I am pleased to announce that the NHDC will start a vast programme of construction in 2018-2019. Our aim is to build 6,800 new social housing units over the next two years endeavour and has a project value of Rs12.7 billion (...).”

Année après année, cela a commencé par 1 milliard, 5 milliards, et on est passé à 12.7 milliards. D'effets d'annonce, s'il vous plaît ! Pas de réalisation !

“I am also providing 1.3 billion for the completion of 3,041 housing units (...).”

Maintenant 2019-2020, enter l'honorable Steve Obeegadoo, ministre du Logement, au paragraphe 250 –

“First, to meet the need of low income families, 6,000 units will be constructed on 16 sites around the country over the next three years, with necessary amenities. These will be in high rise buildings with a maximum of 6 floors.”

Not even two floors, six floors! C'était en 2019-2020, et là, pour la première fois, on entend –

“First, we are providing Rs12 billion for the construction of 12,000 social housing units across the whole island.”

C'était en 2020 ! Le paragraphe du budget 2020-2021, paragraphe 27 –

“This is why today I have announced an exceptional effort to construct 12,000 residential units over the next three years for Mauritian families with monthly income of up to Rs60,000. ”

Maintenant, on passe à l'année 2021-2022 –

“Government will invest some Rs 65 billion in priority projects over the next three years.”

Et encore une fois –

“Rs12 billion for the construction of 12,000 Social Housing Units. Our commitment to this policy is undiminished and the project will be completed by 2024.”

C'était en 2021-2022. On est arrivé maintenant au budget 2022-2023, M. le président –

“We made a commitment (...)” Donc, on progresse toujours dans le *commitment*, dans le *promise*, dans le *rêve* quoi!

“We made a commitment to provide 12,000 families with a decent home during this mandate.”

Et tenez-vous bien, au paragraphe 280, M. le président –

“Construction will start (...)” not has started! “Construction will start (...)” M. le président!

Un projet qui a été annoncé pendant trois ans, l'argent a été budgété, *construction will start!* Voilà où on en est par rapport à la politique du logement.

C'est pour cela je pèse bien mes mots, la politique du logement de ce gouvernement et de l'ancien gouvernement est une faillite totale, M. le président. Maintenant, le ministre Obeegadoo est en train de se dédouaner, bien sûr, je lui dis que vous êtes en fonction depuis 2019, je crois.

Et maintenant, laissez-moi venir au *PQ*. Encore une fois, dans le *Hansard* - je vais donner la référence parce que je ne vais pas parler sont les preuves - *PQ B/374* datant le 15 mai 2018, *PQ* que j'ai posé moi-même. Voilà la réponse - j'ai donné toute la liste des promesses. Maintenant, je vais donner les réalisations, en fait combien de maisons ont été construites –

“Between January 2015 and March 2018, construction of 1,358 housing units has been completed...”

Et tenez-vous bien,

“out of which construction of 746 housing units started prior to January 2015...”

C'est-à-dire le gouvernement précédent,

“and were delivered in 2015.”

Donc, 1,358 en 2015 à 2018, si on retire le 746, cela fait 612 maisons, pour la période 2016, 2017, 2018, trois ans !

Maintenant, le dernier *PQ* qui a été posé par le Whip de l'Opposition, l'honorable Armance, *PQ B/191*, 30 juin 2020 –

“For period 2018-2019, construction of 383 housing units has been completed, out of which 302” ont été délivrés.”

Okay, on prend note combien ont été *completed*: 383.

“For period 2019-2020, construction of 307 housing units has been completed.”

Donc, si on refait les comptes, 2015-2018, il y a eu 612 maisons, si on prend 2018-2019, 383 maisons, et si on prend 2019-2020, 307 maisons. Quand on ajoute tout cela, ça fait 1,302 maisons de 2015 à 2020.

Et aujourd’hui, on est en juin 2022. Le ministre des Finances et le ministre du Logement nous dit qu’ils vont construire 12,000 maisons, M. le président ! Et ils veulent que la population accepte cela. 13,000 maisons ! Voilà, M. le président, tous les chiffres que j’ai pu retracer dans les différents discours du budget de 2015 à ce jour, et aussi dans les questions parlementaires qu’on en a. Maintenant, si le ministre du Logement a d’autres informations que je n’ai pas, je serais ravi qu’il nous donne tous les chiffres, mais moi j’ai cité *from* Hansard pour les années 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020.

Donc, M. le président, en attendant, elles sont nombreuses ces familles, qui attendent toujours leurs maisons et se plaignent à cet effet sur les ondes des radios privées, et on ose parler du budget avec le peuple et pour le peuple, M. le président ! Comme quoi, en matière de slogans, on ne saurait faire mieux pour leurrer le peuple.

Maintenant, M. le président, laissez-moi parler par rapport aux institutions qui ne fonctionnent pas parce qu’on n’a pas recruté selon le mérite et la compétence. On récompense des amis du même bord en les nommant à des postes de haute responsabilité. Ils ne sont pas à la hauteur des résultats. Institutions par institutions sont décevantes. Le pays en souffre. Leur fiasco est du domaine public. Tout le monde en parle. Comment peut-on redresser un pays si l’on ne met pas la compétence en avant ? Et là, laissez-moi vous citer quelques exemples, et en premier je prendrai l’exemple de la banque de la *State Bank*. Vous savez, M. le président, la *State Bank* autrefois, c’était un joyau de la couronne ; c’était un des fleurons des actifs du gouvernement. Vous savez ce qui s’est passé depuis 2015 ? Les profits, année après année, ont considérablement diminué.

Là, juste avant de commencer mon discours, je suis entré sur le site de la State Bank pour regarder les bilans des années financières et rapidement j'ai pu noter sur la ligne *credit loss expense on financial assets and memorandum item*, c'est-à-dire, les *impairment* pour les *non-performing loans*, etc. Pour l'année 2018, au niveau du groupe - tenez-vous bien - pour la *State Bank*, on a *write off*, on a *impair*, *just to name it* - Il y a différents noms qu'on peut appeler cela - pour l'année 2018, R 3 milliards ; pour l'année 2019, R 3.6 milliards ; pour l'année 2020, R 3.8 milliards. Comme disait l'honorable Collendavelloo : '*Nou sa' B wi zot sa !* Il a bien dit, c'est *zot sa* qui a fait ça. Et pour l'année 2021, R 2.4 milliards. Si on totalise cela, plus R 12 milliards de *credit loss*. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'on a nommé des copains, des copines, des gens incompetents à la tête de la *State Bank*.

Et, comparativement, il y a une autre banque mauricienne, une autre banque commerciale, une banque privée, La MCB, une fierté nationale. Après la Covid-19, la MCB a posté des records de profits. R 8 milliards en une année ! Donc, quand on compare tout ce qui se passe dans le pays, M. le président, et résultat des courses, les actionnaires ne sont pas payés *dividend* parce que la banque ne peut pas.

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: Wait! Wait!

Mr Ameer Meea: Et, le plus gros actionnaire de la *State Bank*, c'est l'État, c'est nous, notre argent. C'est un manque de revenus de l'État Mauriciens parce qu'on a placé des gens incompetents. Je vous donne un seul exemple. Un Indien basé à Dubaï, il emprunte de l'argent. Un Indien, il est basé à Dubaï, normalement, où est-ce qu'il aurait dû emprunter ? Soit en Inde ou bien à Dubaï dans le golfe. Vous savez où est-ce qu'il a emprunté de l'argent, ce monsieur-là ? Il a emprunté de l'argent à notre *State Bank*. Il a emprunté des milliards à notre *State Bank*. Et le lendemain qu'il a eu son fric, il a fait faillite. Le lendemain qu'il a eu son fric, il a fait faillite ! Et après qu'il y a eu une levée de boucliers par les membres de l'Opposition, par la presse, notamment le journal de L'Express, il y avait eu un article d'investigation, on a entendu dire qu'il y a une enquête policière. Mais, depuis, jamais entendu qui a été - même *call* pour une enquête - arrêté ou condamné. Des milliards ont été volatilisés de la *State Bank*. C'est ça le règne de ce gouvernement-là. C'est ça le règne de ce présent gouvernement-là !

Et là, je vais continuer, M. le président. Je vais vous donner un autre exemple, et ça je suis sûr que beaucoup d'entre nous ne sont pas au courant encore une fois. Vous savez ce qui se passe actuellement à *Mauritius Telecom* ?

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Dir; dir; dir !*

Mr Ameer Meea: Vous savez ce qui se passe à la *Mauritius Telecom* ? Il y a un ami qui m'a envoyé un tableau relatant la performance de *Mauritius Telecom*, je peux dire à la Chambre depuis 2010 à 2021. *And I am talking about the Company, not the Group.* La compagnie *Mauritius Telecom* faisait des profits en 2010 de R 1.5 milliards ; en 2011, R 1,558,000 millions ; en 2012, R 2.8 milliards ; en 2013, R 1.4 milliards ; en 2014, R 912 millions ; et en 2015, R 965 millions. En 2016, la compagnie *Telecom*, autre joyau de la couronne, la ça commence à se gâter, on a fait seulement R 55 millions de profits, *the company*. En 2017, une perte de R 98 millions. En 2018, c'est réparti à R 1.3 milliards de bénéfices. Mais en 2019, R 390 millions de pertes. En 2020, R 188 millions de pertes, et en 2021, R 74 millions de pertes. La *Mauritius Telecom*, M. le président.

Mauritius Telecom autrefois déclarait des dividendes de R 700 millions par année. La dernière année ils ont déclaré que R 100 millions de dividendes parce qu'ils n'ont pas assez de fric pour payer. Et qui est encore une fois l'actionnaire principal ? C'est l'État, c'est nous, c'est notre argent. Une des raisons pourquoi le budget est déficitaire parce que l'investissement que le gouvernement a fait, il n'y a pas de retour d'investissement.

Mr Juman: *Mil fwa* Travailliste !

Mr Ameer Meea: Il n'y a pas de retour dans l'investissement du gouvernement. Et n'en parlons pas d'*Air Mauritius* ! N'en parlons pas d'*Air Mauritius*, M. le président ! *Air Mauritius* je n'ose même pas donner les chiffres de *profit and loss*.

(Interruptions)

Au contraire, je cite de mémoire, on a injecté 12 milliards, 12 milliards de *public funds* dans *Air Mauritius* pour ce qui vaut aujourd'hui, M. le président.

An hon. Member: Incroyable!

Mr Ameer Meea: Donc, voilà, la situation financière qu'on a cachée à la population, qu'on a caché à la Chambre ; et qu'on n'ose pas ; et ce silence assourdissant des membres du gouvernement est une preuve, M. le président.

Donc, ce gouvernement doit laisser les institutions fonctionner avec plus d'autonomie et de donner la pleine mesure de leurs capacités répondant ainsi aux attentes de la population. Il doit aussi revoir sa politique de recrutement et de domination. Au lieu des proches et des agents sans aucune compétence, il faut privilégier la méritocratie, et à travers une sélection de candidats selon leurs qualifications et non pas selon un certain calcul. C'est de cette façon que la population fera confiance à un gouvernement. Sans cela et sans une justice sociale tangible, l'unité restera une utopie.

M. le président, pour la stabilité sociale d'un État, deux éléments sont indispensables et inextricablement liés, l'unité nationale et la démocratie parlementaire. Sur les deux, ce gouvernement a lamentablement échoué. Le gouvernement dans son ensemble doit se comporter de façon respectueuse et non pas en attaquant et en insultant l'adversaire à tout bout de champs et qui profite des réunions socioculturelles pour prononcer des discours d'un autre temps. Il faut un peu de retenue sur l'aspect démocratie. Les comportements des élus de la majorité et par rapport aux interpellations est un flagrant exemple de violation des règles élémentaires de la démocratie parlementaire. Cela exaspère la population qui attend des réponses nettes et claires sans ambiguïtés. Le pays n'a pas le moyen de s'offrir une insurrection. Quand tout va mal, un soulèvement pourra paralyser le pays. Nous sommes un petit État insulaire qui dépend massivement du commerce extérieur et de l'arrivée des touristes, il faut penser à tout cela.

Ce qui se passe au Parlement est une réflexion de notre démocratie actuelle. C'est notre devoir, notre droit de questionner le gouvernement. Et c'est le devoir du gouvernement de répondre, on est payé pour ça. Et là, M. le président, je voudrais exprimer ma solidarité envers les trois parlementaires femmes du côté de l'Opposition qui se sont faites expulser. Si je ne me trompe pas c'est une première dans les annales parlementaires.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member!

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Make sure you don't contest my ruling!

Mr Ameer Meea: Of course.

Mr Speaker: Make sure!

Mr Bérenger: ...

Mr Speaker: I am not interested with you. I am interested with the Member. You don't have the floor!

Mr Ameer Meea: I was just expressing my solidarity.

M. le président, c'est un triste record, c'est un moment très sombre pour notre Assemblée. Non seulement c'est un sale coup pour notre démocratie parlementaire mais un manque de respect envers les dames qui constituent la moitié de la population de notre pays.

M. le président, qui ne se souvient pas de cette voix mystérieuse d'une honorable parlementaire qui avait proféré des mots grossiers, des injures inacceptables dans cette auguste Assemblée ! Je crois que vous allez être d'accord avec moi...

Mr Speaker: Please, your time is over! Your time is over! And I have...

(Interruptions)

Your time is over!

Mr Ameer Meea: I have the privilege.

Mr Speaker: Just wait! Just wait! What is it Whip?

Mr Armance: Can I address you? It has been agreed that the hon. Member would be eligible for 50 minutes for his speech.

Mr Speaker: Yes, but the time is now 15 minutes more.

(Interruptions)

Ms Ramyad: He started at 18.57, now, 50 minutes is 19.47. That's it.

Mr Speaker: Okay. Please continue.

Mr Ameer Meea: Before starting, I asked you because I know at times you get messed up with the minutes.

Donc je répète, M. le président, qui ne se souvient pas de cette voix mystérieuse, d'une honorable parlementaire qui avait proféré des mots grossiers, injures, inacceptable dans cette auguste Assemblée. Je crois ...

Mr Speaker: Now, I will stop you there. There has been an incident which happened. We viewed the camera and we could not identify who that person was and the matter was referred to experts and I gave my ruling on that and you cannot refer to that matter, neither put any blame nor comment on that.

Mr Ameer Meea: I am not putting any blame. I did not mention any name.

Mr Speaker: You cannot comment on that. The matter has been solved.

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes, I was just regretting...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The matter has already been sorted out and we have evidence from experts ...

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes.

Mr Speaker: ... and so this is the end of the story.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, I was just regretting that we could not identify who said it. That's it. I was just regretting that we could not identify who said these words. That's it.

Mr Speaker: This is better.

Mr Ameer Meea: Donc, M. le président, c'est vraiment écœurant, c'est vraiment désolant ce qui s'est passé dans notre auguste Assemblée. Donc, je disais que la répression est une mauvaise méthode et qu'éventuellement tourne contre celui qui l'utilise. Il y a pas mal d'exemples dans notre histoire politique. Donnez a cette Assemblée ses lettres de noblesse. Ne la ridiculisons pas davantage, il y va de notre prestige, M. le président.

Pour conclure, M. le président, je m'élève avec force contre ce qu'on pourrait appeler le viol flagrant de la démocratie avec les renvois des élections municipales. Je m'élève avec force depuis deux ans, depuis deux ans, M. le président, il faut que le gouvernement cesse de prendre les mauriciens pour des imbéciles. Si aujourd'hui on a des restrictions sur les nombres de gens dans tel ou tel activité, c'est uniquement pour des raisons politiques, M. le président. C'est

uniquement pour des raisons politiques ! Ne prenez pas la Covid comme excuse. A travers le monde, les élections sont organisées. Ici, à Maurice, il y a des foires, il y a des bazars, il y a des centres commerciaux, il y a des cinémas ; *just name it*, qui fonctionnent à plein régime, même les autobus sont bondés de gens.

Fair enough, M. le président, mais il y a que les élections municipales qui ne peuvent être organisées parce qu'il y aura une flambée de Covid? Il faut que le gouvernement cesse de nous prendre pour des imbéciles, cesse de prendre la population mauricienne pour des imbéciles, M. le président.

Et là, je vais m'adresser à mes chers collègues du gouvernement. Vous savez, perdre des élections municipales fait partie du jeu démocratique. Il faut l'accepter, il ne faut pas y avoir peur. *You know well the writing is on the wall*, M. le président et je dirai en terminant c'est que je suis persuadé que l'Opposition dans son ensemble fera tourner ce gouvernement.

Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo, after your speech there will be a break.

(7.41 p.m.)

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, and then we will stop if need be. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

M. le président, je voudrais d'abord répondre aux orateurs précédents sur deux points ; sur la question des élections générales, le cas du *recount* dans la circonscription de Rose Hill-Stanley et aussi revenir sur le renvoi des élections municipales pour quelques minutes.

M. le président, j'ai bien entendu l'honorable orateur précédent, l'honorable Ameer Meea, qui s'est servi du mot 'traficoté'. C'est une accusation grave et c'est vrai, il a fait état d'un bulletin qui a été découvert quelque part et le bulletin qu'on ne pouvait pas en vérité *account*. Il y avait un décalage mais tout ceci, M. le président, en disant tout ceci et en acceptant tout ceci, nous devrions nous rappeler que dans cette circonscription, le 21 janvier, la Cour *made an order for a recount upon the motion made by the Electoral Commissioner and there was no objection from the ESC and the respondent*, notre ami Collendavelloo, and the recount was carried out, le 1^{er} février 2022, et officiellement ce que le *recount* avait dévoilé - *that the results*

were maintained. Donc, en vérité, M. le président, il n'y avait pas eu de traficotage, aucun traficotage de la part du candidat élu Collendavelloo parce que c'était lui, c'est son élection qui était en jeu et aussi, M. le président, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Ganoo : ... *ni aucun blâme doit être porté contre la Commission Électorale* and this, Mr Speaker, Sir, gives me an opportunity to give an answer to this mischievous and devious campaign that has been launched by Members of the Opposition against the Electoral Commission in the aftermath of these electoral petitions and we know, Mr Speaker, Sir, what has happened to these electoral petitions. I am not talking about the electoral petition which is still before Court, but we know Constituency No.1 because I have the register with me –

- (a) Constituency No. 1 – GRNW - set aside with costs;
- (b) No. 9 – Flacq & Bon Accueil - Bachoo against Maudhoo - set aside with costs;
- (c) No. 13 – Bundhoo against Jagutpal - set aside with costs;
- (d) Savanne & Black River – Jhuboo against Ganoo and others - set aside with costs;
- (e) Sooredoo against Electoral Commissioner – Vacoas & Floréal - set aside with costs;
- (f) Curepipe & Midlands – Duval against Electoral Commissioner and others – set aside with costs;
- (g) Stanley & Rose Hill – Seewoosurn against Collendavelloo – set aside with costs,
- (h) Adebiri against Collendavelloo as I just said earlier on, the results were maintained, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, what has happened? These hon. Members of the Opposition are talking about respect for democracy.

An hon. Member: *komien li fer la?*

(Interruptions)

Mr Ganoo: Many of those allegations were vain, baseless with a multitude of unsubstantiated facts which were hinging on pure conjuncture and speculation and in many of these petitions heard or withdrawn, the petitioners did not have proper evidence to prove their allegations and yet, they dared, in some cases to ask for recounts.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a quotation with me from President Joe Biden, and I quote him

—

“We must reject the culture in which facts themselves are manipulated and even manufactured.”

The Supreme Court judgments in two of the cases which I have just cited in the cases of Constituency No.14, my own Constituency, and No. 17 when we read the judgments, Mr Speaker, Sir, these judgments have put a death knell on this narrative that has been pedaled around concerning claims of fraud, that have never been substantiated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what the Members of the Opposition did in the course of these electoral petitions, they have put themselves on trial and they lamentably failed, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, free and fair transparent elections are of the lifeblood of any democracy. Charges of fraud are extremely serious, but calling an election fraudulent does not make it so, Mr Speaker, Sir. Charges require specific allegations, and then proof in a court of law. In their cases, we had neither the specific allegations nor the proofs. There were just speculations and rumours. That is why, all these petitions were set aside, Mr Speaker, Sir.

But, what is more dangerous in what the Opposition embarked upon, Mr Speaker, Sir, is with regard to the Office of the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Commission. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I need to remind the House and the population and the Members of this Opposition that this office was established 10 years before independence in 1958. The Electoral Commissioner is not a political appointment. He has been appointed by the judicial and legal service presided by the Chief Justice, Mr Speaker, Sir. Therefore, in 12 elections since independence, 5 general elections resulted in the victory of the Opposition in favour of the *alternance politique* and there was a smooth transition to power, and this has been the flagship of Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir.

We are praised worldwide for having an independent electoral commission since independence, Mr Speaker, Sir. But, the Opposition must be wary of the consequences of such a campaign smearing such an institution and instilling doubt in the mind of the population, destroying the credibility of this institution, and this will take years to restore, Mr Speaker, Sir. Our Electoral Commission and the Commissioner are widely respected as we all know in the region and beyond; regularly called upon by the United Nations, the Commonwealth Secretariat, *l'Organisation de la francophonie*, the African Union, the SADC. About 15,000 civil servants are recruited to work for general elections each time they are held in Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir, and all are people selected mainly from the judiciary, the office of the AG and the DPP's office. If we say that there has been *traficotage*, then, we are saying that there has been a general conspiracy involving all these public servants who are honest people, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is why the Opposition must stop playing this dirty and sordid game and trying to belittle and bring into disrepute such a respected institution like the Electoral Commission or the Electoral Commissioner.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I come now to *les élections municipales*. The hon. Member seems to have forgotten that the municipal elections were postponed between 2000-2005. The hon. Member seems to have forgotten the reasons provided by the hon. Prime Minister when the question was asked to him the reasons that motivated the government for postponing the municipal elections. But what I can tell the Opposition is to have some more patience. They should not worry. The time will come, and then we will be on the battlefield against them in the urban areas, Mr Speaker, Sir. The time will come, and we will face the music because as a Government when you look at this Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, the number of projects that have been appropriated for urban areas, I do not think any Budget has done that in the past.

Let me now, Mr Speaker, Sir, come to comments I wish to make on the Budget itself after having replied the hon. Member with regard to the alleged *traficotage* that had taken place in the case of constituency no. 19.

Mr Speaker, Sir, je voudrais commencer par dire que de toute ma carrière politique, je n'ai jamais vu un budget mettre une opposition à plat comme dans ce cas-ci. C'était un véritable *uppercut*, M. le président, qu'a reçu l'opposition. Un vrai coup au poker de la part de notre grand argentier à qui j'exprime mes félicitations les plus vives.

Un budget qui a fait mouche, un budget qui a été certainement l'objet d'une réflexion mure, profonde et soutenue. Savamment dosé, brillamment construit et habilement élaboré et exposé, il a donné une nouvelle impulsion à notre machine économique et j'y reviendrai et un ballon d'oxygène à une population en proie à des inquiétudes et appréhensions. Il a créé sans aucun doute un *feel good factor* et a remis un sourire sur le visage de tous les mauriciens sur la majorité de la population, M. le président.

En effet, ce budget - j'avais servi le mot de *flashflood* le premier jour - a été un déluge de mesures sociales, un feu d'artifice de propositions populaire et a mis fin à toutes les spéculations, et ces campagnes négatives que faisaient l'opposition avant sa présentation pour saper le morale de notre peuple. Aucun budget de notre histoire, M. le président, n'a consolidé notre état providentiel, notre *Welfare State* comme celui-ci. Et dans sa volonté de venir en aide à la population dans son ensemble, toutes les strates, les couches et toutes les catégories ont été *taken onboard*.

Quand vous épluchez ce budget, M. le président, savez-vous quel est le nombre de catégories de Mauriciens qui ont bénéficié d'un soutien et d'un apport additionnel ? J'ai essayé de faire le compte, M. le président, mais j'ai dû finalement me résigner la liste étant tellement longue. Commenant à la page 7 –

- les *vegetable planters* ;
- les *fruit planters* ;
- les *flower growers* ;
- les *tea workers* ;
- les *beekeepers* ;
- les *sugarcane planters* ;
- les *farmers* ;
- les *breeders* ;
- les *pig breeders* ;
- les *fishers* ;
- les *SMEs* ;
- les industriels ;
- les *small contractors* ;

- les *property developers* ;
- les *local artists* ;
- les *young graduates* ;
- les *incubatees* ;
- les *apprentices* ;
- les *taximen* ;
- les *van operators* ;
- les *private pre-primary schools* ;
- les *NGOs* ;
- les *children with special education needs* ;
- les *specialists providing paramedical services to children* ;
- les *cancéreux* ;
- les *malades* ;
- les *children* ;
- les *women entrepreneurs* ;
- les *women victims of domestic violence* ;
- les *house keepers* ;
- les *young fooballers* ;
- les *athlètes* ;
- les *professionals athletes* ;
- les *public officers* ;
- les *citizens de Rodrigues* ;
- les *Chagossiens* ;
- les *disabled* ;
- les *pensioners* ;
- les *middle income earners* ;
- les *bakers* ;
- les *housewives* ;
- les *young jobseekers* ;
- les *owners of Asbestos houses* ;
- les *victimes of Sale by Levy* ;

- les familles *listed in the Social Register* ;
- les bénéficiaires du *social aid* ;
- les *single mothers* ;
- les *relatives of deceased person* ;
- les *residents of charitable institution* ;
- les *cyclones & flood victims* ;
- les *charitable institutions* ;
- les *children in residential care institutions*;
- les *vulnerable families under the national database* ;
- les *homeless* ;
- les *patients de Brown Sequard* ;
- les *staff members of NGO* ;
- les *bedridden* ;
- les *severly disabled* ;
- les *persons with hearing impairment* ;
- les *disabled persons* avec moins de 60% de *disability* ;
- les *elderly's* ;
- les *widows* ;
- les *old pensioners* ;
- les *orphans* ;
- les *muslim widows* ;
- les Mauriciens âgés des 65 ans ;
- les parents ;
- les personnes à revenue moyen ;
- les salariés touchant le salaire minimum ;
- les *160,000 tax payers* ;
- les Mauriciens à revenu moins de R 50,000 ;
- les *registered self-employers*;
- les 350,000 salariés ;
- les *self-employed*, et en fin de tableau, M. le président, j'allais oublier
- les *baby-boomers*.

Qui dit mieux, M. le président ! C'est pourquoi je disais jamais, au plus jamais, un budget n'est allé aussi loin pour consolider notre *Welfare State*. La décontenance sur le visage des membres de l'opposition, leur embarras pendant que le ministre donnait lecture à son discours, à mesure que le clou s'enfonçait faisait pitié, M. le président.

M. le président, it is, therefore, obvious *que ce budget* has given satisfaction beyond expectations to different strata of our population. It has cut across regions, ethnic groups, and class divisions. The only group who finds nothing positive with the Budget is the Opposition, Mr Speaker, Sir. Marred by value judgement, by bad faith, subjectivity, the Opposition, I think save for one Member, failed to appreciate a single measure. The least that could be done, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to recognise in the hon. Minister of Finance, an able Minister who has spared no effort to bring solace in the lives of every Mauritian and relieve the nation in very challenging times. *Il était comme un acrobate qui marchait sur un câble et en dessous c'était le grand néant*, M. le président. *Donc*, he deserves to be congratulated against a backdrop of daunting circumstances that collectively were apt to lead to a melting pot of social instability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the risk of repetition, let us recall some of the factors that dominated the global and domestic landscape before the presentation of this Budget. Only two years ago, we experienced the worst economic contraction of economic history: a drop of 15%. It was important to bring the economy back on its growth trajectory, which the Government did, as pointed out in this Budget, backed by official figures and appreciated, Mr Speaker, Sir, by both the IMF and the World Bank. It may be recalled that during the pandemic the Bretton Woods institutions adopted a flexible approach to a designated list of countries, which allowed them to borrow heavily and run high deficits. However, this list did not include Mauritius, perhaps because we are reputed for our prudential economic management, good governance, administrative responsibility and political commitment.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, when the population was on its knees, this Government, under the able leadership of the Prime Minister together with Minister, hon. Dr. Padayachy, came to its rescue, gave financial support, saving jobs of thousands of Mauritians on an unprecedented scale. There is nothing more effective in bestowing dignity and alleviating poverty than a job that firmly anchors the individual in society. At the macro level, the balanced approach of Government actions averted looting, burglary and other undesirable social activities. Can we

imagine without the positive action of the Government and the Minister of Finance what type of social unrest could have taken place in this country? The recent events, unfortunately, in Sri Lanka which failed to contain public uproar is a case in point.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our Government acted to harness an explosive situation without dillydallying on the means. The key issue is that it maintained socio-economic and political stability, took drastic measures to protect the nation, closed the frontiers at different points in time out of national responsibility and enlightened leadership. It adopted several measures to enable the country to cruise smoothly. Yet, what criticisms were not levelled against Government?

Faced with an emergency, this Government averted a socio-economic explosion, fed its nation, fed its children, saved jobs and created the conditions for an early recovery, as the Bretton Woods Institutions have pointed out. But instead of giving a helping hand, the Opposition behaved in a most unpatriotic manner having recourse to ranked demagogy, to different types of devious and reprehensible actions. Government, loyal to its principles, adopted a pragmatic fire-fighting strategy to protect our nation and our economy, and we averted a historical collision that would have been disastrous to our country, Mr Speaker, Sir.

We are now more than three months since the start of the Ukraine war, people and countries are being trapped between a rock and a hard place; the rock is the unprecedented cost of living crisis not seen in more than a generation, with escalating price shocks in the global food, energy and fertilizer markets due to the war. And the hard place is the extremely fragile context in which the crisis has arrived, namely in a world facing the cascading crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate change. No country or community has been left untouched, Mr Speaker, Sir, by this cost of living crisis due to the severe price shocks.

There is need to acknowledge, Mr Speaker, Sir, as we all know, Russia and Ukraine, the largest exporters of wheat, oil and natural gas. According to the IMF estimates, inflation will reach up to 8.7% in developed countries and two-digit inflation rate in developing countries. The prevailing inflation rate in developed countries, Mr Speaker, Sir, like the UK and Singapore varies between 5% to 7% while in developing countries such as Egypt and Brazil the inflation rate exceeds 10%.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this conflict between Russian and Ukraine resulted in an unprecedented hike in the price of basic commodities and –

- (i) the price of European natural gas has risen;
- (ii) fertiliser prices are more than double;
- (iii) maritime transport costs are more than triple;
- (iv) rising interest rates and growing investor uncertainty has eroded both the value of developing countries as well as their capacity to borrow in foreign markets;

Mr Speaker, Sir, after the 100 days of the war, the currencies of 142 developing countries have depreciated on average by 2.8% against the US dollar. And Mr Speaker, Sir, when we look at all the documents that are related to the current crisis, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are horrified, in fact, we are *pétrifiés, M. le président !*

I am quoting a UN global crisis document –

“Global impact of the war in Ukraine: Billions of people face the greatest cost-of-living crisis in a generation”

Another one –

“Russia’s invasion of Ukraine puts the global economy at risk”

Another one –

“Economic consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict: Stagflation ahead”.

Another one –

“Medium and long-term knock-on effects of the war in Europe on global sectors trends: Will there be resilient sectors?”

We cannot be any exception, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have been badly stricken by this pandemic for the last two years. And the ongoing Russian-Ukraine conflict has not left us unscathed. The aftermaths of this pandemic and the raging war are exogenous factors beyond our control. In spite of subsidies provided by the Government on essential commodities such as canned fish, powdered milk, cheese and edible oil, food prices have continued to rise. The price of fuel has since the start of this conflict increased by around 76%, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Against this bleak backdrop and the spectre of global economic slowdown, this Budget, with its visionary approach and bold economic and social measures, is set to carving the road towards an economic recovery, and more importantly a turnaround of the current socio-economic situation towards a sustainable and shared prosperity. These measures were designed to inject new vigour and resilience to the economy, however, based on social justice and inclusiveness.

And, Mr Speaker, Sir, when we listen, on this side of the House, to all these criticisms, frivolous, unfair and unwarranted comments made; expressions coming from the Opposition like '*des miettes*'; or '*budget billet mille*' all these remarks that have been made against the budget, against all these social measures that the Minister has announced, Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot add my voice to what other Members of this side reminded us with regard to the Labour/PMSD Budget of 2006. In that Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, I remember I was on the other side of the House; I intervened. How many crimes were not committed in the name of economic reforms? Labour laws were revisited. They came up with a new labour legislation doing away with severance allowance at normal rate; eliminating the termination of Contract Service Board which had offered protection to laid off workers; abolishing the tripartite mechanism; doing away with subsidies on SC/HSC examination fees, on rice and flour, and worse, Mr Speaker, Sir, depriving school children of their bread. And this is what the hon. Minister said in an unforgiving cynicism at page 30 of his Budget Speech, I quote, this is what he said, Mr Speaker, Sir –

“Equally, why do we accept a primary school feeding programme known for its wastage and inequity?”

He called that “wastage and inequity”! And that was a Budget of, as far as I remember, Rs16 or Rs17 m. only, Mr Speaker, Sir. He abolished this Primary School Feeding Programme and called it ‘wastage and inequity’.

And he goes on to say: ‘Now is the time to stop this irrationality and spend taxpayers’ money in a way that really achieves our noble objectives.’ So, this was irrationality and this was a wastage and inequity, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Hardly had the pandemic abated than this world of ours, as I just said, Mr Speaker, Sir, was subject to this Russian invasion with the impacts on the tiny economy of Mauritius. The embargo on the oil imports from Russia started; the Russians retaliated and started to pay in roubles to produce soaring oil prices on the world market. And although we do not directly buy

these items from these countries, of course, the war situation has caused a shortage on the world market, triggering a supply chain rise in prices. And we remember in our country just after the war started, there was a demand to raise the price of bread but our Government took pondered action. Instead of allowing bakeries to close shops and make workers redundant or allow the price of bread to rise to Rs4 per loaf, the Government decided to maintain socio-economic stability and prevent further erosion of the purchasing power by granting a substantial subsidy to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. Mr Speaker, Sir, if this is not a clear manifestation of a genuinely caring Government with a high sense of responsibility, what is it, Mr Speaker, Sir?

And we also do not forget how sea freights underwent a consequential increase combined with the appreciation of the USD. Distant and tiny Mauritius has had to bear the brunt of distance tyranny, Mr Speaker, Sir, when we know our dependence on imports which account to nearly 80%. We are a trading nation and one of the most open economies in the World. We do not have the might to withstand the oligopolistic pressure of the shipping magnates of linear maritime transportation or the tramp vessels. Small countries like us, we are at their mercy with little bargaining power, or they just don't stop at your port. And this has also seriously affected the cost of merchandise delivery to Mauritius. Does the Opposition, Mr Speaker, Sir, realise that this Budget has made, in fact, a serious effort to address this situation with clear measures? I am talking of the announcement made by the Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the new maritime lines which will be serving Mauritius and India and Mauritius and East Africa.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to attenuate this impact that I am just referring to, what has our Government, the Minister of Finance in fact done? He has provided an arsenal of subsidies, maintaining the prices of basic necessities: flour, rice, LPG on the consumption side. The Budget has also provided various incentives on the production side as in agriculture for tea production, fruit growing, the minimum guaranteed price to planters of onions, inputs such as fertilizers and seeds, through concessionary rate of interest for easing facilities to cooperatives, tax holidays and exemption of Registration Duty.

These measures, Mr Speaker, Sir, make a formidable bundle in the supply chain and trigger dynamism with a blend of hope, optimism, and trust lurking in the horizon. Confidence is a major factor in economic recovery. Throughout this Budget, the emphasis is to regain the atmosphere of confidence and place our country on the road to sustained growth. This

Government has left no stone unturned to generate this element of trust because the nation recognises in this Government, its commitment and seriousness of purpose. Through its institutions, it creates an infrastructure to enhance food security by creating or upgrading livestock zones in selected regions and a propitious climate to do business.

What this Budget also did, Mr Speaker, Sir, it got the macroeconomic fundamentals right. And it is the primary purpose of a serious Government to get these fundamentals right, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is the appropriate behaviour and conduct of macroeconomic fundamentals that generate the enabling environment, the confidence, the entrepreneurial spirit to blossom and grow. Mr Speaker, Sir, this abstract and indirect approach to trigger growth and stability has probably eluded observers but without this indirect approach to attain stabilisation and gradual structural adjustment, no economy can thrive.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the real economy, the Budget provides an arsenal of measures incorporating incentives, fiscal concessions, infrastructure support, grants, introduction of suitable legislative framework to stimulate production while addressing inflationary pressure. A significant proportion of inflation is imported. So, addressing the issue of rising imports is equally one way to fight inflation. Mr Speaker, Sir.

At the same time, the Budget addresses the problem of unemployment. With the measures in place and new measures announced, unemployment is expected to shrink to around 7%. With the measure of providing Rs15,000 to each new recruit and the confidence meticulously built, there is every reason to expect a major dent in the unemployment rate. Mr Speaker, Sir, the multiplier effect will do the rest. With inflation in check and unemployment poised to significantly contract, we will be approaching the internal equilibrium, and as idle resources are put to work, it will translate into higher growth.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with economic growth back, it is not surprising that we will reach the 2018 level sooner than expected and solidly anchored to full recovery in 2023. This is what the Budget explains. This is plain basic Mathematics Mr Speaker, Sir. The debt rose to an alarming level in the ratio analysis during the pandemic because GDP had contracted by a significant margin of 15% as we know. The Opposition and the Press, they had a field day to write alarming and sensationalist article. And the Opposition saw in the soaring ratio only the incompetence of Government when, in fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, only one variable had changed: the GDP growth.

So, we can now be more optimistic, Mr Speaker, Sir. As a result, we can hope public debt, which had peaked at 96%, has dropped to 87.4% in June of this year, and it is poised to fall to 77.3%. It represents a fall of 18%, Mr Speaker, Sir. Such a feat, although still far from the target, invites a round of applause. This is tremendous achievement in terms of setting the economic fundamentals right. The trend improves the credibility of Mauritius and sends strong signals to world opinion and economic compilers of information.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the enabling environment created through the budgetary measures and policies, we expect that exports will pick up. COVID-19 has taught us that there is room to stimulate the domestic market. Even the internal tourist market can make an important contribution. At the same time, the domestic production can contribute to reduce imports, even if marginally at the start. This should reduce the both the trade and current account deficits with an increase in savings rate. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, we can look forward to approaching external equilibrium at a faster rate. Our biggest challenge, however, remains reducing further the inflationary spiral. Mr Speaker, Sir, preliminary data shows discernible signs of a pick-up in the exported-oriented manufacturing sector, in ICT, in the financial services sector and in tourism. Although we are still producing inside our production possibility frontier curve, the policy measures are intended to shift production capacity to attain the optimum economic potential.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in other words, this Budget is not only one proposing an array of strong social measures. But this Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, is, in fact, laying the basis. It constitutes a springboard for accelerating growth and development. And in this context, I would like to commend the Minister for one of his continued measures in terms of openness of our economy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, from time to time, we hear rather unfortunate comments made by the press or Members of the Opposition with regards to the openness strategy of this Government. It has become imperative that we further open up our economy and country, attracting more foreign investors, professionals and retirees, will not only boost economic activities, create jobs and contribute to the wealth of our country. It is also part of a defined strategy to tackle the demographic by attracting more foreign investors, digital nomads and retirees to Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic is a wake-up call for all of us with the absence of tourists for nearly two years showing us the limits of a strong domestic

captive market. This situation compels us to build a solid domestic base and a captive market for our economic operators. Today, there are more than 1,100 foreign investors and more than 550 self-employed individuals under an occupation permit who have invested in our country in several sectors, including ICT, Manufacturing, Financial Services and Real Estates, amongst others. They have brought with them significant amount of FDI which has had a beneficial impact on GDP as well as employment. FDI, not only creates economic opportunities, but also steady flow for foreign exchange, we shall stabilize the Mauritian Rupee.

In addition, Mr Speaker, Sir, more than 4,600 professionals are working in high hand and technical posts under an occupation permit in sectors where there is an absence of local expertise. Today, the success of several economies such as Singapore, Dubai, Ireland, Australia or even Canada are based on their opening strategy to foreign talent, why should Mauritius be any different? In fact, today, we should encourage more of these investors, more of these professionals and of the self-employed individuals to come to our shores and contribute to economic development through their capital injections as well as the expertise and technology that they bring in.

The fall in FDI to Rs15.3 billion for 2021 has also been evoked at length by several Members, I would like to remind Members that this is a more than admirable performance, given that our borders were close for nine months in 2021, Mr Speaker, Sir, which made it nearly impossible for foreign investors to prospect the markets and conclude deals. The interest of potential investors to set up operation in Mauritius is still here and the reopening of borders will result in a major increase in projects and FDI flows in 2022 as delayed projects materialise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are seeing major multi-national companies such as Corel who have set up in Mauritius earlier, and more such companies will be present in the near future.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will come to the transport sector if you will allow me for a few minutes. I wish to inform the House about certain developments in that sector, Mr Speaker, Sir, and this will give me a chance also to answer a few queries or respond to a few comments that have been made by some Members on the other side.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a country cannot aspire to new levels of development without investing in its national infrastructure, likewise, continuous improvement in the transport system is a major prerequisite for enabling economic development.

We cannot overemphasise the importance of mobility as an effective liver for growth. To that end, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Metro Express has been instrumental in favouring a modern reliable convenient and safe road of travel. The extension of the light rail alignment to Réduit and Curepipe would no doubt further enhance connectivity throughout several parts of our country and afford our citizens with a comfortable and rapid mode of commute.

By the end this year, both these alignments would be completed. The Metro Express is an *avant-garde* undertaking as it has challenged conventional thinking. The benefits accruing from the light rail transit system cannot be overstated, Mr Speaker, Sir, in as much as the Metro Express has had significant positive impacts on both the social and environmental fronts in addition to having put Mauritius at par with the best in class international jurisdictions. The reduced travel time has undeniably uplifted the quality life of our citizens, who are now able to reach home earlier to spend quality time with their families, and restoring the work life balance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it carries with it many environmental benefits. With a view to making the operation of Metro Express more sustainable, the Budget seeks to facilitate the setting up of Photovoltaic farms in order to allow Metro Express to generate electricity from a clean and renewable source. To this end, the installation of solar farms at the Richelieu Depot, Barkly and at the Ebène Recreational Park would allow the light rail operator not only to save on its operational costs but would enable it to meet the demand for electricity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform the House that the ridership of the Metro Express is steadily picking up in spite of the impacts of the COVID-19 on the transport sector. With a daily ridership reaching up to 25,000 since the opening of the Phoenix line on 08 May of this year, the Metro Express is poised to become the preferred mode of commute of the Mauritian population as the 8 million passengers' milestone will soon be attained. We need to acknowledge, Mr Speaker, Sir, and this is to answer a few Members of the other side who have said that the Metro is *en faillite ou bien metro pe roule lor rail, p roule lor zente*. Mr Speaker, Sir, let tell these hon. Members that the light rail transit system is not yet fully operational, and it is still in its teething stage. It is to be highlighted that Metro Express is expected to be fully operational by December 2022.

The Metro, Mr Speaker, Sir, has almost put in place its full operating structure and is therefore incurring 92% of the costs now, but it will attain its full operating revenue stream only

in December of this year. On the other hand, as the light rail alignment has not yet been completed, only 35% of the full operation ridership has been achieved at this stage. Internationally, such projects, in the initial stage, do incur losses. We should therefore wait for the completion of the project before any assessment of financial performance.

Moreover, Mr Speaker, Sir, the fares were initially aligned with the bus fares. It is only now that the metro fares have been reviewed, and it is expected that the Metro Express Ltd will meet its full operational costs on full operation. We should not forget that the Metro Express is an economic enabler with significant multiplier effects in terms of opportunities for entrepreneurs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, le budget a fait aussi la part belle au développement durable. En sus de favoriser un système de transport soutenable, une panoplie de mesures a été dument élaborée pour accompagner le secteur du transport dans le processus de décarbonisation.

De ce fait, M. le président, je note avec une satisfaction indicible que provision a été fait pour une assistance financière aux opérateurs d'autobus à travers des facilités de *leasing* étalées sur dix ans et à un taux très attractif de 3% par an.

Cela va sans aucun doute permettre aux opérateurs de mieux planifier le renouvellement de leur flotte incluant les infrastructures nécessaires pour la recharge de ces véhicules. A travers cette mesure phare, nous sommes en bonne voie pour l'électrification de notre flotte d'autobus et un écosystème approprié sera mise en place pour mieux encourager les opérateurs d'autobus à adopter les bus électriques.

M. le président, ces mesures interviennent à un moment opportun car la cause écologique est plus que jamais d'actualité, et il faut maintenant passer à l'action, étant donné que nous avons à faire face à une flotte vieillissante dans les années à venir. Il est donc temps d'agir. Le rôle de l'État est, certes, de faciliter cette transition du diesel à un mode de propulsion plus verte, et il convient aussi aux opérateurs de faire le bon choix en optant pour un véhicule moins polluant et qui d'après certaines observations, démontre un meilleur couts-bénéfice sur le long terme.

C'est dans cette optique, M. le président, que le budget préconise que les subsides sous le plan de modernisation d'autobus sera applicable seulement pour ceux à moteur électrique. Le but, M. le président, est de favoriser une approche verte et respectueuse de l'environnement car

nous ne pouvons continuer à soutenir une flotte polluante, et dont les émissions représentent un danger réel et ambulant pour la santé de nos concitoyens. Et c'est pour cette raison, récemment mon ministère, avait quelques mois de cela, promulgué des amendements au Road Traffic Regulations afin de permettre l'utilisation d'opacimètre pour mieux sévir contre les véhicules fumigènes. Et là, je dois remercier mon collègue, le ministre Ramano responsable du dossier environnement, pour sa contribution ainsi que celle de son ministère pour la concrétisation de cette mesure.

M. le président, les mesures énoncées dans le budget sont alignées à la vision de mon ministère de mettre en place dans le moyen et long terme un système de transport respectueux de l'environnement avec zéro émission carbone. De plus, cela permettra au pays de faire des économies substantielles sur la facture d'importation de carburant.

M. le président, on se doit s'apprécier les efforts consentis par le gouvernement à travers l'IFCM pour permettre aux compagnies désirant procéder au renouvellement de leur flotte par des véhicules électriques de bénéficier de facilité et de crédit-bail à un taux vraiment très attractif de 3.5% annuellement. Et comment passer sous silence l'annonce concernant le renouvellement de la flotte de la Corporation National de Transport qui, au fil des années, n'a cessé d'améliorer ses services et opérer sur les *social routes* afin d'offrir un moyen de transport convenable et assurer la mobilité de nos voyageurs. Certes, il y a urgence pour améliorer une partie de la flotte et de remplacer les autobus ayant atteint un certain nombre d'années. M. le président, ce sera chose faite d'ici peu car ce budget préconise le remplacement d'environ 200 vieux autobus par des véhicules modernes avec un mode de propulsion électrique. Cette mesure phare constitue une première car jamais auparavant nous avons envisagé un renouvellement de cette envergure. Cette technologie a été testée car la CNT qui s'est procurée d'un autobus électrique à des fins de test dont les résultats ont été probants et cela nous a permis de nous familiariser avec la technologie automobile électrique.

A travers le renouvellement de la flotte par des autobus électriques, c'est un signal fort que nous voulons émettre car la Corporation se doit en tant que compagnie étatique de montrer la voie et de monter l'exemple d'une compagnie de transport respectueuse de l'environnement. L'industrie du transport est le second gros pollueur de notre pays, M. le président. Nous avons pour ambition d'atteindre un taux d'électrification très élevé d'ici la prochaine décennie.

Et je voudrais répondre à l'honorable Assirvaden ou autres membres sur les commentaires sur le projet d'acquérir 25 bus électriques dans le budget de l'année dernière. En effet, c'était une annonce, M. le président. Je dois souligner qu'il y avait une urgence de procéder au renouvellement de la flotte de la Corporation. Mais compte tenu de l'échéance du temps qu'il allait prendre pour l'acquisition et pour la réception de ces autobus, M. le président, nous avons dû, au cours de cette année financière, procéder à l'acquisition d'environ 20 bus conventionnels. Un exercice de *tender* a eu lieu ; le *lowest bidder* a été choisi ; celui qui avait offert de nous vendre les 20 autobus, mais avant que le contrat lui fut alloué, il n'avait pu soumettre la garantie financière comme exigeaient les *bid documents*. Donc, l'exercice a dû être renouvelé, M. le président ; ce qui a été fait et en septembre de cette année, la CNT recevra les 20 bus conventionnels flambants neufs. Ne vous en faites pas, honorable Assirvaden, je vous inviterai à l'inauguration.

The transition to electric vehicles would definitely allow Mauritius to abide to the commitments taken at the different fora for example, the Prime Minister will remember at COP-26, Mr Speaker, Sir, for easing the adoption of electric vehicles so on.

The negative excise duty scheme of 10% is an astute fiscal instrument to foster a greener vehicular fleet in Mauritius and I must thank the hon. Minister of Finance to have been very attentive to the request of the Ministry of Transport and the NTC, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Taxi Operators and vans also play a vital role for ensuring the mobility of our citizens and they have not been left out from this green bandwagon. They would also be eligible to a loan facility of up to Rs3 m. with interest rate as low as 0.5% spanned over a period of 7 years for the acquisition of electric-run vehicles.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is so much to say on the transport industry; how we are supporting the industry; how we have helped during the COVID period the transport operators, especially those in the hospitality sector because of the reduction in the number of tourists; so much help was given to all these operators, Mr Speaker, Sir. It will take me so much time. Amidst the difficulties faced by the taxi and contract bus operators in the tourism sector, Government generously granted a one-off allowance of Rs10,000 under the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund. Mr Speaker, Sir, bus operators were also eligible to assistance from Government for the payment of salaries to their employees under the Government Wage Assistance Scheme. We launched the

Taxi Operators Welfare Fund, where the Minister of Finance again, generously, earmarked nearly Rs900,000 for taxi operators in this Fund and today this Fund is an appropriate set-up for easing the plight of the taxi operators. Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been set up and is working well. It has about 2,000 members and we shall proceed also with the setting up of a Contract Bus Operators Welfare Fund in the near future.

I say all this, Mr Speaker, Sir, to show the magnanimity of this Government, the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister, towards the transport industry during those testing times. But I would like also to make an announcement which I am sure will please the workers of the transport industry, Mr Speaker, Sir. *Je voudrais ici mentionner que les employés de l'industrie du transport bénéficient déjà d'une indemnité mensuelle ad hoc de R 1 000 initialement payé par le Gouvernement sous le Bus Company Recovery Account. Et ceci depuis Décembre 2019. Cette mesure qui avait été mise en place en faveur des travailleurs de la CNT d'abord en Janvier 2020 a par la suite été étendue à tous les travailleurs de transport régit par le NRB en Septembre 2020.*

M. le président, les représentants syndicaux des travailleurs du transport ont fait une demande à ce que cette indemnité soit incluse dans le salaire de base des employés. Ainsi, suite à la récente révision des tarifs d'autobus, le gouvernement, soucieux du bien-être des employés, a décidé que cette allocation de R 1,000 sera incluse dans le salaire de base et devra être payée par les opérateurs d'autobus car ils ont généré des recettes additionnelles. Ainsi, avec l'inclusion de l'allocation de R 1,000 dans leur salaire de base, les employés du transport auront désormais droit à un salaire de base plus élevé par le calcul de leurs primes, heures supplémentaires et etc., M. le président.

Évidemment, ces travailleurs bénéficieront également de l'allocation de revenu mensuel d'un montant de R 1,000 comme annoncée dans le budget à condition que leur revenu brut soit inférieur à R 50,000.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning road safety, several measures have been taken with a view to enhancing road safety, I don't think I will have time to go through all these measures, Mr Speaker, Sir –

- (i) speed reducing devices;

- (ii) Roadside Hazard Management;
- (iii) Belisha Beacon Lights at all zebra crossings;
- (iv) speed limit reduced in respect of various roads in our towns and villages;
- (v) Road Safety Audits, Mr Speaker, Sir;
- (vi) pelican crossings;
- (vii) Arrestor Beds at Soreze and Valton – an arrestor bed is normally on the side of a road and it is constructed to slow down and bring to stop heavy vehicles that have encountered braking failures when descending a sharp slope, and
- (viii) Mid-Term review is being conducted to assess the effectiveness of all these measures.

With regard to fluidity and mobility also, Mr Speaker, Sir, several measures have been taken and I would not have time to go through all these measures. But I would like just to say one word on the modernisation of the transport sector, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are coming up with a Fleet Management System which would allow real time monitoring of buses by the NLTA to ensure that the buses adhere to the approved timetable. This would allow live tracking of bus locations and the mapping of same would enable passengers to know the expected arrival time of their buses and they would as a result be in a better position to plan their journey ahead. The Fleet Management System would act as an effective mechanism to ensure that any non-compliance to agreed standards such as excessive idle time or over speeding are flagged so that the NLTA may initiate relevant actions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, budgetary allocation has also been made for the Cashless Ticketing System. Similarly, consideration is being given to make optimum use of online tools to ease the registration of new or second-hand imported vehicles by motor vehicle dealers and for the issue of the *Certificat De Gage* electronically. This is to streamline processes and reduce lead time for administrative tasks.

Mr Speaker Sir, my Ministry is also promoting inclusive development in the transport sector. C'est justement pour cette raison que nous voulons désenclaver certaines régions et y améliorer les infrastructures routières dans l'optique de faciliter l'accès et assurer une meilleure connectivité. Nous allons, par exemple, développer un plan stratégique en partenariat avec le

secteur privé pour permettre à certaines localités comme Roches Brunes ou Mont Roches et même Camp Levieux d'être mieux connectées à la station ferroviaire de Barkly.

Cela améliorera non seulement l'accès mais permettra à la région de Barkly de devenir un centre névralgique et un maillon important dans le contexte d'un système de transport intermodal basé sur le système de 'hub'.

Nous projetons aussi de venir de l'avant avec un concept de développement intégré et innovateur dans cette région à travers un Terminal périphérie moderne alliant espaces commerciales et récréatives, articulé autour d'un système de transport efficace à travers le Metro Express. Ce même concept sera étendu dans d'autres régions périphériques sur l'alignement du Metro, *Mr Speaker, Sir*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are, in fact, reshaping our transport sector. In other words, and my Ministry is also aspiring to provide the appropriate legal framework to allow online booking of taxis, Mr Speaker, Sir, but this would need, of course, a lot of regulation and the framework will increase the convenience and improve the experience of availing taxi services.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have also put on our roads minibuses and new categories of buses are being introduced and this mode of transport has been very popular and we are also introducing the shuttle service through minibuses to provide first and last mile connectivity to and from the light rail stations and this new innovative service would be the linchpin for inter-modal integration by enhancing accessibility to Metro Stations and for an advanced transport system.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are finally devising a Transport Master Plan geared towards the reorganisation of the transport sector so that we may have a scientific and balanced approach to the deployment of buses and for rationalising transport services without compromising on quality services to the commuters as the ultimate aim is to induce a higher uptake in the public transportation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we ambition for the Mauritian Transport System to be hailed as one of the best in the region in terms of reliability, sustainability and in terms of comfort.

If you would allow me, a few words on my other portfolio, Foreign Affairs, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I need not emphasize that this Ministry and its associated portfolios of regional integration and international trade have a crucial role to play in this regard. As the first point of contact for our bilateral, regional and multilateral partners, this Ministry is ideally placed to ensure that our partnerships give tangible meaning to our national objectives through our foreign policy engagements.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in terms of Economic Diplomacy, my Ministry has been pursuing sustained efforts to open up new market access opportunities. Four major trade agreements entered into force last year; the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the Mauritius-China FTA, the UK-ESA EPA and the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with India have opened up preferential trade opportunities for local operators on a market of over 5.4 billion people, representing nearly 70% of the world population, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The entry into force of the CECPA with India in April 2021 has provided the business community in Mauritius with access to a market of 1.3 billion consumers for key products.

In 2020, our total exports to India were Rs1.26 billion, export to India as at January this year, Mr Speaker, Sir, stood at Rs2 billion. An increase of 58.3 % compared to 2020.

With regard to China, we exported Rs1.4 billion worth of products in 2021 and in 2020, it was only Rs561 m. So, from Rs561 m. in 2020 with regard to China, we moved up to 1.4 billion worth of products, an increase of 148%, Mr Speaker, Sir, and regarding the African Continent, negotiations on Trade in Services are being intensified to enable a successful completion by June 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Kenya, SADC, COMESA, with regard to these two institutions and this country, following intense lobbying made by the Ministry and other COMESA members in Kenya, we have liberalised the market for imports of White Refined Sugar and, in addition, SADC and COMESA discussions are going further to consolidate market access for trade in goods and trade in services.

We are also promoting our 'Look East' strategy. My Ministry is reinforcing our close and historic ties with traditional countries such as India and China but we are also exploring avenues of cooperation with other countries, such as South Korea and Indonesia. We are availing

the opportunities offered by the 50 years' celebrations of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, and the 75th anniversary with India, Mr Speaker, Sir, to further develop collaboration in various promising and innovative sectors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we continue to remain engaged in the strengthening of our relations with the Middle East countries, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) so that they emerge as enduring economic partners of Mauritius in the fields of Finance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are sparing no effort to act on our priorities. We are now aiming at a determined intensification of our engagements with all these blocs with clear goals and objectives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry will continue to contribute to advocacy on ensuring also that our Africa Strategy delivers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I will just say that this Budget has been un budget de promesses et d'avenir. In fact, when we, après deux années difficiles, M. le président - je vais terminer dans une seconde - engendrées par la conjoncture économique, l'heure est à la relance économique tout en plaçant l'intérêt de notre population au centre de notre préoccupation. Ce budget se veut inclusif et personne n'a été laissé de côté.

Présenté par mon collègue, le ministre des Finances, il comporte tous les éléments pour donner une nouvelle impulsion à notre économie et accorder un essor à plusieurs secteurs pour qu'on puisse créer la valeur autour d'une ligne directrice bien articulée. C'est un budget socialement inclusif, avec le peuple pour le peuple.

La preuve, M. le président, est que la population dans son ensemble, a bien accueilli les diverses mesures préconisées et qui vont grandement contribuer à améliorer leur quotidien.

Quant aux pôles économiques, le budget a fait la part belle aux petites et moyennes entreprises qui sont, il faut l'avouer un maillon essentiel dans notre économie. Il va sans dire que la reprise et l'envol économique qui sera assuré par la concrétisation des mesures énoncées par mon collègue contribuera grandement à la création d'emploi surtout pour nos jeunes.

Ce budget a non seulement réussi à fédérer la population autour d'un projet commun mais a aussi réussi à faire taire certains oiseaux de mauvais augures qui ne cessaient de noircir le tableau et dépeindre une situation chaotique. Au fait, l'intervention salutaire du gouvernement a

été d'une importance capitale pour diverses couches sociales comme je l'ai démontré dans mon discours et pour contrer les pressions inflationnistes.

Il ne fait aucun doute que notre pays, sous la direction éclairée de notre Premier ministre, est sur la bonne voie et à travers de ce budget de relance économique, contenant un bon dosage de mesures sociales et sans faire de surenchère, saura remettre les secteurs affectés par la pandémie sur les rails. En ces moments difficiles et dans la conjoncture mondiale actuelle, on ne pouvait faire mieux et personne n'aurait pu faire mieux, M. le président. Comme j'avais dit, pour terminer mon discours lors de la motion de censure, de ce côté de cette Chambre, M. le président, nous sommes optimistes, nous sommes sereins à confronter l'avenir que ce soit les élections municipales ou les élections générales parce que nous savons le peuple saura juger notre bonne foi et nos bonnes intentions et c'est pourquoi j'avais dit et je le redis à tous nos amis qui nous écoutent, l'avenir nous appartient. Ensemble, nous le ferons.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members I am suspending the Sitting for one hour.

At 8.46 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.57 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Bodha!

(9.58 p.m.)

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The Opposition has spoken with one powerful voice. May I, for once, congratulate each Member on this side of the House for his or her valuable contribution. May I say also one word for the Minister of Finance, because he has done his duty to bring the Appropriation Bill 2022-2023 to Parliament.

M. le président, ce budget n'est qu'une accalmie. La colère, l'angoisse et les attentes de la population sont toujours là face à un avenir très incertain. Par ailleurs, tous les grands problèmes structurels de notre économie restent entiers. De même que tous les grands défis devant nous et surtout les conséquences socio-économiques causées par ce budget. C'est un exercice avec une grande distorsion de la réalité quand on voit le poids des fonds spéciaux, M. le président. Il fallait des mesures urgentes pour soulager la population, mais il fallait aussi des

idées nouvelles et un nouveau dynamisme pour relancer la machine économique et créer un climat de confiance.

Let us see, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what happens to the urgent measures that were required, but before that let us see what has been done in other countries. In Britain, for a year the government will cut taxes on gasoline and diesel which will save the average car driver about 2 pounds a week. They are removing VAT on certain products which improve energy efficiency in homes and tackling energy bills. In the Netherlands, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the government is raising the one-off energy allowance for people. In Japan, the government of Prime Minister Kishida is considering to finance the subsidy program and other measures to cushion the impact of rising prices on the economy. He says we need to prevent rising fuel, raw material and food prices. South Africa, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will reduce its general fuel levy for two months and sell part of its strategic oil reserves to mitigate against the impact of rising crude prices. The duty imposed on each litre of fuel will be reduced by almost 40%.

Now, what is the trend? The trend in the world today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is to reduce taxes on fuel prices to address of the dramatic increase in the cost of living as we have seen. But what have we done in Mauritius? We have done the contrary. In fact, we increased the price of fuel twice before the Budget to increase the revenue of the Ministry of Finance. In fact, in all the other Budgets, we have cuts which are announced in the Budget Speech. Here, we have price rise before the Budget because the Minister of Finance cynically wants his coffers to be full. Petrol prices have increased by 46%, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since the last six months to reach Rs74 a litre today. We all know that everyone owning a car in Mauritius will drive at least 500 to 1500 kilometres a month, making a difference between Rs1,000 to Rs3,000 per month on one single item.

So, what is cynical, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that he increased the prices before the Budget to fill his coffers before handing over one rupee across the board. He is doing exactly the contrary of what is being done elsewhere and laying the burden on the population, knowing fully well that each rupee on the litre brings Rs500 m. to the Government. This is exactly the subterfuge that he has used, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

On this side of the House, many arguments have been put forward. As I said, powerfully, speaking on one voice by the high rate of inflation, the high cost of living, high budgetary deficit,

unsustainable indebtedness, unemployment, lack of transparency, lack of accountability, urgent need to address living conditions of most households, and manipulation of figures. When we come to the macroeconomic fundamentals, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, have these figures been manipulated? Can we rely on the figures which have been given to us in this exercise? First of all, the Minister stated that according to IMF forecast, our GDP will exceed the pre-pandemic level reaching 520 billion by 2022 compared to 465 billion in 2021. In fact, he is not telling the truth about our economy growth performance by focusing on nominal GDP. And in fact, what is going to happen in real terms based on IMF projections, GDP will exceed the pre-COVID level of 2019 only in 2024, and he keeps overestimating the real GDP growth be it for 2021-2022 and for the next year. Again, he is relying on a massive 8.5% growth in 2022 when most economic observers do not believe it will exceed 6%.

In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, most of our sectors have not returned to the pre-pandemic levels of economic activity. For example, our exports in real terms in 2021 were 54 billion as compared to 83 billion in 2014, and 69 billion in 2019. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, growth has been overestimated for the year 2022-2023 given the slow global growth rising rates and high inflation, and this growth is based artificially on a weak rupee. We know what is going to happen as regard to inflation and the rise in prices.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me say a few words about the unemployment statistics which have been constantly manipulated over the months. If we take figures of people who are classified as inactive and not as unemployed, the unemployment figures are likely to be much higher than 16%. On the other hand, youth unemployment is even higher than the rising rate of 23%. And this is extremely important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have almost 100,000 workers who have a job and who are looking for a second job to make ends meet to support their family. This is the reality in many households today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Minister states in paragraph 347 of his Budget Speech that Budget is driven by investment. But the inward FDI figures for 2021 show a remarkable drop in USD. It is around 50% and Mauritius is getting less and less competitive. As regard to households, the Budget has not compensated households for their loss in purchasing power. We know that households are getting poorer and poorer year by year.

Let me also say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that this Budget will on the contrary worsen the situation of households. The Minister of Finance will be collecting from households an additional Rs22 billion in tax revenue. From Rs107 billion to Rs129 billion, it is an addition of Rs15 billion only on VAT which will be collected and we know who pays for the VAT.

I would say a few words about the budget deficit; we are told that it is going to be Rs25 billion or 5% but we know that the real deficit has to be adjusted. After adjustment from income from quasi corporations and bailout expenses and we are also expecting Rs22 billion of sale of assets.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me come to the debt. Our public sector debt remains unsustainably higher than what is expected and let me say one thing, in real terms it is massive. For the year 2021-2022, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, interest and capital to be paid is Rs34.7 billion. In 2022-2023, interest and capital to be paid is Rs53 billion; in 2023-2024, interest and capital to be paid is Rs35 billion, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and in 2024-2025, interest and capital to be paid is Rs55 billion. We can see how it is spiralling year after year. And we know that the revenue *pour le grand argentier* will be around Rs200 billion and we can see the burden ahead; we have to pay for 2022-2023: Rs53 billion of capital and interest and in 2024-2025: Rs55 billion.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Bank of Mauritius expects inflation to be only 6.6% and with a weak rupee, we know what is happening. In the first quarter of 2022, this year, inflation was 6% officially but food inflation, the cost of prices of essential food items was 14% and food inflation is at least twice the official figure and a terrible burden on the households. And let us not consider the inflation of construction materials and items; this is even higher, it is between 40% and 50%. And everyone who is building or constructing whatever is bearing the full brunt of it.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are going towards huge increases in many food items as the Minister of Finance has scrapped the subsidy of Rs1.2 billion. The Minister says he prefers to save the Rs4.8 billion for the next 12 months rather than maintaining the stability of essential goods. We all know what is happening today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, prices have already gone up in a dramatic way, milk products, oil, all other essential products which will make life really, really difficult for the households to come.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to say a few words about special funds. As I said, *cette exercice a une grande distorsion à cause du budget lui-même et les fonds spéciaux*. This syndrome of special funding, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is to avoid accountability. This parallel budgeting is not good at all for good governance and I would like to say a few words about it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. In 2009, three special funds were created by Dr. Rama Sithanen, one was *Maurice île Durable: R 1 milliard*; then you had the Manufacturing Adjustment and SME Fund: Rs1 billion; Human Resource Development and Knowledge and Arts Fund: Rs1 billion. And what were the consequences of this? Lack of transparency, lack of accountability and this is totally contrary to the tenants of good governance. As I said, it is a distortion of the management of an allocation of public funds.

I would like to say something here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. During the Budget Speech of 2021, Pravind Jugnauth, in fact, abolished all these funds and brought only one consolidated fund. And I would like to read what he said on 30 December 2009 on the 2010 Budget. And, in fact, he criticised the Special Funds, the syndrome of special funding and the criticism, in fact, for me, is a very good criticism of this budget and I am going to read what he said –

« Le peuple Mauricien a été emporté délibérément dans un tourbillon de chiffres manipulés, d'arnaques préméditées en guise d'apparente mesures sociales et il y eu les fonds mirobolants portant sur un sensationnalisme rêveur et le tout destiné à faire croire que la politique économique du ministre des Finances et du gouvernement vise le bien-être de la population ».

C'est exactement ce qu'on pourrait dire de ce budget ; je le répète, M. le président, –

« le peuple Mauricien a été emporté délibérément dans un tourbillon de chiffres manipulés, d'arnaques préméditées en guise d'apparente mesures sociales et il y eu les fonds mirobolants portant sur un sensationnalisme rêveur et le tout destiné à faire croire que la politique économique du ministre des Finances et du gouvernement vise le bien-être de la population ».

C'est exactement ce qu'il a dit à l'époque en décembre 2009.

And then in the Budget 2011, Pravind Jugnauth, then the Minister of Finance, announced that he will be removing some of the opacities around the Special Funds and integrate all these

funds that were proliferating – that was his words – all over the place into the Budget for better expenditure coordination; for better accountability and for better transparency. However, this was done and then he came back again in 2017 with this syndrome of Special Funds and we see today what is happening; we have the Special Funds without the accountability. For example, we have heard about all that has been done under the MIC, under a number of other funds. What I would like to say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think that as from the next Budget, all Special Funds should be abolished and there should be only one consolidated fund for good governance and accountability.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me say one word now about what I call the black money economy in Mauritius. Let me start with the Norco economy – about the drug business. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since 2015 this is what is being said in this Budget by the Minister of Finance –

“Since 2015, Government has been engaged in a relentless battle against drug trafficking with a seizure of over Rs13.7 billion worth of dangerous drugs and the arrest of some 20,000 persons by the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit (ADSU)”.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if we take 20,000 people arrested over six years, it is 3,000 people arrested per year which means that it is about 10 person who have been arrested every day for drug offence. If we take Rs13.7 billion and we divide it by six, it means that we have had a seizure of Rs200 m. worth of drugs every month. So, that is the track record for 2015 up to the end of 2021. Now, in this Budget, what does the Minister say –

“This year itself, our Police Force has seized Rs5 billion worth of dangerous drugs and arrested over 4,400 persons by the ADSU”.

What does that mean, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? It means that we have arrested 30 people per day for drug offences. And it also means that seizure on an average is Rs1 billion of drugs per month and Rs30 m. per day. So, what is happening in this country? How big is the Norco economy, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

How do we interpret these figures? We can say that, yes, we are arresting more people, we are seizing more drugs but the problem is a basic fundamental problem. Is it the tip of a huge iceberg? We were having before, until 2020, Rs200 m. seizures per month, and now we are

having 1 billion per month. So, we have to be very careful about this. It seems that there is a boom in the drug-trafficking and Narco business and Mauritius has become one of the most lucrative hubs in the world. And we have to ask questions. What is the real value of the Narcotic business in which Mauritius is involved? And we know that the drug trafficking has led to a Narco-economy where you have drug barons, you have drug territories, you have no man's land, where there is a lawless anarchy ruled by drug barons who have divided the country in zones of control and they do not fight each other because they have the geographical zone of control.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the drug business has two pillars. The first one: the international cartel using Mauritius to deal with hard drugs in billions such as cocaine and heroin. The second pillar is the local cheap synthetic drug available everywhere. We all know what is happening. Each one of us, we know what is happening. We all know about the cases around us, including schools, colleges, universities, places of work; destroying the young generation and the workforce. So, we have to really address this mafia system which is corrupting many of our institutions and we should really not make seizure and arrest the target and the landmark as the criteria for us to say that we are having a relentless battle and we are winning the battle. We are not winning the battle. We cannot win the battle if we are arresting 30 people every day for drugs and we have Rs30 m. of drugs being seized every day. So, this is a national scourge and we have to address this. *Nous sommes arrivés devant un système mafieux. Nous avons un système, aujourd'hui, où la mafia est extrêmement sophistiquée.*

Now, when you add this money from drug, Narco money, to what is happening in the races, *dans le monde des courses* and what has just happened with the way races are being organised now by a new company, *nous arrivés, donc, à un système où il y a des ramifications extrêmement dangereuses.*

Et là, je vais vous parler d'un philanthrope qui déclare qu'il possède presque un milliard et qu'il ne paie pas d'impôts ; il dit qu'il est un consultant qui contrôle un système de pari ; un propriétaire de quelques chevaux et qui arrive pourtant à avoir une main mise et une emprise totale sur les courses, une industrie qui brasse des milliards avec accès au plus haut niveau sommet de l'État. En une phrase, M. le président, la mafia joue dans notre camp alors que cela devrait être l'inverse. Si nous ne finissons pas avec les fléaux, ils vont finir notre jeunesse et notre pays.

And what did we see in the Budget as regard to drug, the Prime Minister made a long speech in the morning, there are three measures, Rs18 m. for vehicles. Then, we speak about High Patrol Vessels to be acquired, well, we do not know when they are going to be acquired and how many. And the third one, they are scanners in the prison system. That is what has been allocated specifically for drug-trafficking.

And we all know what is happening in the Port. There is nothing in this Budget as to how to make the Port more efficient or how to make the Port more secure against the illegal importations of drugs. *Alors conclusion, M. le président, la mafia est à des années de lumière plus sophistiquée, plus avancée que notre force policière qui reste avec des moyens traditionnels très limités. Et, aujourd'hui, c'est la narco économie qui est en train de prospérer.*

Now, let me come to the economy itself because I said that we should have a business environment which is conducive to investment and job creation. The question is: whether this Budget has created the business confidence needed for investment and for jobs? The answer is no. Let me take a number of measures sector by sector; Agriculture. Hon. Dr. Boolell talked lengthily about many of them but I am going to talk about the planters.

All the measures of the last Budget were not implemented. I am going to give examples. There is no single allocation of land which is available at Landscape for agricultural purposes. There have been thousands of applications from individuals, cooperatives, *sociétés* who are still waiting. All the incentives that have little impact on community planters with very few young people willing to join the agricultural sector. Serious issues have not been taken care of, for example, alarming cases of theft of vegetables. Then, my question is, you have this Minimum Guaranteed Price which is an interesting idea but when I have asked planters what they think of it, they said that for onions, it is Rs33,000 per tonne, for potatoes, it is Rs38,000 per tonne; and two comments have come. The cost of production is almost the same. So, the planters are asking why the difference of Rs5,000 for the guaranteed price of onions and potatoes. And, then, they are saying that it is too late for the season and the seeds are not available. Subsidy on fertilisers, do you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that planters affected by the cyclones in January have been granted a voucher only this month? Six months later. How can they survive?

Let me now come to the loan schemes which are being proposed. Planters are already heavily indebted. They cannot put upfront the 50% needed to access the scheme. If you want to

have Rs500,000 for your hydroponic plants, you should have Rs1 m. You should have it constructed and, then, you have the reimbursement of Rs500,000. Reimbursement happens as I said, only when the project is completed and the planters have already paid the total sum. And there is a huge delay, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the processing of applications.

And there is no mention at all as regard to the wholesale market which has cost millions, which has already been completed. When is it going to be open? When is it going to be a key factor in the food security scheme and in our ambition to be self-sufficient? And, I have always said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we can engineer a cheaper hydroponic local system, affordable for everyone, from households to professional farmers. And, of course, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we need a full-time dedicated Minister to rise up to the challenge of making Mauritius self-sufficient. We cannot have a part-time Minister for agriculture and have the ambition to achieve food security.

We cannot come back to 1.4-1.5 million tourists and have a part-time Minister. Let me now come to tourism, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. When we see the arrivals we have had so far, 500,000 tourists less. When we compare Mauritius, Seychelles, and Maldives for these six months, we see that Mauritius will be 500,000 down as regard to 2019; and 160,000 down as regard to what has been budgeted. Seychelles will be only 20,000 down and Maldives will do better by 200,000. So, we should understand what is happening. Adaptability of the Maldives, they are open on various markets. They are actively chasing rich Asians and other emerging markets while in Mauritius, they seem to be focused only on European markets. I always said why don't we go to South Korea? Why don't we try Japan? Why don't we try certain markets in the East? And what is being said in the Budget? The tourism sector is fast recovering. We are confident that we will achieve pre-pandemic figures, 1.4 million tourists, we hope so. And this is the sentence: this shows that Mauritius is and remains a destination of choice for travellers. For having been a Minister of Tourism, I must say that this is totally far from the truth, Mauritius has lost its unique, prestigious image and competitive edge. The recent videos which have gone viral, painting Mauritius as a land of torture and inhuman treatment by the Police will further impact on the negative image of Mauritius. A lot will have to be done to re-engineer, to reinvent, and to reestablish Mauritius on the world tourism map because we were once the Rolls-Royce of the tourism industry.

If today, you go and Google search and you put *Maurice torture*, you come up with six to seven million people who have been doing the search. Six to seven million! Who can understand the damage this has done?

Now, I would like to say one word about this measure. All incoming passengers of Air Mauritius will receive a voucher of Rs200 to be spent on arrival on the Mauritius Duty-free Paradise. I have never seen such a shameful budgetary provision offering \$4 to a tourist for his duty-free shopping, and the more so, discriminating against passengers flying all the other airlines, that is, 80% of tourists. How can we offer a tourist \$4? Why didn't we say if you buy \$100 of goods, you can have 5%? Or if you buy \$200, you can have 10%? This shows the lack of innovative ideas, shows that the system today, those who are at the helm of the industry do not understand what is happening in the industry itself. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the engine of the tourism industry regarding connectivity, new markets, new segments remains our national airline and it is a tragedy that Air Mauritius is carrying only 20% of passengers to Mauritius, and we still do not see when Air Mauritius will be able to play its dynamic role as an engine. I still wish the country well even if in this crucial sector, at this crucial juncture, we still have a part-time Minister.

I will address a few other topics, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. *Jalsa dans Dubai*. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, 13 Ministers participated at the event where our stand close to that of Dubai was a total disaster as regards to the promotion of Mauritius. There was a difference of 50 years between the two stands; between the stand of Dubai which was so futuristic, and the stand of Mauritius. It was as if we were 50 years behind. Rs43.9 m. were spent and the Minister of Finance, that is why I am saying so, justified this sum and informed the House that eight projects were 4.5 billion who have been identified in Dubai. But today, not a single mention of any of these projects in the Budget Speech. We know what happened there; we had all the shows and all the meetings between the would-be-investors and the Mauritian site were very dismal.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the issue of job creation. The Minister did not even say one word about the number of jobs he believes can be created in our country. What does he say? It is only with a stronger economic growth that we will drive our future with more jobs, higher skills, higher production, greater investment, lower inflation and lower debts. But

where are the more jobs, higher skills, higher production coming from? In which sectors? And we know that every year, about 20,000 people join the market.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the continuous erosion in the people's purchasing power and the increasing public debt level all due to the dramatic lack of innovation ideas from the Government to re-launch and boost sectors like tourism, manufacturing, agriculture, financial services and technology, just to name a few. These strategic areas of our economy could have contributed to net off our current challenge of influx of foreign currencies in the country to a significant extent, and could have also acted as a catalyst to shape up a new economic paradigm and structure of our economy with innovation and people at the core of its development. This pathetic lack of vision and reckless decisions from the Government and the Minister would soon lead to a severe wake-up call to tax payers, who have had to face the high level of public debt servicing, as I mentioned earlier.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the sheer lack of foresightedness and the poor strategic thinking around the preparation of this Budget is clearly portrayed by the absence of transformational projects in new high potential industry like biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, emerging in technologies field, finTech, robotics, digital marketing; not a single word in this Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! Innovative ideas and plans are also drastically missing for highly critical sectors of our economy such as agriculture and the financial services which have reached the end of cycle and require an urgent revamping of the activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is no emphasis on plans which have been laid to rethink and build a new human resource development plan for new and emerging sectors of our economy because we always say, *c'est le génie mauricien qui va nous sauver, mais jusqu'ici rien concernant la formation, concernant les nouveaux secteurs*. Question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir: is this Budget the recipe for more jobs, higher skills, and higher production? Is this a recipe for greater investment? The very first expectation for a young man is a good job but this Budget does not give any clue about jobs created, other than jobs created in the public service. And he proudly announces the creation of 8,353 posts in the public service. More than half of it, when we go through the Ministries, they are in the very low skill category. Furthermore, he says 2,000 employees will be recruited by Mauri-Facilities for cleaning services. This is the job creation which has been mentioned in this Budget. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we know how things are

done when it comes to recruitment at the PSC, and we know what has to be done for these jobs. We will all have to line up at the CAB Office on Wednesdays in the constituencies. This is not the way that we can engineer an economy and create new jobs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as a responsible Minister of Finance, we find it shocking that nothing pertaining to reduce waste in the public sector management has been highlighted. There is no mention that we will do everything it has to be done for good governance, for financial probity, for transparency and accountability. What is going to happen, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? Are we going to have another Director of Audit Report next year? Are we going to have another PAC Report next year with the same wastage of billions of Mauritian Rupees? Nothing is being done as regards to wastage. Nothing has been said about fraud and corruption, and I would like to say that the most important thing in this times of dire straits, we should have had a better stewardship of public finance.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now say a few words about a few items. Others have highlighted it. 12,000 houses announced last year, not a single one even started. And then we have 500 units per constituency. As a town planner, I am asking myself is this a wrong guideline because in each constituency the demand is not the same. Availability of land is totally different and the amenities available to facilitate the settlement of the new home owners are not the same. So, how can we come with 500 houses in each constituency? I think that from the urban planning perspective, it should have been urban development with housing and not 500 housing units in each constituency. I heard the hon. Minister of Transport, saying that the CNT will buy 200 electric buses. Last year, 25 were announced, only one was bought. Now, let me say that one electric bus costs Rs10 m., so, 200 electric buses is going to cost Rs2 billion. Where will we get this money? And for the private operators, this electric bus costs Rs10 m., what is going to be the level of subsidy to encourage an operator to buy a bus of Rs10 m. in our plea, to be able to be more energy efficient?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me come now to the end of what I wanted to say. About Municipal Elections, a lot has been said, and a lot have made a plea, it is high time that it should be done and it can be done, it is a question of political decision. And the more so, because there is one issue which is coming - yesterday, we mentioned it in the PNQ - this has become more

urgent with the issue of identifying flood-prone areas in all the natural drainage paths, as rightly raised by the Leader of Opposition in the PNQ yesterday.

We can understand the trauma of each and every citizen, not being informed about the possibility that his property may be affected by being in a flood-prone area, or near a natural drainage path while this information is available at the level of the Municipalities and the District Councils. As you are aware, the hon. Minister yesterday said that the map has been designed with the high digital elevation model and aerial model imagery, and that map was available but was being kept a secret. At the same time, this information is being used by the Municipalities and District Councils, not a grant a Building and Land Use Permit (BLUP). The right of the citizen, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is to be informed about the specificity of his plot. The information for each plot should have been counter-verified on the terrain, with the consultation and approval of the owner, so that the citizen can contest legally, the findings of the survey which has been made by satellites. Thousands of plots and thousands of owners are concerned and we can understand their trauma, and this has to be addressed urgently in each case.

Next, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we should let the Mauritian people breathe. We cannot continue with the sanitary restrictions; we should come to a more normal life. The restriction of 50 persons for public gathering is only - we know, it has been said by all the Members on this of the House - a political decision. It is a political strategy.

Furthermore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Parliament should sit in its normal architecture as is the case in the House of Commons, as is the case in *l'Assemblée nationale en France*, as is the case of the *Lok Sabha*. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we also want to stand up. We also want to say what the people feel, what the people want. We should be given the possibility that the Assembly should stand up, should sit as it was sitting in the past. Let us stand up and voice our opinions and questions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget has the wrong priorities and is totally out of touch with what this country needs for the future, more trouble ahead, we will all have to pay back those huge debts. But the Minister of Finance had the opportunity to come up with an innovative Budget while shielding the population of this difficult time of our history. The hon. Minister of Finance has not been able to rise up to this challenge, he has failed. *Il y a bien sûr la tyrannie de la majorité*. You have a majority today and you believe in money politics. This is only an

illusion. The hon. Minister of Finance has chosen a statement from the noble prize winner, Joseph Stiglitz - the only true prosperity is shared prosperity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, the noble prize winner came to Mauritius in 2011, as the guest Speaker in a conference on the way forward for Mauritius. And, you know what happened? He wrote an article later about Mauritius, which has been published in the US Press. The article was called the 'Mauritius Miracle'. This is what he writes. The small island of Mauritius has established a track record of democracy, strong social cohesion and rapid economic growth since independence, a half century ago. The reasons behind the country's success should be borne in mind by politicians in the US and elsewhere, as they fight their budget battles.

But, what I say today, I wonder what Joseph Stiglitz would write today when he will see the state of our democracy, the social tensions and the sluggish economy, fraud and corruption, the scourge of drugs and political interference at all levels, *la faillite des institutions*. In fact, I had the opportunity to have a breakfast meeting with Joseph Stiglitz and he asked me many questions about Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government believes in the power of money politics, the power of political handouts. This country, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is poised for fundamental changes. Our people want desperately and deserve a better Mauritius. I do not think that money politics will change the course of history, and I will say this, if you still believe in it, may I refer to the words of, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, I quote –

“One must beware of Ministers – and political leaders - who can do nothing without money, and those who want to do everything with money.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Opposition has spoken powerfully with one voice. Fundamental change will come at the next election, be it, Municipal or, be it, General Elections.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our people know how they are being fleeced. Our people know how billions have been wasted, plundered. Our people know how the whole apparatus of power of the State has been taken by the few. The population knows that he is being called to bear the brunt of it all. He knows his voice is being stifled. We, at the Opposition, we know it; we have said so in one powerful voice in the Opposition.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the people want hope for a better Mauritius with the unity of the Opposition, and the Opposition will unite. We love our country, God bless Mauritius.

Thank you.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

‘L’EXPRESS’ NEWSPAPER - PRESS ARTICLE - 17 JUNE 2022 - PRIVILEGE COMPLAINT

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I have an announcement to make. Allow me to inform the House that Dr. the hon. Marie Christiane Dorine Chukowry, Parliamentary Private Secretary, has, in writing, today, given notice of her wish to raise a privilege complaint arising out of an article which appeared in the newspaper daily *l’Express* of today, under the caption “*ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE - Kalpana Koonjoo-Shah et la photo polémique*”.

In the said article, the hon. Ms Anquetil is reported to have said the following, I quote –

“On se souvient de la fois où des jurons avaient été proférés. Il n’y a pas eu de tests pour retracer la voix. Il y a aussi eu l’épisode de lalang-gate, où il n’y a pas eu de sanction. Mais dans mon cas, l’enquête a été faite très vite. Voilà ce qu’est le temple de la démocratie.”

The hon. Member is of the view that the content of the said article may amount to a contempt of the Assembly under section 6(1) (s) of the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act for uttering and publishing a statement reflecting on the conduct and character of the Speaker, and containing accusation of partiality in the discharge of his duty as Speaker.

The matter has been referred to me by Mr Speaker. Hon. Members, I have perused the said article against the provision of section 6(1) (s) of the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act, which reads as follows –

“6. Contempt of the Assembly

- (1) Subject to subsection (2), each of the following acts, matters and things constitutes the offence of contempt of the Assembly’

Subsection (s) reads as follows –

‘uttering or publishing any statement reflecting on the conduct or character of, or containing or amounting to an accusation of partiality in the discharge of his duty by the Speaker, Deputy Speaker or Chairperson of any committee.’

Hon. Members, I take the view that the content of the said article may amount to a statement reflecting on the conduct and character of or containing or amounting to an accusation of partiality in the discharge of his duty by the Speaker.

I consider that an offence may have been committed under the aforesaid section of the law.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the light of your Ruling, I move that the matter, whereby an article which appeared in the newspaper daily *l’Express* of today, under the caption “*ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE - Kalpana Koonjoo-Shah et la photo polémique*”, be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for appropriate action pursuant to Standing Order 74(4) of the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly.”

Hon. Mrs Diolle seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister Ramano, please!

(10.49 p.m.)

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr. K. Ramano): M. le président, permettez-moi de commencer mon intervention par une question dans le pur style de questions pour un champion – Qui-suis-je ? Je ne suis pas Jules Caesar, je ne suis pas Mahé de Labourdonnais mais tous les développements dans mon pays portent mon empreinte. Qui-suis-je ? J’ai pris quatre années pour réparer le tronçon Terre Rouge-Verdun.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Nou kone !*

Mr Ramano: Qui-suis-je ? Je suis à la base du dénigrement du MMM en 2010. Le MMM est une caricature d’unité nationale. Seul, en 1983, 1987 et 2010, *it is only when the*

MMM is in an alliance that it enters in a mainstream of national unity. This is the truth and they know it. Le MMM a toujours dit qu'il a le monopole de l'unité nationale et de la justice sociale. C'est faux. Qui-suis-je ? Qui a à son actif des motos écoles fantômes poussant plusieurs familles à la faillite. Des innocents ont même contracté des emprunts jusqu'à R 14 millions.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Dominer!*

Mr Ramano: M. le président, on a entendu *jalsa* à Dubaï mais il y a un *jalsa* dans bureau.

M. le président, qui a rénové son bureau et celui de son *Adviser* au coût de R 2,9 millions sans passer par les procédures établies de courriels ?

M. le président, ce gouvernement est à la présentation de son troisième budget. À la clé, il y avait un week-end gratuit dans un campement à Roches Noires.

(Interruptions)

M. le président, ce gouvernement est à la présentation de son troisième budget. La population a aujourd'hui la confirmation de la philosophie qui guide ce gouvernement, de la philosophie de la majorité gouvernementale.

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Ramano: La population sait aujourd'hui *ki zot tou pas pareil*. La population a choisi son camp, M. le président. Dans son préambule, le ministre des Finances est des plus clairs dans ses propos. En tant que gouvernement juste et responsable, notre réponse ne pouvait être que solidaire ; l'humain surtout, l'humain avant tout.

Les mesures dévoilées aujourd'hui ne sont certainement pas un cout, elle constitue un investissement, un investissement de notre pays, un investissement dans notre avenir, un investissement dans la population à défaut de revenu. Par la taxe, nous préconisons la croissance par la consommation.

C'est dans cette ligne, M. le président que –

- (a) 350,000 personnes percevront une allocation de revenu mensuel ;
- (b) 300,000 personnes verront leurs prestations de retraite augmenter ;

- (c) 189,000 jeunes recevront leur passe sport culture ;
- (d) 169,000 retraités auront droit au CSG *retirement benefit* ;
- (e) 110,000 ménages ne paieront plus la taxe municipale sur leur résidence;
- (f) 100,000 contribuables auront un revenu disponibles plus élevés ;
- (g) 18,000 ménages bénéficieront d'un soutien accru au titre de l'aide sociale et du *SRM* ;
- (h) 13,000 familles percevront le baby bonus ;
- (i) 10,000 personnes toucheront désormais le CSG *Disability Allowance*, et
- (j) 10,000 jeunes et femmes seront éligibles à la prime d'emploi.

M. le président, après la présentation du budget, alors que la population célébrait les mesures humaines et sociales de ce présent budget, il est vrai de dire qu'un vrai *feel good factor* s'est installé dans la population mais je ne vous cacherais pas mes difficultés à déchiffrer et à éclaircir les propos des dirigeants de l'Opposition.

Après leur conférence de presse, on n'était toujours pas sorti de l'auberge. On nous remplit les oreilles pour dire que les mesures sociales ne sont pas assez, qu'on aurait dû donner plus, que R 1,000 est insuffisant mais en même temps, on entend l'honorable Paul Bérenger et d'autres dirigeants de mettre en garde des risques inflationnistes des mesures sociales – *ki ti bizin fair ? Donner pas donner ?*

Augmenter la liquidité dans le circuit monétaire fait partie du jeu de l'offre et de la demande. C'est une question de choix, M. le président. Nous savons que nous avons choisi d'investir dans l'humain. C'est le choix de ce gouvernement, c'est la philosophie de base de ce gouvernement, M. le président.

Tout comme l'honorable Bodha l'avait fait en 2010 ; permettez-moi de citer Lindsay Rivière qui en un certain 12 octobre 1983, au lendemain du budget, avait ceci à dire –

« Je crains que cette lente dérive du MMM vers le recours systématique à l'anticipation du pire ne prépare ce Parti des lendemains difficiles marqués par une amertume profonde et grandissante. »

Cette déclaration de Lindsay Rivière est toujours d'actualité aujourd'hui, M. le président.

M. le président, nous avons dans les rangs de l'Opposition d'anciens Premiers ministres, des *Deputy Prime Ministers*, d'anciens ministres des Finances, nous avons aussi l'*iznogoud* du PTR.

Résumer l'allocation de R 1,000 à une question de nombre de boîtes de lait, ou des boîtes de conserves, c'est insulter l'intelligence de la population, insulter aussi la misère de certaines couches de la population. Mes amis de la majorité ont donné amples détails des augmentations, de compensation salariale ou de pension dans le passé. C'est pour vous dire à quel point les augmentations qui ont été prévues pour divers couches de la population sont très bien accueillies par la population.

M. le président, la cerise sur le gâteau des interventions a été la glorification de Rama Sithanen, la justification du *National Residential Property Tax* par l'honorable Ramful, soucieux de la courbette comme d'habitude. La *National Residential Property Tax* frappait indistinctement les biens quels que soient les lieux, construits ou non construits, le *Net Annual Value* avait complètement disparu dans les évaluations, dans la taxation. On nous a imposé R 30 le mètre carré des immeubles bâtis et R 10 le mètre carré de la superficie du terrain. Une mesure tellement injuste que le gouvernement, en 2010, avait abolie complètement le *National Residential Property Tax*, M. le président.

M. le président, il y a un élément extrêmement important qui a été annoncé dans ce présent budget. Le budget fait mention expressément de permettre le *tardy registration for nikahs* pour les mariages religieux musulmans dans le but principal de permettre aux veuves de bénéficier du *widow's pension*. C'est une injustice flagrante qui est en train d'être corrigée. Il faut se rendre à l'évidence d'un fait. Le *Muslim religious marriage* est bel et bien connu selon les provisions du *Civil Status Act*. Depuis l'amendement de 1990, obligation est faite d'enregistrer le mariage religieux au *Muslim Family Council* pour que le mariage soit reconnu, et qu'en cas de décès de l'époux, l'épouse survivante bénéficie du statut de veuve, et de ce fait, est éligible à la pension de veuve.

Il est un fait aujourd'hui qu'il existe des cas malheureux où le mariage n'a pas été enregistré ou que ce soit par le religieux célébrant le mariage ni même pas les mariés eux-mêmes, cela prive à l'épouse survivante son statut de veuve. Il convient de reconnaître plusieurs périodes, M. le président. Il y a la période post 1982, date de la mise en place du *Civil Status*

Act ; il y a la période de 1987 avec l'abolition du *Muslim Personal Law* ; à 1990, année de la reconnaissance du *Muslim religious marriage*, ou encore la période de 1990 à 1992, date de la constitution du *Muslim Family Council*, ou encore les quelques cas de non enregistrement depuis 1992.

M. le président, permettez-moi de citer feu Sir Anerood Jugnauth, le *mover of the motion* en 1990 –

“The main object of the Bill is to make better provision in relation to marriages celebrated in accordance with Muslim rights. Members of House will recall that in July this year, a committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Mr Justice Ahmed to review the provisions of our law in relation to religious marriages and to remove some of the practical difficulties encountered by our Muslim brothers and sisters.”

Il va plus loin –

“Henceforth, a person can go through a religious ceremony of marriage celebrated in accordance with Muslim rights without the necessity of a former civil marriage and without the religious marriage producing any civil effect. Nor will the officiating priest celebrating the nikah commit any offence. These marriages will be considered as purely religious marriages.”

M. le président, il faut bien le dire et le reconnaître. Des nombreux dirigeants de ce pays ont condamné cet état des choses, ce manquement au niveau de la loi, mais combien ont eu le courage d'apporter les amendements à la loi pour corriger ce manquement ? Le PTr est bien arrivé au pouvoir avec le MMM en 1995 avec une majorité absolue. Le PTr et le PMSD avec Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam et Xavier Luc Duval comme *front bench* d'un gouvernement jusqu'en 2014. L'honorable Shakeel Mohamed reconnaît la correction d'une injustice, mais il doit pouvoir reconnaître ses responsabilités ou encore celles de son Parti pour avoir resté insensible à ces injustices lorsqu'il était au pouvoir. Par opportuniste politique, l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed est plus disposé à régler ses comptes avec Feu Sir Anerood Jugnauth pour l'amendement de 1987. Mais il fait abstraction complètement de l'initiative de feu SAJ de nommer le juge Ahmed à la tête d'une commission. Les recommandations de laquelle sont à la base de l'amendement de 1990 pour reconnaître le mariage religieux musulman et l'institution du *Muslim Family Council*.

M. le président, dans son discours qui vient d'être fait, l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed dit

–
 “It was blown away in 1987 by Sir Anerood Jugnauth. It was blown to smithereens in 1987... But then, in 1991, the MMM was in Government, if memory serves me correctly, and things were brought right, the MMM could make the MSM see straight...”

Et il va plus loin, M. le président, pour dire –

“The reason why the Muslim Family Council came into being, and it was corrected in 1991,” it was because “the MMM was in power! That is the reason. I always have to say that is the truth.”

M. le président, *plus passeur du beurre que ça tu meurs !* Laissez-moi vous dire pourquoi, M. le président. Je peux comprendre, M. le président, que le poids de l'âge peut rendre la mémoire sélective, mais l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed, en reconnaissant après avoir tout dit sur toutes ces étapes en ce qui concerne l'adoption du *muslim religious marriage*, gagnera en crédibilité de reconnaître que lui, Shakeel Mohamed, s'est joint au MSM en 1995 !

Permettez-moi de vous citer une déclaration, M. le président, de l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed dans le Star du dimanche 03 décembre 1995.

À une question du journaliste –

« Pourquoi avoir choisi le MSM ? »

Sa réponse, M. le président –

« Paul Bérenger, cet assoiffé du pouvoir, a réussi à embêter Navin Ramgoolam. Il s'est servi de la communauté musulmane comme un dépôt fixe dans le seul but d'accéder au pouvoir. En retour, cette communauté n'a rien eu ou profité. Depuis que Paul Bérenger a soulevé la communauté musulmane contre mon grand-père Abdool Razack Mohamed, les musulmans se sont retrouvés sans leader. Ils ont perdu leur droit constitutionnel et religieux. Il ne faut pas oublier que c'est Paul Bérenger qui a attaqué la *Muslim Personal Law*. Il n'a pas défendu la communauté quand celle-ci était marginalisée. Navin Ramgoolam m'a dit que la *Muslim Personal Law* ne sera jamais retournée aux musulmans. *Mo pa kapav fer konfians bann dimounn ki pena* à cœur l'intérêt de la communauté. »

Il ajoute même, M. le président –

« Je me sens à l'aise au sein du MSM. Je retrouve la sincérité et une facilité de dialogue avec le Premier ministre, Sir Anerood Jugnauth. »

M. le président, je pense qu'il y a lieu en tant que jeune génération au niveau du Parlement qu'on puisse avoir un langage de vérité surtout.

M. le président, le présent budget proposé s'adresse d'une façon directe et sans détours au calvaire que subit les personnes victimes du système de *Sale by Levy*. Nous savons tous ce système qui favorise le dépouillement des débiteurs. Les débiteurs se retrouvent dans ce cercle vicieux avec l'accumulation des intérêts et du capital. Une fois le bien saisi, le débiteur est à la merci des institutions créancières. Au *Master's Court*, la mise à prix des biens saisis ne tient malheureusement pas en compte le *market value* des biens. La mise à prix est fixée selon le bon vouloir des institutions créancières. Ce budget, M. le président, corrige cette injustice comme recommandé par la *Law Reform Commission*. Le budget préconise que la mise à prix ne pourra être inférieure à 90 % de la valeur du logement familial de l'emprunteur.

Autre révolution en faveur des emprunteurs, toute somme en excédent du capital, des intérêts et des pénalités seront automatiquement remboursées aux emprunteurs. Ces derniers étaient dés laissés-pour-compte une fois les biens vendus à la barre. Autre nouveauté, M. le président, la vente par le biais du *Sale du Levy* sera dorénavant fait par le biais d'un processus de soumission scellée. Finit la présence des tapeurs, des casseurs pour intimider les potentiels acquéreurs. M. le président, c'est justice faite à ces nombreuses victimes du *Sale by Levy*.

M. le président, les débats budgétaires ont aussi été marqués par des échanges entre les députés OPR de Rodrigues et le député Armance du PMSD sur la question d'autonomie de Rodrigues. M. le président, un principe sacro-saint a toujours été respecté par l'ensemble de la classe politique à Maurice à l'exception du PMSD. C'est le principe de ne pas s'immiscer, de ne pas s'ingérer dans la politique intérieure de Rodrigues. Cela fait partie du respect des plus profonds du principe de l'autonomie de Rodrigues. Les honorables Léopold et Francisco François ont été pourtant reconnaissants dans leurs propos, reconnaissants en faveur de Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Pravind Jugnauth, Paul Bérenger pour leur contribution à marquer d'une pierre blanche le tournant de l'histoire de Rodrigues dans la période 2000 à 2005 où le

gouvernement MMM/MSM est venu de l'avant avec ce projet de loi pour assurer l'autonomie de Rodrigues.

M. le président, lorsque l'on voit les députés du MMM applaudir le député PMSD, l'honorable Armance, qui se vante d'avoir un élu, un membre du PMSD à l'Assemblée Régionale Rodriguaise, on est en train de se demander ce qu'est devenu le MMM aujourd'hui.

Rejeter une conviction aussi profonde qu'est l'autonomie par opportuniste politique, c'est cela le mode de survie du MMM aujourd'hui, M. le président. Les monarques du PMSD, partenaire privilégié du MMM, dans l'entente de l'Espoir. Cette posture de caméléon de certains dirigeants du MMM, M. le président, l'entente de l'Espoir ne participe pas dans la politique. La posture qui a été adoptée après les élections régionales à Rodrigues, c'est pour dire officiellement : 'l'entente de l'Espoir ne participe pas dans la politique intérieure de Rodrigues' ! Mais l'honorable Bérenger trouve cela normal qu'un des parties de l'entente de l'Espoir s'ingère dans les affaires de Rodrigues. Peut-être qu'on nous dira que l'entente n'est pas une alliance ; le concubinage n'est pas le mariage. En croirai avoir affaire à une alliance libertine ; chaque conjoint est libre de dormir dans le lit qui lui plaît aussi longtemps que le mariage n'est pas célébré.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Dr. Renganaden Padayachy has presented a bold and courageous budget which has been presented against the context of a lingering pandemic, energy crisis, ongoing supply-chain, disruptions and rising inflation, not to mention the geopolitical divides.

Indeed, we have begun another year in the grips of a global pandemic whereby COVID-19 continues to upend lives, plans and hopes. The only certainty is more uncertainty. In addition to that, the war in Ukraine is setting in motion a three-dimensional crisis on food, energy and finance that is producing alarming cascading effects to a world economy already battered by climate change. We have all witnessed the global impact that this war is having on the rise in fuel and freight costs leading to prices of fertilisers and agricultural products reaching soaring heights. Analysts are even suggesting we may be in the early stages of an energy price shock comparable to the 1973 oil price crisis.

The recent food export bans in Asia is prompting fears of more protectionism. In the name of domestic food security, Malaysia has restricted the export of chicken whilst Indonesia has done so for cooking oil. There is no visibility as to when things will be back to normal or whether other countries may in the name of domestic security restrict the export of other commodities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius as a small island has little bargaining power on the world market when prices and freight costs go up; we are squeezed and we cannot do much. It is with this backdrop that the Budget 2022/2023 has been prepared. The hon. Prime Minister rightly stated that this Budget is the most difficult one in our history. We have pledged to change the way we do politics by avoiding sound bites but rather to provide solutions and means to the people of this country to address their concerns in the challenging times that the whole planet is experiencing.

With the theme “With the People, For the People”, this Budget that is people-centered from all angles; it fosters the development of an inclusive society while laying sound bases for a long term sustainable growth. We have once more, in this Budget, shown our commitment to work in total solidarity with one and all, more specifically those at the bottom of the social ladder, so that our development leaves no one behind and is totally inclusive.

Increases in social aid and welfare benefits in this Budget, bear testimony of our solidarity towards those who are most affected by the recent global price increases. Rs4.3 billion have been provided to maintain the prices of essential commodities including bread, household gas and rice. We are spending 10 % of our GDP in subsidies and social benefits.

This Government under the enlightened guidance of the Prime Minister, the hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, is determined to pursue its progression towards the creation of wealth, fairness in the distribution of the wealth pie and ensuring ecologically sustainable development keeping future generations in mind. This Budget thus espouses the philosophy for a strong foundation for Mauritius to transition into a model of sustainable, inclusive, green and circular economy. The budgetary measures and coherent distribution of budget provisions will allow the various Ministries to move in this direction.

Unsustainable production and consumption in the world coupled with the traditional linear business model has posed major environmental challenges. The order of the day is to

mainstream sustainability across all economic sectors. I note with great satisfaction that greening of the economy has been at the heart of this Budget, in particular boosting sustainable agriculture and food sector, sustainable manufacturing, sustainable tourism and renewable energy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the fragility of our global food supply chains, but has also offered the opportunity for a reflection on the importance of building resilience in the sector, promoting local production, achieving greater food security. Panoply of measures has been provided to planters, cooperatives, seed producers, farmers and breeders to promote local production and green the sector through mechanisation, innovation and sustainability.

In the manufacturing sector the promotion of our locally manufactured products and *savoir-faire* as well as the provision of facilities and incentives for SMEs and cooperatives to green their businesses will give a much needed support to our local industry.

This Budget has taken the commitment for Government to ensure carbon neutrality in our industrial sector by 2030 which is a highly commendable one.

Mr Speaker, Sir, tourism is the third pillar of the economy, accounting for 14% of GDP. As a small island State, with the advent of climate change, increased erosion of our beaches, accelerating sea level rise, coral bleaching and degradation of the reef system, the challenge of sustainable development are therefore real, critical and existential threats. We have no other option but to support and promote strong commitments from operators in the sector, all along the value chain. The Budget provides for the elaboration of a 10-year blueprint which will pave the sustainability in the tourism sector and green the value chains.

In addition, it is very important that I recognise that the Budget provides for concrete actions as enablers to implement the recommendations from the recent National Policy Dialogue organised by my Ministry in the context of the Switch Africa Green project which has intervened in 3 priority sectors for Mauritius, namely agriculture, tourism and manufacturing.

The National Environment and Climate Change Fund has been provided with a budget to the tune of Rs75 m. to fund projects on green economy which I am confident will help us go a long way to meet our set targets.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is to be recalled that at COP 26, Mauritius through its reviewed Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), took the ambitious commitment to -

- reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 %;
- achieve 60 % of green energy in its energy mix;
- phase out of coal in electricity generation;
- promote a circular economy by diverting 70 % of waste from landfills, and
- encourage the use of electric vehicles.

This economy-wide emissions reduction which aim at addressing sector specific mitigation targets for the energy, transport, waste and manufacturing sectors will have the potential to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the context of a circular and low carbon economy.

This Budget has no doubt, provided the necessary boost. Measures such as the acquisition of 200 electric buses for the national transport corporation; removal of excise duty on hybrid and electric vehicles; implementation of a PV farm at the MEL depot; investment in 8 MW Solar PV Farm at Henrietta; setting up of a 20 MW battery energy storage facility; a green transformation package to increase share of electricity supply from local renewable sources, amongst others, will contribute to improve our socio-economic resilience and meet all the challenges in the face of the energy crisis as well as decrease our dependency on fossil fuels and increase our share of the use of renewable energy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me now to elaborate on the formulation of policies, innovative legislation and status of projects implemented at the level of Ministry since the last Budget and what we intend to achieve with means that are being provided to us in this Budget.

From a policy perspective, my Ministry has been undertaking a review of the national environmental policies and strategies through the framing of a Master Plan for the Environment in the Republic of Mauritius for the next decade and an in-depth review of the Environment Protection Act.

I am pleased to announce that the Master Plan on the Environment for the Republic of Mauritius (2020-2030) has been finalised and some of the short-term recommendations are already in the implementation phase. Another achievement of my Ministry has been the extensive consultations regarding the review of the Environment Protection Act so as to provide

for better environmental management in light of various lessons learnt from existing and emerging environmental challenges. This was one of the recommendations of *les Assises de l'Environnement* organised by the Ministry in December 2019.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Environment Protection Act is thus being reviewed. This exercise has been possible thanks to Grant Funding from UNDP Country Office which has enlisted the services of international and local legal experts.

A part of the review exercise, extensive consultations spanning over the period of 2020 to March 2022 have been held with relevant stakeholders, including Ministries, Parastatal Bodies, Local Authorities, academia, private sector, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the public.

The proposed main amendments are -

- (i) Establishment of a framework to facilitate the coordination among different Ministries and agencies for the protection and sustainable management of Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs), which are natural and ecological assets of Mauritius that provide direct economic and environmental benefits.
- (ii) Re-introduction of a framework for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to enable decision makers to consider environmental and sustainable development objectives at the outset of the plan and programme development.
- (iii) Setting up of a sustainable development framework to underpin governance for the implementation of the transformative process toward sustainable development and compliance to international commitments.
- (iv) Based on experiences and lessons learnt during the 2020 MV Wakashio oil spill, amendments have been proposed to strengthen Part V of the EPA which deals with spill and environmental emergency.
- (v) Strengthening the enforcement and compliance mechanisms for a more effective and efficient application of environmental legislation.
- (vi) Proposal for Plastic management and circular economy:

- (vii) Setting up of an *Observatoire de l'Environnement* and a Science to Policy Platform, which is an important component of an evidence-informed policy-making.

I am pleased to inform that drafting instructions were sent to the Attorney General's Office on 14 April 2022. It is expected that after finalisation of the proposed amendments, the Bill will be introduced to the National Assembly by end of 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our aim is at transforming the current a linear material management system of 'take-make-dispose' to one based on a circular model whereby optimum use of resources is made. The closing of the loop at the post- consumer stage is very much needed in view that the rate of recycling in Mauritius is currently at only 3%. A study of the recycling sector has depicted several bottlenecks, namely limited amount of sorted and clean recyclable materials, operational costs exceeding revenues derived from recycling activities and limited markets for recycled products.

This Budget will allow us to address a number of the above barriers through the construction of new waste management infrastructures, new legislation and an aggressive awareness and sensitisation campaign.

Les Dechetteries, also known as Civic Amenity Centres, have been constructed at La Chaumière, La Laura and Poudre d'Or. Such infrastructures provide for easy drop-off points for householders and businesses to dispose of selected recyclables such as plastics, paper/carton, waste oil, construction and demolition waste, tyres and metals.

My Ministry has already implemented several programmes of household composters and these have contributed to reducing the amount of wastes generated in Mauritius. My Ministry is also providing technical and financial assistance to the Ministry of Agro-Industry to set up two small scale composting plants at gardens and parks, namely, at SMF – Vacoas and at Bras D'Eau. The corresponding bidding documents have been prepared and will be launched shortly.

Furthermore, the setting up and operation of regional composting plants and sorting units on Public Private Partnership basis has been approved by Government in August 2021. A Transaction Advisor is currently preparing the Request For Proposals documents for the setting

up and operation of the composting plants and sorting units on a Design-Build-Own-Operate basis. The bidding documents are expected to be launched in September this year.

In view to encouraging active participation of the private sector, the necessary economic conditions will be laid down under a framework to ensure business viability.

As regards End of Life Vehicles, a Feasibility Report on End of Life Vehicles from Africa Rise, which is an EU funded project, has been prepared and submitted in April 2022. The report concluded that for the implementation of a scrapyard for such vehicles to be feasible, a number of economic conditions and amendments to Road Traffic legislations will have to be effected. The implementation of the facility is to be governed through licensing and the promoter will have to be selected through an RFP based on Public Private Partnership. My Ministry will work closely with the Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail to ensure its successful implementation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, currently we do not have any dedicated legislation in Mauritius that deals with solid and hazardous waste management holistically. Regulations for specific waste streams are made under the Local Government Act and the Environment Protection Act while general provisions on solid waste management are likewise made under these two Acts. The current legislative and regulatory frameworks for solid waste management are therefore not comprehensive and in some cases, the provisions are outdated leading to a weak enforcement of the laws.

Furthermore, different Government organisations share concurrent jurisdictions over aspects of solid and hazardous waste management without a proper definition of roles and responsibilities of all involved stakeholders, thereby resulting in a fragmented and ineffective approach to solid and hazardous waste management. In addition, a number of gaps exist in the current legislative and regulatory frameworks that consider the aspect of waste management and which need harmonisation.

In this context, an Integrated Waste Management Legislative Framework co-financed by the UNDP, has been nearly finalised with a view to providing strategic direction and guidance towards sustainable solid and hazardous waste management practices in line with the concept of circular economy. This new legislative framework therefore, will assist the Ministry in adopting

an integrated and sustainable approach for the sound management of all forms of waste streams covering solid and hazardous wastes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the demand growth of non-renewable resources will not be able to meet further demand increases. We are all aware that the traditional model of a linear economy is therefore no longer viable in a world of finite material resources. It must be replaced with a circular economy model aiming at closing the loop of resources and reducing the environmental impact of the product life cycle at all stages of the process.

The importance of circular economy as a key approach to sustainable consumption and production was also recognised at the recent United Nations Environment Assembly, held on the 03 and 04 March 2022, through the adoption of a resolution on Enhancing Circular Economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production.

The National Environment and Climate Change Fund has been providing with a budget to the tune of some Rs71 m. to fund projects on circular economy. Support for the purchase of recycling equipment will act as an enabler in the further development of a Circular Economy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the recent 3-day National Conference on Circular Economy organised by my Ministry has been largely successful in bringing together representatives from all spheres, to share knowledge and experience on how best to take forward the agenda for circularity in six economic sectors, namely food system, manufacturing industry, construction and demolition sector, energy sector, ICT and solid waste sector.

For a quick and proper transition to a circular economy, there is pressing need to address barriers identified. And we are coming forward again with the help of the United Nations Environment Programme to develop a roadmap and legislative framework on circular economy. We are expecting the roadmap to be ready by December this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are conscious of the fact that Government being major consumer of goods plays a crucial role in creating the demand for recycled goods thus sustaining recycling activities who have to compete with cheap virgin materials.

The budgetary measure 218 makes specific mention to –

- (a) a tipping fee to be paid to local recyclers per tonne of waste, excluding used tyres and PET bottles which are covered under previously announced budgetary measures,

- (b) a margin of preference to be provided for products manufactured from recycled materials.

I strongly feel that this measure will give a strong boost to the recycling sector and contribute positively in keeping resources in use for longer time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the worldwide efforts that are put to enhance climate action, we are, unfortunately, witnessing the worsening of climate change effects. Countless devastating events such as flooding, heat waves, forest fires, category-5 storms, accelerated melting of the ice cover are being felt globally. You will recall that, early this year, cyclone Ana has killed more than 35 people in Madagascar, Mozambique and Malawi and left hundreds of thousands of homeless and trapped in flood-hit areas. And after quite a long time, we have also witnessed a category 4 cyclone in Mauritius.

The National Climate Change Adaptation Policy Framework was also updated in 2021 to adopt an integrated approach in addressing adaptation in the water, agriculture, tourism and biodiversity sectors to reap the co-benefits. The First Biennial Update Report, published in December 2021, provides information on measures undertaken at national level to implement relevant international obligations and decisions pertaining to climate change.

My Ministry is working on different fronts and reaching out to our development partners to support the country in developing the enablers for climate change mitigation and adaptation and this includes supporting the energy transition. To this effect, under the Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMA) project, the National Climate Change Mitigation Strategy and Action Plan is being formulated to achieve low emission pathways and green economy in line with the Climate Change Act of 2020. A national on-line NDC Registry platform has been set up to monitor report and verify progress in the implementation of the NDC in a transparent manner. In order to address the social and economic challenges of the climate change on the maritime borders of Mauritius and Rodrigues, an in-depth study on the hazards of Coastal Erosion and Marine submersion is under implementation. Furthermore, we have embarked on another initiative, the Capacity Building Initiative for transparency. This project will assist Mauritius in improving the quality of national Green House Gas inventory and the data collection.

Mr Speaker, Sir, notwithstanding the present challenging economic situation, Mauritius has taken the commitment to provide an unconditional support for the implementation of its NDC by

35% share of the total estimated financial requirement of USD 6.5 billion. This budget is going to sustain efforts which have already started and support new initiatives which will allow our country to achieve the climate change adaptation and mitigation targets.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the use of Hydro chlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) in the refrigeration and air conditioning sectors are being regulated since 2011. The implementation of the HCFCs Phase Out Management Plan which will enable Mauritius to phase out HCFCs in the country by 2025 is on-going. It includes technology transfer, capacity building and awareness raising, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as per the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report 2022 on Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, it is stated, I quote –

“current trends of increasing exposure and vulnerability of coastal communities, risks, such as erosion and land loss, flooding, salinisation, and cascading impacts due to mean sea level rise and extreme events are projected to significantly increase throughout this century under all greenhouse gas emissions scenarios”.

Mauritius is experiencing an accelerated sea level rise of 5.6 millimetres per year, which exceeds the global average of 3.3 mm per year. As a result, our coast is being severely impacted by beach erosion. In addition, rising sea surface temperature is impacting on the coral reef health by decreasing its sediment generation capacity. Coral bleaching leading to the gradual loss of the reef bio generative and productive functions is further accentuating beach erosion. Our beaches are major assets for the economy, tourism industry and leisure for the population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the difficult financial context of the country, the Government is committed to continue with the protection of the coastal zone. Substantial funds have been earmarked under this budget to the tune of not less than Rs182 m. to address coastal erosion and to adapt to the impacts of climate change for the following on-going and future projects amongst others, we have –

- coastal protection works at Pointe aux Feuilles to Grand Sable, Providence, Bois des Amourettes;
- we have replacement of casuarinas trees by endemic plants in the dynamic beach zone to control beach erosion;

Consultancy services for the design of *Deux Frères* Waterfront Project over 900 metres and we are very confident that we will be starting work at *Deux Frères* Waterfront shortly. Consultancy services for coastal protection works at 16 sites, over some 8.4km.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to control and management of public beaches, as the House is aware, the Beach Authority, falling under the aegis of my Ministry, is responsible for the control and management of public beaches in Mauritius and Rodrigues. There are at present 132 and 12 proclaimed public beaches in Mauritius and Rodrigues respectively. Our vision is to develop our public beaches in a systematic and integrated approach.

The Beach Authority has also embarked on the implementation of beach management plans on a phased manner during the Financial Year 2021/2022. Works have been completed at Mont Choisy. Works for Phase 1 have already started at La Prairie and works shall start shortly at Belle Mare and Flic en Flac public beaches.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view for the authority to meet effectively its objectives, the Beach Authority Act 2002 was amended. The Beach Authority Act 2022 has now broadened the functions and power of the authority amongst others, as follows –

- (1) Besides the management and control of public beaches in the Island of Mauritius and Rodrigues, the Beach Authority will also manage any public beaches in Agaléga, Tromelin, Cargados Carajos and the Chagos Archipelago, including Diégo Garcia, and any other island comprised in the Republic of Mauritius.
 - (2) Allows the Beach Authority to construct and lease commercial premises and tuck-shops, defined as a fixed structure, specifically adapted for trading purposes.
 - (3) Strengthen the enforcement of regulations made and to be made under the Act.
 - (4) Restoration of native vegetation on public beaches and replenishment of public beaches following the promulgation of the Climate Change Act 2020.
- Prior to the proclamation of the Act, the present regulations namely the (i) Beach Authority (Traders' Licence) Regulations 2004, and (ii) the Beach

Authority (Use of Public Beach) Regulations 2004, are being reworked out to reflect the amendments as per the Beach Authority (Amendment) Act 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is coming shortly in the coming weeks with an Environmental Quality Index, with due consideration given to the following main indicators, air, water, seawater. We are investing in best available technologies for the online real time monitoring of environmental quality.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Air Quality Index system will also be a useful tool to establish air pollution trends in those affected regions and will also help to enforce the law by driving industrialists to make use of pollution abatement measures to reduce air pollution.

With regard to usage of pesticides, it is well known that excessive use and inadequate management of pesticides represent a significant risk to both human health and the environment, especially when they move into the food chain and the environment. In this respect, a pesticide residue testing unit has been set up at the National Environmental Laboratory of my Ministry for regular monitoring of pesticide.

As the enforcement agency for air, a series of measures have been initiated in collaboration with the Ministry responsible for the National Land Transport Authority and we have acquired 15 portable smoke meters which are already in place throughout the island, Mr Speaker, Sir.

M. le président, je dois dire que ce gouvernement attache une importance importante surtout à l'aspect environnemental. Nous vivons dans un contexte économique extrêmement difficile avec la covid-19, avec la crise Russo-Ukrainien et je dois dire que le gouvernement considère que nous n'avons pas de compromis à faire sur toutes les sujets à caractère environnemental. C'est avec beaucoup de plaisir que nous pourrons dire aujourd'hui que nous sommes dans cette phase d'implémentation de pas mal de projets révolutionnaires dans le pays, et c'est avec beaucoup de fierté que je souhaite aussi remercier le Premier ministre, le ministre des Finances pour le budget qui a été présenté. Et c'est donc avec confiance, et aussi avec amour pour ce pays que je dois dire que nous souhaitons longue vie à ce gouvernement, et longue vie à la nation mauricienne.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much! Hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

(11.42 p.m.)

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before I go into the main subject of my speech, I would like to say a few words about the comments made by some Members of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the words *très peu et trop tard*, I think, about four times in his speech, regarding the allocation given in the Budget. He mentioned that the Government has billions in different accounts and they could have increased the allowance to each and everybody. On the other hand, he himself said that the war in Ukraine is not going to end so soon. To quote him: “*la crise internationale*” has just started, and “the economic hurricane is coming.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if we are living in such an unpredictable time, is it not the job of the Minister of Finance to prepare this Budget taking into account the possible eventual consequence of the Ukraine war? If the Minister of Finance increases the pension and other allowance massively now, how would we cope when things go wrong internationally in the months or years to come? After the Leader of Opposition, having said that the Government has money to dish out around, the hon. Osman Mahomed said the opposite. He said the coffers of the Government are empty. Mr Speaker, Sir, they have to decide I think. They have to *comme on dit accord zot violion* as to whether the coffers are full or empty. Some Members said it is full, some Members said it is empty.

On another note, the Minister of Finance increased the tax on alcohol and cigarettes by 10%. This has been done by successive Governments over the years because we know that cigarette is a real poison and gives rise to chronic bronchitis, cancer of the lungs and cardiac problems amongst so many other medical problems. If I remember well, I think, the Leader of the Opposition, when he was, the Minister of Finance, did increase the tax on alcohol and cigarettes, himself. And now, what he is saying is that the increment of Rs1,000 per month is just equivalent to *2 cigarettes Matinée par jour*. Just see the attitude of the Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Speaker, Sir, increasing the tax on cigarettes has been shown to discourage cigarettes smoking especially among the young people but the way the Leader of the Opposition is

belittling or *banalisé* this measure of the Minister of Finance, would send the wrong message to the young people.

Another measure I would like to mention is the removal of the Municipal Tax. After the removal of the trade fee for the small businesses a couple of years ago, by this Government, that is those who were paying less than Rs5 000, now we are coming with the removal of the Municipal Tax on the residence, and that, this Government is doing it. Just like the trade fee was decreased before, now the Municipal Tax on residence is being removed by this Government, the MSM Government. As we all know, this measure was well received by these 110 000 households in the 5 Municipal Councils. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this will cost Government more than Rs100 m., and this Rs100 m. *pe ress dan pos ban sitadin*, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. And the Opposition does not find anything positive to say about this.

This very bold measure was taken, again by this Government, the MSM Government. Just like we decreased the trade fee for the small business, now we are decreasing the municipal tax on the residence as well. But it is the same sour grape response, again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

What did some of them say? This measure would make the local authorities dependent on the Central Government.

They don't see that this measure has helped a lot of people, 110,000 people; no they don't see this side of the story. What do they see? This measure is going to make the local authorities more dependent on Central Government.

I would like to ask the Opposition since when the local authorities have been totally independent from the Central Government financially.

As far as I can remember, since independence, even before, the local authorities have always been dependent on the Central Government financially.

If the Leader of the Opposition wanted the local authorities to be independent, why did he not give the local authorities this financial independence when he was the Minister of Finance?

Hon. Osman Mahomed added that the Government must compensate the local authorities for the tax rebates. Has he read the Budget Estimates? I would ask him to read the

Budget Estimates. If he read it, he would have seen that the Government has increased the allocation to the local authorities from Rs3.3 billion in 2021 to Rs4.1 billion in this Budget to cover, among other things, the removal of the municipal tax as well. But he has not even read the Budget Estimates. So, he does not know and he is coming to ask questions here in this House.

Talking about hon. Osman Mahomed, in his speech, he continued to criticise the local authorities. But the same gentleman, when a project is done by the local authorities, for example, either asphaltting a road or attending to a lighting issue, he would rush and stand there and take a *selfie* of himself and put it on Facebook.

(Interruptions)

No, it is a fact! I am told that in his Constituency, he is known as the “*selfie* man”. I am not surprised. He would tell everybody that the project was done on his initiative when it was done by the Local Government, and now he has the cheek to come and criticise the same local authorities. I don’t know how to qualify it. I don’t know.

That reminds me of the Fourth Member of Constituency No. 3; so arrogant and full of himself. No, it is! I am sorry I have to use these kinds of words, but it is. I would like to remind him that I have got a *bilan* in Constituency No. 3, that is, Plaine Verte, Camp Yoloff and Roche Bois.

I would challenge him to submit his *bilan* tomorrow. In Constituency No. 3, you have not done anything and now you are trying to challenge the Prime Minister at national level calling him, among other things, ‘*pareseux* and *incompetent*’. Can you imagine how arrogant you can be? I can’t understand.

I just wonder who came to see the Leader of the MSM to join the MSM party about ten years ago and, today, you are calling the same person all sorts of names. There is no limit.

You, who has been condemned by a Court of law for bribing a policeman, now you are pointing fingers at other people? Shame, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, quite a few Members of the other side of the House criticised the local authorities, but what surprised me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these same people who criticised the local authorities, at Adjournment Time, almost every week, they would request the

local authorities to carry out different tasks in their constituencies. After criticising, they are the ones to criticise the local authorities left, right and centre. But almost every time, at Adjournment Time, they ask the local authorities to do the work. I mean, now you decide yourself. How ridiculous they can get sometimes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the measures that have been brought to control the abuses that were done by the Sale by Levy is, for me, one of the most important measures that have been taken in this Budget. We know how many people have lost all their assets and *zordi zot lor lapaille couma dire*.

We know how these were being controlled by the mafia. I am very happy that this Government, once again, took this bold decision to put some order in this inhumane procedure that has caused so much pain and misery to so many people over the years. Congratulations to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development as well.

Another subject which I would like to raise here is the pension for the Muslim widows. It is a fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that for many years, Muslim widows whose *Nikkah* were not registered with the Muslim Family Council were not entitled to a Widow's Pension. This situation has caused a lot of hardship and injustice to these widows for so many years. So, many of them have children and were facing difficulties in their daily financial obligations. Some of them came to see me in the CAB to tell me about this difficulty. Not once; so many times.

Today, once again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government, the MSM Government, has shown its willingness to address this burning issue. It is this Government again.

Hon. Shakeel Mohamed, in his speech, has tried, *comme d'habitude, de noyer le poisson*. He told us a long story from pre-Independence period, but he deliberately did not tell us the whole story, as was mentioned by my colleague, the hon. Kavydass Ramano, just a few minutes ago.

Despite all what he has said on the MSM, he forgot that he started his political career in that very same political party, that is, MSM in 1995, and, by the way, he was in the Government from 1995 to 2000 and from 2005 to 2014. Why did he not try to find a solution to this problem?

For nearly 15 years, he was in Government. It is easy to criticise now, but why did he not find a solution - 2005 à 2014?

Today, he is blaming everybody. But did he do anything for the last 15 years that he was in Government to find a solution to the plight of these widows?

I would like here to put on record, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that on 10 November 2009, as a Member of this Assembly, I raised the hardship and injustice that was caused to so many Muslim widows. I raised this point at Adjournment Time, but, unfortunately it fell on deaf ears and nothing was done about it.

Now, again, it is the MSM which is coming with this historic measure so that these unfortunate Muslim widows will now be eligible for their pension. Just earlier, this evening, another Member of Constituency No. 3, hon. Ameer Meea, talked about Canal Anglais –

“Rien n’a été fait à Canal Anglais.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, just to put it in perspective, the project started on 01 December 2020 and the expected completion date was on 30 November 2021 and it costs Rs114 m. About a year ago, when the project started, my hon. colleague, Mr Mahendranuth Hurreeram and myself, we did a site visit there and after that, two or three times I did site visit to check the progress of the work. And besides site visit, I was having meeting in my office with the Consultant, with the contractor to see how the work is going. And now he comes in this House - *“Rien n’a été fait à Canal Anglais”*. I mean, 80% work now has been done. I mean *encore il n’y a pas de limites* ? I do not know what to say. The work is being done and additional work has to be done because there are some problems with the riverbed. The additional works are being done by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. And still, he says that nothing has been done! I cannot understand that.

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, hon. Vice-Prime Minister, I will suspend for a few minutes.

At 11.57 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 00.12 a.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much for being patient. Hon. Vice-Prime Minister, please!

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, *la popilasion general finn resenti enn boufe ler frai avec bann mezir anonse dan sa bidze la, sof natirelman pou sertin dan loposition.* It has always been the same with some of the Members. With this Opposition, *naryen pa bon.* Some of them have termed the budget as *confetti*, others have qualified it as *pe fer la bouss dou, bidze tap latab, bidze ilision.* Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it has always pained me to take note of some of their cheap, inconsistent, illogical and paradoxical comments.

To those small few, allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to set the context against which this Budget has been brought and their impact on the economy of our country. Since 2020, the world has been facing COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impact on countries have been considerable. Mauritius has not been spared. Following the two successive national lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, the economic activities were at a standstill, and both the public and the private sector were severely affected.

In February this year, the war between Ukraine and Russia has compounded the situation leading to a cascading effect on the political, social and economic situation of so many countries across the world. Russia and Ukraine combined, accounted for 25% of the world's wheat exports and 14 percent of corn shipments. Further, Russia is one of the world's biggest energy suppliers globally. This war is causing worldwide disruptions to trade and investment, affecting, amongst others, the manufacturing industry, tourism, as well as severely impacting consumer foods and fuel prices. Higher prices for natural gas, a key ingredient for ammonia fertilizer, is pushing up costs for farmers and reduce crop yields, further exacerbating food shortages.

According to a new World Bank Report, the economic shock waves are moving through five channels –

- commodity markets;
- logistics networks;
- supply chains;
- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and
- sectors such as tourism.

Disruptions to global and regional supply chains have caused input shortages and price hikes. The economic situation in all countries has been severely affected. Mauritius, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is not shielded from these economic shocks, and naturally, this has had a direct impact on the prices of fuel, commodities and food products which are imported to Mauritius resulting in the rising cost of living in our country, and especially when we consider that, we, in Mauritius, have to import 70% of our food. Not only the most vulnerable and down trodden have been affected but the middle-class as well.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius does not possess natural wealth such as minerals or fuel or gas deposits. It is in these dire and difficult prevailing economic contexts that the Minister of Finance has had to prepare this Budget.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Government is well aware of the difficult situation which our fellow countrymen are facing. That is why the Government has come with this Budget to give a helping hand to those people who are suffering the most, that is, the people at the lower rung of the ladder and the middle-class as well.

Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States, said –

“The care of human life and happiness is the first and only object of good government.”

The well-being of our population, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has, is and will always be the main developmental priority of this Government. It is with this objective in mind that the Minister of Finance came up with this budget which aims to relieve the pressure on the different groups of the population, be it the old age people, widows, handicapped children and others. The Government is aware of the financial difficulty faced by the population and this budget is responding to their call.

Last year’s budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, laid the foundation for accelerating economic recovery, triggering revival and strengthening resilience thereof. It was underpinned by a spate of bold, innovative and sensible strategies and actions for transformation of the economic landscape of Mauritius such as –

- boosting investment;
- economic growth;

- poverty alleviation, and
- sustainable development and green initiative.

These measures have enabled significant growth in our GDP which is expected to exceed its pre-pandemic level. The following indicators are also expected to improve substantially –

- exports of goods and services;
- increase in investment rate;
- foreign direct investment, and
- tourist arrivals.

This, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, clearly shows that this Government is on the right track and we are determined to work even harder for the betterment and upliftment of our population. This budget is all about the people; investing in them in order to create wealth and lay the foundations to stability and prosperity for our country. As announced by my colleague, the Minister of Finance, we will strengthen our economic growth and resilience; accelerate our transition towards sustainable and inclusive development.

This Government has always aimed at ensuring food security and crop production in the country. Our farmers, planters and fishers are key to addressing the food security problem and increase in the price of commodities. I welcome the investment of Rs3 billion in these sectors. These investments will be in terms of support, grants, incentives, subsidies, tax holidays and exemption of registration duties, depending of specific schemes. It will also provide guaranteed prices for our farmers, cane planters, beekeepers, fruit, tea, and flower growers cooperatives in the agricultural sector. Our fishers will also benefit from similar schemes and this will further contribute towards our food security.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now address the various achievements and allocations for my Ministry. Local authorities serve a two-fold fundamental purpose. Firstly, they provide various services such land use planning, construction, lighting issues, maintenance of amenities and waste collection. Secondly, to represent and involve citizens in determining specific local public needs and how best these needs can be met. In this budget, the grant-in-aid for local

authorities has been substantially increased from Rs3.1 billion to Rs4.1 billion, nearly 25 % increase to enable local authorities to achieve these objectives.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is a country where the rule of law, equity and natural justice is one of the fundamental tenets of democracy. We, on this side of the House have always believed that rural and urban areas should be at par in all domains. The place of residence of any Mauritian should not act as a divide between them. To address this issue, during our general elections campaign in 2019, we pledged to abolish the Municipal Tax on Residential Property. This was confirmed in the Government Programme 2020-2024. For me, it is with a feeling of pride and satisfaction that I welcome this historical measure which so many citizens have been waiting for such a long time. As I mentioned earlier, this measure will benefit some 110,000 households at a cost of more than Rs100 m.

The Metro Express Project has changed the architectural landscape of Mauritius and provided major opportunities for the redevelopment of strategically located areas in and around our city and town centres. One such project is the development of modern urban terminals. Accordingly, with a view to uplifting and enhancing the image of our city/town centres, it was proposed to develop six modern urban terminals incorporating state of the art architecture through private sector participation along the metro corridor from Port-Louis to Curepipe. As a major transport interchange at the most strategic locations of the city and the towns, the Urban Terminals are expected to be an iconic building accommodating a mixed-use development, comprising major amenities, commercial spaces, leisure and entertainment, markets, food courts, and dedicated hawker areas. In addition to the potential for private investment to the tune of Rs10 billion, their contribution towards boosting employment in the country is not to be underestimated.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Victoria Urban Terminal has already started its operation and some 670 hawkers have already signed their contracts with the Municipal Council of Port-Louis. Once again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the MSM Government has come up with a humane and sustainable solution to provide the hawkers a suitable place to ply their trade.

Regarding the Vacoas Urban Terminal, the contract is being signed at any time next week between the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning and the promoter. As regards to Quatre-Bornes Urban Terminal, we have already launched the Expression of Interest and the

closing date will be in about two months' time. As for Rose Hill and Curepipe Urban Terminal, the Request for Proposals will be launched shortly. Rural areas will also be provided with similar developments. I have already requested local authorities to work on the development of mini Urban Terminals in large villages which will include similar facilities and services as the six urban terminals.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to improve the day to day life of the citizens in both urban and rural areas, Rs2.3 billion was provided under the Economic Recovery Programme to local authorities for the improvement of infrastructure in every corner of the country. These projects included the setting up of synthetic mini soccer pitch, resurfacing and constructing new roads, acquisition of various types of vehicles and equipment for the modernisation of local authorities to enable provision of better services. The Administrative Buildings for the District Councils of Pamplemousses and that of Flacq have been completed and inaugurated at the cost of Rs60 m. and Rs80 m., respectively. Presently, we are working on the construction of a headquarter for the Savanne District Council.

With a view to modernising the existing network of incinerators, 16 additional LPG gas fired incinerators have been installed around the island. This year, we are proposing to construct another 5 LPG fired incinerators for a total sum of Rs100 m. in various localities of the country following requests from local inhabitants.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, climate change and disasters pose a significant risk to the socio-economic development of our country. The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder that global epidemics, like climate change, know no boundaries. Mauritius, as a Small Island Developing States (SIDS), faces some 41 hazards of meteorological, hydrological, environmental, Geo and technological nature, amongst others. It is also a fact that the frequency of extreme weather, heavy rains and tropical cyclones has increased significantly over the last two decades. All these hazards, if not properly managed, can lead to disasters. We are all aware that with climate change, we are and will continue to face many challenges with flooding throughout the island. Flash floods may occur at anytime and anywhere and it cannot be predicted precisely. Today, construction of drains by local authorities, RDA and NDU are being coordinated by the LDA.

The passage of Batsirai has been a true wake-up call to recognise the scope for future improvements in our prevention, early warning, preparedness, response and relief measures.

Hence, the early warning systems have been reviewed for the improved safety of our population. Other newly identified vulnerable locations such as La Laura/Malenga, Vallée des Prêtres and Chemin Grenier will be included in these programmes.

In line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Mauritius embarked on the National Multi-Hazard Emergency Alert System project which is a state-of-the-art tool for early warning.

In an endeavour to protect all those residing in vulnerable regions which are prone to landslide, measures are being initiated by my Ministry to relocate some 73 families from Chitrakoot, Vallée Pitot, Le Batelage, Rivière des Anguilles and Rivière des Créoles to safer locations. Compensation packages are also being worked out by the relevant authorities and will be offered to all eligible families.

Procurement of light armoured personnel carriers to maintain operational mobility of casualty and personnel during emergencies and disasters is being earmarked; an amount of Rs90 m. for the purchase of oil spill combat equipment over the next three years has also been earmarked.

My Ministry is actively engaged in the process of improving our existing early-warning systems for cyclones and heavy rainfall to adapt to the dynamics of climate change and societal convenience.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the next financial year, the Mauritius Meteorological Service (MMS) will upgrade its IT infrastructure, namely its Climate Database Management System and the High-Resolution Limited Area Model, which would enable forecasts at higher resolution in space, possibly every 1 to 2 km and timescales of 3 hours to 1 hour.

Early Warning Services will be further enhanced through, amongst others, procurement of additional Automatic Weather Stations to replace the old ones and installing new Automatic Weather Stations in critical areas that are flood prone.

The MMS is also aiming to set up a Research and Development Unit at its headquarters.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) has the mission to save life, reduce fire loss, protect the environment from adverse effect of fire and other calamities due to climate change.

Moreover, the average time taken for a crew to attend an incident was 7 minutes in 2021 compared to 8 minutes in 2020.

The implementation of the Electronic Licensing of Fire Certificate through the National Electronic Licensing Platform is already in place, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Before concluding, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind the House that despite the difficult economic situation that we are all going through, the Minister of Finance has come up with a Budget that takes care of the people who are at the bottom of the ladder as well as the middle class who are being squeezed by the present difficult financial situation. His Budget was welcomed by the vast majority of the population, many union leaders and the business committee as well. Allow me to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for the presentation of this Budget, which I am sure will consolidate our social fabric in this challenging political and financial turmoil that we are facing, not just in Mauritius; this is happening across the world.

I would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate the hon. Minister for having been designated as the African Finance Minister of the Year 2022 by the African Business Leadership Awards on the eve of the presentation of this Budget. The African Finance Ministers knew the track record and they knew that he would deliver again.

On the other hand, we should not let ourselves be side-tracked by some Members of the Opposition. We know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that demagoguery is embedded in the DNA of some of the Members of the Opposition. So, on this side of the House, we are not expecting any change for the better from some of them. If any mutation there will be, it will be more virulent and more pathological, I'm afraid. But, we, on this side of the House, must gather our strength, face the difficulties ahead and help our countrymen and women to overcome this unprecedented situation courageously and successfully so that in the years to come we can have a brighter future for us and our family as well.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Salim Abbas Mamode!

(00.31 a.m.)

Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Permettez-moi d'abord de saluer mes collègues qui sont restés jusqu'à ce matin. Et permettez-moi de saluer les membres de l'Opposition qui sont également présents malgré le fait que le *Whip* de l'Opposition n'est pas là tandis que le *Chief Whip* est là. Donc...

(Interruptions)

You are only four; hon. Dr. Boolell, hon. Lobine, hon. David and hon. Nagalingum.

M. le président, permettez-moi tout d'abord de transmettre mon appréciation au ministre des Finances pour ce budget social comprenant des mesures importantes pour soutenir les plus vulnérables de la société. Je souhaiterais rappeler à nos concitoyens que ce budget est présenté dans une conjoncture internationale des plus difficiles. D'une part, la pandémie du Covid-19, et de l'autre, la guerre en Ukraine ont provoqué un grand choc à l'économie mondiale. De plus, les perturbations de la chaîne d'approvisionnement et les récents confinements en Chine influencent négativement le prix à l'échelle mondiale.

M. le président, présenter un budget dans une conjoncture sans précédent, Covid-19, la guerre, en passant par des *flashfloods*, des cyclones, le coût du fret, le taux de change, le ministre des Finances, le Dr. Renganaden Padayachy, avec la bénédiction bien sûr du Premier ministre et ses collègues ministres, a pu préparer un budget pour le peuple, avec le peuple.

Pour décrire ce budget, j'ai un sentiment que les mesures annoncées font la part belle sur le plan économique et social. Malgré tout, M. le président, le gouvernement a fait des efforts considérables pour sauvegarder les emplois, maintenir le niveau de consommation, aider les entreprises en difficulté, tout en stimulant et protégeant les plus vulnérables et, en fin de compte, stabilisant les prix des commodités de base.

Comme mentionné dans ce budget, M. le président, nous étions plongés dans l'abîme et l'inconnu, et nous aurions dû sombrer, mais il faut saluer a priori la population mauricienne dans son ensemble, puis le gouvernement. Nous avons travaillé avec tout un chacun. Au prix d'efforts et de sacrifices, nous continuons de surmonter les obstacles qui se sont dressés devant nous depuis 2019.

Aujourd'hui, nous avons un début de reprise qui porte, malheureusement, encore des cicatrices de la guerre. Et la guerre en Ukraine est venue rajouter son lot de pires difficultés. Mais encore une fois, M. le président, main dans la main, épaule contre épaule, ce gouvernement et la population ont su s'unir pour faire de notre île un pays résilient et prospère.

M. le président, durant la crise, ce gouvernement, je le rappelle, a réussi à introduire le *Wage Assistance Scheme* et le *Self Employed Assistance Scheme* pour un montant de 27,3 milliards afin de sauvegarder l'emploi, et ce sont 542,000 travailleurs qui ont bénéficié largement de cette mesure. Payer la pension à quelque 302,000 bénéficiaires afin de maintenir leur pouvoir d'achat ; 5.2 milliards pour les subventions de produits essentiels tels que le riz, la farine, le lait, l'huile comestible et les légumineuses, etc. Il a pris une décision sans précédent, M. le président, c'est-à-dire l'augmentation du salaire minimal à R 11,075 ; payer la compensation salariale des employés des PME ; trouver une somme de 100 milliards pour soutenir les entreprises. Ces mesures ont permis, M. le président, d'éviter une faillite économique totale noyant dans un chaos et de prendre des décisions rigoureuses afin de donner l'élan nécessaire pour la reprise.

Dans ce budget, M. le président, le ministre des Finances offre une panoplie de mesures afin de stimuler la production agricole et alimentaire ; afin d'assurer notre autosuffisance et de pallier ces grands problèmes à l'échelle mondiale. La sécurité alimentaire, tout en considérant le problème d'emploi, on fait des efforts supplémentaires pour plus d'investissements en maintenant une forte croissance. Pour stimuler la production alimentaire autosuffisante, c'est-à-dire les fruits et légumes, le ministre des Finances a pris une panoplie de mesures dans le secteur agricole telles qu'une subvention de 50% plafonnée à R 500,000 aux planteurs pour l'achat d'une première ferme pour la culture hydroponique, et cela est applicable pour l'achat d'une seconde ferme. Dans le but d'encourager la communauté de planteurs à recultiver les terres abandonnées, des emprunts à un taux préférentiel annuel de 2.5% leur seront accordés, ce qui permettra d'augmenter la superficie des terres sous-culture. Il faut aussi saluer, M. le président, l'initiative du gouvernement d'investir R 200 millions par le truchement de la *DBM* pour la mise en place de deux clusters pour la sécurité alimentaire et de même pour le parc agroalimentaire d'Henrietta qui s'étendra sur une superficie de 5,000 m².

De plus, M. le président, j'accueille vivement l'initiative de la mise en place d'un pôle de transformation de fruits à Solitude qui permettra à 50 PME d'opérer avec toute la logistique nécessaire pour fournir le pays et d'exporter le surplus.

M. le président, la subvention de 50% jusqu'à un maximum de R 500,000 pour l'installation de facilités de maturation des fruits et la subvention maximale de R 100,000 pour l'achat de matériel de plantation permettra aux producteurs de fruits et de fleurs de mieux s'équiper pour soutenir la croissance dans ce secteur. Les apiculteurs se sont souvent sentis délaissés dans le passé et aujourd'hui ce gouvernement leur donne des outils nécessaires. Une subvention d'un maximum de R 5,000 pour dix reines d'abeille ; une subvention unique de R 150,000 pour sécuriser les zones d'apiculture par apiculteur ; la vente par l'AMB de la cire d'abeille en vrac à un prix abordable. Nos apiculteurs pourront bénéficier du programme d'acquisition de caméras et l'introduction de nouvelles plantes pour permettre la production de miel tout au long de l'année.

M. le président, dans l'optique de favoriser la transition vers une production locale et durable, le ministre des Finances a mis à la disposition de la communauté des planteurs R 75 millions pour subventionner à hauteur de 50% l'achat d'engrais ainsi qu'une subvention de 75% qui sera accordée pour l'achat d'engrais liquide ; une subvention de 50% jusqu'à un maximum de R 500,000 pour l'achat d'équipements de compostage ; une subvention de 50% sera accordée aux producteurs de semences.

M. le président, toutes ces mesures permettront de rendre le métier de la terre plus attrayant aux jeunes et plus productif. On a ainsi assuré la pérennité pour les générations futures. Quand on parle de la sécurité alimentaire, M. le président, on doit prendre en considération le secteur de l'élevage, et ce budget comporte une série de mesures pour encourager la production locale, incluant R 200 millions à travers la *DBM* pour la mise en place de cinq zones d'élevage ; la subvention sur les aliments pour animaux passe à R 10 par kilo ; R 100,000 aux coopératives pour l'achat des vaches et la construction d'étables à travers les *Zero Budget Natural Farming Scheme* ; une subvention de 30% sur l'achat d'équipements pour la production de lait pasteurisé local ; jusqu'à R 200,000 par coopérative pour l'achat de chèvres et la construction d'abris à travers un *Board Farming Scheme*. Et de plus, M. le président, l'organisation d'un salon de

l'agriculture permettra aux acteurs du secteur de démontrer leur savoir-faire. Merci à l'honorable Maneesh Gobin.

M. le président, je vais maintenant parler des mesures annoncées pour faciliter les affaires. Ce budget, M. le président, permettra que la création d'entreprise ou la constitution d'une société soient gratuites, et en sus, l'ouverture d'un compte bancaire peut se faire en une semaine, que ce soit pour un particulier ou une entreprise. Cette mesure, M. le président, permettra de soutenir la politique gouvernementale afin d'encourager l'entrepreneuriat chez les jeunes. Désormais, les jeunes pourront s'investir pleinement dans la réalisation de leur projet d'entreprise. L'augmentation de l'allocation mensuelle du *National Apprenticeship Programme*, du *National Scheme Development Programme* ainsi que du *Graduate Training for Employment Scheme* encouragera plus d'acteurs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the SME sector is not to be neglected. This sector contributes to around 34.9% of the gross value added and 44% of the total employment. The Government, that is, this Government, has provided, throughout the DBM and the IFCM, some 4.7 billion as loan and equity financing to support more than 12,000 SMEs. This Budget has accommodated the proposed amendment to surely help SME nurture their growth. Among these measures, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the redefinition of SME will enable some 142,000 enterprises to benefit from support programme and financing designed for SMEs. This includes SME interest free loan scheme and Covid-19 Special Support Scheme from DBM, various schemes improving productivity and competitiveness offered by SME Mauritius and the Industrial Finance Corporation of Mauritius Ltd. These measures, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will thus reengineer and reorient their business models focusing on greener and industry 4.0 technologies. *Merci au ministre Bholah.*

Moreover, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget is also allocating some 10 billion to support SMEs, Mid-market enterprises and entrepreneurs through MIC and DBM. As we know, SME is really the powerhouse of growth and employment.

M. le président, je vais maintenant élaborer sur l'éducation. Ce secteur est prouvé d'une augmentation budgétaire de R 1.3 milliards pour s'assurer de la gratuité de l'éducation au niveau primaire, secondaire et tertiaire. Cela s'ensuit dans le but que chaque enfant mauricien puisse réaliser son plein potentiel. La scolarisation au niveau pré-primaire est quasi universelle avec

77% des enfants fréquentant des écoles pré-primaires privées. Prenons en considération l'exercice financier 2021-2022. La subvention mensuelle par enfant dans les écoles pré-primaires privées est passée de R 200 à R 40, soit une augmentation de 100%. On n'a pas négligé les régions les plus vulnérables; 125 écoles pré-primaires privées vont bénéficier d'une subvention unique de R 50,000.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Move on.

Mr Abbas Mamode: L'éducation plus inclusive, ce budget accorde une subvention de R 100,000 pour la réparation et la rénovation des bâtiments et R 50,000 pour l'achat d'équipements et matériels pédagogiques aux 53 écoles administrées par des ONG, y compris celles générées par le SeDEC. Malheureusement, l'honorable Dr. Gungapersad n'est pas présent ici. Lui, qui a tant parlé, les sommes versées aux écoles SEN pour les services paramédicaux, des soutiens aux enfants connaîtra une augmentation de 10 %, incluant des repas chauds et des moyens de transport. La subvention aux écoles SEN, gérées par les ONG, SeDEC, a augmenté à R 155 millions, M. le président.

Ce gouvernement démontre, de par son action, sa volonté d'offrir une éducation de qualité plus inclusive et équitable, favorisant les opportunités d'apprentissage tout au long de la vie et l'assurance d'emploi pour tous. Merci, au ministre, l'honorable Dookun-Luchoomun !
Merci au ministre ! Vive l'honorable !

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now talk about the Health and Wellness sector which has a Rs1.6 billion rise, Rs1.6 billion rise in this Budget compared to last year. The public health services are here to ensure universal health coverage for the population and, around 73% of the population use the public health system for health care needs.

Moreover, in 2021, some 4.2 million cases have been seen by Doctors in the public health care system of which some 200,000 persons are treated as inpatients, and as at mid May 2022, over 90% of the adult population was inoculated with at least two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Furthermore, this Budget is investing some Rs2.5 billion for modernising health infrastructure which comprises the completion of the new Cancer Centre by December 2022. The

new Flacq hospital, by June 2023 and upgrading of Neo Natal Intensive Care Unit at the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, and upgrading work at Souillac Hospital. The construction a new unit at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam National Hospital, a Renal Transplant Centre at the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital and new orthopaedic appliances workshop at Brown Sequard Mental Care Centre will start very soon.

Afin d'assurer des services de hautes qualités, le secteur de la santé publique recrutera 1354 personnes cette année. Et des services spécialisés, 24/7 seront intégrés dans le domaine suivant : gynécologie, obstétrique, pédiatrie et anesthésie. De plus, des services d'angiographie primaire par *ICP* seront offerts à l'hôpital Victoria et au *Trust Fund for Specialised Medical Care for Cardiac Centre*. I have a very special mention for Dr. Jeetoo hospital, where I witness quite often the dedicated commitment of doctors. Special mention to Doctors: Bundhun, Appadoo and Beeharry Panray. Only to mention a few but, everybody is so good at Dr. Jeetoo Hospital.

The CCU and ICU look more like a private clinic. I also have a special thank for Dr. Ismet Nawoo, who did a marvellous job at Dr. Jeetoo Hospital, when he was the Director. I wish him all the best and that he will bring necessary changes at Rose Belle Hospital, where he is now posted. Thank you very much, hon. Dr. Jagutpal, for your brilliant performance.

M. le président, une promesse donnée est une promesse sacrée, et ce gouvernement honore toujours ses promesses. C'est pourquoi, malgré la conjoncture actuelle de juillet 2022, M. le président, 110,000 ménages ne paieront plus la taxe municipale. Bravo à, l'honorable Dr. Husnoo ! Il faut aussi souligner, M. le président, que le budget des Collectivité locales a connu une augmentation de R 800 millions dans le but de continuer l'amélioration des services offerts à mes mandants. Merci, l'honorable Dr. Padayachy ! Merci, l'honorable Dr. Anwar Husnoo !

M. le président, je souhaiterai remercier encore une fois le ministre des Finances, et la ministre de L'intégration sociale, de la Sécurité sociale et de la Solidarité nationale d'avoir étendu le *Basic Widow's Pension* pour les veuves de foi Musulmane tout en reconnaissant l'enregistrement tardive du mariage religieux auprès du *Muslim Family Council*.

M. le président, il faut souligner que le Parti travailliste a été au pouvoir pendant 15 ans et n'a rien, rien, rien fait à cet effet. Cette décision vient de corriger une injustice, donc furent victimes plusieurs veuves et orphelins, que depuis plusieurs années ont mené un combat sans

relâche pour leurs dues. *Zordi c'est MSM ki inn coriz sa ! zot inn kuyon dimoun pendan 10 banane.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, by the grace of the Almighty, I have succeeded in any election as my people have always approved my candidanship and I am and will be ready to respond to any unflinching dedication, and friendship to my mandates. *Ameen!* After the 2019 election, the *Alliance Nationale* did not survive the defeat and, no working arrangement was able to be secured by both ex-allies. And, I am sorry for hon. Dr. Boolell, *lin paye lepo kase, enn lalliance ki pas ti mem presenter dans election zeneral, l'alliance lespwar.* I did my job of representative of the Constituency No. 3, and as time goes, the PMSD Leader decided to join *L'entente de l'Espoir*. Was *L'entente de l'Espoir* present in the last General Election? So, better look in mirrors, my dear friends of the PMSD. *Coute poignard zot ine donn Boolell dan so ledos.* I did my job of representative of the constituents, and PMSD decided to join *L'entente de l'Espoir*, and to walk on the tune played by the MMM.

You are less in numbers. So, you have to go according to the tune of the MMM. In April 2021, as a responsible citizen, but also, as a responsible MP, I report to the Police, a socio-cultural slippage which could have disrupted the national harmony that prevails in our multi-cultural island and this was to the dislike of some, in the PMSD. I will not say all, of some in the PMSD.

M. le président, je ne peux plus retenir de dire que, mes mandants ainsi que la population en générale, ont finalement compris ma décision de quitter le PMSD pour rejoindre ce côté de la Chambre. *I will say why.*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my actions are always guided by the prosperity of our nation and the interest of my faithful constituents. And, I resign from the PMSD and stood in this August Assembly, as an independent Member for several months. During the confinement and the declaration of part of my Constituency as red zone, due to the surge in COVID-19 cases, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have witnessed how accessible and helpful Ministers of this Government, and even the Prime Minister, himself, was to help alleviating the stress and burden faced by my constituents.

Like for the celebration of the Eid ul Adha, in Red Zones, logistic solution was worked out and my humble proposal and those of others were taken on board to have practical solution

to help ease the situation. Despite of a false perception that the Government was unpopular, the Government continues to work to safeguard the lives of our fellow citizens.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it was at that time, guided by my duty to safeguard the wellbeing of my Constituents, and having seen the commitment of this Government for the interest of the whole population, that I took the decision to join even though some said that I was committing a political suicide. Mr Speaker, Sir, today I can say it out loud, I don't regret my decision at all and many people who advised me not to join the MSM, today, are appraising my decision and even reckon that they are seeing more and more projects being implemented and that the Constituency has not missed the train of progress and development. *Enkor ene fois merci l'honorable Dr. Anwar Husnoo.*

M. le président, je parlerai maintenant des différents projets à venir dans ma circonscription. L'île Maurice est témoin que le développement est toujours associé au MSM. Même l'Opposition doit le reconnaître, sous le *National Flood Management Programme*, R 66 million alloués pour des projets au Canal Anglais, Roche Bois, Route Nicolay, Camp Yoloff. C'est bon de faire rappeler que la première fois qu'on avait fait le Canal Anglais, c'était sous le *Prime ministership* de Sir Anerood Jugnauth. Il y a tellement de projets dans la circonscription no. 3 qui sont on *track*, M. le président, on doit reconnaître que lorsque le MSM est au pouvoir, c'est quand le MSM est au pouvoir, il y a du développement dans le pays.

Et ces faits sont reconnus au sein de la population et les membres de l'Opposition ne veulent pas le nier à moins qu'ils ne souhaitent réécrire l'histoire de notre pays à leur sauce.

M. le président, il faut saluer le soutien offert par le Premier ministre à son cabinet ministériel, ces patriotes travaillant dans l'ombre pour une île Maurice meilleure –

- Prix pain maison – R 2.60
- Gaz ménager – R 240 au lieu de R 680.

Donc, il y a tellement à dire et heureusement *population li, li truv clair li.*

On dit que pour le pessimiste, le verre d'eau est à moitié vide alors que pour l'optimiste, il est à moitié plein. Ici, nous avons un Opposition plus que pessimiste, le verre est toujours vide alors que le gouvernement, comme un être généreux, voit un verre d'eau et regarde si quelqu'un a soif autour de lui.

On an ending note, Mr Speaker, Sir, please allow me, I pray to the Almighty and everybody here, be it on this side or on the other side, of the House should pray that we have a better Mauritius and that the Almighty bless our beloved country with peace, harmony and a prosperous future.

Thank you for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move for the adjournment of the Assembly to later today, Saturday 18 June, at 10.30 a.m.

Mr Seeruttun seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: Have a safe trip; we'll meet later on today!

At 1.01 a.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Saturday 18 June 2022 at 10.30 a.m.