



SIXTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

**FIRST SESSION
THURSDAY 09 APRIL 2015**

CONTENTS

QUESTION (*Oral*)

MOTION

BILLS (*Public*)

ADJOURNMENT

Members

Members

THE CABINET**(Formed by the Rt. Hon. Sir Anerood Jugnauth, GCSK, KCMG, QC)**

Hon. Sir Anerood Jugnauth, GCSK, Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs, KCMG, QC	Minister for Rodrigues and National Development Unit
Hon. Charles Gaëtan Xavier-Luc Duval, GCSK	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism and External Communications
Hon. Showkutally Soodhun, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Lands
Hon. Ivan Leslie Collendavelloo, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities
Hon. Seetanah Lutchmeenaraidoo, GCSK	Minister of Finance and Economic Development
Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Yogida Sawmynaden	Minister of Youth and Sports
Hon. Nandcoomar Bodha	Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport
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Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo	Minister of Local Government
Hon. Prithvirajsing Roopun	Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment
Hon. Marie Joseph Noël Etienne Ghislain Sinatambou	Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
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Hon. Santaram Baboo	Minister of Arts and Culture
Hon. Ashit Kumar Gungah	Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection
Hon. Mrs Marie-Aurore Marie-Joyce Perraud	Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare
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Hon. Soomilduth Bholah	Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives
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Hon. Marie Roland Alain Wong Yen Cheong, MSK	Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms
Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn	Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training

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MAURITIUS

Sixth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 19 of 2015

Sitting of 09 April 2015

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

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

JIN FEI ECONOMIC ZONE PROJECT

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Jin Fei Economic Zone Project at Riche Terre, he will state where matters stand, indicating as at to date –

- (a) the names of the present shareholders thereof and the involvement of the Government of the People's Republic of China therein;
- (b) the sums spent on infrastructure by the Mauritian side;
- (c) the foreign investment received and the number of jobs created;
- (d) the details of the –
 - (i) subleases granted;
 - (ii) Memoranda of Understanding signed, and
 - (iii) completed and forthcoming projects respectively;
- (e) what is being proposed to the displaced planters, and
- (f) if the Culture House project still stands.

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Madam Speaker, the Jin Fei project is yet another resounding failure of the previous Government. The previous Government signed an initial lease agreement in July 2007 with the Tianli Enterprise Group. Subsequently, a new Lease Agreement and Framework Agreement were signed with a new company, namely the Mauritius Jin Fei Economic Trade and Cooperation Zone Ltd on 16 September 2009. Both documents have already been tabled on 10 February 2015.

As regards part (a) of the question, the present shareholder of the Mauritius Jin Fei Economic Trade and Cooperation Zone Ltd is the Shanxi Investment Group Co. Ltd. The Chinese Government is not involved directly in the Mauritius Jin Fei Economic Trade and Cooperation Zone Ltd.

The Lease Agreement was for a plot of land covering an area of 211 hectares, that is, 500 *arpents*, which was leased to the company for a period of 99 years.

Concerning part (b) of the question, I am informed that the previous Government had invested some Rs525 m. on offsite infrastructure of which -

- Rs115 m. for water infrastructure;
- Rs236 m. for electricity supply;
- Rs92 m. for road development, and

- Rs82 m. for sewerage infrastructure

In addition, an investment estimated at Rs1 billion is still required to meet the water needs for the Jin Fei project.

Concerning part (c) of the question, according to information provided by the Jin Fei Group, the total foreign investment - foreign direct investment - amounted to Rs1.7 billion with a breakdown as follows -

- Rs765 m. for on-site infrastructure works, and
- Rs920 m. for three projects, namely a Business Centre for an investment of Rs580 m.; an apartment block for an investment of Rs235 m., and a warehouse for an investment of Rs105 m.

The figure of Rs920 m. is way below the commitment taken by Jin Fei Group to invest a minimum of Rs18 billion by end of next year.

An estimated 80 jobs have been created as opposed to the 5,000 direct jobs which the Company undertook to generate during the first phase period from 2009 to 2012.

Concerning part (d) (i) of the question, there are four subleases granted by Jin Fei, on a total land area of 3.5 hectares.

As regards part (d) (ii) of the question, no MoU has been signed outside those four sublease agreements. I shall table a copy of those sublease agreements by this afternoon.

As regards part (d) (iii) of the question, as I pointed out earlier, in reply to PQ No. B/16, during the last electoral campaign, we took the commitment to revive this project and give it a new impulse. Ever since we assumed office, we started intensive discussions with the promoters.

A high-level delegation from the People's Republic of China comprising the representatives of the shareholders of Jin Fei visited Mauritius from 23 January to 05 February 2015 to hold discussions with Government. In the light of those discussions, Government made the following proposals to Jin Fei Group -

- (a) to set up a joint venture company in which Government of Mauritius will hold 80 percent shares and the Mauritius Jin Fei Economic Trade and Cooperation Zone Ltd will hold 20 percent shares in joint venture company;

- (b) to replace the lease agreement signed on 16 September 2009 between Jin Fei and the Ministry of Housing and Lands with a revised lease agreement, to be entered between the joint venture company and the Ministry of Housing and Lands;
- (c) to allocate the 20 percent shares to Jin Fei for the contribution made by the latter with respect to onsite infrastructure, and
- (d) option for the Government of the Republic of Mauritius of acquiring the business centre, the warehouse and an apartment building developed by Jin Fei on leased land at a price to be mutually agreed.

A full-fledged delegation from Jin Fei is now presently in Mauritius to finalise the discussion. I am pleased to inform the House that the Chinese Group has already agreed in principle to our proposal to set up a joint venture company with 80 percent Government of Mauritius and 20 percent of Jin Fei.

The Jin Fei Company is prepared to acquire the plot of land on which they have constructed the Business Centre and the Apartment block and other projects up to a maximum of 75 *arpents*, as compensation for the total investment in on-site infrastructure amounting to Rs765 m. The land to be allocated to Jin Fei will be subject to an independent valuation and any difference between the Rs765 m. and the actual land value will be paid in cash by Jin Fei to the Government of Mauritius.

Madam Speaker, we have finally succeeded to take back, at no cost to Government, 425 *arpents* of the land leased to Jin Fei Group, which I have to inform the House is now fully serviced with all amenities. These lands will be used to develop a smart city project dedicated to port logistics activities.

As regards part (e) of the question, the previous Government refused to compensate the small planters who were evicted from the Jin Fei site. It was only after a strike and a Court case that the previous Government was compelled to pay a total amount of Rs73 m. as compensation to 227 planters who were occupying plots of land in the Riche Terre/Terre Rouge land settlement area. Furthermore, some 106 planters were leased land to the extent of 10 perches each for residential purposes and 34 planters were granted one *arpent* each for vegetable plantation.

Following the meeting I had with the small planters at Solitude, we agreed -

- (1) to sell the plot of 10 perches of land being leased to those small planters concerned for a nominal price of one rupee;
- (2) to provide the small planters concerned, grouped in a Cooperative Society, with a plot of land of 100 *arpents* to set up a bio-farm project. Government will also provide all necessary support for the Cooperative Society to successfully implement the project.

As regards part (f) of the question, Government has decided that the Culture House project will not be implemented in the Jin Fei site but rather in Réduit.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that we are on the point of finally unlocking the Jin Fei saga.

Mr Bérenger: I heard the hon. Minister say that, Jin Fei, through representatives who are at present in Mauritius, have agreed in principle to becoming the minority 20% shareholder in a new entity to be set up and, therefore, to take back the 425 *arpents* that were with Jin Fei. Can I know whether in principle - and then, has the value of the 80% that they are going to lose in a way, a 100% shareholders they were - now they are going to become shareholders at 20%? Can we know whether a value has been placed on what they will ask from the Government of Mauritius to become minority shareholders?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: On the basis of discussions we have had those past few days, the 425 acres will return to the Ministry of Housing and Lands. So, the company, the new joint venture 80 to 20 is being set up mainly for the management of the site, for the management of the whole smart city and it is in this management that Jin Fei will have 20% and Government of Mauritius will have 80% and the 425 acres of land will stay probably with the Ministry of Housing and Lands or in a separate company. So, we are not adding those 45 acres in the joint venture itself.

Mr Bérenger: My question is: is the Jin Fei site so generous that they are saying, ok, we hand back these 425 *arpents*, we become a minority shareholder in a management company and you do not compensate 'us' in anyway? Is that what they are saying or will we have to pay Jin Fei for returning that land and becoming a minority shareholder in a management company?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Well, I need to say that there has been a lot of arm-twisting and we told the Jin Fei people that this is a highly politically explosive joint venture, which has not given any result after five years, in spite of the commitment they have taken. So, we were in a strong position to tell them that we have waited for so long, there has been no result

and that we now want to take back the 500 acres. It is from this point, when we said we will take back the total area that negotiations started and, as yesterday, they are proposing and, I think, we will go with it. There are 75 acres comprising of the apartment block of the warehouse and another building and they want to purchase this plot of land.

We have made a counter-proposal that the land be leased rather to them 99 years...

(Interruptions)

Yes, but there is strong objection. So, they have reverted back to China and we are still insisting that the 75 acres of land that we upkeep will remain as lease lands for 99 years which means, therefore, that we have taken back the 425 acres.

Mr Bérenger: I take that to mean that there will be no compensation for them to handing back that land, except that part over which we are discussing lease or ownership as they are requesting and I am glad to note that the hon. Prime Minister insists that it should be a lease. Do I take it that the nature of the project at Riche Terre is changing completely because before Jin Fei was to come in big with 40,000 employment created, Rs20 billion of investment and so on, now they are out I take it that, now, they are going to have the land on lease where they have already built, hand over everything else, be a minority partner in a management company and that the rest will be returned to the Ministry of Housing and Lands with the main thing in mind, from what I understand, being port development.

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Yes, and I have to add also that the 75 acres of land that they are proposing to buy is in compensation for the infrastructural work they have done there which is about Rs765 m. So, we have suggested that we balance; we have an official evaluation of the 75 acres, and if it is more than what we owe them - because we owe them the work that they have done on the site: road, electricity, and water. So, they have invested Rs765 m. directly for which we have to compensate them. Probably, we will come to an arrangement whereby the land, the 75 acres, will be some form of part compensation for the investment in infrastructure. It is a management project which we propose to have with them and, yes, also, as you know, the smart cities will all have a theme and the theme for the smart city of Jin Fei is Port logistics. Why? Because the Port project we have, extending from Grand River North West through Bain des Dames down to Baie du Tombeau, this huge project might also integrate the Port logistics project which will then give us a huge smart city for Port logistics plus the infrastructure for Port development.

Mr Bérenger: Do I take it that this Jin Fei is represented by top management from the other company in China and can I know whether the hon. Minister, himself, or Ministers have been involved in those discussions with those representatives of Jin Fei?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: No. This is a Technical Committee of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development headed by the Financial Secretary. My role is mainly to do PR with them. So, I am inviting them for dinner tomorrow with the Chinese Embassy and try to find a solution for this main issue which stays now; they want to buy and we want to give them a lease. So, we are there, there is some form of deadlock which might stay for a few days and I hope, hopefully, that, at the end of the day, they will accept the 75 acres of leased lands.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: It's good to see negotiations taking place in front of us. Can I know whether the hon. Minister has information because the whole Jin Fei project was supposed to include - well, included, in fact - granting of passports? Can I know within the Jin Fei context, how many passports have been granted?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Well, I think, the hon. Leader of the Opposition should come with a substantive question because this goes outside the purview of my Ministry.

Mr Bérenger: If I can move on to the subleases, can I know whether all of those subleases were approved by Government and for what duration those subleases were agreed to?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Well, I don't have the information. This is why I am submitting this afternoon the four subleases signed by Jin Fei with four Chinese groups.

Mr Bérenger: I understand that, that land will be extracted from what has been handed back to be subleased and what is the intention of Government - the 99-year lease?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Yes, I have the information that the sublease was approved by the Ministry of Housing and Lands.

Mr Bérenger: If I can move on to the subject of the planters. At one point, the hon. Minister himself said that - let me quote the article concerned from what has been reported –

“Les terres seront restituées aux planteurs.”

Then, another statement was made to the effect that a cooperative would be set up on 100 *arpents* for those planters. Have the planters, through their representatives, agreed to what the hon. Minister is proposing now, that is, a 100 cooperative on a 100 *arpents* piece of land?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Yes. In fact, they are very indebted to the Government if we go ahead with both projects. That is -

(1) that they be given the 10 perches of land against payment of a symbolical R1, and

(2) that we start a bio farm project at a cooperative level where they all will be involved on 100 acres of land. Naturally, we will have to help Government also.

Mr Bérenger: As far as the culture project is concerned, I am very happy because it was my suggestion to the former Government. I insisted that it is out of this world for a Culture House to be placed in the Jin Fei area, whereas the 2000-2005 Government had already decided that it would be at Réduit. We had already placed the land for that which was later on given by the previous Government to MBC. So, do I take it that the Rs250 m. interest-free loan that China had offered still stands or is it going away with Jin Fei?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: I was made to understand that it is a direct grant from the Chinese Government. Then, I need notice of this question. Yes, the Financial Secretary told me that this is a grant. Therefore, this money would be used for the construction of the Cultural Centre, but in Réduit.

Mr Bérenger: I take it that this grant is still on the table, it is still offered by China?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Yes, it is still on the table.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Under the previous Government - and it was discussed in this House through a PQ - there was a project of a company to be set up in the Jin Fei economic zone project for the production of electricity. Can I ask the hon. Minister if this is still on the cards?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: I am not aware. There must have been quite a few projects, none of them materialised. So, you might be right, but I don't know.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Ganoo!

(Interruptions)

Mr Ganoo: *Bizin casse ene coco!*

Can the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development inform the House since nearly Rs1 billion or more precisely Rs925 m., have been invested in utilities by our Government in terms of utilities and road development, will the hon. Minister then take this factor into consideration when negotiating with our Chinese counterparts because they also have been making use of these offsite infrastructures for the apartments, for the warehouse or for the business centre which they have built, and will Government allow them to sell these apartments after their construction?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: There are two parts in the question. One is, I have to tell the House that we have squeezed them a lot. We have squeezed the Jin Fei group a lot to come to

this basic arrangement where they are returning 425 acres back to Government. So, the question is whether what we have invested should get in the negotiations now. I think we have got a fairly extraordinary deal with the Jin Fei. I never thought that this would go through. It is going through. Now, as for the apartments that they want to purchase, I don't know whether they want to sell it or keep it.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan!

Mr Bhagwan: I am informed that 100 *arpents* have been earmarked for the planters. Has there been a site visit with the planters to specify which area and whether a preliminary study has started for that bio farm?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Yes. In fact, the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security is earmarking these plots of land which might be used and which we will visit just after the Budget, once we are a little free.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Jhuboo!

Mr Jhuboo: Madam Speaker, since Government has taken 80% of the joint venture, can we know from the hon. Minister *quel organisme de l'État va gérer cette participation dans le nouveau joint-venture?*

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Je n'ai pas bien compris la question. Excusez-moi.

Mr Jhuboo: Since Government has taken a participation of 80% in the joint venture, can we know *quel organisme de l'État va gérer cette participation dans ce nouveau projet?*

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Well, the joint venture will manage. It is a management company. So, the joint venture needs to be set up and when we come to the bridge, we will cross it. But, for the time being, we have agreed to the principle that the joint venture, Jin Fei and Government of Mauritius, will be on the basis of 20 and 80.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo!

Mr Jhugroo: Madam Speaker, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether a feasibility study has been done before starting this project and, if so, for what reason this has failed?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: The other initial project – no, we all know that the circumstances surrounding the Jin Fei, ex-Tianli project, were done in very dubious circumstances. We have said it so often. Even now I am not satisfied and I still don't understand how the former Prime Minister could have kicked out 250 small planters from his own Constituency, taken back this land to give it to a Chinese company in the EPZ. I am still perplexed on this.

(Interruptions)

That's true! I am not just saying it. I am also quite perplexed that the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development also got the lease agreement signed and delivered it in China. So, it is very difficult not to doubt that there is more than meets the eyes in the Tianli project.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mahomed!

Mr Mahomed: Thank you, Madam Speaker. From what I understand from the hon. Minister, 80% of the development that is going to occur there, will be from Government funding, and if so, whether a feasibility study will be done in that case?

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: No, it is a management company. The management company will develop the Smart City on those plots of lands which are there and we are going to use extensive investment from abroad and Mauritius also.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan!

Mr Bhagwan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't know if the hon. Minister has made a site visit recently in this area. It is a shame for Mauritius. This area has been converted into a dumping ground. Can I make a request - in the interest of the country, for our reputation - that the hon. Minister of Environment put some order to prevent the illegal dumping?

(Interruptions)

This is a case where there is a lot of illegal dumping and at least immediate action should be taken by the Ministry of Environment and the Environmental Police to prevent such cases of degradation.

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: The Jin Fei land is a great land for the marriage of dogs presently. I have been there recently and there are hundreds of dogs there, and there is undoubtedly an environment issue there. The joint venture will have to look into it in consultation probably with the hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr Bérenger: Can I put a request to the hon. Minister that the House be kept informed of how discussions are finalised with Jin Fei and the final conditions both in terms of money, but also of the lease conditions. Once the discussions are completed with Jin Fei, we will be fully informed.

Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo: Yes, Madam Speaker, I will make a statement as soon as the negotiations are completed with the Jin Fei group giving full details on the whole project.

Madam Speaker: Any more questions! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you don't have any more questions!

MOTION**SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10 (2)**

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, 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 rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(12.01 p.m.)

PUBLIC BILLS

Second Reading

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL (NO. V OF 2015)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. A. Husnoo): Madam Speaker, with your permission, I move that the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. V of 2015) be read a second time.

Madam Speaker, it was announced in the Government Programme 2015-2019 that the Local Government Act will be amended to consolidate democracy at the local level and to promote better participation of the local Councillors in the management of the affairs of the community.

True to our words, Government set up a Ministerial Committee under the chairmanship of hon. Charles Gaëtan Xavier-Luc Duval, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism and External Communications, to look into the pressing issues that need to be addressed in the Local Government Act with a view to consolidating democracy at the local level.

The Ministerial Committee met on several occasions to examine the various sections of the Act which require urgent attention and agreed on the following policy measures -

- (a) the holding of the Municipal Council elections;
- (b) increase in the number of Municipal Councillors;
- (c) change in eligibility to stand as candidate;
- (d) presentation of candidates of both sexes by groups/party alliances presenting more than two candidates at a Municipal Council election;

- (e) assumption of office of the Lord Mayor, Mayors, Chairpersons of District Councils and their Deputies;
- (f) holding of meetings of Local Authorities, and
- (g) the quorum for meetings of Local Authorities.

Madam Speaker, the House will recall that the Municipal Council elections were held in December 2012. The alliances for these elections constituted of the two major blocks, that is, the Alliance PTR/PMSD and the Alliance MMM/MSM.

At the City Council of Port Louis, the then Alliance MMM/MSM won a majority of the seats; similarly at the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes and Beau Bassin-Rose Hill. However, we all know subsequently what happened to the political landscape in the country and the difficulties being encountered at the Municipal Councils subsequently to operate smoothly.

Madam Speaker, we all know that the Local Government is the first public authority, due to its proximity, where citizens look up to solve their immediate social, welfare and environmental problems. It is also the level of democracy in which the citizen has the most effective opportunity to actively and directly participate in decision-making for the society. In other words, a vigorous local democracy is the basis for a healthy national-level democracy.

With that background, Government has come with this Local Government (Amendment) Bill. The amendments being proposed have been captured in the Bill as follows -

At clause 3, to allow the holding of Municipal elections this year and thereafter every six years, or earlier in such other year as the President shall, on the advice of the Prime Minister, appoint. The primary objective of this amendment is to allow Municipal Councils to operate smoothly at the earliest.

Further, with a view to ensuring consistency, a similar provision is being made at clause 4 of the Bill in relation to section 12 of the Act in order to allow for the holding of the Village Council election prior to the date on which it falls due or in any other year as may be determined by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, with a view to improving local representation of the various groups at the decision-making level of the Municipal Councils, clause 3 of the Bill is providing for an increase in the number of Councillors to be returned per ward in each Municipal Council from three to four.

Consequently, the First and Second Schedules of the Act are being amended to indicate the total number of Councillors to be returned for the City Council of Port Louis and the four Municipal Town Councils as indicated at clauses 15 and 16 of the Bill.

The City Council of Port Louis will now have 32 Municipal Councillors, the Municipal Councils of Beau Bassin-Rose Hill and Vacoas-Phoenix will have 24 Councillors each and the Municipal Councils of Curepipe and Quatre Bornes will have 20 Councillors each.

In the same way, groups or party alliances will have to ensure that not more than two thirds of the group's candidates for the election to the Council are of the same sex.

However, where the group forms part of an alliance, it shall be sufficient for the alliance to comply with the requirement without each group forming part of the alliance necessarily complying with this requirement.

The House will agree with me that, for economic and cultural reasons, groups find it difficult to ensure that, at least, one third of their candidates in an electoral ward are women.

The amendment proposed will require groups to ensure that not more than two thirds of the group's candidates for the election to a Council area, instead of an electoral ward, are of the same sex. This amendment, which aims at easing groups or alliances to ensure the participation of both sexes at the Municipal election, is also captured at clause 3 of the Bill.

Madam Speaker, the House may wish to note that the Local Government Act does not allow for an owner or a tenant of a business premises to stand as candidate for the Municipal elections if he does not reside in that particular area.

With a view to allowing the business community of a Municipal Council area to directly contribute at decision-making level in the Councils, an amendment is being proposed at clause 5 of the Bill to allow any person occupying as owner or tenant, any business premises in a ward of the city or town for not less than 6 months before the election to stand as candidate for the election.

On the same note, the amendment being brought at clause 6 of the Bill will allow chairpersons and members of statutory corporations and organisations which are wholly funded by the State to also stand as candidate for Local Government elections.

Madam Speaker, following the last general elections in December last year, a few Municipal Councillors were elected and are today, Members of this august Assembly. Their seats have been duly filled in accordance with the provisions of the prevailing legislation, but not necessarily from the groups they belonged to. The Local Government Act provides that an alliance may submit a reserve list for the filling of vacancies that may arise. No indication

on the group to which each candidate belongs to was required at the time of nomination for the last Municipal elections.

As I explained earlier, with the new political configuration, the seats of the Municipal Councillors who are now Members of the National Assembly have been filled, but not necessarily from the group to which these Councillors belonged to. Such a situation may create imbalances or disturb the relativity between the majority and the minority groups in a Council.

With a view to safeguarding the balance between the majority and minority groups in the Municipal Councils, we are bringing an amendment to section 18 of the Local Government Act, which is referred to as clause 7 of the Bill, to provide for a candidate to declare that he belongs to a group and the alliance to which his group belongs to, at the time of nomination. It also provides that the group may submit a reserve list of candidates for the filling of any vacancy which may arise.

It is worth pointing out that even if the group forms part of an alliance, any vacant position will be filled from the reserve list of the group to which the outgoing Councillor belonged to as indicated for at clause 13 of the Bill.

Madam Speaker, clause 8 of the Bill is providing amendment to section 33 of the Act so as to allow a Lord Mayor, Mayors and their Deputies, Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons of District and Village Councils to assume office for a period of two years starting on the day of their election until such time as their successors are elected.

Clause 9 of the Bill provides for an amendment to section 36 of the Act so as to provide that, in addition to a Lord Mayor, Mayor and the Chairperson of a Local Authority, a Deputy Lord Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Vice-Chairperson of a Local Authority may be revoked following a vote of no confidence.

Madam Speaker, the Local Government Act provides that whenever a Councillor resigns from his group, he shall lose his seat as Councillor. The Act also provides that where a group no longer believes that a Councillor belongs to the group, it may, by notice, request the Chief Executive of the Council to declare the seat of the Councillor vacant.

The House may wish to note that since the last Village Council Elections held in 2012, more than ten cases have been entered by the then elected Village Councillors at the Supreme Court contesting the procedures followed for the declaration of their seats vacant. They aver that they have been unfairly expelled from their groups and have undemocratically lost their seats.

With a view to ensuring that democratically elected councillors do not lose their seats in an unfair manner, amendments are being brought to section 38 of the Act to repeal the provision that renders the seat of a Councillor vacant when he is ‘expelled’ from his group. However, if a Councillor chooses to resign from his group, he will lose his seat as Councillor.

This amendment which would be applicable to both Municipal and Village Councillors is being proposed in clause 10 of the Bill. Furthermore, this amendment will entail consequential amendments to sections 39 and 40 of the Local Government Act, as indicated at clauses 11 and 12 of the Bill.

Madam Speaker, section 45 of the Local Government Act provides that meetings of Municipal and District Councils shall be held at least once every fortnight and the quorum should be at least half of the members.

Following representations received from local Councillors, an amendment is being brought to that section of the Act as indicated at clauses 14 and 17 of the Bill, to provide that meetings of Municipal and District Councils shall be held at least once every month and the quorum of the meetings shall be more than one third.

Madam Speaker, we are confident that these proposed amendments to the Local Government Act will contribute to consolidate grassroots democracy and promote better participation of local Councillors in decision-making at the Local Government level.

With these few words, I now commend the Bill to the House.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr Gayan rose and seconded.

(12.13 p.m.)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger): Madam Speaker, to us, to me in particular, this is another missed opportunity, another *occasion ratée*.

The House will remember that the 2000-2005 MMM-MSM Government had voted a new Local Government Act in 2003, a new law that was both *exemplaire* and *avant-gardiste* in terms of Local Government. What the Minister has just said *ne correspond pas à la vérité historique du tout*, that these piecemeal amendments are moving forward, democracy and so on. He does not even know the recent past.

I repeat in 2000-2005, the MMM-MSM Government voted *un texte de loi exemplaire*, *avant-gardiste* which gave real powers and real autonomy to Local Government Bodies and not only that, but which moved national unity a huge step forward by putting urban areas and rural areas *sur un pied d'égalité*. This was a beautiful piece of legislation that we voted in

2003. I do regret, Madam Speaker, that we did the same thing, granting maximum autonomy to Rodrigues. In 2000-2005, the MMM-MSM Government gave maximum autonomy to Rodrigues. We voted a piece of legislation that set up a regional elected Assembly, a regional executive with maximum autonomy. We were wise to put that in the Constitution.

We amended the Constitution with a three-quarter majority so that other Governments could not fiddle with that fundamental piece of legislation to the advantage of our Rodriguan brothers and sisters. I regret deeply, but I cannot remember why we did not do the same thing. Of course, we could not put the 2003 Local Government Act in the Constitution, but we could certainly, as in the case of Rodrigues, we did not put the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act in the Constitution, but we put *l'essentiel* of what Rodrigues' autonomy meant. We could and should have put in the Constitution *l'essentiel* of what Local Government democracy means. I cannot remember honestly why we did it in the case of Rodrigues and why we did not do it in the case of Local Government. Maybe we thought there would never be a Government like the previous Government that did away with such a beautiful piece of legislation to move backwards, decades, if not centuries. *L'histoire a retenu cela!*

Never, a Government like the previous Government that did away with such a beautiful piece of legislation to move backwards decades, if not centuries. *L'histoire a retenu cela.* If we had put in *l'essentiel* of what the 2003 Local Government Act contained in terms of Local Government, maybe, today's Bill would not have come before us; in fact, cosmetic amendments to *la loi Aimée*.

La loi Aimée was a huge step backwards! Huge step! And we all agreed on that. When there was the Remake, we agreed that we would go back to the 2003 Act which was superb and, of course, amending what needs to be updated - not much as far as I am concerned. Not much! Therefore, *il suffisait de prendre la loi de 2003, de* update it and we would have corrected the democratic crime committed by the previous Government and the Minister concerned, Hervé Aimée, instead of keeping the Aimée piece of legislation with cosmetic amendments. *C'est la vie!* What the MSM had agreed to with us when we were in the Remake, the same thing that we agreed in the case of Rodrigues, now has been thrown overboard by *l'Alliance Lepep* and *la loi Aimée* is kept *intacte* except for cosmetic amendments. Shame! What a missed opportunity!

Apart from that, Madam Speaker, it is also sad, I find, that in the case of *transfuge* this piece of legislation before us today simply deletes section 38, subsection (e). I think it is probably the only good thing that Aimée tried to do, that is, putting in his legislation a clause that if somebody - the word '*transfuge*' is not utilised, but the idea, at least - becomes a

transfuge, he loses his seat. It was not perfect, it would not necessarily work, but, at least, the intention was flagged *de condamner le transfugisme* and to provide that if somebody becomes a *transfuge*, he loses his seat. This is done away completely! Totally! There is only one paragraph that is related to that, it is section 38, subsection (e) and this is being deleted by the Bill before us. Therefore, there is nothing left to compel somebody who becomes a *transfuge*, who is disciplined out of the group which got him elected, this is out.

This is simply deleted, Madam Speaker, and I find that rather sad. As I said, it is probably the only thing that Minister Aimée did that was, at least, meant to be positive, that was at least meant to be good for democracy. It reminds me of the one case - I don't know if I said that here - but it reminds me of something which happened around the (DPP) Director of Public Prosecutions' issue where the previous Government placed the DPP's office in the same category as the Judiciary or the President or the Vice President, that is, to well underline its independence, as guaranteed by the Constitution. But to well underline that, in practice, this is probably one of the very few things that the previous Government did and that I agreed with. *Quelle ironie* that the *gouvernement Lepep* has hit at that! Now, *gouvernement Lepep* hits not only at that piece of legislation that targeted *transfuge* or *transfuge en puissance*, but also keeps the Aimée Act instead of replacing it by a new Act that would have been more or less the same thing as that Act that we voted in 2003. This is why I say this is another *occasion ratée* and it is a sad day. To me, it is a very sad day.

As far as municipal elections are concerned, all we have heard is that elections will be held this year. I looked at the estimates and I saw that I think a sum of Rs10 m. is provided in the estimates for the first six months of this year and nothing for next year. Of course, Rs10 m. is not sufficient to organise the municipal elections, we could have put a token vote both in the first six months or the second six months, but I don't know why Government put Rs10 m. Anyway, elections are coming, everybody agrees with that after what has taken place.

On a note, Madam Speaker, which I find quite ironical again, I have been amongst people who regularly, at every opportunity, have proposed that we '*grignoter les pouvoirs du Premier ministre*', because in our system, nearly all powers are in the hands of the Prime Minister. We have changed that over the years when we became a Republic, as years went by we changed that and we shifted quite a number of responsibilities from the Prime Minister to the President. In this case, I agree with what the Bill is doing. Surprisingly, one might say! But I agree with what the Bill is doing because Aimée was wrong. Aimée, in his piece of legislation, put it that municipal elections, or rather, the date of the regional elections is decided by the President of the Republic. That is not in order because it should be by the

President of the Republic on the advice of the Prime Minister in that case, not generally. Because, of course, the Prime Minister will take into consideration the budget time, law and order issues, visits of foreign dignitaries and so on to advise...

(Interruptions)

... the President on a given date. But Aimée, amongst everything else that he got wrong, got that also wrong and it went through Parliament. The previous Government had taken that. So, I agree, but in that case only, with that part where we are giving back to the Prime Minister the power to fix the date, of course, he advises the President, but it is the Prime Minister who chooses the date and advises the President.

Thank you, Madam.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mrs Jadoo-Jaunbocus!

(12.24 p.m.)

Mrs R. Jadoo-Jaunbocus (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Madam Speaker, the Local Government Act 2011 has been one which has indeed been surrounded by a number of controversies and has not really been an acclaimed piece of legislation. That is true and reality has shown that. I have, before making my speech, appealed to the hon. Minister of Local Government and, indeed, it is clear that given that there are the forthcoming municipal elections, it is in this context and we have to bear in mind when we look at the amendments why these amendments are being proposed.

As time went by, everything became clear and what the hon. Minister of Local Government has proposed goes at length to redress some of these pertinent issues in this particular context and I stress the context. We cannot, within just three months of taking up this Government, come with a full-fledged, full-blown amendment without studying it and working on fundamental and in-depth amendments. That would be erroneous and I believe in his pragmatism, the hon. Minister of Local Government has borne that in mind and has stated that in due course, necessary amendments will come.

Let us look at the proposed amendment in the Bill. As clearly set out in the Explanatory Memorandum, this Act is being amended to the extent, as I have just said, to provide for municipal City Council elections and municipal Town Council elections. When I listened to the intervention of the learned hon. Leader of the Opposition, what I sensed in his words is a sense of what could have been, should have been, but has not been. That is what we have said for the Remake, it was there to have been, but it has not been! This is what I detect in his words and this is what I sensed in what he was trying to say. Of course, much

could have been, but something else has been and what has become is here to stay for years and years and mandates and mandates, Madam Speaker.

One of the major flaws being set right by the Bill is the issue of repartition of women across the wards within the councils. What we have had in the past is that we have had indeed mandatory one-third repartition of women per ward. What has been the end result, Madam Speaker? The end result, when we look at what we have had after the elections, is that, out of the 16 female candidates in both major alliances, only five stood elected. This is what has been, in fact, the result of what was the previous law then. What this amendment does? It is aiming at striking the right balance. That is, at the same time, we are still maintaining the quota of one-third compulsory participation of women as recommended by SADC guidelines, but we are simultaneously allowing women to stand as candidate in wards where they are much more at ease. And this gives the women candidates the required flexibility and freedom, that is, to go in constituencies where they feel more at ease. We have to draw lessons from the past. Indeed, we must draw lessons from the past. Hon. Mrs Boygah, yesterday, in her address to this House, in her speech on the Budget, has indeed appealed on behalf of women folk that the hon. Minister of Local Government should take the plight of women and should bear that in mind when coming up with laws. And indeed, this is a direct response to that; this is a direct answer to what in part she has appealed for.

This amendment, indeed, will give an optimal chance to get a maximum number of female candidates to be elected. We have to draw lessons from the past. We have to look at the past. We have, whilst looking at the past, to look forward and see how we can improve.

I now turn to the amendment concerning the reserve list to be submitted, that is, on nomination day. Once more, Madam Speaker, we have to look at the past. Indeed, when we talk about this law, we cannot help looking back and then move forward. What has recent events shown regarding the reserve list provision in the Local Government Act? It has shown that the provision has failed lamentably. How so, Madam Speaker? What we have had after the general elections, we have had a number of former Municipal Councillors being elected to this House. They have stood as Members of Parliament, and once they have done that, they have had, including myself, to resign as Councillors as per the provision of the law.

Fortunately, but also unfortunately, when we look at the Municipal Council, we see that, out of the four Municipal Councillors who have been elected, all four are Members of this side of the House. When we have had them replaced on the reserve list, three of them have been Members on the other side of this House. The result, Madam Speaker, is that there has been utter pandemonium in our municipal councils and town councils.

Let us look at the Municipal Council of Port Louis, for instance. There has been an occasion where the Lord Mayor has called a council meeting, and this was not held because there has not been enough reflection, there has not been a quorum for him to hold the council. We do not want this to happen again. Moreso, we go further. What we want is what the people want.

Madam Speaker, the actual system of party list would have been a perfect one, had it not been for certain political leaders who go on and off and this affects the partners in the alliance. The end result of the Municipal Council election of 2012 is that it was called off at the tune of only one person after some 18 months of election. We have felt it. We have felt it at Port Louis, Madam Speaker. This political instability by leaders has led on the back of elected Municipal Councillors a total upheaval and uncertainty in the running of the City Council of Port Louis. What has happened? From experience, we have had municipal councillors' meeting, we have had our *groupement*, and what we are saying is: 'what are we do to?' Follow leaders or follow the will of the people? At the end of the day, if we want to be at the pinnacle of democracy, we have to follow what the people want, and what this provision does is that it goes along with the will of the people and it does away with someone's or another's change of mind. This amendment is motivated by the well-being of our *citadins*; the *citadins* of each and every town or council where one is elected, and one has to be steadfast in our mandate.

Once the damage is done, that is, once a councillor of one side is replaced by a councillor of another side, as has happened, what we have is that we have the tune of others leading the life of the *citadins*, and this does not work. And this is what has led to the amendments where we want to maintain the *statu quo*. We want the *statu quo* to be maintained council level, Madam Speaker.

Now, I turn to the next piece of amendment - and I urge this House to look at this - concerning the enlargement for the provision of Deputy Mayors, Deputy Lord Mayors and Deputy Chairpersons to committees. What we had in the past is a provision which provided only for a vocation of Mayors, Lord Mayors and Chairpersons. Clearly, this amendment will answer to a lacuna in our existing law, and I dare say a lacuna which has caused a lot of distress and panic after the break-up of the 'Remake'. Because it was realised by some that there was no possibility of putting a motion of disallowance against the then Deputy Lord Mayor of Port Louis.

Madam Speaker, we will recall how in a flush of panic on the radio we have heard that the Deputy Lord Mayor has stayed in his post in Port Louis "*pou sa ti casse là*". One will

recall that scandalous statement on the radio which stated that he stayed “*pou sa ti casse là*”. That was a very shocking comment which shook everybody, especially, Madam Speaker, in the light of the sincerity of that person, the devotion of that person to the City Council of Port Louis. We have lived it; we have experienced it. He did not stay for the “*ti casse*”. He stayed for the last two years for the Lord Mayors that had come; he had stood behind them like a shadow, assisting them in their inexperience, holding their hands to take major decisions, holding their hands in disaster, accompanying them and advising them. We recalled the 31st May; we recalled February; we recall the accident at Sorèze. He was there all the time, shadowing Lord Mayors, helping them to take decisions, and stood behind them steadfast. That is why he stayed; for the people, for the Council.

Now, the law is being amended as it should have been. That should set some people's mind at rest. What we have now is that a motion of disallowance can be brought against the Deputy Lord Mayor and the Vice-Chairperson.

Another meaningful change being presented by the Local Government (Amendment) Bill is that now owners and tenants of business premises - that is all those paying a trade licence in the city council and town council - will now be given the opportunity to stand as a candidate in that council. Formerly, the law provided that one had to be registered on the electoral roll before that person could stand as a candidate.

I commend the hon. Minister of Local Government for such a proposition. This, indeed, Madam Speaker, allows someone who may not have been a resident, but spends a lot of time in Port Louis, is very much concerned in a very particular town - I mean the decisions of that town or city - and takes interest, can now participate in the decision of that city. All those amendments that I have talked about, Madam Speaker, goes a long way to show how democratic we want to be and how we work along with the will of the people.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mohamed!

(12.36 p.m.)

Mr S. Mohamed (First Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have been going through this piece of legislation that has been brought in and presented, very briefly, by the hon. Minister. The speed at which he presented that piece of legislation explains that very legislation which I was expecting would go in line with what is provided for in the electoral manifesto of ‘*L’Alliance Lepèp*’. I read here –

« *L'administration régionale. Le Local Government Act sera revu pour donner plus d'autonomie aux collectivités locales* ».

Now, when I read this in the manifesto and I heard that there was going to be a Bill brought in this august Assembly to change fundamentally, process the way of working in Local Government, in our municipal councils, in our district councils, I thought that, yes, there would be a piece of legislation brought here by this new Government that would precisely give *plus d'autonomie aux collectivités locales*.

In order to do so, this Government would not have been able to have the hon. Minister of Local Government present this Bill in such an express manner because the express manner, the rapid manner, the fast manner in which the hon. Minister of Local Government has presented this Bill shows, and dictates, without any doubt, that what is contained in this Bill is nothing more and nothing less. And I agree here with the hon. Leader of the Opposition, ‘cosmetic change’. For that, I thank the Government because in the process what they are saying is that, fundamentally they agree with the previous laws, as being brought by the previous Government. Had they not agreed with the previous law, the changes would not have been only cosmetic but would have been in-depth and fundamental.

(*Interruptions*)

That is a fact! And now I understand. When you look at the changes here, where is it and in what clause do we see a fundamental change where you are giving *plus d'autonomie*? Show us in this paragraph! And here, Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister will have to answer later on, when he will sum up, where in this Bill do we see *plus d'autonomie* that is being given. Where? I don't see a single clause therein where *plus d'autonomie* is being given in anyway. There is no change whatsoever that is being brought to the autonomy that exists. On the contrary, there is no such change, but, maybe, the answer to my question was not brought in by the hon. Minister of Local Government but was brought in by the previous orator. Maybe, she has given us the answers to the questions the members of the public are asking, the members of the municipal and district councils are asking, they are wondering why is it that we were told that there would be *plus d'autonomie* and we were expecting some fundamental changes. Why is it, therefore, that those changes never came up, never showed up? Most probably they would say later on we will come up with it, but the answer came from the hon. Member who preceded me and I thank her for that, Madam Speaker.

It is that there was no time to go into fundamental changes because we had to come up with something three months afterwards - she said it. It was not possible, therefore, for this Government to go into the fundamental changes provided for *pour plus d'autonomie*

because three months only is not sufficient - I agree with that. But it is sad that a promise was made and it was not kept. They could have waited.

(Interruptions)

They could have waited!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Mohamed: They could have waited. And I say it again, they could have waited and done a better job, but no, they want to do a half-baked cake. Now, one thing which is of utmost interest - I go to the Constitution of this country because we are in this august Assembly, in the temple of democracy. When I go to the Constitution of this country and I read, in paragraph 1 -

“We shall be a sovereign democratic State”.

Everyone seems not to want to talk about that very important section of our Constitution -

“(...) a sovereign democratic State.”

I hear the words of hon. Mrs Jadoo-Jaunbocus and she is totally right once again; I agree with that. And I enjoyed that moment of agreeing with her, when she says -

“If we want to achieve the pinnacle of democracy (...).”

Beautiful words!

“(...) we have to do what the people want and not what (...).”

(Interruptions)

I understand what she meant in-between the lines, not necessarily what leaders want, but what the people want. We cannot be at the beck and call of leaders, but we should be at the service of the people. I agree with her. But if that is the case, then let us go back, therefore, to section 1 of the Constitution -

“We shall be a sovereign democratic State.”

There was a legislation that was passed in this august Assembly by people elected to represent the population of Mauritius in this august Assembly. It was voted First, Second and Third Reading; it was made an Act of Parliament, the Local Government Act. You may not agree with what is in there, you may not agree with the clauses therein, you may not agree with the vision therein, you may not agree with the vision of ‘Aimée’ found therein, you may not agree with us what we voted for, but what is certain, we are a democracy and nowhere in there did I see a clause that said: if you do not agree that elections shall be held

some six years from now, that you shall call Parliament again and go against what the people have decided to ensure that the legislation is adhered to. I did not see it in that legislation.

(Interruptions)

Show me!

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Mohamed: We shall hear a lot of noise but we shall not hear reason!

(Interruptions)

We shall hear a lot of noise, Madam Speaker, but I cannot hear any reasoning in that noise. The only way they can hush my voice down is to make noise! The only way they can stop me from talking is to intimidate, but I shall not be intimidated!

(Interruptions)

And we hear the noise going on. Where is it that in that Local Government Act...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Not really. Thank you for giving food to my – now we are going to talk. Now, there is someone who just said that if a Government comes to Parliament and asks for elections to be postponed, that is undemocratic; whereas if a Government asks that election be preponed, that is democratic. There is nothing more nonsensical than that. There is nothing more illogical than that reasoning.

(Interruptions)

This is illogical. It is the first time in the years that I have practised law that I come to some sort of this illuminated type of reasoning. That does not make any sense.

(Interruptions)

Now, Madam Speaker, if I am allowed to talk and if I am allowed to speak on the debates ...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order, please! The hon. Minister of Local Government will have time to reply!

Mr Mohamed: I have the impression that some Members of this Government, if you have a view that is different to theirs, what they have to do is shut you down and speak you down. The impression I have is that if someone in this august Assembly has a different view to theirs, we shall not be allowed to express oneself, the only thing that they will do is say that you are nonsensical.

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker: No! Hon. Member, you cannot say that because I am here to restore order!

Mr Mohamed: Thank God Madam Speaker is here. Oh, thank God! If you had not been here, I would have run away!

(*Interruptions*)

I feel protected by your presence, Madam, I assure you of that.

Madam Speaker: Let me tell you hon. Member that you cannot be ironical about me as well.

Mr Mohamed: I am honest and far from ironical. I am not here dwelling in irony; on the contrary, I say it out loud, Madam Speaker, I feel secure in giving my views, in expressing myself precisely. Because, Madam Speaker, you are here and I say it out loud and I feel that I should say this is what I feel.

But what I would like to say here is: show me in the Act brought in by Mr Aimée, if you do not agree with the contents therein, do you go against what the people have done? They have voted in the last elections. That's the thing! Can anyone deny what I say? That people went to elections and those elections saw the defeat of the Labour Party at municipal level? That's the truth? The MMM and MSM controlled the majority of Municipal Councils, that is a fact! The legislator provided for situations; in situations where what happens, democracy is there; you do not simply come to Parliament and say: "Well, we are just going to bring elections, postpone it!" It is as worse as postponing it because it goes *contre le vœu de l'électeurat*. That's a fact! That is a fact, whether we like it or not! The legislator has provided for solutions in the eventuality that there is a problem at the level of the Municipal Council. That is a fact!

The preceding orator said we have talked about the pinnacle of democracy. Democracy means that we cannot, simply because we have a majority, come to Parliament and say, the people, yes, we agree there were elections, they came up with results, those results are clear, no one challenged it in any Court or before any tribunal or before any institution. There are Members who have been elected to do their job democratically, *la voix du peuple*. And, this time, the same party that calls itself this organisation, *l'Alliance Lepep* goes against what the people had decided and changes what the people had decided.

(*Interruptions*)

The people have never mandated this Government to change.

(*Interruptions*)

Show me where...

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr Mohamed: The question, therefore, begs to be answered: “Has the people of this country mandated this Government to postpone the Municipal Elections?”

(*Interruptions*)

Where? Is it in your *manifeste électoral*? Show me where it is in the *manifeste électoral* of *l'Alliance Lepèp* that you said to the people during the election campaign: “we will postpone the Municipal Elections”. Never was this said to the people. The first time that it is being said was after the general elections.

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr Mohamed: It would have been simple, and this I am talking *au nom d'un principe; le principe* that if we are a sovereign democratic State, we cannot, therefore, abuse our position as Parliamentarians to come here and change what the people decided. We cannot!

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker: Order, I said!

Mr Mohamed: So, as I said, these are simple, *les simples propositions* what emanate from section 1 of the Constitution. People may say that section 1 of the Constitution means democracy whereby you can come here and change, but what I am saying here is that the people have decided that it shall go on until a certain date and *le vœu du peuple* is being modified. I am wrong, it is not being modified; it is being violated. It is being violated, violated in the name of the alleged democracy! And last time, I checked to give a further explanation to my point of view. Let's look at what is proposed!

Now, instead of ensuring that there are no potential conflicts of interest in what is being proposed by those who will one day represent us and *les citadins* or people who live in villages, in District Councils or Municipal Councils, what I read is -

“That the chairperson or a member of the governing body of a statutory corporation or an organisation wholly funded by the State may stand as a candidate at a local government election.”

Now, people say: “Well, you know, it was like that once upon a time, so, there is nothing wrong in going back to what it was like before.” I thought we were moving forward.

I thought that the whole object of this new Government was precisely to leave the dirt of the past, that they say so proudly, to change, to move forward, but this is simply a simple straightforward example of how people move backward. Would there not, in this particular situation - imagine you are a Chairperson of the Central Electricity Board; imagine you are the Chairperson of the Central Water Authority; imagine that those people or even members on that Board will now be able to be Councillors, would that not create potential conflicts of interest? What do we do then when there are potential conflicts of interest; then we are going to say: "Well, wait a minute, we did not think about it or we did not think it would really happen!" Or are we going to simply brush it under the carpet, or maybe, I am so naive that I did not realise the real design of this Government. The real design of this Government is they do not want to go back to the situation where Members of Parliament, their candidates could have been, they could have decided to go back where Members of Parliament could have been candidates in the Municipal Elections. They could have done that. They decided to go against that.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Ameer Meea, I heard you. Maybe they are scared, but my question is maybe this is the way to ensure not only that the jobs for the boys, as Chairpersons, they go on and have additional money now as Councillors. Therefore, double money! This is one way. Instead of ensuring that there is more democracy, instead of ensuring that there is more autonomy, what you are doing is ensuring that the boys and girls, *comme l'honorable Ivan Collendavelloo avait dit récemment*: people who are close to us will get the jobs. We decide people who are close to us, who are going to get the jobs that are important, people who are close to us will get the benefit of our generosity, because we are not in the Government of Mauritius, but we are in the Government of *l'Alliance Lepèp*. Is that democracy? Tell us, is this democracy?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Mohamed: Madam Speaker, this is a sad day for democracy.

(Interruptions)

True it is, Madam Speaker,...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Mohamed: Madam Speaker, I am only one voice in this august Assembly. It is true that through a lot of ladies and gentlemen here, they have got louder voices than I have, and can easily cover me up.

(*Interruptions*)

But I am not only one voice because out there, the people who are brought in here into power are watching and, right now, if they are to believe that the honeymoon period is still on, they are worse than mistaken. The honeymoon period they enjoyed is over, dead and gone and buried. Right now, what I am saying, Madam Speaker, is the simple thing: *le vœu du peuple*, as a matter of principle, must be respected. What this Government is doing by preponing Municipal Elections is just a sham, a sham in order to pretend to be democratic, but they are far from it. What they are doing is being autocratic.

Thank you very much.

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker: Order! Order! I will now suspend the sitting for one and a half hours for lunch.

At 12.55 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.32 p.m. with Madam Speaker in Chair.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Duval!

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism and External Communications

(Mr X. L. Duval): Madam Speaker, I will say a few words on this Bill being presented this afternoon by my colleague, hon. Dr. Husnoo.

I listened, of course, with a lot of interest to what hon. Mrs Jadoo-Jaunbocus had to say and I thank her for her very good speech. I listened also to hon. Shakeel Mohamed. He had nothing much to say, but he said it very well.

(*Interruptions*)

And, of course, I listened to the hon. Leader of the Opposition and I think he has, at least, one major point wrong and I will take that in a moment.

Madam Speaker, we should not mistake this piece of legislation, this Bill, with the major reform that *l'Alliance Lepèp* wants to bring to the Local Government. They are not the

same things and we should not mistake or pretend not to understand. This is not the same thing. We know, Madam Speaker, that reform of Local Government must take account of a number of issues: accountability towards the electors; accountability towards the Central Government; the autonomy - how much autonomy should a local authority have in deciding its own affairs. I am the first to agree that there is too many ministerial interventions in the present Act.

Financing, Madam Speaker, how do we finance local authorities? And I will come to that in a moment. And, of course, how does a local authority relate to its parent Ministry in Central Government and also to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development for funding.

This Bill, Madam Speaker, has 17 clauses. It is obvious, Madam Speaker, that the clauses that we are presenting today - changing the Local Government Act - deal basically with representation, how will people live in the towns basically. We are not really dealing with District Councils or Village Councils; how people living in Municipalities are going to be represented in the local authority. That is what this Bill is dealing with. Who may stand; how many Councillors do we have; what is going to happen to the reserve list, etc. So, it deals with representations. The rest of the reforms that *l'Alliance Lepep* wants to bring and we had not included them in the 12 actions that we had set out for the first three months. So, there is no rush. We are not rushing because we are just over the three months. No! It is not in the first series of actions that we had envisaged, but this is coming along. Why? I think it is a good question also: "Are we bringing this Bill dealing with representations?" I think, again, Madam Speaker, the answer is fairly obvious because we have an unhealthy situation at the level of many of the local authorities basically the Municipalities. There are five Municipalities; three of these Municipalities are being operated by a Mayor who does not have a majority.

For instance, if you take Port Louis, I think the Mayor from the MMM has 8 Councillors in all vis-a-vis a total of 24. The quorum is 12. So, he does not even have a quorum to run his Council. There is a problem of how do you manage, how do you get effective Local Government in a Council that has a Mayor in a minority and that cannot even ensure that basic regulations are passed, basic actions are taken when he does not even have a quorum to run his Municipality. So, that is why this Bill is being presented. It is being presented so that at a convenient time, elections may be envisaged to put order in the

Municipality. That is the whole point of this Bill, so that elections may be effected to put order. Once the elections are effected, we will come with a more important piece of legislation, but we want to do it democratically. Once the Councillors have been elected, we would talk to them, we would sit with them and we would see what sort of amendments, what sort of local authority is required and we will have, hopefully, a consensus between Central Government and the newly elected Councillors about the way to go. There are many things that need to be changed. So, the consultations will be after the elections and, as we know, the Bill, if passed today, will allow the Rt. hon. Prime Minister effectively to decide on the date for the new elections.

I was a little surprised by what hon. Mohamed said. I think we were all surprised that, in fact, postponing of elections is democratic, but giving power back to the people to vote, is actually undemocratic. This is a very unusual way of putting things and I think it is quite silly. Really! In fact, after the general elections, a break-up of both coalitions that had contested the Municipal Elections, have made meaningless, in any way, the votes that people had effected some time ago. Not only that, to complicate matters, one party has lost quite a few - in Port Louis, etc. - of its Councillors. That complicates matters even more. And God knows whether there will be more to come. I do not know. But this complicates matters even more in the Local Authority. So, the votes that were cast, sometimes may go through the Municipal Elections, basically, meaningless, because the alliances have broken and nobody can say who voted for whom in the PMSD-Labour Party alliance at the time or the MMM-MSM alliance at the time. It is all gone topsy-turvy, Madam Speaker.

So, far from being a missed opportunity, this Bill enables the elections to happen and enables us to bring, in consensus with the newly elected Councillors, a new Bill with a new vision for Local Government, *plus d'autonomie* and less powers of the Minister. I would myself like to see that, but then there should have to be consensus amongst the majority here. If you look at the law, if you are going to revoke a permit of someone who has a market stall, you have to go back to Central Government and ask permission from the Minister. That does not make sense. I mean, this sort of power is ridiculous and we have to get rid of it. At the same time, if you want to close a road, you have to ask for a permission from the Ministry of Local Government.

Other things which affect the dynamism of the Local Authority like getting into a joint venture, like doing things novel, you have to go back all the time to Central Government. I would say that some powers need to be kept, especially when we take into

account that about 70% of the running expenses of the Municipality are met by the Central Government. The taxpayers pay this, obviously, to the Consolidated Fund and someone has to look after and see that this money is not wasted, Madam Speaker.

We are told that the 2003 - I was not, obviously, in that alliance - law was so fantastic that it was never promulgated, Madam Speaker. So, I cannot say why. They will say why. But surely then, there is some sort of contradiction in having the best law in the world and not to promulgate it, but history will tell us, eventually, why that law was not promulgated, perhaps it was not. I would expect that good after all.

Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, I think a number of things will need to be looked at in the new legislation. One of the things that I have been concerned with, has been the discrepancy in the grant-in-aid to the various Municipalities and District Councils. It is wide discrepancy, it is historical, it happens like this. There is no sense in how the grant-in-aid is allocated anymore, it is historical. I mean, last year, you got some money, this year it will be a bit more or a bit less at the whims of the Central Government. So, I would like to see, Madam Speaker, in conjunction with the new legislation, a fairer way of allocating grant-in-aid.

I will take some examples for you, Madam Speaker. If you take Port Louis, Port Louis gets a subsidy from Central Government of Rs3,500 per annum, *per capita*. If you take Vacoas, it gets Rs2,700. I think Vacoas is better run. So, Vacoas needs less money, probably, from the Central Government. But that is not a reason to penalise people from Vacoas. Maybe they should have more amenities because their Local Council is better run. If you take Black River, it gets Rs3,500 *per capita*, per year, but where I live in Pamplemousses, Madam Speaker, it is only Rs1,400 *per capita*. Something is wrong; something needs to be looked at.

So, we are not only talking about the Bill, but we are talking about the money that will make that law come true. Give the autonomy that is required, reward good administration and penalise bad administration where there is bad administration. So, that is also something, Madam Speaker, that we need to look at, that is the whole question of financing of Local Authority. You would be surprised, Madam Speaker, to know that the taxpayers, as I mentioned, actually subsidise Port Louis to the tune of 70% of its annual expenses, nevertheless, we subsidise 70% amounting to Rs3,500 *per capita*, yet Pamplemousses does not raise a cent from its own people, because there are only trade fees, whereas Port Louis will raise general rates on all the population in Port Louis, whereas Pamplemousses does not

raise any rate from its population. Pamplemousses gets Rs1,400, runs a decent District Council and Port Louis more than twice, at the same time, raises rates. That shows, in fact, that there may be a lot of wastage in the system; there may be a lot of inefficiency in the system that needs to be looked at. But, anyway, this is another debate and I would not go too much into it.

Madam Speaker, I mentioned about the democracy a bit. It is now going to be at the Rt. hon. Prime Minister's discretion and I think that it is a good thing. We won't have elections every six years, we should have them every six years, we have maintained the six-year interval, but we are providing for some flexibility should there be something in the next six years that will arise, that will cause us to have to bring forward the elections and this is the same thing, basically, at the National Assembly. We will have it every five years or at such time as the Rt. hon. Prime Minister decides. I hope it is not going to be too soon, but that is another thing.

Madam Speaker, we are increasing the number of Councillors from 3 to 4, because we feel that it gives us a better chance to fairly represent each ward and to offer candidates who have the right experience; the right sort of candidates, Madam Speaker. That is why we thought that 3 candidates per ward is too restrictive. We are giving more flexibility, as my colleague mentioned. Obviously, we cannot have one third or four in every ward. So, we have to change it. But we have changed it for the better, that is, now you will have to get one third of the whole council area. For each alliance or party presenting more than two people, we must have a third woman or man, but not the same. What that means, in fact, is that you will have your normal nomination day. The nomination day will close at 3 o'clock and from 3 o'clock to, let's say, 4 or 5 o'clock, whatever will be discussed with the Electoral Commissioner, there will be some time for you to bring corrections if, for instance, you find that an alliance or a party has not submitted the third that is required by law. Say for some reason, in one ward one female candidate has not shown up, then, you may have less than the one third that is required per council area. So, you will have some time to add another candidate there and make a change after closure of the nomination day. I just wanted to mention that. It is a little bit of more complication than usual, but that was necessary to allow this to happen.

Madam Speaker, as you know, we are allowing tenants and owners also to take part. Obviously, they will not be able to vote this time, but they will be able to take part in the election. One reason why we are allowing chairpersons and members of parastatal bodies -

board members, but not employees - to stand is to increase the quality of candidates that are available at election. It is not because we are desperate for another Rs9,000 for our people or something like that! That is quite ridiculous! But it is, in fact, because we find that many of the very able people are naturally given a chance to serve on boards and as chairpersons. These able persons then are restricted from serving as an elected councillor. So, that is why it is increasing the pool of able people who are able to stand in any election. I think it is a good thing that this is happening. We are maintaining the fact that Members of Parliament will not be allowed to stand because we feel that there should not be over politicisation of our municipalities. I assure you, Madam Speaker, there are many Members here who are dying to stand as candidates!

(Interruptions)

Given the '*batter boeuf*' that was given recently! But they will be a little bit disappointed with this provision.

A novelty, Madam Speaker, is that each candidate now will have to disclose if he is a member of an alliance and which party he belongs to. That is new and that is a good thing, I think. There is more transparency. At the same time, the reserve list will now be provided by each party so that if a member of a party resigns or loses his seat, it will be a member from the same party who will replace him. At the moment, the reserve list is mixed, it is a whole mess when someone actually resigns or loses his seat. That is going to change.

I must say, before I conclude, Madam Speaker, that, I think, if I understood the Leader of the Opposition rightly when he mentioned that we are doing away with *transfugisme*, that is not with the control or restriction on *transfugisme* entirely, that is not true. What we are maintaining is - and if you look at section 37 (3) of the main Act, you will see that we have not touched that section. This is where the Leader of the Opposition, I think, is wrong. We have not touched that section. If you yourself resign from your party, from your group, as it is said in the law, you will lose your seat as a councillor. This remains. What is being taken out is that if you are expelled from your party - let us take the case of hon. Barbier, if it was for Parliament, for instance, he would have lost his seat completely now if that same law had applied to this Assembly. We think that is unfair. We think that instead of being democratic, it, in fact, encourages dictatorship of the party in that if you do not follow the party line completely, at any time your party expels you and when you are expelled, you lose your seat also as a councillor.

As my colleague, the hon. Minister of Local Government, mentioned, there are, at least, 10 cases in Court where people are disputing this because they think it is undemocratic.

They have had a fight with their party, but they have not had a fight with the electors. This is going to change. If you expel someone now, he will remain as a councillor, but if he resigns voluntarily thinking that he will go and join another group, then he will lose his seat. I wanted to bring that clarification following what the Leader of the Opposition had mentioned.

The last thing, Madam Speaker, concerns the quorum. As I mentioned, quite a few councils are running with councillors less even than the quorum because the quorum is quite high at 50% and that can cause paralysis of councils. We don't want that, so it is being brought down to one third of the councillors who will now form a quorum.

Madam Speaker, this is what I would like to say, in fact, on this Bill. I think it is a step forward to allow better and fairer representation of our councils and *rendez-vous est donné*, Madam, for the next step. Once we win the elections, we will go for the municipal elections, we will have the discussions with the new councillors and we will come forward with a Bill that is *avant-gardiste* and democratic and bring the councils of Mauritius to the third millennium.

Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Quirin!

Mr F. Quirin (Fourth Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Madame la présidente, le ministre des administrations régionales, je dois dire, a raté une occasion en or d'entrer dans l'histoire des collectivités locales à Maurice. En effet, il est fort dommage, Madame la présidente, qu'au lieu de venir avec une nouvelle loi, il a choisi l'option de la facilité avec quelques amendements cosmétiques, comme je l'avais moi-même anticipé, et d'ailleurs mentionné lors de mon intervention, tout récemment, sur le budget.

Ce n'est un secret pour personne, Madame la présidente, dans cette Chambre combien la loi de 2011 est rétrograde et centralisatrice. Et au lieu d'apporter plus de démocratie dans la gestion des affaires des villes et des villages, cette loi de 2011 bafoue, en toutes circonstances la démocratie régionale. Dans ces circonstances, il était important de doter les administrations régionales d'une nouvelle loi pour assurer une vraie autonomie aux municipalités et aux conseils de districts.

J'ai écouté les commentaires de l'honorable Madame Jadoo-Jaunbocus par rapport au manque de quorum dans les municipalités et, en particulier, à la Municipalité de Port Louis. Madame la présidente, n'est-ce pas le devoir de tous les élus – quel que soit leur bord politique - d'être présents à chaque réunion du conseil? Qui est à blâmer si les conseillers ne répondent pas présents aux réunions? Mais ce sont les conseillers eux-mêmes! Ils ont été élus pour servir et je pense qu'ils devraient être présents dans les réunions afin de pouvoir prendre

les décisions qui s'imposent. D'ailleurs, ce cas de figure peut encore se reproduire même après les prochaines élections.

Madame la présidente, je voudrais rappeler à la Chambre qu'une vraie démocratie locale commence d'abord par une politique qui vise à transformer également les conseils de districts en municipalités. Cela, bien sûr, dans le but de permettre à tous les citoyens, indépendamment de leur région, d'être sur le même pied d'égalité et de participer pleinement au processus de décentralisation des pouvoirs. Ce qui n'est, bien sûr, pas le cas actuellement.

Le ministre des Administrations Régionales a donc choisi de venir avec des amendements, mais là encore il a raté une autre occasion de passer de la parole aux actes. Lors de son intervention durant les débats sur le programme gouvernemental, il avait lui-même indiqué, entre autres, et je cite –

“We will amend the Local Government Act to consolidate democracy at the local level and to promote better participation of local councillors in the management of community affairs.”

Je me demande, Madame la présidente, comment la démocratie est-elle consolidée dans les amendements que nous proposons l'honorable ministre? Et je considère non seulement que le ministre a choisi de conserver tous les pouvoirs que lui confère la loi de 2011, ces amendements viennent aussi, à mon avis, faire la promotion du transfugisme malgré les assurances données par l'honorable Duval que tel ne sera pas le cas. Donc, je dis bravo pour la démocratie !

Madame la présidente, il est clair que ces amendements n'ont pas été motivés dans un esprit de consolider la démocratie à travers les collectivités locales.

Je tiens pour preuve l'amendement qui sera apporté à la section 16 de la loi, qui va désormais permettre aux nominés politiques - d'autres avant moi l'ont également souligné - siégeant dans les conseils d'administration d'être candidats.

Madame la présidente, un tel amendement démontre à quel point, malheureusement, ce gouvernement ne pense qu'à protéger ses petits copains, déjà bien lotis - et copines, comme me le rappelle mon collègue l'honorable Baloomoody - au sein de divers organismes gouvernementaux. Et d'ailleurs, l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed avant moi l'avait aussi souligné, et cela, bien sûr, avec des risques de conflits d'intérêts qui existent bel et bien.

Dans la foulée, nous constatons que le ministre vient aussi avec un amendement qui met au grand jour la méfiance entre les différents partenaires au sein de ce gouvernement.

En effet, la section 18, Madame la présidente, de la loi de 2011, fera de la place à une série de sous-sections qui va obliger un candidat d'une alliance d'indiquer tout d'abord le

nom de son parti. En d'autres mots, le candidat en question ne sera pas celui de l'alliance avant tout, mais le candidat du parti auquel il appartient et qui fait partie de l'alliance. Il est aussi stipulé que chaque parti au sein d'une alliance –

(Interruptions)

C'est mon interprétation! Si vous n'êtes pas d'accord, c'est à vous de répondre après moi à travers le ministre de collectivités locales.

Il est aussi stipulé, comme je l'ai dit, Madame la présidente, que chaque parti au sein d'une alliance aura la possibilité d'avoir son propre '*Reserve List*'.

Donc, Madame la présidente, si ce n'est pas un manque de confiance entre les partenaires de l'alliance gouvernementale, je me demande alors ce que c'est ! Le ministre a évoqué dans cette même Chambre le 26 février dernier, et je cite –

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Quirin:

"We shall definitely not reinvent the wheel when we will debate the model of local democracy in Mauritius, but we will definitely attempt at finding a model of democracy which, we hope in the present time, would best suit the aspirations of our population and the local communities."

Mais au lieu d'aller dans le sens de son discours, l'honorable ministre a préféré conserver tous ses pouvoirs de décision au détriment d'un conseil démocratiquement élu.

Oui, Madame la présidente, malgré les amendements à cette section de la loi, c'est toujours le ministre qui détient le pouvoir, par exemple, de révoquer un maire ou son adjoint suite à une motion de '*no confidence*' du conseil.

Comment croire que ce gouvernement veut apporter, voire renforcer la démocratie locale, quand le ministre des Administrations Régionales, lui-même, vient légaliser et justifier le transfugisme.

Madame la présidente, les sections 38, 39 et 40 seront amendées afin de permettre à un élu de conserver son siège au sein d'un conseil malgré le fait qu'il change de parti en cours de route. Ça c'est mon interprétation. Il est clair comme l'eau de roche que c'est une démarche vicieuse de la part de ce gouvernement. Cet amendement sera sans aucun doute une arme dans la main du gouvernement pour inciter, si besoin est, des élus d'autres partis à *cross the floor*.

Madame la présidente, faut-il en rire ou en pleurer quand le ministre des Administrations Régionales n'a trouvé comme parade pour justifier cet amendement que des

supposés cas devant la justice de certains conseillers qui auraient perdu leur siège suite à leur départ de leur parti! Et il le dit lui-même.

“Pretty soon, we will be coming with major changes in this Act, and you know the Local Government Act 2011 is very undemocratic. Any councillor who disagrees with his group or party can be expelled, and he or she will automatically lose his or her seat.”

Avait-il indiqué dans son intervention lors des débats sur le budget.

Madame la présidente, je dois souligner que je n'ai cependant rien constaté de tel dans aucune municipalité. Visiblement, ce gouvernement a une drôle de conception de la démocratie régionale. Pourtant, Madame la présidente, la démocratie locale ou régionale peut se définir comme le pouvoir de décision transféré dans certains domaines de compétences par un État à une collectivité locale ou régionale dotées elles-mêmes d'institutions démocratiques. Or, les amendements proposés ne sont qu'un ensemble incohérent. Pour preuve, la proposition du ministre des collectivités locales sur la fréquence des réunions des conseils municipaux ou de districts !

La section 45 sera amendée pour que les réunions du conseil se tiennent chaque mois, donc une fois par mois, au lieu de chaque quinzaine. C'est une incompréhension totale, Madame la présidente, quand on connaît le volume de travail abattu et les nombreuses décisions qui doivent être prises et ratifiées par le conseil.

Aujourd'hui, les conseils municipaux et de districts font face à un nombre incalculable de demandes et de requêtes, que ce soit de la part des habitants, des associations de jeunesse, des clubs de sports, de 3^{ème} âge ou d'autres secteurs d'activités.

Comment voulez-vous que des décisions soient prises dans le meilleur délai tout en assurant un service efficient alors que le conseil n'est autorisé à se réunir qu'une fois par mois ?

Est-ce de cette façon qu'on va rendre nos municipalités plus efficaces ? L'honorable Xavier Duval qui a présidé le comité ministériel avait pourtant affirmé, lors des débats sur le *Local Government Bill* en 2011, et je vais citer quelques phrases rapidement de son discours

“I remember the time, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when for a permit you had to wait for the committee to meet. Maybe, you would have to wait for the full council to meet, and that might take one month or two months. God knows how long you would have to wait. This is not on these days; end of 2011 and beginning 2012. There is need for

quick decision-making and the fact the council will have to meet, at least, every two weeks is fantastic.”

(Interruptions)

Voilà l'honorable Xavier Duval qui s'est émerveillé en 2011 ...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order now!

Mr Quirin: ...avec le changement permettant aux conseils de se réunir chaque quinzaine, et c'est lui-même qui préside le comité ministériel et qui cette fois ramène ce délai à un mois, Madame la présidente.

(Interruptions)

Je laisse le choix à tout un chacun de tirer ses propres conclusions. Donc, Madame la présidente, au lieu de favoriser une gestion plus saine et plus efficiente des collectivités locales, le ministre lui-même vient, pas le biais de ces amendements, fragiliser le système.

Madame la présidente, je ne pourrais terminer sur ce dossier sans évoquer les aberrations de la loi de 2011 qui n'ont pas été prises en considération dans les amendements qui nous sont proposés aujourd'hui. Et je sais de quoi je parle, Madame la présidente, ayant été moi-même membre et maire du conseil municipal de Beau Bassin-Rose Hill.

Lors des débats sur la loi Aimée en 2011, j'avais attiré l'attention de la Chambre sur l'excès de pouvoir qui se trouve entre les mains du ministre des Administrations Régionales.

Nous constatons que le nouveau ministre a jalousement conservé tous ces pouvoirs - absolument tous ces pouvoirs - un peu comme ces enfants qui ne veulent pas partager leurs jouets. Plus d'une cinquantaine de fois le mot '*Minister*' est mentionné dans la loi. C'est pourquoi je considère à nouveau, Madame la présidente, que les statuts du ministre des Administrations Régionales, en vertu de la loi, sont ceux d'un super maire.

Tout laisse croire que ce gouvernement, comme l'ancien du reste, est obsédé par la centralisation, puisque les nouveaux conseils qui seront en place une fois les élections terminées n'auront toujours pas de marge de manœuvre.

Madame la présidente, c'est le ministre qui a le dernier mot sur tout. Sur ce point, rien n'a changé, y compris en ce qui concerne, par exemple, les décisions du *Permit and Business Monitoring Committee* où le ministre conserve un droit de regard sur toutes les décisions et les recommandations faites par ce comité.

Il serait bon aussi, Madame la présidente, de partager avec les honorables membres de cette auguste Assemblée quelques commentaires qu'avaient faits les députés du MSM, alors

dans l'opposition, lors des débats sur le *Local Government Bill* en 2011. Et dire qu'eux-aussi, à l'époque, avait qualifié cette loi de centralisatrice et je cite l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth qui, malheureusement, n'est pas parmi nous –

“(...)*This Local Government Bill* porte l'empreinte d'un accaparement de pouvoirs (...).»

Compared to the Local Government Act of 2003, there was at least some decentralisation of powers to local authorities.

Faisant aussi référence à la section 117 de la loi, “*Application for Building and Land Use Permit*”, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth disait ceci, et je cite –

«Toutes les applications vont venir sur la table du ministre. Ce n'est pas lui qui va décider, bien sûr, mais il aura un droit de regard sur toutes les applications *and he can intervene also because the subsection gives him the right to intervene into such applications* ».»

Madame la présidente, actuellement au gouvernement on pouvait s'attendre à ce qu'il recommande à son collègue, ministre des Collectivités Locales, d'amender les clauses de la loi qui sont anti-démocratiques et trop centralisatrices, ou carrément lui recommander de venir avec une nouvelle loi.

À mon grand étonnement, il n'en est rien. Je laisse le soin encore une fois à tout un chacun de tirer ses propres conclusions. Par la même occasion, Madame la présidente, je me pose la question pour savoir quel a été le rôle du ministre des Collectivités Locales au sein du comité ministériel, présidé par l'honorable Xavier-Luc Duval, *Leader* du PMSD.

Il est bon aussi de rappeler, Madame la présidente, que l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth - encore lui – avait aussi mentionné lors de ces mêmes débats, en 2011, et je cite –

« Maintenant nous avons le règne du Parti Travailliste et du PMSD, et l'image des Collectivités Locales est déjà salie. »

Voilà ce qu'avait affirmé l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth! Comprenez qui pourra! Dois-je aussi rappeler à cette Chambre ...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Please, allow the hon. Member to proceed!

Mr Quirin : Dois-je aussi rappeler à cette Chambre, Madame la présidente, que les amendements proposés constituent aussi une atteinte à la démocratie dans ce pays ? La section 11 sera amendée afin que les élections se tiennent en 2015. Or, nous savons tous, Madame la présidente, que les élections au niveau des Collectivités Locales ont eu lieu en décembre 2012 et que l'échéance arrive à terme qu'en décembre 2018, donc, pour un mandat

de six ans. On peut se poser la question pourquoi le gouvernement s'empresse à venir bafouer la démocratie avec des amendements à l'emporte-pièce, alors qu'il dispose du temps nécessaire pour venir avec une nouvelle loi digne de notre République.

(Interruptions)

Kan pas comprend reste tranquille !

La démocratie régionale suppose l'existence d'un niveau d'autorité régionale, dotée d'organes de décision démocratiquement élus, librement organisés et bénéficiant d'une large autonomie et de moyens suffisants, eu égard à leurs responsabilités dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions. Certains pays, Madame la présidente, notamment en Europe, ont fait des avancées considérables à ce niveau. Ils ont même des Chartes sur la démocratie régionale et la démocratie participative.

J'avoue ma très grande déception devant le peu, sinon aucune, considération de ce gouvernement sur cette question. Madame la présidente, les amendements qui nous sont proposés ne sont que cosmétiques, voire un brin vicieux, taillés sur mesure pour le gouvernement en place. Rien de plus!

Je vous remercie.

(3.11 p.m.)

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. A. Husnoo): Madam Speaker, I have listened carefully to both sides of the House and I would like to thank the hon. Members who have taken part in this debate.

Firstly, I would like to answer the hon. Member who just ended his speech. When I started my speech, I said that we are going to look at the sections that need urgent attention. Did I say we are going to look at the whole Act? No! We specify that we are going to look at the sections that need urgent attention, but it seems that the hon. Member must have missed that bit; and not just me, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister had said the same thing, that we are going to look at the first part now and, in the future, we are going to look at the Act again. We have said this twice; they have not listened or have not understood what we have said. They refuse to understand.

Another thing which the hon. Member mentioned....

(Interruptions)

...the council is going to meet once a month...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: No cross talking, please!

Dr. Husnoo: We have repeated it twice.

(Interruptions)

Anyway, we have repeated it twice but the hon. Member has not understood. Now, we say that the Council should meet, at least, once a month. At least! That means you can meet every week if you want, if you have a lot of work you can meet every week.

(Interruptions)

You can meet every day if you want but you have not understood that, I suppose.

Now, why election in 2015? You have just mentioned it. Why election? It is because of the mess that some of the municipalities are in at present. In Port Louis, you do not have the quorum and that is why we are doing that, trying to correct this. We are trying to correct the mess that is being created. When the Opposition party postponed the election, it is good! When we try to clean the mess, it is not good! That's how the other Members see it. I don't understand that logic. I leave it to them.

I would like to clarify another point which was taken by the last hon. Member and the Leader of the Opposition as well. If a person is expelled from his group, we have repealed section 38 (e) so that he does not lose his seat because, Madam Speaker, that causes quite a bit of problem. In fact, I have mentioned, this is an abuse. This is a tyranny of the party. If somebody does not listen to you, you just expel him tomorrow and he loses his seat. Is that what we want? Is that what this House wants? No!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order, please!

Dr. Husnoo: In fact, there has been abuse of this section and some Councilors have unfairly lost their seats and currently, as I have mentioned it earlier during the day, you have about 10 cases in Court now, because people have been unfairly expelled from the party. However, let me say, if a person resigns from his group, then he loses his seat. We have kept that section 37 (3) in the law because we don't want people to cross the floor. You can check it. We have kept that section. I think there has been some confusion somewhere and I will ask Members to have a look again at sections 37 (3) and 38 (e) of the Bill.

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East - unfortunately he is not here - talked about democracy. He did not say anything but just mentioned the word 'democracy' and, unfortunately, he is not here. But what did his party do last year? This Parliament was closed for such a long time; it was on holiday for such a long time. Now, the hon. Member is giving us lesson about democracy. What happened last year?

(Interruptions)

Exactly, ‘off’! Prolonged holidays! They have postponed the election in the past, nobody talked about democracy then. How many times they have postponed the elections? Nobody talked about it and even now, from what I have heard in the press, they are not going to take part in the Municipal Elections. I don’t know how true it is and he is talking about democracy! He is not going to take part in the elections!

(Interruptions)

Exactly!

Madam Speaker, I think, we have explained these points in details. I am going to repeat it again. We have come to look at some of the major issues now. We are going to look at the other issues later on. We have said it; the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has said it, but I get the impression that this has not sunk in. I repeated it for a third time. I hope that it sinks in this time. I have talked about the modification of the law, sections 38 (e) and 37 (c) about crossing the floor. It is still there. But it seems that some Members have not understood it. I would ask them to have a look at it again. Well, Madam Speaker, with this, I will stop here. I submit the Bill to the House.

Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

The Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. V of 2015) was considered and agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with Madam Speaker in the Chair, Madam Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. V of 2015) was read the third time and passed.

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2015) BILL

(NO. III OF 2015)
&
THE APPROPRIATION (2015-2016) BILL
(NO. IV OF 2015)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the Appropriation (2015) Bill (No. III of 2015) and the Appropriation (2015-2016) Bill (No. IV of 2015).

Question again proposed.

(3.20 p.m.)

Mr S. Fowdar (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre D'or): Madam Speaker, allow me to join my other colleagues and friends of the House to congratulate the Minister of Finance and Economic Development for his Budget Speech and contents therein.

Madam Speaker, this is the first budget of this Government for the present mandate and, as usual, the first, second and the third budgets are usually tough and really contain hard measures. But this one is just the opposite. The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has presented a good and generous budget. Year in year out, we all know that budget expenditure increases and they are all financed by increases in taxes. Surprisingly, Madam Speaker, this budget had no tax increases although the Opposition is insisting that this is not a no tax budget, but it is in fact. I have not found any increases in the taxes in this budget. Well, this is something great, Madam Speaker, in this tough period, during this period of recession that the Minister of Finance and Economic Development comes with a budget without any tax.

I also understand that this budget is a little bit of embarrassment for the Opposition because it contains many good measures and it is so positive, they did not find any sort of arguments in the budget for them to come in this House and argue against the budget. In fact, the budget is such a good budget that they themselves, they have got no point against the budget. In fact, it is a big embarrassment for them.

Madam Speaker, during the electoral campaign, we promised increases in the pension and we remember the hon. Leader of the Opposition and the ex-Prime Minister, they argued that it would be impossible for the Government to pay that much of increases and they even proposed to increase the pension, but not to Rs5,000 as what we promised. In fact, what happened today, Madam Speaker, is that pensions have been paid and there have been no tax

increases. They thought that we were going to increase taxes and pinch the poor. I remember the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development stating, the usual victims of the budget, those who smoke, those who drink, they were not penalised this time. Madam Speaker, this is really an excellent budget presented by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development.

Having said so, I don't have any quarrel with the Opposition. I know it is their job to criticise and we expect them to criticise. I know they are having big hard times outside. So, at least, let them crunch a little bit in the House here with some false and fake arguments.

Madam Speaker, I don't know, they themselves know and we all know, speak to people in the streets today, the whole population, it is a fact, we are not inventing things; people are happy about this Government and people are happy with the budget. They are happy with the Government.

(Interruptions)

I don't realise...

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I think I have to draw your attention that Members are required to conduct debates calmly and without passion. Please!

Mr Fowdar: Madam Speaker, even they shout, even they disagree, it is a fact; if you speak to people now, if you speak to the population, they are really happy of what is happening in this country and they are extremely happy with the Budget.

Last time, I listened to my good friend, hon. Ameer Meea, he raised an issue that we had promised 12 measures and we did not do anything, except one. It was one over twelve; we achieved only one over twelve. Well, I don't know whether the hon. Member is still living in Mauritius. We promised 12 measures, but we have done more than 12 things which were unexpected.

Madam Speaker,...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea, please! Don't provoke hon. Jhugroo!

(Interruptions)

Mr Fowdar: Madam Speaker, when this Government took over, the state of affairs of this country was upside down.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Now, you are disrupting the hon. Member. Allow him to proceed with his speech!

Mr Fowdar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, Madam Speaker, when the new Government took over, the country was upside down. We promised 12 measures and these 12 measures are going to be fulfilled. There is no doubt about that. But before fulfilling the 12 measures, we had so many things to do; the country was upside down. Let me cite a little bit of what we achieved. We started with the biggest political scandal in this country in the whole region of Africa where the ex-Prime Minister was caught with millions of rupees in his coffers. It is not an easy thing, Madam Speaker and the Government had to deal with that. Rs220 m.! That took a lot of time for that. On top of that, we know the Roche Noires saga and also Mrs Soornack is still running out and we are still chasing her. So, that took the time of the Government. Last week and even now the BAI saga, the Bramer Bank saga. Will you know all this? This is taking the time of this Government. Repossession of land: hon. Showkutally Soodhun has been spending so much time to get back the lands given away by the ex-regime. *Petits copains, petites copines!*

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo, please!

Mr Fowdar: And, last but not the least, Madam Speaker, the Betamax affair is still going on. So, this Government is doing things and people are happy about it. People are happy about it that we are not sleeping on our laurels and the Government is really working hard. This Government, Madam Speaker, is not going to give way and it is in a position of no retreat, no surrender. It is going to make things happen and within the five years! Some of the hon. Members are so in a hurry to get things done quickly. The Government in place today has in front of it a system: corrupted system, fraudulent, nepotism. We have to remove all those incompetent people in place so that we can get things done smoothly.

Madam Speaker, there is one thing which worries us all and it is something which I really care about, it is unemployment. We all know - the hon. Members of this House, even the Opposition - that unemployment is hitting hard and we get requests from our mandate almost every day to get them a job. It is not easy and Government is trying hard to create employment. I congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development to come up with the programme for SMEs; motivating the SMEs; giving them support, training, finance so that jobs can be created.

Madam Speaker, most of the successful economies have nearly 90% of the companies classed as SMEs. If this happens in Mauritius, I am sure we will be able to create jobs for the

unemployed. But talking about this, Madam Speaker, why and how all this happened? Why do we have such a great number of unemployed persons in this country? I listened to my friend, hon. Ramful, yesterday about HRDC. Madam Speaker, HRDC was created by the MMM/MSM Government in 2001-2002 and I presented the Bill in the House. The main objectives of HRDC was to look after manpower planning, to guide the population, to guide parents and students, to tell them the field of study their children have to choose so that, after three years of study, they don't fall on pavement with no jobs and this has not been done, Madam Speaker. Nine years after 2005, HRDC has been left on its own.

HRDC has been acting as a *commis de l'État*. I am not disputing the hon. Member's achievement at HRDC. This is completely apart from what I am saying. The HRDC has not attained its objective and they have not accomplished their role of guiding the population, guiding parents and guiding the students on what to study. I will make a humble appeal to the hon. Minister of Education to look into this matter and to get HRDC to come to term and to start working on manpower planning. You know, Madam Speaker, we created the HRDC Board in such a way that all the sectors of the economy would be represented. I think there are 14 or 18 members on the Board, representing all the sectors of the economy, who work together so that they can forecast - following the economic development strategy of the country - what will be the need, what will be the jobs demand in three years, four years, five years, in ten years so that people are prepared and they don't waste their time in fields of studies which do not bring them any bonus.

Today, it is really saddening to see so many doctors, many professionals who are unemployed and it is not the fault of the Government. We didn't plan. There has been no guidance. So, it is very important and urgent that this Government, in particular, the Minister of Education comes up with a good programme for career guiding.

Madam Speaker, we are now witnessing the BAI and the Bramer Bank saga. I am a little bit perplexed. How the Bank of Mauritius and the FIU didn't spot all these transfers made? Usually, the FIU and the Bank of Mauritius should have been aware and they should have stopped everything immediately. They have kept silent all this time. And thanks to this Government which has taken bold measures! You know it is threatening. It is really threatening, all these people's money at stake. The ex-regime was just sleeping and doing nothing. I understand that some of these people are together and that's why they have been sleeping. I would request the hon. Minister of Good Governance to see to it and come up with measures so that we can prevent things like this to happen in the future, like the Ponzi scheme. The FSC is also to be blamed. *FSC n'a pas été inquiétée, Madame la présidente.*

FSC, FIU et la Banque de Maurice n'ont pas été inquiétées. I have not read anything about whether they have been questioned as to how all these things happened and they are still being free out of these things. Again, I would congratulate the Government for bringing down all these things to earth and doing investigation.

This is why I disagree with my friend, hon. Aadil Ameer Meea that we are not doing anything. In fact, we are doing more things than we programmed. We programmed to do only twelve measures in these three months, I think we have done more than 12 things in the three months and we have still more to do; I am asking the hon. Member to be patient. He will see in a few months' time that we will set things right and the Government will get going. Mostly what we are really scared of, what we are really worried about is job creation and this is really taking all the resources of Government. The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has proposed finance, money for SMEs, training and support. I hope all this will happen and jobs will be created. Foremost, what is more important is in the next five years we don't come up with the same number of unemployed graduates or people, so we have to do career guidance.

Madam Speaker, this is what I had to say because my colleagues have pointed out all the good things that are spelt out in the Budget and I don't want to repeat the same thing again and again.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr V. Baloomoody (Third Member for GRNW and Port Louis West): Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development, at paragraph 264 of his speech, whilst concluding, he stated, and I quote -

“I am therefore pleased to announce, Madam Speaker, that the first Budget of this Government is a no tax budget.”

It is a ‘no tax budget’ according to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development. But let us see what independent economists - not politicians - had to say when they had an opportunity to comment on the Budget. Let me refer to Mr Pierre Dinan in ‘Week-End’ of 29 March, a respected economist, this is what he had to say –

« *Ce n'est pas un no tax budget mais une petite ruse du ministre des Finances, une manière de dire ‘pas de taxe additionnelle’.* »

(Interruptions)

I will come to that if I will be allowed to.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr Baloomoody: But I will reply only to the Rt. hon. Prime Minister, with due respect to the Leader of the House, of course.

He goes even further. The hon. Minister, at paragraph 269, stated –

“Madam Speaker, this Budget goes far beyond a classical Budget and presents to the nation a ‘*véritable projet de société*’.”

This is what Mr Pierre Dinan has to say -

“*Mais je dirais pour le dernier budget qu'il suit le cours des précédents : une partie sur l'économie et l'autre sur le social (...) en général le budget obéit à la même logique économique.* »

Nothing new! He goes even further and with regard to the tax he explained why there was no need for additional tax. Apart from the additional money the Government is getting on petrol, they are getting much more than expected on VAT. We all know, Madam Speaker, they call it depreciation of the rupee; I call it devaluation of the rupee. While the rupee is being devaluated, many prices in the shop have already gone up and these articles are VAT rated. So, the Government is getting more money through VAT. It is misleading to say that it is a ‘no tax budget’.

Last week, I went to the pharmacy next door to buy medicaments; I met an old man; he told me: “my medication now costs me Rs800 more per month.” The dollar was only Rs33.00 then. If you go to the shop now, basic necessities which are VAT rated have already gone up because of the depreciation of the rupee, the increase in dollar.

The hon. Minister of Labour is not here. In addressing the House, he wants us to believe that all the people out there, even the trade unions were all happy. This is what he said -

“One cannot be *plus royaliste que le roi*. Indeed, how can one criticise this Budget for the majority of the trade unions, workers, representatives of *Forces Vives*, NGOs - I will come to one by one – have acclaimed most of the measures proposed by the hon. Minister of Finance (...).”

Let us see the trade unions. The President of the Congress of Independent Trade Unions –

“C'est un budget différent, cependant rien n'a été dit sur le travail décent. »

(Interruptions)

I will come to hon. Benydin's brother! This is what the President of the Government Services Employees Association had to say –

“C'est une bonne chose de s'attaquer à la nation zougadère, mais rien pour un travail décent. »

For the President of the Federation of Civil Service and other Unions –

« Ce n'est pas un budget impeccable mais c'est balancé. »

For the President of the *Confédération des Travailleurs du Secteur Privé (CTSP)* –

« Beaucoup de similitudes avec le précédent régime. »

Even Mr Deepak Benydin of the Federation of Parastatal Bodies and other Unions had some reserve about the Budget –

“Le budget est satisfaisant, le volet sur la création d'emplois a été trop minime. »

For the President of the FTU –

“Ce budget laisse à désirer, ce budget est une déception. »

For the President of the Mauritius Labour Congress –

“Un budget de continuité mais (...).”

Now, let us see what the JEC had to say, the private sector –

“Budget courageux et pro-investissement.”

And –

« Le JEC se réjouit que le budget 2015-2016 contienne des mesures favorisant l'investissement en particulier celui du secteur privé.»

Madam Speaker, when the hon. Minister of Labour – the new Minister – says that everybody is happy, it is clear that he is not in touch with the common people. I do not blame him; he is a good friend of mine; he just comes from the Judiciary to politics. He does not

know the feeling, he does not know how to touch the pulse of the people outside, but then, I hope he will learn very soon.

Coming to this year's Budget, Madam Speaker, we know that the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development was the President of the MMM economic team. It is normal that in his Budget there are some good ideas which we have discussed before in the Economic Commission of the MMM. Some are not too good, but there are some considerable ideas which are missing. There are some actions which have been taken which had he been or still be the President of the *Commission Économique* of the MMM, he would have never taken. I will come to that later.

So, there are some good measures like I said. The campaign they had on the *nation zougadère*, it is good that action is being taken. But is it enough? Already, there is some confusion about which *carte gracie* is allowed, which *carte gracie* is not allowed. There is confusion in the casinos about which table will tax the price and which table will not tax the price. Concerning the loto, so many things were said about the loto, but the loto is still here every week.

(Interruptions)

Loto is still here. One would have expected that, at least, on the loto, we would have restricted...

(Interruptions)

I do not say 'abolish', probably there will be some contractual issues raised, but once, at least, every month. Why every week? I remember the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development was supposed to have a press conference on that loto. He came to the press conference; he talked about everything except the loto. The invitation was to come and talk on the loto: "I will announce drastic measures on the loto." He came to the *conférence de presse*, but nothing was mentioned about drastic measures on the loto. Loto *en panne*!

So, for the *Petites et Moyennes Entreprises*, the decision mentioned...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Is there a phone ringing somewhere!

Mr Baloomoody: Even the babies are not happy with that Budget, they are crying. Even the babies are crying. So, with the PME, good measures have been announced regarding the *Petites et Moyennes Entreprises*, but we have heard quite a lot on them in

previous budgets, only time will tell you - specially the one-stop shop. You must have heard about it being in this House for quite a long time! How many times the one-stop shop has been mentioned, but has never been materialised.

But, anyway, we wish that it materialises because it is a very important sector of our economy. Transforming Port Louis into a regional hub, it is welcome. But, again, time will tell. Reducing tax on hire purchase is a very good measure, but we have to be careful as it can encourage consumption. So, if people used to buy one TV set, they can instead go and buy two. It does not necessarily mean that we are going to reduce consumption by reducing hire purchase. In fact, some shops are very happy with this because they say that their sales will go up. Anyway, this is the choice of the people.

However, on this Budget, I will address only four issues, which I feel are of tremendous importance. I will not be long. First is the issue of minimum wage; secondly, the issue of law and order; third, is the fight against corruption, and fourth is the fight against poverty. But the actual situation *oblige*. I will have to address the issue of the Bramer Bank and the BAI. Things are so serious outside! People are so much in despair; some have even lost their life! I will have to address this issue.

On the question of minimum wage, Madam Speaker, much has been said during the campaign and most of the trade unions believed that minimum wage would be introduced on the first occasion. They had campaigned thoroughly on that issue. In their manifesto, at bullet five of the 12 points, it reads –

“Introduire un salaire minimum pour les travailleurs au bas de l'échelle.”

And God knows how many campaigns there were on this! How many false hopes were given to *les travailleurs au bas de l'échelle*! Since coming into power, none of the Ministers, not even the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training nor the Minister of Finance and Economic Development has mentioned this word: minimum wage!

When we had the Bill for the remuneration at the end of the year, there was no mention of minimum wage. In this Budget, there is no mention whatsoever of, at least, a first step towards minimum wage. Worst, the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training addressed the House - he had the opportunity of addressing the House on three occasions: first, when he introduced the Bill at the end of the year; second, when he addressed the House on the Presidential Address, and third, yesterday or the day

before when he addressed the House on the Budget. Not a single word on minimum wage, Madam Speaker!

And the unions have done their work. I have been informed by, at least, one federation that since 07 January, they have sent a proposal. They have asked for a meeting with the Minister and, up to today, more than hundred days in power as Minister, he has not found five minutes to receive them! The letter is dated 07 January. They have given a detailed proposal on how to deal with the NRB.

There are also many Remuneration Orders which have not been renewed for years. My friend, the Vice-Prime Minister, hon. Soodhun, knows about that. These are the people *au bas de l'échelle*. These are people whom, in all public meetings, the *l'Alliance Lepep* had addressed them, especially. But nothing! They have turned their back to these people! No rendezvous up to today, following a letter sent on 07 January.

Even on the question of NRB - I have just mentioned it - they have made concrete and practical proposals, not imaginary or *rêve* like the *l'Alliance Lepep* was selling. No! They have come with concrete propositions and a memorandum was submitted to the hon. Minister. But, up to now, no reply! No answer! No meeting!

Madam Speaker, let me address also the issue of foreign workers. Whether we like it or not, the foreign workers are contributing quite a lot in the development of this country, but we have to treat them humanely. We have seen recently what has happened in one of the factories where ladies were not handcuffed, but were pushed into a bus, dragged directly to pick up their bags and to the airport!

(Interruptions)

So, we have one law for local workers and an inhumane and archaic law for the foreign workers! Is this the image we want to project? I hope that the Rt. hon. Prime Minister has seen that programme - there was a programme recently on TV - where it showed how we treat Bangladeshi workers and they were campaigning not to buy 'Made in Mauritius' T-Shirts because of the way we treat our workers here. Again, here, *chapeau aux syndicalistes*, they have made a proposition for an Employment and Foreign Workers Regulation to cater for the foreign workers. It is in the memorandum which they have sent to the Minister. Again, no answer! No reply! No rendezvous!

So, I am making an appeal to this Government, these people *au bas de l'échelle* expected a lot. There was a lot of promise made to them. But, at least, if you cannot do things now, talk to them, receive the trade unions, and keep the door of the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training open. Because we are not talking of a simple

contract, we are talking of the contract of work where human conscience and *la sueur* are involved and not only money, delivery or productivity.

Let me come to the Youth Employment Programme! It is a good step in the right direction that we are going to extend the Youth Employment Programme. But, are you aware, Madam Speaker, that in the employment sector, the Youth Employment Programme is not recognised as a *temps de service*? Many people who have undergone two years of Employment Programme in a specific field, when they apply for a job which needs two years' experience, it is not recognised. They don't recognise the Employment Programme as years of experience. So, in one way, it is a waste of time. If you do Employment Programme and you don't get a job because it is not recognised as two years' experience in that field, what is the purpose of doing it? Here again, Government should sit with the MEF or the Employers' Federation and try to get a formula in which employers recognise the Employment Programme as years of service in these specific fields.

(Interruptions)

Forget about hon. Shakeel Mohamed or others! You are in Government, you have been elected on a programme and people have trusted you! Work for these people who have voted for you and for the country! Forget about the past!

(Interruptions)

Now, let me come to the question of law and order. A lot has been said again during the campaign about law and order. I am the one, whilst I was sitting in the Opposition, on each and every occasion, I raised the issue of law and order. But what do we see in the budget? Only one paragraph with regard to law and order where the Minister says, and I quote –

“First, in this Budget I am making a provision of Rs7.9 billion for the Police Force.”

But what he has not told us is how much was provided last year, what provision was there in the Budget for last year and for this year. If you look at the Estimates for the Police Force last year, the planned Budget was nearly Rs8.5 billion projected. When we know there is a big problem of law and order in the country, Government tells us in one phrase that they are giving Rs7.9 billion to the Police. In fact, he is giving less money to the Police. Less money is being allocated to law and order, and we all know what effect that will have on the social and economic; probably leading to a worst economic condition. Government is not putting the money where its mouth is.

Law and order has been degraded in the Budget and next it is stated that there will be 600 additional recruits for the Police, as if *pe casse grand grand paké*. Replying to the question of my good friend, hon. Ameer Meea, this week, on Tuesday, we came to know that there are already 558 vacancies in the Police Force. 558 vacancies in the Police Force! And, most importantly, in the middle management! But we are going to have 600 recruits. How many years will it take for them to become middle managers? And this is what is lacking in the Police Force! Today, there is no middle management in Police Stations. Today, I rang the Pointe-aux-Sables Police Station. I wanted to speak to a senior Police Officer. Do you know who was there? A Sergeant! I asked: “There is no Chief Inspector?” He said: “*Ça blier ça missier, pena ça!*”

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo, please!

Mr Baloomoody: Forget about Ramgoolam! There is an urgent problem. More money should be put! More money on law and order, on recruitment, and more training! That’s what we need. Law and order is an issue and it is a concern. Recruitment of Police and the proper academic...

(Interruptions)

Am I allowed to talk?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Please, don’t make provocative remarks! Allow the hon. Member to proceed with his speech calmly.

(Interruptions)

Mr Baloomoody: So, it’s clear that the money allocated there is not sufficient. In fact, it is less from what was estimated.

We have other problems as well. We talked about ICT, electronic and everything. Madam Speaker, the vast majority of Police Stations are not equipped with the Crime Occurrence Tracking System. I have been informed that this is a very important tool to track HCs, criminals. This is, in fact, creating much confusion and uncertainty in the case of file monitoring and preservation of data. This project has been online for quite a long time. Maybe the hon. Prime Minister is not aware; he does not go to the Station anymore now to give a declaration. There is an electronic device. It takes you two hours to give a declaration, and, at the end of the day, it does not work because most of the Police Stations do not have that electronic machine. It is not connected and it does not work. This was made in order to have a data of habitual criminals and to track them so that the whole station knows

that you have made a declaration against X, and it is communicated all around. But it is not working. This is why we have so much confusion. One of the causes, I can tell you, is what we have seen in that party, where one accused who was not supposed to be out after 0600 hours; it is because of this. They have used manual communication, sending misleading information, and he was in a party in the company of our Serjeant-at-Arms. So, there is a problem there. We have to put money.

There was another programme that was set and which we do not hear anymore, that is, the electronic bracelet for prisoners.

(Interruptions)

But, at a certain time, it would have told you that it's 6 o'clock and you have to go home. That's the electronic bracelets. So, the electronic bracelet was a programme which was welcomed by everybody.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr Baloomoody: This was a bracelet that was welcomed. Unfortunately, we have not heard anything about that again.

I read yesterday or the day before that a white Policeman killed another black American in America. And now there is an interesting debate which I hope Government will, at least, try to learn from it. They are trying to have a body camera on certain Police Officers. Body cameras on Police Officers who are affected to stop and search at night; a body camera, at least, on the one who is at guard at the station. Because we know how people are treated when they enter Police Stations. So, these are things which we can, at least, learn, and I am inviting Government – or hon. Dayal – to look into these issues, because if we want to modernise our Police Force and stop Police brutality, we will have to look for electronic machines.

(Interruptions)

Yes, body cameras on certain Police Officers! I saw a programme yesterday or the day before; there was a special programme on that, and it seems that it has worked in certain countries - in Japan. But we have to see.

Now, let's come again to the most important thing which concerns many citizens in this country, namely the issue of fraud and corruption. Again, much has been said during the campaign about fraud and corruption: "Once we come into power we will do this, we will do that. We will clear here, we will clear there."

I have already spoken about ICAC. ICAC had a wrong start. When we look at the Budget, there is no mention of additional money, be it for the ICAC or for the other institutions to fight fraud and corruption. It looks like people are happy to come and say: “Look, we have reduced the Budget of ICAC. Now, we have part-time directors, we have part-time president.” It is a serious issue! Probably, it is more dangerous to have part-time assessors than full-time. Put the right people in the right place! We have to spend money on corruption. If you look at the report of the National Survey on Corruption for 2014, which was sponsored by the UNDP and done by a local firm, at page 34 of the report, it says clearly that the most corrupt institutions in Mauritius are –

- (i) the Police;
- (ii) the NTA;
- (iii) the Customs/MRA - I will come to the MRA.
- (iv) the Municipalities

And I am sure hon. Bodha will.

(Interruptions)

It is for the Government; we have to invest in these institutions to ensure that there is no corruption. I am not blaming this Government. But, then, we have to put money in the Budget. There is no money in the Budget for these. And the fifth one is –

- (v) the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping.

So, if we want to fight corruption, we must have a budget for it. But there is no mention of the words ‘fight against corruption’. There is mention of the word ‘financial crime’.

(Interruptions)

No, we have to keep the item on the agenda. The only way to keep the item on the agenda is to have it mentioned in the Budget; have money, specific for it so that people are aware, are conscious that there is a continuous fight against fraud and corruption.

But at paragraph 246 of the Presidential Address, it is stated –

“Government will relentlessly fight fraud and corruption and financial crime. To that effect, a Financial Crime Commission will be set up.”

No mention of this Financial Crime Commission; no budget for it; no mention in the Budget Speech. It was in the Presidential Address, but no mention in the Budget Speech. Nowhere

with regard to allocation of money is there specific mention of this Commission. What is worse, there is confusion about what will be the role of that Commission.

Even the president of a certain institution - I can't mention it here but we know, those who were in that Committee know – and even certain officials don't know what would be their role tomorrow. So, let's be clear what this Commission will be? Come and define! It is more than 100 days and we don't know. We are naming people here to head this or that institution, but they tell us privately: 'yes, mo fine nommé, but I don't know what would be the Financial Crime Commission, etc.'.

So, again, with regard to fraud and corruption, this Budget is silent. Ensuring transparency and good governance - I will start with meritocracy. I have spoken about it, so many nominations have been made without meritocracy, but this time I will go on the procedures for procurement. I will quote at page 37, paragraph 229 of the Budget Speech. I quote -

"The principle of meritocracy will also be extended to procurement procedures. In view of the opacity surrounding allocation of contracts in the past which has led to shady deals and widespread corruption, we have decided, as a matter of transparency, that all contracts will henceforth be allocated after full and transparent tender procedures. The Public Procurement Act will be amended accordingly".

This is, indeed, welcoming to amend the Public Procurement Act to have a transparent procurement exercise. But then, what has happened in the recent past cannot just go over, because there have been so many cases at the IRP, Madam Speaker. where the Independent Review Panel (IRP) has made severe remarks against procedures; it has concluded that we have to retender; it has made severe remarks with regard to the procedure adopted by the Tender Board, but, again, the Tender Board decided to set aside the findings of the IRP and allocate the contract to the one who should not get the contract according to the IRP. There are so many cases, especially at the Wastewater Authority, the CWA and the Police. Contracts were allocated to certain contractors to build Police Stations. We have to look into that. I am sure there must have been some external persons, but who have put pressure. Like what happened yesterday regarding the Betamax case, where the gentleman spent the night in jail. He said that there has been pressure. It is about time that we inquire about these people at the IRP, at the Tender Board to see who has put pressure for them to do away with the ruling and the judgement of the IRP. I have a recent case of 'Security Clean v/s Ministry of Local Government'. In fact, there were three cases. In all these three cases, the

rulings were against the Tender Board, but, again, the Tender Board made *fi* of it, it allocates. It is good to question one Mr K.S. at that institution to know who has put pressure on him to sign 3 letters to allocate contracts to another party. When the IRP said that the contract should go to 'X', it was allocated to 'Y'. So, here, again, it is good that we look into the matter.

According to the Standard of Corruption, the MRA is the fourth most corrupt according to the survey - and we know - and I would like this to go on record. In the past, we know how the MRA has been used as a political tool on certain opponents. So, they can't remain untouched there; they have to account, for what they did.

(Interruptions)

I know of certain cases. Ok, should I disclose my interest? I was a victim. There was a Question here, and the next day the MRA landed in my office. We have to look at the MRA also. What has been their role for the past five years?

We are hearing, here, that this lady has 50 companies; this gentleman has 60 companies, but have they paid their income tax to the MRA? Have they been called upon by the MRA?

(Interruptions)

But then, we have to put it in our Budget! We have to put money and inquire about the MRA as well.

(Interruptions)

There is one thing which I would like to recommend when you inquire about the MRA. It is good that now we have reduced the 10% when it comes to appeal.

(Interruptions)

Yes! What about these people, Gooljaury and others?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr Baloomoody: At the MRA, if you owe them - let's say they assess you for Rs500,000, you have an asset of Rs5 m. or Rs10 m. or three houses, they freeze all your assets. If you don't pay within one month, there is an objection to departure on you. And this measure they choose to whom to impose as well. So, when they freeze your assets, if you are in the MCIB, you can't get any loan to settle your claim. You have to go and beg them and this is where the corruption sometimes come in; then they say: ok, we will release one asset, you can mortgage this one. But, Madam Speaker, all crimes should be punished proportionately! If I owe you Rs500,000, you put Rs500,000 as *lien* on my asset, you don't

freeze all the assets. Many *Petites et Moyennes Entreprises* have been victims of this situation. I am inviting the Government, the hon. Minister and the Rt. hon. Prime Minister to look into the matter. I think it is quite serious; there is an abuse, especially on this side. We have to get the MRA as well on board.

Madam Speaker, there is also the recent report which has just been laid regarding the horse racing with ‘SMS *Pariaz*’. This is what they had to say –

“However, there was a five-year delay in connecting the one inline bookmaker *SMS Pariaz*”.

My friend, hon. Bhagwan, put a question on the system which the Commission found surprising and asked whether that company had, in fact, paid over the five-year period, it was not connected to the system. There was no clear answer to the query. The acting Chief Executive of the GRA said that tax collection was the responsibility of the MRA and not the GRA. Although ‘SMS *Pariaz*’ had a responsibility to pay tax for the five years, it was unconnected and the MRA stated that tax had been paid, but there is no confirmation available through the gabs on whether taxes had been paid to buy the company and for how much. So, even at the MRA things are not clear.

Madam Speaker, we are concentrating on the FIU, the MIU, that lady, the other ‘*madame-là*’, but the MRA as well has to be put in the picture.

Now, I come to an issue which I feel is very serious: the fight against poverty. It is commendable that there will be a Marshall Plan for the fight against poverty, but are we doing it the right way and are we going to have the result of what we want to do? The Mauritius Systematic Country Report of 2014 clearly states - and the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has stated that the gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider. There is an urgency with regard to the fight against poverty. But, Madam Speaker, let me refer with regard to how the Government proposes to attack that scourge of poverty. Again at paragraph 178 of the Budget Speech, it is said, and I quote -

“I have given deep thoughts to the matter, and I have decided to review the CSR system in depth”.

He starts by reviewing in depth!

“I have come to the conclusion that the preferred alternative is to let companies decide on how best to fulfill their social responsibility (...).”

The companies’ social responsibility!

“(...) and obligation in a most effective manner. Companies, hereon will be free to allocate the 2 percent of the CSR according to their set of priorities”.

Madam Speaker, it is the company now which will decide what is the set of priorities for those in poverty? We are talking about Rs700 m. to Rs800 m. of CSR money and that 2% is supposed - if not, it will go to the MRA – to be taxpayers' money! We are giving Rs700 m. to Rs800 m. of taxpayers' money to the companies for them to fight poverty! And what is worse, we are doing away with the guidelines at paragraph 180 -

“I am therefore removing all existing CSR guidelines.”

So, there will be no guidelines and it is good for Members, who have tapped the table while the speech was being read, who were not aware of the guidelines, let me tell you what the guidelines are! It is good to know. The guidelines give a restriction as to on which project you can use money and on which project you cannot use money. The approved guidelines are that you must use the money on certain specific projects as approved by the NEF and this is for the fight against poverty.

So, now, there are four schemes which are approved for the operation guidelines of housing. There are four schemes proposed. You have the concrete/CIS houses, participating in social housing programmes, targeting families with monthly income of Rs600, etc., upgrading of living environment and vulnerable persons.

So, today, the companies are free and you are not allowed to give things in kind. Your 2% must go in a specific project on specific guidelines. So, what we are telling the company today is that they are not required to follow the guidelines. So, they are free to invest the money where they are, how they are, free for all the companies.

Government may have a specific policy in a *cité*, to have drains, water supply and electricity, and we know companies for whatever it spends, one cent, they will need a benefit either in kind or in publicity of two cents. A little *cité* in my Constituency, *Cité* Firinga, where the priority is probably for drainage, sewerage or to rebuild the roof of these houses, will they be interested to go there or will they prefer to sponsor a football team, in the frontline with their names on their T-shirts, which they are not allowed to do today.

I have been informed by NGOs, but they refuse. A well-known supermarket came with two vans of 8 tonnes of biscuits which are going to expire in one week. They wanted to deliver that in a home and wanted them to sign this as a contribution under their CSR Fund. They refused. Another well-known shop, which, if you don't pay the hire purchase, seize your product like table, TV, etc.; they wanted to deliver it to a certain shelter, second-hand things and have these deducted on their CSR.

So, now we are removing all the guidelines. There would be no control. For the private sector, it is a jackpot for them, Madam Speaker, giving them Rs800 m. to spend as

they wish and they will sign: 'I have used it for CSR, selling their own products, sponsored without looking for any guarantee; that this money is going there and they will sign. The taxpayers lose, the MRA loses those Rs800 m. and the private sector gets it, but the poor is not sure to get it. There is no guarantee that this money will go to the poor. So, this is a serious issue. When we talk about privatisation of the fight against poverty, this is, in fact, Madam Speaker, privatisation of the fight against poverty, telling the private sector: go in your locality, see what you think is best for you and you spend the money there. So, this is a serious issue. I think you should review that issue of giving to the private sector the money to fight poverty, the Rs800 m. to Rs900 m.'

This is what I had to say. It is a serious issue. Look at the guidelines, you will see, what they can do, what they cannot do. Now, if they want to do, they can fund political parties. Because they can use the money as they want, they can finance socio-religious bodies; they can finance whatever institution they want. There are no guidelines and you get the party to sign it. I have received Rs500 m. This is part of my CSR, 2% contribution. So, where are we going? Is this a Marshall Plan? Is this how we are going to fight poverty? This is why the private sector said: "Wonderful budget! It allows us to do what we want to do! Excellent for the investment!" They are getting back their 2% for them to enjoy, to spend it on what they want to spend.

Madam Speaker, I can't resume my seat before addressing the issue of the BAI and the Bramer Bank. In fact, I am sure we were all shocked when we read the newspaper this morning which says –

"Un client terrassé par une crise cardiaque."

When he learnt that his Rs12 m. - according to what the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has said in this House - will not be guaranteed. And in the same article, two other persons had a heart problem, but thank God, they did not pass away. I have personally received many people and these people, Madam Speaker, they are not gamblers. The money that they have put is not for gambling; they have put it there for revenue; a fixed deposit for a better life in their old days. Some have put...

(Interruptions)

I will tell you how you will fight the case, but don't penalise innocent people who have put their lump sum, their VRS money, all that they have earned in their life, because this scheme...

(Interruptions)

This is a very serious question.

(Interruptions)

We should see about the institution. I am not here to say about Mr Rawat, I am here to say about the institution and the creditors, those who have put their money there. This is what we should aim at; this should be our principal aim. Then, if we have to stop Mr Rawat, we should show him if he has committed whatever crime, let him pay for that, but not innocent people.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker, when replying to the question of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, in the first paragraph, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development said -

“Madam Speaker, at the very outset, I would like to state that we are all dealing with a crisis of national proportion that goes beyond party politics.”

And we agree with it. The hon. Leader of the Opposition did agree, but it is unfortunate that when such a crisis is hitting the country, we are talking about a proportion of money which represents 10% of our GDP; the number one in Government and the number two in Government do not agree. The number one, the Prime Minister, comes and tells us that there is a Ponzi scheme. The number two comes and tells us: ‘I can’t say whether there is a Ponzi scheme.’

(Interruptions)

But this is what I am saying. There is a disagreement already at the top level of power. And the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development comes and says: “There is a Ponzi scheme.”

(Interruptions)

The *conservateur* appointed by Government, Mr Oosman comes and says: “That is too early to say it is a Ponzi scheme.”

(Interruptions)

Hon. Duval answered to a PNQ of hon. Bérenger fourteen months ago. I take it that the hon. Minister has done his homework before answering that question or he has been misled by the FIU or by the FSC. But then, for an issue like this, we would have expected that there is unity in Government. We all go in one direction and the priority, at this stage, Madam Speaker, is to save the money of the depositors; to save the jobs of these people; to save the deposits. Let me be clear: the scheme where nearly 24,000 people are concerned is called the Super Cash Back Gold. It has been on the market for many years. There has been advertisement. There have been brochures for it. Our institutions have failed. It has been

approved by the FSC! Our institutions have failed and it is good to know that Iqbal Rajahbalee, when the MSM/MMM was in Government, made a report in 2004.

(Interruptions)

But then he was replaced by another CEO. Subsequently, hon. Jugnauth, when he was Minister of Finance, appointed another lady at the FSC. So, these people should be made accountable. I understand that there has been objection to departure of so many people at the BAI, but about those people who were in that institution, let them come and say there was pressure on them and we know who has put the pressure. The Conservator and the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development cannot come just like that and say 24,000 people will not get their money because this is Ponzi scheme; because these people have not gone for interest for 50%. The difference with them what they will be getting is 6% in the bank, 8% in that scheme. Had they gone to the institution, everybody would have told them: "Yes, it is an honest scheme. You can go." So, where have they gone wrong? So, we should work in a direction. I make an appeal to the Rt. hon. Prime Minister and to the Government at large to work in a direction and to review their strategy. They must not think only of penalising Mr X or Mr Y. They must think about the institution, about the people who will suffer. They must look what we can salvage from this project and distribute the money to all these policyholders. Let us not make the difference between one policyholder and another one because these people are innocent. These people have invested their life saving. These people have invested in that scheme to get a better life when they get older or when they stop working. So, my appeal to Government is to be more humane in approaching that issue and let Government go as a team, not the Prime Minister goes this side, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development goes the other side, the hon. Minister of *l'enquête* takes the plane, the other one we don't know what is happening.

(Interruptions)

Let the professionals do their work; there should be no political interference and let's make sure that, at least, all those who have contributed honestly in that project do not suffer.

I have done, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: I suspend the sitting for half an hour for tea.

At 4.30 p.m the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.05 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Seeruttun!

The Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Seeruttun): M. le président, laissez-moi d'abord présenter mes vives félicitations à mon collègue, l'honorable Vishnu Lutchmeenaraaidoo, ministre des Finances et du Développement économique pour la présentation de ce budget qui est son huitième.

C'est aussi la dix-septième fois que le Premier ministre, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, en tant que chef du gouvernement, voit son ministre des Finances dans cet exercice. Mais avant de rentrer dans le vif du sujet, je voudrai répondre à notre ami, le précédent orateur, l'honorable Veda Baloomoody. A l'écouter attentivement tout à l'heure, il donne l'impression que ce gouvernement est au pouvoir depuis plus d'une dizaine d'années. Or, nous sommes là qu'à peine trois mois. Il veut que dans ce premier budget on réalise toutes les mesures prévues dans notre programme électoral qui est étalé sur cinq ans. On sait qu'il réalise que c'est un gouvernement qui est en train de travailler à une vitesse vraiment extraordinaire, mais, malheureusement, on ne peut pas faire tout d'un seul coup. C'est vrai, on a parlé du salaire minimum, cela viendra. C'est un engagement qu'on a pris. On a parlé du *Law and Order*. Il a parlé.

(*Interruptions*)

Il y a cinq paragraphes.

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker : Order !

Mr Seeruttun: Il pose la question pourquoi il y a une baisse dans le budget. Mais on peut faire des choses d'une manière plus efficiente. On peut enlever les gaspillages. C'est cela qu'il y avait avant. Et aujourd'hui, ce n'est pas parce qu'il y a une baisse dans les dotations budgétaires qu'on ne va pas faire le travail mieux, avec plus d'efficacité. On a dit qu'on va faire du *capacity-building* dans la force policière, une police académie. Tout cela c'est pour donner les outils qu'il faut pour redresser la situation du *Law and Order* dans le pays.

Il a parlé du '*No Tax Budget*'. Soit il ne veut pas comprendre ou bien c'est par pure démagogie. On a tous compris qu'il n'y a pas de nouvelles taxes. Et c'est cela qui veut dire un '*No Tax Budget*'. Il vient dire qu'il y a de la taxe. Bien sûr, il y a de la taxe.

(*Interruptions*)

Il avait aussi parlé de la dévaluation de la roupie mauricienne. C'est totalement faux ! Regardons ce qui se passe au niveau international! Les *fundamentals* de la devise américaine est en train de s'améliorer. C'est cela la raison! Cela n'a rien à voir avec ce qu'on fait ici ! C'est ça qui fait que le dollar américain a autant apprécié. Il n'y a aucune dévaluation, honorable Baloomoody. Ce n'est pas bien !

(*Interruptions*)

Il sait très bien. Parce qu'après avoir dit tout cela, il a aussi dit : « C'est un bon budget. », un budget qui rejoigne un peu ce que son parti voulait mettre en place, parce que le ministre des Finances était aussi responsable, à un certain moment, de la commission économique de son parti.

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Seeruttun: Concernant le *CSR*, lorsqu'on parle de parrainage, cela veut dire on prend en charge un village et prendre en charge un village veut dire regarder ses problèmes.

Ce qu'il faut aussi faire ressortir, M. le président, c'est que le *CSR* est là depuis au moins sept à huit ans ?

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Baloomoody, no cross-talking please!

Mr Seeruttun: Cela n'a donné aucun résultat.

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Please, allow the hon. Minister to continue without interruptions.

Mr Seeruttun: Le *CSR* est là depuis huit ans au moins et le niveau de la pauvreté aujourd'hui dans le pays n'a fait que détériorer. Donc, la formule en place n'a pas marché.

(*Interruptions*)

Si la formule n'a pas marché, il faut la changer et c'est cela qu'on est en train de faire. C'est un peu aussi responsabiliser les entreprises. Le *CSR* veut dire *Corporate Social Responsibility*. Ce parrainage va pouvoir donner à ces entreprises la responsabilité de prendre en charge certains lieux où vraiment ils ont besoin d'être encadrés et il faut essayer

d'éradiquer le problème de pauvreté. Donc, on attend, après on fait des commentaires là-dessus.

L'honorable Membre a aussi dit qu'on n'a rien fait dans ce budget pour les salariés et pour les travailleurs. Mais bien avant le budget, on a déjà pris des mesures qu'il faut. On a donné R 600 *across the board* à tous les travailleurs. Avant même qu'on présente ce budget, on avait déjà enclenché certaines mesures pour venir pallier le problème que font face les Mauriciens.

Il avait parlé des traitements des travailleurs étrangers, la manière dont ils ont été traités. Je ne dis pas que je suis d'accord avec comment cela s'est passé, mais il faut le rappeler, son *leader*, qu'avait-il dit ?

(Interruptions)

On a un travail à faire. On s'est présenté devant l'électorat et on leur a dit de nous faire confiance. Il y a tellement de pourriture qu'il faut nettoyer. Et c'est ce qu'on est en train de faire.

(Interruptions)

Et cela prend du temps justement ! Pour pouvoir commencer à faire des choses bien, il faut d'abord enlever toutes ces pourritures. On a connu l'affaire *Airway Coffee*, on a connu l'affaire Dufry et l'affaire du coffre. Aujourd'hui, en ce qui concerne ce scandale financier, ce scandale bancaire, M. le président, on était à deux doigts d'une crise sociale sans précédent. Presque 200,000 personnes étaient touchées par cela. *And that's not our doing*, M. le président, ce qui s'est passé ! Nous sommes là que trois mois ? Il a bien dit. Dans le passé, la sonnette d'alarme avait été tirée, mais rien n'a été fait. On a laissé perdurer cette situation. Alors, qu'est-ce qu'on aurait dû faire ? Est-ce qu'on aurait dû laisser pourrir encore cette situation ou bien prendre les mesures qu'il faut et arrêter cette hémorragie.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Seeruttun: Alors que ce gouvernement a pris la décision de sauvegarder les intérêts de 50,524 clients de Bramer Bank et 135,283 polices d'assurances émises par la BAI, l'honorable Membre de l'opposition est en train de venir défendre M. Dawood Rawat et ses enfants. Aujourd'hui, c'est la perception qu'on est en train de faire une vendetta politique. Aujourd'hui, alors qu'on est dans une situation où les critères émis par la Banque de Maurice

ne sont pas respectés, alors qu'ils ont eu la possibilité de corriger des choses qu'ils n'étaient pas en train de *comply with*, M. Rawat pensait qu'avec lui tout est possible. Il ne doit pas souscrire à ces conditions, donc il pouvait se permettre et il croyait que cela allait continuer de la même façon!

(*Interruptions*)

Donc, lorsqu'on applique les règles, certaines personnes pensent que c'est une vendetta politique! Mais non, M. le président ! Les règles doivent être appliquées à toutes les institutions bancaires, que ce soit M. Rawat ou dans telle ou telle autre banque. C'est ce qu'on a fait. Aujourd'hui, on est en train de définir ce que c'est qu'un *Ponzi scheme*. C'est ça le débat d'aujourd'hui! Alors ce n'est pas un *Ponzi scheme*! Peut-être si on parle du *Ponzi scheme* de M. Ponzi des années 30.

(*Interruptions*)

Quand on est en train d'inciter des gens à investir dans un quelconque projet d'investissement avec un retour vraiment alléchant, on prend cet argent et on le place dans des projets bidons, pour moi c'est du *Ponzi scheme*, en sachant très bien que l'investissement dans lequel on place cet argent ne va jamais avoir suffisamment de retour pour pouvoir payer ces investisseurs.

(*Interruptions*)

Donc, qu'est-ce qu'ils font? Ils prennent l'argent d'un autre investisseur pour payer les intérêts à celui qui avait investi en premier. C'est cela le *Ponzi scheme*.

(*Interruptions*)

On peut le définir dans n'importe quel sens, mais finalement c'est ça le *bottom line*, on prend l'argent...

(*Interruptions*)

On prend l'argent...

(*Interruptions*)

Donc, c'est une forme de *Ponzi scheme* ! N'allez pas essayer de couper les cheveux en quatre pour voir les virgules et les points et dire que ce n'est pas un *Ponzi scheme*.

(*Interruptions*)

M. le président, notre pays était aux urnes en décembre de l'année dernière et il n'est pas nécessaire pour moi de rappeler le verdict de ces élections. Tout le monde le sait. Depuis le 11 décembre, le peuple a fait confiance à l'Alliance *Lepep* grâce à la démocratie. Et nous avons donc aujourd'hui, M. le président, un droit d'honorer nos engagements.

En janvier – le 27 plus précisément – il y a eu la présentation du programme gouvernemental pour la période 2015-2019. Les projets ont été énoncés et les débats ont eu lieu. Depuis, la machine est en marche et rien ne l'arrêtera. Dès l'entrée en fonction de ce nouveau gouvernement, nous envoyons de nombreux signaux forts pour que les activités économiques redémarrent dans la République de Maurice. Et elles sont bien parties! Ce n'est pas le fruit du hasard. C'est le fruit d'une volonté collective et il faut oser, M. le président. Nous vivons dans un monde qui change constamment et la seule chose qui reste inchangée, c'est le changement.

M. le président, *nobody owes us a living*. Au sein de notre équipe, nous en sommes conscients et il existe au sein de ce gouvernement une cohérence, une cohésion et une volonté de réussir. C'est une équipe soudée dirigée par le Premier ministre, Sir Anerood Jugnauth connu pour sa rigueur au travail et à la discipline. Le lundi 23 mars dernier, l'honorable Lutchmeenaraidoo est venu avec un budget pour la nouvelle année financière 2015/2016 et pour les six premiers mois de l'année 2015. Et le Grand Argentier nous a encore une fois prouvé ses compétences avec ce budget présenté dans le contexte économique mondial.

Nous nous attendions à voir à l'œuvre une Opposition responsable et digne. Avec les circonstances sociales et économiques qui prévalent actuellement, il n'y a pas une seule proposition valable qui a été faite jusqu'ici par les intervenants de l'Opposition. Je dois avouer que l'honorable Ramano a été très juste et il a dit lui-même que c'est un des meilleurs budgets depuis les dix dernières années. Donc cela démontre quand même...

(Interruptions)

Un bon garçon!

(Interruptions)

Je reconnaiss que l'Opposition se doit de critiquer, mais je m'attends à ce qu'elle le fasse intelligemment et positivement car le but final est que la société mauricienne, nos compatriotes en sortent gagnants.

A la place, M. le président, on voit ce parti qui s'embourbe dans le communalisme, le castéisme. Ce n'est pas l'honorable Alan Ganoo, président du MMM, qui me contredira.

(Interruptions)

Dans une interview de presse récemment, il a vertement déclaré en parlant de la restructuration faite par son *leader*, l'honorable Paul Bérenger, je cite -

« *On aurait dû juger les valeurs des personnes en toute sérénité et faire fi de leurs appartenances castéistes ou communautaires*»

Et plus loin, il dit qu'il n'a peut-être pas le bon profil pour être *leader* adjoint. On a été choqué, M. le président! Surtout la jeune génération - toutes confessions religieuses confondues - qui se côtoie tous les jours. A un moment où l'on communique à travers les *sms*, les *Whatsapp*, *Viber*, le MMM prône le castéisme et le communalisme.

L'opposition, M. le président, doit se montrer plus responsable. Il ne faut pas être des antipatriotes à ce point. *Year in, year out*, l'Opposition MMM trouve toujours des choses contraires à dire sur le budget. Toujours le même vocabulaire! Je vous rappelle qu'en 1983, le *leader* de l'Opposition avait qualifié le premier budget de l'honorable ministre Vishnu Lutchmeenaraidoo comme un budget de '*couillonneur*'. Qu'avons-nous vu en cours de route? Le taux d'inflation qui était de 13,4% en 1981/82 sous les travaillistes tomba à 5,6% en 1983/84. C'est ça qu'il appelait budget '*couillonneur*' !

En 1984, toujours lors des débats budgétaires, l'honorable Bérenger déclarait que c'est un budget de mensonge. Qu'avons-nous vu après? Des industriels choisissaient Maurice pour installer leurs entreprises dans les quatre coins du pays.

En 1985, toujours lors des débats, le *leader* de l'Opposition avançait que c'est un «*private sector budget*». Qu'avons-nous vu après? La population mauricienne respirait. Des maisons en bois et tôle étaient remplacées par du béton, avec du carrelage et la télévision couleur et vidéos *players* faisaient leurs apparitions dans chaque foyer, les appareils électroménagers mettaient aux oubliettes la «*roche lavé ou roche kari*» et les lampes vertes mortelles.

(*Interruptions*)

En 1986, le *leader* de l'Opposition avait dit que la population était restée sur sa faim. Le temps lui a encore une fois donné tort. Il y a eu le plein emploi, le gouvernement était obligé d'accorder des permis pour l'importation de la main-d'œuvre étrangère pour que les investisseurs du secteur du textile puissent honorer leurs commandes vis-à-vis des marchés extérieurs. Le Parti travailliste, lui, nourrissait le chômage et n'attendait que la veille des élections pour offrir des emplois non-productifs. Qui ne se souvient pas des 21,000 jeunes embauchés à la veille des élections de 1982?

(*Interruptions*)

Sir Anerood Jugnauth avait eu raison de mettre fin à leur contrat à l'issue d'une commission d'enquête. Ces mêmes jeunes s'étaient retrouvés par la suite avec un emploi productif, M. le président.

De 2005 à 2014, la population a été confrontée à de rudes épreuves, pire que durant la période qui a précédé 1982, M. le président. La dette publique à décembre 2014 était à plus de R 250 milliards; le taux de chômage était à un niveau élevé, 100,000 familles vivaient en-dessous du seuil de pauvreté, des familles ne pouvaient pas envoyer leurs enfants à l'école, le nombre d'enfants de rue est en augmentation et j'en passe.

Cet héritage, M. le président, ne nous a pas découragés. Le ministre des Finances, inspiré par le Premier ministre, a pu faire concrétiser son rêve avec un programme pour l'avenir des Mauriciens. Un programme visant à redresser notre économie, à assurer le plein emploi, à donner un travail à chacun des 75,000 Mauriciens sans emploi, à rendre la réussite scolaire accessible à tous et à réduire le fossé entre les riches et les économiquement faibles.

Comme en 1982, M. le président, avec Sir Anerood Jugnauth comme Premier ministre, l'île Maurice, à coup sûr, rebondira une nouvelle fois pour faire oublier l'ère Ramgoolam. En travaillant avec dignité, dans un esprit d'unité et de respect, le peuple en sortira gagnant. C'est le souhait de ce gouvernement, M. le président.

Laissez-moi revenir encore une fois à la période 1982-1995, sur un secteur qui me concerne directement, c'est-à-dire, le secteur agricole. Tout le monde se souvient que durant les années 1975/76, le pays a connu le boom sucrier ; le prix avait connu une augmentation énorme. Mais quel a été le sort de ce secteur durant la période allant de 1978 à 1982?

M. le président, the Mauritian Sugar Economy was in trouble for three unprofitable years -

- liquidity squeeze affecting increasing number of factories;
- one-third of firms operating under severe financial strain;
- deterioration in the performance of the sugar industry;
- fixed investment declining, and
- land under irrigation had fallen.

Rising costs of production resulting from low average sugar cane output were -

- the rising costs of inputs;
- the rising financial cost, and
- the depressed prices of sugar above preferential quota which went on world market.

And some urgent actions were needed -

- to enable and encourage resumption of investment;
- to raise ability of planters to pay for water and other inputs so as to raise yield of small planters;
- to rehabilitate the existing waterworks by building new water reservoirs and to promote further growth and diversification, and
- above all to stabilise the industry's costs

Qui a sauvé l'industrie sucrière, M. le président ? C'est bel et bien le gouvernement de SAJ en 1982/83. C'est le même scénario qui se pose aujourd'hui pour l'industrie sucrière, avec tous les acquis que le pays a perdus, c'est-à-dire -

- Le prix garanti;
- Le marché garanti, et
- Le volume d'exportation garantie

Mais nous ne baisserons pas les bras. Ce secteur ne va pas mourir. Vous pouvez compter sur ce gouvernement. Et comme je l'ai dit aussi lors de la PNQ du *leader* de l'opposition hier, il nous faut un effort national dans ce sens.

Le budget, M. le président, offre d'autres opportunités, dont la création de milliers d'emplois. Qui avait créé la Cybercité d'Ébène ? C'est bien Sir Anerood Jugnauth ! Et qu'est-ce que l'Opposition à l'époque, surtout le Parti travailliste, n'avait pas dit ?

Mais, Sir Anerood Jugnauth n'avait pas écouté les critiques de l'Opposition ; il a fait sa route pour l'aménagement de la Cybercité d'Ébène. L'Opposition travailliste a eu tort d'avoir pris position contre un projet de cette envergure, devenu maintenant un pilier important dans l'économie mauricienne. *Today, we have a booming Ébène city with over 15,000 intelligent jobs on an area of around 100 hectares of land.* Avec les huit *Smart Cities* en cinq ans, le paysage mauricien changera. Nous sommes certains d'offrir à nos jeunes un emploi productif.

Je trouve regrettable la position de l'honorable Reza Uteem - malheureusement il n'est pas là aujourd'hui - qui a exprimé ses réserves quant à la démarche du gouvernement d'absorber le chômage.

Mes collègues, M. le président, ainsi que toute la nation mauricienne savent que ce gouvernement va mener à bien ces projets, car nous avons pris l'engagement de servir le peuple.

Ce budget ranime l'espoir de voir se concrétiser un deuxième miracle économique après tant d'années. En voyant le ministre des Finances prononcer son discours sur le budget, j'étais sûr qu'il réussirait à redonner espoir à la population et qu'il se mettait à l'œuvre afin de redonner le sourire à nos compatriotes et aux acteurs de l'économie mauricienne. Il n'a pas prononcé des mots creux. C'est pourquoi les réactions ont été claires et positives. C'est pourquoi je peux ajouter à cela le sondage de DCDM publié par l'Express dans son édition du 26 mars dernier, qui nous donne encore une fois ce soutien. L'Opposition dit que c'est la fin de notre *honeymoon*. Mais la population croit en nous, parce que nous sommes un gouvernement sérieux, avec un Premier ministre, comme on dit, *smart*, n'est-ce pas ?

M. le président, nous voyons déjà l'impact positif de ce budget sur le marché boursier. Les déclarations de M. Raj Makoond du *Joint Economic Council*, des représentants syndicaux, des forces vives et d'autres ONG sont encourageantes. Même Mgr Ian Ernest, l'Evêque de Maurice, dans son message à l'occasion de la fête de Pâques, l'a bien fait ressortir : ce budget propulse le pays dans la bonne direction.

Dans ce même élan, M. le président, je lance un appel à tous les citoyens qui aiment notre république : venez nous soutenir dans notre mission visant à propulser l'île Maurice à l'avant-plan. Parce qu'en démocratie il n'y a pas d'ennemis. Comme je l'ai fait ressortir plus tôt, il y a une opposition et un gouvernement. Mais si nous aimons notre pays, si nous avons à cœur l'avenir de nos compatriotes, ne soyons pas des oiseaux de mauvais augure, ne prions pas pour l'échec de ce gouvernement, mais soyons les bons semeurs. Que le gouvernement gouverne avec droiture et discipline et que les critiques de l'Opposition soient constructives.

Ayons un but commun : tout faire pour que notre pays oublie les moments douloureux qu'on vient de vivre avec la saga de la BAI.

Comme le ministre des Finances l'a bien dit : “*We are at a crossroad*”. Nous sommes à la croisée des chemins. Ne ratons pas notre rendezvous avec l'Histoire.

Vous avez tous vu comment, durant les années de règne de Navin Ramgoolam, il y a eu cette cassure entre l'État et le peuple. Avec ce budget, nous avons pu reconstruire ce lien État-peuple, primordial pour l'avancement d'une société. Quand nous disons que nous sommes à la croisée des chemins, cela veut dire que nous nous séparons d'une route, celle éventrée par le PTR, pour emprunter une autre voie construite par *l'Alliance Lepèp*, bien meilleure et sécurisante, pour aller droit vers le but fixé par ce gouvernement.

Together with our people we will live our life in such a way that whenever we stop and look at the footprints, we see a path that we are all happy to call it's our own and one that the future generation will benefit. Above all, the future generation will be able to say 'thank you' for leaving a legacy which we would be proud of. A country which will allow future generations to live happily and decently! Not a country where all the money is in the safe of one or two persons.

M. le président, nous entrons maintenant dans une phase extrêmement concrète. Le ministre des Finances a brossé un tableau des indicateurs économiques. Il compte prendre contrôle et maîtriser la situation.

(Interruptions)

Il a annoncé qu'il vise une croissance de 5,4% pour 2015/2016 et 5,7% pour 2016/2017 et c'est réalisable, M. le président. Je suis triste de la déclaration des membres de l'Opposition disant que les objectifs de la croissance fixés pour l'année prochaine ne seront pas atteints. Au lieu de nous encourager, de prier pour que le pays progresse et que les Mauriciens en sortent gagnant, ils se laissent animer par la négativité. Comme on le sait, la négativité ne fait que casser le moral mais fort heureusement que nous avons un moral d'acier.

Regardez les pays en développement ! Leurs dirigeants espèrent atteindre une croissance moyenne de 5,3% et 5,4% pour l'année 2016 et 2017 respectivement. La Chine et l'Inde, deux pays émergents, visent une croissance de 7% pour l'année 2016 et dans ces pays, l'Opposition ne rouspète pas. Maurice ne peut adopter une attitude défaitiste avec l'héritage laissé par le Parti Travailliste. Nous sommes motivés et nous travaillerons sans relâche pour réussir.

M. le président, laissez-moi revenir aux mesures annoncées dans le discours budget pour le ministère de l'Agro-Industrie et de la Sécurité Alimentaire. Je me réjouis de la décision prise concernant le paiement d'une compensation aux planteurs de canne à sucre. Ils passent par des moments difficiles ces dernières années avec la baisse continue de prix du sucre sur le marché européen et la dernière baisse a fait chuter le prix de R 16,500 en 2013 à R 12,400 pour la récolte de 2014. Ça a été un autre grand coup dur pour ce secteur.

Les planteurs, et plus particulièrement les petits planteurs, ont un rôle important à jouer pour la survie de l'industrie sucrière car leur production de canne à sucre compte beaucoup pour avoir la masse critique nécessaire à la viabilité de ce secteur. Beaucoup de petits planteurs, découragés par la baisse de prix, les augmentations des coûts de production et du manque de main-d'œuvre, ont préféré abandonner la culture de la canne. Ce

gouvernement est disposé à prendre les mesures adéquates pour encourager les planteurs à continuer de cultiver la canne à sucre.

Tout un arsenal de décisions doit être pris pour la valorisation de ce secteur, autrefois l'épine dorsale de l'économie mauricienne. Pour que les planteurs n'abandonnent pas leurs terres, il faut une vision claire et des actions d'ampleur nationale. Une fois qu'on arrive à franchir cette étape et qu'on transforme cette industrie en une industrie cannière à forte valeur ajoutée, la jeune génération, qui ne s'intéresse pas aujourd'hui avec l'industrie sucrière traditionnelle, se tournera volontairement vers ce secteur.

- L'introduction de nouvelles variétés à meilleur rendement en remplacement de celles qui ont fait leur temps est nécessaire;
- Les résultats des recherches qui sont en cours pour l'amélioration de la culture de la canne doivent être suivis de près et vulgarisés auprès des petits planteurs;
- La technique de *zero budgeting farming* sans utilisation des pesticides est une pratique qui ne nécessite pas de gros investissements. Cette méthode qui existe en Inde est très intéressante. Déjà à Maurice, un individu dans la région de Flacq a recours au *zero budgeting farming* sur une petite échelle et les résultats sont très concluants. Cette technique, on doit la faire parvenir aux autres planteurs, et
- Soutenir sans aucune hésitation la production d'éthanol pour le marché local et aussi pour l'exportation.

Mais il est dommage, M. le président, que l'ancien gouvernement nous a fait perdre une enveloppe de R 200 millions pour n'avoir pas respecté l'engagement auprès de l'Union Européenne dans le cadre des mesures d'accompagnement pour la réforme sucrière et l'honorable Osman Mahomed sait de quoi je parle. Un projet qui aurait déjà dû être mis en place, le *blend* d'E5 d'éthanol avec la gazoline. Un projet pilote a été entamé mais est resté dans le tiroir quelque part. Quel gâchis, R 200 millions parties !

M. le président, des provisions budgétaires de plus de R 600 millions ont été faites dans les deux budgets en cours pour permettre à d'autres planteurs de se joindre au projet FORIP afin d'augmenter leur production et réduire leurs coûts de production.

Le Consultant, *Landell Mills Consulting*, vient de soumettre un rapport préliminaire sur la restructuration de l'industrie cannière afin d'assurer sa pérennité, spécialement en vue de l'échéance de 2017 qui verra l'abolition complète des quotas sur le marché européen. Les

consultations avec les différentes parties concernées sont en cours et le rapport sera finalisé très bientôt. Le gouvernement prendra, bien sûr, les décisions appropriées en vue de reformer ce secteur en s'assurant que les intérêts de tout un chacun soient préservés dans la mesure du possible.

M. le président, une autre mesure qui intéresse grandement les consommateurs est la culture des produits agricoles bio. C'est un fait indéniable qu'il y a actuellement un usage abusif, et peut-être involontaire de la part de certains planteurs de produits chimiques dans la culture des fruits et des légumes. Ces produits rentrent sur le marché avec le risque de contenir des résidus, des pesticides et ce qui expose les consommateurs à des risques de problèmes de santé. Il a été très difficile déjà jusqu'ici, en dépit des mesures prises, de retracer les planteurs concernés afin de les conseiller sur les pratiques agricoles appropriées à prendre.

La solution idéale est d'encourager les planteurs à adopter l'agriculture soutenable ou la culture des produits organiques qui nécessitera une diminution graduelle, éventuellement l'élimination complète de l'usage de fertilisants chimiques et autres pesticides dans la culture des fruits et des légumes.

Le gouvernement viendra avec des mesures incitatives pour encourager nos agriculteurs à se tourner vers la culture bio. La législation sera amendée afin de permettre l'importation et l'utilisation des fertilisants bio. La production et l'usage de compost seront encouragés. Le gouvernement subventionne déjà le prix du compost. La culture protégée, telle que l'hydroponique, recevra une attention particulière.

M. le président, autre mesure qui va vraiment marquer l'histoire, l'annonce dans le budget de venir avec un *National Wholesale Market project*. As the House may be aware, the present marketing conditions in which fruits and vegetables are offered on the wholesale market are considered to be mostly unsatisfactory by almost all operators of the production and marketing chain at the national level.

Small growers are asking for an alternative marketing solution to the existing auction markets in Port Louis, Vacoas and Flacq. Auctioneers are operating in unacceptable and unhygienic conditions, particularly in Port Louis. Small retailers have to reach the auction markets very early in the morning to get good quality products. Wholesalers working mainly with store chains have to make long queues before delivering their products. Store chains have expressed the wish to have alternate supply solutions to accompany their growth.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a timid attempt was made by the previous Government to remedy the situation. This situation cannot persist. We, as a responsible Government, are

sympathetic to the plights of the planters and other stakeholders and have decided that the wholesale marketing system should be completely revamped and modernised to reflect the image of a modern Mauritius.

The objective of the National Wholesale Market is to reorganise the wholesale marketing for fruits and vegetables at national level by creating a concentration of volumes in a single place. This will bring market efficiency, synergies, and improved costs sharing between operators, better transparency, modern and adequate premises to the whole fruit and vegetable food system.

The new National Wholesale Market will make provision for a modern warehouse to attract store chains, wholesalers and importers for expanding and modernising their businesses. Other services such as banking facilities, agricultural inputs, sale of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides will also be offered.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, another project that deserves to be mentioned is the construction of a new slaughterhouse. The Central Abattoir is more than 37 years old and most of its equipment has become obsolete. We may soon find it difficult to ensure the production of quality meat as per quality standard. In fact, it cannot adapt to the exigencies of a modern slaughterhouse.

There is, therefore, an urgent need for the setting up of a modern slaughterhouse with all facilities and protocol to ensure improvement in animal handling and strict adherence to operational and hygienic norms in the production of quality meat for both domestic and export markets.

The specific objectives of the new project are as follows -

- to ensure that slaughtering is carried out under high standards of hygienic conditions in compliance with international norms and practices, and I may add,
- to ensure also improvement in operational efficiency with cost reduction.

M. le président, il y a une série de projets en cours au niveau de mon ministère pour la protection de nos forêts et de notre biodiversité.

- Un nouveau projet de loi sur la biodiversité - *the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Bill* - est en voie d'élaboration et sera présenté à la Chambre prochainement.
- Une campagne nationale de reboisement de nos forêts avec la plantation de 500,000 arbres sur les prochaines cinq années.

- Une nouvelle pépinière sera aménagée au sanctuaire d'oiseaux à l'Estuaire de Terre Rouge.
- Un *Wetland Bill* va être présenté bientôt.
- Un plan de gestion des îlots sera élaboré bientôt.
- Mon ministère travaille aussi de concert avec l'Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund sur le projet de l'UNESCO visant à retracer la route des travailleurs engagés car il existe des ruines sur l'Île Plate datant de l'époque de l'arrivée des travailleurs engagés à Maurice.

S'agissant des jardins de Maurice, j'ai la ferme intention, M. le président, de les transformer en des sites de références mondiales avec des attraits historiques, culturels, loisirs et économiques dont nos compatriotes et touristes peuvent en profiter.

M. le président, j'aimerai conclure en réaffirmant la conviction de ce gouvernement pour gagner la bataille du développement en vue de réaliser le deuxième miracle économique. Et comment en cette occasion ne pas avoir une pensée spéciale et une grande admiration pour le *leader* de cette équipe gouvernementale. Lui, qui est source d'inspiration pour beaucoup d'entre nous. Aux jeunes, je leur recommande de lire et relire la biographie de Sir Anerood Jugnauth, pour connaître le profond de cette personnalité. Il se décrit lui-même et comme je cite -

«I'm a simple man and I live a simple life »

Contrairement à l'autre qui '*tousse sali*' et qui a fait beaucoup de tort à cette Île Maurice pluriculturelle.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Hon. Bhagwan, no cross talking!

Mr Seeruttun: To be more specific and precise, I'll say that only simple and humble people with the utmost simplicity in their lives who come as blessings and when you have a simple man like Sir Anerood Jugnauth at the head of the country, you own the most beautiful treasure of the world.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Jhuboo!

(5.50 p.m.)

Mr E. Jhuboo (Third Member for Savanne & Black River): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on the Budget Speech.

In Parliament, a serious Government presents its policies and a serious Opposition presents its alternatives. We have a responsibility in saying whether the Government is taking the proper direction or not. It is easy to say that these measures are inappropriate without proposing alternatives. This very House is the place to debate on national matters to express our concerns on what should be done and emphasise on what should be avoided. The people have spoken. *L'Alliance Lepep* has won the elections; Ministers have been appointment; policies and orientations have been defined. After preliminary inquiries, it is now apparent that public affairs have been mismanaged. Then, if one has departed from the basic rules of good governance, transparency and plunged into the ones of favouritism and corruption, he will be answerable to the law, in strict compliance with our constitutional and legal frameworks.

As far as my intervention on the Budget Speech is concerned, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I shall observe the strict guidance of our Standing Orders which stipulates that a debate upon a Bill shall be relevant to the Bill, and I have no intention to depart from that principle.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I inherited from my father sugarcane fields, like many other Members of this House and due to hard work, perseverance, vision and luck, I transformed these unproductive assets into a diversified group with interest in the hospitality sector, supermarkets, agribusiness, port centres, education and real estate. I believe this gives me a unique insight to the challenges and opportunities entrepreneurs face in our country.

The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has presented his Budget, I wish him and the country well, but my concerns are as follows.

M. le président, l'orientation de ce budget fait la part belle aux *smart cities* qui devront porter notre croissance économique et comme l'a dit, à juste titre, l'honorable ministre des Finances et comme nous le savons tous, quand la construction va, tout va. Cette initiative est certes ambitieuse, mais tient-elle la route? L'impact positif sur notre produit intérieur brut des constructions et autres développements liés à ces *smart cities* sera colossal. Mais il est bon de rappeler que ces projets de nouvelles villes sont pour la plupart déjà sur le marché et certaines depuis un certain temps déjà. D'autres ne se sont pas concrétisés eu égard à certaines lenteurs administratives mais la stricte vérité est toute autre. Cette vérité que tout projet immobilier prend du temps pour être imaginé, financé, conçu et finalement bien réalisé. L'immobilier étant le socle de tout projet économique ou social, une école, une université, un hôtel, un centre de sport, une usine ont besoin de terrain et de mur. Ces projets s'inscrivent dans une logique de long terme et ne se réaliseront qu'en séquence. À ce titre, M. le président, je voudrais déposer deux documents : le premier d'Omnicane et le deuxième de

Médine, qui indiquent que ces développements sont prévus dans la durée. Donc, celui du Médine *Master Plan* est inscrit pour la période 2005-2025 et le Mon Desert-Mon Trésor Urban Master Plan Mauritius, *it is a long term regional development vision* pour 2065.

M. le président, l'immobilier a été pour moi, créateur d'opportunités. Mais la chose est simple, comme je vous l'ai dit, ces deux projets prennent du temps car ils répondent principalement à une logique qui est tout simplement celle du marché, celle de l'offre et de la demande. Je peux vous confirmer que tout investisseur avisé ne prendra jamais le risque d'investir massivement dans un projet si le marché n'est pas prêt, si le marché n'est pas capable d'absorber les mètres carrés additionnels. Il faut apprendre des erreurs du passé ; aussi bien le secteur privé que le secteur public, des échecs du projet de *Centre Point*, du *Merit* ou du *Mall of Mont Choisy* sont avant tout des erreurs commerciales qui viennent confirmer que le marché est incapable aujourd'hui d'absorber le nombre de mètres carrés additionnels à court et à moyen terme.

Je suis donc curieux de savoir quelle est la part de ces centaines milliards d'investissements prévus par le ministre des Finances qui vont, pendant les 18 prochaines mois, permettre de porter notre croissance à 5.3%. Par ailleurs, ce projet prévoit de revoir les *guidelines* RES et IRS pour, entre autres, lutter contre la création des ghettos de riches ou par soucis de mixité sociale. Force est de constater que ce ne sont pas seulement des étrangers qui achètent dans les IRS ou dans les RES. Force est de constater également que la majorité des projets de morcellement haut de gamme réalisés depuis de nombreuses années sont des ghettos, de belles maisons entourées d'un grand mur et d'un *gate* à l'entrée, on peut voir ce type de morcellement à Tamarin, à Moka, à Belle Vue, à Grand Baie et j'en passe. Les différents promoteurs qui les ont réalisés ont répondu aux attentes d'une certaine clientèle, soucieuse de sécurité et d'un développement planifié et qui respecte scrupuleusement les *guidelines* afin d'avoir une certaine cohérence esthétique et un bon entretien des parties communes.

Personnellement, je suis contre ces *gated communities* mais je comprends ceux qui se sont laissés tenter par ce style de vie, car, malheureusement, les gouvernements précédents et les autorités locales n'ont pas su apporter les bonnes réponses à leur problématique. Dans les morcellements traditionnels on le voit bien. L'État bien souvent ne joue pas son rôle en laissant proliférer des soi-disant morcellements agricoles et en ne sanctionnant pas les constructions sauvages et illégales.

M. le président, l'État doit pleinement assurer son rôle de garde-fou de notre démocratie et pas seulement pour faire part, pour faire la une des journaux à sensation mais aussi pour veiller à ce que notre population vive dans un environnement de plus en plus de qualité, en ville ou en région rurale.

M. le président, je reviens en quelques mots sur cette volonté de ce gouvernement de revoir l'accession à la législation RES/IRS et je tiens à rappeler quelques chiffres. Ces produits ont rapporté 44 milliards de FDI. Ils ont remporté 4.4 milliards de taxes directement collectées par l'État. C'est quatre-vingt-cinq millions de roupies injectées dans le social et cela représente 24% du FDI pour toute la période. Cette législation est globalement bonne mais certains aspects doivent être modifiés notamment une obligation de GFA couvrant toutes les phases du projet; tous les propriétaires terriens devraient avoir le droit de faire un IRS ou un RES. Cette restriction de *small landowner* n'a pas de sens.

Si le *landowner* veut vendre son terrain et ne veut pas prendre le risque du projet, il doit pouvoir le faire. Il ne doit pas être contraint de rester dans l'actionnariat. Les frais de transferts et d'enregistrement doivent être alignés sur la législation nationale et non plus être uniformisés sur un palier de 25,000 dollars par résidence. Au-delà de cette taille, il y a la nécessité d'avoir un vrai aménagement et de ce fait une législation qui pourrait être ou encadrer celle des fameuses *Smart Cities*. Ainsi, ces nouveaux quartiers où quartiers rénovés pourraient être habités par des mauriciens et seront aussi attractifs pour les étrangers. Et pour cela, j'estime qu'il ne faudrait pas avoir l'ambition de se limiter aux *Smart Cities*. Nous devons avoir l'ambition de transformer toute notre île en un *smart island*. Il faut encourager, encadrer les promoteurs immobiliers : petits, moyens et gros à faire de meilleurs projets plus réfléchis, mieux ciblés, et surtout mieux intégrés. Il faut encourager une rénovation urbaine nationale pour que nos villes redeviennent des endroits où il fait bon vivre.

Quand on parle encore aujourd'hui de Curepipe, ville lumière; Quatre Bornes, ville des fleurs ; quand on voit ce que Grand Baie et Flic en Flac sont devenus, on mesure le travail qui nous reste à accomplir pour changer et transformer le visage de notre île. Nous devons prendre ville par ville, quartier par quartier, ensemble avec le privé, imaginer, conceptualiser, végétaliser, oxygénier toutes ces espaces. Ces *Smart Cities* ne sont pas une réponse durable car elles laissent de côté tout le reste de la population. Explorons le concept de *Smart City* mais étendons ce concept à un *smart island* ainsi que des *smart neighbourhoods* dans tous les endroits. Ayez le projet, certes ambitieux, d'un vaste chantier de rénovation urbaine. Alors où commencer ? Je m'adresse à l'honorable ministre des Terres et du Logement. Tout

simplement par dépoussiérer le rapport MATIM. Ce rapport MATIM dort dans les tiroirs du ministère des Terres et du Logement depuis bientôt 40 ans. Ce fameux rapport MATIM (Mission d'Aménagement du Territoire de l'île Maurice) date des années 70 et avait pour cadre de définir l'aménagement cohérent de notre territoire. Je laisse le soin au Vice-Premier ministre de le sortir, de le dépoussiérer et de voir si ce rapport est encore d'actualité ou pas. Cela pourrait être un début.

Pour conclure sur le volet terrien, M. le président, il faut que notre pays s'ouvre non seulement aux investisseurs mais aux étrangers. N'ayons pas peur de l'étranger. Nous sommes tous de par nos origines un peuple de déracinés et nous avons pourtant appris à vivre ensemble. Il suffit de voir arriver 500 familles étrangères que l'on s'offusque de l'invasion de ces derniers. Nous avons besoin d'idées nouvelles, de capitaux frais et, à ce titre, il est temps d'accepter et de partager nos espaces avec ces nouveaux immigrants économiques car il en va de notre avenir. Je crois que ce gouvernement doit clairement indiquer ce qu'il veut faire de notre île et envoyer des signaux clairs. Je recommande fortement la mise en place d'un comité d'experts afin de rédiger un *Regulatory Impact Assessment* préalable à la mise en place des nouvelles règles IRS/RES. Si ce gouvernement se veut responsable, il doit être totalement conscient de l'impact de tout changement de loi - impact qui peut s'avérer dramatique sur l'attractivité de notre île.

M. le président, je souhaite maintenant survoler rapidement certains secteurs de notre économie et identifier quelques lacunes. La part de l'investissement public dans ce budget est réduite de trois milliards; miser uniquement sur celle du privé et risquer dans les objectifs d'atteindre une croissance de 5.3% sera sérieusement compromise. Par ailleurs, la contribution de notre secteur manufacturier au produit intérieur brut est en baisse. A part le *seafood hub* et quatre pôles textiles: le jean, la chemise, le pantalon, le T-shirt qui ont su se réinventer et ont été en mesure de rivaliser et d'être compétitifs, en général le secteur est morose. Il est prévu d'investir quatre cents millions de roupies pour ce secteur. J'espère que celui-ci sera utilisé pour cibler et valoriser notre savoir-faire. Nous ne sommes plus en compétition avec la Chine ou le Vietnam mais nous devons monter en gamme toujours à la recherche d'un marché de niche et nos compétiteurs directs sont Italie et Singapour.

M. le président, un point inquiétant concerne la productivité de nos employés et, à ce titre, elle doit être au centre de nos préoccupations car il faut inculquer que pour gagner plus, il faut travailler mieux et il n'en ait pas fait mention dans ce budget. Une meilleure productivité de l'économie nationale engendrerait une meilleure production qui de source se

traduirait par un meilleur partage national. Il faut une profonde réflexion et une réforme structurelle dans ce secteur.

Sur le volet agricole, M. le président, depuis que nous avons opté pour la monoculture suite aux accords préférentiels, nous ne produisons plus rien depuis cinquante ans. Fut un temps où nos campagnes produisaient tout: du lait, des légumes et des animaux de ferme. Aujourd’hui, nous importons pratiquement tout. J’invite l’honorable ministre de l’agriculture à venir avec des assises du secteur agricole afin que nous redéfinissions l’avenir de ce secteur ainsi que du pôle gagné.

M. le président, je souhaiterai également commenter les mesures en relation avec le CSR. La plus grosse difficulté des entreprises était ces fameux *CSR guidelines* dont l’obligation était de faire pré-approuver tous les projets par le *National CSR Committee*. Au fil des années, ces *CSR guidelines* se sont complexifiés par de nombreuses restrictions. Il y avait pour résultat que l’entreprise privée faisait de l’administration et non plus du social. Pour autant, devons-nous, l’État, nous désengager de notre mission première. J’ai appris une chose dans la vie. Si on veut réussir, il faut savoir se focaliser sur une ou deux choses, un ou deux objectifs atteignables à défaut de se disperser sur plusieurs autres. Ces entreprises, comme l’honorable Baloomoody l’a fait ressortir, ont contribué à hauteur de six cents à sept cents millions l’année dernière. Concrètement, comment cela va se passer s’il n’y a plus d’interaction avec l’État. L’entreprise financera qui elle veut à savoir du déjeuner de vieillesse, au ballon de football du club de la localité ou même les associations socioculturelles, donc totalement diffus, disperse, non-ciblé et sous productif.

Il me semble primordial d’identifier au minimum un cadre ainsi que des actions définies. Si le ministère de l’intégration sociale en ligne avec le plan Marshall de ce gouvernement estime que la lutte contre l’extrême pauvreté commence par un logement décent, le *social housing*, faisons de cette orientation une priorité majeure et concentrons-nous dessus. Je pense que déléguer au privé sans avoir préalablement défini une orientation laisse le champ libre aux abus et aux actions qui n’auront pas le résultat escompté. Je tiens par ailleurs, M. le président, à saluer les initiatives suivantes -

- l’abolition du plastique, en espérant que la prochaine étape sera le tri sélectif ;
- l’intention de transformer le port ;
- la création de technopoles ;
- la maison de la culture mauricienne ;

- l'évolution de l'agriculture bio, et
- l'amendement de ce *Local Government Act*.

Mais plus en profondeur car j'étais - tout comme l'honorable Madame Boygah et l'honorable Rughoobur et même l'honorable Premier ministre qui a commencé comme Chairman du village de Palma - moi-même *District Councillor* pendant dix ans, donc c'est un secteur que je connais bien. Et à ce titre j'ai pu constater, de l'intérieur, les lacunes inhérentes à ces départements. Donc, une fois pour toutes, réformons cette loi inadaptée.

M. le président, quelques mots sur ma circonscription rapidement. Je demanderai aux autorités d'y accorder une attention particulière. En effet, elle souffre d'un manque cruel de logements sociaux, d'une infrastructure inappropriée et dans certains endroits, on y côtoie une pauvreté extrême.

Voilà, M. le président, nous sommes à l'aube de ce premier budget *l'Alliance Lepep*. Critiquer dans le vide n'a pas de chance, critiquer sans pouvoir comparer en ce qui était promis et réalisé n'est pas productif. Nous le ferons donc en temps et lieu.

En attendant, je vous souhaite à toutes et à tous bonne chance.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun!

(6.06 p.m.)

The Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun):

M. le président, laissez-moi pour commencer dire que l'honorable Jhuboo a été très *fair* dans ce débat et il a trouvé juste de dire qu'on ne peut comparer à ce stage puisque nous sommes seulement là en train de dire quels sont nos projets. Et, en temps et lieu, il pourra juger si nos projets vont finalement se concrétiser ou pas.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I stand before you today, before this House as a proud Member of a Government, a Government to which I belong and which has proved, right from the beginning of its mandate, through its first Budget, that it means business.

I have to extend my congratulations to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development and his team who have masterminded the whole enterprise.

The Finance Minister has indeed set the tone right by demonstrating its capacity to align the Budget on the Government Programme he presented to the nation for the period 2015 and 2019.

This House will recall paragraphs 6 and 7 of the Government Programme that read thus –

“Government’s objective is to transform Mauritius into a truly forward looking, environmentally sustainable, economically vibrant and innovative country with modern infrastructure, global connectivity, high skills and technology.”

Again, paragraph 7 had this to say –

“Government will improve quality of life, accelerate social integration, strengthen democracy and ensure the independent functioning of institutions. The ultimate aim is to shape a second socio-economic miracle in the interest of one and all.”

And now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us cast an educated glance to the 4 main objectives of this Budget. The first reads thus –

“Steer the economy towards a path of high investment and high employment.”

And the remaining 3 go thus –

- Secure long-term sustainable development for all;
- Achieve greater equity and social justice for one and all, and
- Promote transparency and good governance in the management of public affairs.

Anyone would see the coherence between the two documents, indeed, the discourse has not changed.

In fact, the discourse has not changed an iota since the time of the political manifesto of “*l’Alliance Lepep*” that did emphasise the paramount necessity for –

- greater justice and socio-economic betterment;
- the creation and sharing of the national wealth;
- institutional credibility, and
- enhanced transparency, accountability and good governance in the conduct of Government affairs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have carefully scrutinised the Budget. A classic budget presentation merely indicates what measures will be taken and where the money will go for the year - in other words, the here and the now.

But this budget goes many steps further. It indicates a clear vision of the future that this Government wants to construct for the nation.

This is a vision that is not constricted by the *carpe diem* principle. The *carpe diem* principle which says –

“Seize the day, trusting as little as possible in the future.”

No, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget does not rely on this philosophy. This Budget is instead solidly anchored in an article of faith, a vision for the future whose foundation is laid today.

And I see this vision built on 3 major areas of focus -

1. Infrastructural Environment;
2. Employment Generation, and
3. A People Centred Development.

Let us take the infrastructural environment. We have what we call the “Mega Projects” centred around a policy thrust aimed at the development of the country’s infrastructural environment for a more than decent future for all.

The smart cities, the transformation of the Port Louis harbour into a regional hub for bunkering, seafood, transhipment, cruise and petroleum, the restructuring of the IRS/RES – all spell out an approach that necessitates mammoth investments.

This would appear daunting, but when we keep the dividends in balance, the investment would definitely be worthwhile.

In fact, any investment that projects a country in the future is worth making, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

When we come to employment generation, the second area of focus is directly related to the first. This has to be with employment generation and, as a case in point, let us briefly concentrate on the new growth pole that has today secured international acceptance and recognition, namely, the Blue Ocean Economy. We know exactly how ground-breaking this is likely to be. This is what UNCTAD 2014 Report had to say about the Oceans Economy: opportunities and challenges for Small Island Developing States has to say about it, and I quote –

“The oceans economy offers significant development opportunities and also raises challenges for SIDS in sectors such as sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, renewable marine energy, marine bio-prospecting, maritime transport and marine and coastal tourism.”

The Abu Dhabi Declaration on the Blue Economy of January 2014, for its part, offered a framework to protect and enhance the value of marine and coastal systems through an integrated approach. Such is likely to be the growth of this new economy that a plea has been made for enhanced mechanisms for governance of the high seas to be set up while all parties – States, international agencies and donors – were called upon to work out means to support and facilitate the implementation of the Blue Economy in developing countries.

Thus, once the port infrastructure is properly kick-started, it will become a key contributor to the development of the ocean economy. The impact this will have on the SMEs and even the non-formal sector will be incredible. And above all, this will call for a massive demand for a workforce for the relatively new types of jobs that will be created. The National Ocean Council will thus have a heavy responsibility to shoulder in the process of coordination for the effective implantation of Ocean Economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that was only in relation to the Blue Economy. When we think about the other sectors the Budget looks at - the SMEs, the Agro-Industry, the manufacturing industry as well as Tourism, Financial Services and ICT, we realise the whole new set of job opportunities that will be created. Employment prospects when realised and employment opportunities when presented become, in fact, the instrument for social integration, social peace and the base for human and societal development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to come to the third major pillar on which this Budget is premised. In the 2014 statement of its position on the post-2015 development agenda - the African Union Groups, Africa’s development priorities into 6 pillars, the third one in that list is the People-Centred Development. The House will remember that even before his Budget Speech, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development had been steadily stretching the importance he meant to attach to social uplift of the people of the Republic. No one can say that he has not lived up to his words.

We recall here paragraph 14 of the Government Programme which reads thus –

“A key consideration of Government during its mandate will be to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, promote social justice, economic empowerment and national unity and protect the elderly and vulnerable ones.”

The House will agree that both the NGOs and the community at large have been all praised in favour of the Marshall Plan against poverty.

Of special interest to them has been an appreciation of the concept of '*parrainage*' for a list of pockets of poverty that exists in Mauritius. We are not here talking of the one-off CSR sponsorship or a strategy based on adhocracy. Rather, we are talking about a well-planned and well-implemented programme that looks at the overall development of a deprived region in a comprehensive manner.

As the Budget indicates, this takes on board these expected outcomes –

- Improved living conditions generally;
- raised level of employment;
- curb of social ills;
- school attendance by children taken up, integral holistic development of these children;
- the creation of sports and leisure facilities, and
- the improvement of the quality of life generally.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this together with Government's commitment and a spate of other measures that go in the direction of improving the lot of the people, the provision of improved health care facilities, environmental betterment, new social security measures and so on will no doubt bring results. But, by no means, will Government abdicate from its responsibility towards the deprived. It will be good to remind Members of the Opposition that this Government is led by Sir Anerood Jugnauth, a Prime Minister who has the trust of the people, a Prime Minister who will not, at any cost, tolerate dilly-dallying. This is our asset, our Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, and we will certainly work hard and manage to attain our goals.

With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now concentrate on the measures relating to my portfolio, that of Education. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the first annual report by J. P. Morgan Chase, the extremely renowned firm of huge financial assets, is reputed to have stated the following, and I quote –

“The power of intellectual capital is the ability to breed ideas that ignite value.”

And, a few years back, the Deutsche Bank took out a big advertisement in the Wall Street Journal with the headline: ‘Ideas are capital. The rest is just money.’

This, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the world in which our youth are called upon to evolve. Education is now viewed as the creator of the intellectual capital and hence, logically the economic capital. This places a major onus on education and training as the driver of socio-economic transformation.

I will now talk about the integral development of our learners and this has to start quite early, in fact, right from the pre-primary subsector and onwards. We need to move away from the kind of rote learning and didactic frontal teaching to-the-text that have characterised primary schooling so far. We are killing the creativity of our children. Nor are we successfully inculcating a system of values and right attitudes in them.

Competitiveness has become the catchphrase and leaves our children with no opportunity to demonstrate their multiple talents and non-academic achievements. And, these, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are instrumental in the promotion of self-esteem and self-confidence within them.

My Ministry accordingly intends to stress the inculcation and assimilation of the right values - civic and moral - as part of the curriculum. Further, we also want to allow the complete holistic development of our children by providing opportunities for them to develop their full potential. Arts, music, dance and drama need to be introduced in our schools from the very early stages, primary level, indeed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has a plural society and it is of crucial importance that our children learn to respect and accept others. This is why it is essential that they acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours which will enable them to develop a global culture of greater respect for human dignity. And it is now time to introduce human rights education in our schools. This will allow our children to grow with a high self-esteem and a notion of justice, freedom, equality and peace. We intend to roll human rights education at lower secondary level as from January 2016. I would like here to thank the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister’s Office for the support given to my Ministry for the introduction of human rights education in our schools.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the numerous cases of child abuse clearly underlines the urgent need to introduce sexuality education in our schools. And, thus, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the recent unfortunate case of a child in a primary school has reinforced my conviction in

making sexuality education fundamental for all learners and, thus, with a view of protecting our children, of making them aware of the risk that they may face. I think this is extremely important and need to be taken on board very soon. We will need to talk with all stakeholders, get the support of the different stakeholders; the parents, the teachers, the different groups of schools, managers of schools to come up with the proper programme to ensure that our children are well protected.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now quickly talk about the nine year continuous basic schooling. For a decade or more people have been expressing their concern with regard to the CPE. What hasn't been said about the corrosive power of the CPE? Agreed, it did serve a purpose at a time when the educational landscape was not dotted by high number of secondary schools. *A l'époque, un examen qui aurait fait office de certification ainsi que de sélection comme passage obligatoire au cycle secondaire était de rigueur. Mais le CPE a aujourd'hui fait son temps.*

It has also been the cause of a constant hand-wringing in all quarters – the parents, first, who see the debilitating effect it has on their children; the school next, that see the system encouraging rote learning and teaching to-the-text rather than developing the whole child in an integrated manner. *Et ensuite nous avons cet élément de décrochage, une perte importante de ressources humaines qui est économiquement intolérable et moralement inacceptable pour un pays comme Maurice. Donc, je le répète, le CPE a aujourd'hui fait son temps.*

The new Government will not batten down the hatches and wait for the storm of universal dissatisfaction to pass. Rather we will meet it headlong. We are within the next few weeks coming up with a carefully thought through programme for the implementation of the nine years of basic continuous education. Hon. Members on the Opposition side should rest assured that I intend to have a large-scale consultation with all stakeholders, including the hon. Members of the Opposition, prior to the implementation of the new system. For today, let it suffice for me to say that full-scale roll out of the nine year basic schooling is for soon.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if we all agree that every child should have a right to education, then we must bear in mind that this is true for every child and especially for those having special educational needs. The Special Education Needs Resource and Development Centre is welcome as it is an imperative to ensure that access to education is open to all.

Furthermore, four resource centres are being set up at Allée Brillant, Centre de Flacq, Rivière des Anguilles and Plaine Magnien. They will contribute to extend services offered to children with special needs, providing special therapies, paramedical and psychological

support. Together with the precious help of the NGOs, we will ensure that these centres, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, give a new dimension to the life of these children. *Ces enfants doivent pouvoir mener une vie normale et aspirer à un épanouissement sain.*

M. le président, mon ministère a la responsabilité d'un réservoir de jeunes avec un destin à façonner. Ces jeunes sont dans l'expectative d'un futur qui leur soit favorable, que ce soit au niveau autant professionnel que personnel.

However, the unfortunate fact is that, so far, this has not happened. Rather we have been losing our youth to frustration and dispiritedness. For the last few years, the mantra that had been driven into the youth psyche was that of becoming graduates – no matter what the cost. The Government, therefore, inherited a situation where youth employment and employability started to play second fiddle to the cheap politics of slow organising the nation. *On n'a pas oublié encore le ministre Dr. Jeetah passant de porte en porte disant* ‘one graduate per family’ and the like, without any guarantee of quality or any project for ensuring employment of these young graduates.

And what has been the result? Thousands of students with degrees, some of which are not even recognised are still awaiting an opportunity to get a job. Obviously, we cannot leave these young people in the lurch, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This is why this Budget gives the expectations of the young people a timely shot in the arm. They will now be given the possibility of sharpening and updating their skills through bespoke ‘crash courses’ in fields with high job prospects. These will be conducted in recognised Tertiary Educational Institutions. It certainly takes a Government with a heart to assume the responsibility of covering the annual fees amounting to around Rs80,000 for every such student. We are planning to have the service given to about 3,000 graduates without employment.

Et là, je voudrais faire ressortir que le membre de l'opposition, l'honorable Reza Uteem, a raison de dire qu'il est important de bien encadrer les étudiants afin qu'ils choisissent des filières appropriées pour assurer leur avenir. Le *Human Resource Development Council* et le service de *Careers Guidance* devront tous deux déterminer les filières porteuses et guider les jeunes d'une manière efficace.

M. le président, le secteur de l'enseignement supérieur a souffert des carences du régime précédent. Que l'environnement pour l'enseignement supérieur à l'île Maurice ait connu une évolution effrénée, pour ne pas dire anarchique, les quelques dernières années, l'ont amplement démontré. Oui, M. le président, dans pratiquement tous les domaines, qu'il s'agisse de l'enseignement médical supérieur ou le secteur des sciences pures, de l'ingénierie ou des sciences sociales, le nombre croissant d'institutions d'études supérieures, les contenus

académiques et les rapports de ces institutions à leur environnement ont rencontré des défis majeurs au cours de cette phase de croissance. Et cette phase de croissance, qui a quelquefois été au détriment de la bonne gouvernance, n'a hélas pas été sans heurts, et nous en faisons les frais aujourd'hui.

Ainsi, le régime précédent s'est permis de donner des orientations malencontreuses aux étudiants ces dernières années, et la tâche nous est maintenant confiée, au nouveau gouvernement, de veiller à ce qu'aucun étudiant ne soit laissé pour compte en cours de route !

L'un des objectifs de la politique de mon ministère et du gouvernement est donc, présentement, de rechercher l'approche optimale pour relever les défis que présente cet environnement alité de l'enseignement supérieur.

Afin de traduire dans la réalité les axes de développement dans ce secteur, il est question dans un premier temps –

- de relever le lien entre les efforts de recherche des institutions, et
- d'enquêter sur l'ensemble des questions d'optimisation de réglementation, d'assurance qualité, de financement et d'accréditation de l'enseignement supérieur, avec un accent particulier sur leur agencement dans les arènes de l'innovation et de la bonne gouvernance de tous nos organismes de formation.

Notre vision est donc d'abord sur la mise en place des systèmes de formation académique –

- de bon *standing*;
- accessibles à la fois aux jeunes et aux adultes, et
- qui leur garantiront un emploi à la fin de leurs études, avec des diplômes reconnus académiquement et professionnellement.

M. le président, notre auguste Assemblée n'est pas sans savoir qu'un audit de notre système de l'enseignement supérieur a été effectué par la *Quality Assurance Agency* de l'Angleterre. Une première ébauche de ce rapport nous est déjà parvenue avant que les rédacteurs n'aillettent de l'avant avec la phase finale. Mais d'ores et déjà on voit l'étendue du travail qui attend mon ministère. N'empêche ! Mon Ministère est actuellement un pied d'œuvre pour repositionner le secteur afin qu'il puisse être une plate-forme fiable et crédible pour l'éducation et la formation.

Plus concrètement, on vient, comme annoncé dans ce présent budget, avec un projet de loi sur l'enseignement supérieur, qui est en cours de préparation. C'est ainsi que nous

agencerons nos universités en termes d'accès, de disponibilité, de différentiation des prestations de formations, et les contenus de programmes afin d'assurer la qualité et la progression durable de ces formations sur le long terme.

Pour réaliser cette vision, mon ministère et la *Tertiary Education Commission*, dont le fonctionnement sera revu, seront des plateformes de coordination et d'engagement approfondies, afin qu'en ensemble et avec l'expérience nationale et internationale dans ces secteurs nous trouvions des solutions aux problèmes identifiés.

Puisque notre gouvernement souhaite faire de Maurice un centre de savoir, il nous faut nous assurer que l'éducation de qualité soit délivrée par toutes nos institutions et surtout de nous assurer également qu'il n'y ait point de dissonance entre l'offre académique et la reconnaissance professionnelle ultérieure de cette formation universitaire. S'il le faut, nous allons trancher, et trancher sur le vif.

La *TEC* est aujourd'hui appelée à être plus vigilante et à résilier toute accréditation accordée à des institutions d'études supérieures qui ne sauraient être en règle avec les normes de qualité et de pérennité.

M. le président, si on veut tabler chez une économie du savoir, il faut bien que nos institutions de l'enseignement supérieur fassent la part belle, d'une part, à la recherche, qui est la source même du savoir. Les services informatiques, la médecine, la biotechnologie et l'industrie marine sont autant de secteurs de recherche qui méritent une attention particulière de par l'aspect pratique qu'ils engendrent non seulement pour Maurice mais également pour la région.

D'autre part, je trouve dommage qu'un pays aussi multilingue que Maurice n'est pas encore misé sur le développement des capacités de nos jeunes dans le domaine de la traduction et de l'interprétariat, surtout quand on a comme ambition de faire de l'île Maurice une destination pour les conférences internationales.

J'ai bien l'intention d'y remédier en encourageant l'Université de Maurice et le MGI à mettre en place des laboratoires linguistiques et multimédias, afin de donner un essor à ces nouveaux domaines de développement. C'est tout cela qui nous donnerait une longueur d'avance sur nos compétiteurs dans ces *niches areas*.

M. le président, vous comprendrez donc que l'enseignement supérieur est un secteur auquel je paie une attention particulière. Je suis déterminée à redonner ses lettres de noblesse au secteur de l'enseignement supérieur, afin que celui-ci soit fermement ancré et imbriqué dans la grande famille de l'éducation, et aussi à exercer efficacement son rôle de contribution à la croissance sociale et économique de notre pays.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has the responsibility to ensure that our young learners avail themselves of all curricular competencies for a smooth transition and progression from these different levels of education. Maintaining a strategic linkage between these subsectors is crucial, especially given the potential to propel secondary and technical/vocational students in the entrepreneurial hubs.

I also deem it vital to have an effective articulation between TVET and higher education.

Today's global conversation resolves around the linkage between the world of education and human resource development and the dispersion of responsibilities related to human resource development. Education and human resource policies have then to be situated in the promotion of lifelong learning within a human resource development perspective. Our learners will have to develop great versatility.

This is especially so given that we have a wide range of learners who would be expected to go through a constant phase of de-skilling and re-skilling at different stages of their professional lives.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the new impetus in the world of TVET is today leading the country to step up and venture into new areas of training. Thus, as Mauritius positions itself to develop its ocean economy as well as the SME sector, the TVET and the human resource development subsectors will be called upon to play an increasingly important role as providers of skilled workers and technicians.

In particular, it is intended to put up an appropriate skills development system which will contribute to strengthen the human capital base of the country.

If there is one myth that is hard to eliminate from the minds of people - and only in Mauritius - it is that concerning the TVET sector. For a long time now, skills-based learning has been frowned upon as lower level at best, demeaning at worst.

There is a pressing need to *revaloriser ce secteur*. It is about time that people understand and appreciate the role of institutions providing technical and vocational education in genuine human resource development.

I am deeply appreciative that this Budget has stressed the significance to be attached to polytechnics. Modern-day polytechnics are no less in significance and scale than established universities. In fact, they provide for the filling of major positions for middle level professional and technical skills, skills that ultimately contribute to the empowerment and quasi-employment of work-ready graduates.

The polytechnics in Mauritius will work with both private and public sector players to successfully provide the necessary skilled manpower for the emerging sectors highlighted in this Budget as well as enhance national productivity.

It is also worth highlighting that my Ministry has already embarked, with the support of development partners (*Agence Française de développement*), on the formulation of a new National Skills Development Strategy for Mauritius over the short and medium term, in view of identifying and matching the skilled labour supply requirements for existing as well as the emerging sectors of the economy. It is worth noting that elsewhere in the world, young people favour entering the technical stream as the related salary package tends to be more attractive and sometimes the pay package is higher than for graduates from the academic stream.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the three parastatal organisations responsible for TVET subsector, and which fall under the aegis of my Ministry, namely the MQA, the HRDC, the MITD and the polytechnics, will be called upon to shoulder higher-order responsibilities in the near future, in the fulfilment of their strategic functions – that of regulatory body for the MQA, HR planning and orientation for the HRDC and that of training provider for the MITD.

Among other things, for example, the HRDC will need to spearhead and facilitate the implementation of training programmes, which are critical for the development of the new growth poles of the economy as well as provide all necessary support for such crosscutting projects as –

- the three Polytechnics under construction at Réduit, Montagne Blanche, and Pamplemousses, and
- the conversion programme for some 3,000 unemployed graduates whose training do not match market requirements.

Again, the HRDC will –

- (i) be called upon to forge deeper linkages with the private sector and operating on a demand driven basis rather than the generic recommendations on skills gaps, and
- (ii) concentrate on its role to stimulate a culture of training and lifelong learning at the individual, organisational, and national levels with a view to enhancing employability of the labour force and contributing to their enhanced innovation and productivity, and

- (iii) they will also be required to significantly improve the effectiveness of the current mechanism for administering, controlling and operating the National Training Fund such that we obtain value for money in the allocation of financial and levy grants.

In this regard, I wish to reassure the House that the provision has been made in the Finance Bill such that the Human Resource Development Act 2003 will be subsequently amended with a view to streamlining its institutional provisions.

We will also thereby ensure that the skills mismatch issue is addressed in a more effective manner and the trainer-employer synergy be promoted.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry will introduce a *Chambre des Métiers Bill* that will provide for the establishment and management of the *Chambre*. This *Chambre des Métiers* will give due recognition to the various professions, including the registration of people in the different trades, setting standards for training facilities and qualification in each stream. The main objective of the *Chambre* will be to encourage tradesmen to become true professionals through appropriate skills development. Enable small enterprises to have a platform for the promotion of the interest of tradesmen and their trade in general and improve the status and safeguard the interests of tradesmen and trades in general.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has already worked out a preliminary draft “*Chambre des Métiers*” Bill after discussions with the close collaborators of the public sector and the private sector. My Ministry will shortly initiate wide consultations with relevant stakeholders in Mauritius of this draft Bill prior to its finalisation.

We are also looking into models available in other countries and how the “*Chambre des Métiers*” has to be set up in Mauritius and how it could be adapted, taking into consideration the specificities and realities of our own labour market. In this regard, I am pleased to inform the House that representatives of my Ministry met a delegation from the “*Chambre des Métiers et de l’artisanat*” of Reunion Island last week in Mauritius to explore collaborative ventures between the two islands. The ultimate aim is to instil a high dose of professionalism in the ‘*métiers of artisans*’ and craftsmen in Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, John Fitzgerald Kennedy is known to have once said -

“When written in Chinese, the word ‘crisis’ is composed of two characters.

One represents danger and the other represents opportunity”.

As Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, I look upon these challenges in the education and training fields and they are many as opportunities to bring about change and transformation.

The significance of knowledge as a critical input for modern economies has since long been recognised. This implicitly places into focus the necessity to create conditions for the establishment of what has been called the ‘Knowledge Triangle’, the linkage between education, research and industry.

My endeavour will be, in fact, to work towards creating the enabling conditions for the learners to live fulfilled life both as individuals and the intellectual capital “breeding idea that would ignite value”.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(6.42 p.m.)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, Madam Speaker will now resume the Chair.

At this stage Madam Speaker took the Chair.

Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière): Madam Speaker, allow me, first of all, before coming to the Budget, to wish the Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, *bonne chance*. The Ministry of Education is a very important one and the Minister, hon. Mrs Dookhun-Luchoomun has the very delicate task to clean the mess left by the former Minister Jeetah, especially at the TEC and she can rely on our support, not only for the education sector which is a non-political issue but also as other sectors where that person had his hands.

Coming to the Budget, Madam Speaker, I am very proud to stand in the National Assembly as it is my 32nd year as MP and I shall be giving my comments on the 32nd budget of a Government. I had the opportunity of commenting on several budgets, be it as MP, as PPS, as a backbencher, as a Minister of Government, and now as a Member of the MMM Opposition. As I said, I am very proud to be here to give my comments on this very important item on our Parliamentary democracy system.

Madam Speaker, a quarter of a century ago I was here, listening to the budget presented by our Minister of Finance, my good friend hon. Minister Lutchmeenaraidoo and the Prime Minister was then the Prime Minister in 1989.

And after the presentation of the budget, for several weeks, even months, the effect of his speech was there within the population, not only the common man, but the private sector, the civil servants and the business community; they were all discussing after one month the effect of the budget. We have had the Budget Speech on 23 March 2015 and it is

our 6th sitting, three weeks now since we are discussing on this Budget. What do we see outside? The population is no longer talking about the Budget; things have changed.

(Interruptions)

Allow me to speak! I have listened to your speech. The mood of the population has changed - it might be because of events. There have been events after the presentation of the Budget *et quelles sont les préoccupations de la population? Je ne veux pas être démagogique, mais c'est l'augmentation du coût de la vie, le problème de law and order.* Il y a un problème réel de *law and order* dans les différentes circonscriptions, il y a un problème réel au niveau organisationnel de la Police. And there is the recent problem of the British American Insurance. Everybody is talking about it. It doesn't affect only the business community, the banking sector, our reputation as a financial sector in general, but also those innocent people who have invested in this scheme.

This morning, I received, as MP, three old ladies. One has invested Rs5 m. after the sale of the house which she had obtained from her husband. She got into that project through a salesperson. There is one civil servant who has put all his retirement benefits in that scheme and there is a person who has put all his VRS money in that scheme. These are poor innocent people and all of them have shown me their certificates. This is where I join my friend, hon. Baloomoody, for the plea he has made to Government.

We, as MPs, have been talking about the difficulties that we are facing as politicians. I have been discussing with the Vice-Prime Minister, hon. Soodhun, who is also a long standing Member of the House. We are not interested to know whether the owners still have their first class tickets to travel around the world or whether the owner can hire a private jet to go to the Bahamas. This is not our problem. As MPs, we have also a duty towards the nation to see to it that these persons pay for what they have done. This is why Government has its duty and is doing what it should have been doing.

Government must also have at heart the interest of these poor innocent people who have been caught, perhaps, in a trap and, at least, show them some sense of humanity. This is the plea that I am making, right at the outset of my intervention, before coming to the Budget, because we meet members of the public. During the weeks to come, I have heard that some people are gathering all these persons. There might also be people trying to group these people and form a new political party. This is their problem, but we, as MPs, as far as we are concerned, we have at heart the interest of these poor people who have been caught in this trap.

Madam Speaker, before coming to the Budget, I would talk on the agricultural sector, especially the small planters. Since three months now, we have witnessed the crusade which the hon. Prime Minister is leading against those corrupt people. There have been results; we have seen; we have witnessed, but once we had this slogan of ICAC - '*ICAC pas capave guete figir*', what I am asking Government, through the hon. Prime Minister, is that, at least, Government should not pick and choose. There is an impression; those who have to go to jail must go to jail. Those who have done dirty things, they have to pay because it's public money, it's morality, but Government should see to it - and I appeal to the hon. Prime Minister – that there is no discrimination. I am not saying that he is making discrimination, but people are talking, names are being mentioned that certain people are being spared, because they will be the star witness, and so on. I take one name, that of Mr Gooljaury. There is another one who is still hiding in UK, Mr Teeren Appasamy. All the proceedings of what he did at the MCB/NPF are still there. He was supposed...

(Interruptions)

'Mo pane cause are toi Gayan, laisse mo terminer! To so avocat toi? To avocat Teeren Appasamy toi?'

Madam Speaker: No cross talking, please! Address the Chair!

Mr Bhagwan: Let me have my views.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, address the Chair!

Mr Bhagwan: And then, we have one Mr Lee-Shim who came to Mauritius. It can be a previous case but we have a Government, it might be the previous Government, but what we are asking is that this case be re-opened and see all the avenues. We have to bring that person here who has stolen Rs800 m. of public money from the NPF and MCB, and then we have one Mr Lee-Shim on whom I asked PQs myself. He was *persona non grata* in Mauritius. How come he came to Mauritius, he went directly to the Central CID, gave statements and then, left the country!

(Interruptions)

And he went on the radio when he was at the Central CID.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Baloomoody, please!

Mr Bhagwan: This is why I am asking with all seriousness, the hon. Prime Minister with all his reputation, at least, to see to it that nobody is spared.

(Interruptions)

But there are new cases also.

Madame la présidente, je vais maintenant venir sur quelques commentaires sur le budget du ministre Lutchmeenaraidoo.

Madam Speaker, yesterday, we had a PNQ on the sugar industry and we all know that *la survie même de l'industrie sucrière est menacée*. The hon. Minister has given replies to us, we are satisfied with them, but we see that this very important industry is in danger and the hon. Leader of the Opposition made a request to the hon. Minister to have a Master Plan and to see to it that there are new incentives, there are new avenues to redevelop, to save that industry.

This morning, I was listening to one of the trade unionists, Mr Ashok Subron, who was appealing to the hon. Minister concerning one particular report and if we want to succeed in that reorganisation process which started back in 2002/2003 when hon. Jugnauth was Minister of Agriculture, we will need to have everybody on board, not only the owners of the factories, but even we, Parliamentarians, we will have to give a helping hand because it concerns the survival of the main industry which has been there for such a long time. So, I appeal to the hon. Minister, at least, to hear the voice of the trade unionists, not only Mr Ashok Subron, who is a trade unionist, but also others who are also very keen to give their support to the Ministry and the Government in order to save this very important industry.

Madam Speaker, our basic agricultural production is severely suffering these days and yet, we are talking of agro-industry. The budgetary measures announced for the Agro-industry sector, according to me, are not enough for a country which needs absolutely to aim at food security in a viable and competitive agricultural sector. We need to facilitate, encourage and technically support our planters and farmers to achieve self-sufficiency in our basic agricultural production. We are, here, thinking about the potatoes, onions, garlic and even vegetables, and also animal products. This is a very important sector where I think the hon. Minister must give maximum attention to facilitate and encourage our planters. Once this sustainability is attained, we can think about the next step which is agro-industry. Government has come up with a bio farming development certificate. This certificate will include a package of incentives and an 8-year tax holiday and other facilities.

Once more, Government, through this Budget, is giving monetary incentives to the private sector because such project is only implementable by the private sector, but in order for small planters to take advantage of such facilities, there will be a need for technical support and appropriate training facilities for our planters also. This, the Government has not mentioned, the hon. Minister has not mentioned, I am appealing to the hon. Minister and asking him to see to it that our small planters also be given training facilities in this bio-

farming sector. These days when we talk about small farmers, *ils sont très démotivés que ce soit au niveau du secteur agricole mais aussi au niveau des légumes*, be it small planters, be it big planters.

Madam Speaker, with this Budget, the small planters feel that they have been excluded; they have raised several issues through their representatives on radios and in the press which are genuine concerns to this sector. The hon. Minister has informed the population that the Government is giving a one-off Rs2,000 per tonne assistance for those producing up to 60 tonnes and Rs3,400 for those who are producing less. From what we have gathered, this money comes from the Sugar Insurance Fund Board. These farmers have appealed to Government that special efforts be made to increase this grant because of the difficulties they are facing, they have not even been able to purchase fertilisers these days because of their income. You know better, you have been in this sector, Madam Speaker. These small planters don't have much revenue. The price of sugar has been falling over the years and they have had very, very big problems which are not taken care of. Whatever has been said in speeches has not been taken care of by the different Governments during the past 10 years. So, there is need to help and make a special additional effort for these small farmers.

Madam Speaker, the planters have also asked the hon. Minister - I think they have sent a request - for the amendment of the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act with regard to the price of bagasse. Actually, they are receiving Rs24 per tonne of bagasse and we all know that this bagasse is being used for the production of electricity. We have also been made to understand that, with the trend which we are having, it may happen that there is no bagasse at all. The planters have gone less to their fields and the outcome is that bagasse is less. So, this will give an incentive to the farmers to go to their fields. We all know the impact of bagasse for the production of electricity which has a big impact on the financial outcome on the sugar industry itself.

We all know also that planters are abandoning - I stated yesterday - because of the problem of *métayage*. The hon. Minister has agreed to relook into this FORIP mechanism. Planters are abandoning their fields and this has been going on and figures have been produced. One demand which has also been made by the planters, Madam Speaker *c'est d'aplanir les difficultés légales pour qu'ils puissent donner leur terrain pour la construction des maisons*. At a certain period of time, there was a legislation which was passed or regulation giving planters incentives for doing small *morcellements* like those planters who could not go into the agricultural sector, who could not continue with the sugarcane plantation. We don't know what has happened afterwards because normally if you go for a

morcellement, there is need for money to be injected, for money to be given as bank guarantee. The hon. Minister may inform us later on. We shall be coming with a parliamentary question on that subject so that these planters may be allowed to do small *morcellements* of two, three or four plots and even to give plots to their families to build houses. Actually, there is some technical problem on that score.

As far as the vegetable planters are concerned, Madam Speaker, I know in the Constituency of the hon. Minister, at Quatre Soeurs and all the coastal regions, onion planters are facing lots of difficulties with the problem of erosion, with the problem of their deeds with the hon. Minister of Housing and Lands.

As far as we are concerned, in our own Constituency, we have the planters of La Chaumi re which is a *grenier de l' le Maurice*. Normally, after each election we have a Minister who comes. The hon. Minister of Cooperatives has been there from what I have heard for a site visit with television and so on. It is a one-off visit. So, I would appeal to the hon. Minister. There is even a store which was given to them by the Agricultural Marketing Board. These planters, who are in Constituency Nos. 19 and 20, have been on their own for many, many years. These planters have been giving a lot of their time since generations. At a certain period of time, there was not even electricity. They were given all incentives like additional land. So, what I would appeal to the hon. Minister is, at least, to make a special effort to regroup these planters and give them whatever technical support in terms of fertilisers, subsidy or pumping equipment. Some have even boreholes. It is the country which will benefit from that. I would request the present Government to help these planters.

Madam Speaker, *je demanderai aussi   l'honorable ministre de faire un effort au niveau des  leveurs de porcs de St Martin. Je ne sais pas si cela tombe sous son minist re ou le minist re des coop ratives.* Au niveau de St Martin, though there is a need to boost up this sector, there is a real problem of environment which is affecting the health of the people. Maybe, the hon. Minister of environment can help. There is a borehole near La Ferme from which not only the people of the region, but also the CWA takes water.

Madam Speaker, I will come to two housing projects in my Constituency. Last time, I asked a parliamentary question to hon. Minister Soodhun concerning the houses which are being built at Chebel and Maingard. From what we see, these housing projects had been initiated without any proper planning. There is one at Maingard which is called Barkly Maingard; the houses are built in a low area. I think it is a marginal land which has been given to Government under this 2,000 *arpents* scheme. In case the Ministry, through the NHDC, does not invest in a proper drainage system and if these houses are delivered to

people benefiting from the lower level scheme, then there will be big problems. I am appealing to the hon. Minister, through the new Budget, to see to it that there is a proper Master Plan for the drainage and same applies for Chebel.

At Chebel also, there are houses which are being built here and there. On small plots of lands, there are two or three houses. There is no proper planning. So, there is an urgent need for the hon. Minister to have a rethink in this housing project which is being implemented at Cité Chebel - where there are, I think, 50 houses which are nearly under completion - so that these works may be effected prior completion.

The same applies for the project at Petite Rivière. At Petite Rivière, the project was initiated when hon. Duval was the Minister responsible. It was in 2011. There also, Madam Speaker, there are 59 housing units, commonly known as *lakaz boîte zalimet*. Even the *l'Evêché* did an exhibition here, at Cathedral Square, to show that Mauritians cannot survive in so small *boîte zalimet*.

Hon. Minister Roopun is not in the House. I asked a parliamentary question regarding these houses where the contractor has defaulted. He has defaulted not only in terms of time frame but also in terms of quality. I asked the hon. Minister to have a site visit because he has been given a wrong reply. My colleague, hon. Quirin and myself, we know what is happening there. The reply of the hon. Minister was that there was no structural damage. And if you go and visit these houses – only 5 or 6 houses have been delivered following the flash floods of Port Louis. We have got people in Pailles who have been transferred there. But the house itself, *cela commence à craquer* and the officers of the Ministry has informed the Minister that -

“I am informed that no structural defect has been noted till today.”

So, this reply is not correct and I informed the hon. Minister that there is urgency not only to ask the contractor that he must have a bank guarantee or some deposits, but also to have an inquiry, through the relevant authorities, of how these houses have been constructed and whether the procedures have been followed. We have been told that the procedures have been followed, but we do not think so. It is a shame for modern Mauritius if you go there and see the way these houses have been constructed - *boîte zalimet*. If you ask me and my friend, hon. Jhugroo, to go through the door, we would not be able to get in the house. The door is so small.

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker, since we are talking about Budget, our Constituency has been penalised - I am not doing politics - for the past years as far as projects from the NDU and the Ministry of Public Infrastructure are concerned. Perhaps there are other Constituencies also. So, we are appealing to the Prime Minister responsible for NDU through the PPS.

I have been a PPS myself; I have never done such things. When you ask a PPS who is responsible for two Constituencies, he will spend most of his time in looking about his own Constituency and even taking the maximum of the budget allocated to him to his Constituency instead of sharing it equitably. So, what I am appealing to the hon. Prime Minister is, at least, to make sure that the PPS responsible for our Constituency, makes sure that *nous rattrapons ce retard*. We are not asking more, but we are asking for the projects identified, especially land drainage and roads rehabilitation and the same for the Public Infrastructure. There is one particular project which started from July last year and, up to now, the work is not completed.

At Chebel, at the road leading to the temple, starting from the main road, there was a drain. It is a classified road, so, it is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. Work started some 8 months back by COLAS and then it was left behind. We have been told that there is no money. So, we have had lots of problems during the rainy period and we foresee further problems in case this project is not completed. It is left half or three-quarter completed as is the case now.

Madam Speaker, a budget is the intention of Government. It is a new Government and the first budget. There are some positive measures. My good friend, hon. Dayal, is not here. I started through the National Environment Commission when the hon. Prime Minister chaired in 2000. We first initiated several strategic measures and one is to stop the extraction of sand. Mauritius is gaining, it is revitalising our lagoons like lead-free petrol. We started first with biodegradable plastics and the next step would have been banning plastics, I would say, the common plastics which are used and found everywhere. So, the decision of banning plastics is a good initiative. From what I heard, the manufacturers would be brought on board and we are also asking the hon. Minister what he has promised, the plastics which are being used by the household, in the *poubelle*, but this also should be taken care of.

Madam Speaker, those were my comments on the Budget. We will be here next year to make the *bilan*, we will be asking questions at Committee Stage and, at the end of the day,

it is the country which must be the winner. We will be around to see and examine the results the next coming financial year.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Soodhun!

(7.13 p.m.)

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr S. Soodhun): Madam Speaker, he is, as we say, the pioneer in this House, my good friend, hon. Rajesh Bhagwan, who is a good brother as qualified by the hon. Member. I am not going to comment for the time being concerning the proposals or the remarks made by my good friend. I can assure him that this Government is not going to *faire la sourde oreille*. He also rests guaranteed that he is dealing with responsible people who are going to listen and we are going to implement what we have said.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has rightly pointed out that we are indeed at the crossroad of transforming Mauritius into a country where socio-economic conditions benefit each and everyone.

Madam Speaker, without wasting the precious time of the House, let me come to the measures pertaining to the Ministry of Housing and Lands.

First of all, I will elaborate on housing issues, which concern everybody, the whole population.

During the last 10 years, only 2,585 housing units of 39 square metres have been constructed by the previous Government and I have already given the details. My good friend, hon. Ganoo, asked me a parliamentary question and I gave him clear details about this. This is the *bilan* of the Government of Navin Ramgoolam.

L'Alliance Lepèp has, on its side, promised 10,000 housing units during our mandate of 5 years and we are going to make it.

I announced earlier in the House that this Government will provide for decent housing units which cater for the real needs of the population. *Parole donnée* of Sir Anerood Jugnauth is *parole sacrée*! I had a long discussion with the Prime Minister and he has given me a clear instruction on how he wants the houses to be. I totally agree with my good friend, hon. Bhagwan, that the houses which have been built during the 10 years were qualified by Père Labour as “*des boîtes d'allumettes*”. It is true.

Madam Speaker, the size of the new housing units is being increased from 39 m² to 50 m². In his intervention, hon. Uteem said that he was very disappointed about the fact that the Minister of Finance and Economic Development announced only 1000 low-cost houses on 83 *arpents* of State land and only 700 housing units under the NEF that will be constructed. Let me inform the House that for the moment, 1423 housing units are under construction now. The project of building of 1000 low-cost houses on 50 m² is expected to start within three months. I believe as at April 2016, 3,000 housing units will be completed. What they had done in 10 years, I am going to complete more than that in one and a half years. *Insha Allah!* I am sure, Madam Speaker.

Furthermore, hon. Uteem claims that the Government has not taken into account the housing needs of various income groups. Well, I will refer the hon. Member to the definition of social housing. It is housing provided to people with low income or with particular needs. This Budget perfectly responses to the requirements of social housing.

However, my Ministry, in collaboration with the NHDC is studying the setting up of new eligibility criteria. Different categories of income groups are being studied to further benefit more citizens.

Hon. Members are aware that the NHDC is located in Rose Hill. There is only one office for the whole country. Therefore, applicants for the different facilities have to go to the NHDC for any queries and so on. I am proposing now to decentralise the service so as to spare applicants of the ordeal to call at the NHDC. Henceforth, applications for housing facilities and assistance under the other housing schemes will be registered at the Citizens' Advice Bureau offices throughout the island. To assist applicants in filling their respective application forms, CAB officers will be appropriately trained so that they can properly advise callers around the island.

(Interruptions)

If needed, we are going to do that. This is not a problem. But we are going to try. Let us try! However, all applications will continue to be examined and processed at the level of the NHDC for eligibility and determination.

The housing estates will be designed in such a manner as to accommodate some basic social and recreational amenities like polyvalent hall, playing space, crèche and other facilities. It is really well mentioned by my colleague, hon. Bhagwan, that for the actual construction, we only have small houses with no social amenities. These social and recreational infrastructure facilities will be managed by the respective local authorities.

Madam Speaker, for the first time, the financial assistance for roof slabs and even the income threshold have been increased. It is also through the contribution. We have listened carefully to our friends in the Opposition and we have taken them into consideration and the Minister of Finance and Economic Development has been able to do it. The Roof Slab Grant Scheme has gone from Rs65,000 to Rs75,000 for those earning up to Rs10,000 monthly. In the past, all those earning less than Rs8,500 were eligible for the scheme. Let me remind the hon. Member that now, we are also including persons who earn as from Rs10,001 up to Rs15,000 monthly. For this category, the Roof Slab Grant Scheme will be up to Rs40,000. This is new! We are targeting more than 2,000 families who will be able to benefit from this aid of the Government annually. Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the financial aid for the purchase of construction materials has been increased from Rs55,000 to Rs65,000. Families earning up to Rs10,000 can apply for that grant.

Hon. Uteem also believes that households with monthly income exceeding Rs15,000 are being left out, but he is wrong. The Ministry of Housing and Lands is providing 436 serviced plots of land to families with monthly income between Rs10,000 to Rs25,000. An appropriate extent of 60 *toises* is being provided for this income group, at the annual nominal rental fees of Rs3,000.

Madam Speaker, our actions do not limit to only providing housing units, serviced plots or financial aid. My Ministry is also involved in the process of the democratisation of land ownership. It is not the same as hon. Ms Deepalsing, alias *micro*. Better forget!

(Interruptions)

That is through sale of lands to the families holding building site leases over plots of State land not exceeding 10 perches and over which stand their residential unit. Again, 3,543 genuine cases have been found by the Ministry. Now, we are initiating the procedures to allow these families to become owners of the plot of land which they are occupying. 3,543 in nearly four months!

Madam Speaker, for the first time in the history of Mauritius, my Ministry is coming up with a humane solution to tackle the issue of squatters. Let me inform hon. Members that Port Louis will be the first region concerned. Out of 332 families leaving as squatters on State land, the situation of 52 will be regularised at the actual place they are occupying. 233 will be relocated at Pointe aux Sables, whereas the Ministry is looking for an alternative site for the relocation of some 43 families. Madam Speaker, as at 01 May of this year, my Ministry has decided to clear all squatters in Port Louis.

(Interruptions)

It is the first time!

(*Interruptions*)

We will have no more squatters! And we are not just destroying the houses or whatever; we are providing other facilities, much better than where they are. This is what we are doing.

These families will be able to seek assistance from the National Empowerment Foundation and the Mauritius Housing Company. So, as from next month, the problem of squatters in Port Louis will be sorted out.

In connection with the efficient management of State land, my Ministry came up with a proposal for the creation of a State Land Register. A request to that effect has been made to the existing contractor of the LAVIMS project. Following submission of the contractor, consultations with the Procurement Policy Office and Central Informatics Bureau are on.

Let me now come to the allocation of State land. Who has ever thought that big sharks are not caught only in the sea but also on State land? The former Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, and the previous Government had distributed prime land, even *pieds dans l'eau*, to relatives, *cousins*, *cousines*, *copains*, *copines*, political agents, and even to mistresses of political agents.

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Rutnah, please, do not interrupt the hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

Mr Soodhun: Since, Madam Speaker, I assumed office in line with Government's vision, efforts are being made at the level of my Ministry to retrieve all lands where the promoters have systematically not complied with the conditions.

Consideration is also being given to the retrieval of land in cases where the proposed development has not taken place. As at today, the process has been initiated for the retrieval of some 500 *arpents* of State land resulting from such non-compliance. Some other cases have already been referred to the State Law Office for advice with a view to retrieving approximately another 100 *arpents* of land. Do you imagine! And these people are not only criminals! To take this bold decision and to retrieve the land was not easy. Let me inform the House that several times they threatened to kidnap my granddaughter.

(*Interruptions*)

Yes.

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo, please no cross talking when the hon. Vice-Prime Minister is intervening!

Mr Soodhun: I have to thank the Rt. hon. Prime Minister and hon. Minister Pravind Jugnauth who have given me full support in every incident that happened. Even when I was going for shopping, there was a ‘Sungkur’. Certainly, I don’t have a bodyguard to go shopping with my granddaughter of two and a half years at Super U. It was not easy to tackle with these people. My friends on the other side – the young boys in this Parliament, I appreciate hon. Jhuboo’s sober speech.

(Interruptions)

I will explain later how he got the plot of land at Trou-aux-Biches.

Madam Speaker, I have to inform the House that I have set up a dedicated committee at the level of my Ministry to examine and identify weaknesses in the present system of allocation of State land. The committee will also propose new ways and means to bring fairness and transparency in the exercise.

Furthermore, this committee will be coming up with a revised policy framework which will clearly lay down the procedures for the processing of application for the allocation of State land. In this connection, the legislative framework will also be reviewed and consolidated to ward off any abuse and sanction of malpractices. Then, as announced in the Budget, for greater transparency, the names of the beneficiaries of new leases of State land will be published in the Government Gazette, giving details of the lands leased and for which purpose.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that the Town and Country Planning Act, which dates back to 1954, and the Planning Development Act of 2004 will be reviewed. Instead, a new Land Use Planning and Development Act will be prepared in order to come up with a proactive approach to land development.

I must add to that, Madam Speaker, that a much-delayed positive outcome in urban planning has been the preparation and finalisation of the new Outline Planning Schemes for the five municipal council areas following a full-fledged revision of the 1995 outdated scheme.

Not later than this week, the new Outline Planning Scheme for Curepipe has been approved by the President of the Republic. The new schemes for Beau Bassin/Rose Hill and Quatre Bornes are being approved at any time now. The last two Outline Planning Schemes are Port Louis and Vacoas-Phoenix; they will be submitted for approval shortly.

Madam Speaker, a Fast Track Committee is being set up at the level of my Ministry under my chairmanship. The objective is to avoid all bureaucracy concerning requests which aim to attract foreign direct investment.

Madam Speaker, it is important that we let the population know why mud is being thrown on the Budget presented by the Government.

When Sir Anerood Jugnauth was the President of the Republic, it was none other than the Leader of the Opposition, hon. Paul Bérenger, who convinced him to jump back into the political field. I am the star witness together with my friend hon. Dr. Joomaye.

(*Interruptions*)

Star witness of this negotiation.

(*Interruptions*)

We can say that the Leader of the MMM told Sir Anerood Jugnauth many things in front of us. I am not going to reveal all, but a few: “*Pays à la derive; Ramgoolam pe pourri ça pays-là; bizin nettoyer; redresse l'économie ; combatte fraude et corruption.*” This was the starting point between two leaders. As a true patriot, Sir Anerood Jugnauth came out to save the country. I have to mention it. He said: “*Paul to pe dire moi sorti, pangare to pou abandonn mwa au milieu chemin.*” It was said on that particular day. This is very important for all, and maybe many hon. Members were not aware. Even Paul Bérenger used to say that *Remake c'est le cauchemar de Navin Ramgoolam*. We had everything to win.

Today, my friend, the hon. Leader of the Opposition should have been on this side of the House, on the front bench, governing the country, cleaning the mess created by the previous Government as he had promised to do so. But what happened? The Labour Party made hon. Paul Bérenger believe that with remake, he will have to wait too long to become Prime Minister, whereas Dr. N. Ramgoolam was offering the possibility to make hon. Bérenger Prime Minister as soon as he departs from the State House after the general election.

(*Interruptions*)

No, we should not blame hon. Ganoo. Anybody cannot do without the permission of a leader. Even me, I cannot move without the permission of the leader. I have nothing to blame hon. Ganoo.

(*Interruptions*)

That was the ‘*véritable partie de pêche de requins*’. The whole of the MMM got caught. Then hon. Bérenger started the episode of ‘on and off’.

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo!

Mr Soodhun: It hurts me. Hon. Ganoo and I, we started in the political field at the same time, in the same month. Madam Speaker, it has also been mentioned in this Parliament that the Parliament has remained 'off' for almost nine months. Democracy!

(*Interruptions*)

Sincerely, he did not believe in it himself! What has hon. Paul Bérenger not said on Dr. Ramgoolam!

He said -

“Mo péna enn sou confiance lor Navin Ramgoolam. Enn boug péna vision. Pas kapav prend li au sérieux. Péna et pa pu ena oken koz kozé ek Parti Travailiste.”

I am very sad to see my friends on the other side. They do not deserve to be where they are. You will recall that before concluding an alliance with the Labour Party, hon. Paul Bérenger, Leader of the Opposition used to hold press conferences on a weekly basis to denounce scandals such as Bangalea, Soornack, EILLM University, Betamax ...

(*Interruptions*)

Oui, MPCB tou, Neotown, Jin Fei, the cracks of the Ring road, l'affaire Roches Noires, MITD and so on. He was right. I have mentioned in my speech about the Pandit Sungkur who did not make appropriate application for State Land to the Ministry. Let me tell you the story of this Pandit Sungkur and Dr. N. Ramgoolam. We have to say this because it concerns the State land. I know that he is not so happy with that, but I can say it is

(*Interruptions*)

This is the real story of the State land. Pandit Sungkur has never applied for a State land. Never!

(*Interruptions*)

Who applied? Mr Seeruttun, the Director of the Beach Authority who applied for this particular plot of land situated at Trou aux Biches.

(*Interruptions*)

Without any application, without any demand, the then Prime Minister considered that all State lands belong to him, *le propriétaire!* He got a fake Letter of Intent which does not appear in the file; I have gone through the file. *Il l'a fabriqué!* And he gave it to Pandit Sungkur, officially – we have seen in the newspaper. How come?

(*Interruptions*)

What is very sad is that the Leader of the Opposition closed his eyes on all these scandals, cases of favoritism, etc., saying that *le passé c'est le passé, nu bizin guet l'avenir'.*

(*Interruptions*)

This hurts the population. *L'avenir* with Dr. Ramgoolam, a person comparable to President Mugabé! There is no difference between Dr. N. Ramgoolam and the President Mugabé who was a dictator, achieving his personal ambitions by abusing his authority

(*Interruptions*)

Hon. Paul Bérenger was aware about the way a Government led by Dr. N. Ramgoolam used to work because they were in alliance in 1995. The MSM also was in alliance with the Labour Party and it has seen their rotten ways of working. *Chatte boire enn sel fois di lait chaud, deuxième fois li pa boire!*

It is disappointing how all of a sudden, how '*le cœur de militant*' of hon. Paul Bérenger started beating for a leader who has mismanaged the country, leading to the dilapidation of public funds. Was the hon. Leader of the Opposition not concerned about the waste of taxpayers' money in hedging? Betamax: Rs8 billion! Hedging STC: Rs5.7 m., hedging Air Mauritius: Rs10 m. Nearly Rs25 billion! It is the taxpayers' money. It is really a pity! And it is with the same Dr. Ramgoolam that hon. Paul Bérenger decided to join hands to make Mauritius a model to combat fraud and corruption. *Le grand nettoyage!* How could hon. Paul Bérenger forget about the statements Dr. Ramgoolam made against him?

Let me remind the House that in May 2011, Dr. N. Ramgoolam stated the following –

“Paul Bérenger so rôle mickey finn fini. Zamais li pu rentre dan gouvernement. Ça tou seki suive li pu reste lor coltar ».

It is true ! *Koma dire linn guet ça dans boule de crystal!*

(*Interruptions*)

And, Dr. Ramgoolam further stated –

“Bérenger est l'instrument du grand capital”.

So many insults over the years and the MMM was o.k. with that. Blinded by power, they decided to go forward with the Labour Party. So, I am really very sad to see the MMM of Zeel Peerun, Chafeekh Jeerooburkhan, Jooneed Jeerooburkhan as it is today.

Let me also say that the MMM presently is going through a crisis whereby many of its Members are leaving for valid reasons. Today, even Members like my good friend, hon. Alan Ganoo, who gave a statement, and had the courage to tell the truth. Hon. Kavi Ramano, hon. Steve Obeegadoo, 'die-hard MMM', have expressed their feelings about how the MMM is deviating from its principles. Dr. N. Ramgoolam has been mocking '*l'Alliance Lepép*', calling us '*camion saleté*', but today, he himself is like in a septic tank – I am sorry to say so.

(*Interruptions*)

The Labour Party is trying to consolidate its core electorate. Exit Dr. Ramgoolam, enter Dr. Arvin Boolell. What's the difference? *Bonnet blanc, blanc, blanc bonnet!* It is the same culture. Is there any difference today between Parti Travailiste and Parti Malin? *Parti Malin ena plis crédibilité!*

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition who recently stated that it will be impossible for Dr. N. Ramgoolam to bounce back in the political field. I agree with him. Let me tell you, Sir Anerood Jugnauth is known as '*le père de l'économie, de la stabilité, de l'unité et de progrès*', and he has proved it all the way.

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam is known as '*le père de la nation*', but what about the son, Dr. N. Ramgoolam? Dr. N. Ramgoolam should be known as '*le père de la honte*'! This is for this country.

Let me come to the intervention of hon. Aadil Ameer Meea, my good friend, who stated that hundred days in power of *l'Alliance Lepen*, did not bring about any positive changes. He expected more changes. Well, let me remind him that *l'Alliance Lepen* has been implementing measures announced in its manifesto as soon as we came to power.

Be it increase in pensions, payment of wages for the workers of the sugarcane industry engaged in strikes, compensation for all workers or abolition of SC/HSC fees, on which my colleague, hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun is working. We do not have *baton magique*, but we have the willingness and the ability to achieve our goals.

Then, as we promised that we will uncover all malpractices during the leadership of Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, inquiries have been initiated on the affairs of Roches Noires, money in coffers, Duty-Free Paradise, Betamax, etc. In my Ministry, every day we have ten officers from the Central CID who are carrying out inquiries. Every day! You can go and see!

It is the Government of Sir Anerood Jugnauth who had the courage to cancel the contract of Betamax; to set up an inquiry on the cracks found on the Terre Rouge-Verdun Road; examine all cases of State Land allocation where procedures have been bypassed; review the Tertiary Education Commission which has been closing eyes on *universités marrons et faux certificats*.

The Opposition does not seem to blame the previous Government for all the harm caused to the country, but instead they are pointing fingers at the good work being done by Sir Anerood Jugnauth's team. But they will have to answer for the coming *élections municipales*.

I must also seize this opportunity to applaud hon. Ivan Collendavelloo who refused to be a blind follower of his ex-Leader. He has the courage. I don't think there are many people who would like to be in his place to take such a responsibility, we know all. When he saw that his ex-Leader was deviating, he expressed his disagreement by slamming the door. Today, it is hon. Ivan Collendavelloo who seems to be the real Leader of the MMM and who is fighting for the cause of militants.

(Interruptions)

He has the *militantisme*. He is working for '*la lite militant*'.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker, hon. Lutchmeenaraidoo has also been an exception in the MMM. He got the message that the MMM is going in the wrong direction. He made the right choice by joining our team.

We will all recall that in 2007, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the MMM, hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger himself had qualified hon. Lutchmeenaraidoo as "*le meilleur ministre des finances*". Besides, hon. Lutchmeenaraidoo was chairing the economic commission of the MMM. Hon. Paul Bérenger used to praise him as being an 'economist intellectual' in his party, always using the term of 'Top Team'. However, when hon. Lutchmeenaraidoo refused to support his leader, in a "*voie suicidaire*", hon. Paul Bérenger insulted him by saying that he is not genuine.

Madam Speaker, I believe that if the MMM was on this side of the House, forming part of the governing team, he would have pat hon. Lutchmeenaraidoo on the back, applauding the measures.

The Opposition is doing its work in its best capacity, I agree, while some Members act as des *prophètes de malheur*, but we have no lesson to learn from them.

The first budget of *l'Alliance Lepep* reflects the vision of the Government to build a better Mauritius, a country where every citizen feels that democratic, meritocracy and corruption-free values are duly promoted. Therefore, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development deserves our appreciation and congratulations for laying the necessary foundation for a prosperous economy.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Soodhun, before I pass on to the next orator, I just want to draw your attention to the fact that during the course of your speech, you averred that Pandit Sungkur attempted to kidnap your...

Mr Soodhun: I did not mention that.

Madam Speaker: ...two and a half...

Mr Soodhun: I said there are people...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Did you say that? Because, if you did aver, from my understanding, if you did aver that Pandit Sungkur tried to kidnap your two and a half-year old granddaughter, then this is a very serious allegation, and I hope you will take full responsibility for that.

Mr Soodhun: Madam Speaker, on a point of explanation, what I mentioned is that I have been threatened. People are threatening to kidnap my granddaughter. It is true. I am not referring only to that case. I don't want to mention people's names. Everybody knows in this country that I was doing communalism or what it is! You know very well. I have not mentioned Pandit Sungkur, but there are other people. This is what I want to mention.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Dr. Sorefan!

(7.52 p.m.)

Dr. R. Sorefan (Fourth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix): Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, I would like to congratulate you for having been elected to the Chair of this National Assembly as Speaker and, secondly, having been decorated by the President of the Republic of Mauritius as Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean. I am deeply honoured with you in the Chair, because you are among my best friends in this august Assembly.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Sorefan: Madam Speaker, now let me come to the Budget itself. To start with, as my colleagues, hon. Lesjongard, hon. Barbier and hon. Ramano, said they had no quarrel, so do I. I have no quarrel with the contents of this Budget, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development said that we are indeed at the crossroad. Yes. We are at the crossroad, Madam Speaker, and the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has proposed various measures that to him is the road that he wants to venture with a vision. A vision of the *gouvernement Lepen!* The hon. Minister presently standing at the crossroad and saying to us: 'If you choose not to follow me, I will move on without you.'

Madam Speaker, there are two ways to go when you hit that crossroad that the hon. Minister is talking about. In one's life, there is the bad way, when you think of giving up, and then there is really the hard way when one fights back. I honestly think the hon. Minister

of Finance and Economic Development is going the hard way to come out successfully for the nation at large. Madam Speaker, at the crossroad, life presents us with moments of decisions. Either we choose a new direction and move on, or cling to what we already have and be miserable. Madam Speaker, I don't want to be miserable and I think no one wants to be miserable in this House.

Madam Speaker, I think you will agree that these Budget Estimates are not always tied up in neat little packages, occasionally we find ourselves at unexpected crossroads with more than one opportunity from which to choose. Madam Speaker, time itself is often the best indicator of which decision to make, for it can tell so many things that are now hazy.

Madam Speaker, let me now come to the real issue of the budget that I would like to question or to get clarifications upon or to propose for amendments. The first issue, Madam Speaker, concerns the megaprojects where I think it is left to the private sector to deal with. I want to know how far the public sector will get involved in those projects, I mean, financially so as for the Government to get a long-term durable benefit that can be translated to the benefit of the population. I know many benefits are mentioned in the megaprojects which, when the projects are completed, only the capitalists will sit back and enjoy their capital gain, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, about the SMEs, this is a real long-term, durable and sustainable project that we must fully concentrate on because SMEs do not fall in the preview of the capitalist world. By the way, Madam Speaker, capitalists in the world are decreasing their investments in manufacturing or troublesome industries. They prefer to invest in financial projects where they can sit back and enjoy their capital growing. So, SMEs like the abbreviation means Small and Medium Enterprises is the lifeblood for the future generation. All the measures to facilitate the SMEs in the budget are most welcomed but the mind-set of the public officers in the SME department should be refreshed if we want to succeed, Madam Speaker. We must also prohibit local artisanal objects pertaining to Mauritius, for example, dodo sculptures, etc., which are made abroad to enter in Mauritius to prevent competition with our local market.

Madam Speaker, regarding diaspora, I think the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development is ill-advised on this issue. Those who are presently settled abroad and are working will not come back to Mauritius although we are proposing a tax relief. What about those who have recently come back from abroad and who are working in Mauritius by giving a helping hand to improve the economy of Mauritius at the expense of getting less money compared to what they were earning abroad? Shouldn't they get the same facilities, Madam

Speaker? It may be interpreted as *deux poids deux mesures*. One issue that may crop up in the future is that some rich guys, with lots of black money, encourage their relatives to come back to Mauritius to start a business and get involved in money laundering. What I propose, Madam Speaker, is to let the Mauritian diaspora alone where they are and start with a policy to make Mauritius a larger Mauritius. This group of Mauritian diaspora is well-educated, well-connected and well-disposed to Mauritius in business, academia, science and other issues. The Mauritian diaspora is distinguished, Madam Speaker. The Mauritian diaspora is a worldwide web of ideas and influence.

Madam Speaker, our large expatriate community should be a source of strength and confidence for us. We should not resent, attack or criticise them because of their talents in achievement abroad. We should, Madam Speaker, accept whenever expatriates express an opinion on our country. We should celebrate their success wherever they live. We should use our expatriates as an instrument of soft power, that is, the ability to attract and to cope rather than use force or give money as a means of persuasion. We should draw them more fully in the mainstream of our national life. Creating a global community of Mauritians would help to make us a larger country, a larger Mauritius. What I mean by larger Mauritius, Madam Speaker, is that the Government should compile a list of Mauritians abroad about their qualifications, types of work, their interests and from there to let them help Mauritius in terms of ideas, criticisms and proposals. I know, Madam Speaker, many are willing to do so and some are already doing so at no cost. You know, Madam Speaker, diaspora makes the world a global village. With information technology, most things are at our doorsteps. Madam Speaker, Mauritius should not turn inward trying to get Mauritian diaspora back instead Mauritius should turn outward. When one starts to think outwards, it is then that the Mauritian economy will boost up. Madam Speaker, the Asian States, including India, have an outward looking policy. Why not Mauritius?

Madam Speaker, if we can't get them back, at least, we can use them. Let them be our Ambassadors to the capacity for Mauritius. Talking about Ambassadors, Madam Speaker, we have many in different countries. We should tell them to mandatorily inform the Government about any contagious diseases that are being manifested in the country so that Government can advise and inform the travelling Mauritians to avoid such cities and countries. Recently, the hon. Minister of Health said that we had about 21 cases of dengue fever in Mauritius. The contamination resulted, if I am not wrong, from India. Had we known that such and such cities have dengue fever, we could have informed the travellers from Mauritius to avoid these cities. Is the hon. Minister of Health aware that about three weeks ago, a resident of Quatre

Bornes who came from India died from H1N1 virus? Has there been a notification from the private clinic for this case? The poor lady was, at last, transferred to SSRN hospital where she passed away. That is a very recent case. It is up to the Ambassadors in different countries to inform us what is going on in that country so that we can prevent. It is not when the travellers come back with the disease that we start panicking and doing a lot of expenses to prevent the disease from propagating.

Madam Speaker, let me say a few words on our parastatal bodies. Many of them have enormous debts. For example, through a parliamentary question addressed to the hon. Minister Pravind Jugnauth with regard to the Rs150 paid to MBC by the households, to my great surprise, the hon. Minister said that MBC has a debt of nearly Rs1 billion. Many other parastatal bodies are in the same red situation. I keep asking myself, Madam Speaker, how can these parastatal bodies function properly with such huge debts? If MBC wants to embark on a new project or innovation that costs money, how can MBC, CEO or Minister concerned approve such project? Is it possible for the Government to come with some sort of financial policy to help these bodies? Of course, if the Government does so, the CEO will have to be answerable for future management of their fund. It is just an idea, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I would like, now, to propose an amendment for the consideration of the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development. This concerns the first-time buyers. Madam Speaker, first time buyer of bare land. The hon. Minister has increased the ceiling to Rs1.5 m. Madam Speaker. My amendment to this is that every first-time buyer will not be charged duty of the Rs1.5 m. even if the land costs more than Rs1.5 m. Presently, if the land costs, say, Rs1.7 m., the buyer will have to pay duty on the whole Rs1.7 m. This is unfair, Madam Speaker. We must not forget, Madam Speaker, how land is rocketing high.

The same goes for the first-time buyer of flats. They should be exempted of duty to the tune of Rs4 m. even if the flat costs Rs4.5m. or Rs4.7 m., Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, regarding ICT, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has mentioned that ICT companies that recruit a minimum of 100 employees will be allowed to bring a quota of foreign qualified employees. Madam Speaker, I think the minimum amount of 100 employees is on the high side to encourage ICT players to set up business in Mauritius.

Most welcoming is the increase of Wifi hotspots to 350. The sooner the better and undoubtedly will propel us as a larger Mauritius.

Madam Speaker, tax on SMS was a non-event since its introduction. It was just to increase the revenue; there was no reason for its introduction at that time. I am glad, after the hon. Minister answered my PQ on this issue that I knew then that the hon. Minister will abolish the 10 cents levy on SMS.

Madam Speaker, regarding infrastructure, nothing much as major projects apart from consultancy services for grade separated junction at Pont Fer/Jumbo to the tune of Rs25 m. and consultancy services for renewal phase II, A1, M1 Bridge to the tune of Rs50 m. that are earmarked for June 2015-2016 Budget.

Madam Speaker, road maintenance, that we have a huge sum of Rs3 billion, is an ongoing project. Madam Speaker, I am hoping that the hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure will strongly consider going ahead with the construction of the traffic centres mainly at Ébène and St. Pierre to the tune of Rs100 m. for each as has been mentioned in the Budget.

Madam Speaker, the LRT project has suffered the on and off phenomenon for some years. Like the MMM/PTR on and off, so was LRT. When LRT was on, there was no bus lane, when LRT was off, the ex-Government came with third lanes on the M1 motorways at an astronomical cost for introduction of the bus lane. Madam Speaker, the ex-Government put the bus lane on hold when they started dreaming of the juicy lucrative contract for the new LRT to be financed by the Indian Government to the tune of Rs19 billion. Now that this Government has shelved the LRT project on the off mode, will it come with bus lane and make it on the on mode as we have already in place the third lane that has been well done but not used for bus lane? By the way, what happened to the issue of the Rs19 billion to finance the LRT by the Indian Government? We would like to know whether it is still available and for what purpose it is going to be used.

Madam Speaker, I would not go to the issue of underpasses as opposed to flyovers. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure is well aware of my proposal dealt this Tuesday through my PQ.

Madam Speaker, Verdun/Terre Rouge, we all know the fate of this road and so for the Ring Road Phase I. One piece of advice to the hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure: '*pas barre delo montagne avec banne chemin, toujours la nature ki sorte gagnant*'. Concerning Phase II, there are reports that are unfavourable for construction of roads on the slope of the mountain. This project of tunnel and Ring Road Phase II should be abandoned. Use the money somewhere else! If the Ministry goes for the Phase II, as scheduled by the ex-

Government, I hope one day I do not have to come and say: 'Hon. Bodha, sorry, we have got another crack or landslide in that region' - like I did with ex-Minister Bachoo.

Madam Speaker, coming to why there are no major projects from MPI for the moment, the answer is that the ex-Minister was so greedy that he left no major road projects for this Government. Hon. Minister Bodha would remember, when ex-Minister Bachoo was intervening on previous Budgets, we were together on the other side.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member should address the Chair!

Dr. Sorefan: Yes, Madam Speaker. When ex-Minister Bachoo was intervening on previous Budgets, he spelt out road projects that were under construction and in the pipeline without forgetting how much each project cost. He gave us a list and every time he came as a tape recorder. For every project, he knew the exact amount for the project. And all the projects were mainly to Colas. I am sure, Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of financial Services and Good Governance will undoubtedly look in those juicy contracts.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has mentioned at section 244 that –

“(...) We bypassed international tenders for the SSR International Airport and paid Rs14 billion for a contract that was not worth more than Rs8 billion.”

I am sure the hon. Minister knows what he is implying. My PQs on the airport were not fully answered, Madam Speaker. Do we know that the contractor has fixed metal roof of 1 mm thickness when the contract talks about 1.2 mm? Do we know that the structure made in steel frame is zinc plated instead of galvanised?

Madam Speaker, do we know that the glass window panel is of bad quality and not of BS standards as per the contract? The panels are showing signs of warpage and cracks and some of them are being replaced now. I hope that they are not being replaced by the same kind, but that the people there watch it that they are replaced by those of BS standards. The quality of tiles - most of us have gone through the VIP. Have a look on what you walk! There are different shades of the tiles and their quality. It is a pity for VIPs to go and walk around there.

Madam Speaker, when the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development mentioned Rs14 billion, to know the exact amount, I came with a parliamentary question for the Ministry of Financial Services to contact Aconex Ltd. which is a software management enterprise. They have all the payments done stored in their software. The hon. Minister of

Financial Services has promised me that he will go for an audit trail and I am dying to know the exact amount of this substandard *bijou*, as said by Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

Madam Speaker, let me deal now with hire purchase where the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has reduced the interest from 19% to 12%. Quite welcoming! But I just learned that we have a monopole of only one lending firm – the CIM, Madam Speaker. When somebody goes to buy from a shop on hire purchase, the storekeeper refers the buyer to the CIM which used to charge 19% yearly. Now, it will charge 12% yearly. And the CIM also charges the storekeeper 15% on the selling price of the goods. That makes a lot of money that the buyer pays! For CIM, to curtail the loss of interest of 7% that has been proposed in this Budget, it has contacted all shopkeepers to increase their margin of profits and CIM charges 15% on the new selling price to curtail the 7% loss. So, the people buying on hire purchase are not benefiting from this decrease.

Madam Speaker, now let me deal with illicit monies as per the Global Financial Integrity Report 2003-2012. The illicit financial flows from Mauritius average per year is 153 m. US dollars. The total for 2003 to 2012 is 1,532 m. US dollars illicit money leaving Mauritius. The trade invoicing outflows from 2003 to 2012 amounts to 1,170 m. US dollars. Illicit hot money outflows from Mauritius for 2012 is 360 m. US dollars. Gross trade misinvoicing import and export totalled to 3,102 m. US dollars. That makes for about seven or nine years, Rs100 billion which left Mauritius illicitly! That probably is new to some Members. Rs100 billion!

I am sure, Madam Speaker, for 2013 and 2014, illicit money must be very high. All these illicit monies are big losses to the country. From what we have witnessed, Madam Speaker, from Friday last, how much illicit money left Mauritius, without forgetting the case of Mrs Soornack, the ex-Prime Minister and many others!

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development said, through the press, that the Central Bank will buy an undisclosed amount of gold from Australia's Perth Mint. Why undisclosed amount? The public should know! Like many of us in this House - I am sure - do not know or they have probably just heard of it that in 2009 Mauritius bought two tonnes of gold from the International Monetary Fund valued at an equivalent of 72 m. US dollars at that time. The introduction of a plan for Mauritius Gold Fund on the Stock Exchange of Mauritius with tax exemption is a good idea.

I will not be long, I have nearly finished. Madam Speaker, with regard to *nation zougadère*, we cannot stop people from dreaming, but we can minimise some not to become chronic *zougadère*. Madam Speaker, one issue that bothers me is the way the drawing of

winning numbers is carried out by *Lottotech*. To me, it is semitransparent. I have my own theory on how this is done. I get the impression that it is up to the management to decide which week they want to issue a jackpot. The magnetisation of the winning ball numbers may be the way they can control their wish whether to have a winner or not. My proposal, Madam Speaker, is that the drawing of winning numbers should be done at the Government House where the winning numbers for *Loterie Verte*, as we know, is done. It is more transparent and it works on a suction technique. There, it is not at the whims and caprices of the management to decide when to give or keep it in the bank for interest.

Madam Speaker, section 140 talks about Trade and Investment Managers who will be posted in our embassies. I am glad that this Government is embarking on this like the United Kingdom Trade and Investment Department has opened an office in Mauritius on 27 January 2015. These eight managers should be well qualified and trained on bilateral trade and businesses. They should not be political nominees. I personally think that those selected eight managers should follow an intensive course helped by the UK Trade and Investment Department which recently got an office in Mauritius.

Madam Speaker, our ocean is very vast and we must not let foreign countries exploit it. They can help, but whatever investment they come with, Mauritius should be a partner and the financial benefit should be above 50% of the profit and exploitation. Madam Speaker, India will soon start exploration of mineral deposits, mainly polymetallic sulphides along 10,000 square kilometres mid Ocean ridge of Mauritius. The development comes following approval from International Seabed Authority. Madam Speaker, this Government needs to follow the path of India expertise and to seek help to explore our seabed for metallic deposit, amongst others.

Madam Speaker, this Budget - it goes without saying - has brought a feel good factor among the population. Why? The answer, I think, as I am in the medical profession, is that the Budget proposal has minimised stress on *Lepep*. If one is not stressful, his internal body feels happy. Stress is a slow killer, Madam Speaker.

This House has witnessed how some MPs end up with cardiac problems because of stress. I, myself, was very stressful in a party, which I left, because of a leading virus that wants everyone to always agree with him. In our laboratory here, we are coming with an anti-viral medicine that will take care of this virus. The drug is nearly ready and very soon we will administer the anti-viral drug to eliminate the virus from this House, and all of us will be free from this inflicted stress on us. I, myself, am free from mental slavery, free to express

myself, to voice my opinion and to lead a better life with normal blood pressure, slow heart rate and hope to live longer.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, I wish everyone of us to do our job as faithfully as we can, with least possible stress.

Madam Speaker, in this century, I think the heroes will be the people who will improve their quality of life, fight poverty and introduce more sustainability, and I pray God that this Budget, with some of my observations and suggestions, will bring happiness to everyone of us.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mrs Jadoo-Jaunbocus!

(8.28 p.m.)

Mrs R. Jadoo-Jaunbocus (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Madam Speaker, given the time, I would do my best endeavour not to tax this House with a too lengthy speech.

Madame la présidente, promesse faite, promesse tenue. Je dis encore : promesse faite lors des élections, promesse tenue. Lors de la campagne électorale, *L'alliance Lepèp* avait promis une série de mesures à être implémentées une fois au pouvoir.

We had said for instance that we are going to increase old age pension to Rs5,000. We have done it within weeks. We have talked about *une compensation salariale équitable*. Madam Speaker, we have done it. We have promised 100% subsidy on examination fees, irrespective of means of that parent, irrespective of the number of students, in order to help those families. We have again done it. We have many other examples which I will refer to later on in my address to this House.

Madam Speaker, within less than 100 days we have achieved a number of things that we have promised to the people of Mauritius. This Budget, Madam Speaker, has proved a lot of people wrong; *les oiseaux de mauvais augure qui criaient sur tous les toits que ce serait impossible de réaliser ces promesses sans une augmentation des impôts*. We have proved them wrong. We have yet again done it, Madam Speaker.

Yet, in spite of having done so, we are being taxed again and again, and I refer to a particular speech of one hon. Member on the other side of this House who has taxed the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for having come with a no tax budget. Why? Because he has said before that, in order to give compensation, to increase old-age pension, tax will have to be increased. When he does come up with a no tax budget, he is being taxed for that. This is the views of those on the other side of the House.

Talking about hon. Members on the other side of the House, hon. Bhagwan had stated in his address to this House that small planters are suffering. True! They are suffering. We should not forget that funds which had been received from the European Union had, in fact, been dished out to the private sector for payment of VRS by the previous Government, Madam Speaker. This money was meant for small planters. Let me remind the House that when hon. Pravind Jugnauth, then Minister of Agriculture, was there, the private sector had to fund the VRS themselves; not from European Union funds, not from Government funds.

So, money, in fact, meant to provide assistance to the small planting community had gone to the sugar barons. It is now for us to help them to breathe again. Hence, the numerous measures brought in by this Budget, which will be implemented by our hon. Minister of Agro-Industry. The Minister of Agro-Industry stated, in reply to the PNQ of yesterday - we heard it - that the number of *métayers* had considerably decreased in this country. Why so, Madam Speaker? Because the previous Government ...

Madam Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo, please resume your seat!

Mrs Jadoo-Jaunbocus: Because, Madam Speaker, the previous Government took back land which had been given to the *métayers* of the sugar industry. Hundreds of *métayers* were compelled to give back their land for peanuts with the excuse that the sugar barons needed prime land. When these *métayers* had taken the land initially from those sugar barons 50 years ago, these lands were bare and arid and, today, they have transformed these very lands into first-class agricultural lands. But, unfortunately, for the previous Government, democratisation of the economy meant taking away from small people to give away to those who have a lot; the other way round, that is, Robin Hood in reverse mode, Madam Speaker.

Now, what do we see? The Budget of 2015-2016, as I have just stated, is a no tax one. As they said: “*Séki nu dire nu faire!*” After *le miracle politique réussi par l'alliance Lepep*, now, surely, with this Budget - and *le peuple* believes in us - we are paving the way towards a second *miracle économique*.

Going through this Budget, we find a series of measures that strike the equilibrium between *le développement économique et le social*, and this is important. One of the major problems to be addressed by this Budget is the creation of jobs. Indeed, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development, in his speech, when he talks about job creation, he comes up with a number of measures. One of the measures that he comes up with is the *mesure phare*, as we say, for the creation of jobs; the reform of our Small and Medium Enterprise sector (SME sector), which, in the next few years, will become the driving force behind our *deuxième miracle économique*.

As stated at paragraph 28 of the Budget Speech, Madam Speaker, I quote –

“(...) making the SME sector the backbone of our economy.”

it is one of the most ambitious goals of this Government. Yet, we are taxed for not having a vision and not dealing with the problem of job creation, and I will address that in my speech, Madam Speaker.

Another *mesure phare* is the creation of smart cities. Yet another one is the development of the port area, which will be extended right from Baie du Tombeau to Grand River North West, and this to make it a regional hub for bunkering both onshore and offshore.

Another example of the *mesure phare* is the innovation and development of the ICT sector. I will dwell a lot on the SME sector, Madam Speaker. As the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development said, it is the backbone of our economy, it is the greatest source of creation of jobs. What do we see today, Madam Speaker? Through this Budget, Government is proposing a complete re-engineering of the SME sector. It is not merely a question of injecting Rs10 billion over the next five years into the SME sector. We are doing more than that. What we want by creating the SME bank, is to bring the necessary reforms to the SMEDA and to bring about real change in the mindset of entrepreneurs. We want to come around with a new revolution in the way things are being seen by our entrepreneurs and things are being done by our entrepreneurs.

Going through the measures announced in this sector, we realise that a new avenue of success is being opened, especially for young entrepreneurs of this country who have the willingness and the capacity to work and assert themselves. Why not so?

Madam Speaker, I recall upon first being elected, coming to this House, I went to the Rt. hon. Prime Minister after having spent a few weeks in the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB). What was being asked from me all the time, is a job in the Government. I said to the Rt. hon. Prime Minister: “What do we do?” With all his pragmatism, he said to me: “*Pas pou capav donne tou dimoune travail dan gouvernement; bizin trouve bannes avenues.*” This is one of the examples.

Apart from finance for years the SMEs sector, in fact, has lagged behind due to a number of administrative constraints. How can we not express our gratitude to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for his vision, whilst dealing with SMEs as we go through the measures that he has announced and this we see, Madam Speaker, at the annexes where no less than eight measures have been announced in order to lighten up the SME sector and to make it more accessible and to facilitate business. I refer, for example, to

the exemption of Corporate Income Tax for the first eight years. Another example is the exemption from the requirement to operate tax withholding under tax deduction at source, that is, TDS for the eight years. I refer, yet again, to the exemption from submission of financial statements and annual returns through the Registrar of Companies for the first eight years. There are eight measures and it is found in the document, so, I will not go in all the details, but we note that these measures, Madam Speaker, are innovative and, for the first time, we see a Budget *qui pointe du doigt sur les vrais problèmes qui ont miné ce secteur pendant des années et des années.*

For too long, our entrepreneurs have been stunned with our upcoming generation and nipped in the bud by all these administrative hurdles because for a beginner to set up a business, a small or a medium enterprise, it would appear like he has to climb the Mount Everest, an uphill strive, with so many complications and so many hurdles. Madam Speaker, this Budget should be looked at globally as we have a series of measures within that Budget that are interlinked to create the right environment for us to achieve our end result, that is, our *miracle économique*.

This has been done by the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development, a man of vision who has integrated the development of the SME together with the retraining and reintegration of our graduates within the job market in a very holistic manner and complementary manner. Here, Madam, I am referring, for instance, to the measure of providing the sum of the maximum of Rs80,000 per graduate for their reconversion. We have heard hon. Members on the other side of the House criticising even this measure, Madam Speaker, to say that this is just a question of Mathematics - they are good at Maths! Of course, we have seen that! Results have proved how good they are! And that this is going to just result in a reduction in the unemployment rate. Let us look at the reality of what this does!

The previous Government has gone at length to create, and I say it, *une génération of gradués chômeurs*, and the only solution they came up with was to give unemployment benefit. What a shame! Not a shame, of course, to those who will benefit from this, but what a shame for not coming up with a better solution! They failed to create a job market, they failed to cater for our young graduates and now what they do is take away their dignity. But what this Government is doing, what the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development together with the Rt. hon. Prime Minister is doing, is to give back to these people their dignity, reset their dignity and tell them: go again and find a job because we

know without retraining, it would be so difficult for these graduates to reintegrate into the job market.

Madam Speaker, this Government is the one who is providing long-term and permanent alternatives to our young graduates. I am sure, Madam Speaker, that no section of the population will be left out and left outside this revolution within the world of small and medium enterprises.

I hereby appeal to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development in his quest to get each and every willing and budding entrepreneur on-board of this country, involved in this development, to consider opening a branch of his proposed SME Bank in my constituency. This is a special appeal I make to him so as to make accessible all facilities proposed to the people of this region who, as everybody knows, have been the driving force and economic parallel. Here, I refer, Madam Speaker, to the *marchands ambulants*. Much have been said about them, much have been said to take away their dignity and, again, I appeal to take into account this sector and to give them the chance to come back into the mainstream and reintegrate the mainstream, another way of, yet again, giving them their dignity and their status.

I now turn, Madam Speaker, to smart cities. Madam Speaker, this Budget will surely bring back memories to those who have witnessed the duo Sir Anerood Jugnauth and Vishnu Lutchmeenaraidoo in the 1980s. I myself was not so mature in those days, but I was young enough and could grasp what was happening and what I have grasped and what I have learned from our history is that, they have dared to take steps then that were deemed to be too risky. History bears witness to that, history bears witness to the fact that with those calculated risks, the country has known unprecedented development.

The Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, hon. Seeruttun, had talked about it in his address: '*Lacaz la paille finn remplacer par lacaz béton, roche lavé finn remplacer par machine laver, foyer dibois finn remplacer par plaque à gaz*', and I can go on with the list, Madam Speaker. The standard of living, in fact, by these bold measures have been given a boost, and for those people, the sky was the limit in those days.

(Interruptions)

I think I will be less than four minutes. I had promised and in *l'Alliance Lepèp* we keep our promise; I will be less than four minutes. In those days, we had people who painted – the very same people - a very bleak and alarming picture of what was to happen within the then Government. Yet, we stood fast and had we then listened to them, our first '*miracle*

économique' would never have been, Madam Speaker, had we had stood still, it would never had become reality.

Today, Madam Speaker, the legendary duo has come back and they have responded to the call of the nation. Yes, they are back, Madam Speaker, this legendary duo and they fear to tread where angels dare to tread.

Yet again, the sequel to our first economic development begins all over again – bold measures are being taken, a leap, but a very calculated leap aimed to trigger the second '*miracle économique*' is being taken and all of us together we are going into that direction but, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the wagging tongues do not stop wagging. They are here, again, the very same one - as in the 1980's - are back again. Sadly so! Sadly because they are here, yet again, auguring ill in the future, for the future! *Malheureux sont ceux qui nous pointent du doigt et n'ont pas appris de leurs erreurs. Ces gens n'ont jamais voulu ni oser prendre des risques calculés.*

Madam Speaker, when we are talking of small citizen port development, those are the vision of the very much forward looking Government who moves with time. Madam Speaker, *c'est tout à fait légitime de rêver*. Not the sort of '*rêver*' that was referred to by hon. Dr. Sorefan for the '*zougadères*', but the sort of '*rêver*' that this duo has dared to dream about in the past. For, Madam Speaker, we have to dream and only then we can realise our dream. We must have a vision in order to conceive that vision into the modern future. We know for a fact, as this has been tried and tested in the past, that under the leadership of Sir Anerood Jugnauth, real dreams become true. Yes, we dare to dream and we make that dream a reality with Sir Anerood Jugnauth and, most importantly, it is the *rêve* of *ti-dimoune* which becomes true and that is what we are here for. We have dared to dream, but we are also aware that in order to get that dream into reality, we have to create that feel good factor. The other Members of the House have said it, everybody reluctantly says it. It is like extracting a tooth from the Opposition that we have created a feel good factor. But this is the reality and we cannot run away from it. We have done it. Creating this feel good factor has been possible, we do not hold a magic wand and we say 'be' and it is, like the Godmother in Cinderella. We do not have that but what we have, is we have laid the foundation in a pragmatic and realistic way in the Sir Anerood Jugnauth way as usual. This Government together with our Minister of Finance and Economic Development have come up with a series of measures which have been criticised, sadly so, as being small.

We are told that giving 6 m³ of water is a small measure. Too small, Madam Speaker! We are being told that removing tax from SMS is too small, Madam Speaker. We

are told, therefore, Rs5,000 for the elderly is too small. We are even told that giving 100% subsidy on examination fees are too small, Madam Speaker.

Everything that we do is too small, Madam Speaker. But little by little - and that is mathematics, it adds up and it becomes the bigger picture. That is what it is all about and that is where they got their mathematics wrong. We start by little and we take over.

(Interruptions)

A small part; *le plus petit parti, je me souviens mais ‘coument nous dire, ti piment, li bien fort ça!’*

These little things make a difference for small families of small means, because I see them every day and I see the gratitude in their eyes. We have heard we do nothing for law and order; we do nothing, no provision, no measures for the Police, for law and order. I have had officers from the Force today, coming up to me and it gave me a boost, Madam Speaker, as we say, little things, it gave me a boost: *‘Madame, zot gouvernement pou vini avec ça bane mesures ki zot ine dire la, pour nous, bane policiers?’* These people are waiting with bated breath, the Police Academy, re-training, giving the dignity to these Police will have Police Officers who are walking along the street, proud of their uniform and wanting to accomplish their duty. Those little things will bring those big results, Madam Speaker, and the little that we have, means a lot to these people.

Let us now, Madam Speaker - because time is pressing - travel to the future with this budgetary *train à grande vitesse*. Each and every future development will inevitably and inexorably have to travel through the fast lane of the ICT and technological development, be it a small enterprise, be it a big development, be it the oceanic development, be it the port, be it construction of smart cities, be it energy development or any other field that one can think of and I am sure that a number of fields I have missed out, our Motherland has to adapt itself to the changing information and technology sector.

De nos jours, we talk about *fibre optique*, broadband fibre connectivity, safe cables, lion networks, lion 1 lion 2, it goes on. Innovation and development of the ICT sector *est incontournable* and it is the cornerstone of any progress and advancement of the country. The number of free Wi-Fi spots increasing from 15 to 350 is in itself a major progress, and it has huge impact. Just imagine, the knowledge covered will now know no bounds and will not be limited to a selected few. Hon. Pravind Jugnauth will now bring knowledge knocking at the door of each and every family of this country. How can we not applaud this measure, Madam Speaker! Just imagine this, just for innovation, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has allowed a sum of Rs125 m. to be injected to fund a National Innovation

Programme. I dare say, Madam Speaker, only those with a limited vision - and I will go further to say - with the twisted vision and twisted agenda, will dare criticise such initiatives. Again and again, we are told: '*Zot pas comprend zot, zot pas cone narien zot, zot pe tape la table, ki zot comprend zot?*' Don't we know anything and, yet, we are here! Even now they have not learned to respect. We listen to constructive measures and propositions, we listen and we adapt, but do they listen? They call us *imbéciles*, they call us *limités*. Look in the mirror! That's what I will say!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker, at this point, I have to turn to the National Development Unit. I have to. I am part of it and I have to turn to that. Under the leadership of...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order, please!

Mrs Jadoo-Jaunbocus: Under the leadership of our able Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, our budget of nearly Rs1.4 billion will be judiciously utilised for the optimum benefit of this nation. I will not go into the issues of debts. The hon. Prime Minister had explained it only the day before about how many debts that we have to pay for the previous Government.

In my Constituency, Madam Speaker, we have identified a number of projects. Let hon. Bhagwan rest assured that we will have budget for each and every Constituency and I am sure that hon. Boissézon will make sure that the distribution is equitable and fair in the constituencies of which he is PPS.

We have identified a number of projects and, as we say, '*Insha'Allah*', it will be realised in the near future within the limits of the budget. I say this because often we are asked why are we not starting any work within the NDU and I speak in the name of all the PPSs who are here in this House; we are awaiting to pay debts that were contracted in our name by the previous Government. We honour our debts, we are going to pay our debts and then, we will start working for the nation.

But this is not all, Madam Speaker. This is a Government which operates in good - I am on the last page, Madam Speaker - symbiosis. Why do I say 'we operate in good symbiosis'? It is because we do not set limits. For instance, the hon. Minister of Housing and Lands has not been deaf to the appeal of those in my Constituency, that is, the Camp Manna, Tranquebar and the Vallée Pitot. He has today said in his speech that all those squatters in these regions, hopefully, will be regularised. So, we have been working, we work in partnership.

The hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism and External Communications as well as the hon. Minister of Arts and Culture, hon. Baboo has listened to our appeal to look at Montagne Citadel and to revamp it. Hon. Raj Dayal has heard and responded to my appeal and, again, hon. Bhagwan will be very happy to hear of the revamped rejuvenation given to *Le Dauguet*, which has been dying into a slow death, I dare say. Over the last 10 years, all the aspects which have been left to neglect over the last nine/ten years, we are now going to tackle them one by one over the next five years, Madam Speaker.

This Government will not stay still, as I have said, the Dauguet, the Citadel, the Montagne Signaux and I make an appeal it will go to - even though the hon. Minister is not here - Vallée Pitot to have another *parcours de santé* there.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, I have one thing to say: *que l'Opposition fasse sa tâche promise, comme elle l'a promis. Qu'elle vienne avec des propositions concrètes et constructives, et non critiques*, just for the sake of criticising again and again. It is easy to point fingers, but what has the past Government done in the constituencies nine years ago and especially, in the ninth year with the blessing of the *mauvés*, what has it done, what has it achieved? *On sait le résultat que cela avait apporté; jamais une décision politique avait enchaîné autant de rejets que l'alliance PTR-MMM. J'espère qu'ils en ont tiré de leçon.*

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr Rughoobur: Madam Speaker, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Mr Tarolah rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Housing & Lands (Mr S. Soodhun): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 10 April 2015 at 2.30 p.m.

Mr Bodha rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

At 8.54 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 10 April 2015 at 2.30 p.m.

