

MAURITIUS FOURTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION

Debate No 12 of 2009

Sitting of Friday 29 May 2009

**The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis,
at 3.30 p.m**

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

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MAURITIUS

National Assembly

First Session

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PAPERS LAID

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

A. Ministry of Local Government, Rodrigues and Outer Islands -

The State Lands (Port Louis City Centre Boundaries) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 48 of 2009).

B. Ministry of Labour, Industry Relations and Employment -

The Occupational Safety and Health (Electricity at Work) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 47 of 2009).

**ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION
NGOs AND PRIVATE FIRMS - VAT- EXEMPTION/REFUND**

The Leader of the Opposition (*By Private Notice*) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to exemption or refund of Value Added Tax for construction or other purposes to private firms or Non-Governmental Organisations, since 2005 to-date, he will state the names of the -

- (a) beneficiaries thereof, indicating the amount involved in each case; and
- (b) Non-Governmental Organisations which have made requests therefore and the outcome thereof, in each case, indicating those which are likely to benefit from the measures announced in the 2009 Budget.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment (Dr. R Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, VAT was introduced in 1998 by replacing the sales tax on goods and the tax on hotels and restaurants. The introduction of VAT had two major objectives.

First, to be the mainstay of revenue within the broad policy to shift from reliance on trade related to domestic taxes.

Second, to provide a system that allows recovery of taxes paid on inputs and, therefore, encourage investment and economic activity.

In view of its purposes, VAT has always taken a strictly rules based approach to exemptions. The National Assembly must approve all VAT exemptions. Such exemptions from payment of VAT are provided through two channels. Either an activity or product is exempt from VAT or it is zero rated. There is therefore no discretionary power whatsoever vested in the Minister of Finance.

A zero rated activity or product can obtain a refund of taxes paid on inputs whilst an exempted activity or product is outside the VAT system altogether.

VAT is a tax that reflects a generally accepted principle of public finance that investment should not be taxed, and instead taxation should focus on consumption. Exports are zero rated and so are products that are important inputs to exports and where the suppliers may not be in the VAT system.

Moreover, exemptions have been applied to health including medical equipment; Education; public transport; airlines, diplomatic missions (in line with international conventions) and NHDC housing estates.

The list of items is occasionally reviewed. During the period 2000 to 2005 some additional items were added to the zero rated list. Since 2005, the main changes relate to the promotion of exports of new services, particularly in health and education.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Finance Act 2005, the previous Government provided that constructions of buildings for the provision of tertiary education would be exempted from VAT. This exemption was extended in a transparent manner to the Health sector in 2006.

Given that Health and Education are exempt, investors in these sectors would be unable to obtain a refund for their inputs. This is a particularly important issue since during the investment stage when the project does not generate revenue. In fact, until the tax reforms of 2006, a holder of a Health Development Certificate could obtain VAT and Customs duty exemptions on an approved list of medical equipment and exemption from registration duty on land. The list was subject to regular additions.

With the emphasis on promoting the knowledge and medical hubs, during missions of the Board of Investment it became clear that investors required being exempt from VAT on construction and wanted this done in a transparent manner that would bring certainty and predictability. Investors also required maintaining the provisions for exempting VAT on medical equipment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the approach taken to accommodate investors in a transparent manner has been to provide these exemptions to all investors in these sectors registered with BOI for health projects and with Tertiary Education Commission for education projects. There is now a rules based approach.

In line with the philosophy of VAT and the need to be competitive in attracting FDI in a globalised world, it is necessary to provide exemption from VAT to the construction related phase of investment projects in our knowledge and medical hubs.

Our approach to taxation is part of a wider philosophy of putting public finances on a sound basis and inspiring investor confidence by moving to a clearly spelt out rules based system. Reforms in our taxation regime emphasize clear rules applied equally to all investors. This approach is paying dividends with high levels of FDI.

Moreover, the move away from discretionary tax breaks selectively given to favoured taxpayers has been dramatic. Prior to our reforms, before the Minister of Finance relinquished his discretionary powers in favour of a transparent and rules based approach, tax expenditures (i.e. exemptions being provided on a discretionary basis) amounted to 3.5% of GDP. Following the reforms and reliance on rules and transparency, these expenditures have come down.

More importantly, now the tax expenditure is entirely rules based and provided to all without special favours. Also, the quality of the exemptions provided previously was lower due to being largely provided on a case by case basis at the discretion of the Minister.

For example, the Illovo deal involved tax payers providing at least Rs400 m. in one tax exemption to support a large disinvestment from Mauritius. In addition, the interpretation of the fiscal law was tweaked to exempt many transactions under the Illovo deal from payment of several other taxes. If these taxes were included, the exemptions given on a discretionary basis would be significantly higher than Rs1 billion.

All these, Mr Speaker, Sir, were done in a non transparent way where the Minister used his discretion. He did not even come to this august Assembly for approval.

In contrast, under this Government the largest beneficiaries have been related to FDI in new sectors and new activities. At the same time, we have been increasing the taxes paid by IRS projects, our tax expenditures have been focused on investment that creates jobs and diversifies the economy to make it more resilient.

In that context, the Apollo Bramwell Hospital project which is a joint venture between one of the most reputable medical institutions and a local company has established medical tourism in Mauritius. It will bring high tech, state-of-the-art medicine, provide additional training facilities to support the development of medical training and create 500 jobs.

I have recently provided the details on VAT exemptions to the projects in response to PQ B/364. Additionally the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the MEF have also benefitted from the same provisions in a transparent way for the construction of its new training centre to the tune of Rs6.5 m. VAT exemption.

The JSS Academy, an India based tertiary institution and Jhurry Rya School, a local institution, have been approved and by the end of construction it is expected that their VAT exemption – again in a transparent manner- will amount to Rs45 m. and Rs6 m., respectively. Charles Telfair Institute is expected to benefit to the tune of some Rs25 million once its new building project is undertaken.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all these exemptions have been given in strict conformity with the rules based system that we have introduced. There is no discretionary power used as was the case previously in some large transactions. We also have several other knowledge and medical hub projects in the pipeline like Ramachandra, Manipal University and D.Y. Patil University that will benefit from the same provisions, as will other projects in these sectors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the need to provide incentives is not new. For example, previously all EPZ companies were benefitting from Customs and VAT exemptions as well as preferential prices and rentals on land and industrial buildings.

For instance, in 2002 the then Government provided generous incentives for the spinning sector to encourage investment. Beneficiaries include Tian Li spinning, FUEL group and CMT. Benefits include a 10 year tax holiday, VAT and Customs Duty exemption, beneficial electricity tariffs, land at concessionary rates and exemption of tax on land conversion.

In the case of FUEL, the promoters obtained exemption from land conversion tax on 25 acres for the setting up of a spinning plant. In addition Mr Speaker, Sir, the BPML Cyber Tower, a very important project for our country, has also benefitted from refund of VAT. Likewise the Swami Vivekananda Convention Centre has equally benefitted from these, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In the ICT sector, tax holidays were provided up to 2012 and with 5 percent corporate tax for a lifetime. Customs duty exemptions on office buildings and furniture were also given. Similarly, in 2004, a seafood project benefitted from concessionary rates on land rental.

Concerning NGOs, over the years many have requested various exemptions including from VAT. Since VAT is rules based it has not been possible for Ministers to provide such exemption on a discretionary basis. Moreover, there are significant risks involved due to the complexity of administering any regime to limit benefits to deserving NGOs.

This Government is for the first time proposing a framework to support deserving NGOs. However, because of the way VAT functions, there will be no exemptions but a refund system for VAT related to construction for projects approved by the National Empowerment Foundation for deserving NGOs.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister has given a number of firms that have been benefited, from what I understood, from VAT funding on materials for construction. Obviously, in the case of British American Insurance/Apollo Hospital, this is a profit -making venture. The description of the

hon. Minster has given of others that have supposedly benefited from the same kind of advantage, are they other profit making?

Dr. Sithanen: Well, it depends how you define profit, Mr Speaker, Sir. In 2005, when the then Government introduced a change for education it was available for public sector and also for private sector. So, I don't want to go into a debate whether Charles Telfair Institution, which is providing very good training in this country, is a non-profit or a profit organisation. The same thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, for all the other institutions that I have mentioned coming from India or elsewhere. So, we are not going to enter into a debate whether it is profit-making or non profit making. We consider, just like they consider that the time when they introduced the changes, that these are extremely important for broadening economy activities of the country with a view to enhancing its resilience.

Mr Bérenger: In the case of the Apollo Hospital, which is American Insurance, can we have the dates on which they made the applications and the date on which it was approved?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't have the exact dates, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I will look into it and come forward to the Assembly and give more information to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. But let me stress one thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is in the law, just as the hon. Jugnauth who was Minister of Finance came to the Assembly to change VAT to encourage tertiary education which, I think, was a good thing, we extended it to health facilities because we believe that Mauritius can attract these activities in Mauritius. Everything has been done in strict conformity with a rule based system that is transparent. Apollo Bramwell Hospital has benefited from it, the MCCI, MEF also have benefited from it, the JSS Academy also Jhurry Rya Schools. Charles Telfair would benefit from it and there are others that will come, including Ramachandra, which is a leading medical institution in India, will also benefit from it, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are strict rules that have been provided for in the Board of Investment in case of medical facilities and through the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) for tertiary education.

Mr Bérenger: In the case of the same Apollo Bramwell Hospital, we were given a figure of Rs136 m. of Value Added Tax refunded as at February 2009. Can we have the figure as at to date as I requested?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't have the figures, Mr Speaker, Sir, I can check and will come back because it has not been fully commissioned. Let me again make two points Mr Speaker, Sir. The alternative very often is zero, because if you do not provide these incentives, the investors don't come. Very often, I tease hon. Jugnauth and say: "look, if you just increase the 15% to 30%, it doesn't mean that you will double the tax receipts". Probably, the investors will never come, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have said it very often: Mauritius is not the only very beautiful girl in town. If we did not give, just like hon. Jugnauth when he was Minister of Finance and the hon. Leader of the Opposition was Prime Minister this facility for education and, as a result of these incentives some educational institutions have come; now, we cannot go on and say that if we had not given the VAT they would have paid the amount. If we have not done it, it would have been zero. I keep telling everybody, Mr Speaker, Sir, that 150 multiply by zero is zero, Mr Speaker, Sir.

And second great advantage of this system is its transparency. We don't have to tweak any fiscal law to give benefits to a specific company, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the case of the Apollo Bramwell Hospital, which is a profit-making venture, the figure that we are provided was Rs136 m. of the Value Added Tax refunded. Is the hon. Minister happy with the situation where after having benefited from such refund of Value Added Tax, the same company sells its shares to a foreign company?

Dr. Sithanen: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, the concession is given to the project and not on who is the shareholder. We have never done it; they have done it in the past, they looked at who is the shareholder and then they have tweaked the law to give Rs1 billion of tax exemption to five companies, Mr Speaker, Sir. And here everything has been done.....

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: Order please!

Dr. Sithanen:..... in transparency, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now it has become a joint venture. I don't know whether two is joint - three, if you understand what I mean - British American investment, Apollo Hospital and a leading investment company from the Middle East. We need to diversify the base of our investment also. If tomorrow Charles Telfair Institute changes its ownership, Mr Speaker, Sir, as long as it functions within the legal system, the law of this country, they will benefit from the concession, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: I am not interested in comparing like with like. He mentioned the Illovo deal; I could mention the LONRHO deal where the same kind of facilities was extended to LONRHO in the past exactly in the same way. We are not talking about the same thing at all, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have had the figure for Apollo Bramwell Hospital ...

Mr Speaker: Order please!

JMr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether it is not a fact that among other NGOs, APEIM, which is one of the best most sincere NGOs dealing with *enfants inadaptés* - *APEIM is Association des Parents d'Enfants Inadaptés* - has requested, whereas Apollo Bramwell Hospital has benefited from Rs136 m. of refund up to February 2009 , in March 2008, a refund of Rs5.8 m. Can we know from the hon. Minister whether there were other such NGOs, non-profit making, dedicated NGOs, apart from APEIM, which had made requests, and why was not the law amended, as it was in the case of Apollo Bramwell Hospital earlier on to allow refund of Value Added Tax to such NGOs?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, first, the law was not amended for one particular company. We never tweaked the law to tailor-make a fiscal incentive for 5 firms. The law on education and the Finance Bill of 2005 provided for education; we broadened the scope for medical services in line with the objective of Government to develop both education and health facilities, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, we had the label and then investors took advantage of this. For the other one, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has been Minister of Finance twice, in fact, last year, he spoke to me on a deserving case - he knows very well and, in fact, he told me: "I know that this is not possible, you have to change the law." There are many deserving NGOs who are doing a good job, Mr Speaker, Sir, but the law does not allow us to give concession. I receive many requests from many NGOs on a regular basis. The problem, I think, all Ministers of Finance and all Governments have faced is: how do you prevent abuse in a system and how do you have a system that will administer these concessions? We have thought about it. In fact, it is for the first time that a Government is coming forward with an architecture or a structure that will support deserving NGOs, not by exempting them from VAT, but by refunding their VAT. As soon as the Finance Bill is approved, we will start assessing or evaluating these requests and when there are deserving cases, they will be given their refund of VAT, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: I am sure the hon. Minister will agree with me that nothing prevented Government when it met with such genuine requests, like the one from APEIM for a meagre Rs5.8 m. of refund of Value Added Tax, from amending the law as it has been done for construction purposes extended to health institutions. It could – and I say, it should - have been done in the case of such genuine NGOs for construction of their own centres, non-profit making NGOs. Can I ask why was this not considered and done?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can reply the hon. Member why he had not done it when he was Minister of Finance.

(*Interruptions*)

These requests have been made. When I was Minister of Finance for the first time, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have received many such requests. Hon. Dr. Bunwaree, hon. Jugnauth must have received

requests. This is the problem. They do not do anything. When we do, they say: "why did not you do it before?" They need to be very fair to us. I am sure, both the hon. Leader of the Opposition and hon. Jugnauth, when they were preparing the Budget, they must have received requests from deserving NGOs. It is a tricky situation. Now we have taken the decision and we will do it. The problem that we will face, Mr Speaker, Sir is: how do you determine who is the deserving cases and who are not and how do you make sure that there is no abuse? But, it will be done in a transparent way, in a rule-based manner.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister *noie le poisson dans l'eau*. I am not talking about requests from NGOs in general, come Budget Time! I am talking about a specific request for Value Added Tax refund on construction material. This is a very specific request that was made. I am talking about - I don't think it is fair to *noyer le poisson dans l'eau* - Value Added Tax, specifically on construction of their centre, refund which has taken place in the case, for example, Apollo Bramwell Hospital. Specific request came from APEIM, why was it not considered?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, *le Leader de l'opposition fait une fixation sur cet hôpital. C'est injuste*, Mr Speaker, Sir! *Fixation sur cet hôpital* and we know why, Mr Speaker, Sir! He is trying to compare and contrast to say this is what we have done for the shareholder of that company and this is what we are not doing for APEIM. This is very unfair. The law provides for one, but does not provide for the other one. They had the opportunity to change it, they did not do anything. Now it is this Government that has taken the initiative, Mr Speaker, Sir, to broaden the scope of the refund by including genuine cases for construction. Mr Speaker, Sir, I received also - it is my eighth Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir - some cases on construction by NGO's, but I have told them that the law does not allow us to do it. So, you cannot compare a situation where the law is clear, transparent and has been enacted in the august Assembly and one which does not exist. But now we are coming forward with a policy that will be rule-based, transparent and not tailor-made for some few companies that were doing a Real Estate transaction.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I come to what is being proposed now. But, obviously, the law that we are going to amend now could have been amended before, especially after receiving this request in March 2008 from a genuine NGO. Nothing prevented Government from amending the law there, rule-based, to provide for such cases. Now what is being proposed is that NEF, National Empowerment Foundation, approve, requests will be granted refund. Does that mean that there will be no backdating?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is telling us why we did not do it. Why he did not do it for five years, Mr Speaker, Sir?

(Interruptions)

Of course, there were requests! I received requests when I was Minister, hon. Dr. Bunwaree also received requests when he was Minister...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. Sithanen: I have presented eight Budgets, Mr Speaker, Sir. I know what I am talking about, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have made a move forward, *c'est un pas en avant!* Let the system operate, Mr Speaker, Sir and depending on how deserving the case is, we will take action accordingly. We have to come forward to this august Assembly, Mr Speaker, Sir, and change the law and not do it *en catimini*, like it was done in the case of the Illovo deal.

Mr Bérenger: It is no *catimini*, Mr Speaker, Sir. My point is that the law will come before Parliament, of course. But will it provide for the National Empowerment Foundation? Because before that no NGO knew that it had to seek the approval of the National Empowerment Foundation. Now, it is being proposed. When we draft the law, my question is: will we cater for

genuine cases? Will they have the opportunity of coming back through the National Empowerment Foundation for those genuine requests?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the reason why we have suggested that it should be approved by NEF. We all know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there are many NGOs; some of them do an excellent work for the community; some of them are not beyond reproach. We have to find a system, how do we filter them and we believe that the National Empowerment Foundation is probably best equipped to carry out this exercise. If there is a case that is made, Mr Speaker, Sir - we have shown that we are a compassionate Government - they must pass the test of eligibility and they must be recommended by the National Empowerment Foundation. I am sure the hon. Leader of the Opposition would agree with me that this is progress that we have made compared to what it was before, Mr Speaker, Sir. Every time we make one step forward, he says: "why did we not do it two years, three years ago." Then, why did he not do it when he was in Government?

Mr Speaker: Can I make a point here now on this line of questioning? Being given that the hon. Minister of Finance has said that he is coming to the House with a Bill to provide for refund of VAT to the non-governmental organisations, I think that rule of anticipation applies here and that when the Bill will be in the House, the hon. Leader of the Opposition will have the opportunity to make his point, and perhaps propose amendment to the Bill.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, we know how it works. Even when we make genuine suggestions, because a decision has been taken, because the law is, as proposed, to the House, Government won't budge. So, I am raising the point whilst the law is being prepared, that we should provide for genuine cases, even from the past, to go through the National Empowerment Foundation.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bodha, last question!

Mr Bodha: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact I had three questions, but I'll try to put all of them in one question. My first question, Mr Speaker, Sir: may I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister what is the project value of each of the cases where there has been a refund? Second, there is a fertility clinic which has been established in Mauritius. Did that clinic qualify for a refund? And third, Mr Speaker, Sir, as we have been told that it is rule-based approach, who monitors that the rule-based process is applied and whether the Minister is satisfied that in each of these cases, the approach was implemented.

Dr. Sithanen: If only the hon. Member had listened to the answer I have given, for the third question, I stated that it is the Board of Investment that does it in the case of medical tourism; it is the TEC in the case of tertiary education and it will be NEF in the case of the NGOs. I don't have the specific value, but if you take the amount that I have given and you divide by 0.15, you will get it, because, in fact, they are having 15% exemption as VAT. In the case of Telfair, you just divide it by 0.15, you will have the figure.

(Interruptions)

As for the fertility clinic, if they satisfy the criteria that have been laid down in the regulations, they will have it and this is the advantage. It applies to all, assuming they satisfy the criteria, and it is not tweaked for one particular investor.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O 10 (2)

The Prime Minister: Sir, I beg to move that all the business on today's Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

RS DENIM LTD – ASSETS & REPRESENTATIVE

The vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker Sir, further to my reply to PNQ of Thursday 28 May 2009 I wish to make the following statement concerning two points raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I am informed that the total assets of RS Denim Ltd are US \$ 42 m. approximatively Rs1.3 billion consisting of US\$ 38 m. or Rs 1.2 billion of fixed assets and US \$ 4 million approximatively Rs128 m. of other assets.

As to whether Mr Darga is the current representative of DBSA in Mauritius, I am informed that this is not the case. DBSA had in the past, from December 1998 to April 2005 been represented by Straconsult, of which Mr Darga is the Managing Director. I am further informed that since that time DBSA is represented in Mauritius by DCBM and that neither Straconsult nor Mr Darga had been involved with the RS Denim project.

Mr Bérenger: I refer to the point I raised the other day. A statement by Ministers is supposed to be facts and not be polemical. Can I ask the hon. Minister to complete the information, that assets assessment was made by whom?

Dr. Sithanen: Assessment was made by DCDM.

EC/MAURITIUS - SHORT-STAY VISA WAIVER - AGREEMENT

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Dr. A. Boolell): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the Agreement between the European Community and Mauritius on the Short-stay Visa Waiver was signed on the 28 May 2009 in Brussels. His Excellency Mr Sutiawan Gunessee, our Ambassador to the European Community, signed the Agreement on behalf of the Republic of Mauritius. Her Excellency Ms. Helena Bambasova, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and Mr Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the Commission of the EC, signed on behalf of the European Community.

The agreement came into effect the very day it was signed, that is, as from yesterday 28 of May 2009.

This agreement, Mr Speaker, Sir, is no doubt a major milestone in our relations with the European Union given that as from yesterday *bona fide* Mauritian travellers will be able to travel to any one or more of the 25 Schengen Member States belonging to the European Union, as listed at annex, for tourism, social or business purposes and for a period not exceeding 90 days from the date of the first entry during a six month-period will be exempted from visa formalities. (**Appendix**)

Mr Speaker, Sir, this agreement is the culmination of comprehensive negotiations with the European Community. It testifies the excellent relations that we share with the Community and further enhances the already good reputation and image that Mauritian travellers enjoy abroad. I also wish to underscore that this agreement is reciprocal in nature.

I wish to place on record the valuable and unflinching support of our Prime Minister in this process, as well as the efforts of the various institutions such as the Passport and Immigration Office, the State Law Office, our Mission in Brussels and the officials of my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the implementation of this agreement will be financially beneficial to our nationals travelling to Europe as they would no longer have to pay visa fees to the tune of Euros 60 per applicant. However, I wish to underscore that the conditions mentioned in the agreement should be observed by all. In this respect, I invite all Mauritians to exercise a sense of responsibility when travelling to Europe so that the perennial nature of this agreement is safeguarded.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the benefit of the House, I am tabling two documents, namely -

- i. a Joint Press Communiqué issued on 28 May 2009 following the signature of the agreement, and
- ii. an information sheet on the agreement issued by the European Union Delegation in Mauritius.

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2009) BILL

(No. IX of 2009)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Appropriation (2009) Bill (No.IX of 2009).

Question again proposed.

(4.06 p.m.)

The Minister of Health and Quality of Life (Dr. R. Jeetah): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me at the very outset congratulate my colleague, hon. Dr. Sithanen, for presenting this Budget of six months from July to December 2009, which is mainly geared towards riding out to the global crisis, saving jobs, protecting people and preparing for recovery. I would also like to congratulate and thank the hon. Prime Minister for his vision and leadership and for his unflinching drive and commitment towards the betterment of the people of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if one was to take a picture of the world today, we would note that we are going through the greatest depression, far deeper than in 1930s. 40 million jobs have been lost in the US, Japan, Germany and the UK and recession can be seen all throughout the world. Hon. Members, from the other side, might not agree, but here we have some facts whereby no banks have gone bankrupt in this period of economic downturn. The other day a little boy was asking me what happened to AIG - AIG is the brand name of this very big insurance company which has gone bankrupt. No such thing has happened here in Mauritius, no civil servant has been laid off and the PRB report has been fully implemented in 2008. Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that some of the comments that came from the other side of this House were harsh, some nasty and some downright personal. I think there were unjustified, and I have got some indices to prove to the contrary of what hon. Members, from the other side, had been speaking of. First, Mr Speaker, Sir in the World Bank's Doing Business Survey, Mauritius was ranked 32 out of 175 in 2007. This year, Mauritius ranked 24 out of 181 countries, and Mauritius has significantly improved its position based on major improvements of starting businesses. This is mainly due to Business Facilitation Act and also to the implementation of the Act. Secondly, with regard to Outsourcing Readiness Index by Commonwealth Business Council, Mauritius came out second out of 15 African countries in 2009.

Thirdly, in the Ibrahim Index of African Governance in 2008 Mauritius was the first of 48 African countries. Fourthly, the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index ranked Mauritius 26 out of 167 in 2008, and I would like to take a final parameter out of so many whereby in 2009, Mauritius ranked 158 among 165 countries, the last being Finland and this showed that we had a highest political stability in this country. The question that we had to ask ourselves, Mr Speaker Sir, is: how did this all happen?

How is it that we managed to keep free health care, free education and, on top of that, extend facilities to an extra 8,000 students, maintain free transport, universal social security benefits, subsidies and so on and so forth? I guess this is due to the leadership and organisational skills of the Prime Minister.

Mr Speaker, Sir, here, I would like to relate a personal experience of mine with regard to the skills of the Prime Minister. This relates to the election, which I went through in Constituency No. 7 where, in 90 days, we had 450 meetings, all prepared under the leadership of this Prime Minister who, not only planned, but directed, motivated and controlled. As his key word then was 'result', so it is today.

M. le président, j'ai écouté attentivement le discours du Leader de l'opposition qui n'a été qu'un chapelet de critiques. Certes, vous me direz que c'est le propre d'un Leader de l'opposition. Je note, malheureusement, qu'il n'y a eu aucune proposition, aucune idée lumineuse, aucun effort d'imagination. But, he did it with a smile. This, I must give it to him.

I shall, however, wish to comment on two points raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Let me quote from his speech, Mr Speaker, Sir –

“The advisers' heads themselves should be chopped, not their entertainment allowance! There is an awful abuse of advisers - awful abuse - we all know that, Mr Speaker, Sir.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to lay on the Table of the Assembly the list of advisers from September 2000 to July 2005, and I wonder what they would feel when they hear the Leader of the

Opposition's speech.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also like to put on record - a record that the hon. Leader of the Opposition holds – that, out of 11 questions asked on this subject, from 2004 to 2005, he never replied. He even went on to say that he is not willing to waste his time to go and compile these figures. I think that he actually holds a record in the Commonwealth for somebody who has not replied a question over 11 times.

The second point, which I would like to quote, Mr Speaker, Sir, is -

“On égratigne le problème de la pauvreté malgré les meilleures intentions du monde.”

C'est déjà un aveu! But the good intentions are here. But I wonder whether he is in a mode of denial or he just wishes to pretend that he cannot see what is happening. We have maintained free transportation, subsidies on gas and flour, universal pension of OAPs, free education and, over and above all this, we have been able to come up with very imaginative pieces of legislations such as equal opportunity, business facilitation and so on.

This Government firmly believes in its people, and everything has been done to make sure that our children get the best insofar as education is concerned. I think the idea of providing extra capacity for 8,000 extra students would push us even further from where we are.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would now come to my Ministry. The House would be glad to note that the provision of Rs3.29 billion for the health sector represents, for this year, that is, from July to December 2009, 2.2% of the GDP as compared to 2.09% during current financial year 2008/2009. It shows that there has been progress in terms of expenditure. The public health expenditure, as a percentage of total Government expenditure, is 8.16% as compared to 7.2% during this current financial year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to give an overview of this sector. But, before I do that, I would like to talk about the vision of the Prime Minister. The vision is to offer services that are similar to what is happening in Singapore. Why Singapore? Because if one was to compare the GDP percentage spent in the health sector in Singapore to that spent in the U.S, one would see that, in 2008, it was 3.5% of GDP expenditure in Singapore, and they had an infant mortality rate of 3 per 1,000 life birth in 2006 and a life expectancy of about 80 years. This is a remarkable achievement, Mr Speaker, Sir, compared to the U.S., with a health expenditure of 15.2% in 2006 and an infant mortality rate of 7 per 1,000 life birth and a life expectancy of 78 years. In Mauritius, the life expectancy is 72.6, and the infant mortality rate was 14.3 per 1,000 life birth. This is why we are looking towards Singapore to try to see how they managed, with an expenditure of 3.5%, to get down to an infant mortality rate of 3 per 1,000.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to share some information with Members of the House here with regard to the work being done by this sector. The public health sector offers free health at user cost to 90% of the population. And, over the last four years, that is, since we have been in power, if one was to look into the number of attendances we have had in our institutions, it is not less than 32 million. For a population of 1.2 million inhabitants, we have had 32 million attendances, that is, just over 8 million a year. This is not just a figment of our imagination, we have got all the details. For example, one can see that we have had 1.5 million attendances in the Accident and Emergency Department, and all the different services that we offer in our specialised units, as well as our area health centres and so on. This says a lot about the state of health of our nation. We have 32 million attendances in four years.

In 2008, we carried out 44,173 surgeries. Every week, we have 175 eye surgeries, and we have reduced the waiting time from 12 months to 3 months. This was done by the good work of my predecessor, I must admit. Every year, we have about 500 cardiac surgeries. In fact, last year, we had 554 and, again, in 2008, we had 570 angioplasty and 2,290 angiography. Our bed occupancy rate was 72.1% for a bed capacity of 3,500. This is another interesting figure that Members of the

House might wish to note. On average, the public service dispenses 5,916 meals a day and that makes for 118,625,000 meals a year. Unfortunately, we also have this sorry state of affairs where we have 400 amputations.

With regard to the pharmaceutical sector, we offer 750 items costing around Rs350 m. every year. It would be good to note that, each year, we dispense 58 million paracetamol tablets at a cost of Rs6 m., 5,000 litres of methadone costing Rs7 m., 300,000 vials of human insulin costing about Rs55 m., HIV drugs to about 500 patients cost us around Rs15 m.

Here, I would like to, once again, seize this opportunity to put on record my personal appreciation and that of Government of the remarkable work being carried out by our health personnel. With regard to the Blood Transfusion Service and Central Health Lab, Mr Speaker, Sir, last year, we carried out 7.5 million tests, covering a range of about 250 different tests, and the Blood Transfusion Service collected and processed 46,000 pints of blood in 2008, 80% of which was collected from volunteered donors. We have introduced a number of new lab services such as the HBA1C, and we are currently working on a roadmap for help lab services in Mauritius. It is being finalised by my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have offered some information with regard to the state of the health service. One is to ask ourselves what is happening in this country. It would be good to note that 20% of the population suffer from diabetes, 30% of the population suffer from hypertension, 39% of the population are either obese or overweight, 45% of the population have a high level of cholesterol and, maybe, about 45% of the admissions in the Brown Sequared hospital are there because of alcohol and, unfortunately, 75% of men in Mauritius do not do physical exercise. If one was to define physical exercise as a 30 minutes breathe, walk. 90% of women don't do any physical exercise, and 95% of adults in Mauritius have, at least, one decayed tooth, and the worst thing in here is that people don't seem to understand that tooth decay is causing heart problems. Some other figures I would like to share with the House is that, between 1976 to 2006, there has been an increase in the mortality rate, because of diabetes, by 700% and, worse of all, 50% of people in this country who suffer from diabetes don't know about the problem. If we had 100 persons here, an assessment would show that 20% of us would probably suffer from diabetes and, as I said, the worst is that 50% of the population that suffer from diabetes don't even know that they have this disease.

I have got some other figures that I would like to share with the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to consumption and our way of life. For a population of 1.2 million people, as at last year, Mauritians consumed 1,089,939,000 cigarettes. Mauritians consumed 6,083,673 litre of what they call country liquor, that is, rum - as they call it with love in Mauritius, 'Grand Mario' - a year. And with regard to whisky and other sophisticated drinks, Mauritians consumed 17,758,092 litres, namely 17.7 *millions de litres de whisky*, 6 *millions litres de rhum* and, to top it up, 36,133,982 litres of beer. Mr Speaker, Sir, 35% of attendances in our hospitals are alcohol related, and this is a sorry state of affairs with regard to consumption of alcohol and cigarettes.

(Interruptions)

Since the hon. Member is talking about money, if we were to add on these two items, that is, alcohol and cigarettes, for 2008, Mauritians consumed, in terms of rupees, an estimate of Rs13.5 billion. *Mes chers amis*, I hope we pay heed to this figure. *R 13.5 milliards pour l'achat d'alcool et de cigarettes*. That exceeds the two largest Ministries, that is, mine, which has about 15,000 people, and the Ministry of Education. I got a budget of about Rs5 billion last year, and my good friend, Dr. Bunwaree, got about Rs8 billion. Mauritians consume more than these two large Ministries. *Alors là, peut-être, maintenant*, you would ask me what this Government is doing! Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government came up with the alcohol regulation effective as from 01 March, whereby people cannot consume alcohol in public, and also people would not be allowed to sell to under aged, that is, minors. We also came up with the tobacco regulations. That has been partly operational since 01 March 2009, and would be fully operational as from 01 June, whereas one would not be allowed

to smoke in public and also one would not be able to sell to the minors. And here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I count on your indulgence to state that this is a public place as well and under the law, the House as well. We have reinforced our inspection for tobacco and alcohol and, as I speak today, our flying squad is making what we call landings in various places, to try to let people know that this is illegal. We are starting a first tobacco cessation programme as from this month, and we are also discussing with relevant Head of departments of the WHO Headquarters in Geneva with regard to obtaining technical support and reinforcement of these regulations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to make a review of the situation. I guess that we have got many challenges. The figures of 32 million and the percentage of people suffering from various diseases should be reduced in my view, and a number of actions have started in my Ministry. The first point I would like to mention is about infrastructure. An amount of Rs351 m. has been provided for infrastructural projects and the first one I would like to mention here is the construction of the new Jeetoo Hospital, where preliminary work has already started, and the first phase would start, I guess, in September 2009. This would be a modern hospital with 550 beds, with all facilities what could be expected in a modern hospital. In Flacq, we have three new blocks, what we commonly call as Block C, Block D and Block E, and these will be constructed in phases to accommodate the medical, orthopaedic, psychiatric wards, dialysis units and so on. This would be at a cost of Rs125 m., and this is due to start shortly. Construction work of a medi-clinic started on 24 April of this year and is expected to be completed in March 2010. Because of the high number of patients that each of our hospitals receive, there is need to extend the Accident and Emergency department at the SSRN hospital.

We are also building a new Operation Theatre at Victoria Hospital with six operating theatres to cater for an increased number of operating sessions. We are also building a new surgery and spinal block at the new Outpatient department at Victoria Hospital, and these works are expected to start in January 2010. We would be renovating the Mahebourg Hospital, and we would also upgrade 12 area health centres into model health centres to strengthen primary health care, as recommended by WHO. One of the major problems in Mauritius is that people tend to get confused between a casualty and a primary health care system. We want to make it more appealing, so that we can offer the service as we ought to in our hospitals.

Secondly, I like to mention investment in equipment. New equipment for the sum of Rs200 m. have been purchased, and these include anaesthetic machines incorporated with ventilators, new X-ray machines, mobile CRs, echography machines, digital retinal cameras, new MRI, new cobalt teletherapy machine. During the next six months, Rs100 m. have been provided to purchase one lithotripsy machine at the cost of Rs20 m., one digital mammography machine, three laparoscopic sets, one central cardiac monitoring system and, apart from the acquisition of costly equipment, planned preventive maintenance and repairs are equally important. In this respect, for all new acquisition of equipment, there is now an inbuilt element of maintenance and repairs, and we are also acquiring assistance from friendly countries to assist us in having better capacity in this field.

I would like now to talk about the 350 grades of officers under the establishment of my Ministry, which accounts for nearly 15,000 employees. The policy of the Ministry has been to build, as a priority, capacity at professional level, namely at medical and para-medical level, that is, for doctors and specialists as well as nursing and other technical officers. For instance, the course followed by student nurses to qualify as nursing officers will be upgraded from certificate to diploma level. Some 346 doctors, including 60 specialists and almost 360 student nurses, 14 midwives have been recruited from July 2005; 684 student nurses have qualified as nursing officers since July 2005, and some 1,150 employees in other grades have been recruited. Again, an interesting point to note here, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that 10,000 staff members have been trained in customer care and performance management system. I am not saying that we have won the battle with regard to customer care, but this a constant battle that we have to wage to make sure that people do understand that customer is king in the service. With regard post-graduates studies, we have *Université Bordeaux 2* and *Montpellier University* which are training our specialists. Since

2005, 109 medical staff have followed post-graduate studies in different fields. I must also add that we recently had an agreement with these *hôpitaux universitaires de Genève*, whereby they would assist us in training specialists in the field of cardiology, neurology and plastic surgery.

One of the problems that we face, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that people seem to be unaware of the current difficulties that we have in terms of health. NCDs, that is, Non-Communicable Diseases have become a major public health threat in Mauritius, contributing up to 80% of the burden of diseases. I did mention the figures whereby people are not eating properly and they are not doing enough exercise, and we have this inherent capacity of having diabetes. My Ministry has set up a National Service Framework with 14 standards - based on the UK model - to fight diabetes. We have started a new school health programme for secondary schools students, which started in 2007. We are putting much more effort in prevention. As we all know, prevention is better than cure. From February 2007 to December 2008, we have visited 450 schools where we have screened 60,000 students and, for this year, until May, we have screened another 15,000 students. We have also screened 95,000 persons in about 750 sites, and we have started the business of creating health clubs in various regions. We are also training community leaders so that they can support the programmes. The House may wish to know that a major surveillance study has been undertaken on diabetic patients, who participated in successive NCD surveys, and another one, that is, NCD Survey 2009, will be carried out in July 2009.

The House also may wish to note that we are going to host an International Conference on Diabetes in November. With this, we would like to be in the business of fighting diabetes where we would learn about latest developments and practical management of the disease and take stock of the latest scientific evidence based on best practices to address the epidemic of diabetes and related complications.

My other point, Mr Speaker, Sir, is with regard to the manner in which we consume food in this country. It would be good to know that we are consuming 28 kgs of fat and oil annually and 31 kgs of sugar. It means that we ought to be consuming about 15.5 kgs of sugar annually and we are consuming about twice and the same goes for oil and fat. Therefore, my Ministry is coming up with a national plan of action on nutrition that would include dietary guidelines for nutrition, fruit and vegetable promotion initiative. We would also be revisiting the food items allowed for sale in school canteens, that is, we are going to review the regulations.

In this day and age, we have to make awareness and sensitisation programmes towards motivating people to adopt healthy eating habits and to practice physical activities daily. As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, 75% of men in this country do not do exercise, and 90% of women do not do physical exercise, which leads to this appalling state of affairs with regard to overweight and obesity. 39% of the population of Mauritius suffer from this disease.

A national Action Plan on cancer as well is being developed, and this is also on the rise. From memory, Mr Speaker, Sir, I know that, everyday, three persons died out of cancer in this country. So, by the time I am speaking, unfortunately, three persons would have passed away. With a view to get to the people, we have started a mobile clinic service. I must say it is not new; it was there in the past, but we have extended services throughout the five regions. We offer a range of services, whereby we screen for NCDs, we screen for cervical and breast cancer, we give voluntary counselling and testing for HIV/AIDS; we give cooking demonstrations, counselling on practice of physical activities, and we also offer dental check-ups and offer services such as ayurvedic medicine.

We have visited 95 sites, and we have screened 43,122 persons. 7,082 married women aged 30 to 60 years have been screened for breast cancer, 5,466 married women aged 30 to 60 years have been screened for cervical cancer, and we found that 282 cases over this short period of time of screening had to be referred to area health centres. Mr Speaker, Sir, it will be good to note that, over this short period of time, for the screening, we have found that 69 cases were positive and, since they were detected at an early stage, they would all be treated and followed up in hospitals. I

guess we have just saved 69 lives from developing cancer. The target is to screen 100,000 individuals over a year. And, here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to make an appeal to the female population of this country. I do understand that there is a cultural problem, there is this cultural barrier, whereby people tend not to accept to be screened against cervical and breast cancer. As you can see over these few months, we have been able to detect 69 persons, and I wonder how many more we could have done if we could have had the assistance of the community.

I would like now to talk about HIV/AIDS, and harm-reduction strategies. Along with NCDs, HIV/AIDS is the other major concern for Mauritius, and we have undertaken a number of measures since 2005. The service has been decentralised and, as at date, 1,250 drug addicts have been induced on methadone, and we are aiming to increase it fairly rapidly. Mr Speaker, Sir, under the Global Fund, Mauritius will be benefiting from a total sum of €7 m, that is, Rs315 m. over a period of five years, for implementing projects to fight HIV/AIDS. This has been made possible, I must say here, due to the unceasing advocacy of Government, and the Prime Minister in particular, at international fora. The fight against HIV/AIDS will be undertaken at all fronts, and the policy in this area is to initiate measures and reduce eventually stigmatisation and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS. Here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I could like to add that, recently working with Dr Gaud, it appears that it is possible to prevent the spread of AIDS in a country. So, we are working toward that very ambitious goal. The House may wish to know that we have been able to eradicate malaria in this country, and I guess that, if we put our heads together, there is no reason why we could not achieve this very challenging target to get rid of new AIDS cases in this country.

As I mentioned earlier on, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are currently working towards decongesting our hospitals. Therefore, we are renovating 12 Area Community Health Centres, with a view to encourage patients to attend these health services for their basic needs. With regard to mental health, we have a new project to follow up patients who have been detoxified for alcohol, in collaboration with NGOs attached to NATReSA. There is one point I would like to make here, Mr Speaker Sir. We have a rehabilitation team that has been set up at Brown Sequard Mental Hospital. Eight long-stayed patients, who have been in the old Brown Sequard Hospital, for over 10 years, have been rehabilitated and discharged, and reintegrated in the community. The House may wish to know that we have patients who have been up to 25 years in this hospital, and we are working with the community to find out solutions to this great state of affairs.

I would like now to talk about this current difficulty that the world is facing, that is, the AH1/N1 flu. This Government has put a lot of effort and resources in combating or preparing against this influenza. The Ministry of Finance has offered Rs 100 m., as was requested by my Ministry, to procure PCR equipment at the cost of Rs4 m., to be able to do the test here in Mauritius. We are upgrading the stock of Tamiflu, to be able to cater for 25% of the population. I will also buy whatever is required in terms of additional medicine, should the flu reach our shores. I must also say that our surveillance system has been upgraded, both at the port and airport level, so that we actually are in a position to know the state of affairs and act as and when required. We have had a number of meetings, and we are finalising our preparedness plans. My Ministry is also working on a mass casualty preparedness plan. If, for example, tomorrow, we are in a situation where we have 200 wounded people, how is it that we would cope with the situation? This pandemic influenza has given us an opportunity to work out a plan, to make sure that we can handle the situation as and when it happens.

Given the size of this Ministry, Mr Speaker, Sir, it requires a certain level of management skills. We have discussed, and we have found that it would be beneficial to this Ministry to adopt and implement an ISO system. Therefore, my Ministry is implementing the MS ISO 9001:2008 in all public hospitals and all other health institutions, including the national blood transfusion services. Basically, what this does is that it forces us to say what we do and to do what we say. Then it enables us to have a third party assessor to come, and make sure that what was said is being done. We are also having in mind the effectiveness and efficiency of the system, and I understand that all

health services should be ready by February of next year, with regard to ISO. At least, that's the target. I understand that the blood transfusion services would be applying for the standard soon.

Another point that I would like to mention, Mr Speaker Sir, is to transform Mauritius in a medical hub by encouraging private healthcare and medical education. We had a PNQ earlier on, and this side of the House takes great pride on having institutions such as Apollo hospital group. I had the chance to talk to the chief Executive of Apollo, who happens to be an American national, and he has promised me that this is going to be the best Apollo that exists currently, and this is a strategy. Should they want to build elsewhere, the next one will be the best one. This Apollo Hospital is going to be the best in the world, as a matter of fact. Whatever Apollo that exists in India, the one here will be better. I was a bit surprised to hear the contention of the Leader of Opposition. We are talking about public health here, and if one was to look at the amount that this Government spends in sending people overseas, one should have been for this project. We are all for this kind of investment, which I understand is up to about Rs2 billion. It would be a 200-bed multi speciality hospital. We all know that Fortis has landed here in Mauritius, which I understand, again, is the second largest group in India. They have made an arrangement with CIEL, and they are investing about US\$7 m; they have invested in the share capital to the tune of 59%.

Earlier on it was made mention of Sri Ramachandra Medical College as well as Manipal and Chitkara. For Sri Ramachandra, the investment would be to the tune of about \$30 m. Here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not being concerned about investment, I am concerned about the skills. We have ambition to convert all our hospitals here in Mauritius into teaching hospitals. I have laid down the figures. There is no one person who could manage such large figures on his overall. That is why we need to convert our hospitals into teaching hospitals where having developed into a teaching hospital, it would create an in-built pressure by the press, by the students, by the parents and maybe by Parliament to make sure that we offer the best to our people. This is a strategy of this Government to achieve the vision of the Prime Minister, that is, to offer health care similar to what is happening in Singapore.

I have mentioned Chitkara, there is also *les hôpitaux universitaires de Genève* and next month I understand University of Merida School of Medicine is visiting us after a visit of the Prime Minister in the U.S. All this is being done to make sure that the people of Mauritius have a chance to do well in education, in business, but also in health. After all, this is the best resource that we have. I understand that there are also three applications for the setting up of private schools of nursing and these have been approved.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to reassure all these investors that these are all projects that will get the full support of the Government. I think that it would not be a good thing to do politics on such kind of investment because, after all, the life of a person is worth – well, there cannot be any value that could be put to that. So, we are doing the best to have the best service here in this country. We also have a number of international collaborators, Mr Speaker, Sir. As from July 2005, we have had 64 foreign teams in different specialties such as neurology, ophthalmology, limb surgery, maxillofacial surgery, spinal surgery and pediatric and cardiac surgery, which have been offering us their assistance and the training to our paramedical staff and the doctors. They have performed some 1570 complicated surgeries. If these were to be sent overseas, these would have cost us Rs100 m.

Last week, in a meeting at the WHO in Geneva, I signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the *hôpitaux universitaires de Genève* where they have offered 3 seats for 4 to 6 years, as I mentioned earlier on, in the field of cardiovascular surgery, plastic and reconstructive surgery as well as neurosurgery. We are also, Mr Speaker, Sir, encouraging corporate socio- responsibility with regard to the upkeep of our hospitals. We have about 150 wards and we have identified a number of private institutions which wish to invest in their corporate socio- responsibility to assist us in the building up of our wards. Barclays Bank, for example, is supporting my Ministry to the tune of Rs10 m. in the fight against diabetes; Sun Resorts recently opened a modern pediatric

cancer ward at Victoria hospital, Betonix has sponsored the renovation of a ward at Nehru Hospital and some other 25 potential companies. We would like to make it easier for private firms to have a foot in the health sector. After all, the health of the nation is our wealth as it also affects the productivity. The private sector seems to be well aware of this and they are assisting us wherever they can.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like, before concluding, to make a summary of what is happening in this country. We get about 8 million patients every year for a population of 1.2 million. I do not know if it is a large or a small figure. But I think we have to do something about it, it is prevention. Government is doing what it can, but I think everybody needs to be acting as a responsible person. We have to basically look at what we are eating and start doing some physical exercise. If we started with this little action I think we would have gone a long way. We cannot go on having these 400 amputations every year. As I mentioned, we have 550 open heart surgeries in Mauritius yearly. This is only in the public sector, there is even more in the private sector. We cannot keep on having 175 eye surgeries every week. It goes on like this. By tonight we would have operated 175 and the same would happen next week. We have got a number of challenges, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think if we all put our heads together, I am sure we would be in a better situation in the years to come. I am not saying that it is going to change overnight, but we have to take it seriously.

As I mentioned, Mr Speaker, Sir, 39% of this population is either obese or is overweight. We have to start doing something about it. This is not a comical affair, this is a pathological condition whereby it seems to put strain on your heart, your eyes and lots of other difficulties are going to happen, the pancreas and so on. I am not a medical doctor, but this is where I have started to learn. We have got some challenges here that we have to take it seriously. Whether Members of this side of the House or my good friends on the other side, we have to be able to tell it to people about the way we eat and what we consume and so on. Alcohol and cigarettes are causing the major disaster to the people of this country. Imagine if we already have a predisposition of 20% of the population which suffers from diabetes and we add on six million litres of rum and seventeen million litres of whiskey and thirty six million litres of beer, where are we going to be in 20 years time, Mr Speaker, Sir? This is an appeal I am making to one and all here for each and everyone to do the little bit one could do to make sure that we get out of this cycle, if I may call it so.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are in the midst of a violent tempest which has already hit many countries and it is causing serious havoc on all fronts. But I am sure with the leadership of our Prime Minister and with this very resilient Minister of Finance that we have, who has a very large set of shoulders that has been taking so much on him, I am very confident that with such able leaders we will be able to brave the economic storm. We expect that in such difficult times we will be *solidaires* and behave as true patriots.

I would like to thank you for your attention, Mr Speaker, Sir.

At 4.59 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.33 p.m with Mr Deputy Speaker in the Chair

Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is always an honour and a pleasure to take the floor of the august Assembly, to participate in debates. *Pour être sincère, je suis aussi déçue que la population mauricienne car j'ai vraiment cru que, pour une fois, je pourrais féliciter le ministre des finances, mais hélas c'est encore une fois, du bluff.*

M. le président, c'est n'est pas dans mes habitudes de reprendre les propos des intervenants de cette Chambre, mais hier en écoutant l'honorable Hawoldar j'ai été frappée par

quelque chose. Lors de son intervention, l'honorable Hawoldar semblait offusquer à l'idée que les terres agricoles achetées à R40,000 l'arpent étaient vendues aux petits planteurs à R300,000 l'arpent par l'ancien régime. Il a aussi fait mention que les parlementaires du gouvernement d'alors dormaient et n'ont pas réagi. Permettez-moi, M. le président, de demander à l'honorable membre – malheureusement, il n'est pas la cet après-midi...

(Interruptions)

Ce qu'il fait actuellement probablement, qu'il dort effectivement alors que ces mêmes terres sont vendues à R3 million l'arpent actuellement. Donc, M. le président, a quoi bon faire de la démagogie. Bien sûr, sans rancune pour mon ami, l'honorable Hawoldar.

Let me get back to my speech, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while going through the Budget speech presented by the hon. Minister of Finance - I got the strong feeling - revisiting the three previous Budgets presented by the same Minister of Finance. It was not a sense of continuity as we would have expected, but one of *du déjà vu*. Unfortunately Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once again the hon. Minister's largesse is directed towards big boss, 'gros palto' with little concern for *la population qui est restée sur sa faim*.

After a careful analysis of this Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I realise that it is a fact - for sure, it is not a joke - that Dr. the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance is not only *le meilleur économiste de la planète ou mieux encore "le professeur expert dans la matière électorale"*, but has become a master in the creation of Funds and moving allocated amounts from one Fund to another.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at a time when the world is facing a social crisis, after going through the financial and economic crisis, we cannot afford to let this country, our beautiful island, *notre île paradisiaque* move towards a social crisis. Today in this august Assembly, we have before us a Budget proposal with no concrete measures geared towards helping most vulnerable sections of our society to overcome this crisis.

Enfin que du bla la bla pour ne pas changer ! Les groupes les plus vulnérables, ceux qui ont déjà perdu leurs emplois, ceux qui ont déjà fait face aux effets néfastes de la crise sont les plus déçus et ont été quasiment oubliés. M. le président, ils n'ont rien vu dans ce budget qui pourrait soulager leur misère de tous les jours.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, 1,000 of jobs are at risk and the blunt reality is that the majority of the population, with a major unemployment problem, is mostly women. On top of that, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I note with great concern that no particular attention has been given to this aspect of the problem. Today, we also note that the hon. Minister of Finance is proposing to invest heavily in public infrastructure and SMEs, I mean harbour bridge, ring-road et *j'en passe*. *Il faut aussi souligner, M. le président, que je ne suis nullement contre le progrès, les projets et aussi les développements majeurs mais la grande question reste : est-ce que ces grands projets vont apaiser la douleur et la faim des petites gens ?*

But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these projects, if ever realised, *je dis bien* if ever realised, will not directly benefit to thousands of women that are being laid off by the textile industries. We all know Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, of the flop of the 2006 Budget proposal and where thousands of women were to be formed by the IVTB as *mâçons, plombiers, électriciens etc.* *Je préfère m'abstenir et ne pas faire de commentaires sur ce sujet-là. Et dire que maintenant on parle de recycler les femmes qui ont perdu leurs emplois ! Je voudrais saisir cette occasion qui m'est offerte aujourd'hui, M. le président, pour attirer l'attention du ministre, sur le fait qu'à chaque fois qu'on parle de recycler des femmes qui ont perdu leurs jobs et les former en femmes entrepreneurs, cela se résume à la confection des achards, de la confiture et autres. Il semblerait que certains s'imaginent que cela suffirait pour les transformer en entrepreneurs. M. le président, c'est tout un mindset qu'il faut revoir car c'est une culture d'entreprenariat qu'il faut développer chez les mauriciennes. Il faut les former et c'est pour cela que je pense que le Human Resource*

Development Fund *doit être utilisé à bon escient pour le capacity building en gestion et marketing pour s'assurer que ces femmes puissent réellement gérer leur entreprises et qu'elles ne soient pas laissées en cours de route.*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, everyone knows that the promotion of SMEs is being proposed as one of the solutions with the creation of various schemes or more appropriately the renaming of various schemes. What can SMEs expect from these schemes?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, not later than the week before at Réduit, during a symposium for SMEs, the hon. Minister of Business, Enterprise & Cooperatives, my good friend, hon. Gowressoo, admitted publicly that almost the totality of funds allocated for SMEs promotion by the various schemes in the last Budget has not been used due to administrative constraint. *J'en profite pour saluer tout bas mon ami pour sa franchise. And today, the Minister of Finance is again proposing the same remedies that have failed in the past.* Et, bien sûr, Dieu seul sait si tout ceci n'est pas dû au tour de yo-yo au remplacement et le non-renouvellement du contrat du directeur de la SEHDA et les boutades sans fin entre l'ancien ministre de l'industrie et le directeur. Mais, en fin de compte, c'est la population qui en a payé les frais.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once again we are being told that consultants will be recruited to assist SMEs - I am referring to paragraph 62 of the Budget. Here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to make my point. I would like to quote section 6 paragraph 140 of the Budget Speech 2007/2008. I quote –

“The SME Partnership Fund has constituted a pool of consultants to advise SMEs on their business plan. The service of these consultants will be extended to closely follow up and mentor SMEs. (...)"

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at a time when our country is sailing the rough waters of the worst crisis of the century, our people expect this Government to come forward with firm and concrete measures that will help them to overcome the crisis. We have no time to spare. SMEs cannot afford to sit and wait for consultants to be recruited by the Ministry. The hon. Minister of Finance seems, unfortunately, to be cut off completely from the reality of the difficulties faced by the entrepreneurs-to-be and the existing SMEs in our country. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, how can we expect this Government to manage the SMEs section when we all know that SEHDA, the authority in charge for the SMEs, has had three management changes over the past three years.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us face the bare reality. The reforms of the Minister of Finance, over the past years, have failed to set up the structures needed to implement these measures. Events led us to believe that the whole SME sector is being managed by trial and error by this Government. We cannot keep on fooling people and give *fausse l'espoir* to our entrepreneurs. The crisis is here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We are in the eye of the storm and time is our enemy. Our actions should be adjusted so as to give immediate results to beneficiaries.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in my humble opinion, I have a few suggestions that I think would have helped the SMEs to get through these difficult times. *Il y a des critiques constructives, il y a des critiques destructives.* I strongly believe that SJR Fund could have proposed measures that could have benefited to the whole SME section, instead of the actual system where only a few individual companies are benefiting. My suggestions, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are as follows –

- (i) special tariff from the CEB for SMEs;
- (ii) part or totality payment of NPF charges to be paid by the Fund for SMEs;
- (iii) subsidy for the purchase of raw materials, and
- (iv) freezing payment of road tax for all SMEs using vehicles for their business.

I am sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that these few measures would certainly help SMEs to manage their cash flow problem and reduce their cost during these difficult times. For sure, Mr

Deputy Speaker, Sir, this can be done if the Government really wants to give a helping hand to the SMEs section and help them to face the crisis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one budget proposal which, I think, needs much attention, is with regard to the proposed facilities being offered to individual entrepreneur to create a company and transfer the immoveable assets to the newly formed company to be used as equity for loan purposes. Here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to stress upon the fact that these individual entrepreneurs are being asked to put at risk assets acquired after years of hard work. I wish to make a parallel with the 2006 Budget with the famous Business Facilitation Act, where people were lured into registering themselves with the Business Registration Office and which resulted into the Business Registration Card saga. Thousands of people were made to believe that being registered, will open doors to all their needs. I am talking *en connaissance de cause, M. le président*. I know a lot of people of my constituency - Constituency No. 1 – who, after two years of having obtained a Business Registration Card, are still knocking at doors to start their business. On top of that, the only official document that they have received up to now is an MRA form asking them information for tax purposes as they are now being considered by the MRA as entrepreneurs. *Et le comble dans tout cela, M. le président, c'est que ceux qui faisaient estampiller leur carte de travail au ministère de l'emploi, leurs noms ont été retirés de la liste des demandeurs d'emploi, s'il vous plaît! Quelle aberration!*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the implementation of new schemes may seem to be the best solution. Have we carried out any audit to the past reforms? Today, we are assuming that the Business Facilitation Act set the path for these proposals. I wish to make a point here that, following the implementation of Business Facilitation Act, the Municipal Council of Port Louis, *que tout le monde connaît d'ailleurs comme le poumon du petit commerce à l'île Maurice*, registered in the following financial year a decrease in the number of trade licence issued. I am here referring to the licence fee collected by the Municipality of Port Louis under the 8th Schedule, where the Council had a shortfall of nearly R6 m. from fiscal year 2006/2007 - Rs 50 m. to R44 m. - for year 2007/2008. This, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, shows that implementation of the Business Facilitation Act has had exactly the opposite effect that was expected. With a significant decrease in the number of licence holders, individuals, *petites entreprises* have been forced to close down business.

M. le président, je côtoie régulièrement le petit peuple et je réalise comment la population a été leurrée par les précédentes promesses budgétaires. Je me demande, M. le président, si avec cette nouvelle mesure proposée par le ministre des finances, on ne risque pas de faire de nos aspirants entrepreneurs des locataires de demain dans leurs propriétés d'aujourd'hui.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have talked mostly on one section of this Budget regarding SMEs. But it is crystal clear that this Budget is, in fact a repetition of intentions with no action. *C'est vraiment, M. le président, un budget d'occasion râtee* at a time when the whole population is made to understand that this country is going to face very difficult times ahead, expectations were great.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am sure that all Members of this august Assembly will agree with me that this scheme should not be used by some financial institutions to bypass the new Borrowers Act, which resulted from the Sale by Levy saga.

Parcourant ce budget, M. le président, l'on découvre comme d'habitude que l'honorable ministre des finances dévoile beaucoup de bonnes intentions mais, aujourd'hui, on constate qu'après quatre longues années beaucoup de promesses sont restées sur papier. La population en a assez des 'Amigos', comme l'avait si bien dit l'honorable Mme Daureeawoo, des créations 'Amigo', des créations de fonds et de fondations. C'est de l'action concrète que la grosse majorité de la population attend. L'amélioration de la vie quotidienne, l'accès réel aux richesses de ce pays ne doit pas se limiter à une poignée de gens. La population attend toujours la démocratisation de l'économie. Puis-je me permettre, M. le président de poser deux petites questions au ministre des finances. Bien sûr, il aura l'occasion de me répondre par la suite. Qu'en est-il du Programme Based

Budget énoncé trois ans de cela ? Il parlait d'une autre approche de l'exercice budgétaire, une nouvelle culture d'efficacité et de productivité des services publics. Avec le Programme Based Budget, l'argent *earmarked* était supposé être déboursé pour des programmes. C'était en quelque sorte des objectifs pour des projets intégrés, et chaque ministère avait droit à un maximum de huit programmes. La deuxième question: what about the top economists which would have been recruited for smoothing the strategies and implant a method of economic development? Bien sûr, j'attendrai sa réponse.

M. le président, la population en a assez des histoires à faire dormir debout. Quatre ans de cela, le gouvernement de l'Alliance sociale avait promis à ce peuple '*pou change ou la vie dans 100 jours*', to '*put people first*' and, today, the same Government has been reduced to a situation where they need to protect people from economic disaster, malgré les *early harvest* et *bumper flop*; je m'excuse, je voulais dire *bumper crop*. It seems that the *early harvest* and the *bumper crop* ne profitent qu'à certains privilégiés.

M. le président, je faillirais dans ma tâche si je ne pipe mot sur la décision prise à l'encontre de nos artistes locaux et, bien entendu, je ne peux rester insensible à ce pas en avant du ministre des finances. Je pense sincèrement que c'est un grand pas en avant, et il faut saluer le ministre pour cela. Voyez-vous, il faut rendre hommage à la vérité ! Nos artistes locaux sont restés trop longtemps derrière les coulisses et, je dirais même, trop longtemps livrés à eux-mêmes. Lors de la présentation du budget, le ministre des finances avait fait mention de quelques noms seulement. J'imagine que la liste est trop longue, car à Maurice nous avons des artistes talentueux qui, malheureusement, par faute de moyens, ou encore pire par faute de soutien, se sont fait un nom à l'étranger, alors que dans leur pays natal, ils ne sont même pas reconnus. Je parle ici de Mario Ramsamy du groupe Images, du chanteur Eric Carter, - Eric Rima, de son nom mauricien - de Vishnu Carombayenin, et tant d'autres encore. Mais là, par contre, je ferai un appel au ministre des finances. Tout d'abord, que ces allocations soient reparties équitablement; et, deuxièmement, tout comme on le fait pour ceux qui ont bénéficié d'une bourse d'État, et à qui on fait toujours appel afin qu'ils retournent au pays pour y apporter leur contribution. Donc, tous ces artistes qui ont dû se rendre à l'étranger, afin de vivre de leur talent, de leur métier, puisqu'il n'y avait pas d'avenir pour eux à Maurice. Je dirai au ministre des finances: 'encouragez les à retourner au pays, afin qu'ils contribuent dans le secteur du tourisme'. Bien sûr, certaines troupes d'artistes ont eu de la chance de *perform* à l'étranger à l'époque du MSM/MMM, il faut le souligner. Cela a rapporté ses fruits, car je me réfère ici à Gaston Valayden qui, de par son expérience, acquise à travers ses tournées, a ouvert une école de théâtre. M. le président, il y a beaucoup d'autres qui peuvent apporter leur contribution. Car, si nous voulons vraiment faire démarrer l'industrie du tourisme culturel, il nous faut faire plus d'efforts. M. le président, on a trop longtemps sous-estimé notre potentiel culturel, et il est grand temps de réagir.

M. le président, permettez-moi de dire quelques mots sur la jeunesse et le sport. When I go back to the Government Programme 2005-2010 at section 216, mention is made, and I quote –

'With a view to enabling the development and general welfare of the youth who constitute the pillar upon which a nation is built, youth policies will be reviewed; emphasis will be laid on national unity, social integration of youth; empowerment and skills improvement as well as creation of opportunities for their personal growth'

Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is very simple. What has been done for the youth of our country? We are now in 2009! I said that in my speech last year. Nothing has been done last year and, in 2009, again, nothing is being done for our youth. Encore une fois du bla-bla-bla mais action zéro.

The Minister of Finance lays emphasis on education. But how can we encourage the youth towards education, mainly tertiary education, by announcing the construction of a brand new university, which will accommodate some 8,000 students? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on the one hand, you pretend that *l'éducation sera à la portée de tous* and, on the other hand, the Minister of Finance removes subsidies on fees for SC and HSC. How will this youth reach tertiary education,

alors qu'il n'a même pas les moyens pour payer les *fees* pour les examens de la SC et de la HSC? Qui veut-on berner ici, M. le président? On prétend vouloir promouvoir les jeunes. Que de belles paroles! Mais, encore une fois, action zéro! Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, sports hold a place of great significance in improving the quality of life, mostly among our youth. Our leader, hon. Pravind Jugnauth, has always said and he keeps on saying that, if we invest in our youth, we are investing in a brighter future for our country. That's why, when he was Minister of Finance, *il a misé beaucoup sur les jeunes et, le plus essentiel, c'est qu'il a cru dans la jeunesse mauricienne, et ça...*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Bunwaree! Would you allow the hon. lady to continue her speech, please!

Mrs Grenade: Merci, M. le président. L'honorable Pravind Jugnauth a misé beaucoup sur les jeunes. Il a cru dans la jeunesse mauricienne et je peux dire, M. le président, cela a rapporté ses fruits. Mais, aujourd'hui, avec ce budget, qu'en est-il pour la jeunesse mauricienne ? Rien encore une fois, M. le président! La jeunesse mauricienne est laissée sur la touche encore une fois. *True it is, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we are in a crisis situation, but that does not mean that we have to ignore the needs of our youth et, surtout, l'attente de nos jeunes.* Le ministre ne va pas nous faire croire que mettre des infrastructures sportives à la disposition des jeunes alourdira son budget, ou encore plus, débalancera son budget!

A l'époque où le MSM/MMM était au pouvoir, nous avons beaucoup fait pour leur épanouissement. Qu'en est-il pour l'entretien ou la gestion des infrastructures que nous avons mises à la disposition des jeunes? J'imagine que le ministre de la jeunesse et des sports, l'honorable Devanand Ritoo, a dû voir de toutes les couleurs afin de trouver le financement requis pour la rénovation et le *turfing* de deux stades.

M. le président, avec la visite probable de grandes équipes de...

(Interruptions)

Mais donner encore! Ce sera mieux!

M. le président, avec la visite probable de grandes équipes de football dans le contexte de la coupe du monde en 2010, le gouvernement devrait permettre un plus grand nombre de jeunes d'avoir accès aux stades pour voir ces grandes équipes à l'œuvre. Le ministre des sports, que ce soit l'honorable Ritoo ou l'ancien ministre des sports, l'honorable Sylvio Tang, peuvent être dynamiques, peuvent faire preuve de détermination, mais une chose est claire, M. le président: c'est qu'ils auront toujours besoin de financement et du soutien indéfectible du grand argentier. Alors, si M. le ministre des finances croit fermement dans la jeunesse mauricienne, qu'il y mette du sien! Pourquoi ne pas réintroduire les bourses études comme on le faisait à l'époque ? Le ministre des finances doit encourager nos jeunes.

Encore une fois, M. le président, ayant parcouru ce budget, l'on découvre, comme d'habitude - comme je l'ai dit tout à l'heure - que l'honorable ministre des finances dévoile beaucoup de bonnes intentions. Mais, aujourd'hui, on constate que toutes ces bonnes intentions restent sur papier.

Pour conclure, M. le président, c'est un budget non événement, et c'est clair que rien ne découlera de cela. Quant aux projets, on sait qu'un bon nombre demeurera au stade de bonnes intentions, alors que d'autres sont quasiment irréalisables.

M. le président, les gens, aujourd'hui, ont le sentiment qu'on traverse un ouragan. L'honorable ministre des finances a eu recours à un nombre incalculable de fois à protéger la population. Si c'est vraiment le cas, et si le ministre des finances croit dans ses propres mots, je lui demanderai d'avoir un langage de vérité envers la population, car c'est la vérité que la population attend.

Merci beaucoup.

(6.00 p.m.)

Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must say that I was quite surprised when I listened to the first part of the Vice-Prime Minister's Budget Speech of last Friday. I will tell you why. Since the world's economy started crumpling even the biggest countries like the United States étaient K.O. - we are given the assurance by the hon. Minister of Finance that Mauritius would outsmart the worst of storms which were coming towards us. *Le mot utilisé 'resilience', un mot très en vogue, veut dire être capable d'encaisser et se redresser par la suite; comme un bon sur lequel on est assis. On se met debout, et le coussin reprend sa place. Mais, en l'écoutant l'autre jour, M. le président, je me suis rendu compte qu'on n'était pas assis sur un coussin, mais sur un volcan. Jugez vous-même l'ampleur des termes utilisés par le ministre :* astonishingly severe financial turmoil. It is written in the Budget booklet - job recession unfolding, severe human crisis, gloomy forecast for 2009 and not too bright for 2010, 100 million job cuts worldwide, and loads of very unfriendly economic terms like declining FDI, precarious economic balance, public finance showing signs of stress. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we were served the Rama Horror Picture Show. That was the first part of the Budget.

Alors qu'à la même époque, c'est-à-dire à l'époque de la résilience, l'opposition tirait la sonnette d'alarme et disait qu'on allait vers la catastrophe, le gouvernement répondait qu'on semait la panique parmi la population. Et, aujourd'hui, on voit que c'est le ministre des finances lui-même qui est en train de tirer la sonnette d'alarme. *As he reads on*, il vient quand même nous promettre tout un chapelet de projets qu'il va réaliser dans les 18 mois à venir. M. le président, je ne suis ni docteur, ni économiste, mais *I am very sceptical about all this*. Je vous en donne les raisons. En écoutant le ministre, il m'a semblé effectivement - je vais peut-être reprendre un peu ce que d'autres honorables membres de ce côté de la Chambre ont dit - entendre des répétitions; le même budget que l'année précédente, ou même des choses qu'on avait lues dans le programme gouvernemental 2005/2010, en particulier concernant les grands projets promis. A l'époque - Je parle du programme gouvernemental qui avait été lu en juillet 2005 - il n'y avait pas de crise financière, tout allait bien, mais rien n'a abouti. On n'a même pas posé une première pierre pour tous ces projets dont on a parlé dans ce programme. Aujourd'hui, en pleine crise financière, on parle du *largest investment programme in the history of Mauritius*. *I really don't understand*. Et ceci, pour citer le ministre, malgré *a gloomy forecast for 2009 and a not too bright forecast for 2010*. Malgré cela, le gouvernement va construire the *famous dream bridge* – entretemps, on a changé de nom, c'est devenu le *harbour bridge* - le Terre Rouge-Verdun link road, Bus Rapid Transit System, East-West connector and so on and so forth, et quelques *shovel ready projects, some bypasses and bus lanes in the next few years*. *With all these road projects pour résoudre le problème de trafic à Maurice, I think we are being taken for a ride*.

I have a small piece of paper here where is written *les dix mesures radicales qui vont changer notre vie en cent jours. The very famous 100 days! C'est vrai que notre vie a changé dramatiquement, earlier than the 100 days*. Parmi ces dix mesures, il y a le point numéro 9 : Réduire la congestion routière. *That was written before the elections of 2005*. Cela faisait partie du programme de campagne. Introduire une autoroute à trois voies à l'entrée et à la sortie de Port-Louis et construire un tunnel à l'entrée de la ville de Port-Louis faisaient parti du programme de campagne. Des slogans creux !

Vint ensuite le programme gouvernemental où à la page 16 au chapitre 128, on peut lire ceci

‘*Consideration will be given to the problem of traffic congestion*’.

Plus loin, au paragraphe 130, on lit –

“Government will give urgent attention to proposals concerning alternative modes of transport”

Urgent, M. le président! *And yet, do you know what has been done to alleviate the traffic problems for the past four years? For the past four years, this is what this Government has done to alleviate the traffic problem.* Ils ont rallongé, pendant quelque temps, la troisième voie qui descend vers Port-Louis entre Montagne Ory et ils l'ont rapproché de Réduit. Seeing that it didn't work, they have stopped it. *That's all that has been done by this Government.* S'il y a des choses qui ont été faites dont je ne suis pas au courant, *please tell me. But I am not sure there are any.* Ils ont, donc, rallongé cette voie et ils l'ont ensuite fermée parce que cela ne marchait pas. Et là, subitement, à la veille des élections, on vient nous promettre des projets piecemeal à grand frais ! Quand on ajoute cette série de onze mesures, on arrive à R 27.4 milliards. Cela inclut le Harbour Bridge, le Transit System, Terre-Rouge-Verdun, etc. *So much money suddenly needs be spent on the eve of the election!* Je suis en train de me poser des questions. Il n'y a même pas eu une étude *to back all this. Where is the Master Plan ?* Est-ce que cela a été commandité? Est-ce qu'on travaille là-dessus ? Il y a plein d'ingénieurs à Maurice. Nous avons le *Road Development Authority*, un ministère du transport, le *Traffic Management Unit*. Now, this Budget comes and adds two more institutions, namely the Road Development Company and the Transport Authority. Vous connaissez cette expression: *Too many cooks spoil the broth!* Voilà ce qui va se passer ! Rien ne va se matérialiser. *We will see nothing.*

Il y a un dernier point sur ma liste –

‘Addition of a third lane to the motor way between Phoenix and Trianon.’ We all have in mind, le chaos quotidien qui existe dans ce coin-là. C'est un projet qui coûtera R 150 millions. *A third lane is going to be constructed* entre Phoenix et Trianon. Je suis prêt à faire un pari to whoever is ready to take on the bet, that the day after inauguration, if that lane is built, it is going to be congested. *We are transposing the traffic from the Phoenix roundabout to Trianon, and then we are doing the same thing from Trianon to Phoenix in the evening. This is what is going to happen.* Ce n'est pas une solution à la fluidité du trafic; c'est une transposition d'un problème. *It will be Rs150 m. of taxpayers' money thrown into the drains.* Je suis prêt à parier. *I am not neither an economist nor a doctor; I am an engineer. I was talking about throwing money into the drains.*

Justement, parlons-en des drains. Là, encore, nous savons que le pays toute entier souffre d'un manque chronique de drains pour évacuer les eaux de pluies. *The Ministers of Education know what headache they have when it rains heavily on a Monday morning and children have to go to school. When I go back to the 2007/2008 Budget Speech,* à la page 12, there is a chapter there: *Addressing the flood ordeal. It is said there that Rs150 m. had been earmarked for 180 projects across the island to alleviate that problem.* On parle de R 27.4 milliards à dépenser pour des routes, et ici on parle de R 150 millions à dépenser sur 180 projets pour apporter une solution aux problèmes de drains. *This has not been done,* et on va dépenser R 27.4 milliards pour les routes.

Ceci m'amène à ma circonscription – No. 20 . Je parle de drains et c'est un problème. L'évacuation d'eau de pluie est un problème dans ma circonscription aussi. *Unfortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir,* la pendule du développement s'est arrêtée *on 04 July 2005.* Malheureusement, l'honorable PPS Mootia n'est pas là. J'ai appris avant-hier qu'il était responsable de la circonscription No. 20. *In his speech he admitted, not in so many words - that is what I gathered - that he did not have any money.* Il est venu dire que mon colistier, l'honorable Bhagwan, avait un budget et qu'il a tout dépensé. Ce qui fait que lorsqu'il est arrivé, il n'y avait plus un rond, et cela l'a empêché d'assumer ses responsabilités de PPS. Il a, donc, laissé tomber la circonscription No. 20. Mais, dans la même foulée - et il était entrecoupé, à chaque fois, par les applaudissements de mon bon ami, l'honorable Boolell - il a énuméré le nombre de projets réalisés dans la circonscription No. 11 de Rose Belle à Vieux Grand Port, en passant par le Lion Mountain. Il a même donné le chiffre – R 200 millions dépensées. Les habitants de la circonscription No. 20 en ont pris note.

Mr Speaker, Sir, puisque je parle de ma circonscription, je dirai un petit mot sur la gestion de nos conseillers municipaux. S'ils ne sont pas en train de se battre entre eux, zot manzé-boire. Cela se passe à Beau Bassin/Rose Hill, et c'est connu. Je vais raconter une petite histoire concernant ces conseillers municipaux. Il y en a qui sont en train de causer pas mal de soucis à une force vive dûment enregistrée. *They have all their documents and they wanted to have* le centre municipal de la région pour faire leurs réunions. Voilà qu'un conseiller municipal et ses amis, très connus pour leurs écarts, sont en train de causer toutes sortes de soucis à cette force vive. J'ai lu dans le journal d'hier que mes deux amis, l'honorable X. L. Duval et l'honorable Valayden, utilisent l'école hôtelière pour une activité politique - le lancement de leur journal. It hurts!

(Interruptions)

Je ferme cette page, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: I think it is better, hon. Naidu.

Mr Naidu: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now I want to say a few words about parastatal bodies. *Nous savons tous que ce secteur est très malade*, you name it, les plus importants, le CEB, la CWA, la MBC, la NTC - et son Jaguar - pour ne citer les plus importants which are all in the red financially and not capable of sailing a few months *sans un scandal*. I have to go back again to a previous Budget Speech, celui de 2007/2008 par le ministre des Finances, l'honorable Dr. Sithanen, who stresses that it would be "an irony that Government pushes its efforts to the limit to narrow its deficit, only to find out that these efforts are completely nullified by the need to bail out parastatal bodies" and two years later, it is still the same thing, unfortunately. There was a question of "re-engineering" the sector; I would like to see it happen, *surtout pour tous les employés de ce secteur*.

Je pense, M. le Président, avoir en quelques mots démontrer que ces budgets qui passent sont souvent que des promesses en l'air : *the drains, the roads, re-engineering in the parastatal sector*. On peut continuer comme cela toute la nuit, d'où l'impression que beaucoup ont eu, *on this side of the House that*, c'est du réchauffé.

Pour terminer, M. le Président, un mot sur l'île Maurice durable. Là je reconnaiss l'effort qui a été fait pour interdire once and for all l'affichage sauvage. That's well done. On a des grands chantiers qui vont venir. Très bien. Mais je me dis qu'il y a des petites choses qu'on peut faire immédiatement. On peut prendre la décision aujourd'hui et l'implémenter demain. Je pense, par exemple, aux sacs en plastique. *Let's abolish them tonight!* Allons cesser d'utiliser les sacs en plastique ce soir. Les gens vont se plaindre pendant deux jours et, puis, dimanche, ils vont aller faire leurs achats leurs *tentes bazar*. Ils trouveront une solution. *There will be no need to tax the bags. Just abolish them.* C'est une proposition simple, je pense, qui peut se faire sans dépenser un sou.

The Last word - I appeal to the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to reconsider les subventions pour les panneaux solaires. They said the other day that there were about 20000, 5000 on the waiting list.

(Interruptions)

Mais ce sont des choses que les gens demandent dans la rue; if that is going to be done, then that's fine. That's it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. J'ai fait le tour, j'ai un peu répété ce que les autres on dit mais, inévitable, *I guess. Thank you.*

(6:25 p.m.)

Mr M. Dulloo: (First Member of Grand Baie & Poudre d'Or): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, last Friday, we, Members of this House, came to the National Assembly with a copy of the

Appropriation Bill, which was the only item on the Order Paper, to listen to the presentation of a transition Budget of six months. It was presented by the Minister of Finance and the object of the Bill, of course, was very clear, namely to appropriate a sum of some Rs31billion to meet expenditure for six months only, in conformity with the Schedule to the Bill and the Programme Based Budget estimates 2009 laid before the Assembly.

We came to listen to a Budget presentation of six months. However, at the end of two hours of speech, we walked out of this House with an Action Plan of 18 months, but with no Budget estimates in our hands. We came to listen to a Minister of Finance for the Budget and instead we listened to a Minister of Economic Planning and Development explaining his 18 months' Action Plan and the financial and economic background constraints and exigencies dictating his 18 months plan.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, where does this lead us? We can ask the Minister of Finance the question: *quo vadis*? Where does this lead this country and its people? The answer is simple: to disaster. I will show this to the House and later, at the end of my speech, I will show where this Action Plan will lead this Government. This 18 months' Action Plan, in fact, presented to us in the so-called Budget Speech is not an Action Plan to ride out the global economic crisis, as the hon. Minister puts it, in the very first sentence, when he was moving the Bill. The very first sentence at the very first page: An Action Plan to Ride Out the Global Economic Crisis.

In fact, these 18 months' Action Plan is a recipe for disaster, as I will show in a moment. I will also show that, far from riding us out from the economic crisis, as hon. Naidu said a moment ago, the hon. Minister is taking everybody for a ride, including his own Government, his own Prime Minister whom he dearly calls or dares to call as the most presidential of Prime Ministers that Mauritius has ever had. When I was addressing the House on the Stimulus Package Bill the other day, I was referring to, what he calls, his big boss. This is not Mauritius, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This is not the way to govern the Mauritius that we know and that we love. The Mauritius that we have, over the years, contributed to nurture and to build. Last year, for the Budget, the Minister of Finance came with a plan, a Government programme of some 5 to 10 years. He was speaking in terms of the next decade with, I think, six or seven special Funds. Now, he is talking of five specific paths that will be taking us we do not know where. In the past Budget, he was providing for projects with implementation plan expanding over 5 to 10 years, which he called early harvest or bumper crop. This Government Programme was called - he just shouted it out a moment ago, when hon. Mrs Grenade was addressing the House - the AMIGO programme. As somebody with a good sense of humour has said, this reminds us of the spaghetti western with which we were accustomed during our student days - the Jango, the *Ringo et quelques dollars de plus*. But, unfortunately, for this country, his AMIGO programme missed the target completely. They were saying: *Ringo tire ou meurt*. But his AMIGO programme *est passé complètement à côté de la plaque*. Now, his AMIGO plan has yielded to a 18 month Action Plan. This is not to govern. We are miles away from the President's Speech of 2005.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what Government should have done in the circumstances is to come with a new programme, a new plan, and a new speech from the President. It should have prorogued Parliament and come with a new Government Programme presented by the President, and defended by the whole Government under the leadership of the Prime Minister in the House here. On the basis of this new programme, the Minister of Finance would have come to present his six-month transition Budget or his one full calendar year Budget next year, if ever they are still here. The Leader of the Opposition was right. In very diplomatic terms and in the most beautiful parliamentary style, he said it. This Budget is not the work, should not be, and we cannot assume that it is the work of the hon. Minister of Finance only. This is why he said that we should not criticise him alone, we should not take him to task alone; it should be the whole team, the whole Government, because it is not a Budget exercise or a Government Programme, it is an Action Plan,

where each Ministry should have contributed to set it up. What confirms this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the fact that immediately after he had delivered his speech, here, in Parliament, the hon. Prime Minister had to rush to the television and appropriate for himself this Action Plan. He said it was his Action Plan, he is the boss and, therefore, it has been presented on behalf of his Government. This was never seen before. When the Minister of Finance would have presented his Budget, normally his team and himself would go and explain it to the media and to the people, and then we would listen to those who would come and criticise. The Leader of the Opposition would be given air time or TV broadcasting time in order to expose the views of the Opposition. This has not been done. It is the hon. Prime Minister who came forward on TV to claim that it was his Action Plan, but well presented by his Minister of Finance. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this shows how things are going wrong in this country. The management, the Government and parliamentary democracy are going wrong. Why has the hon. Minister of Finance got to present an Action Plan of 18 months instead of a Budget? Because, as he says, in the Budget Speech, it is because of the financial turmoil which is even more severe, more precarious than in the 1930s. He said it even before and after the so-called Budget and in all the PNQs. Mr Speaker had to stop him in a PNQ when he was repeatedly making reference to the 1930s, and telling us that it was the most precarious global economic outlook, etc. I think hon. Naidu, who just spoke before me, has gone on the glum, unfavourable and even hostile backdrop of economic growth in Mauritius. All the superlatives of pessimistic and negative forecast such as unprecedented economic storm affecting the real, fiscal, financial and external sectors were mentioned. He goes on and on stating about public finance already showing stress marks, etc. This is why he said, at paragraph 14, that this Budget is an Action Plan for the next 18 months. But then, again, AMIGO has missed the target, because it seems he has not understood the crisis of the 1930s on which he is relying to speak. Others before me have said how he was reacting in the middle of 2008, and even in the second half of 2008 when he was saying that we are protected and resilient. I go along with him on the question of resilience. During the debates on the Additional Stimulus Package Bill, I have said that we have a built-in resilience in this country. Not because I was part of the first two or three Budgets of this Government, but because this has been built in over the years, and we should go on repeating. This has been in previous Governments and all the institutions. But what is worrying now is that all the institutions are being destabilised, all these built-in resilience are now in danger and when we see what has been done we will come to this realisation. What about the 1930s? How is it that the hon. Minister has completely misunderstood what happened in the 1930s and is actually committing the same mistakes. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I won't be long on this, but it is good to highlight this to the House. The reasons which caused the great depression are as follows - I will just mention a few: wrong fiscal policy because the US Government led by President Hoover was putting too much emphasis on budget deficit and he was even willing at all costs to balance his budget, that was his priority; there was uneven distribution of wealth; easy credit was making money available; all sorts of insolvent firms or institutions were being injected with money, thus leading to more problems. There was also poor monetary policy. What is even worse is that the wages and the purchasing power of the low/middle income group was not keeping up with the level of prices, and the workers' earnings were not enough for them even to buy their basic food. That was one of the reasons, and this is actually what is happening here, in Mauritius. The supply was greater than demand. In order to boost up production, they wanted to invest and supply more and, of course, the great theory in those days was that when you have more supply, this would create demand by itself. This was the wrong policy. It is now that we have changed the economic theory altogether. In those days, the highest paid manual worker of General Motors, which is now crashing, was earning only 0.50 cents per day.

Even, in those days, General Motors, which is now crashing, had the highest paid manual worker earning only 0.50 cents per day, and that was the tragedy. There was lack of Government regulation and control. There was excessive real estate construction injecting a lot of money, more infrastructure, more buildings in order to create jobs and to give new dynamism, and that was

wrong. There were too low interest rates; people were allowed to borrow blindly, and there was more debt trap, as somebody put it.

Now, what did President Hoover do to balance the budget? He cut spending, raised taxes, instead of increasing spending and reducing taxes, especially for the low and middle income groups. Then they also passed the highest tariffs on foreign goods, as if to protect the local market. But this was the protectionism that has lingered till now, and which is the battle being waged right now in WTO. As a result - the Minister of Finance used the same words: 'the mayhem in those days', the 'chaos', the social unrest' - what happened? President Hoover had to resign in 1932, and was replaced by President Franklin Roosevelt who, in his new economic model, known as the New Deal, reversed much of the policies that were adopted by Hoover, and started disbursing, distributing money for the households, for the low income group, even distributing coupons to ensure that basic commodities like foodstuff be available immediately to the people of the United States.

The present Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has missed out altogether, has not taken into consideration all those dangers. In fact, there is a resemblance as if our Government is adopting most of the measures of President Hoover. This is the fatal weakness, because we are forgetting the purchasing power of the vast majority of the population, which consists of low and middle income groups. The debate about the purchasing power of the people, about the wage compensation is exactly this, and this is why there is a danger which can lead us to disaster, especially impoverishing the people. The majority of the people cannot identify itself with, call it the Budget, an Action Plan or whatever it is, right now, and this is a big problem. The Government side has been very unfair all along, not only in the course of this debate but also when Parliamentary Questions on financial matters were being asked. They were constantly referring to 1982. When we put a PNQ on the question of wage compensation, the hon. Minister of Finance stood up and said: "Well, in those days inflation was 13.7% and you gave only 8% wage compensation". 8% wage compensation at a time when Mauritius had gone bankrupt, when the situation was terrible, with two devaluations, as hon. Rajesh Bhagwan is saying.

What has happened, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? There were already three standby agreements with the IMF: one in 1979, another one in September 1980, and the third one in December 1981. Do you know what terms were agreed with the IMF? The terms of the agreement were that the Budget itself should be negotiated. That was an agreement signed by the previous Government, the Labour Government of pre-1982, namely that the Budget had to be negotiated entirely with the IMF. A new Government comes in and says: can we renege on the contract? There is a continuity of Government, and there are lots of terms, but I just took one which was criticized, namely that wage compensation should be less than the increase in consumer price index. That was the term agreed by the Labour Government and signed with the IMF!

I would ask new Members, especially those who were not in this House in 1979-1982, to go and read the State of Mauritius Economy and they would see what the situation was. We are almost in the same situation with the question of balance of payments. I would not go and raise all the points that have been raised outside. But I would invite my colleagues of the House to read the article of the previous Governor of the Bank of Mauritius, where he talks about the balance of payments situation. I think the Leader of the Opposition explained this to the House fully well the other day when he was intervening.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if we look at the inflation, that was running and had to be controlled! I would also invite my hon. friends on both sides of the House to go and read the Budget Speech of 1982, presented by the then Minister of Finance, hon. Paul Bérenger. The various measures that had to be taken to put discipline and order in this country were very painful. Many of those who are on the Government bench were those who had been with the trade unions, who had been with the workers, who had been working, gone to prison, assaulted, "*matraqué*", or had shed their blood. We all know this and I for one said it. Mr Speaker was there from 1976 to 1982, and

knows well that the situation was like this, we could not get away from the grip of the IMF. This is what the then Minister of Finance said in 1982: " We are taking measures, Government will have more scope to give proper impetus to the *reiance* and other policies in order gradually to try to reduce our dependence on the IMF, and in order to free us completely from the grip of the IMF." This was prophetic, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It was said in July 1982, and it was done. A few years later, hon. Vishnu Lutchmeenaraaidoo, Minister of Finance, under the leadership of the then Prime Minister, paid up all the loans in advance, and we broke away from the Bretton Woods institution and managed our own economy and finance.

There is one thing which is very important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and which I recommend to the reading of the Prime Minister and his team on the other side. What is important is to get the participation of the people. How to achieve this? By telling the people the hard truth and taking measures - I think hon. Mrs. Grenade said this just now. They should not go and take the people in euphoria " I have done so well; our Government is doing so well; bumper harvest and what not; we are dishing out billions of rupees; we afford all that money, we can give you", when the majority of the people cannot balance their household budgets, cannot give the basic necessities to their children. They are telling them that we are dishing out billions of rupees. No! They should go and tell them the hard truth, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The people of Mauritius and many on both sides of this House have done a lot of sacrifice and hard work, and we know what this means. Our culture, religious beliefs and our upbringing is such that we are ready in hard days to do the sacrifice; provided that the father is doing the sacrifice, the children also will do the sacrifice. Provided that Government is leading the way, the people will follow. This is very important, and this is the philosophy.

These are the words that we can find in the Budget of 1982. The work was done and the magic was done a few years later, that is, the *miracle économique* in Mauritius. This is the thing that I would appeal to Government. It is symbolically said that out of the Rs200,000, whatever pay packet we are giving away for six months from July...

(Interruptions)

Alright for 18 months! But Parliament will stand dissolved before that.

(Interruptions)

They will go on giving the Rs10,000 even though they would not be Ministers, they would be booted out by the people, and they will continue for the 18 months to give 10,000! Very good! We appreciate this sacrifice! But anyway, we should see what was done in 1982! It is not just Rs10,000 for a certain period, it was a reduction that is projected over the years - reduction of five percent with the agreement of the Opposition. What the Government of the day did?

(Interruptions)

No, there was an Opposition! Sir Gaëtan Duval was the Leader of Opposition! With the agreement of the Opposition! This was announced and written in the Budget Speech. This is what we were doing and the Opposition also has agreed, all Members of the House have agreed. But there it is only the Ministers. Not even the hon. Members of the Government side, the PPs, they have to be queried by the public outside.

(Interruptions)

This is what we have said. Government should have come and consulted the Opposition on this very important issue, get the whole Parliament behind it and then get the whole people behind them, but they should not proceed in the manner that they have done. They come and challenge the Opposition by saying: "what are you doing!" This is not a way to run a country, this is not a way to rally the full support of the people behind you.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, having said this, I go now to the philosophy behind the Budget. What is wrong is that the Minister of Finance or Government - because we say that it is an Action

Plan of Government - has missed out completely these important economic questions of price and income stability. This is very important. The hon. Minister of Finance, day in day out, has been saying that Government had decided to inject money in what he called the distressed, but viable enterprises in order to save the jobs. This is not the way it was done, this is how we suggested to him in our supplementary questions of the PNQs, that he should work more on the question of demand.

They cannot just invest to produce and this where things went wrong. What we should do is to incite the people to consume as consumption is very important. But what has happened? The Minister of Finance does not seem to agree and he is shaking his head negatively. What is important is that we should ensure that consumption would start and I will be using his own statistics in order to show how consumption at one time went down. Demand is very important and it is demand that will incite people to produce. It is production that will get people to work in order to produce. When people would work to produce, this will keep the enterprise going. But what was happening? The signals were there. This is why, I would say, notwithstanding the global financial and economic crisis, the Minister of Finance, Government was already failing as from the beginning of 2008. This is why, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I humbly said that I was putting emphasis on the question of purchasing power and jobs. Finally I had to come out in public and I said it on 01 May 2006, 01 May 2007, that our most important task is the purchasing power of the people and the preservation and creation of jobs, but what was happening by the end of 2007, beginning of 2008? I have got it from official Government documents from the Ministry of Finance, the Bank of Mauritius document. It is very good that they are publishing the inflation report of 2008, of the first half of 2009. You see clearly from there that domestic demand started to lose momentum since 2007 as evidenced by the National Accounts Data on economic activity particularly in sectors dependent on consumption. For instance, output growth in the distributive trade sector declined to 4% due to falling consumers, real disposable income after the series of price rise, especially in the food and fuel products. As inflationary measures originating from domestic and demand factors appeared through 2007/2008 Government should have intervened there and then boost up consumption. For example, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the gross of financial consumption expenditure decreased from 5.5% in 2006 to 3.9% in 2007. Both components of final consumption mean household and Government consumption expenditure is going down, this is where the hon. Minister of Finance and Government saw right. They said that we should start spending, we should implement more projects, but it was not done. Domestic consumption and Government household consumption and Government consumption also went down. All these slowed down significantly in 2007 through the first two-quarters of 2008 and deceleration was already evident then and there, not according to me, but according to the Central Bank, hence the conflict...

(Interruptions)

Deceleration started, this is written! At that time the prevalence of high inflation in those days 2007/2008 was eroding the purchasing power of households and curtaining real consumption growth. On the other hand, tighter credit conditions resulting from the high interest rates coupled with the high inflation was hurting consumption growth further. This is what was happening. Of course, corrective measures were soon taken. The Minister said that we should spend, we should do everything immediately. The Central Bank started to reduce the rate of interest and all that. But, at the same time, there is an equilibrium. What is happening at the same time on savings and all that? Government should have intervened to protect and later I will come with some budget measures taken against the small consumers, the small savings citizen etc. Now Government has realised that there is a bottleneck somewhere after the AMIGO plan of many billions, after the Stimulus Package of many billions, after so many billions in infrastructure, they cannot cope. Now Government is looking at the Procurement Act again in order to allow certain direct procurement - and this is very dangerous - of Rs50 m. and Rs100 m. in certain cases, public bodies especially. We should look at the definition of public bodies of the Procurement Act. What the hon. Minister did last year? Because there was a problem, there was a bottleneck. How to solve this bottleneck? He came with

regulations. We did not know because when he was talking about Rs50 m., I said where he got this sum of Rs50 m. I looked at the Procurement Act and it is said Rs 5 m., Rs 10 m., except, I think, of one case of Rs50 m. concerning the Mauritius Revenue Authority, if my memory serves me right. Last year, the hon. Minister of Finance came with a regulation - we did not know - and he brought up this limit of Rs50 m. etc. He can do that by regulation. We should be very careful, especially at a time when we see how those public bodies are being run, when we have seen those scandals, how some people at the head of the public bodies had just to quit overnight and get their golden handshake, cars and pension and all that. This has happened in quite a few public bodies recently and we know now that we are going to give those people a *chèque en blanc* for contracts of up to Rs50 m. etc. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we should be very careful. But let me say a few things about the second part, that is, boosting up project realisation and capacity. We should be humble on this score. It is good that Government comes forward, through the Minister of Finance, makes its *mea culpa* and says: now we realise that we don't have the implementation capacity. After the AMIGO Plan of billions, we don't have the project realisation capacity. Who is to blame? The Central Tender Board or the Procurement Board! Therefore, we have to withdraw certain size of contracts from them. No, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! The bottleneck is created in the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance has become the Ministry of Planning & Economic Development, everything is in that Ministry. Now it has become the Ministry of Economic Empowerment, keeping the department of Economic Planning & Development. All those billions of rupees of economic empowerment are under the good auspices of the hon. Minister of Finance. Not only this! Financial institutions and all that are under the hon. Minister of Finance, billions and billions of rupees. How about implementation? It is very difficult. There are more than 100 public bodies. Do you know that in most of them there is a representative of the Ministry of Finance? But how is the Ministry of Finance functioning when they are sitting on the Boards all the time? This work should have been done by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development concerning the Action Plan. All the Ministries should have worked together. How can the Minister of Finance, who is monitoring the Budget, monitoring the daily, monthly, annual expenditure etc, decide as to which project to implement or not? And which Minister? *Celui qui détient la bourse, détient le pouvoir!* Which Minister is going now to challenge on the Board of the various parastatals, public bodies? The Ministry of Finance - especially when we know that the Minister of Finance can afford to give his letter of resignation, and then he has got to stay there, he is begged on the knees to stay there! We know how powerful he is and who would dare to challenge the views of the Minister? This is the bottleneck. I can go and analyse the functioning of the Ministry of Finance and show how many Ministers have been working and getting a lot of projects, bilaterally at international levels. That's not all! I forgot, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that he has now become the Ministry of Finance - I do not say the Minister – and also the Ministry for International Cooperation. Poor Minister of Foreign Affairs, he is now just Regional Integration! He is the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration and International Trade, but he cannot travel anymore now; some of the Embassies are going to close down, but we do not know which Embassies. The Minister of Foreign Affairs cannot travel any more according to what we have been told. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerning International Cooperation, sometimes we allow the Minister of Finance to go and sign cooperation agreement with Seychelles, with India and all that, in order to keep peace in our Ministries so that our officers do not have problems with the Ministry of Finance. But this is wrong! This is the bottleneck! And I can go and give examples of all this, but unfortunately, time will not permit me. What the Minister of Finance should have done? There is a lot of things that the Minister of Finance could have done. I have just listed out some of the difficulties that we are having. I have talked about the eroding purchasing power of the low and middle income group, and the high fuel prices. The other day, we have pleaded with Government to give certain subsidies, special rate, special price for fuel to some of those productive sectors, starting with the small fishermen, to give them some subsidies on fuel for them to go at sea, give them some special price for their diesel, for them to risk their life at sea to provide us with our food. I have asked also that some companies be allowed to pay their fuel at the world rate, not at the hedge price that the State Trading Corporation

has signed. But now the State Trading Corporation has signed a contract at such a high price for petroleum products and the same group of people are binding us for 15 years now.

(*Interruptions*)

We should look at all those incestuous relationship. The other day there was a PNQ on those companies that have benefited under the Stimulus Package and we can see the incestuous relationship with the RS Denim, and if we have a Commission of Inquiry on this particular case, you will be shocked about the incestuous relationship existing between various institutions, with politicians, and how the billions of rupees of the public are going down the drain. But Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what I say is that the prices of energy, the prices of input could be controlled and this is what is being done elsewhere in economies like those of Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the other difficulty is the new labour law. They are telling people that they are injecting money in order not to dismiss people and they give them a blank cheque again by virtue of the Employment Rights Act. Yesterday, 60 persons in my Constituency have been sacked by a company which told them that it is allowed to do so. They go to the Labour Office and they are told that under the new law they can sack people and now they are going to get some thousand rupees and what not. I can go on and on and show the weaknesses in this Budget. What does the Government come forward with? The Government comes forward with a tax of Rs 1 on the can of beer, reduction of Ministers' salaries – I have talked about that, suppression of foreign Embassies, *réaménagement au logement*, infrastructure projects of some Rs20 billion. But for protection of employment what have we been given here? Inject more money in order to protect employment! Lessons should be learned elsewhere also. Let us see what is being done in US, Australia, in all those major economies, the same system as ours. They are giving money to the people, 200 euros in France, Australia and elsewhere are giving out money. We can see the recent decision of President Sarkozy, asking that profit be shared, otherwise sanction would be taken.

(*Interruptions*)

De la poudre aux yeux! At the time that they are speaking of new campus, it is as if to beef up human resources, capacity building. Aid for trade is a missed opportunity, unfortunately. I understand the Minister of International Trade cannot do more, we are missing opportunities. Mauritius was already positioned to be the pilot project of aid for trade.

(*Interruptions*)

They did it wrong with COMESA. I pleaded and Mauritius has already positioned to be the pilot project for aid for trade, to be the model for aid for trade. Instead of doing that, some people go around in international fora, becomes the *précheur* on aid for trade with COMESA, with SADC. Of course, all countries wanted to be first past the post on aid for trade. What happened to small Mauritius? We will come to that in another forum.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a lot of alternative measures that could have been taken, because we do not talk without suggesting. What I would suggest is to suspend immediately this new labour legislation and the problem of dismissal of workers would be stopped and jobs would be preserved.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the NRPT should be removed. They want people to build. I have with me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Consumption Price Index. In five years, it has moved from 114 points to 168 points. The Government is incessantly telling people that they are going to build. What would be the cost of construction, let alone those that they can exempt from VAT? They can exempt this and that for the big ones, that can import workers and pay cheap. What about the small contractors and the individual households? Now they don't allow them to exempt their interests on housing loans, to deduct education for their children, the insurance premium and health care. They are saying that our public health care has become almost difficult to finance. It is good to encourage the public. It is very good to build up Apollo Bramwell Hospital, a lot of private clinics, but it is

good also to encourage people to go to private health care. How do you do that? Allow them to deduct their expenses from their income tax and this would be an incentive! The pension contribution to the different portfolios would allow that. There is legislation for that. Allow them to deduct that from their income tax!

Deducting interests on savings is a very bad thing for they twice penalise that person. He has got some money in the bank and he has done it by hard work. He wants to send his children to study, he wants to invest for the marriage of his kids etc. Now they deduct check-off by 15% and when he declares in his income tax, he has got to pay this tax again. This is very unfair indeed.

I would suggest removing the levy on the petrol prices. This is money going to the Government kitty; it has got millions to spend.

Concerning the subsidies and grants to SC and HSC – my friend, hon. Maurice Allet said this very well, I won't take time on that – there is another university campus and the citizen cannot pay the fees for the SC/HSC examinations. Inevitably, we have to do it because other great countries want to be WTO friendly, but in difficult situations, they are protecting their industries, their people. This is why Mr Lamy is saying: 'don't be protectionist'. But we should introduce some price control on certain basic commodities. This is very important especially at a time when certain basic commodities are going down. There are a series of measures like this.

The Minister can play on VAT. It is very unfair to the population when the Minister of Finance comes and says: 'one of my options could have been to increase VAT'. The poor Prime Minister goes on television and says: "my Minister of Finance is very responsible. He could have increased VAT, but he has not done so!" This is misleading, Mr Speaker, Sir. I don't blame the Prime Minister. It is said that he does not trust his Ministers or believe in them but, above all, he trusts and believes in the Minister of Finance. He goes and repeats what the hon. Minister of Finance has told him, that increasing VAT was one of the options. It could never be an option. In no country as they considered the increase of VAT, on the contrary! I can list out a series of countries: India, France, UK and everywhere decreasing VAT in order to whip up consumption.

(Interruptions)

We cannot take as example countries which are in a mess like Iceland or Ireland. They take countries which they want to emulate. Mauritius is not an example of a country that should have considered ever to increase VAT. That was never an option. On the contrary, we should consider - in order to increase demand, in order to encourage people to spend - removing VAT altogether or reduce VAT in order to encourage people to buy local products and, at the same time, keep up the SMEs. This is a transition for me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and, very briefly, I will say a few things on two very important sectors, that is, the SMEs and agriculture.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at paragraphs 61 to 79, there is a list of twenty actions for the SMEs. *La poudre aux yeux!* You cannot be cruel to people in difficulty like that! Let us consider these twenty actions, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Most of them are setting out schemes for training, for consultancy, for campaign awareness and for advice. There is nothing really for production in order to help those SMEs to thrive as they have done in the past. I don't quarrel with them on that Action Plan. Maybe, in the long term, when all those consultancies, trainings, awareness campaigns that they have set up under the heading '*Bringing All SMEs and Micro Enterprises under the Safety Net*', this would happen. I do not say no. But, in the near future, in one and a half years, they cannot achieve this through what they spell out here. The best thing - I have said that under the Additional Stimulus Package Bill - is to ensure the wages to those SMEs. Government can intervene instead of injecting billions in the so-called distressed and viable big enterprises. We have heard about these enterprises. You can give a percentage wage support to those SMEs. This can be done. Secondly, you can play on the rate of exchange. This is what happened and this is what the Labour Government did before 1982. For the supply of rice and flour, there was a special rate of exchange after the devaluation in order not to pass on the devalued amount to the consumer. The

rate of exchange was frozen to the pre-devaluation rate and rice and flour were sold to the Mauritian public at a special rate. This is why we have said that for certain export companies, especially for those SMEs, we have ambitioned for them to go out on the international market. We have done it with the United States under the TIFA, Sarjua and others are selling their pickles. They have participated at the famous Las Vegas Magic show and they are doing it. But now, if we have maintained the rupee at a certain rate, artificially high - and this is dangerous because there is a lot of people who have got black money and they want to change it at a certain rate in order to siphon off from Mauritius. We must be very careful and this is where we should watch out. What I say is that we can have a special rate of interest for those companies. As regards price inputs, this is very important. I have talked of petroleum products. There are certain actions being taken in agriculture about production of potato seeds, onion seeds and all that, but this is not the proper way to do it. You should give directly to the producer. Don't set up schemes that are complicated! The people do not know what they get. As soon as they know that on each rupee they invest, Government is going to give 20 cents, on each rupee that they sell to the consumer, they are going to get ten or twenty cents additional, this would be the incentive. Therefore, give support for input and production! Each unit of production, be it the fisherman, be it the small breeder, the small planter of vegetables, fruits or whatever, we should give him this direct support in order to subsidise his inputs and, at the same time, in order to ensure that he gets an income, and it won't cost him much.

In the past it was Rs50 m. and now it is Rs350 m. If the sum of Rs350 m. is given to a competent Minister of Agriculture, he is going to inundate this country with fresh food, vegetables and fruits. We have been selling fruits outside. We have been the No. 1 pineapple exporter in Germany. We have been exporting fruits and vegetables to Europe and to the famous Rungis in France, and we have been doing it so well. We can supply food even in this region. We were selling potatoes, onions and chickens to Seychelles. This can be done. The Minister who knows how to do business well is nodding his head. He seems to agree with me. This is what should be done.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have not only criticised, but I have also made lots of suggestions concerning the introduction of a good price and income policy. This is where we should start working, be it for the wage-earners, the economic operators or the producers.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, although I have got a lot more to say, I would like to conclude on this note. The hon. Minister of Finance has, on many occasions, boasted that this is the eighth budget that he is presenting. Eighth budget! We have heard this *ad nauseam*. He presented four budgets in the Government of 1991 to 1995. I was there halfway with him. He presented four budgets in this Government of 2005-2009 or 2010. I have been almost halfway with him there also. But each time I have been cautioning him, I have been telling him certain things. If only he had marked my words!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Please gentlemen! Thank you.

Mr Dulloo: All the times, he has had the ears and mouth of the Prime Minister. Well and good for him! May he be blessed! Now, you draw the parallel, Mr Deputy Speaker. If you compare the four budgets of his previous mandates with the four budgets of this mandate, it is exactly the same pattern. The first two budgets were really budgetary exercise, but then he started to know the size of Government and he came forward with a lot of projects in his third budget. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is no difference between this budget and the Budget of 1995/96. We can see the list of infrastructural projects and schemes set up in order to put Government in the super highway.

Really, it makes interesting reading the 1995/96 Budget, the last budget of his previous mandate. What was the result, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? After his Budget of 1995, the Government got booted out with 60-0. In the course of time, halfway through, hon. Paul Bérenger, Minister of Foreign Affairs and hon. Madan Dulloo, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries were booted out first. Then, of course, the calamity came through the budget of 1995. Now, again, his first two budgets were budgetary exercise - the Deputy Speaker was there as Minister – but he made certain fundamental mistakes when he started removing all the support given to the SMEs, especially the small planters, fishermen, and pig-breeders, the duty-free facilities on double-cab and single-cab and the subsidies. All these were dismantled when he referred to the various taxes, the decisions he took in order to hit directly at the labour electorate, the middle-class people, those who rely a lot on those fiscal measures in order to survive.

His last year's budget, just like his third budget of 1994, was Amigo, a full programme, expansionary budget or whatever they call it. This budget is an Action Plan budget; again, a lot of development, plan, massive investment, billions of rupees of investment. I think hon. Naidu pointed out clearly. He should have come and talked, as hon. MrsGrenade said. I have said that I would show that he is taking not only the whole nation for a ride, but also his own Government and his own Prime Minister. I have said a ride. Hon. Allet is by my side. I know that the last race in Champs de Mars is the 'Au Revoir plate'. When he was delivering his speech, it was as if an 'Au Revoir plate', Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. For the first time - the hon. Leader of the Opposition put this well in his speech - I saw my good friend, the hon. Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment crestfallen when he was addressing the House. I asked myself the question why he has come with all these plans and all that for his last budget instead of giving us a transition budget of six months, because for the by-election in Constituency No. 8, he was blacked out completely. We did not hear about the Minister of Finance during the campaign. Of course, now he is frightened.

(Interruptions)

This is why they won, because hon. Sithanen disappeared completely!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please! Order! Order!

Mr Dulloo: You will see what would happen, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. After his Budget of 1995, he was blacked out completely in the election of 1995 and he knows about this. He is a man of experience and wisdom. He knows and he does not want to disappear in the next election. He has come, he has presented a Budget, but, unfortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Action Plan will not bail out the Government. Worse, he will not redress the economy! He will not ride us out of the crisis. Government was right that they would not ride us out of the crisis. What is more important is that they have not been able to build on the trust and confidence of the population. They should win the trust and confidence of the population and the situation is worse than in 1982. Therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what we need is a *politique de vérité*. This Government cannot, unfortunately, get this across. It is only the next Government that would be able to do this and we'll get out of the mess where we are right now.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(7.30 p.m.)

The Attorney-General (Mr J. Valayden): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have listened to many orators in this House intervening on the Budget Speech. And if I have to respond to some of the criticisms, maybe we will have to stay here till tomorrow morning. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will try to address on 10 points only. The first five points will be about the criticisms, the second

half will be about what my Ministry is doing and the last part will be my humble appeal to the nation. Before I go further, not out of a mantra because sometimes we may feel that out of a mantra we have to congratulate X or Y.

When one knows that, for example, in the ninth largest economy, that is, the State of California which is a very powerful economy, more than 50,000 people will lose their jobs. The terminator as the man who is in charge of the State will not have to sack 50,000 people but, because there is no money, he will have to get 50,000 criminals out of prison. This morning I listened to BBC and France Inter. Le Bureau International du Travail a prédit que ce n'est pas 100 millions de personnes qui vont perdre leur emploi cette année, mais 250 millions. I have listened to my friend, hon. Dulloo. I have a copy of the speeches which he made during the two Budgets before me, namely the 2005-2006 Budget and the 2006-2007 Budget. Hon. Dulloo is definitely a good lawyer. Mr Speaker, Sir, when one looks at the two speeches which he made, it would seem that they are completely different. Before coming to criticisms I will only answer my friend with an African proverb, which says, I quote –

“Even the short man can see the sky.”

Can we really believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that there is one person in Mauritius who does not know what is going on worldwide? Therefore, when we look at the Budget that has been presented by the Minister of Finance, my colleague, hon. Dr. Rama Sithanen, under the leadership of the Prime Minister - I know I have to use a language that some of our friends in the Opposition are accustomed to, that is, the body language – and we look at the body language of some Members on one side of the Opposition, you definitely feel that they were expecting the worst from the Budget Speech, and it seems that we have been in a certain way like the supporters of Manchester United when, at the end of the day, the result is not what some doomsayers would have expected. The body language was clearly expecting the worst. The country was expecting the worst. Because of the situation around the world, the nation was ready for some very hard medicine and when they listened to the Budget Speech of hon. Dr. Sithanen, the nation felt relieved. This is why I must congratulate him. Relief does not mean that there will be no toil, there will be no tears, but there will be no blood, to paraphrase what Churchill said during the Second World War. This is not an occasion like any other mantra, this is not a cosmetic congratulation. Deep down I was scared. I have been with the workers and know the difficulties which they have to face. I genuinely thank hon. Dr. Rama Sithanen and the hon. Prime Minister for the speech. It is good that the Prime Minister was the first person to speak on the Budget on the television. Why is it good? It is because there should not be any missing link, as we are living unusual times. And in unusual times, the Prime Minister has shown his methods by going forward and said that he takes the responsibility of this Budget, because it is a collective responsibility. As Prime Minister of this country, he said that he will shoulder his responsibility. We are now living in the time of communication. If the Prime Minister did not speak immediately after, what could have been the conclusion of some people? They would have started to say on Saturday that there is a big gap between the Prime Minister and then Minister of Finance. In fact, the Prime Minister stops all these short stories by saying that it is his Budget. In fact, it is the Budget of the Prime Minister, it is his vision. By putting people first, we mean saving jobs in this very difficult time. I have to congratulate him. Had I failed to congratulate then we would have been playing cheap politics. We are not playing cheap politics. This is the best of time and also the worst of time - The tales of two cities by Charles Dickens - because this is the worst depression that the world has seen since 80 years, but the best of times because it gives us an occasion, like patriots, to show that we love our country, to show that we really mean good for our country. This is why I have to thank the hon. Prime Minister and the Vice-Prime Minister, hon. Dr. Sithanen. I have taken some time to say it, because we don't want to convey only a pessimist message to the nation. We should speak the truth, some have said. But the truth has been stated; the truth is bitter. We have said that there will be a contraction of the economy worldwide. We have said that the growth rate will be much lower than we have predicted. I will nail the point, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission. Can we have one honest person

saying that he has seen that crisis coming in Mauritius? We must not be so razor blade in thinking. We must not try to think *a posteriori*, which means trying to rationalise from the back, try to think we could have won, *écrire l'histoire au futur antérieur*; we can't. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, tell me if there is a man or a woman within our Republic who would have foreseen it? All of us have failed, economists have failed, the IMF has failed, the World Bank has failed, everybody has failed and, yet, this is why we have to thank. A Nobel Prize Economist has said that we have not reached the bottom. Maybe, we are still falling, and we are near the bottom. Maybe! How long will it take for all of us to be at the bottom? Will we bounce back? Will we stay there for long period of time? These are things that we are asking. Therefore, let me, for the first time, expatiate on that congratulation again.

The second point is riding out of the global crisis. I know that some people have been taken for a ride; some people have been promised the post of Prime Minister and yet, today, they are not even the shadow Prime Minister, not even the *bras droit*. The title of the Budget Speech of my friend, hon. Dr. Sithanen is: Riding out the Global Crisis. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir are we responsible for what has happened? In fact, let it be clear. I will refer to the speech made by my friend, hon. Dulloo, during the debate on the Budget 2006/2007, talking about different things, why we are in such a mess. What are the reasons as to why we are in such a mess? They also said that this Budget *défonce la caisse*.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I rather prefer that the hon. Attorney-General sticks to the Budget. I have given him some latitude.

Mr Valayden: I am referring to it, because my friend has referred to 1982. This is very important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Therefore, again, we are in that situation because of what we have inherited - I will not expatiate on that again. We had to take certain decisions, which have made it possible for us to be resilient. Resilient is not, as has been stated by hon. Naidu, namely that we sit on a soft cushion. To be resilient is like Mohamed Ali. Resilience has been defined by Mohammed Ali, the greatest boxer of all the times. Mohammed Ali said that for a boxer to be great it's not a question of punching; George Foreman could have punched a buffalo at one blow and killed the buffalo bare hand! But it is not a question of hitting a person, it is the question of receiving, going down *sur le tapis*, and then bounced back. This is Mauritius. This is what we have done within three years. Were they not the Budgets that have been presented by hon. Sithanen, under the leadership of Dr. Ramgoolam, where would we have been? Could we think of that nightmare scenario? Doomsday would have had to be rewritten because really it is doom everywhere, we would have dicided with the future of all our children if we had not taken the decisions at the beginning of our mandate. Therefore riding out the global crisis, what does it mean? It means that we have a global crisis; it means that we have to know what are the decisions we are going to take? What are the resolutions that are going to take? What are the paths we have to take in order to ride out the global crisis?

This is, in fact, what is inside the 49 pages of this Budget - budget for action, 200 measures, a budget of Rs14 billion to ride out this global crisis, and I will come to that in a few minutes. But before going any further, let me respond to some of the criticisms that we have faced inside the House.

First, only one of historical importance. My friend, hon. Dulloo, said in 1982, there was consultation about the 5% reduction. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is true that we have the Opposition at that time, true that the Leader of the Opposition at that time was Sir Gaëtan Duval but, in fact, it tells us the difference. We do not have to go very far to know the difference. We know that the MSM has already gone very far in proposing that there will be a 2% reduction in the wages of MP's of the MSM, that will go into a Fund for property or will go into a sort of Solidarity Fund.

(Interruptions)

Whatever be, we can feel it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! The second point that has been stated by many Members on the Opposition side - I would not again try to deal with it, for example the artists, the Supreme Court, each point, because I will take the time of the House, but I will refer to a *parabole* because we can't define something. The blind man, if he holds the tail of the elephant and asks to describe what is an elephant, he will explain that the elephant is a tail and if he holds the ear, he will say that an elephant is an ear. I dig out. It is not a question of trying to score points on my good friends. I wonder - because I am a person that will always state that my friends are acting *bona fide* - whether they have really mastered what is going on. I will stop there but if I go to the Jurassic Park then I will have another animal. This is to try to limit all what have been stated by the Opposition. I will come to that when I make the call to the nation as a humble servant of the people. I will come to that in my conclusion. But now let me come to some of the actions that we have taken. Concerning the 200 measures - I will not take all of them - I will try to do it under different headings.

Poverty, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is difficult and what have we stated in the Government programme and in the Budget? We have stated that we will fight absolute poverty, because we know it is very difficult to say that they will fight poverty because at the end of the day, they are only selling a sort of dream to the people. But one good example that we have been doing is what had happened at La Ferme. In the case of La Ferme, in the case of the Village of La Vallete, this is a concrete example - it is not a question of bla bla bla - that we have looked at the environment of the people, at the jobs of the people, the history of each individual, we have had meetings with them, we have empowered the people and then asked them to go there and also looked toward the education of the children of these people who were living in abject poverty. I know personally a lot of people who are now living in La Valette which is a good example. If we continue on the path we have taken and I am sure it will be a success story, this will easily become an example not only for Mauritius, but for that part of the world.

In fact, any independent observer will tell you that it is working. This is why we will go to transform another place, in the North of the island; in fact, in the constituency of hon. Dulloo and hon. Rucktooaa. It is Cité La Lumière where it will be replicated. Therefore on that score, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are not only trying to sell certain things that are not possible.

The second one is about the NHDC, Mr Speaker, Sir. You know, when you prepare a Budget, there is a lot of consultation. The Government will now spend Rs280 m. in order to help another class of people who, some of them, are living in quasi abject poverty, to help them in terms of water, sewage, electricity and also on infrastructures. There again it is a way to combat poverty because I know the NHDC of Camp-Le-Vieux very well and I know School Césaire. Some of the children, have been living in very abject conditions. We have provided Rs280 m. because we are a caring Government. We have not only stated that we will do, but we are doing it. We have allocated the money, it is a question of putting it into practice, fighting poverty at micro level.

The third point is a simple thing - corporate social responsibility. The 2% will be used, will be given by the big ones, those above Rs50 m. and that money will have a programme which will have to be agreed by the Government and the money will be spent, for example - and it is not an exhaustive list as you go through the Budget - on literacy. If you want to fight poverty again, the first example, I gave, was housing, environment, family history; the second one I gave is housing and the third one is that the money will be used top on the list, if one has read the Budget Speech, for literacy.

We are going to save 30% of the children who failed CPE, who are not able to write their own names. Which Government has gone so far? I do not know. Maybe I am wrong, but they must not look only at the measures that are being taken now to fight poverty, but also look at what has been done in the past by this Government. *Nous avons eu l'éducation gratuite*. Secondly, we have free transport. This is important. We have kept free transport in an era where some of them were asking that we get rid of it and solve simplistically our budget problems. In fact, we are facing the

global crisis while keeping free transport because we know who are those who will face the direct consequences will be the poor. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do not want to fight with anyone, but I know the real figures of those who are obtaining 100% of SC and HSC fees; these figures have more than tripled. Of course, we will always have to cut somewhere. Again, we are talking about fighting abject poverty. In Mauritius, we have many categories of people. First, you have a class of people where you have the working class or those who are not working or living on the informal economy, *marchands ambulants*, owners of something, living or working with some people.

We have what we call single mothers, *mères célibataires*. For how many years were they feeling the brunt? What has been done by this Government? The allowance has been increased from Rs700 to Rs1000. But the Rs700 started under this Government, under the Primeministership of Dr. Ramgoolam. We have even gone further. Now, we have increased it up to Rs 7500. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we must be serious if we want to fight poverty. Can we, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, forget how we are fighting poverty along the lines? We are empowering people to have their own businesses at different levels. Therefore, again, on fighting poverty this Government is doing a lot. I have only concentrated on four paths to fight poverty: education, housing, empowering women and helping those who really need it.

On the question of education, I will not talk on what we have done at preprimary, primary and secondary levels. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. There are many students who have succeeded their HSC examinations, but they cannot go overseas because they do not have contacts or parents there or they do not have enough money to go and study there. We know that to get an entrance at the University of Mauritius, for example, in law, you need to have three A's. If you don't have it, you cannot get it. Yet, if you want to go to Holborn Law School in London, with two E's you can get an entry and become a lawyer. Those who cannot go to university or who cannot pay for external examinations are the poor. This Government is increasing the intake capacity of students at the University of Mauritius. Again, you can have many laws, but the greatest leveler of all empowerment tools is Education. 8000 people in Mauritius will get the opportunity to follow tertiary education. Perhaps, we are not realising what we are unleashing. Of course, we have reasons behind it. The only asset that we have in this country is our people. We are investing on them. The other fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that we are investing on people who maybe will get the chance to work in other countries. We are investing not only as a group, but also as a person. When we introduced free education in 1976 and when we introduced the University of Mauritius, the criticisms were the same, and today, again, we are having the same criticisms. Do we really deserve them? When the previous Government decided to build schools, there were criticisms, people said why we have to build schools, we could still learn under trees. But, today, we have 8000 students. As for myself, I went to London as a tourist, but not as a genuine tourist, but in order to learn. I know what it is. I feel it when I know what we are doing. I keep on pestering my good friend, hon. Dr. Bunwaree, as to when are we putting the first shovel to kick off the project. He is very human at heart, he is a heart doctor; he knows how to cure hearts also in physical and spiritual terms. This is important. There again, I must thank the hon. Prime Minister and all our friends. I forgot to thank my friend, hon. Xavier Duval, on the question of single mothers, but if I would have said it earlier, people could have made other conclusions.

Let me now come to the question of artists because I am an artist myself; I write, I play. Let us forget about what we have done, but tell me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in which Budget Speech has there been reference to artists and names were given! What we are doing for the artists is really amazing. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the greatest assets of England and Wales, the United Kingdom, one of the areas where they get a lot of money is not the financial services, but it is from culture specially music. In this country, I dare say that we are the greatest lovers of music as an island on earth. We have many talents. This Government will invest on the artists, they will be able to rehearse and go overseas for training. This is the first time that artists are receiving so much attention. Again, in these difficult times when the Government is thinking of artists, it speaks volume. Perhaps some people would have said why we are spending so much time on artists. In

fact, we are speaking of artists because we know poets, singers and musicians play great roles. It is not a question of having academic education only; it is a question of fulfilling any person's ambition, fulfilling the spirit of the person himself. I will not ask the question that Plato asked thousands of years ago.

After talking about artists, let me now come to FIFA.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister has been doing so well on artists. It's about 8.00 p.m. I'll suspend the sitting for an hour and then come back to listen to him. Thank you.

At 8.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.02 p.m with Mr Speaker in the Chair

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, before coming to football I was saying on the issue of artists, that this Government has done a lot in the present Budget. Another area where it is worth mentioning - I will fail in my duty if I don't do so - is the corridor between Aapravasi Ghat and Le Morne. These are the two institutions, the two pillars. I have been associated, together with my friend, hon. Minister Gowressoo and others, to inscribe them on the *patrimoine mondial*. What this Government is doing now is to have artists who will be able to, in a certain way, make it a visual project so that people can live what our forefathers and foremothers have been through the Aapravasi Ghat and Le Morne, as a link which will be not only for us Mauritians, but also for people in this globe planet to be able to live it. I must say that this again will be a great example of how much Government values what we call the artistic powers, artistic imagination of our artists.

Then there is another issue about the artists. There have been some criticisms on the part of some Members about how we are going to commemorate the memory of Kaya, who is, I repeat, the Father of Segae. In fact, it is clear, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the present Government is coming with something which has already taken shape and it is a question of time now before the Ministry of Education & Culture will announce it. We have already gone very far on that subject to commemorate the memory for Kaya who is the Father of Segae. Therefore, the sum total of what we have been doing for artists, goes beyond imagination. Like John Lennon has said, we have a tendency to dream about the artists, but we are not the only one to dream about the powers of artists.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now move on to the issue of stadiums. The Minister of Finance has earmarked Rs15 m. to rehabilitate two stadiums namely, the George V Stadium, which in future will be called as the Stadium of Ram Ruhee and Anjalay Coopen Stadium in the North respectively. Why these two? It is to keep on with the development of what is going on in the world of stadium sports. But the main rationale behind going very fast with these two stadiums is to rehabilitate and to put them at par with the levels asked by *FIFA – Fédération Internationale du Football* in order to attract teams that would be qualified for the World Cup which will be held next year in South Africa, to come to Mauritius and use Mauritius, which is only four hours away from South Africa, as a training camp. What are the consequences of that action of Government? The consequences are immense, because Mauritius being four hours away, we will know, for example, that if Germany happens to choose Mauritius as a training camp, worldwide everybody will know in Germany about Mauritius. Because, Mr Speaker, Sir, *la finale de la coupe du monde* will be the biggest show on earth. Four billion people will watch the World Cup at one moment or the other. This is what the estimate says. Four billion people, before or during World Cup, will hear about Mauritius; people will learn about Mauritius. Whatever MTPA is doing is very well, but the very fact that four teams from Europe or other parts of the world will come to Mauritius will be a very big impetus to our tourist industry. In fact, we must go further. In fact, it is because we are going along that line that the Ministry of Sports is saying that we can't do so, because we are rehabilitating the stadium. They are asking how we can do so during that present time, while concerts will be going on there. There was no ill motive or other motives behind that. We cannot say that we will invest Rs50 m.

and, at the same time, have some big gatherings on the pitch that will be used by professional footballers. It means investing and keeping them in a good state. This is why, again, perhaps some people have tried to say that we are stopping some people to go to stadiums; outside some people have even used some communal undertones. We are going further, we are not stopping there. There will be a committee of Ministers to look for other avenues. It is very important also that we keep on, because we love artists. We cannot love them and do not give them the facilities to have their shows. We will continue to do it. There will be alternatives, we will make sure that these alternatives exist and they will be in good shape for people to come and attend show. I think this is important. What is more important - perhaps my friend hon. Minister X. L. Duval would not even say so - is that *la Fédération Internationale du Football* (FIFA) has already agreed with the Ministry of Tourism that for next year - is that since yesterday evening of the tickets for the final, semi final, quarter final, *match d'ouverture* and all other matches have already been sold out? As I said, since yesterday evening all these tickets have already been sold out *et pour la coupe de la confédération qui aura lieu dans un mois. 85% des tickets ont déjà été vendus. Mais pour revenir à notre sujet, pourquoi l'île Maurice est en train de faire son maximum?* My good friend, hon. Minister X. L. Duval has gone to meet people from the *FIFA*. The *FIFA* has asked for the booking of hotels in Mauritius for the one month of the World Cup. In fact, some 3,500 hotel rooms are booked for the World Cup. What is more interesting is that there will be investment in sports, in hotels, in the MTPA going overseas to try to convince people from the *FIFA*, investment in stadiums, investment in looking for alternatives. But, these people will be here, the planes will be coming to Mauritius and they will be living in Mauritius. At the same time, they will leave Mauritius only to go and attend football matches in South Africa. Can we imagine having *a Franz Beckenbauer in Mauritius - nicknamed the Kaiser - and the captain of the great Bayern de Munich, as well as the captain of Germany during that time, living in Mauritius and then take the plane the next day to go and see Germany playing?*

We have so many examples. Let us think for one second we have Pelé and even those officers from *FIFA* which means that today what we are doing is preparing for next year. This is another example. Perhaps it is innocuous when you read the Budget speech, you see only three lines, you don't realise how much work, how much input there has been behind these three lines: Rs50 m. for two stadiums linked with tourism. But next year, the sum total in real terms is Rs1 billion - my friend, hon. Xavier Duval, will correct me if I am wrong - which will come into the coffers of Mauritius. For investment it is around Rs50 m. Is this not vision? Is this not foresight? This is why I am aghast a bit. I remember very well I contacted some of my friends of the Opposition, I stated to them, that we could have made a case for the island not to take a part in the finals, but to have a group match here. But this was not contemplated because this came from me. Because never ever will a small island be able to hold the World Cup. We missed an opportunity, but today I hope the nation will be gathering behind that idea which will get its momentum. I am not talking on sports, I have taken only that particular part related to World Cup.

I will be very short concerning what my Ministry has done. Mr Speaker, Sir. Maybe *ce sera une fausse modestie*, if I say that we have not done much or trying to say that I am not proud of what we have done. At the Attorney-General's Office we are very proud of what we have done. Let me go very quickly. We have set up the Law Reform Commission which has come with many papers which can be easily accessible through the Net and I will only cite some of them: report and draft Bill submitted, an access to justice and the issue of limitation of action to which we are coming soon, discussion papers on laws and practices relating to criminal investigation, arrest and bail, papers on forensic use of DNA, papers on the criminal justice system which will be followed by a law. In 2009, harmonisation of laws with Human Rights including the legislative framework for doing business in line with best international practice, rule of law, good governance which is another paper. The law practitioners legislation on which there was a paper. There is a paper that is being 'produced' by the Law Reform Commission which has now its own office, its own Chief Executive, its own budget. Every two months we have special paper which helps my Ministry in

order to contemplate what new legislation we will have to bring to Parliament. This is again, Mr Speaker, Sir, one important tool, one important element that will stay with us for many years, and I hope it will continue to grow because it is one of the areas where we can take the political things out of it and come with it after wide consultation with the general public or some special group of people.

Second, the law practitioners legislation which was amended to permit joint venture between law firm and foreign law firm. Now the law has been proclaimed and I can inform the House again there that we have started to receive a lot of international law firms coming to Mauritius. The law firms are again recruiting people and will also create new jobs, but more it will help to make Mauritius a judicial hub. We are still within the teething period, but once we get *la vitesse de croisière*, that is, by January next year, I am sure that we will reach 15 or 20 international law firms in Mauritius.

Briefly, Mr Speaker Sir, I will speak on the restructuring of the Supreme Court. We know at the moment that since January we have a Commercial Division which is housed in all the District Courts of the Human Right Centre and is fully operational. In fact, I have paid *a visite de courtoisie* to the judge presiding in the Commercial Court and I have been assured that by the end of November, the judge will be waiting for cases, because the cases which were pending will already be heard by the commercial Court. On the question of when we amended the law, how we have the criminal assizes all year round. I would say *un petit amendment, but has a big effect*. I can only say - because I don't want to take the time of the House - there again the waiting time where people were spending nine years on remand, cases were taking from the day of commissioning of the offence, case lodged, it was nine years, six years from the days the case lodged before the Supreme Court and the case heard.

I gave an example in 2000 and now it is reduced to an average of three years and it will go down because we will bring new amendments which means that this sort of cases will be heard within two years. And in some cases, if I take cases of 2009, we have gone so far, for example, the case which has already been heard, namely, States against Nadeem Summun, date of commission of offence which is public, 20 February 2008. The case was lodged 04 November 2008. The case has already been heard, the person has already been sentenced. It is the new trend. These are the things that nobody could have imagined some years back. Again on these things we are making a lot of progress and people are not on remand and before we were being criticised for that.

Restructuring of the Attorney-General's Office - I will not make a speech about what we have been doing. The office now has a Civil Advisory and Litigation Unit, Legislative Drafting Unit and the Criminal and Advice and Litigation Unit. Today, I am proud to say to the House that one of the proposals of Lord Mackay for the DPP to have an independent office - physical independent office - which is not within the same building as the Attorney-General - the wrong conception - and its own budget is now a reality. We will go again through four, five and six months stifle period, because the time it will take for the new DPP's office with its own budget to recruit other people and a balance with my office to have other people will be a great difficult period, whether other people will be able to go from the DPP's Office or the Attorney-General's Office, you know it very well, Mr Speaker, Sir. But, at the end day, what will happen? Mauritius will be one of the rare countries in the world where we have been within a very short span of time, God helping - we talk about nation building, about State building, but here it is a question of building the infrastructure for an independent Judiciary, another independent mechanism in order to see to it that the rule of law, independence of the Judiciary, independence of the institution really work. Mr Speaker, Sir, with its own budget we will have also a Deputy DPP; we are already now making the ball rolling so that in the coming month we have a Deputy DPP. Again a big change! We are also making the needful on that issue.

Concerning other reforms, we are again revisiting the small claims in the period of where people will have to borrow, people will perhaps borrow, others will get credit, others will not be able

to repay. The Small Claims Court will play an important role. We are discussing and we will go very far in that instead of using the week days, we will use Saturday for small things. If we manage to succeed on that, it will be a big leap forward.

I would like now to take another issue, that of tourists who have been robbed. Police have made arrests and the people are ready to plead guilty. We are liaising with our friend, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, hon. X. L. Duval, so that we get some help in order to have the cases heard in the evenings. This again will help to give a certain *encouragement* to the Police, because sometimes the Police make an arrest, but there is nobody to stand as witness. On the other hand, if people are robbed and the inquiry is very quick and people are punished it will enhance the image of Mauritius. The needful is being done, again with the help of other bodies. The prosecuting counsel has been reactivated so that in the Intermediate Court, prosecuting Counsel will be there instead of having people from the DPP's office or from the AG's office, because sometimes we waste a lot of energy on small cases.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one important thing is mediation and conciliation. We have talked about the international arbitration. As part of the Government programme, we committed ourselves to create a business friendly environment. We have the Mackay Report. However, if we are to achieve noticeable results in enhancing our business environment in the short and medium term, we need to look at the positive conflict management. As part of the business facilitation strategy, a Commercial Court already has been set up. We have also enacted the Permanent Court of Arbitration Act of 2008 which adds to our existing arbitration procedures, as contained in the *Code de Procédure Civile*. But we'll go further with the positive conflict management. We are referring to what is called mediation and conciliation; facilitative processes for the neutral and dependent third party, providing assistance in the management of the process of dispute resolution. A neutral and defendant third party has no advisory or determinative role in the resolution of the dispute or in the outcome of its resolution, but assists the parties in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement by encouraging parties to define the issues with the aim of finding common ground between the parties. This category of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) includes the process of mediation. We have been very slow on that. We have learned from *la médiation* that exists already in the Ministry of Labour. In fact, this *médiation* has been set up by my friend, hon. Dr. Bunwaree. We have contacted Professor Thorul and now we have asked the Law Reform Commission to look into it and we will come by November with the necessary law on that issue.

I'll now come to the change of name. This was a process where sometimes you have to see an Attorney and some Attorneys charge some fees. But we have made it very much easier now and the form is ready on line; it is a standard form and one can find it also in all the Citizens Advice Bureau. You can write directly to the Attorney-General and things get moving. Then, we have another predicament; the statutory takes four months, but we are now contemplating to reduce it to one month, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I believe it will help a lot of people. This is done not only because the name belittles that person, but because we have a history of slavery. Some people have had names imposed on them which are so debasing. Once you look at the name itself, you don't have to do an inquiry. I have also written to some associations and, in the coming months, we will have meetings with the press to make it free, instead of having a press which is agreeable to have it published free in newspapers. *Venons-en maintenant au Certificat de moralité, M. le président.* I brought the law; I must inform the House that before it was 80 per month, now it is above 230 applications per day for different reasons. People want to go overseas, now following the event of 9 September, everywhere they ask you for a *Certificat de Moralité* for so many reasons. There is also the case of people working in the security area, who, every six months, are asked to bring a *Certificat de Moralité* by their employer. Mr Speaker, Sir, there again, we are going to make the necessary changes. But then, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have, what we call, the big bang. What is the big bang? It is that we are coming with 16 new laws after going through Cabinet and making them available for the general public to make comments. For example, the Law Practitioner Amendment Bill. Let me give what was the object of the Bill. It enables citizens who have

obtained a professional qualification or of equivalent to that of barrister in an English speaking State or a French speaking State to apply for admissions to practice in Mauritius. We have the Constitution Amendment Bill to put into practice the recommendation of the Presidential Commission chaired by Lord Mackay of Clashfern, to provide that the Supreme Court shall consist of a Court of Appeal, a High Court, etc., to permit any person to do away with the archaic procedure of appeal by way of case stated already ready. We have the Judicial and Legal Provisions Bill, we have the Ushers Amendment Bill, 16 new laws which I call 'the Big Bang'. This is what will change and will change the colour of the walls of justice. Perhaps when people will look at these 16 amendments, from the jury going through the Bail Act, going for a Criminal Code, going through our Civil Code concerning divorce and what we call *l'organigramme du judiciaire Mauricien*, we will be a really a big change. This is why I say I cannot be modest, I must be very proud of what we are doing and this Government is also very proud, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Lastly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the great recession has nothing to do with us; we are not responsible. The Budget is an Action Plan of 200 resolutions of Rs14 billions. We are going to save jobs, protect people. We do not know how long it will last, how we will be able to fight against it, but we are taking actions. Mr Speaker, Sir, on these issues we are not masters of our fate, it depends on what is going on in the international front, what is going on in the big countries. Will we see green shoots as from autumn in these northern countries and next year we will have a recovery? But one thing, we are not masters concerning the great recession, but we can be masters in terms of being ready for the recovery. Therefore, we must get ourselves prepared so that once the world gets moving again, gets out of the hole we are in, Mauritius will be able to benefit from the measures we have taken. This is why we are doing all these reforms. This is why I make an appeal, Mr Speaker, Sir.

We all love this beautiful country of the Republic of Mauritius. I don't think there is one person in this House who does not love our country. As true patriots, Mr Speaker, Sir, let us join hands together in order to save our motherland; let us join hands together in order to remove the tears on the cheeks of those who lose their jobs, to remove the tears on the cheeks of fathers, let us remove the tears on the cheeks of Mother's day will be on Sunday and by so doing we will be able to say to our country we had a chance in 2009, there was a great recession, and yet, because we get the opportunity to prove to the country that we love it, we did it by working hard, by not doing cheap politics and by putting all our faith in our country with conviction. Let us help Mauritius because Mauritius deserves better than cheap scoring politics.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands): Mr Speaker, Sir, budget time is a time where all Members of this respected House intervene and I'm no exception. Since the debates have started, as others have done before me and will do after I have ended my speech, each hon. Member in this Parliament rightly feels it is his or her duty to express views on a document that will undoubtedly affect the lives of our fellow citizens. Indeed this mini budget will definitely influence the life, livelihood and mood of the population for the following six to eighteen months, at least. Even further, many of the decisions announced a week ago by hon. Dr. Sithanen will indeed have far-reaching consequences and impact on all our lives for years and years.

Taking a simple analogy, Mr Speaker, Sir, enables me to view the budgeting exercise quite like the father of the household, given free rein with the familial income regarding spending and investment decisions, would conduct once a month except, of course that this is on a much larger scale, for longer periods of time and that it affects consequently a whole country's population.

The head of the household, Mr Speaker, Sir, will announce the saving spending decisions of the household hopefully after having had prior consultations with the family members. At some point though, just like in this House, once the decisions have been announced, Members of that family have their say with regard to the orientation and impact of the measures decided upon.

For as much as he would like a human being is not perfect. Consequently, there can be a real possibility that important decisive measures have been overlooked, misdirected or even discarded when they should not have been. Ideally, the father would, of course, try to strike the right balance and be fair in his decisions. He will also try to protect the household by ensuring that the actions that he undertakes, especially those that have long-lasting consequences, are the result of thorough reflection and are implemented as quickly as possible. Vision, wisdom is required for that. What is also required from the father is the humility and openness to realise that he is not perfect and that others too can have good ideas. Except when it comes to *le meilleur économiste que le monde ait connu*, of course, this cannot be the case. For what have we witnessed since 2005? Hon Dr. Sithanen engaged in pure cold mathematical equations, so persuaded of detaining the sole truth that he throws a tantrum when a Member of this House dares make him see where he has gone wrong or what he could have done differently. He doesn't want to hear from it.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this mini budget speech is no exception. In it many crucial decisions have been left aside or overlooked. One line about health, nothing about youth and sports, trifles about Rodrigues, nothing about Agaléga, the other major outer island still maintained in a state of underdevelopment when so much could be done there, nothing about reform of civil service, and I could go on and on.

In his address to this House a week ago, hon. Dr. Sithanen developed so many paths, one wonders if, in his mind, he does not take himself for the enlightened one except where Buddha had humility and wisdom to learn from others Dr. Sithanen has none. Where Buddha's middle way leads to light and freedom, Nirvana and happiness many of Dr. Sithanen's paths will lead nowhere, do nothing, but perpetuate a cycle of darkness and frustration amongst the Mauritian population.

Et c'est là tout le drame de la chose, M. le président. Je demanderai donc au ministre de ne pas s'arrêter aux critiques et de les rejeter en bloc mais les entendre pour mieux les comprendre et voir si vraiment on aurait pu faire les choses autrement. Quand on critique ses mesures, sa parade est de dire: 'qu'avez vous fait quand vous étiez au gouvernement?' On pourrait lui retourner la phrase: 'Alors pourquoi faites-vous pareil?'

Because it is a fact that for some measures namely for the advancement and development of SME sector, poverty alleviation, arts and culture, environment which are the subjects that I will dwell upon in my intervention, Government is hardly moving at a pace that one could qualify as rapid and visionary.

M. le président, je dirai au ministre : maintenant n'est pas le moment de voir ce que les autres ont fait mais ce que vous pouvez faire de mieux. Les finances du gouvernement c'est vous. Le peuple vit présentement sous votre responsabilité et subit de plein fouet le poids de toutes les décisions que vous prenez. Le présent est le moment d'agir pour que le futur soit meilleur. Le passé n'a d'importance que pour nous aider à ne pas en répéter les erreurs. Si on passe notre temps à nous attarder sur ce que les autres n'ont pas fait, on n'avance pas. Et avancer, progresser malgré les écueils d'une crise économique et de conjonctures qui sont loin d'être idéales sont les maîtres-mots pour sortir de ce marasme. »

Car s'il a toujours maintenu une fidélité sans faille en faveur du secteur privé au détriment du peuple et des travailleurs, le registre du dialogue du Grand Argentier, lui, a changé, M. le président. From robust growth, early harvest and bumper crop, he moved on to resilience and now a vulnerable economy.

D'un répertoire optimiste, avec maintes mesures, on le sait, en faveur du secteur privé alors que la population, elle, était requise à faire des sacrifices les uns plus durs que les autres, il s'est transformé en secouriste alarmiste sur fond de crise économique mondiale, inondant encore une fois le secteur privé de largesses émanant des caisses de l'État sous-entendant qu'il n'y a pas d'autres alternatives et que si le peuple n'accepte pas ses mesures, l'emploi ne sera pas sauvé; que les travailleurs se doivent d'accepter encore une fois sans broncher la baisse continuelle des pouvoirs

d'achat et le règne sans partage de la loi des employeurs sur leur misérable vie afin de préserver leur gagne-pain et celui de leur famille.

Du coup, M. le président, quand on fait un tour dans la rue, que constatons nous? En 2005, le peuple était rempli d'espoir par rapport aux promesses de croissance robuste que lui avait garanties l'honorable Sithanen. L'espoir a été remplacé par de la colère et de la frustration, quand pour le budget 2006-2007 une série de mesures serre-ceinture a ciblé les travailleurs et la classe moyenne de ce pays.

After 2006-2007 Budget, anger was tangible on the streets with regard to the measures contained within the budget namely the NRPT, the tax on income, taxing bank savings, the removal of subsidies for SC/HSC but to name a few measures. The 2007-2008 budget carried in its wake waves of frustration especially while the social fabric was deteriorating with the continuous loss of purchasing power for the consumer.

Today and perhaps it is the worst thing, there is resignation. De la résignation et du fatalisme qui sont peut être, M. le président, plus dangereux encore que la colère et la frustration, les deux réactions mentionnées précédemment. Parceque maintenant, il est clair pour tous les travailleurs de ce pays et la population en général qu'avec l'honorable Dr. Sithanen la balance penchera toujours en faveur des employeurs et que, sous prétexte de vouloir sauver l'emploi, ils auront à subir tous les revers possibles. La perte continue de leur pouvoir d'achat notamment à travers la dévaluation de la roupie et une compensation plus faible que le taux d'inflation qui continuent depuis quatre ans, des structures telles que le NPC qui consolident de manière générale l'ascendant de l'employeur sur l'employé et surtout, surtout des mesures annoncées qui, faute de structures appropriées, restent au niveau zéro de mesures non réalisées ou inaptes à répondre aux réalités du terrain.

Prenons par exemple, M. le président, le cas des petites et moyennes entreprises. Mr Speaker, Sir, SMEs, as conceded by the hon. Minister of Finance, have a crucial role in helping Mauritius through the global economic crisis both as creator of jobs and generator of income. The importance of SMEs has been underlined by hon. Dr. Sithanen, himself, when he has stated that this sector represents about 43% of the jobs available in this country. Yet the measures advocated for SMEs, Mr Speaker, Sir are simply made to cater for problems as they arise when they should have been part of a Master Plan for this sector. As an example, year by year, we are just moving from one Fund to the other, and this year from MASMED to SJR. This is simple when it comes to the Budget Speech. But when we see what happens in reality, it is proved that, in fact, the first Fund did not meet the expectations of the small entrepreneurs. So, we had to create another fund and this could go on and on.

But I was glad to hear the Minister say yesterday that, finally, an understanding has been reached with regards to defining Small and Medium Enterprises. This was, in fact, causing quite a lot of problems, especially where allocations of funding facilities and other schemes were concerned. *Comme on dit, mieux vaut tard que jamais.* It is now a question of bringing the necessary legislation amendments, and I hope this will be done in the shortest possible delay.

The drive in setting the plan for SMEs as for many other sectors for that matter has been, I am afraid, more based on a supply driven set of programmes rather than a demand driven set of programmes. The measures designed for SMEs in the current context are not responsive enough to cater for the specific needs of SMEs which are essentially family-based enterprises where the question of security and trust by the banks cannot be acceded to.

One of the main problems and concerns of SMEs is access to finance. Commercial Banks rarely help sustain SMEs because of the higher risk that they carry. I have had on several occasions cases concerning my own constituents who have tried their hand at business and have come to me

for guidance after they had applied for a loan with commercial banks and have had their application refused.

Consequently, the DBM finds itself submerged with loan requirements with the delay in procedure that this entails. And when the entrepreneurs fail to pay, DBM finds itself in a precarious position with loads of bad debts and defaulter loans. Only now, after 4 years nearing the end of this Government's mandate is the hon. Vice-Prime Minister thinking that it would be appropriate to provide SMEs with consultants who would help them monitor their activities and financial dealings.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the equation is simple. The Minister has proceeded in an inverse pyramid system, trying to boost up the creation of SMEs without providing them with adequate and appropriate means to evolve successfully in a ruthless business world. The remedial measures which he is now proposing namely in terms of restructuring, financing and marketing are even more difficult to implement today that the world financial crisis is here and the situation is far from being idealistic. Mr Speaker, Sir, planning should be done before setting out and measures forecast well ahead, not added in a piecemeal manner as problems crop up.

Tous les curepiens, M. le président, savent que même lorsqu'il fait beau il faut sortir de la maison avec un parapluie dans son sac parce que Curepipe est un endroit pluvieux. C'est beaucoup plus simple que d'être obligé d'acheter un parapluie neuf en cours de route parce que la pluie peut nous tomber dessus n'importe quand. Par conséquent, on est couvert. Cela s'appelle de la prévoyance. C'est une précaution toute simple prise avant que le problème ne surgisse. Le ministre, lui, a commencé à l'envers, M. le président. Tant il a hâte de voir les entreprises démarrer au plus vite, dans trois jours, pour que les initiateurs soient enlevés de la liste des sans emplois, modifiant ainsi les statistiques, permettant du même coup au ministre de glorifier sa stratégie de création d'emplois.

Je ne sais, M. le président, combien de problèmes cela a créé parce que ce n'est qu'après coup que ces entrepreneurs sont visités par les autorités. Si leur entreprise ne répond pas aux normes, ces entrepreneurs se retrouvent en plus sous le coup d'une amende ou doivent même fermer boutique.

Aussi, M. le président, parlons de ces mesures pour aider des femmes sans expérience du monde des affaires à sortir de la pauvreté. On les a encouragées à lancer des petites entreprises pour la plupart dans des secteurs traditionnels. Mais il nous faut former des femmes à prendre des initiatives dans de nouveaux secteurs, à développer des entreprises dans des créneaux et des niches qui sont adaptés à leur profil. S'il y a un secteur où les femmes peuvent très bien faire, c'est dans la diversification agricole avec l'hydroponique. Certaines ont réussi brillamment dans la culture de légumes de qualité pouvant trouver un débouché dans le secteur hôtelier par exemple.

Il faut leur procurer l'engagement et l'encadrement nécessaire et pertinent pour qu'elles ne se retrouvent pas avec des dettes lourdes et qu'elles s'enfoncent davantage dans les spirales de la pauvreté parce que, M. le président, si le ministre dit combien de petites entreprises existent, il ne dit pas combien d'entre elles se sont enregistrées et ont dû fermer leurs portes après. C'est normal, M. le président, que ces chiffres sont moins glorieux. Et quand on sait qu'il s'agit là de personnes vulnérables, on se dit que le ministre devrait se sentir plus concerné.

And this is why so many other measures announced by the hon. Minister are simply again and again *un effet d'annonce* or remain *lettre morte*. We always have to come back to that same reality. *Comment se réajuster face aux réalités du terrain au lieu d'aller de l'avant?*

Furthermore, when we speak of the opacity with regard to the statistics and the information dispensed to enable entrepreneurs to benefit fully from existing facilities, we realise that many of them are still not aware of the facilities available, and again I speak from experience with my constituents.

My colleague, hon. Bodha, was saying, the other day, that SMEs suffer from two major problems, marketing and access to financing. This is true and even more so that Government is aware of that fact, but the projects are still held up somewhere in the pipeline.

Indeed let's have a look at them. Where are the “access to consultancy support that spans the life cycle of a project, from conceptualisation to implementation (...)” promised since August 2005 in the Vice-Prime Minister's setting the stage for robust growth document? Where is the SME Consultancy Services Scheme that had been announced? How many Small and Medium Enterprises have benefited from such facilities? Where are the tourist villages that would have accommodated small entrepreneurs and helped them to market their products? Where are the nine low-cost industrial estates that were designed for SMEs? True this is a project that dates since ten years or so, but what is being done to accelerate the process?

Mr Speaker, Sir, radical improvement of the support framework for new entrepreneurs and SMEs announced in 2005 in the Budget Speech 2006/2007 is still awaited in 2009 where we learn now that consultants will be recruited to assist SMEs to prepare and submit financial restructuring plans.

Had these measures been taken beforehand, they would certainly have enabled entrepreneurs to be more resilient during those harsh times. Now the fear is that the measures are coming almost at the end of a mandate and many of them may never see the light of day.

Concerning the eradication of poverty, Mr Speaker, Sir, although tackling the problem is a tremendous task, one should not be deterred by the fact. In this perpetual battle, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is so much to do, especially so for a Government that advocates to Put People First. For myself, I could speak volumes about this subject but for the sake of time management, I will, of course, contain my interventions to five examples where we can do much better than this.

First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, let's talk of “le droit au logement”. Tout être humain, M. le président a droit à un logement décent. Cela fait partie des droits fondamentaux de l'individu. Or à Maurice, de nombreuses personnes vivent toujours dans des conditions déplorables. Le ministre des finances a parlé, il y a un an, de quelques 7157 familles vivant dans des situations d'extrême pauvreté. On peut sans crainte dire, M. le président, qu'avec la crise économique il y a un risque réel que ce chiffre ne s'accroît à une vitesse incalculée.

Il faut donc tout faire pour accélérer le processus de logement de ces personnes afin de leur redonner leur dignité. Pourquoi ne sommes-nous, pour l'instant, qu'au projet pilote de La Valette? En matière de logement pour les plus démunis il serait temps aussi de passer à la vitesse supérieure. Pour cela, il faut un engagement politique réel et non cosmétique, M. le président.

Cela va sans dire que nous accueillons avec bonheur le projet de réfection des appartements et maisons de la NHDC. Dans ma circonscription il y en a deux, celle d'Atlee et de Dubreuil qui requièrent attention. Cela fait longtemps qu'il fallait le faire. Je l'ai d'ailleurs moi-même souligné dans une question parlementaire puis subséquemment le *Leader* de l'Opposition dans une récente PNQ. L'état de ces logements est déplorable et il faut y remédier. C'est un pas dans la bonne direction mais il faut aussi parallèlement que le projet de relogement de familles particulièrement vulnérables ne se limite pas à fournir des logements de tôle et de bois. Ces mesures renforcent la précarité de ces familles et ne peuvent être que temporaires. Il faut une révision complète du système assortie d'une réelle planification d'un engagement politique vrai et concret afin que le processus avance plus vite que n'enfle le problème. M. le président, il ne faudrait pas réduire la dignité des gens à une question de chiffres ou d'argent.

Qui parle de pauvreté, M. le président, ne peut le faire sans parler d'éducation. Je ne m'attarderai pas sur le sujet mais je ne peux passer sous silence ce fait quand le ministre parle d'aider de jeunes universitaires en difficulté dans le paragraphe 217 à obtenir des bourses en augmentant le seuil d'éligibilité de R 7,500 à R 10,000.

Encore une fois, M. le président, c'est le concept de la pyramide inversée qui est appliqué. Cette mesure est en soi une mesure louable mais le ministre ne réalise-t-il pas qu'avant d'accéder à l'université, il faut d'abord passer par le SC et le HSC ? Or le seuil d'éligibilité qui permet à ces jeunes étudiants d'obtenir une subvention de leurs frais d'examens de Cambridge n'a pas augmenté. C'est triste parce que R 100 millions auraient suffi et auraient permis de soulager pas moins de 30,000 familles.

What is this if not discrimination, streamlining from the base, to prevent more people coming from the most vulnerable sections of the population to accede to higher education when we know full well that education is one of the main means to help people free themselves from the scourge of poverty?

Thirdly, IRS, Mr Speaker, Sir, was heralded as a great harbinger of job opportunities. But, systematically, one finds that the best jobs do not go to the locals, but that our Mauritian brothers and sisters in majority find themselves at the lower end of the ladder. With all due respect to those who work in those sectors, how many maids, gardeners and waiters is this country going to create? Will this enable people to come out of the cycle of poverty with the soaring prices of land and consumables? More importantly, is this the future we are envisaging for a large portion of our population?

Fourth, we know that those who are the most vulnerable when we talk of poverty cycles and its predicament are women and children. Actually, training is given to women without any afterthought as to how they will fend afterwards. This way of proceeding leads to a wastage of resources, Mr Speaker, Sir. One should have a more inclusive approach to alleviate the poverty scourge instead of trying *colmatage*, patchwork methods.

Laws should be passed to provide for more adequate gender parity in recruitment where this is applicable. Women should be given an equal chance to progress in their professional lives while ensuring that their children are safe and their responsibility as mothers are not obstacles to their career, because nowadays numerous women have to make a choice between family and career while men do not have this dilemma. While, long ago, women sacrificed their professional lives for their children now, often, we find the inverse pattern is happening.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is not whether this is a good or bad thing. The question is that such choice, in itself, should not be arising because, like

should be able to aspire to the same fulfilling careers.

One simple way to do this, Mr Speaker, Sir, would be to conduct a study on what are specifically women's needs in a working environment. One might come up with ideas that may seem strange at first, because they have never been applied in our conservative society, but ideas which may, in fact, prove more rewarding to the enterprise because of the incentive that is will bring.

I remember when I was working at the MBC, some time back, most of the married women journalists were sometimes at a loss as to how to conjugate complicated working hours with the safekeeping of their children. Indeed, when your working hours range from 4 am to 9 pm on shift system, sometimes you are at a loss as to who will take care of your children once they come from school or kindergarten, or how you will leave them in the morning to come to work. On many occasions, some even preferred, on certain days, not to come to work as there was no one to care for the children.

So, we came up with the idea to propose to the Corporation to accommodate our children in a sort of day care centre/crèche centre that was to operate within the compound of the corporation, the running of which we were prepared to contribute an amount of our salary so as to ensure the smooth running of the project. A suitable location as well was identified. Such an idea was to

serve two purposes: ensuring the well-being of the children, thus enabling the mother to take further responsibilities without any worries. This is a practice that has been implemented before in several countries, where large companies accommodate space to adapt to their female employees' needs.

Unfortunately, as you would have guessed, the idea of crèche was considered ludicrous and was never implemented. But just think of it! Concepts such as working time management or construction of crèche within large companies on a cost sharing basis, where applicable, can prove in the end a measure that will avail itself more productive. Where applicable of course, this could take the form of a CSR project to help alleviate poverty.

Consequently, women aspiring to evolve in a sector with difficult hours of work would not be forced to make drastic choices or change the course of their career simply because they have small children.

Speaking of CSR, Mr Speaker, Sir, je voudrais, ici, me mettre à la place des entreprises et aussi des ONG par rapport à cette mesure qui enjoint les entreprises à contribuer 2% de leurs profits aux ONG enregistrées auprès du gouvernement. Pour moi cette mesure contient en soi une contradiction.

Nous ne disons pas que c'est une mauvaise mesure. Mais qu'en est-il de la liberté des entreprises à aider les ONGs ou les projets CSR de leur choix ? Certaines compagnies, M. le président, ont déjà entrepris des programmes de responsabilité sociale. Leur donner la possibilité de confier tous leurs projets CSR à un fonds géré par le gouvernement peut en fait provoquer plusieurs choses :

Premièrement, que l'entreprise ferme son département CSR, avec les pertes d'emplois qui s'ensuivent.

Deuxièmement, que l'entreprise se libère complètement de l'action sociale et, avec elle, tous les employés et professionnels de la compagnie susceptibles d'apporter un encadrement additionnel à l'ONG, et qui habituellement mettent la main volontairement à la pâte quand il s'agit de soutenir un projet social. Avec, pour résultat, une diminution dans l'engagement social pris par l'entreprise, de l'apport additionnel de soutiens professionnels et une réduction importante du nombre de personnes engagées dans le volontariat à Maurice.

Troisièmement, une lenteur administrative pour déboursier les fonds vers les ONG qui ont souvent besoin d'argent au plus vite. Pour le privé comparé au gouvernement, le temps de réaction est bien différent. Tout le monde sait que quand une ONG frappe à la porte d'une entreprise, l'argent est obtenu beaucoup plus rapidement que lorsqu'il s'agit d'un fonds émanant du gouvernement. La série de critères et de procédures appliqués dans ce deuxième cas augmente considérablement le délai avant que l'argent ne soit déboursé, sans parler de la perception d'ingérence politique que tout déboursement financier d'un organisme d'état en faveur d'une ONG peut susciter. L'impression qu'une ONG a obtenu de l'argent parce que *c'est zot dimoune* et qu'une autre a subi un rejet parce que *c'est pas zot dimoune*, a vite fait de marquer les esprits et de ternir l'image d'un organisme, M. le président.

Quatrièmement, un établissement de critères aussi stricts que la seule subvention d'ONG approuvée par le gouvernement exclut *de facto* toutes celles qui ne seraient pas approuvées par le gouvernement, parce qu'elles ne sont pas enregistrées ou parce qu'elles ne défendent pas les causes préconisées par le gouvernement. Je pense, ici, à des exemples concrets tels les groupes et collectifs qui se sont élevés contre la construction de l'autoroute dans La Vallée de Ferney, contre la création de barachois dans nos lagons, ou qui protestent actuellement contre le projet d'incinérateur, etc. Tous ces groupes qui défendent le droit fondamental de la liberté d'action et d'expression sur des dossiers chauds qui voient le jour pour une cause spécifique, mais qui, après, sont dissous une fois la bataille terminée, ne pourront plus obtenir des fonds CSR. Du coup, une ONG ne sera plus libre de défendre ses convictions à 100% par crainte ...

Mr Speaker: If I may interrupt the hon. Member. As established for so many years, we have allocated a certain amount of time to each party and any overrun on the time will be deducted, and then some Members will not be able to speak.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I was allocated 35 minutes. So, how much time I am left now?

Mr Speaker: All the backbenchers have been given 24 minutes.

Mrs Martin: I was not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will try to be as short as possible.

M. le président, le signal que le gouvernement lance aux CSR, à travers cette mesure, telle qu'elle est aujourd'hui préconisée, n'est pas d'avoir un geste de solidarité envers les plus démunis. C'est "nous voulons de votre argent mais pas vraiment de vous". Aux ONG, c'est "fermez-la et rentrez dans les rangs, sinon vous n'aurez aucune subvention". En sus de cela, les petits groupes de personnes, qui non enregistrées comme ONG, mais qui font néanmoins de l'action sociale reconnue par tous, sont complètement occultées du processus.

C'est malsain, M. le président. L'indépendance et la liberté d'action et d'expression des ONG sont gravement remises en question. Alors que la question est beaucoup plus simple, simplement en maintenant les deux pourcents, donner la possibilité aux entreprises de subventionner les actions sociales de leur choix, enregistrées ou non. Mais, qu'à la fin de chaque année, elles viennent prouver dans leurs comptes, leur contribution, et si elles n'ont pas contribué assez, elles versent le reste dans le fonds du gouvernement.

On environment, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would say it is so sad that, last year, having announced the brilliant concept of *Maurice Ile Durable*, we find ourselves with a speech today, where the challenge of preservation of the environment is not even given the slightest importance.

Au fait, M. le président, le concept 'Maurice Ile Durable' n'aura duré que le temps d'un brillant discours du budget de l'année dernière, sur une des plus grandes priorités de l'humanité d'aujourd'hui, la préservation de notre univers pour léguer une planète plus saine et plus belle aux générations futures. Quand on considère la passion et toute l'énergie que le Professeur de Rosnay a mises dans ce concept, on peut se demander, quels seront ses sentiments de voir reléguer une si grande priorité au dernier plan.

Avec le concept MID, l'île Maurice s'était faite une place de choix dans le concert des nations, à un moment où la préservation de l'environnement interpelle tous les décideurs. Le plus grave, M. le président c'est que le gouvernement n'a même pas honoré ses promesses et ses engagements en ce qui concerne les priorités déjà établies. Plus de 20,000 familles attendront en vain la subvention pour se doter d'un chauffe-eau solaire pour faire des économies par les temps difficiles qui courrent. On voudrait atteindre les chiffres de l'île de la Réunion en ce qui concerne le degré de pénétration; il faudra attendre longtemps.

Le milliard de roupies déjà dépensé virtuellement selon l'ESC de l'année dernière, n'a pas été dépensé. Et voilà que, cette année, le budget du MID Fund se rétrécit comme une peau de chagrin.

Lastly, Mr Speaker, Sir, a word about Arts and Culture. I must say, I was very happy to hear the substantive Minister state that he is envisaging to make arts and culture an economic pillar. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is high time that such a measure takes place.

M. le président, sans notre culture, sans notre ancrage dans les valeurs qui font de nous un peuple à part, nous ne serons jamais une nation. It is my dream as a young parliamentarian, as a Mauritian, as a patriot, that our national heritage be passed on to the future generations as something which is part of us all, something we should be proud of, because it has made our

country what it is, and has contributed to make us reach where we are. Apart from what I have read and have been taught from history, how many of us can say that they know history so well? As Mauritians, we have a heritage and the uniqueness to maintain and to share with the rest of the world.

The tremendous potential of our artistic and cultural heritage is in a world affected by global crisis, what can single us out as a country, with much more than sand, sea and smile? It is, indeed, time to go beyond our parochial understanding of arts and culture and evolve towards arts and culture as an industry. In so doing, many avenues can be developed. Through it, so many jobs created, our historical sites, buildings and monuments should be valorised; so must our creativity of our fellow artists. Again, the measures taken in this Budget to help our artists are commendable but, in developing this industry's vision, a word of caution. The development of arts should not be done to the detriment of our culture and our history. It would be a shame if development is done to the detriment of history. The balance to find here is delicate, but possible. Historical monuments, sites and buildings should serve as a testimony of our past; it is in their intrinsic value that lies their interest to the world. Our two World Heritage sites have this unique status because they have been virtually left untouched. Subsequently, we should be careful that any renovation, upgrading, reconstruction or development undertaken should in no way remove its intrinsic value. Otherwise, the only heritage that we leave to our children and to the rest of the world would be faded photographs, such as the one in the *Musée de la Photographie* or archives from the MBC of how life used to be. These are, indeed, valuable tools of reference, to go down memory lane, but today we know better. We have to be able, in 20 years, to say to our children: 'c'est ainsi que nos grands-parents vivaient à l'époque. C'est ce à quoi ressemblaient les cases d'antan. C'est sur ce genre de pavés que les chevaux et les personnes marchaient dans les rues de Port Louis. Ce sont ce genre de constructions en pierre qui abritaient les bâtiments administratifs, les forts, les tours etc.'

M. le président, notre force réside dans notre mémoire. Today, more and more tourists are interested in what differentiates the country from another, not in what is similar. Perhaps it is because they feel they can learn so much more from our differences than our similarities. This is a valuable lesson that we should learn and apply as well.

Thank you.

(10:06 p.m.)

Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to say just a few words following what the hon. Member has just said. We are living in a democracy and so, obviously, after the Budget time, we can all put our thoughts forward, what we like or what we don't like, we can criticise the Budget. But what I find a bit surprising is when we come to personal attack. I think that was not called for. I am sorry, I'm going to say it. The last Member and the Member before her made some personal attacks against the Minister of Finance...

(Interruptions)

I am sorry. Not directly, but there was a Member...

(Interruptions)

It is the Member's right to attack the policies. I don't say it is not her right. We are in a democracy, I have said so. They can attack the policy and discuss the policy, but not make personal attack! When I heard about the sneer 'the Doctor so and so'....

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of personal explanation...

Mr Speaker: Let me intervene. I was listening to the hon. Member. If there had been any personal attack, I would have intervened myself.

Dr. Husnoo: I accept your ruling, Mr Speaker, Sir. Secondly, when I hear about 'the best Minister of Finance in the world...

(Interruptions)

I agree that it's not a personal attack.

(Interruptions)

Exactly! For him to have been invited by EOCD! Not every Tom, Dick and Harry is invited by EOCD to come for discussion! I don't want to say more than that.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am just going to come back to my speech. As we know, the world is going through the worst recession since the 1930s. This is not just a tsunami, but a financial catastrophe of planetary proportion. The major economies are in recession. According to the IMF, the global GDP growth is at -1.3, with the US economy showing a contraction of about 2.8%, the Euro zone at 4.2%, and even Germany at 5.6%. Countries like India and China, the two major powerhouses, are feeling the brunt of this crisis as well, and the GDP growth is now expected to come down to 6.5% in China and 4.5% in India. Ireland, the Celtic Tiger and Iceland, are both in difficult economic straits.

As you are aware, the number of unemployed in these economies has gone up drastically. China has lost more than 20 million jobs; USA, again in terms of millions of jobs; India has lost about 10 million jobs and, according to the latest report this morning, the number of jobless by the end of this year can reach 250 million across the world. How about Mauritius in all this? How about us in this turmoil? As a small and open economy, which depends on the developed world to survive, unfortunately, we cannot escape this crisis. Sooner or later, we were bound to feel the effect of this crunch. If the Minister of Finance has not managed the economy well for the last four years, that is, since 2005, I wonder where we would have been today. As you are all aware, he managed to decrease the budget deficit from 5.3 % to 3.8% for the last financial year 2007-2008. The GDP growth rate went up from 2% in 2005 to 5.5% in 2007-2008. The unemployment rate went down to about 7%. FDI reached a staggering 20 billion for the last three years, and *per capita* income - let us mention as well - which was 5,000 US dollar in July 2005, went up to 7,000 US dollar in 2008. If the Minister of Finance did not consolidate the economy and put it back on track, I wonder, with this present crisis, Mr Speaker, Sir, in what a mess we would have been today. I think it is very important to underline that we, in Mauritius, are in no way - I repeat, in no way - responsible for this present world crisis. As a small economy, unfortunately, we are bearing the brunt of this world economic crisis which, as you know, started as a sub-prime crisis in the States, and spreads across the world like a tsunami of cataclysmic proportion. In such a situation, what should be our priority? When income from tourism is decreasing, when the textile industry is overstretched, FDI is drying up, what should be our priority in this case? Is it not to save as much jobs as possible in Mauritius, Sir, considering that so many millions are being lost all over the world? Is it not the job of this Government to protect the vulnerable members of society? Is it not our job to consolidate the economy and get it geared up in such a way, so that when the world economic situations finally improve, we, in Mauritius, will be ready to surf the waves as well? Well, that is what the Minister of Finance has been trying to do. He has been trying to re-engineer industrial, commercial and financial sectors, so that when the crisis is over and the world economy picks up, Mauritius will be ready to bounce back and the economy will be back to full steam again. The Minister of Finance has been trying to repair the economy at different levels, at the macro and micro levels, even getting down to the nitty-gritty, just to save a handful of jobs wherever he can. He has put forward about 200 measures, how to help the economy to ride out the storm.

Regarding the measures to save jobs, the additional stimulus package has, so far, as you know, saved about 2,700 jobs directly and about 3,000 jobs indirectly. And, in this present Budget, the Minister of Finance has taken a broad sweep across the different sectors to help to keep as much people in job as possible. The priority, as you aware, Sir, is to keep the maximum number of people

in jobs. That's the priority of this Budget. As we are all aware, the small and medium enterprise provides for the majority of jobs in our economy. But, unfortunately, sometimes a business plan is rather weak, and they have difficulty in getting the necessary credit to finance their business. To help them over the crunch, the Minister of Finance is providing Rs3.5 billion to the sector. Among other things, half a billion to support the SMEs in saving jobs; half a billion for equipment modernisation for the SMEs; half a billion again, to enable the firms to raise liquidity by selling the assets, and one billion to set up an Export Credit Insurance Scheme. This is just to mention a few items. Similarly, in the social field, to protect the people, the Minister of Finance has allocated Rs2.4 billion. This starts from the decentralisation cooperation programme to the NGO community, to providing materials to under-privileged families, and Rs1.5 billion to the National Empowerment Fund for the eradication of poverty.

As far as public infrastructure is concerned, Sir, Government is launching the largest public sector investment that we have ever witnessed so far in Mauritius. With the aim of not just to provide jobs but, at the same time, to modernise the country by improving the overall infrastructure, an amount of about Rs27 billion has been allocated to this sector. This includes the construction of a modern airport at a cost of Rs13 billion, which will cater for four million passengers annually.

Other projects include expansion of the container terminal in Port Louis, key projects, Sir, which will impact positively on the development of the countries for the years to come. Other projects include the Harbour Bridge, the Ring Road around Port Louis, which is long overdue, the Bus Rapid Transit System, the Terre Rouge-Verdun-Ébène road, the East-West Link connector, the dual carriageway from Pamplemousses to Grand' Bay and the Triolet and Goodlands bypass.

In addition Sir, many of the projects have been earmarked in the Agro Industry, Tourism industry and financial services. I am not going to enumerate them, as other Members have already discussed them. To be able to balance his books in such a difficult economic climate while, at the same time, allocating so much money for infrastructural development of the country, many people were getting worried as to where the Minister of Finance was going to obtain the money. During the Budget Speech, everybody was watching the Minister of Finance, each and every word, with bated breath. Many were expecting an increase in taxation, where will the axe fall? Is he going to increase the personal income tax? Is he going to increase VAT which will hammer the population? No, Mr Speaker, Sir, he did neither! Instead, he increased the taxation on the banks and the telecom companies, which have been making massive profits in the last few years, which I think you would agree with me, is fair. Because, when the going was good, the Minister of Finance did decrease the tax from 30% to 15% for them. So, it is only fair when the economy, the country is in a difficult economic situation that they should help.

The Minister of Finance has also asked successful companies to allocate 2% of the profits for CSR activities to improve the environment, the quality of life of the different communities all around the island. While the Budget has been well thought of and well planned to help our industries to protect jobs, to help the vulnerable members of society and to prepare the industries for when the economy picks up. I would like to make one or two points. With this massive infrastructural development in the pipeline, the Government must make sure that priority will be given to Mauritian workers. All too often, we find that when a company gets a major contract in Mauritius, they bring the workers from overseas. Let us face it, Mr Speaker, Sir. In all the countries across the world, the stimulus package is meant to provide jobs for the local population, to help the local population; that is why in Mauritius, we must make sure that these jobs should go to the Mauritian workers and not to overseas workers. I know there will be cries of protectionism, but everybody is doing the same, trying to protect their workers. So, we should not have any qualm about it. When the contract is allocated, the written or unwritten rule should be priority to Mauritian workers.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, again, I would like to make a plea to the Minister of Finance about one category of worker, that is, the unemployed. At present, in some households, we have one or two people who is/are employed; that is a good thing. But, unfortunately in some families, not even one is employed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government of India, where there are about 250 million people in poverty, so many people are unemployed, has just passed a law which guarantees hundred days paid labour a year for one adult from each rural family, that is, in each family, at least, one person will be employed. I will appeal to the Minister of Finance, if India, which has such a large unemployed population and so much poverty, can afford to have such a policy, I wonder why, we, in Mauritius, who have at heart the eradication of poverty cannot afford to have such a policy of providing jobs for, at least, one adult in each family. I appreciate it may not be easy to do it now in the present climate, but the Government should make sure that in the subsequent budget, it would consider this policy. With such a policy, the Government will manage to raise so many people out of poverty, give them the means to look after their family, decrease the social evil associated with poverty, will contribute even to law and order obviously. At the same time, it will give these men and women the dignity of earning a living instead of depending on handouts.

I would ask the Minister, when he has some time, to make a study to the effect that if he does provide a job for one person per household, among the unemployed obviously, how much that is going to cost the economy. On the other hand, how much will be saved from social security benefit which is being paid out to the unemployed, on eradication of poverty programme, empowerment programme, trust fund, etc. So much money is being spent already. I will again make a plea to him to work it out and see whether it is feasible. I, again, feel that the Government should consider passing a law eventually to provide, at least, one job per family; not now, but we should consider it.

Last but not least, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to appeal to the Prime Minister and all the other Ministers. This Budget however well-intentioned it may be, will just remain on paper if the Government does not kick-start all the projects. I mean: give a good kick to start them; I really mean it. Otherwise, what is going to happen in 6 to 12 months' time? We will find that most of the items in the Budget will be just pious wish. We do not want this, and we cannot afford it. Our bureaucracy is effective, but I wonder how efficient it is. I am not blaming anybody. It is true that the bureaucracy can be a bit heavy at times. This world economic crisis won't wait for us. It is approaching our shores at an ever increasing speed; it is already with us, anyway. But the Prime Minister and all the Ministers must make sure that all the projects are started promptly. There should not be any dilly-dallying. If the Government has set up the Road Development Company, it is with the idea of getting the job done, and done quickly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we do not have time to wait. In the next 9 to 12 months, situation can be difficult. We are going through the lag phase now. It may be about nine to 12 months for the economy in Mauritius to pick up, and we cannot afford to wait. That's why it is important to get the projects to start going now. It is this spirit of urgency that must be instilled across all our Ministries to get the job done. If not, as I said, in six to 12 months' time, the projects will be still at the planning stage and in mired in discussions, and this country will be drowned by the economic tsunami.

As I mentioned, we are living in a very difficult time. The Government has come up with an Action Plan to protect our population, the workers, and the unemployed. The Budget has also provided us the necessary means to be ready when the world economy picks up. We should be ready to grasp this occasion when it arises. Once the economy picks up - the world economy in the developed countries - we should be able to be on the ascending curve of growth and prosperity. Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, as the famous saying goes: "we can do it". We need everybody on board: the Government, the Opposition, the Civil Service, the private sector, and the population at large. We

need to get everybody on board to get over that crisis. With confidence, goodwill, and hard work, I am sure Mauritius will be able to get over that crisis and ride on the waves again.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(10.26 p.m.)

Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues): M. le président, c'est devenu coutumier pour les *Whips* que je parle très tard. Cela fait trois ou quatre ans que c'est le cas. Ceci simplement pour faire ressortir qu'entre Rodrigues et Maurice, il n'y a pas trois heures de différence, mais peut être cinq ou dix minutes. M. le président, je ne vais pas être long, car je crois que mon ami Alex Nancy a dûment expliqué à la Chambre la situation actuelle à Rodrigues. Mais malgré ça, au cours de mon discours, je ne manquerai pas de montrer, encore une fois, tout ce qui se passe, tout ce qui crée cette frustration, cette colère et ce désemparement à Rodrigues.

M. le président, je vais commencer mon intervention par me poser moi-même une question. J'ai écouté beaucoup de discours des parlementaires, des deux côtés de la Chambre, à la radio et à la télévision. Tout ce qui se dit maintenant, la faillite bancaire, les milliards de dollars envolés, des gens sans argent, sans maison, sans travail. La question que je me pose est celle-ci: est-ce la fin du monde ? Une superbe puissance comme l'Amérique s'est retrouvée avec deux millions de personnes ruinées, en faillite.

God knows when we will recover, Mr Speaker, Sir. To add insult to injury, the world is now facing the virus H1N1. Luckily, in Mauritius, we are still spared of this trauma. But, we must spare no effort to consolidate the airport. I have travelled, and I have seen that there is room for improvement. I have been travelling from Rodrigues to Mauritius three to four times since that, and there is room for improvement. I think the Minister of Health must go and have a meeting. But, there is room for improvement on the flight from Mauritius to Rodrigues and back. We must see to it that this lack of vigilance is consolidated.

Third thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Indian Ocean, Somalian pirates are attacking everybody; nobody is spared, and even our friends from Seychelles. They even attack a warship with a small fishing boat. Can you imagine! I was speaking to one MP from Seychelles this Wednesday, and she was telling me: "hon. Spéville, I can't believe it. Eleven Seychellois fishermen are now stuck in Somalia, and they are asking for millions of dollars to release them. And my MP colleague told me that they could not afford it to pay a ransom for these people.

(*Interruptions*)

Seychelles is right there from us. We have got fishing banks, and everybody, be it Rodriguans or Mauritians are going fishing on the banks. I am glad to hear in the Budget that we are making provision for a helicopter. But is that sufficient? I mean it is a good start, but I can't believe it.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the theme of the hon. Minister for this Budget is: saving jobs, protecting people and preparing for recovery. That's what it is all about. We need to protect our people. The Budget, which we are discussing, brings some good measures. But I am asking myself: does it bring remedy for the damage caused to the economy of Rodrigues?

Est-ce que ce budget, M. le président, vient répondre à cette hémorragie, cette souffrance, ce moment très difficile que connaît actuellement l'île Rodrigues ? M. le président, je ne suis pas pessimiste, je suis quelqu'un qui pense positivement, mais je me sens quand même très concerné. 8,380 rodriguais ont quitté l'île en 2008, de janvier à décembre. Vous imaginez ce que cela représente pour une population de 37,000 habitants ! La situation est vraiment critique.

On top of that, 2,580 persons in Rodrigues have been disconnected from electricity. Vous vous imaginez en seulement une année! C'est pour vous donner une indication de la situation qu'on vit actuellement à Rodrigues. M. le président, avant même que le monde ne connaisse cette crise financière, Rodrigues était en crise. On est passé en crise depuis décembre 2006 quand le peuple a décidé de placer son destin entre les mains d'un enfant. Le Chef Commissaire actuel Johnson

Roussety est un enfant, un gamin qui ne connaît rien de la gestion. Maintenant, tout le monde réalise son erreur, la gravité de la situation, la mauvaise décision qui a été prise, mais le mal a déjà été fait.

M. le président, Rodrigues est coincé entre le marteau et l'enclume. D'une part, il y a le gouvernement régional qui est très inexpérimenté, unprepared to take power, and they are working for themselves. Right now, there are two Commissioners, namely the Chief Commissioner and one Commissioner who are in Australia, proceeding to Tasmania to have a look at a project which has already been approved by the Minister of Finance. It has already been budgeted, and they are going to see the project.

(Interruptions)

I heard them say UNDP. Why is UNDP investing money where there is no need? Why are they sending two Commissioners and their spouses for four days work plus twelve days holidays? To spend money! This money should have been used wisely for another project. In what country, do we see a Chief Commissioner leaving for 12 days holidays? Who approved that? Who gave that recognition to the Chief Commissioner to go for 12 days holidays, after four days of work, in Australia?

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am very sorry. It's unimaginable. They are taking the people of Rodrigues for granted, and these Commissioners are working for themselves. I am sure that my colleague, hon. Nancy, has given a picture of what's going on here, but it is good for other Members also to know what is happening, Mr Speaker, Sir. For Budget 2007/2008, the Regional Government was allocated Rs275 m. for capital projects. They only used Rs175 m. For the last Budget, 2008/2009, out of Rs300 m., they used Rs 118 m., from the answer given by the Minister of Finance in March. I listened to hon. Leopold last Wednesday. He is trying to say that, since 1982, no money has been given. When we were in power, they said '*narien pas pe faire, 25 ans au pouvoir OPR pa fine faire narien*'. Suddenly, he realises that it was not OPR, but the Central Government is not giving much money. By Government, I mean *l'Alliance sociale*, MMM/MSM; all Governments from 1982 have not given the money. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sorry, he's not there, and I do not want to comment much on that. But, they must know what they are talking about, because the money has been made available. How come that, when we were in power, there was no way the Government could save money on capital projects? It was well used, well utilised.

M. le président, il y a un monde de différence entre le gouvernement que dirigeait Serge Clair et le gouvernement de Johnson Roussety. C'est un monde à part; c'est d'un extrême à l'autre. La vision, la capacité de négociation, la mentalité, la simplicité, c'était ça qui faisait la caractéristique de notre gouvernement par rapport au gouvernement actuel à Rodrigues. C'est cela toute la différence. La différence est dans la capacité de négociation, la simplicité et le tact professionnel. C'est ça qui fait la différence, c'est ça qui manque, et c'est ça qui fait que Rodrigues se trouve là où elle est. M. le président, nous avons gagné les élections en 2002, pour l'autonomie, avec ce thème "*Empower the Population*".

I think the National Empowerment Programme should have fit well in our programme but, unfortunately, people chose in 2006 to look elsewhere. The programme that was well driven by our Government fits well in the National Empowerment Programme. Unfortunately, as I said, things have not gone as we wanted it to be. How did they win the elections? They promised miracles to the population, youngsters, entrepreneurs, Mauritian compatriots, fishermen. Everybody was promised *monts et merveilles*. I don't want to talk about the saga of the fishermen between Central Government and the Regional Government, but that's all about management.

M. le président, j'ai mentionné la difficile cohabitation entre le gouvernement régional et le gouvernement national. D'ailleurs, le ministre des finances, suite à une question posée par l'honorable Paul Bérenger, a dit que the disagreement that exists between Central Government and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly is on how the money would be used. In fact, it's the Executive Committee of the Regional Assembly. We know what we want, we know where we are going, and that's all the difference.

M. le président, tout dernièrement, il y a eu la fièvre porcine, et Rodrigues has long been a provider of pigs to Mauritius. During the swine fever, not enough consideration was given to the production and importation from Rodrigues.

In fact, instead of going to Rodrigues, Government went to South Africa. I was reading a newspaper early this morning, et j'ai lu que quelques 3,000 porcs ne trouvent pas preneurs à l'île Maurice - ce qui veut dire qu'il y a un surplus – et on a donné la raison: les porcs importés de l'Afrique du Sud ne trouvent pas preneurs. A mon humble avis, j'aurais préféré que le gouvernement mette plus d'emphase sur Rodrigues, car cela est confirmé : les porcs à Rodrigues sont sains. Pourquoi aller trouver ailleurs quand, à côté de chez vous, dans le territoire Mauricien, il y a le pain sur la planche?

M. le président, comme je le dis, dans ce budget il y a pas mal de mesures que je trouve intéressantes. Mais qui va les mettre en place à Rodrigues? Pendant les six ou dix-huit mois, qui va mettre en place ces mesures auxquelles je suis favorables? Il y a certains qui sont bien, mais qui va les mettre en place? Vu le contexte actuel dans lequel se trouve le gouvernement central et le gouvernement régional, ma grande question est la suivante: qui va *monitor*, qui va initier et qui va implémenter tout cela? Par exemple, il y a le *training for skippers and mechanics by the Training Academy*, which is a positive measure. M. le président, je demanderais au ministre du Tourisme d'inclure ces gens-là dans le *Tourism Employment Welfare Fund*. Récemment, il y a eu la disparition d'un Mauricien, Jean Claude Cotte, et à Rodrigues on vient de perdre deux jeunes skippeurs professionnels – des *SMEs* - pendant leur travail ils ont perdu leur vie ; ils ont laissé leurs familles, femmes et enfants, sans un sou et dans la peine. Je crois qu'il serait bien si le ministère du tourisme et le ministère des finances travaillent ensemble pour voir comment on peut aider ces gens qui sont des *SMEs* dans le programme du *Tourism Employment Welfare Fund*. J'ai cité le cas de Jean Claude Cotte à Maurice. A Rodrigues, il y a le cas de Jean-Philippe Jolicoeur et de Rony Perrine qui vient de mourir tragiquement.

M. le président, the *National Empowerment Programme* va devenir maintenant une agence *umbrella*. Elle va prendre sous ses ailes toutes les activités du *Trust Fund* aussi bien que l'éradication de la pauvreté. With the Rs1.5 billion earmarked, is the House aware that the *Empowerment Programme has not got a Chairman? The Chairman has resigned, I think, one month ago. And we are talking about Rs1.5 billion* et cet organisme est orphelin de père. M. le président, l'honorable ministre va me dire que le staff en place est compétent, mais c'est un bateau sans capitaine. Je crois que si on veut aller vite avec ce programme-là, il doit y avoir quelqu'un à Rodrigues, ou ailleurs, qui pourra prendre en main cet organisme.

M. le président, à Rodrigues, le NEF va chapeauter tous ces agents dont j'ai cité plus tôt, avec un personnel squelettique de cinq personnes. Je me demande comment ces cinq personnes vont *monitor* tous ces projets, et faire aussi leur part au niveau de la *NEF*. M. le président, la dernière fois j'avais demandé au ministre combien on a utilisé de ces R 75 millions prévus dans le *NEF programme for the fishers*. The answer was that only a sum of Rs1.5 m. was used Ce qui fait que tout l'argent est là ; il n'y a pas la capacité voulue, ni le personnel adéquat. Ils font face à un problème de gestion. Il faut *vet* le projet et le mettre en place. Il y a un problème à ce niveau là, M. le président.

M. le président, j'ai parlé tout à l'heure de l'éradication de la pauvreté. J'ai dit qu'il y a 2,445 personnes qui sont privées d'électricité parce qu'elles ne peuvent pas payer la facture ; donc, elles sont déconnectées. Sur une population de 10,000 à 12,000 abonnés, il y a 2,445 personnes qui

sont dans l'incapacité de payer et cela fait réfléchir. Donc, il faut revoir ces 229 poches de pauvreté. Je crois qu'il faut faire une enquête approfondie sur la pauvreté à Rodrigues. Cela a été fait par le *Trust Fund*, mais je crois que cela doit être complété par le ministère de la sécurité sociale avec l'aide des *ONGs*. Il faut qu'il y ait une étude approfondie sur le sujet, parce que je considère qu'actuellement à Rodrigues, la pauvreté s'amplifie de jour en jour. M. le président, je dois dire, ici, qu'avec le gouvernement actuel à Rodrigues, avec à la tête le Chef Commissaire Johnson Roussety, ils ont freiné toutes les initiatives. Tous les *SMEs* disparaissent complètement, l'industrie de construction n'existe plus – *dead*. Quant à l'industrie de la pêche, ils sont toujours en discussion pour savoir s'il faut payer ou pas. C'est le chaos ! M. le président, l'industrie de l'agro alimentaire, les vanneries, etc. sont au point mort à Rodrigues. Il ne reste qu'une seule et unique industrie, l'industrie du tourisme.

J'ai écouté le ministre des finances attentivement et j'ai lu très, très méticuleusement les propositions pour Rodrigues. Comme je l'ai dit, il a fait pas mal de propositions au niveau national et je me suis dit que certaines vont être adaptées à Rodrigues, par exemple, le *scheme* pour les planteurs. Vous savez combien se vend un kilo de semence d'oignons à Rodrigues ? R 2000 ! Le fameux haricot rouge dont tout le monde raffole, les Mauriciens et les Rodriguais, se vend à R 200 le kilo de semence et c'est planté à Rodrigues. C'est la compagnie que Johnson Roussety a mis en place à Rodrigues, le *Rodrigues and Trade Marketing* – une compagnie privée - qui fait l'achat et la vente de ces semences. Je crois que c'est là l'erreur de Rodrigues. On est en train de tuer toutes les initiatives. Le gouvernement est devenu comme-ci un *Jack of all Trades*. M. le président, c'est cela le mal de l'île Rodrigues actuellement. Je disais tout à l'heure que Rodrigues attend beaucoup de l'industrie touristique car c'est la seule industrie qui reste, mais c'est le chaos. M. le président, le ministre a proposé un *travel tax* de R 150. Vendredi dernier, pendant son discours sur le budget, le ministre des finances avait parlé d'un *travel tax*. J'en ai parlé à beaucoup d'amis. Ils m'ont dit que c'est bien et que maintenant tout le monde va venir à Rodrigues. A ma grande déception, en débarquant à Rodrigues samedi matin, en discutant avec le personnel de ARL, il me dit que la taxe est R 150.

*M. le president, I will make a plea to the Government, the Ministry of Finance, everybody in Mauritius, that this is the only way, there is no choice. Il faut subventionner le *fuel tax*. Ils ont discuté maintes fois avec *Air Mauritius* sur le *hedging*. Le problème c'est qu'à *Air Mauritius* ils ne veulent pas bouger d'un iota. M. le président, tous les associations du tourisme se rencontrent demain pour prendre une décision finale. M. le président, l'industrie touristique à Rodrigues emploient 1,000 personnes.*

D'après mes informations, ils ont déjà arrêté une liste, M. le président, en fonction de la discussion qui sera faite concernant le budget, pour licencier des gens la semaine prochaine, après le vote du budget. C'est déjà définitif. Ils attendent tous un geste que ce soit du ministère du tourisme, du Premier ministre, du ministre des finances et tous les ministres. Pour sauver l'île Rodrigues, il n'y a pas que quatre ou cinq mesures à prendre. Une taxe de R150 c'est insuffisant, ce n'est rien. On ne va pas aller loin avec ça. L'industrie est au bord du chaos total. Mille personnes sont au bord du précipice, les petites entreprises attendent pour les pousser dehors, pour signer leur départ et bye bye Charlie.

M. le président, pour donner les chiffres à Rodrigues, il y a eu une baisse de 15% sur les arrivées pour les quatre premiers mois de l'année 2009 ; pour l'année 2008, la baisse a été de 27%.

Notre marché principal c'est l'île Maurice. 60% du clientèle rodriguais sont des mauriciens. Cela donne du travail pour les petites gîtes, les petites pensions de famille et les hôtels. L'argent qu'on va imposer pour la taxe sera pour les mauriciens. Les gens réclament une révision de salaires. Au moins, ces bénéfices vont être répandues sur tous les mauriciens et rodriguais. Je ne crois pas que c'est une demande excessive, M. le président, vu la circonstance actuelle. Et je vous redis, il ne reste que l'industrie touristique à sauver à Rodrigues. M. le président, je crois que j'ai fait le tour de la question, mais je suis très déçu par ce qui arrive à Rodrigues en ce moment. Depuis 2006, d'année en année, le directeur de l'audit fait des remarques très, très pertinentes. Tout dernièrement, il a fait une remarque sur les R 45 millions de l'État qui a été mis sur un compte en banque - un *deposit account* - par le gouvernement régional de Rodrigues. Je comprends le ministre des finances quand il dit qu'il va mettre sur pied des comités pour superviser tout cela. Mais d'une certaine façon, je ne suis pas d'accord parce qu'on remet en cause notre autonomie. On remet en cause tous ce qu'on a eu à lutter pendant ces derniers 25 ans. En 2002, on a eu l'autonomie avec l'esprit que – pas tout mais du moins – le rodriguais doit se sentir capable de *diboute lors so deux li pieds*. Aujourd'hui, je vois des *supervising committees* partout. Tout ce qui se passe à Rodrigues va être supervisé par des comités. Je ne dis pas que c'est dangereux, mais je dis que c'est malheureux ce qui se passe à Rodrigues. Le peuple a fait un choix, mais *those at the head of the country are misleading, mismanaging and putting the people at stake*. Comme je l'ai dit, actuellement, les commissaires sont en vacances avec leurs épouses, ce qui n'était pas prévu.

Le gouvernement central avec le gouvernement régional doivent rétablir la confiance, sinon on ne va pas aller loin. Ce qu'il faut, à mon avis, pour débloquer cette situation, c'est un *independent body or person at the RRA to look in all the aspects of finance, the stock, etc.* Il faut qu'on arrive à voir ce qui se passe, qui sont les responsables et à ce moment-là on prendra des décisions, on agira en conséquence. *This is the way forward. There are no other solutions. I think confidence should be brought as soon as possible, but before that there should be stocktaking, accountability, questions and answers to what is going on in Rodrigues.*

M. le président, ce n'est pas de mon ressort de faire un long discours, mais je crois que j'ai amplement dit ce qu'il fallait dire. Je crois que l'heure est venue pour moi de dire que je suis née et j'ai grandi là-bas, et que j'aime Rodrigues. Tout ce que je demande c'est qu'on puisse, dans la République de Maurice, s'épanouir car c'est écrit dans la Constitution de l'Assemblée Régionale que le gouvernement central doit donner à Rodrigues les moyens nécessaires. Comme je l'ai dit, vous avez énoncé des moyens mais il faut six mois – ce n'est pas beaucoup – pour qu'on puisse mettre tout cela en place. Il faut que le plus vite possible, demain ou après demain, que le gouvernement se décide à mettre - je ne dis une commission d'enquête - quelqu'un d'indépendant pour siéger sur un comité et avoir un *full-fledged inquiry* pour constater ce qui se passe à Rodrigues et, à partir de là, on rétablit la confiance entre le peuple et le gouvernement central afin qu'on puisse avancer main dans la main pour le progrès de l'île Rodrigues et de l'île Maurice.

Merci, j'en aurai terminé.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

(10.57 p.m.)

Dr. K. Babajee (Third Member for Savanne and Black River): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is getting late and I know that everybody is getting tired. I am not going to take too much of your time. So far, a lot has been said on this Budget.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is indeed a matter of pride and a great privilege to be able to participate in this debate on the 2009 Budget, which also includes in it an Action Plan that will last for 18 months. It is an exercise *avant-gardiste* that will prepare our economy for the period after recession, that is, for the recovery.

At the very outset, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to voice out the feeling of thousands of people out there and the feeling is to our credit that this country is blessed to have a son like hon. Dr. Rama Sithanen, that we have all the reasons to consider ourselves lucky to have the Government of *l'Alliance Sociale* at the head of the country. We should consider ourselves fortunate to have as Prime Minister, Dr. the hon. Navin Ramgoolam. People are already asking themselves a lot of questions like what would have happened to this country if, right now, in this period of economic turmoil, in this period of economic recession like never before, had we had Ministers of Finance like those of a few years ago.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will request you to bear with me for a very short while. I would like to go down memory lane just to show to the House that, as we say, habit is second nature, it is the habit of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. We know that very well nowadays. We have become used to it. It is very important to realise where we started in this country, hardly four years ago, where we are today, and what we are heading for.

As the hon. Leader of the Opposition himself rightly said some three days ago: *la population n'est pas dupe*. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we all agree with him that really *la population n'est pas dupe. Et cette population ne va jamais oublier ce qu'on leur avait dit les années passées*. After challenging the then Minister of Finance in 1982, after promising a compensation of 30%, he came to power and said: '*poêlon là trop chaud. Banne dimouunes pou bizin mange patate et manioc*'. After a victory given to him by this *admirable peuple de l'île Maurice* de 60-0, they ran away after nine months only, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and this, after giving the sugar industry – of course, we won't forget that – *ene cadeau de R 57 millions*. Only a few years ago, between 2001 and 2005, we heard words like: *le pays le mieux géré du monde*. What did we not hear about how this country was being administered? And four months before the general election of July 2005, the then Prime Minister himself came and said: *la situation est dramatique, sans précédent; l'économie est en état d'urgence*. By saying so, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we do realise nowadays that he admitted his own incompetency. He wanted to tell us that, during four and a half years, after having raised the VAT by 50% in a period of two years, after having indebted this population for almost Rs1 billion every month, he came to tell his Minister of Finance: '*tu as foutu ce pays dans un état d'urgence*. Should I repeat it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if you allow me? Four months before June 2005, the Prime Minister came to tell his Minister of Finance: '*tu as foutu ce pays dans un état d'urgence*'. And, to add insult to injury - I am so sorry, hon. Pravind Jugnauth is not here; I have nothing against him – two years ago, he told the same hon. Pravind Jugnauth: 'do you want to become Prime Minister? You will have to wait for 50 years.'

If I have recalled all this, it is simply to refresh the memory of hon. Members about where we started four years ago. We had to admit this economy directly in the ICU. This is exactly what this Government did. Today, we are saying all sorts of words against our friend, hon. Dr. Sithanen. Today, we are affording to tell him that he is *l'homme du secteur privé*, he is *l'homme du FMI*, he is *l'homme de la Banque Mondiale*. But if it were not for hon. Dr. Sithanen, I wonder if our country would have resisted up to now this economic recession.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I said that we admitted this economy directly in the ICU. In spite of several external shocks, cut in the price of sugar, dismantling of the AGOA, the soaring prices of petrol and, of course, the famous skeletons in the *placards*, we moved ahead with bold and courageous reforms though sometimes unpopular. We had to face all these, but we looked at the interest of this country and of this nation. We moved the economy into an early harvest, and one year after, we moved this country into a bumper crop. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from *un état d'urgence*, we moved to a bumper crop. And, there is proof to testify that we were really moving into that bumper crop, because the hon. Leader of the Opposition himself said last year that we should have given more to the people: *Le ministre des finances a un large éventail de manœuvres*. Thus, admitting that the economy was improving.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is the reality. This is the truth. This explains also why our Government paid the PRB last year *in toto*. If we were not in a bumper crop, I don't think we could have afforded that. Paying the PRB *in toto, c'est du jamais vu auparavant, M. le président*. When the hon. Leader of the Opposition said that *le ministre des finances a un large éventail de manœuvres*, he admitted that the situation was improving, that the economy was no more *en état d'urgence*.

Unfortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we did not make it; it's not our doing. We know it started in the States; we know how it went along, came the financial crisis, the alimentary crisis and, now, we are heading towards the human crisis. Fortunately, we have resisted fairly well up to now. We have stayed ahead of the curve, we have been able, up to now, just to keep our head above water. But we keep on repeating that we are resilient. We are not immune, we are not vaccinated, the shocks have started to pound on our shores. Of course, we are as vulnerable as any other small island.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if I have taken the pain of refreshing the memory of all the hon. Members in this House about the situation that we have been crossing since four years, it is because, after having heard the speeches of many Members from the Opposition side, I get the impression that poverty, misery and poor people have suddenly appeared since July 2005.

That in 2002 and 2003, there was no poverty in this country. In 2003 and 2004, the purchasing power was very good and, yet, the people angrily shouted in all the streets of Mauritius that there should be a change and they kicked that Government out. I get the impression, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that poverty only started since July 2005, that law and order has been since only July 2005. It is as if everything was alright, everything was perfect and rosy before July 2005. It is important that we realise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once for all - I know Members of the Opposition are doing their job, criticising everything that this Government is doing, but it is important to be honest to ourselves - the situation we inherited in 2005, that these problems do not exist only since July 2005. These problems have started decades and decades ago. In my Constituency, people come and tell me that it is now 15 years that they are waiting to build a small house, that since 15 years their road has not been tarred. I will come to Macondé Bridge very soon. This is what we had to face. Moreover, the Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance is paving the way towards the after recovery. The Vice-Prime & Minister of Finance is preparing this country for the recovery, make us ready to enjoy and to benefit from all the consequences - there will be consequences of this recession. We have to be here prepared for the recovery. He is modeling this economy. At a time when there is a cyclone *nous sommes en alerte No. 5, M. le président*. *Certains membres ne veulent pas comprendre ou ils comprennent très bien, mais à l'Assemblée Nationale, ils font semblant du contraire*. I was saying that the Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance is remodeling, that's why we say it's no more going to be business as usual. It's no more going to be a Budget where when there are difficulties, the VAT will be raised or when people are suffering outside to give them money. All these have to be stopped, because when we say we want a change, we want a change as well in the mindset of each and every one of this country. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our Prime Minister has got the habit of saying it. We want to build a strong nation; we don't want *un peuple assisté*. I put a question last year and I am still waiting for the answer. I have not got it yet. Name me one country in the world where so many services are given free! Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with due respect to those people who have suffered from floods, one friend coming from UK a few weeks ago told me, this is a fantastic country: "*La pluie tombé, dimoune gagne casse*". Once this global recession is over, we want to be in a situation where we can reap all the benefits. This is the vision, this is the plan. A lot has been said so far and we have observed also, at the same time, a lot of contradictions in the interventions of hon. Members from the two sides of the Opposition. One Member talked and, rightly so, - I won't name him - about the finality of our political actions, of the need to strong build the nation and the Leader of Opposition, the other day, said that people don't live on infrastructure. One Member of the Opposition said we are in a world of uncertainty, we are in a tunnel and we don't know when we shall come out of this

tunnel. And the hon. Leader of Opposition, the other day, wanted a guarantee that compensation will be paid in January 2010.

This Budget is aimed, as the title says, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and it is clear that “we are out to save jobs”. We have to protect our people; we have to prepare for the recovery. As a famous Chinese proverb says: “if you want to feed your friend, don’t give him a fish every day. Teach him how to fish, he will have fish throughout his life”. This Budget is aimed at saving jobs, I was saying. One Member said to give money to people to spend. They wanted us to give the money that we don’t have. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I was saying that there are lots of contradictions in their speeches. I can go on and on to highlight the contradictions in the speeches of the two sides of the Opposition. I will only deal with some interventions that talked of *vols, viols*, aggressions and a few problems in some schools. A Member, during the whole of his speech, was looking at the benches of the Government side, as if wondering who is going to be elected and who is not going to be elected and who will not come back after the next election, etc. This has nothing to do with this Budget. We won’t deal with these petty things right now. One Member has talked of our Electoral Manifesto of 2005 and of the Government Plan of 2005-2010. Who knew in 2005 that we are going to have such an unprecedented economic recession? At the same time, in the same line, can I ask the Opposition: did the previous Government put in its manifest that it would raise VAT by 50% in two years? One hon. Member talked of projects which we have started and completed. Either he is not aware, he is not going around the island, he is not aware of the many projects in the country or he is simply savouring his big victory. He is simply living in dreams. Besides, as to the multitude of projects, people are saying that “*l’île Maurice est devenue un chantier de construction*”. I will mention but a few, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I did tell you that I won’t take much time. I will start with Jeetoo Hospital, because I am a doctor, I have a lot to do with hospitals, with health and medicines. Since 2000, la *Banque Africaine de Développement* already gave Rs600 m. to upgrade the Jeetoo Hospital. Year in year out, Jeetoo Hospital has so many millions. Nothing has been done up to now! This Government is going to start constructing Dr. Jeetoo Hospital. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is a saying that goes ‘*la vérité blesse*’, and this is what exactly is happening. We have heard of the market fair at Rose-Belle, we have heard of relocating the inhabitants of Mare Chicose and, apart from the many drains and pavement works that we have undertaken in Chemin Grenier and Surinam, we have the famous Macondé bridge. I promised you that I would talk about the Macondé bridge.

(*Interruptions*)

This is another project which was coming year in, year out in every Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and we have witnessed so many accidents there. A priest had an accident there. A whole bus went into the sea there; a child disappeared, and he has not been seen up to now. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thanks to this Government, thanks to the vision of our Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, this project is done and completed. It is already being used. In so doing, this Government has solved the *calvaire* of the population of the south and of the west.

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Shall we please get some order in this House? Hon. Members, please!

(*Interruptions*)

Dr. Babajee: I understand the anger of my friend. Cool down, hon. Member!

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I am on my feet. We have been behaving very well all this time; I would like it to continue. If the hon. Member has a point to make, he can raise a point of order. Otherwise, we just keep quiet please. Thank you very much. The hon. Member may continue.

Dr. Babajee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must, here, voice out the satisfaction and the *ouf de soulagement* of the inhabitants who had to undergo so much hardship for years and years. This bridge has now become a jewel in the south, and I must convey the thanks of the whole population, of the southern and western coasts of our island to this Government, in general, and, more particularly, to our Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister.

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, yesterday, when hon. Jhugroo was talking, I stayed very quiet and listened to him. I would beg him to please listen to me. For a very long time to come, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritians will remember that it is the Government of *l'Alliance Sociale* that has put an end to the miseries of the southern and western regions of our country.

I could go on and on, but I have to say a few words on the retaining wall at Rivière des Galets. Hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee, my colleague, knows very well what miseries our brothers, sisters and children of Rivière des Galets had to suffer last year because of the tidal waves. We put our hands together; we put our minds together ...

(*Interruptions*)

...with the Minister of Public Infrastructure, and we have raised this wall to a height that will never allow any seawater to come in the houses of those people there. There are so many other projects in so many other localities. I won't be able to name all of them, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because I promised you to be very short. No village has been spared.

A Member talked of *la grogne* out there. The people are angry out there. They are still angry, because they are still saying: what would have happened to this country if the previous Government would have come to power again? And they are happy nowadays that they have taken the wise decision in July 2005.

Yesterday, I was surprised to hear from hon. Allet and, today, from hon. Naidu - he is not here – that, up to now, they don't know who the Private Parliamentary Secretary in Constituency No. 20. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, either they are not serious, either they don't want to know, or they are just not interested in knowing who is the PPS looking after constituency No. 20. I was going to say something else, but since hon. Maurice Allet is not here, I will avoid saying it.

An hon. Member on the Government side said yesterday that the Opposition is purposely proposing some measures here and there, in order to send this country again *en état d'urgence*. This may be the only chance - God forbid - for them to come back. We understand the *enjeu*, and we are determined to work in the interest of the whole population of Mauritius because we have pledged to do so.

We will not fall victims of their traps. This Government has decided to deliver and, of course, as I said earlier on, it is not business as usual, there is a great need to change the mindset of everyone. One strong feeling that I have after having listened to some Members of the Opposition, is that they seem to be completely *à côté de la plaque*. Either they do not understand what is going on in the world. One hon. Member said it only today, that women are at risk. It is still good that they are at risk; millions of people, 26 million in China, 20 million in India, 7.5 million in the US have lost their jobs, and we know full well that many workers in our country are at risk, and this is exactly what this Budget is about. It is about protecting these people. This is exactly what we are doing with the ASP. This is exactly what the Minister of Finance is trying to do: to save these jobs, because they are at risk right now. Either people have not understood the philosophy of this Budget or they just don't want to understand. This Budget strikes the right balance between fighting against poverty.

I did say earlier on, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, name me one country that is giving so much to its inhabitants. In spite of the hard times, in spite of the difficult times we are going through, we are still giving a lot to our people. They speak about purchasing power, the very moment we came to power we gave free transport to all the students. Let us do a small calculation Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. A family that has two children or three children going to school, they immediately saved Rs1000 to Rs1500 per month. We have brought down the price of flour, we have increased the subsidies. We have brought down the price of gas, the price of bread has automatically gone down. Is not all these aimed at keeping the purchasing power of the people? Old age pension, I will not go in the *saga*; some Members from the Opposition had to come and ask for apologies publicly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It pains my heart today to recall that 4800 of our senior citizens were deprived of their pensions in the month of December. And these people are now coming to teach us lessons!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Sithanen, thank you for your silence, please!

Mr Babajee: Who is the politician who would not like to give as much as he can? And knowing the social background of hon. Dr. Rama Sithanen - I apologize for referring to that - I am sure and convinced that he is the first person in this country to jump on eradicating poverty. He will be the first man in Mauritius to fight against poverty. I am very sincere in what I'm saying, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This Budget strikes the right balance between fighting against poverty, alleviating the hardships of people on the lower rung of the ladder but, at the same time, empowering people, developing that mindset of entrepreneurship because, as I said earlier on, we do not want to develop in this country, *une nation, un peuple assisté*. Hon. Nando Bodha talked of strong nation building. This is exactly what the Budget is all about. We would realise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that this Budget speaks a lot on the after recession period. The boosting up of project realisation capacity and of implementation capacity reveal the intention of this Government of a dynamic bounce back when the world economy reaches its turning point. This Budget does not deal only with the six coming months, I am sorry that hon. Madan Dulloo is not here, he must be very confused these days since the Leader of the Opposition has said that he will be himself the Prime Minister. I understand his mood, but it seems that he is confusing between Budget and Action Plan. This tells me immediately that he has not understood a lot much about this Budget. This Budget will prepare our country for years to come. We say very often '*gouverner c'est prévoir*'. This is exactly what this Budget is all about: 'Putting people first'. We are conscious that our most valuable resource in this country is human resource. That is why this Budget has laid so much emphasis on human resources, capacity building, on training, on the NEF, which have reached thousands of people in Mauritius and in Rodrigues through its training re-skilling, basement programmes, circular migration, assistance to unemployed women, the creation of *Espace des Métiers*, the introduction of a functional literacy and numeracy programme. I can go on and on to prove once more to the nation that we have stayed faithful to our *motto* 'Putting People First'.

I would like to end, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once more, as I did last year in the Budget debate, by thanking the hon. Prime Minister, the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and his whole team for this marvelous job and, of course, finally, to pay tribute to the whole nation of our country, to this nation without whose contribution, understanding and patience, a lot would not have been done. They have proved once more a high sense of patriotism, a deep sense of solidarity towards Government. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I pray that this financial crisis does not last long. I pray that things will soon improve that there will be soon an economic upturn and that happiness and prosperity will soon reach every home in this country. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(11.36 p.m.)

The Minister of Civil service and Administrative Reforms (Dr. B. Hookoom): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, today is exactly one week that we have been debating on this Budget

presented by the Vice-Prime Minister, Dr. the hon. Rama Sithanen. Allow me, first of all, to congratulate the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment. We, on this side of the House, are unanimous in recognising that the Minister of Finance has produced an excellent Budget, taking into account the prevailing economic contingencies. Although they have not openly admitted it, we know that some hon. Members on the other side share this appreciation. We have heard a few alternatives proposed by hon. Members on the other side of the House, but most of them seem to be living outside the reality. Throughout the world, we are seeing everything that is happening.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir in such a global crisis situation, our learned Members on the other side are coming up with shallow criticisms. Preparing a Budget at a time of recession of this magnitude is not an easy task at all. The hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Vice-Prime Minister have, in fact, realised '*un coup de maître*' by presenting a Budget that addresses the economic imperative without neglecting its social obligations. We are fortunate that nobody in this House has experienced the great depression of the 1930s. We are fortunate to be born after that. Mauritius is very vulnerable to the shocks of the global economic crisis as a small island developing State. Yet, Dr. the hon. Sithanen, the Vice-Prime Minister, has been able to come up with an 18 month Action Plan to allow Mauritius to safely navigate through rough seas until the economic storm dies down.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, people would certainly ask: "Why an Action Plan?" Clear thinking dictates that an early and timely Action Plan is better than a reaction plan too late. This Government has succeeded in "making hay even at a time when the sun had stopped to shine" in 2005 when our friends on the other side of the House were shown their right place in this august Assembly by the people of this country who have proved to be "*un peuple vraiment admirable*".

This budget is not just the hon. Dr. Sithanen's budget. It is the budget of the *l'Alliance Sociale* under the able leadership of the Dr. Ramgoolam, the hon. Prime Minister, who is our trusted captain, especially in such hard times.

In 2005, our hon. Members on the other side of the House ended up hiding the by now notorious *squelettes* in the closet even at a time when the sky was blue and the sun was shining - as the hon. Prime Minister has said it - and there were no adverse winds. They, in fact, ended up in such fine weather at the lower side of all economic indices whether FDI or GDP.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, had the global recession occurred at the time when the then Prime Minister diagnosed the country as being *dans un état d'urgence économique*, what Reaction Plan or budget would they have presented to the people? Certainly they would have come up with their ready-made magical solution to increase VAT to the great dismay of the people. We had witnessed it in this Assembly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when we were in the Opposition that the Members who were in Government between 2000 and 2005 had increased the VAT by 50%, in 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, within two successive years.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, the people of this country are lucky because this global financial crisis did not occur in those days when certain hon. Members across the floor were managing the affairs of the State. They were wise, Mr Speaker, Sir, because they made the right choice to change and choose a captain who would help them to weather all storms.

It is with great devotion and dedication that this Government has set itself the task of addressing the daunting challenges facing the country and to halt and reverse the declining economic situation. We have succeeded in doing what they had pledged to do, that is, *redresse l'économie*. We have managed to instil confidence in the people and trust in the business community. Socio-economic indicators have turned from red to green.

Despite the multiple shocks, including the subprime crisis, GDP has grown over the past three years, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Small and medium enterprises have emerged. A few weeks ago, Mauritian banks published their Annual Reports showing profits of hundreds of millions of

rupees at a time when other banks worldwide are being nationalised. These are facts: the figures speak for themselves. This Government is doing a good work.

On the other hand, we are today reaping the benefits of the most effective economic diplomacy in Mauritian history. FDI has started to flow in and, in these circumstances, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government has, through this budget, launched the largest ever public sector investment programme in the history of Mauritius. We are investing some Rs25 billion in the coming three years.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have created growth without reducing inputs in welfare. On the contrary, we have walked many additional miles by maintaining free bus transport for students. We have invested massively in health, social security transport and education. While replicating the La Valette (Bambous) model of integrated social development at Grand Baie, we have also maintained incentives under the Slab Grant Scheme and Building Materials Scheme.

Whenever Government has been led by the Labour Party, we have always consolidated the Welfare State and broadened the circle of opportunities for our people. We have initiated a programme to democratise the economy and in this year's Budget we have provided for the participation of Mauritians who have so far remained outside the arena in the hospitality sector. We are creating the opportunity structure for them to now invest in hotel projects.

In this Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government is showing its deep concern for the people who may fall into vulnerability and precariousness for reasons on which we may not have total control. However, the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Vice-Prime Minister have shown to what extent they can be proactive. Rs4 billion will be used from the yields of sound management to save jobs. Rs2.4 billion will be used to provide protection to our people. Our Government is even preparing for recovery with a provision of Rs2.7 billion. This Government is in a position to do all this, because we did actually provide for difficult times.

The other day, we heard the Leader of the Opposition talking about zigzag. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is no zigzag. We do not pervert employment statistics. The records are there for everybody. International institutions are recognising the efforts made by this Government and Mauritius has been well rated by different institutions. The last 'Ease of Doing Business Survey Report' places Mauritius in the 24th position among a global community of 181 countries. We are first in Africa and second only to Singapore, the world leader, among Small Island Developing States. Again, this proves that this Government is on the right track.

The environment grew so positive that the Prime Minister had even set the attainable figure of two million tourist arrivals as our medium-term target for the country. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is true that conditions were created for a bumper crop. We have had an early harvest. It is the yield of that very bumper crop that we have redistributed in the form of increased subsidies on rice, flour and cooking gas although prices were rising across the world. We have fulfilled our commitment towards workers and paid the PRB salary recommendations in full.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we believe in our efforts and we have anticipated the bumper crop. The global recession is not our doing. If there were no global recession, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we would have certainly improved the lots of our citizens as we are bent on 'Putting People First' on our national agenda.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, it is the proceeds of this very bumper crop that is acting as a real bumper in the face of worldwide economic adversities. The bumper factor has enabled this Government to provide for the payment for a full bonus to employees at the end of 2009, when workers in more developed economies are being laid off, when workers are being called upon to take involuntary leave, when countries classified among the East African tigers are curtailing their end of the year bonus. It is this anticipated bumper factor that has made it possible for this Government to come up with schemes to save jobs and prepare for the recovery.

Times are hard, and our citizens have great expectations. We are working in the best interests of the people and will come up with the right outcomes. The economy, in fact, maintained its resilience, the people have trust in the Prime Minister and his team. We are going ahead with our strategy to shore our economy when the theory of market determinism has shown its limits.

Through its successive budgets and fiscal policies, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government has sustained economic growth at an average of 5% per annum over the past three years. As a result of this, we have been able to improve the standard of living of the people, modernise the economy and most importantly contributed towards poverty alleviation.

Thousands of jobs have been created in a sustainable manner. The unemployment rate, which is a social indicator of the well-being of our nation, unfortunately, stood at around 9.6% in 2005. On the strength of policy measures applied by this Government the rate has dropped to 7.2% in 2008. It is indeed a great achievement when we realised that elsewhere unemployment is constantly rising.

Economic growth would have continued were it not for this unfortunate global recession that broke out in mid 2008 and brought severe contraction in the economies of the developed world on which Mauritius depends to a very large extent. The latest indications are that the four main sectors of the economy, that is, manufacturing, construction, tourism and services are under stress. There is an anticipated decline in Government revenue. We have to avert the risk of rising unemployment which may impact negatively on our socio-economic development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in these fragile economic conditions, this Government is striving hard to safeguard employment. Saving jobs is one of the main thrusts of this Budget.

The public sector, more than ever, is called upon to intervene in order to facilitate economic growth by rescuing enterprises in difficulty with a view to protecting people and saving jobs.

We all know that with the dismantling of Sugar Protocol, there has been a substantial decrease in cess. The far-reaching implications of this reduction are obvious and this will call for a thorough review and necessary rationalisation of certain parastatal bodies. My Ministry will, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as in the past, rise to the challenge and assist with any redeployment that may be necessary, in line with the overarching objective of this Government to save jobs and protect people.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has always adopted a very open and flexible approach where public officers are concerned. There is no room for confrontation in these difficult circumstances. My Ministry promotes cordial relations with its stakeholders, including trade unions. This will be further consolidated in a spirit of sustaining harmonious employment relation. Under the new Employment Relations Act, my Ministry will provide conciliation services with a view to promoting peaceful resolution of disputes in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

This Budget reflects, among others the determination of this Government to build and improve capacity by investing in our human capital. This can be achieved only if we have competent human resources, a multi-skilled and innovative workforce.

This Budget paves the way for capacity-building through the mobilisation of technical expertise both at home and abroad to serve in the public sector. This Budget makes provision for a sum of Rs190 m., partly financed by grants from development partners for a capacity-building programme.

I shall ensure that my Ministry avails itself of this instrument to develop human resources in the public sector. No organisation, be it public or private can pretend to succeed, if it does not link its human resource development strategy to its long-term goals.

My Ministry is playing a pivotal role in upgrading knowledge and skills of public officers in developing the right attitude to render public sector organisations more efficient and productive.

Training and development is a *sine qua non* to increase productivity. Ministries and Departments are being made more responsive to the growing needs of all stakeholders.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, training and staff development is and will remain a key strategy in the overall human resource development process. Over the past year alone, my Ministry has trained some 2,800 public officers of different grades and all levels from across the Civil Service, including our officers in Rodrigues. They have received training in different fields. Furthermore, 20 senior officers have benefited from training abroad, to expose them to the latest trend and developments in the field of public sector management.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt that, if we want training to produce the expected results, it is to be sustained over time. To make this happen, the necessary institutional and infrastructural backup will be provided.

Democracy can thrive only on solid institutional foundations like, transparent Government, an independent judiciary and an efficient civil service.

In this respect, the development of the civil service has always been a priority for Government. In fact, public sector has contributed massively in giving this country a competitive edge and in mapping out our vision for development.

The new operating environment no doubt poses daunting challenges. More than ever before, an integrated visionary thinking at local, regional and international level is becoming critical. The most crucial success factor will be our ability to put in place a competent and effective State, whose strength will depend on its rate of evolution and responsiveness to a constantly challenging environment.

In this context of change and reforms in our public sector, the logic of introducing a Performance Management System as the basis of running the civil service is very strong. The PMS is, in fact, at the heart of new public management. It is poised to emerge as the driving force for broader public sector reforms as well as improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our services and ensuring value for money.

Government is paying particular attention to this initiative and investing resources in its implementation. Despite the pinching economic circumstances, Government has provided an amount of Rs1.5 m. to pursue this initiative.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the very fact that this Budget is presented in the PMS and PBB modes, demonstrates the will of this Government to enhance responsibility accounting systems. Public officers will thus be held responsible for results.

In the same breath, public sector organisation actions will be subjected to greater public scrutiny and accountability given the merit of such a reform initiative.

My Ministry has targeted the rolling out of the PMS across the civil service by the end of 2010. May I point out here, Mr Speaker, Sir, that successful implementation of this initiative will culminate in the introduction of a performance related reward system by 2011.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is natural for politicians to take measures that would ensure their political survival. However, this Government is conscious of its heavy responsibilities vis-à-vis generations to come. Somehow, an invisible hand has determined that the *Alliance sociale* be at the helm of affairs at such a crucial juncture in the history of our country when we have to meet unprecedented challenges due to a major global recession.

Through this comprehensive provision of some 200 measures, this Government is proposing to harbour the people of the Republic of Mauritius from undesirable experiences as are being experienced by many countries and viewed by us through the media.

This bold initiative of the Vice-Prime Minister, hon. Dr. hon. Sithanen, under the guidance of the hon. Prime Minister, proposes to prepare the country for the transition to better times.

The nation will appreciate that we, on this side of the House, have acted in the most responsible manner wherein we have given precedence to long-term national interests over our short-term political ambitions. The fruits of this Action Plan will be the legacy of this Government to future generations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to end my intervention on this quote from the Bhagavad Gita –

“Everything happens for the best. We have to seize this opportunity to reengineer our society and reward efforts.”

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(00.05)

The Minister of Youth & Sports (Mr S. Ritoo) :Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is with great sense of honour, pride and emotion that I rise today in this Assembly to deliver my maiden speech in my capacity as Minister of Youth & Sports.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me, at the very outset, congratulate the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam and the Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance, hon. Dr. Sithanen, for their farsightedness and for bringing a new approach in the tackling of the affairs of the country. This Budget, in fact, symbolises the audacity of this Government to brace ourselves to cushion the threats looming on us and which may jeopardise our economic set up and social fabric.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the developed world and even the most powerful country, the USA, have all been crippled under the pressure of the Economic meltdown. Mauritius, being a tiny country, has always depended on the developed countries to create our wealth and welfare. There were many vociferous prophets of doom who had unashamedly claimed that the present economic policy of the Government would bring ruin to the country.

But when there are failures all around, only the pragmatic and daring ones will emerge. Thanks to the vision and courage of our Prime Minister and the drive of the Minister of Finance, Mauritius is still standing on its feet. The bold measures enunciated in this Budget and their strategic implementation will no doubt enable the population to reap the benefit of their efforts and secure a bright future for our children.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I swore in as Minister eight months ago, and I express my deep appreciation and gratitude to the Prime Minister for the trust he has placed in me. But I know that I have big task ahead, and tremendous challenges are awaiting me. I have taken a tryst with destiny that I will attend to them despite all odds and deliver to the best of my abilities to serve the youth and sports community of Mauritius.

My dream is to give sports its *lettre de noblesse* and inculcate in the youth of this country, a sense of belonging and patriotism and steer them in the right direction.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the old days, youth and sports survived mainly on the support of a handful of volunteers and sportsmen. But, now, it is our good fortune that Government is providing institutional and financial support to ensure their welfare and continuous enrichment. This Budget represents the will of Government to drive the country forward. It indicates hope, hard work, farsightedness and obsession for excellence in the delivery of quality service to the nation.

Let me, therefore, express my heartfelt gratitude to the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for his vision and for having, despite all difficulties, provided a reasonable Budget for my Ministry. I was indeed tempted to call our Minister of Finance the “Mauritian Magician” but then I realised that our local star, Bruno Julie, has a copyright on this title.

If I have mentioned Bruno Julie, this is because he is the role model among our sportsmen, and I want all our sportsmen to achieve that kind of perseverance and success. I will fail in my duty if I do not seize this opportunity to mention the names of a few of our athletes who have flown our flag high, namely –

- (a) Stephan Buckland;
- (b) Eric Milazar;
- (c) Arnaud Casquette;
- (d) Fabrice Bulluck;
- (e) Marine Giraud;
- (f) Kate Foo Kune;
- (g) Richard Souci, among others.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the *politique sportive* of this Government was enunciated in our Government Programme more than three years ago and highlighted namely -

- (a) the democratisation of sports;
- (b) provision of maximum incentives to high level athletes;
- (c) optimum utilisation of sports infrastructures, and
- (d) training of cadres.

My colleague and good friend, hon. Sylvio Tan Wah Hing, and myself have ensured that these measures are implemented to the satisfaction of everybody. My Ministry also ascertains that all necessary financial, logistic and technical assistance are provided to the Federations and other partners so that they operate in a conducive manner and offer the best opportunities to our athletes to shine in their respective discipline and achieve excellence. And I congratulate those Federations who, as we say, *jouent le jeu*. Unfortunately, I admit that I am let down by certain Sports Federations, by their lack of professionalism and who are not fulfilling their role as national governing bodies in their mission of promoting their respective discipline. I am also disturbed by those who do not understand the difficult economic plight in which we presently are. I remind them that sailing is always difficult in rough weather and winter is always followed by summer. I also remind them that my Ministry will henceforth link financial assistance with performance. As in all other fields, we have to reap on investments. We will set performance indicators and benchmarks to monitor and assess their achievements. It is in this context that since my appointment as Minister. I have reviewed several incentives being given to athletes and the allowances payable to them to participate in competitions outside Mauritius. The aim is to ensure that the proper conditions are created and enough financial support is given to high performers.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, soon after taking office as Minister of Youth and Sports, I have felt urgent to review strategies and policies for a sound development of our sports starting from grassroot level to the elite. Major measures that have been taken are as follows –

- (i) Besides the Jeux Inter-Colleges which was revived last year, the Jeux de l'Avenir and the Jeux de l'Espoir have been relaunched after nine years of absence and nine years of waste for those youth who had a lot of expectations. The objective for the re-introduction of this project is to detect young sports talents in various disciplines and to direct them in sports structures operated by my Ministry in collaboration with the Sports Federations.
- (ii) A *Directeur Technique National* (DTN) in football has been recruited to redynamise the existing football structures and to give our '*Sport Roi, son prestige d'antan*'.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I should point out here that *la formation*, which is the essence of the development of football, was completely disregarded. I still cannot understand how the Centre National de Formation au Football which was considered to be one of the main pillars to upgrade the level of elite football at club, national and international levels was closed in 2004. This decision, I am sure, was taken by certain irresponsible and unprofessional sports leaders and politicians.

Thus, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I had to take the prompt decision to re-open the Centre de Formation de Football, known today, as Fondation pour la Formation de Football – Centre Technique François Blaquart.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when we talk about major international competitions, we make reference to the high level athletes. As a former international football player myself, I can very well understand the needs of other athletes. In this context, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since I have taken office, I have not wasted a single moment to review the High Level Sport Unit System in order to provide a new orientation and impetus to this sector. As a result, an additional number of 39 athletes have joined the High Level Sports Scholarship Scheme, making a total of 80 athletes. Pocket money allowance to athletes and officials have also been reviewed to enable them to participate in competitions abroad in better conditions. Thus, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with such incentives and motivations, we have recorded good results recently at the African Senior Badminton Championship, African Junior Table Tennis Championship and at the African Senior Judo Championship. Likewise, better results are expected in forthcoming competitions.

Next, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a football programme for primary schoolchildren known as the grassroot project in collaboration with the Mauritius Football Association and the FIFA has been introduced because the potential of able sportsmen can even be detected at that level.

Moreover, a sports programme for the tertiary institutions in order to promote sports activities among students of the tertiary sector will be introduced this year. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the setting up of Club Maurice Committee was my idea. Its main attribute is to follow and support the preparation of Club Maurice for participation in major international games at regional, continental and world levels. This year, our elite sportsmen will participate in the Jeux de la Francophonie in Lebanon in September-October 2009 and again my Ministry is providing the required *encadrement* and facilities to the athletes to enable them to get prepared in the best possible conditions. It is important to encourage our Sports Federations to organise international events on our soil thus putting Mauritius on the world map and promoting it as a tourist destination.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me inform the House that although we are facing economic difficulties, Mauritius organised successfully, the African Senior Judo Championships this month. Our judokas won 3 medals. Also, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry will support the Athletics, Boxing, Swimming and Weightlifting Federations in organising African Championships competitions on our home soil.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, moreover, our athletes are being initiated to prepare themselves for a number of major international competitions namely the 2010 Commonwealth Games and the CJSOI Games, the 2011 Indian Ocean Island Games, the All African Games and the 2012 Olympic Games.

The FIFA World Cup 2010 will be held in South Africa and Mauritius is planning to invite one or two high-profile foreign teams for training camps prior to their participation at the finals of the said competition.

The objectives of this initiative are –

- (1) to revive interest in football in Mauritius;
- (2) to capture international media attention;
- (3) to position Mauritius as a stop over tourist destination for fans and tourists proceeding to or returning from South Africa before, during and after the World Cup 2010 event;
- (4) to tap business opportunities for hotels, tourist tour operators, support services and manufacturing industries, and
- (5) to upgrade the football pitches of the Anjalay Stadium and George Vth Stadium to international norms.

I am thankful to the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism who is chairing the Inter-Ministerial Committee set up for the above purpose for all his assistance in this endeavour. I also wish to thank the Vice-Prime Minister and the Minister of finance for the Rs15 m. earmarked in this present Budget for the upgrading works.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while I am on the issue of stadium, I have listened carefully to the representations made by artists and concert organisers on the recent decision of my Ministry not to authorise the holding of concerts on some stadia. People should understand that the stadia in question are meant for sports activities including football. No one can imagine the extent of damages that is caused to a stadium after a concert. However, I am sensitive to the difficulties of the artists and alternative sites will be identified for them to hold their concert. Government will soon come up with a policy decision on the matter. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you can rest assured that the sportsmen and sportswomen of this country have now the guarantee that they are given due consideration in their endeavour specially the young talented boys and girls including those from Rodrigues.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, athletes do not only need financial assistance to perform well. They need a complete back up and set up because financial means without proper infrastructural facilities for training will not give the desired results.

Over the last eight months and within means available, I endeavoured to satisfy athletes and our youth on both fronts. The following are but a few examples of what we have achieved –

- (i) the first ever synthetic football pitch was inaugurated at St. Francois Xavier Stadium in April this year. We are now going ahead with the second phase which comprise the construction of stand with 2000 seats, parking facilities and other amenities;
- (ii) the George Vth stadium or rather the Ram Ruhee National Stadium is being provided with new lighting facilities to the tune of Rs19 m.;
- (iii) the Sir Robin Ghurburrun stadium in Triolet, the Petit Raffray football ground, the Morcellement St. André football ground, the Arsenal football pitch, the Rohit Boolakee stadium in Rivière du Rempart, the Malherbes football ground in Curepipe and Grand Bois football ground are being upgraded and lighting facilities will be provided with;
- (iv) the Bon Accueil Sports Complex is being enhanced through the construction of a lawn tennis and handball court, and
- (v) sports facilities such as basketball and volleyball and petanque are being provided at Harris street, Port Louis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to infrastructure for our youth, the following new centers are now operation –

- (a) Bois Chéri Youth Centre;
- (b) Tranquebar Youth Centre;
- (c) Yusuf Ali Youth Centre at Khadafi Square;
- (d) New Dockers' Village at Baie du Tombeau, and
- (e) A youth centre at Triolet.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, side by side we are also upgrading and renovating our youth centres at Flic en Flac, Rose Belle, Souillac, Anse la Raie and Bambous. The amount of time, energy, resources and finances required to implement so many projects is astronomical.

In fact, a provision of over Rs68 m. has been made in this budget to cover the cost of implementation of our projects in the youth and sports sector and I am again grateful to the Government for that.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the context of the democratisation of sports, my Ministry not only support athletes, all sports federations but special consideration is given to small youth and sporting associations to encourage them to promote sports activities, the more so as they do not have the financial means. My Ministry always positively considers reasonable requests for donation of sports equipment such as trophies, medals, cups, footballs, volleyballs, petanque set, football and volleyball nets etc., and also financial assistance wherever possible. As a matter of example, over the period of eight months an amount of Rs1.2 m. has been disbursed by my Ministry for these items.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are not only consolidating our *acquis* but also expanding our range of sports disciplines because we want the youth of our country to unfold their talents and to expose them to new sporting fields. Thus we are assisting the cricket federation to encourage this discipline at school level and to construct a cricket stadium near Anjalay stadium on land donated by Government.

Beach Soccer, which can be ideally promoted in an island like Mauritius is not lagging behind. This discipline was launched some months ago with great pomp by non other than King Eric Cantona. Mon Choisy Beach and two other sites have been identified to construct Beach Soccer Stadia.

These disciplines will soon be added in the Sports Act so that they are recognised and are provided with usual assistance. While speaking of the Sports Act, I am glad to announce that amendments to the Act which were long overdue, are now finalised and the Bill will be introduced in the National Assembly soon.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I seize this opportunity to place on record the good work being done by the Trust Fund for Excellence in Sports, the Mauritius Sports Council, the National Olympic Committee and the National Youth Council. In the past, high level athletes were being left on their own even after having proved their mettle. Now, with the support of the Trust Fund, athletes are side by side encouraged into a career path-based on a mixed *sports-études* programme, that is, we are considering seriously "*la politique de la réinsertion sociale et professionnelle des athlètes de haut niveau en fin de carrière sportive*".

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on the international front, my Ministry is deeply involved in ensuring that our athletes who participate in international competitions have earned the respect of anti-doping organisations as they have always been clean and clear. This is so because we are a committed disciple of the World Anti- Doping Agency and the more so, our athletes are well disciplined, motivated and are conscious that results should be achieved through their own merits and they should not be a victim of artificial boosting up.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while being on the international scene, I have to add that my Ministry is reviewing bilateral co-operation in youth and sports matters with friendly countries. Where possible, we will sign agreements for reciprocal assistance in specific disciplines. We are also exploring avenues of cooperation with other countries for the benefit of our youth, athletes, coaches and the sporting community as a whole.

I have ensured that our youth and sportsmen are provided with the best platform to evolve and unfold their potential. The synergy and enthusiasm generated in them through our vision and strategy is commendable and will steer them in the right direction and give sports its *lustre d'antan*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government firmly believes in the capacity of our youth in building a brighter future for Mauritius and in their contribution to the socio-economic development of the nation. Hence, it is absolutely necessary that the youth sector be given all support it requires.

Along this mission of empowering the youth and creating a new dynamism, my Ministry has elaborated a long-term programme to provide opportunities to all young Mauritians to participate in our youth development activities through our youth centres.

Concerning life-skills education, training and personality development, sensitisation programmes on HIV/AIDS, sex education, family life education, first aid and entrepreneurship are the key elements in all our youth programmes. In this context, a series of training sessions and courses have been tailor-made to equip our youth to face new threats and challenges and forge their life ahead.

My Ministry is also envisaging to set up youth counselling services through the existing youth centres to provide opportunities for young people to discuss with professionals about ongoing difficulties and problems. This measure will no doubt help many young people to manage on their own, to be pragmatic and not to have recourse to their peers in difficult situations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the National Youth Policy which was launched by this Government in 1999 is currently under review to better assess the aspirations and needs of our young people. This policy will also be an important tool for my Ministry and other stakeholders as it will help us to bring a new mode of operation of our Action Plan and create a driving force for youth empowerment. The National Youth Council Act will be amended to enable implementation of this policy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, young people are always on the move and dynamic and we have to be proactive to adapt to their way of life. Hence, a regular evaluation of their needs is very important. The assistance of youth associations and youth NGOs will no doubt be of utmost importance in this evaluation exercise.

Our youngsters and the community at large should be informed and sensitised about problems relating to young people. There is, therefore, an urgent need to involve them in problems like substance and drug abuse, stress, suicide, HIV/AIDS etc. Concurrently, we should allow them to live their life to the fullest and give them the necessary tools to shape up a successful career. But, we should also provide opportunities for our youth to live in a world of their own and reach their goals. To enable them to achieve their dreams, we need to give the necessary tools so that they succeed in their career and life.

To help our youngsters to build their career, the Youth Enterprise Programme for young entrepreneurs known as the '*fonds d'insertion pour les jeunes*' is gradually reaching many young people and this will certainly help develop a culture of young entrepreneurs in the Mauritian community.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as a known fact that the youth of today are leaders of tomorrow, thus youth leadership is a very important concept and I am sure that hon. Members have been associated in one way or another with leadership roles in their associations or clubs or have followed Youth Leadership courses organised by the youth cadre. My Ministry is striving hard to inculcate leadership skills among our youths so that they become prominent leaders in their surroundings and set good examples for others to follow.

Our Youth Centres are ideal platforms for the youth to meet, discuss and share their ideas and problems. They will be further equipped to attract more young people and to become an excellent service provider with the help of our youth leaders.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I would like to reiterate and reaffirm to the House that my Ministry will not spare any efforts to provide to the youth, the athletes and to the whole population all assistance and facilities required *pour pratiquer le sport dans les meilleures conditions*.

My vision as Minister of Youth and Sports and as a true patriot is to see our athletes shine in all competitions and achieve excellence at all levels. *Ma vision est également d'inculquer aux*

mauriciens une culture du sport. Le but ultime est de démocratiser et de vulgariser le sport dans le pays afin qu'à terme chaque mauricien et ce dans les quatre coins du pays puisse pratiquer une activité sportive.

M. le président, je suis certain que vous serez d'accord avec moi, pour dire que le sport possède des vertus fondamentales. Il est un élément unificateur qui projette des valeurs essentielles comme les chances égales, l'amitié, la solidarité, la combativité et le respect de l'autre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the message I want to transmit to our sportsmen is that our country has pinned a lot of hopes in them to make Mauritius « *la plaque tournante* » of African and international sports. Government through my Ministry will continue to support and facilitate the upward climb of our athletes on the ladder of excellence. They just have to prove that their energy and all investments made in them have not gone in vain and they create the opportunities for us to be proud of them again and again.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Boodhoo: Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Mr Valayden rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Saturday 30 May 2009 at 11.30 a.m.

Mr Bachoo rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

At 00.30 a.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Saturday 30 May 2009 at 11.30 a.m.

Appendix

AGREEMENT

BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS ON THE SHORT-STAY VISA WAIVER

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, hereinafter referred to as "the Community", and

THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS, hereinafter referred to as "Mauritius",

hereinafter referred to jointly as "the Contracting Parties";

WITH A VIEW to further developing friendly relations between the Contracting Parties and desiring to facilitate travel by ensuring visa-free entry and short stay for their citizens;

HAVING REGARD to Council Regulation (EC) No 1932/2006 of 21 December 2006, amending Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement¹ by, inter alia, transferring six third countries, including Mauritius to the list of third countries whose nationals are exempt from the visa requirement for short stays in the Member States of the European Union (EU);

BEARING IN MIND that Article 2 of Regulation (EC) No 1932/2006 states that for these six countries, the exemption from the visa requirement is to be applied only from the date of entry into force of an agreement on visa exemptions which is to be concluded by the European Community with the country in question;

¹ OJ L 405, 30.12.2006, p. 23.

RECOGNISING that the citizens of all Member States are exempted from the visa requirement when travelling to Mauritius for a period of sixty days;

DESIRING to safeguard the principle of equal treatment of all EU citizens;

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT that persons travelling for the purpose of carrying out a paid activity during their short stay are not covered by this Agreement and therefore for this category the relevant rules of Community law and national law of the Member States and the national law of Mauritius on the visa obligation or exemption and on the access to employment continue to apply;

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the Protocol on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland and the Protocol integrating the Schengen acquis into the framework of the European Union, annexed to the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community and confirming that the provisions of this agreement do not apply to the United Kingdom and Ireland,

HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

ARTICLE 1

Purpose

This Agreement provides for visa-free travel for the citizens of the European Union and for the citizens of Mauritius when travelling to the territory of the other Contracting Party for a maximum period of three months during a six months period.

ARTICLE 2

Definitions

For the purpose of this Agreement:

- (a) "Member State" shall mean any Member State of the European Union, with the exception of the United Kingdom and Ireland;
- (b) "a citizen of the European Union" shall mean a national of a Member State as defined in point (a);
- (c) "a citizen of Mauritius" shall mean any person who holds the citizenship of Mauritius;
- (d) "Schengen area" shall mean the area without internal borders comprising the territories of the Member States as defined in point (a) applying the Schengen acquis in full.

ARTICLE 3

Scope of application

1. The citizens of the European Union holding a valid ordinary, diplomatic or service/official passport issued by a Member State may enter and stay without a visa in the territory of Mauritius for the period of stay as defined in Article 4(1).

The citizens of Mauritius holding a valid ordinary, diplomatic or service/official passport issued by Mauritius may enter and stay without a visa in the territory of the Member States for the period of stay as defined in Article 4(2).

2. Paragraph 1 does not apply to persons travelling for the purpose of carrying out a paid activity.

For this category of persons, each Member State individually may decide to impose the visa requirement on the citizens of Mauritius or to withdraw it according to Article 4(3) of Regulation (EC) No 539/2001.

For this category of persons, Mauritius may decide on the visa requirement or the visa waiver for the citizens of each Member State individually in accordance with its national law.

3. The visa waiver provided by this Agreement shall apply without prejudice to the laws of the Contracting Parties relating to the conditions of entry and short stay. The Member States and Mauritius reserve the right to refuse entry into and short stay in their territories if one or more of these conditions are not met.

4. The visa waiver applies regardless of the mode of transport used to cross the borders of the Contracting Parties.

5. Issues not covered by this Agreement shall be governed by Community law, national law of the Member States or by national law of Mauritius.

ARTICLE 4

Duration of stay

1. The citizens of the European Union may stay in the territory of Mauritius for a maximum period of three months during a six months period following the date of first entry into the territory of the country.

2. The citizens of Mauritius may stay in the Schengen area for a maximum period of three months during a six months period following the date of first entry into the territory of any Member State fully applying the Schengen *acquis*. This period of three months during a period of six months shall be calculated independently of any stay in a Member State which does not yet apply the Schengen *acquis* in full.

The citizens of Mauritius may stay for a maximum period of three months during a six months period following the date of first entry in the territory of each of the Member States that do not yet apply the Schengen *acquis* in full, independently of the period of stay calculated for the Schengen area.

3. This Agreement does not affect the possibility for Mauritius and the Member States to extend the period of stay beyond three months in accordance with national law and Community law.

ARTICLE 5

Territorial application

1. As regards the French Republic, the provisions of this Agreement shall apply only to the European territory of the French Republic.

2. As regards the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the provisions of this Agreement shall apply only to the European territory of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

ARTICLE 6

Joint Committee for the management of the Agreement

1. The Contracting Parties shall set up a Joint Committee of experts (hereinafter referred to as the "Committee"), composed of representatives of the European Community and representatives of Mauritius. The Community shall be represented by the European Commission.

2. The Committee shall have, *inter alia*, the following tasks:
 - (a) monitoring the implementation of this Agreement;
 - (b) suggesting amendments or additions to this Agreement;
 - (c) settling disputes arising from the interpretation or application of the provisions of this Agreement.

3. The Committee shall be convened whenever necessary at the request of one of the Contracting Parties.

4. The Committee shall establish its rules of procedure.

ARTICLE 7

Relation between this Agreement and existing bilateral visa waiver agreements between the Member States and Mauritius

This Agreement shall take precedence over the provisions of any bilateral agreements or arrangements concluded between individual Member States and Mauritius, insofar as their provisions cover issues falling within the scope of this Agreement.

ARTICLE 8

Final provisions

1. This Agreement shall be ratified or approved by the Contracting Parties in accordance with their respective internal procedures and shall enter into force on the first day of the second month following the date on which the Contracting Parties notify each other that the procedures referred to above have been completed.
2. This Agreement is concluded for an indefinite period of time, unless terminated in accordance with paragraph 5.
3. This Agreement may be amended by written agreement of the Contracting Parties. Amendments shall enter into force after the Contracting Parties have notified each other of the completion of their internal procedures necessary for this purpose.
4. Each Contracting Party may suspend in whole or in part this Agreement, in particular, for reasons of public policy, protection of national security or protection of public health, illegal immigration or the reintroduction of the visa requirement by either Contracting Party. The decision on suspension shall be notified to the other Contracting Party not later than 2 months before its entry into force. The Contracting Party that has suspended the application of this Agreement shall immediately inform the other Contracting Party once the reasons for suspension no longer exist.

5. Each Contracting Party may terminate this Agreement by giving written notice to the other Party. This Agreement shall cease to be in force 90 days after the date of such notification.

6. Mauritius may suspend or terminate this Agreement only in respect of all the Member States.

7. The Community may suspend or terminate this Agreement only in respect of all of its Member States.

Done at Brussels, in duplicate, on 28 May 2009 in the Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish languages, each of these texts being equally authentic.

JOINT DECLARATION
WITH REGARD TO
ICELAND, NORWAY, SWITZERLAND AND LIECHTENSTEIN

The Contracting Parties take note of the close relationship between the European Community and Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, particularly by virtue of the Agreements of 18 May 1999 and 26 October 2004 concerning the association of these countries with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen acquis.

In such circumstances it is desirable that the authorities of Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, on the one hand, and Mauritius, on the other hand, conclude, without delay, bilateral agreements on the short-stay visa waiver in similar terms as this Agreement.

JOINT DECLARATION
ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE CATEGORY OF PERSONS
TRAVELLING FOR THE PURPOSE
OF CARRYING OUT A PAID ACTIVITY
AS PROVIDED IN ARTICLE 3(2) OF THIS AGREEMENT

Desiring to ensure a common interpretation, the Contracting Parties agree that, for the purpose of this Agreement, the category of persons carrying out a paid activity covers persons entering for the purpose of carrying out a gainful occupation/remunerated activity in the territory of the other Contracting Party as an employee or as a service provider.

This category should not cover:

- businesspersons, i.e. persons travelling for the purpose of business deliberation (without being employed in the country of the other Contracting Party),
- sportspersons and artists performing an activity on an ad hoc basis,
- journalists sent by the media of their country of residence and
- intra-corporate trainees.

The implementation of this Declaration shall be monitored by the Joint Committee within its responsibility under Article 6 of this Agreement, which may propose modifications when, on the basis of the experiences of the Contracting Parties, it considers it necessary.

JOINT DECLARATION
ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PERIOD OF THREE MONTHS
DURING A SIX MONTHS PERIOD
FOLLOWING THE DATE OF FIRST ENTRY
AS SET OUT IN ARTICLE 4 OF THIS AGREEMENT

The Contracting Parties agree that the maximum period of three months during a six months period following the date of first entry into the territory of Mauritius or the Schengen area as provided by Article 4 of this Agreement means either a continuous visit or several consecutive visits, the duration of which does not exceed three months in any six months period in total.

JOINT DECLARATION
ON THE INFORMATION OF THE CITIZENS
ABOUT THE VISA WAIVER AGREEMENT

Recognising the importance of transparency for the citizens of the European Union and Mauritius, the Contracting Parties agree to ensure full dissemination of information about the content and consequences of the visa waiver agreement and related issues, such as the entry conditions.
