

MAURITIUS FOURTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION

Thursday 28 May 2009

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QUESTION (*Oral*)

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ADJOURNMENT

MAURITIUS

Fourth National Assembly

Debate No. 11 of 2009

Sitting of Thursday 28 May 2009

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

PAPER LAID

The Prime Minister: Sir, the Paper has been laid on the Table –

Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources: The Annual Report 2006/2007 of the Mauritius Qualifications Authority.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

ADDITIONAL STIMULUS PACKAGE – FIRMS - MONEY DISBURSED

The Leader of the Opposition (*By Private Notice*) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the financial assistance given to private firms by Government and the State Investment Corporation under the Additional Stimulus Package, he will state –

- (a) the names of the firms having benefited therefrom as at todate, indicating in each case –
 - (i) the number of employees;
 - (ii) the sums disbursed, and
 - (iii) if any of them has laid-off employees;
- (b) the names of the consultants involved, if any, and
- (c) the limitations, if any, imposed on the remuneration and other benefits accruing to the top management.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, to understand Government actions to protect people by saving jobs it is essential to recall that we are living in

exceptional times with unprecedented events.

It is by now well-known that we are living through the worst and most serious global economic challenge since the 1930's. As a sign of these exceptional times is that General Motors, long the dominant car maker in the World and associated with the strength of the US economy, now appears on its way to bankruptcy. Similarly, in the birthplace and major home of capitalism, the UK and US, Government is now intervening heavily in the market including nationalization of banks and taking controlling interests in large corporations such as Chrysler. Everywhere, unorthodox policies are emerging in countries that are combating the ill effects of this Great Recession. Our efforts to save jobs must be seen in this global context and it is important to take into account the praise and support our actions are unlocking from the international community.

Indeed one of the most troubling aspects is a severe jobs recession that is unfolding across the globe with global unemployment rising at an alarming pace leading to sharp reversals in social progress in many countries.

International and regional forecasts of economic performance are equally bleak. The predictions, one after the other, keep on getting more pessimistic. The latest IMF forecasts put global GDP growth at negative 1.3 percent and in our region South Africa has surprised yesterday by the depth of the recession over 6 percent and is suffering with unemployment at about 24 percent.

It is now feared that the recession will cost 100 million jobs and trap over 100 million more in poverty with 40 million people already out of work. A human and social crisis is unfolding where the best bonus to workers is to keep one's job.

To keep their jobs, many hitherto unimaginable approaches are being adopted across the globe. To preserve jobs, workers have to cut their wages, accept shorter working week and even involuntary unpaid leave. No country is spared. It is happening in strong high income OECD countries like the US, the UK, Japan, Germany and France as well as in developing countries like China and India and emerging economies that were star performers less than a year ago as in the Baltics and Central Europe. Even Nordic countries and Canada, long world leaders on the Human Development Index, are not spared.

Our need to respond is heightened because we are an export platform and particularly badly hurt when World Trade declines by 11 percent - its sharpest fall in 80 years. The collapse of long haul world tourism travel, due to economic and health reasons, further affects us.

Finally, our economy has been benefiting from unprecedented flows of FDI in response to our reforms. This has driven never before seen levels of job creation in our country but is now under threat.

Mr Speaker: May I be allowed to interrupt the hon. Minister. May I be allowed to intervene at this stage? I think that the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment has over the last 2-3 days explained fully all the reasons why he has had to bring the stimulus package; this has been fully debated. I think, according to our rules, we have to stick to the question although some latitude is

given. I have given the Minister enough latitude. Now, I think he has to come to the question.

Dr. Sithanen: I have no problem, Mr Speaker, Sir, if there is more time given to the hon. Leader of the Opposition to ask questions.

Developing countries are expected to decline by 80 percent compared to 2007 figures. Unfortunately our scope to respond is limited by the small size of our domestic market which means instruments available to China, India and even South Africa are either ineffective or have only weak impact. This has been a key constraint in developing a Mauritius approach that draws us on the best from the international response but, at the same time, adapted to our needs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the best way to preserve social cohesion, safeguard progress with human development and protect families and people is to preserve jobs. This is what we have done through the nine ways that I have announced in the Budget.

As regards part (a) of the question, the Mechanism for Transitional Support has directly saved 2,783 jobs by keeping 5 enterprises going that were at the breakdown point. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is important to repeat that we are not doling out money to enterprises. Instead, Government is investing responsibly in temporarily distressed, but viable enterprises to both save jobs as the best way to protect people and to generate a fair return for the taxpayer.

Government is participating through four channels -

- (i) investing through SIC in debentures at 5 percent interest and redeemable within 5 years;
- (ii) providing limited guarantees to enable additional lending by commercial banks;
- (iii) taking equity stakes in the company, and
- (iv) purchasing assets to provide firms with necessary liquidity.

As announced in the budget, we are also widening our interventions to broaden to all sectors and deepen through instruments.

For the MTSP, before Government intervenes, there is a due diligence exercise that involves thorough investigation and analysis by independent consultants and discussions with the company's bankers as well as the main shareholders. Assistance is provided conditional on the firm taking measures to control costs including pay and bonuses to management. Moreover, until Government assistance has been paid back, no dividends can be declared and non-revenue generating assets need to be reduced to minimum. The independent consultants are also tasked with regular monitoring to ensure that conditions are being met and the enterprise is taking steps to remain viable. This includes adhering to the agreed cost-cutting plan that involves the above set of measures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, five companies where agreement has been reached so far are -

1. World Knits: 1,700 jobs saved with an investment of Rs40 m. in debentures out of a total of Rs100 m. No worker, as far I as know, has been laid off as part of the restructuring;

2. Beachwear Exports Company: 160 jobs saved with an investment of Rs15 m. in debentures and an acquisition of an industrial building at a cost of Rs50 m. plus charges. No worker has been laid off as part of the restructuring and banks are providing an additional Rs15 m. facility;
3. RS Fashion: 300 jobs saved with Rs3 m. guarantee of additional financing from the commercial banks to meet its working capital needs until 30 June 2009. No worker has been laid off as part of the proposed restructuring whereby the company had made a request for Rs100 m. involving asset swap. However on the basis of the report of the financial analyst, it was considered that only an interim package of a total of Rs8 m. be provided of which the shareholder will inject Rs2 m. the banks providing Rs6 m. with a guarantee from SIC of 50% of the Rs6 m, that is, Rs3 m.
4. RS Denim: 325 jobs saved with financing by SIC of working capital up to Rs30 m. by June 2009. The request has been made by the main lender, namely DBSA - Development Bank of Southern Africa. This is a coordinated intervention with the principal creditor, that is, the DBSA to ensure that the company can be sold as an ongoing concern to preserve jobs. Placing the company into receivership now would have given the wrong signal to the international buyers of our textiles and clothing exports. MTSP along with major creditors decided to provide the breathing space to find a buyer to prevent a distress sale. The facilities provided are subject to the stakeholders' committee overseeing the conduct of the business and coordinating the sale of the business. An interim manager has been appointed by the Stakeholders' Committee. The main shareholder of RS Denim has voluntarily relinquished all his rights to the new management of the company. The position of taxpayers has been protected: the Rs30 m. committed by Government will rank above all other creditors to be repaid from the proceeds of sale. To date no worker has been laid off as part of the restructuring, and
5. Avant (Mauritius): 298 jobs saved with an investment from SIC of Rs10 m. in debentures and Rs4 m. in the form of guarantees and Rs10 m. of additional financing by commercial banks. No worker, to my knowledge, has been laid off as part of the restructuring.

Concerning part (b), leading accounting firms were approached and those that agreed to a reduced rate of Rs4,000 per hour which is half their normal rate, were selected to support the MTSP due diligence process. These firms are Baker Tilly, BDO/DCDM, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, Grant Thornton, KPMG. To assist SMEs to prepare for their due diligence process, the MTSP has hired an independent consultant, Mr Michael Lim with wide experience from Enterprise Mauritius and State Bank of Mauritius, for a determined period of 6 months at Rs 75,000 per month.

As regards part (c) Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have just mentioned, there are conditions on the remuneration and other benefits accruing to the top management as part of the cost cutting exercise. The term sheet signed by all parties contains both conditions precedent and conditions subsequent to ensure compliance. There is also a

monitoring exercise to enable adherence to the terms and conditions of the agreement.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister of Finance - whether there is available - what is the expected total amount to be disbursed to private firms under that programme and how much of it Government estimates that will be recouped?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a difficult question. Nobody has the answer. I would like to find the person who has this answer. Basically, it is about risk and reward and I am sure that the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows that. I have given the figures for the five companies where the money has already been disbursed. You can see, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we have used three instruments-

- (i) debenture at the rate of interest of 5%;
- (ii) a guarantee for a facility given by commercial banks, and
- (iii) an asset swap for a company.

You can see in the case of asset swap we are guaranteed already because the company wanted Rs80 m. for that building; SIC has paid Rs50 m. so, there is a guarantee in case of a failure. In many cases we would like, as Government, that these enterprises succeed, maintain jobs, pay back the money and we are back to normal but there is no guarantee; the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

What are the risks and rewards? The rewards of the scheme, Mr Speaker, Sir, are that we can save jobs, protect people and they will gain their livelihood. We know 45,000 people lost their jobs between 2003 and 2005 and this has inflicted a lot of suffering on 80% of them who were women. So, this is the human toll that we are trying to avoid. The risk, maybe some will not make it. But I have said in this House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, in some cases, we will not be able to save these jobs. There is one case where we thought that the model was not viable and sustainable and the financial institutions were too greedy, we did not support it. It is difficult to answer this question. What can we do Mr Speaker, Sir, is to come to the House on a regular basis to say how much money has been spent, how much has been provided by the banks, whether the conditions have been adhered to and then it will depend to a large extent on what happens to the world economy.

Let me give the hon. Leader of the Opposition an example because it is from his Constituency. There is one company that straddles his Constituency and my Constituency and that of my colleagues, hon. Xavier Luc Duval and hon. Ms. Deerpalsing. The gentleman came to see me, Mr Speaker, Sir; he has been a loyal supporter of Mauritius for 25 years. He is leaving. He came to see me, I told him: "why don't you stay?" He said, "Minister, I love your country, I am leaving for three reasons. First, the demand for my products has gone down because I sell to the UK market. Second, the rupee has appreciated. Third, we are going to China, to Bangladesh and to India where we are getting a subsidy on export earnings."

Mr Bérenger: Can I know from the hon. Minister, before money is extended to those firms, who takes the final decision? Is it a committee? Is it the Ministry?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me explain the process because I think this is a very fair question. They apply to the MTSP Committee and there is a desk at

Enterprise Mauritius, now there will be two desks one at Enterprise Mauritius and one at SEHDA because we want to give dedicated service to the SME. There is a first analysis that is carried out by the committee; there is investigation and analysis and then there is an independent financial analyst who makes a detailed analysis of the long-term viability of the company. *Est-ce que le problème est conjoncturel ou structurel?* Then on the basis of the report submitted by the independent financial analyst, the committee brings together the shareholder, the banks, SIC and the independent consultant. Then the decision is made by this committee after they have reached agreement with the banks and the shareholder. Let me give the example of one company, Mr Speaker, Sir. They reached agreement with World Knits after the independent financial expert submitted that it has a future. So, Rs40 m. were put by the banks, Rs40 m. by the Government through the SIC and Rs20 m. by the shareholder.

The final decision is made by the committee. Let me be very fair, Mr Speaker, Sir. There will be some risks; there is no decision you take in life that is a riskless proposition. But the alternative is basically massive job layoff. If there is massive job layoff there will be social crisis, a human crisis and there could be social upheaval.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether among the five firms that have already received public funds from either Government or the SIC there is anywhere there are no guarantees, there has been no asset swap and no collaterals?

Dr. Sithanen: Again let us look at the instruments Mr Speaker, Sir. In the case of the asset swap, the company has already sold the building to the SIC. In the case of debenture, a debenture is a loan at 5% rate of interest and then there is a ranking of the payment of this loan. In one case, it is a small amount of Rs3 m., it is a guarantee given to the banks for 50% of the amount lent.

Now, the conditions put are basically the conditions precedent and the conditions subsequent, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are a lot of conditions that are put as they need to take certain decisions to reduce the costs and they need to take certain decisions to repay the debenture. The guarantee is a small amount, Mr Speaker, Sir, if this is what the Leader of Opposition has in mind, but for the large amount that has forked out there are guarantees given in terms of assets and other collaterals.

Mr Bérenger: Let me move to two of the five firms which have been mentioned, World Knits: we have been told how much money World Knits has received. The hon. Minister had told us that an inquiry is on the cross shareholding between that company and another where certain events have taken place. Can we have more details about the cross shareholding which the hon. Minister, himself, referred to?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the committee has issued a communiqué and I am sure that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has had the time to read the communiqué. There is cross shareholding, but the information given to me, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that there is no interparty relation between these two companies. Let me also inform the House that one of the subsequent conditions imposed on World Knits is that they have to dispose of their expenses for leasing of cars and these have been transferred from the company to the individuals themselves. It is unfortunate that this has happened but the money given to World Knits has not been used for that

particular purpose.

Mr Bérenger: In the case of RS Denim, before money from the SIC went to that firm, can I know whether an evaluation - and if yes, by whom - of their assets has been made and whether it is a fact that, in the past, RS Denim gave as guarantee State lands?

Dr. Sithanen: I am not aware of whether State lands have been given as guarantee, but let me make it very clear to this House, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is a good project. It was approved by both the former Government and by this Government, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are three companies that are within the parastatal set-up that have supported RS Denim. First, it is the National Equity Fund. Mr Speaker, Sir, the decision was taken in May 2005 to support RS Denim, to the tune of Rs100 m. for the main reason that there were two very important banks that were supporting the project, DBSA and Barclays. Second, the DBM has supported this project to the tune of Rs50 m. and the decision was taken in October 2004. Third, SIC has supported to the tune of Rs75 m., the decision was taken in September 2005. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, because it was a good project, both the former Government and this Government have supported it. Out of the Rs200 m., Rs150 m. were committed by the former Government and Rs75 m. by this one. They have had two unlucky circumstances. First, there has been cost overrun which has been quite high and second, when they open, they hit the recession. Now what has happened Mr Speaker, Sir? The DBSA, which I am sure the hon. Leader of the Opposition will agree with me, is a leading financial institution in Southern Africa. They are very concerned; they have taken over the management of the company. They have appointed an independent manager and, in fact, things have improved since. They have taken over and instead of selling it at a distressed price where people might lose their job; we have agreed to support them but we have a first rank guarantee in case it is sold and Government will get its money back, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now with respect to the point that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has made on land, I don't know whether the building has been constructed on State land because we have many difficulties on this issue, whether the land, itself, can be used as a guarantee. Because, otherwise, what happens is that we cannot remove the buildings and you keep the land. I don't know whether this is what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has in mind because very often, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the specific circumstances, as it is an immovable property; they can use the land as some sort of guarantee. I don't know whether it has happened in this particular case I have to check.

Mr Bérenger: I have not got an answer as far as the asset worth as at to date of the company concerned.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the information I have is on the total indebtedness of the five companies. The highest one is RS Denim at Rs 800 m., then Avant (Mauritius) at Rs48 m., Beachwear Exports Company at Rs70 m., RS Fashion at Rs70 m. and World Knits at Rs300 m. These are the indebtedness. I don't have the figures as far as the asset is concerned but let me make very clear, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the case of RS Denim, the asset is worth more than Rs1 billion because of that building itself.

Mr Bérenger: We have to check on the worth of the assets, the hon. Minister

has made it clear that hundreds of millions of rupees from the National Equity Fund, DBM and SIC have gone into the RS Denim. He said, himself, that there has been massive project cost escalation. My information is that the project evaluation moves from some Rs800 m. to more than Rs1,300 billion. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether, before fresh additional money is put into that, because all this happened over the recent years not at the start of the project, a full inquiry has been made into why the project jumped from Rs 800 m. to Rs1.2 m; whether second hand equipment was purchased and overvalued and that, therefore, there have been illegal transactions, there has been diversion of funds including of SIC, DBM and NEF.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me be very candid as the hon. Leader of the Opposition very often teases me. I am not happy on how it has been done. Having said that, Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to act also in a very responsible manner. Project evaluations were carried out prior to this Government coming into power and prior to me assuming the office of Ministry of Finance. The project and the detailed business plans were presented to all three organisations way back in 2003-2004. Barclays, which is a banking institution of repute, and DBSA supported it, Mr Speaker, Sir. The NEF (National Equity Fund) as well as the DBM have already agreed to support the project. And often you are in a very tricky situation. We have had an inquiry, the DBSA also has done an inquiry but, at the end of the day, the project has to be completed. I believe *c'est un excellent outil industriel*. Maybe the hon. Leader of the Opposition is right that we have to investigate the cause of the cost overrun, but as far as these three organisations are concerned, they have secured their collateral. We have made sure that the Rs30 m. additional - the only additional that we have given - Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Rs30 m. When the DBSA - a huge team - came to see me and said that they are putting the company in bankruptcy. I told them: "look, you will send the wrong signal; you will put all these people out of work isn't it possible to do something?" They said: "you have to give us money". I say: "we cannot give you money". This was very clear. This is where they start discussing and they said: "could we have a facility of Rs30 m. until we find un *preneur*". But then, we put the condition that we want to have this Rs30 m. back and this would be a first rank security. This is how it has unfolded. Let me say again, I am not happy the way it has happened. But you know we inherited that baby, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we had to look after the baby, unfortunately.

Mr Bérenger: I am not challenging the viability of the project at the beginning. I have never said that. It was a viable project. What I am asking is whether credible investigations will take place as to the use of these millions of rupees from NEF, DBM, SIC which, I repeat, according to my information, have been swindled; second hand machinery has been overvalued and money has gone where it has ended. Will a full criminal investigation be carried out?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the DBSA is carrying out an investigation and we will support the DBSA in order to find out exactly what happened. They have also been requested, at different stages of project implementation, to inject additional fund and they reached a stage where they said that they don't have additional fund. So, we have to make sure that public money that has been committed and invested by both the former Government and this Government is protected and, at the same time, we have

to make sure that the additional funding of Rs30 m. is protected in the event that they have to dispose of the assets. Our priority, Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to finding out what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has stated, we have to keep *cet outil de production* which is very good for the region. Unfortunately its opening has coincided with the recession and we have to maintain the jobs of people.

Mr Bérenger: Concerning the firm RS Denim, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware ...

Dr. Sithanen: Which firm?

Mr Bérenger: Same firm RS Denim! Whether he has information, which I have, to the effect that as at now, end of May, RS Denim owes the Central Electricity Board more than Rs8 m.?

Dr. Sithanen: I am not aware of the specific liability that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has mentioned, but it seems to me, Mr Speaker, Sir, when the officer of the DBSA came to see me, they did mention that they were not covering their operating expenses at that time. I was informed this morning, Mr Speaker, Sir, that since the change in management and the appointment of a new gentleman from South Africa to look after it, things have started to improve. I did give to the hon. Leader of the Opposition the indebtedness of RS Denim which is at Rs800 m. so I am sure part of that indebtedness could be current liabilities in not paying the utilities that the hon. Member mentioned.

Mr Bérenger: Can I know the names of the consultants that were involved in those two cases, World Knits and RS Denim?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the case of RS Denim, the job has been carried out by DBSA itself and in the case of RS Fashion it is Mr Satar Hajee Abdoula who is a consultant. For World Knits, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is BDO/DCDM, represented by Mr Ebrahim, for Avant (Mauritius) it is KPMG represented by Mr Deven Padiachy and for Beachwear it is BDO/DCDM represented by Mr Ebrahim.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister how many applications have been received from SMEs, since when and why is it that none has so far benefited from the ASP? I hope the Minister will not come back again to the definition of SME, because we all know that under the company law, there is a definition with regard to SME and companies other than the small private companies.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member cannot ask the question and give the answer at the same time. He asks questions and I give answer. Mr Speaker, Sir, we know how tricky the definition of SME can be. There is one company with 160 employers. Some people tell me: "you have to look at the number of employees", others that we have to look at turnover. Yesterday, I chaired a meeting. My colleagues, the Minister of Industry, Science & Research, the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development & Family Welfare and the Minister of Business, Enterprise & Cooperatives were there. We took a decision, because for seven years, there have been reports on how to classify SMEs. I read a report of 100 pages from the experts. I was more confused at the end, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, we have taken the decision that henceforth all companies that are below Rs10 m. would be classified as S, all

companies between Rs10 and Rs50 m would be classified as M...

(Interruptions)

Turnover! And above Rs50 m. would be large. I must say that there are some that have applied, but the difficulty we are facing with that scheme is that many are individuals. So, that's why we have introduced in the Budget a scheme that we want them to be corporatized then it becomes easier. However, there is Rs100 m. from the other scheme which has been used to help the SMEs and I can give a list of all these SMEs that have benefited. In fact, I did give some indication the day before yesterday of how they have benefited. The problem we are facing with this one is that you need to discuss with a company and we are encouraging the small business to corporatize. And that's why we are waiving the Land Transfer Tax, the registration duties and when they remove their assets from an individual company and put it in a corporate entity.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has stated the state of the indebtedness of the so-called distress and viable companies which have been afforded financial assistance under the ASP after due intelligence. We have learned, for example, that RS Denim has got a debt of Rs800 m. plus. So, can we have an indication as to the amount owed to the DBM, the State Bank of Mauritius and also the National Equity Fund and the security given for the amount owed to these bank institutions?

Dr. Sithanen: I have given the answer already, Mr Speaker, Sir. I gave the amount. I also said when it was approved. Obviously, the security is always on the assets of the company. In some cases, the shareholders have given their personal asset as collateral.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that we do not know the extent or the length of the crisis, can we have an idea of the lifespan, the duration of the breathing space given to each company by the funds that we have provided?

Dr. Sithanen: One of the most important criteria for such type of support is F - flexibility. There is no one size fits all, Mr Speaker, Sir. It has to be temporary, targeted, and timely, it also has to be flexible and it has to be sustainable. Mr Speaker, Sir, in the case of RS Denim, I think the facility I have mentioned is until 30 June 2009. What will happen after 30 June 2009? Nobody knows! If someone knows, Mr Speaker, Sir, my office is open. That's why we have put more money in this Budget to save jobs and that's why we have put more money also in training. We hope it will not happen. This is risk and reward analysis, Mr Speaker, Sir. The reward is: we can save jobs. The risk that the hon. Member mentioned exists and it exists all over the world. Look, Mr Speaker, Sir, at GM, the icon of American capitalism. For six months they have been fighting to save GM. This morning I read the icon of capitalism, *la fièreté des Américains*, is collapsing. Who could have forecast this, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Mr Bérenger: Two last questions, Mr Speaker, Sir! Again, RS Denim, the main shareholder, is a backbencher of the Labour Party. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he knows that the Development Bank of Southern Africa is the main involved party in this entire affair? Can I know from the hon. Minister whether he has information as to who was in the recent past and may be still representative of DBSA

in Mauritius?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know Mr Speaker, Sir, I will find out. But let me inform the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the DBSA, which is the main creditor, was very concerned and it caused the main shareholder to relinquish all of his rights, not only in the company, but also in the management. Subsequent to this they have appointed a new manager and, if I am not mistaken, I speak under correction, Mr Speaker, Sir, they have appointed a firm to look after their interests. I don't know whether it is one of these top five consulting firms but I will find out. They would like to dispose of the assets and we have asked them whether they can do it in an orderly way instead of doing it in a distressed way *pour sauver cet outil de production* and keep the jobs of the workers.

Mr Bérenger: Can we be provided with the name of that firm which the hon. Minister has referred to and would he care to check whether Mr Amédée Darga is not and may be still the representative of DBSA in Mauritius?

Dr. Sithanen: No, I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will check.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I am really surprised that the hon. Minister of Finance knows the debts of RS Denim - massive Rs800 m. debt and yet he does not know the value of the assets as at today of RS Denim? Can I know whether any examination of the assets worth of the RS Denim has been carried out and if yes, by whom?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't have the answer to that specific question, Mr Speaker, Sir, which, in fact, does not arise from the main question of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Let me say a final thing, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think it is the last question. It is not easy. We are navigating with very little visibility, predictability and heightened volatility, Mr Speaker, Sir. Nobody knows with certainty what the depth is, what is the length of the recession, end of the recession, Mr Speaker, Sir. What we are trying to do is to save jobs, but something else I must tell the House. We are trying to save vital sectors of the economy also. This is important. Many people seem to forget those vital sectors of the economy. We are trying to save textile and clothing. There will be some risks; we are trying to do our best to mitigate the risks and make sure that we have a judicious use of public funds, Mr Speaker, Sir.

MOTION SUSPENSION OF SO 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, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebejaun) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(12.13 p.m.)

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.

The Minister of Housing and Lands (Dr. A. Kasenally): Mr Speaker, Sir, since this Government came to power this country has been subjected to a series of shocks. The massive reduction by 36% in the price of our sugar export to the EU, the dismantling of the multi-fibre agreement and the oil crisis has been followed by an energy crisis, which generated a food crisis followed by now a financial meltdown and economic crisis.

The 2009 Budget is, in fact, a landmark in our history as it marks the breaking away from the traditional July to June fiscal year to one which matches the calendar year.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. I don't think there is any need to distribute the list of orators to all Members of the House, please.

Dr. Kasenally: But, more importantly, this Budget proposes a series of measures. In fact, there are no less than 200 measures aimed at ensuring that our country, through strong State and public participation, faces this dignity and honours the challenges posed by the world's deep recession

The world is currently going through an unprecedented economic slowdown never experienced before. What started as a sub-prime mortgage crisis that caused the crash of the home market in the USA and also in the United Kingdom has proved to be a global meltdown which has set the financial world into a spin with consequential bankruptcy of prestigious financial institutions. Major industries all over the world went nearly bust throwing millions of workers out of a job. In Europe, countries like Iceland and some East European countries have nearly gone bankrupt. The economy of the world has started to shrink. Even the G20, comprising the world's richest countries, has no clear idea of how to proceed as the situation is so unpredictable. After the long nights of deliberation, I understand, some long knives also were brandished, and with great difficulty, they came up with a consensual decision of tightening up financial control, establishing a regulatory and credible financial mechanism. They also decided to target the tax havens. Following the G20 Summit, the non-compliant tax havens have been named and shamed in the first instance. Mauritius was instead classified in the white list which meant that it has a viable and strong financial institution, thus adding to the credibility and soundness of our financial and regulatory institutions. No

sensible and knowledgeable patriot can deny that these are indeed hard times. And these hard times constitute both a formidable challenge for the nation to demonstrate its capacity to adapt and to resist shocks and a great opportunity to show its mettle in weathering the storm and in preparing itself for the post-global crisis period.

It is no longer a question of Government's or private sector's concern. *Nous sommes tous sans exception concernés*. Time is of essence. All of us need, as one body, to lift ourselves up from our boot straps, roll up our sleeves and work smarter and with more productivity in all walks of life to spare our country damaging turbulences gaping us wide from abroad. It cannot be business as usual. There must be a change in the mindset. We need the right mix of intelligence, commitment and energy as a nation to keep our country firmly and soundly on its legs.

Nothing happens by mere coincidence. If we have had a resilient economy up to now it is due to the farsightedness of the Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment who, in the face of such financial and economic quagmire, took the bold and reformative decision to turn around our economy as far back as 2006. He was proactive and introduced his stimulus package well before the economy of the world started its downturn. For the past few days, we have been listening to a litany of acrimonious recriminations against Government by some pseudo-experts, some outside the House, but this country is waiting for them to come up with concrete and implementable alternatives. I understand that somebody suggested that we should convert our reserves into gold; something which even the rich oil producing countries are hesitating and are avoiding despite the fact that they are overburdened with wealth funds. If we give way to unreasonable and unsustainable demands, the country will simply go bankrupt and I don't think anybody in this House or outside wants us to reach that state.

It is in this context that the Budget aims at riding out the general crisis, saving jobs, protecting people and at preparing recovery. Mr Speaker, Sir, food and shelter are undoubtedly two of the most basic human needs and I consider I am privileged to hold the portfolio which is *incontournable* in addressing both needs. This Government is committed to achieving its objective of *un toit pour tous*. My Ministry will be allocating shortly some 553 low cost housing units to low income groups on six sites across the island. In addition, construction of some 550 low cost housing units will start soon.

I must confess that compliance with the provisions of existing legislation and guidelines regarding procurement causes delays in project implementation. I am sure that the measures announced by my colleague regarding procurement procedures will certainly help in reducing these delays.

The casting of roof slab and the building materials schemes introduced in 1998 under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Dr. the hon. Navin Ramgoolam, was another milestone in Government's endeavour to assist those down the ladder. These schemes were introduced to assist our citizens who are downtrodden but who strive to construct a house on their own. For the period starting July 2008 to date, around Rs168 m. have been disbursed to some 3031 heads of households both in Mauritius and Rodrigues, because the hon. Member from Rodrigues was complaining that they

have been left out. But, as far as the Ministry of Housing is concerned, we have been extending this casting of slabs which is a tangible help to those underprivileged. No effort is being spared for around Rs47.6 m. to be disbursed to some 1008 beneficiaries before the end of this financial year. This is not *un effet d'annonce* but a fact.

In line with its policy of democratisation and empowering people, this Government amended the State Land Act to enable owners of the ex-CHA housing units to become owners of their plot of land on which stand their housing units. Out of some 16,525 owners where there is no impediment to the land being sold, around 10,501 applications have been received. To date about 8,700 letters of intent have already been issued to these applicants. Officers of my Ministry have gone to each and every CHA housing estate to capture and encourage every possible beneficiary to come forward and benefit from this measure.

In its furtherance to facilitate access to land to very low income earners, works are in progress for some 242 fully serviced sites to be allocated to eligible beneficiaries.

Land is one of our most precious resources. Imagination turns ordinary land into a landmark. In April 2008, Government entered into an agreement with the Mauritius Sugar Producers' Association on the implementation of the sugar sector reform wherein it was, *inter alia*, agreed that the latter would grant a total of 2,000 *arpents* of land to the State to be used for social and agricultural diversification. In its farsightedness and wisdom, Government has decided that half of the 2,000 *arpents* from the above deal would be allocated for social housing programme. To that effect, some 156 *arpents* of land have been identified.

Capitalism may have won, but capitalists have started re-examining how to adapt themselves to the 21st century. The question of how to create prosperity and social justice is at the heart of the debate. Whether capitalism care about the poor and the disadvantaged are legitimate questions. At this junction, it is high time that the debate focuses on solutions rather than ideology and that we provide economically viable solutions to social problems.

This is precisely what my colleague wants to achieve in this Budget in making provision for all profitable firms to either spend 2% of their profits on Corporate Social Responsibility activities approved by Government or to transfer these funds to Government to be used in the fight against poverty including social housing. More importantly, the private sector is being called upon to use its resources to deal with the poor as consumers and not burdens.

Charity begins at home. This Government is leading by an example. At a time when financial resources are scarce, particularly in the public sector, Rs100 m. have been earmarked from the MID Fund to co-finance a Rs280 m. programme with the CEB, CWA and WMA to clean up the NHDC housing estates and rehabilitate the water, electricity and wastewater infrastructure. This will ensure that the NHDC housing estates will be provided with a congenial environment.

Waterproofing works will be carried out shortly in seven housing estates at an estimated cost of Rs63 m. These works will relieve some 3089 families residing in

these housing estates from much difficulty and hardship encountered due to leakage of water from roofs, shower trays and canopies, water ingress through joints, wall cracks and discharge pipes.

Various representations have been made by families occupying ground floor at Plaine Verte, Malaysian II and those residing at Vuillemin estates to the effect that each time there is heavy rainfall, their houses are flooded due to lack of provision for water evacuation. Cut-off drains will be constructed at these two housing estates. This measure, which is estimated to cost Rs1 m., will bring a long term solution to the families.

Residents at Beau Vallon housing estates have been complaining about loose spalls of concrete both from inside and outside the housing units. This situation represents a potential danger to some 216 families. Furthermore, the exposed iron reinforcement will inevitably rust thereby affecting the very structure of the buildings. For the safety of these families and to avoid further damages to the iron reinforcement, remedial works will be undertaken soon. The estimated cost is of Rs2.8 m.

In a time of dire economic situation, this unprecedented gesture bears testimony to the fact that those, who are at the lowest rung of the ladder, are at the heart of this Government's concern. However, no institution is an island. Government, on its own or even in partnership with the private sector, will never be able to attend to all needs. The civil society has a very important role to play. I wish to seize this opportunity to make an appeal to the owners of the NHDC houses that it is the duty and responsibility of each one of them to ensure that their own living environment is properly maintained and where "*il fait bon vivre*". This Government wants to assist but does not want to create dependence and rob people of their dignity.

It is high time owners of NHDC housing estates assume their responsibilities and organise their syndics as provided by the law of '*co-propriété*'. These houses are theirs and they must from now endeavour to maintain them. To that effect, the housing unit of my Ministry is undertaking a proactive campaign of inculcating the notion of syndic into the *mœurs* of our NHDC citizens. I understand, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition said, it is a very difficult nut to crack but I think, with the help of each and everybody, and with the goodwill of everyone, we can crack that nut. Following the Finance Act of 2006, 1164, out of the 1275 *campement* site lessees, have opted to enter into the new 60-years lease. The revenue thus collected for the period of July 2008 to date is around Rs757 m.

To better reflect the market of the land and to ensure that the State obtains a fair return on its prime land, the individual site policy has been reviewed and aligned with that of the new Campement Site Lease Policy. The point has been raised that we are leasing it for "*quelques sous ou deux cash*". I think we don't even see these pieces of money nowadays.

To ensure that no workers are laid off due to the present difficult economic situation, Government will, in regard to hotel reconstruction, consider refunding either 50% of the wage bill of the difference between new rental and old rental for hotels whose rentals have been recently increased under the new Industrial Lease Policy.

Government has also agreed to the acquisition of hotel rooms and villas by individual foreign and Mauritian investors on condition that they obligatorily lease back hotel rooms and villas to hotel operators.

Furthermore, payment of increases in rental will be suspended for small hotels on less than one hectare, with less than 50 bedrooms, which are facing financial difficulties. Arrears in rental for small hotels will be rescheduled to be effective as from January 2011 in five yearly instalments, whereas for other hotels the rescheduling period will be three years with no moratorium.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the health and good living conditions of the citizens is high on the agenda of this Government. My Ministry has already purchased land from Rose Belle Sugar Estate to relocate the inhabitants in the vicinity of Mare Chicose landfill. Moreover, the State Lands Act will be amended shortly to ensure that the rights of property of these inhabitants are respected.

In the same spirit, my Ministry has already identified land at Chamouny to relocate some 44 families who are exposed to the risk of sea swells at Rivière des Galets, Petit Bien Housing Estate.

In line with the Memorandum of Understanding signed in October 2005, there has been during the last four years sustained action for the implementation of hydrographic survey projects with the assistance of the Government of India.

As from February 2009, Mauritius has adhered to the North Indian Ocean Hydrographic Commission.

My Ministry envisages setting up a hydrographic unit, with the help of Government of India. I wish to seize this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the Government and people of the Republic of India with whose support updated nautical charts for economic use, research and safe navigation will be on sale shortly in Mauritius, and the proceeds will be shared by both Governments. This has been possible because of the special relationship of our Prime Minister with the Government of the Republic of India.

Planning is a key area of work in my Ministry, and its importance is becoming more evident with the concept of Maurice Ile Durable. In fact, sustainable development has become one of the most important agendas on the global stage. A holistic approach to planning aims at providing development approaches that are not only environmentally sensitive, but are also socially and financially responsive.

During the last financial year, we have initiated some important tasks and projects that can address many sectorial and individual initiatives through effective planning and meet our target towards economic development and empowerment.

The following projects are under way -

- Preparation of Planning Policy Guidance on IRS and RES
- Preparation of Detailed Schemes at Palmar and St Antoine
- Preparation of new Outline Schemes for Five Municipal Council Areas
- Review and modification to District Council Outline Planning Schemes.

Actually, only this morning, I signed the document to be released to public for consultation for five District Councils -

- New Land Planning and Development Bill
- Interim Revision of Quatre Bornes Outline Scheme
- Contribution to Streamlining of Permits Planning Policy Guidance on IRS/RES and Gaming Houses which is causing some distress to people in some towns.

With all the gloom and doom scenarios, there is always a silver lining over the dark clouds. The experts are already noting a flicker of recovery. Yesterday, Bloomberg stated that a survey of Business Economics predicts that the US recession will probably end in the third quarter of this year and will begin to expand in the fourth quarter. So, we have to tighten our belts and brace ourselves to weather the storm for 'Come what come may, time runs through the roughest hour', as Shakespeare puts it. There are other indicators, which I have seen this morning from Bloomberg and it says: the US recession will end third quarter. This morning, we were talking about Stimulus Package and even USA Government is in deep problem; negotiators in Berlin, working throughout the night, fail to finalise the rescue of General Motors. So, you can understand the difficulty we use to have before giving any Stimulus Package as indicated recently by my colleague, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment. There is also a big problem to balance Budget, and the New Zealand's Finance Minister deferred tax cut to curb Budget Deficit, prompting the poor to raise the country's credit rating outlook. The Federal Reserves of the United States stepped up asset purchases to prevent its balance sheet from contracting until policy makers are convinced that an economic recovery has taken place. As you can see, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a lot of juggling going on and, in fact, all the economic thinkers and deciders, various Governments in various countries, are unable to set their targets precisely for the very simple reason that nobody knows what is happening. But it is comforting to observe that there is a flicker of hope. Let's hope that the recession will go down, but I must also sound a note of caution. As the economy of big countries like India and China starts getting on, there will a surge in the demand of oil. I hope that, after the financial crisis, we will not have a problem of oil crisis. Fortunately, here also, there is hope, because a lot of speculators and fund hedgers have got a massive stock of oil, which they have stocked in huge containers and are lying somewhere in Europe and around the Atlantic, ready to be discharged as the price goes above \$50.

We hope this will stabilise the energy market in the post recoveries period, and we will not find ourselves in another energy crisis, which again will trigger a food crisis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget has had the excellent technical expertise of Dr. Rama Sithanen. Dr. Rama Sithanen has put his heart in it; and; as you know; he is not a very ordinary person. He is one of the very few Ministers of Finance who have been invited to attend the OECD Conference on economic outlook, later this month, in South Africa. The Prime Minister has put his heart, mind and has been spending endless long hours day and night. The overriding consideration for him has been to

protect the poor and the downtrodden. That is what we have pledged to the poor Mr Speaker, Sir, and that is what we shall deliver.

Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir.

(12.41 p.m)

Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Mr Speaker, Sir, I just listened to the hon. Minister of Housig and Lands and, in fact, again, he is only announcing 563 housing units soon. We know how soon is soon for this Government!

L'année dernière on nous avait promis 774 Firinga *type houses* mais il n'y a rien eu. Cette année-ci, encore une fois, malheureusement, on vient nous annoncer que nous aurons 533 et que, probablement, il y en aura d'autres après. *How soon is soon!* Ce gouvernement aborde le dernier tournant de son mandat, il termine sa quatrième année aussi je me demande *how soon is soon*. On verra, dans les jours qui viennent, si finalement il y aura vraiment certaines concrétisations au niveau de la politique du logement M. le président.

Ce budget 2009 du gouvernement de l'Alliance Sociale ne fait, en fait, que confirmer sa politique antisociale. Je me pose la question: à quoi reconnaît-on un bon budget? Un bon budget, M. le président, prend en considération l'attente, le besoin, l'avenir du peuple dans son ensemble. Un bon budget donne à la population plus de moyens et de possibilités tout en préservant un avenir durable dans le long terme, sans pour cela ajouter à la souffrance des plus démunis et des faibles de la société. Il est possible, M. le président, dans les conditions actuelles où nous vivons, d'assainir la situation dans le plus long terme possible; de limiter les dettes en réduisant la pression du jour et en trouvant des solutions tempérées pour le long terme. Croyez-moi, M. le président, ce n'est pas un exercice compliqué lorsqu'on n'est pas pressé de tout faire dans le court terme et si on n'a pas aussi des *hidden agendas*. Je comprends que la souffrance des gens n'est pas le souci du gouvernement. Le gouvernement veut des résultats comptables, même s'il faut que cela appauvrisse la population, massacre les travailleurs, contraigne les veuves et les handicapés; tout ce qui finalement est antisocial.

M. le président, je ne voudrais pas me contenter à ne dire que des choses sans pour cela apporter certains éléments de ma réflexion qui conferment cette politique antisociale. Commençons par le logement: M. le président, les promesses n'ont pas manqué depuis ces dernières années. Où sont ces logements sociaux promis depuis quatre ans? Le gouvernement n'a fait que terminer quelques appartements de la NHDC qui étaient déjà projetés avant les élections générales, et puis il n'y a eu plus rien. Des maisons ont été livrées récemment à La Valette, Bambous. C'est un projet de Médine en collaboration avec le gouvernement qui ne concerne que quelques dizaines de familles. Je dois souligner que parmi se trouvent ceux qui avaient défoncé les maisons avant les élections à la Tour Koenig et ailleurs. Ils ont eu ce privilège parce qu'il y avait certains engagements politiques de la part de certains membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre. Alors, où sont les 774 Firinga *type houses* annoncées dans le budget

précédent? Rien M. le président! L'ancien gouvernement avait initié de gros travaux à la route Militaire pour enterrer les câbles électriques du CEB. Plus de R 45 millions avait été dépensé pour ce projet afin de faire construire sur le site des maisons pour les habitants de Plaine Verte et Roche Bois. Le site se trouve juste à la frontière, entre Roche-Bois et Plaine-Verte, mais, malheureusement, M. le président, ce projet a tout simplement disparu. On n'en entend plus parler malgré les promesses faites à la Chambre et aux habitants par l'honorable Dullul. Ces projets ne verront apparemment pas le jour.

Laissez-moi vous rappeler, M. le président, que le gouvernement précédent avait fait construire des maisons à la Tour Koenig, à Riche Lieu, à Riche Terre, à Baie du Tombeau, à Chebel. On avait éliminé les longères. Dans ma circonscription, il y en avait au moins deux mais c'est malheureux de le dire qu'aujourd'hui dans la circonscription du Premier ministre il y a toujours et encore des longères. Il n'y a aucun projet approprié pour assainir cette situation à Baie-du-Tombeau. Si ce n'est pas de l'antisocial, c'est quoi, M. le président! Je voudrais vous rappeler aussi que, pour ceux qui habitaient à Karo Kalyptis et aux abords des rivières de Roche-Bois entre autres, le précédent gouvernement avait fait construire des maisons. Une partie de ces gens avaient été relogés ailleurs, notamment à Riche-Terre et aussi à Cité Florida, Baie-du-Tombeau puis tout cela s'est arrêté depuis que ce gouvernement est au pouvoir. Et on nous dit que cela va venir bientôt! Déjà quatre ans! On attend toujours!

M. le président, je ne comprends pas. Le gouvernement dit tout le temps: *we are putting people first. I don't know who are the people they are putting first!* Parce que, malheureusement, au niveau du logement, les gens attendent toujours, et ils risquent d'attendre encore longtemps.

M. le président, je voudrais maintenant aborder le dossier des pêcheurs. Je ne sais combien de fois ils ont dû descendre dans la rue pour se faire entendre et une pétition en date du 30 avril 2009 a de nouveau été envoyée au ministre. Les revendications des pêcheurs ne font qu'augmenter d'année en année. Maintes fois, ils sont descendus dans la rue pour se faire entendre mais là aussi, malheureusement, le gouvernement fait la sourde oreille. J'attire une nouvelle fois l'attention du ministère sur au moins dix de leurs doléances qui tournent en rond depuis quelques années. Laissez-moi citer quelques points sur la pétition en date du 30 avril 2009 qui était adressée au Premier ministre et au ministre responsable de la pêche -

- le renouvellement des radeaux;
- la restriction des cooperatives;
- la protection des lagons;
- l'analyse du mauvais temps par la météo;
- la location des cartes aux pêcheurs;
- le fonctionnement du FIT et du *Fishermen Welfare Fund*;
- le financement des projets pilotes;
- la politique d'associer la famille de pêcheurs au niveau des projets;

- la politique de formation, et
- le développement des villages de pêche.

M le président, tous ces points ont été soulevés et envoyés récemment au ministre concerné en espérant que ceux de l'autre côté de la Chambre vont enfin prendre en considération la souffrance de cette communauté de pêcheurs qui crient dans le désert depuis quatre ans.

En sus de ce que je viens de mentionner, il y a aussi le problème d'aquaculture. Récemment à Bambous Virieux, il y a eu une rencontre entre le FIT et les responsables du ministère. J'ai soulevé ce point au *Question Time*. Je dois attirer l'attention du ministère, qui semble vouloir aller de l'avant avec ce projet, qu'il n'y a pas eu consensus au niveau de pêcheurs par rapport à ce projet.

(Interruptions)

C'est ce que j'ai compris car j'ai moi aussi eu une réunion avec les pêcheurs de cette région. Ce projet d'aquaculture, je dirais, ne fait pas l'unanimité. Je voudrais que le ministre concerné fasse bien attention pour qu'il n'y ait pas de problèmes soulevés par les pêcheurs qui risquent d'enfreindre le projet que le gouvernement et la FIT comptent mettre en place à Bambous Virieux.

D'autre part, en ce qui concerne ce même projet, le ministre Boolell, alors ministre de la pêche, m'avait laissé entendre que ce projet allait être financé d'une somme de R 15 millions à partir du *Food Security Fund*. Tout le monde sait que R15 millions pour un tel projet n'est pas énorme car on essaie de faire quelque chose semblable à la ferme marine de Mahebourg. Je ne pense pas qu'avec R15 millions on pourra réaliser un tel projet pour les pêcheurs de la région. Dans ce présent budget je n'ai rien entendu par rapport au financement de ce projet d'aquaculture. Je ne sais si ce projet tient toujours la route ou a été révisé. Aucun fonds additionnel n'a été voté pour le démarrage. On va suivre cela de près pour voir comment les choses progressent dans les mois à venir.

Concernant le *Fishermen Investment Trust*, et en réponse à une question parlementaire, la MEPZA allait également contribuer, si je ne me trompe, à la somme de R5 millions pour l'acquisition de six bateaux de pêche. Ce projet date depuis décembre 2008, nous sommes en mai 2009 et malheureusement on ne sait toujours pas s'il va démarrer. J'ai cru comprendre aussi, M le président, que la MEPZA hésite à concrétiser ce projet. Je voudrais qu'on me prouve le contraire, mais c'est une information que j'ai reçue. Avec les difficultés économiques actuelles, ils ne sont pas certains d'investir dans ce projet. De toute façon, ce n'est pas clair et j'espère qu'on aura des clarifications plus tard concernant l'acquisition de ces bateaux de pêche *off lagoon*.

Dans ce présent discours sur le budget, au paragraphe 89, mention est faite concernant l'acquisition de bateaux pour une valeur de R28 millions en faveur de 35 pêcheurs. Je voudrais savoir sur quel critère le ministère va se baser pour sélectionner ces 35 pêcheurs à Maurice comme à Rodrigues? Je conçois que c'est indépendamment de ce que fait le FIT et le ministère, mais je ne sais si c'est un mélange des deux et

j'aimerais avoir plus de clarification concernant ces R 28 millions.

D'autre part, M le président, une somme de R 22 millions avait aussi été annoncée l'année dernière pour l'acquisition de bateaux mais à l'heure actuelle, il n'y a eu aucun déboursement. Le mouvement pour l'autosuffisance alimentaire travaille toujours avec certaines sociétés coopératives pour présenter un projet dans ce sens. Je voudrais avoir des clarifications concernant ces R 22 millions, R 28 millions et R 5 millions. Est-ce que ce sont des provisions séparées ou est-ce un amalgame de tout ces fonds? Il nous faudrait savoir comment ces fonds annoncés vont être utilisés, si jamais ils le sont.

Concernant le Decentralised Cooperation Programme, deux sociétés de coopératives s'étaient mises ensemble pour présenter un budget. L'UNDP leur est venu en aide à travers un consultant pour qu'elles puissent avoir les fonds pour l'achat de bateaux de pêche en haute mer; malheureusement, le projet n'a pas été retenu. Mais, concernant ce même type de projet, deux ans de cela, il y avait eu une compagnie dans le sud, dont je ne citerais pas le nom, qui a bénéficié de l'aide sous le *Decentralised Cooperation Programme*. Leur projet était viable. Je voudrais donc savoir pourquoi le projet présenté par les deux sociétés n'a pas été retenu. Je suppose qu'il y a eu certains manquements dans leur dossier aussi je me demande pourquoi le ministère n'a pas pu leur venir en aide.

Nous savons que les pêcheurs ont besoin de certaines assistances techniques, légales, entre autres, au niveau de la préparation du budget. Si le projet a été rejeté, je suppose, M. le président, qu'il y a eu maldonne dans la préparation du budget et je pense que le gouvernement devrait intervenir pour revoir la situation et donner plus de chances à ces sociétés coopératives afin qu'elles bénéficient de fonds sous le Decentralised Cooperation Programme tout comme la compagnie qui en a bénéficié deux ans de cela.

En ce qui concerne la pêche, il y a beaucoup de possibilités selon mes informations. J'ai eu une session de travail avec un représentant des pêcheurs d'Agalega. J'ai compris qu'il y a énormément de possibilités pour développer la pêche au niveau d'Agalega. La région est très poissonneuse mais malheureusement il n'y a pas de politique au niveau du gouvernement pour pouvoir développer, exploiter cette possibilité de la pêche à Agaléga. Je fais donc un appel auprès du gouvernement afin qu'une étude soit enclenchée pour voir quel est l'investissement requis à ce sujet. On me dit qu'il va falloir installer des chambres froides, des quais, une infrastructure appropriée pour développer la pêche sur une grande échelle dans cette région, mais je ne sais si le gouvernement voudrait vraiment aider les pêcheurs d'Agalega afin qu'il y ait un tel développement.

Récemment on a entendu dire qu'on peut aussi visiter les autres îles de l'archipel Diégo Garcia autre que l'île principale. Je pense qu'il y a, quand même, matière à discussion au niveau du ministère des affaires étrangères pour voir quelles sont les possibilités d'exploiter ces régions. Comme nous avons l'autorisation de visiter, je pense que s'il y a une certaine volonté, on peut toujours essayer de voir, au niveau des autorités concernées, s'il y a la possibilité d'exploiter les îles autour de Diégo Garcia.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne les îlots à Maurice, j'ai rencontré quelques

pêcheurs et autres petits commerçants qui, à travers leurs activités touristiques sur les îles, obtiennent un peu d'argent. Malheureusement depuis quelques temps déjà, ils sont très inquiets parce qu'à l'exemple de l'île aux Bénitiers, ils subissent pas mal de pression. On leur demande de ne plus y aller et il y a pas mal d'opérateurs privés qui essayent d'effrayer les habitants de la région du sud qui vivent de ces activités touristiques et commerciales sur ces îles. Bientôt il y aura des constructions sur ces îles et ils ne pourront plus exploiter leur business. Je pense que le gouvernement devrait faire quelque chose puisqu'il y a beaucoup de pères de famille qui en dépendent. Ils ne sont pas de ceux à nous enquiquiner pour trouver de l'emploi pour eux. Ils arrivent à se débrouiller. Il faut que nous soyons des facilitateurs pour que ces gens puissent continuer à vivre de leur petit commerce sur ces îlots. J'espère que le gouvernement va faire quelque chose pour pouvoir protéger ces gens économiquement faibles, mais très débrouillards, pour la survie de leur famille.

En ce qui concerne la sécurité des pêcheurs en mer, M. le président, je ne sais si le ministre concerné est au courant, cela fait plus de dix ans que des gilets de sauvetage ont été redistribués aux pêcheurs à travers Maurice. Depuis, certains sont déjà abîmés et les pêcheurs ne peuvent plus s'en servir. Il n'y a pas eu de nouvelle distribution de ces équipements aux pêcheurs à travers l'île. Je fais donc un appel pressant au gouvernement pour qu'une distribution de gilets de sauvetage soit effectuée dans les plus brefs délais pour la sécurité de nos pêcheurs en mer.

M. le président, nous nous rappelons tous du naufrage du Kingfish II, V. Un rapport avec plusieurs recommandations pour la sécurité en mer, en date du 07 Mars 2008, avait été soumis au Cabinet. Je ne connais pas les détails de ce rapport et je ne sais si ce rapport a été déposé à l'Assemblée Nationale. Je voudrais bien que les propositions de ce rapport soient soumises au Parlement et distribuées aux personnes concernées ainsi qu'au syndicat des pêcheurs. Des propositions finales seront ainsi soumises au gouvernement en ce qu'il s'agit de la sécurité en mer.

Toujours concernant les pêcheurs qui sont 'les pêcheurs des bancs' M. le président, il y en a qui sont au chômage depuis presque neuf mois. C'est difficile maintenant, et avec raison, d'avoir un permis pour aller pêcher à Saint Brandon, sur les bancs et ailleurs parce qu'il y a plus de contrôle au niveau de la sécurité, au niveau des normes requises par les lois pour que ces bateaux puissent naviguer. Je suis tout à fait d'accord qu'il doit y avoir plus de rigidité mais malheureusement il y a un certain nombre de pêcheurs, au chômage depuis plus de neuf mois, qui ont dû avoir recours à la NPF pour une assistance. Je souhaite que le gouvernement trouve un moyen d'aider ces pêcheurs de bancs qui n'ont pas de cartes comme pêcheurs de lagons.

M. le président, je ne sais pourquoi mais cette année-ci rien n'a été mentionné par rapport au *bad weather allowance*. Chaque année on annonce le *bad weather allowance*, l'augmentation et tout le monde frappe joyeusement sur le pupitre en signe de satisfaction. Mais qu'en est-il cette année-ci? Rien. Je n'ai rien entendu. Est-ce qu'il y aura une augmentation pour le *bad weather allowance* cette année-ci ou encore une fois les pêcheurs vont attendre indéfiniment pour connaître leur sort? Ceci dit, M. le président, les pétitions ont été soumises au niveau du syndicat de la pêche au gouvernement. Il y a des comités de temps en temps, mais malheureusement, au niveau de l'*implementation*, on attend toujours. *Soon, soon, how soon is soon* comme je viens

de le dire!

M. le président, je vais rapidement parler de la drogue, sujet dont je ne peux faire abstraction. Dans mon voisinage, à Roche Bois, en un an, je connais six jeunes qui sont morts à cause de la drogue et je ne vous parle pas des jeunes d'un quartier mais d'une rue. Donc, à la rue des Carrières, Roches Bois, on les a enterrés il y a six jours. C'est vraiment révoltant de voir la propagation accélérée de la drogue dans ces régions. Malheureusement, les actions appropriées venant du gouvernement en place se font toujours attendre. Et actuellement, c'est une coïncidence peut-être, ceux, qui étaient des activistes de l'Alliance Sociale aux dernières élections, sont eux-mêmes des vendeurs de drogues. Ce ne sont certes pas de gros trafiquants, mais ils en vendent pour avoir leurs doses comme on dit, pour leur propre consommation. Ce ne sont pas de vrais *dealers*, mais on les trouve dans tous les coins de rues dans ces régions. C'est vraiment révoltant! Je ne sais si le gouvernement est vraiment au courant de la gravité de la situation dans ces régions. Donc, aujourd'hui, je profite de cette occasion, M. le président, pour attirer l'attention sur ce fléau qu'est la drogue.

En ce qui concerne les travailleurs - je ne vais pas m'éterniser là-dessus - on leur demande de contribuer 1% d'après la nouvelle loi. Il n'y a aucune garantie au niveau de la sauvegarde de l'emploi. J'ai moi-même eu ce problème. J'ai une petite entreprise que je compte fermer à la fin du mois et j'ai été me renseigner au ministère sur ce que je dois payer à mes employés.

(Interruptions)

Non, je ne suis pas supposé payer quoique ce soit. On m'a dit de comptabiliser trois jours par année de service et de verser cette somme dans un fonds. Tout cela est pénible, M. le président, car des gens, qui ont travaillé pour moi pendant plusieurs années, partiront sans rien toucher comme compensation. Je vais voir ce que je peux faire mais telle est la situation en général: les gens perdent leur emploi et ils n'ont qu'un mois de préavis ou bien dans certains cas ils n'ont pas de préavis du tout. Ils sont appelés à contribuer dans les fonds de l'État mais en retour, eux, ils perdent leur emploi. Pour moi, c'est un recul de 40 ans en ce qui concerne tout, ce que la lutte pour les travailleurs a représenté.

En ce qui concerne le *Copyright Act*, M. le président, je pense que ...

Mr Speaker : No, I am sorry!

Mr Barbier: Only two minutes more, Mr Speaker, Sir. Comme je le disais, en ce qui concerne le *Copyright Act*, il est grand temps d'apporter certaines nouveautés par rapport aux problèmes du jour car, M. le président, aujourd'hui, le *downloading* se fait directement de l'internet, tels que des transferts, des transmissions par *Bluetooth* ou par *USB from cable to devices*. De ce fait, les CDs ne se vendent plus, les artistes perdent de l'argent et Dieu sait que pour la production d'un CD aujourd'hui ça coute. Ils doivent dépenser entre R100,000 et R150,000; les petits artistes ont à investir beaucoup, il y a le problème du piratage, puis il y a tous ces problèmes donc je viens de mentionner. Tout cela nécessite maintenant d'autres encadrements légaux pour pouvoir aider les artistes.

Je remercie le gouvernement pour avoir pensé à donner certains *grants* pour que

ces artistes puissent aller ailleurs et trouver d'autres possibilités ce qui est une bonne chose. Il y a quand même des problèmes du jour par rapport au développement, surtout dans le secteur *IT*. Il faudrait qu'il y ait de nouvelles lois appropriées car il y a de nouveaux défis. Donc je disais que les CDs ne se vendent pas, les artistes ont recours maintenant à des concerts publics. Pour organiser un concert public aujourd'hui ça couté des fois R1 million ou plus. J'ai cru comprendre que maintenant l'accès aux stades sera refusé aux artistes. Mais c'est incroyable! A la Citadelle, il y a eu des problèmes récemment; maintenant ce sont les stades et ces artistes ont des problèmes par rapport au piratage. Que reste-t-il maintenant pour nos artistes, M. le président? Maintenant il y a la taxe de 10% qu'on prélève *at source* à la *MASA* sur le droit d'auteur/compositeur. Je dirais que le gouvernement devrait revoir et arrêter ces taxes *at source* en ce qui concerne ces artistes avec tous les problèmes qu'ils ont. Je fais un appel au gouvernement pour qu'ils ne payent plus cette taxe de 10% *at source* sur le droit d'auteur/compositeur.

M. le président, permettez-moi de rappeler au ministre de l'éducation qu'il avait promis de faire quelque chose en mémoire de Kaya. J'attends toujours et j'espère qu'il va activer les choses pour bien marquer la mémoire de Kaya.

Ceci dit, M. le président, je reviens sur ce que j'avais dit au départ. Il y a aussi le fait qu'on ait coupé les pensions des handicapés. Il ne se passe pas une semaine où les gens viennent nous voir pour dire: *mo pension ine couper missié, mo ti pé gagne pension 20 ans, handicapé mental* entre autres. Je ne sais pourquoi mais c'est ainsi. Je suppose que ce n'est pas qu'à moi seulement qu'on vient se plaindre, mais aussi aux membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre. Et très souvent, les raisons sont arbitraires. Donc, voilà ce qui arrive, M. le président, la classe ouvrière paie les conséquences, les économiquement faibles font doublement les frais de cette politique *anti-sociale* du gouvernement. Mais jusqu'où allons-nous continuer dans ce sens? C'est pour cela que je trouve qu'il faut arrêter avec cette politique anti-sociale ; il faut que ce gouvernement prenne en considération la souffrance des gens dans les différentes sphères de notre société. Il faut vraiment essayer de donner la chance à tout un chacun, aux plus faibles et aux plus démunis afin qu'ils puissent mieux vivre dans ce pays.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

At 1.17 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.19 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, first of all, I need to thank hon. Barbier. I understand he has been trying to see some tiny details in the whole system, I believe he has not seen the forest, but some two or three trees which have not been watered. But let me assure him that this Government will not only put water in these two or three trees, but will also add some fertilizers in them as well. So far as how soon is soon, in astronomy, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one thousand years may be very, very soon. For a country like Mauritius, I guess that the forthcoming 20 years with this Government

will be very soon as well.

Le 13 septembre 2008, je l'ai dit et je le répète, la crise financière est devenue une crise économique, la crise américaine est devenue une crise mondiale. L'impensable est arrivé, le monde est en feu. D'ailleurs, on a appris hier que l'Afrique du Sud vient de tomber en récession. But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, nobody knows when this fire will be extinguished. Nobody knows, even from the EULW theory forecast, which one will prevail. Mais ce que nous savons, M. le président, les premières victimes seront les pauvres des pays riches tout comme les pauvres des pays pauvres. What we know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that there will be more than 100 million people losing their jobs in rich, developed, and underdeveloped countries. What we know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that more than 150 million people around the world will fall in the trap of poverty, and that more than 300 million people in the poor countries will fall in that club of extreme poverty. We know also that, from what has happened, the configuration of the world, the whole system will change.

M. le président, quand j'écoute les membres de l'opposition, surtout du côté du MMM, j'ai comme l'impression que, par rapport à cette crise mondiale, cette crise financière, seule l'île Maurice est épargnée, seule l'île Maurice n'est pas touchée, seule l'île Maurice n'est pas égratignée, parce qu'on nous dit qu'il faut payer plus, taxer moins, défoncer la caisse. Je ne sais si ce n'est de la démagogie; je dirais peut-être de la malhonnêteté intellectuelle. Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is not immune from this apocalyptic situation. Everybody knows the answer, but nobody from that side dares to come with solutions. Even one page! We asked for 10 pages, but even for one page we don't have any solution. But here, with this Budget, I need to congratulate the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment. Even with the reduction in revenue, due to that crisis, he did not increase VAT; he did not touch Welfare State, in fact, he increased income support. He did not reduce subsidy on flour and gas. He did not reduce salaries as other countries did, in fact, he managed to increase salary for the lower income group. Yesterday, I heard that it was 80% compared to 59% of inflation. He paid full PRB. Even with this crisis, he alleviates 28,000 small planters with the reduction in cess. On a macro-economic level, this Government has succeeded in maintaining the right equilibrium, contrary to many other developed countries like UK, USA and Europe, where Budget deficit and public debt are soaring to alarming levels. This Budget contains Budget deficit at 4.8% of GDP for July to December 2009 and not more than 5.1% for 2010. Public debt is also maintained at 59% of GDP. The list is long, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and all this, despite the crisis.

Let us see the philosophy of this Budget. At this point of time, we do not know for how long this crisis is going to last. This Budget is addressing the needs for stimulating the economy, and also gives space for the Government to inject more in the future if the need arises. By maintaining the Budget deficit and public debt at a very manageable level, the Minister of Finance is still keeping some cards in his pocket, which would be required in the future if the crisis persists, let us say after 2010. *C'est ce que j'appelle, M. le président, prévenir pour le futur.*

I heard also some Members criticising about taking external loans, let's say from IMF, World Bank, but I believe the Minister of Finance is right to have recourse

to external borrowing instead of internal borrowing. Why, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? In fact, we should be proud also to note that Mauritius is eligible to get this kind of loan. When we have recourse to external borrowing, the advantage is that it will not put pressure on our local interest rates and, therefore, it will avoid that private investment be potentially crowded out. This Budget is, therefore, creating space for further reduction in the interest rate, which would be beneficial to reduce financial charges of companies; stimulate investment and also the interest burden of the people and liberate more monetary resources for consumption. That's the idea behind it. By the way, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for every loan, be it internal or external, there is a commitment fee. Let us be realistic for one second. We know, they know, everybody knows that *un job de perdu, c'est une famille qui s'inscrit dans le club de la pauvreté*. A job provides social anchor and prevents frustration and despair. Frustration and despair are social evils that can lead to undesirable social behaviours. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that is why the main priority of this Budget is to secure jobs. I am afraid, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this effort of Government to secure jobs during hard times is not given the full recognition it deserves. They said that more compensation should be given. *Mais on se pose la question: quel gouvernement n'aurait pas aimé pouvoir le faire?* But, in this crisis period, can someone in this House - forget about politics – imagine, for a minute, if this Government increases the salary load of companies in vulnerable sectors, in all the SMEs, could they support this additional burden? What would be the consequences? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, ask anybody if he wants to keep his job or to have no job at all, and you will hear the answer. So, we need, therefore, to be vigilant and closely monitor that labour market, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

We therefore need to be vigilant and closely monitor that labour market, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This Government makes a big dent in unemployment. For more than a decade, employment kept rising, with the coming of this Government and the reform made, unemployment fell from 9.7% to 7%. This Government is not only saving jobs, but also creating jobs and more, stepping great effort so that unemployment does not rise above the tolerance threshold. For this reason, various projects are being implemented, among other things, to absorb surplus labour. The arsenal of projects that will transform our life, change the landscape and reduce our production costs, saving us foreign exchange. The ambitious infrastructure project will turn out economy in one huge construction site, and upon completion, transform Mauritius to a thinking dimension. Such a development will equally have an unimaginable beneficial impact on production costs of manufacturing firms, including an expected rise in productivity. Transport is the artery of development and the heart of family interaction. The infrastructure development will further consolidate the construction sector into a more dynamic sector and act as an economic stabilizer. The cost of congestion is enormous to the country in terms of forgone opportunities, imported fuel, spares, stress and health hazards. Before we had no resources to carry on such projects, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because the priority was to attack the twin problems of debts and deficit, but now when these are under control, there is consensus that if we do not tackle this infrastructure deficit there is a serious danger of the old system clogging with disastrous consequences to the social economic situation. I believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the measures proposed come at the right time to prepare for the prosperous climate. This Government's foresight is evident and needs

no further elaboration. These measures are intended to help us ride out of this global crisis and I am of the view that this country will be riding on the crest of a wave that will permit us to have another era of growth and prosperity. By next year, when the cyclone will be over, we are fully equipped, we are fully prepared, and we still have other cards to play for the after crisis.

I would like to urge the hon. Minister of Finance, regarding my Constituency No. 13, to give a helping hand for the new market at *Rivière des Anguilles* - I hope he is listening to me - to see to it that *les drains at Bois Cheri* are completed and especially - this is serious - to give a helping hand to solve the problem of water supply in Britannia. We have been fighting for this; I urge for this urgent issue.

I would like to conclude my speech with a rhetoric philosophy. This Budget is essentially about allocation of scarce resources in difficult times. This exercise is even more challenging as it can give rise to both conflicts of interests and conflicts of resource management. When there are problems, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we cannot ignore and pretend they don't exist. Susan Stebbing, eminent scientist, argued that there is a tendency that because one has dared to say that Hitler has contributed to restore the dignity of Germans, one is immediately branded as a Nazi when that person was actually an ardent hunter of Nazis. Such perception or misquote or taking words out of its context can lead to great misunderstanding. Defence of the rights or promoting the legitimate expectation have to be studied, but not ignored.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(2.35 p.m.)

Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have listened carefully to the previous orator; I do not understand where they buy *toupet*. It is us, on this side of the House, who have been ringing the alarm bell about the global crisis, but they did not react, their reactions came late and too little. At the very outset of the previous orator's speech, he stated that we are not seeing the forest, but a few trees which have not been watered. But what we know, at least, is that two companies have been well watered despite other firms being in difficulty.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some days have elapsed since the presentation of the Budget. Up to now, some Members on all sides of the House have intervened and from the MSM side, our friend, hon. Nando Bodha, has given *le coup d'envoi*, and our leader Pravind Juganuth will do the summing up of the budgetary debate.

Having said so, let me, first of all, move on a general term, it is our duty as elected Members to point out the shortcomings of Government policies and express our views and concern about how public funds are being used and utilized. It is, in fact, our duty to act as a watchdog within, of course, the norms of the rules and etiquettes of the House to criticise in a constructive manner. Therefore, I appeal to all Members of the Government side not to take any observation as any personal attack. Why not, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, make use of our observations and opinions fruitfully, especially at such a very difficult time when the world is facing a global crisis?

Last Friday, I had listened carefully to the hon. Vice-Prime Minister reading his Budget speech and I was saying to my friends on the side of the House: 'What is there really in the Budget for the common people?' When looking at the Budget Speech, one could not find many things coming for the common people. True it is that the Minister of Finance has rolled out a series of announcements supposedly aimed at saving jobs, protecting people and preparing for recovery - a targeted approach to address three main issues at a time when it is more needed. But the question is: 'how true, could this statement be? How do we ensure that the promises are kept when we know that, up to now, Government has hardly stood by its commitment? To be fair, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is good to mention some good economic measures, in particular, the special levy on profitable banks; infrastructure and upgrading of the NHDC houses; in the tourism sector for village tax to apply and some few other measures. I would like to come to the four previous Budgets. If my memory serves me right, in the first two Budgets, the Minister of Finance created great expectations.

In his first Budget, 2006/2007, he talked of bold reforms to create jobs. In the second Budget, 2007/2008, he stated, I quote –

"The early positive results and outcomes are beyond our own expectations. The signs of economic renewal are vivid."

In his Budget Speech 2008/2009, interesting things like last year we had an early harvest, and this year we are witnessing a bumper crop. From great expectations to nice dreams, we are today being told that the global crisis has reached Mauritius. We are being told that the Budget has to deal with a great recession caused by an astonishingly severe financial turmoil. Why astonishingly, when we all know that the world was facing a global crisis? What a contradiction, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when, in the last two Budgets Speeches, the hon. Minister mentioned, I quote –

"There can be no doubt that strong dynamics are at play in our economy, bearing the promise of more resilience, an even higher growth path, more rapid rise in the standard of living and more solidarity."

Such an assertion was misleading, and today's Budget is disappointing. We were led to believe that everything on the economic front was right. The forecast of the Minister of Finance was wrong. Like everywhere else in the world, we ought to have taken emergency and appropriate measures. The crisis has evolved over months into a wider recession affecting, as we know, the spending habits of consumers. The purchasing power has been decreasing day by day. There were, however, plenty of signs of the pinch starting since last year, but the Minister of Finance kept on saying that everything was fine and our economy was resilient. He has put in measures in the last Budget that give us assurance that we will not be as bad off as some of the rest of the world.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is interesting to know who are those who are optimistic about the budgetary measures and those who are disappointed. On the one hand, there is a tug of war between trade unionists and the representatives of employers and, on the other hand, there is also a tug of war between Government and the nation as to the adequate amount of compensation to be paid. Let us see what the representatives of the employers have to say about the fresh Budget. Mr Patrice Legris

said: *c'est une bouffée d'oxygène*; Mr Anwar Joonas said: *c'est un pas dans la bonne direction*. Mr Raj Makoond said: *le ministre des finances a tout compris*. Why is there this affirmation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? It is simply because they have been taken care of by the Government, whereas the trade unionists are very, very disappointed. Listen to what Mr Sadien said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir: '*c'est la population qui paiera en fin de compte*'; Mr Ashok Subron: '*le budget n'empêchera pas le licenciement massif*'.

The last averments, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, give us a very good picture of the feeling of the population. The population is very angry and disappointed because their purchasing power has been decreasing day by day, and their monthly salary is remaining the same. And Government is doing very little.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to a very important issue, which is of national concern, and which has been taken up this morning in a PNQ by the Leader of the Opposition - the way financial assistance is being given under the Additional Stimulus Package to private firms. I would insist that we need to continue to know, on a regular basis, who are the beneficiaries of those funds. But more important, we should know how the monitoring is being done to ensure that the conditions are being met, and that employment is, in fact, being preserved. The general argument is that it is meant to protect employment. How many employments are we preserving? For what period? Should it go for the next three, six, twelve or twenty-four months? What about the Directors' salaries, special extra bonuses awarded to directors and top managers? What about the actual supervisory committee of the State or its agent over the use of such monies in the enterprises concerned? This ought, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to be closely followed and scrutinised, because here huge sums of money are involved. The committee should have powers to review the allocation of funds, impose conditions about the running of the companies benefiting from such aid, reverse decision of the Board of Directors, if need be. More importantly, the committee should seek a minimum time span for protection of employment within those companies. Otherwise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am afraid that all those monies will be considered, in the mind of the public, to the usual cronies of the present Government. Whether this is true or not is, in my view, secondary. This will, unfortunately, be the escapable conclusion of the population because the latter is closely watching how the present Government is responding to the financial assistance given to private firms under the Additional Stimulus Package. It is only too fair that such degree of responsibility be adopted by those who are asking aid from the public funds.

Let me come on another issue, that is, the support to vulnerable women, children and families. It seems, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the measures, which existed, have again been proposed with a few variants such as an increase in allowance, upper age limit of children, and an increase in the sum allocated to various organisations. What is the real issue if not, just to pump more funds, to provide the necessary *encadrement* to empower the vulnerable families so that the vulnerable women can aspire to get out of the infernal spiral of dependency; to empowerment in the right sense of the term, that is, to be able to become self dependent and self reliant?

In order to provide the appropriate *encadrement* to achieve the objective of

moving the vulnerable women and their families from dependency on the State to self support, we need sufficient resource persons. Has there been a monitoring of the so-called National Empowerment Foundation to establish its effectiveness in promoting the aspiration of women for gainful involvements in sustainable small businesses, or are we here dealing with a foundation without any teeth inasmuch as far from empowering women it is only providing training for the labour force required by major existing enterprises in the tourist and other sectors? True, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we need more maids and plumbers, but are we really empowering these trade persons?

If we really want to know what empowerment is all about, let us see what our brothers and sisters in South Africa mean by empowerment. Are we going to be bold enough to have the Empowerment Legislation Policies and Programmes to do justice to the term 'empowerment'? Let us not forget that women constitute more than 50% of the population, and they represent a sustainable share of human resource. The measures for women to take off in business as "*entrepreneurs*" have unfortunately failed. This is due to the lack of an aggressive programme to bring the economy on a level playing field where equal opportunities will exist. There are no real incentives to promote small businesses through such mechanism as affirmative action, where small "*entrepreneurs*" would have preference in the award of contracts by the public and parapublic sectors.

Before addressing the law and order situations, I think it is good to face the stark reality of what economic recession entails on the social side. It would be an irresponsible attitude if we continue to turn a blind eye on the consequences the economic recession is likely to have on the population. It is unfortunate that the Government did not pay heed to the opinion of international economists who predicted a financial crisis leading to an economic crisis. We were led to believe that our economy was resilient. Today, the Budget Speech 2009 main objectives are: saving jobs, protecting people and preparing for recovery, but the issue of addressing social crisis is not sufficient. We all know that the world faces threats of social crisis, and economic crisis leads to social upheavals. In an interview in a Spanish newspaper, the World Bank President, Robert Zoellick said, I quote –

"The economic recovery will be slow and rising unemployment could bring the threat of social crisis".

He further added that, if we do not take appropriate measures, there is a risk of a great human and social crisis. The question is: what has the hon. Minister of Finance provided for in his Budget to avoid a social crisis, following the promise of an early harvest to a bumper crop? The level of popular disgust following such promises is figuring a silent outrage across the country. The hon. Minister of Finance is conscious and aware of the consequences of a social crisis inasmuch as, at paragraph 218, at page 36 of his Budget Speech, he pointed out, I quote –

"In addition to protecting the population from the negative impact of the Great Recession, we also need to assure their physical safety and protection of their property. We must also preserve our reputation as a safe tourist destination."

The negative impact of the Great Depression, he is referring to, is nothing than a social

crisis. The Government's good intention has not been, up to now, followed by action. In fact, at page 34 of the Budget Speech, the Minister of Finance rightly observed that there are many children who are at risk, and provided for the construction of a new shelter for children at Bambous designed to accommodate about 100 children and 36 mothers. Was the project not expected to start in February/March 2008? In the Programme Based Budget 2008-2009, from the indicative estimates, we learnt that the construction of a shelter for women and children in distress at Bambous was planned for 2010 for an estimated cost of Rs20 m. As at to date, the project has not yet started.

Irrespective of the fact that we are facing an economic recession leading to a social crisis, we nevertheless have to address the law and order issue seriously. According to Government, the right to fund the recruitment of 550 policemen and policewomen to strengthen the police service will be coming. The question is whether the number to be recruited is sufficient. Obviously, it is insufficient, as the Minister of Finance failed to mention the number of police officers who went on retirement or left the service. It is estimated that there are about 300 police officers who leave the service early. Our police force is understaffed and, as such, it is unlikely to become an efficient police service working in the interests of the people. I think that this issue is a very important one which has to be addressed in the days to come. Women in the Police Force need to be better treated to satisfy the equal opportunity philosophy. As a matter of comparison, in the year 2005 - listen to this Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - there was promotion from the rank of Sergeant to Inspector and, among nine women police-sergeants; six were promoted to the rank of Inspector following an exam. In January 2009, out of 1028 police-sergeants, only two have been promoted to the rank of Inspector. Yet, there were 27 women police-sergeants who sat for the promotional examination. The question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is how, despite an increase in the strength of the women police officers and the recruitment of new women recruits, the rank of women police-inspectors decreased compared to year 2005. What has been the criterion that has prevailed to bar policewomen, with excellent qualifications and better results at the last exams, from being promoted? It should be the Government's duty to ensure that women are recruited in the police force and promotion prospects for women are encouraged so as to ensure that the equal opportunity philosophy does not become unattainable. The Minister of Finance in his speech stated, I quote –

“We are upgrading the equipment of vehicles to improve respond capacity and effectiveness of the Force”.

We do hope that the hon. Minister, when referring to the transport issue of the police force, will take into consideration the problem Policewomen are facing when they have to attend night-duty. Recently, the issue has been raised by our friend on this side of the House, hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun, regarding the police-station of Vacoas, but, according to my information, more police-stations are facing the same problem, including that of La Tour Koenig. The women police officers have to arrange for their own transport to reach home after night shift. I again do hope that this matter will be dealt with urgently. Another important factor, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that there is also a need, as crime against women is on an increase, for more Policewomen to play an effective role for reasons which should be obvious. A female victim will find more comfort in confining in a female police officer than a male counterpart. This is where,

perhaps, the term equality needs qualification.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will fail in my duty if I do not say a few words on the Judiciary. You will agree with me that, without a strong Judiciary, we do not have democracy.

The additional force of judges and magistrates has, no doubt, alleviated matters but unfortunately it is not an end in itself. What we also need is proper infrastructure and facilities. After having increased the number of Magistrates and Judges, the supporting staff has remained, unfortunately, the same. In the Supreme Court, for example, judges' secretaries are being asked to act as registrars of the Supreme Court despite their heavy load of work. Another example: the Souillac District Court is being run by only three staffs when we know that, this particular court was being run by six staffs. As a result of decrease in staff, members of the public are penalised; they have to wait for long before they are being taken care of by the court officers. Another serious problem, which needs to be underlined, is the problem of leakage in almost all the courts of Mauritius.

In the Supreme Court, the roof of the Judges' secretaries' building leaks. During rainy days, mud and water drips on them and the records as a result of which the staff has no alternative than to move their movables and court records. So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is good that you're laughing, but these are important and serious matters which have to be taken up, if we are talking of an Amigo Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to sum up, let me hope that Government will give targeted help to people to find new jobs as quickly as possible and, where necessary, to gain the new skills which will allow them to work, as it has been mentioned in the Budget. What are found in the Budget are all words, but what is more important is implementation. We do hope that appropriate action will be taken without much delay because, at the end of the day, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(15:03 p.m.)

The Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives (Mr M. Gowressoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me first congratulate the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment for this remarkable Budget July-December 2009. The merit goes to the hon. Prime Minister for his vision.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not an easy task for the Minister of Finance to come with such a Budget in this period of economic crisis. At the time of the Budget 2008-2009, the Government, the country was facing a food crisis, an energy crisis. The Minister of Finance put a Fund for both crises and then came with the Additional Stimulus Package when the world recession was coming deeper and deeper.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment has come with this Budget, and there will have another one at the end of this year. This shows the commitment towards the population. Regarding the measures in that Budget, the previous speaker said that 50% of the measures are

good and 50% are not. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on what planet is she living? The world is crying. China, Japan - the biggest economies - are preparing themselves to face and to combat this recession. The hon. Member is saying that it's only 50%. What can we do more, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? *Le destin a voulu que ce gouvernement* bears several crises. Since 2005, this Government inherited a catastrophic economy. When the world was having an economic growth of 5% to 8 %, here in Mauritius we had only a 2% economic growth. Unemployment rate came to double digits, factories were closing, there was no investment, 45,000 of workers lost their jobs and public debt was to the tune Rs120 billion...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, I have given you some latitude. From 2005 to now, we have had three Budgets already. We have been having healthy debates up to now, and I would like us to avoid repetition because we have heard about the past so many times already. I would like you to now confine yourself to the current Budget. Thank you.

(*Interruptions*)

I would like some order from the other Members, please.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, there were three shocks, namely the Multi-Fibre Agreement that was dismantled, the rise in the price of petroleum products and the reduction in the price of sugar on the European market. In July 2005, the Minister of Finance took bold measures to charter a new economic route towards success in the creation of enterprises, to invite investment and in hotel construction. Doing business in Mauritius became very easy. The FDI started to come in Mauritius. In all economic fields, for example, the ICT started to develop, *les opérateurs économiques* started to have confidence in our economy. Since 2005, this Government has put the economy on the rail and now, when bad weather is prevailing, we should prevent the economy from derailing hence, this Budget, which is an Action Plan.

I listened to one hon. Member from the Opposition side, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, who said that, to save jobs, we have to go to the workers and give them money; we have to protect enterprises. That is what we have done, because today people are no fools; people are watching everything through Internet. Regarding the SME Fund of Rs500 m., I assure the House that it will be monitored by my Ministry, and the entrepreneurs will be very happy to get funds which will enable them to create more jobs in their enterprises, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

I heard an hon. Member, on the other side of the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, say that while going along a road he saw des poteaux *en tôle*. But these were there decades ago. He has been in this Parliament for 26 years and he should know that we have provided the inhabitants of Bambous with decent housing units, free education to children, food and job training for the inhabitants of this region.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have the following institutions in Mauritius - the Empowerment Programme, HRDC, AREU for hydroponic, University of Mauritius, SEHDA, NICE, National Women Entrepreneur Council, Enterprise Mauritius, AGOA, and now we have the SME contractor, that is, the people who want to invest create

SMEs in construction, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir.

Hat off to the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment, this Budget has been prepared at a time when the whole world is in the midst of a global recession never witnessed before. It is a Budget which has placed the workers and the most vulnerable groups at the heart of public policies. Emphasis is being laid on saving jobs with full support being given to enterprises to weather the storm. Equally extraordinarily in this Budget is the whole panoply of measures that are being proposed to support enterprises without increasing VAT, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, contrary to the other Budgets. It would have been quite easy to enlarge the fiscal space by increasing the VAT. However, in this line of philosophy of 'Putting People First', we have not resorted to this off-the-shelf fiscal measure but how painful for the population at large. As the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment mentioned, this Budget is indeed groundbreaking not only by the measures proposed, but also by the measures not resorted to. The Welfare State, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has been strengthened even in this difficult time when many other countries have had to review their social policies. It is a Budget geared towards continuous reforms to modernise industries, reduce infrastructure bottlenecks, give high priority to human resource development and signal towards a vibrant and resilient economy.

The 2009 Budget provides a lot of impetus for inclusive growth despite the harsh economic realities. The badly hit sectors like textile, tourism and SMEs are being assisted and practically everything is being done to encourage business to grow. Various schemes and support programmes through the ASP and SJR Funds are put at the disposal of the business community, big or small, to improve their competitiveness in the context of global economic slowdown. They have all won the hearts of business and workers.

The 2009 Budget addresses key economic challenges and inflationary pressures. The economic indicators are in good shape and not in red as in many countries, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It is not by accident that the SME sector has been high on our agenda as it is presently representing 40% of our GDP and employs 43% of our labour population. Moreover, the cost of creating employment is relatively lower in the SME sector. We should also not forget that the SME sector is more vulnerable in this present economic downturn. This Government wants more people to be entrepreneurs and self-reliant and to participate in the development process. Since we have assumed office four years ago, we have taken a number of measures to expand the economic space for entrepreneurship to grow and for SMEs to expand.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I inform the House that to boost the SME sector, we have decentralised our services to bring information to the down steps of potential entrepreneurs. We have facilitated the access to finance, industrial space, technology and markets while removing bureaucratic hurdles. The Business Facilitation Act of 2006 and the organisation of the *Caravane de l'Entrepreneuriat* are other concrete measures. Small enterprises have witnessed an unprecedented growth of 18.5% to reach 92,000 whilst employment rose by 18.7% to attain 208,000 in 2007 primarily due to the bold measures taken as from July 2005. During the period July 2005-April 2009 10,154 new SMEs have been registered in Mauritius with SEHDA, compared to

428 enterprises during the year 2000-2005. Out of these, 7209 are new enterprises and 2302 have already started operation generating 4800 new jobs.

Concerning loans and industrial space, I would also like to inform the House that, during the period July 2005-December 2008, some 700,919 SMEs have obtained loans worth Rs1.04 billion from the Development Bank of Mauritius to assist them in strengthening their operating capacity.

In this Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, an extra Rs300m. will be provided by commercial banks as an advance to companies in difficulty. Government will guarantee up to 50% of the loan on a burden sharing basis involving operators and bankers. Further to address the problem of industrial space, some 61000 sq ft. of vacant space have been leased at a concessionary rate to SMEs and incubator facilities are being provided at SEHDA. In addition, two new industrial buildings for SMEs will soon be operational at Terre Rouge and at la Tour Koenig.

To sensitize the public on the facilities and support available to SMEs, several programmes have been implemented such as the SMEs outreach programme, the *Caravane de l'Entrepreneuriat*, the *Semaine de l'Entrepreneuriat* and various workshops. All these have been successful in bringing support services to potential entrepreneurs, creating awareness on entrepreneurship development and bringing new dynamism to attract yet more new entrepreneurs.

My Ministry through SEHDA will continue to provide training in entrepreneurship development and handicrafts to both potential entrepreneurs and existing SMEs.

As from July 2005, some 2500 people have benefited from training in sectors such as jewellery, fashion and design, curtain making and basketry among others. We will continue to provide training to unemployed people from every nook and corner of the island to help them start their own businesses, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

For marketing, we provide assistance to help SMEs move beyond the confines of the domestic market through fairs and exhibitions; we have helped our SMEs in conducting market research and surveys to tap regional markets. Accordingly, a fair was organised in Madagascar in 2006, another one in Reunion Island in 2007. Under the previous MASMED Fund, facilities were extended for entrepreneurs to participate in fairs organised overseas; this marketing strategy will continue and will be strengthened.

A monitoring service will be introduced by the NEF to be delivered by NGOs and private consultants on a cost-sharing, performance-based arrangement. These mentors will assist SMEs in setting up and developing their marketing capabilities and competencies in managing their businesses.

SJR Fund: this Budget, with its various measures, provides our SMEs with the necessary resources to help them survive. The restructuring of the MASMED Fund into the Saving Jobs and Recovery Fund with an additional injection of Rs2 billion specifically for SMEs will accelerate expansion, modernisation and market penetration. We are pleased to note that the MASMED Fund has been converted into a SJR Fund which provides for Rs3.5 billion aimed at saving jobs and preparing for

recovery. SMEs will be called upon to avail themselves of all these facilities, that is, Rs500 m. SMEs will benefit from Rs500 m. for equipment modernisation, Rs1 billion for Export Credit Insurance Scheme, a line credit to encourage leasing and a risk sharing to encourage lending by commercial banks to SMEs. The Mauritius Business Growth Scheme is another new scheme set up to promote business growth among SMEs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government is also providing a life line to our small and medium enterprises in distress by extending the settlement of arrears by a year, waiving all accumulated and writing half of capital for loans up to Rs50,000. In addition, SMEs, which are now facing liquidity difficulties, are having all their loans rescheduled. In order to help SMEs reap the benefits and survive in this difficult time, the following actions are being taken -

- the modalities for the implementation of the various schemes under the responsibility of my Ministry are being worked out;
- an intensive communication campaign will be conducted shortly on the facilities and incentives to be made available;
- a fast track monitoring community will be set up at my Ministry to coordinate and expedite timely implementation;
- I am soon coming, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the SME Bill which will provide a new orientation to the SME sector. We shall see to it that our SMEs operate on a level playing field and we are not unfairly affected by imported goods;
- a joint SME Custom committee will be set up to crack down on the evaluation of imports;
- to authentify locally made products a label 'genuine Mauritian handicraft' will be developed;
- support will be provided for small contractors to qualify as District Contractors;
- consultants will be recruited to assist SMEs in the preparation and submission of financial restructuring plans to enable them benefit from the Mechanism for Transitional Support;
- micro-enterprises will be encouraged to become corporate bodies to benefit from the various schemes for SMEs. To facilitate this process, fees payable for company registration will be waived until December 2010 and exemption of registration duties on the transfer of immovable properties as equity into a company.

These measures will remove the hurdles in the path of our fellow entrepreneurs and will go a long way in consolidating the SME sector and attaining our vision of making Mauritius an island of entrepreneurs.

In the co-operative sector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to reckon with the specific nature of co-operative business which operates with noble values such as self-help, solidarity and community development. Co-operatives are people-centred, organisations jointly owned and democratically controlled by its members. However, as any business entity, co-operatives are equally called upon to be professionally

managed so as to be more efficient.

Today there are more than 30 different socio-economic activities which are serviced by single and multi-purpose co-operatives. Co-operatives in Mauritius and Rodrigues consist of about 150,000 members grouped in some 800 co-operative societies with a turnover of about Rs4 billion. The main economic activities undertaken by co-operative societies are production and marketing of sugar cane, potatoes, onions, fresh green vegetables, fish, livestock, milk, pigs, bus owners, consumer stores, credit and saving, and handicraft.

The co-operative business model has found to provide a supportive environment, especially for women and youngsters new to business as it gives them confidence and is capable of harnessing their skills and resources.

We have thus laid a lot of emphasis on empowerment and capacity building programme for women and youngsters who are encouraged to group themselves in co-operatives. Moreover, to facilitate marketing of their products, my Ministry organises, on a regular basis, co-operative fairs across the island.

It has to be noted that the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment has taken laudable initiatives to ride out global crisis in this endeavour, the co-operative sector has not been left out as co-operatives are considered as vehicles for bringing social justice; empowerment of people and democratisation of the economy.

The Food Security Fund, the National Empowerment Foundation and other institutions will devise schemes for financially assisting co-operatives in their development programmes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, funds to the tune of Rs45 m. under the Food Security Fund have been earmarked to set up three model dairy farms by three co-operative societies namely at Petit Merlo, Nouvelle Découverte and Mon Trésor. Land of 60 *arpents* and infrastructural facilities will be provided to the co-operative societies in connection with the setting up of the farms.

Further, a grant of Rs30,000 per head of improved genetic breeds up to a maximum of 50 heads per farm is being provided. A Pasture Development Scheme is also being set up. These schemes will be beneficial for co-operatives in the dairy sector and will surely boost up our local milk production. 160 *arpents* of additional land from the Mauritius Sugar Planters Association are being provided to groups of small planters for onions and food crop cultivation. Co-operatives may take advantage of this measure.

The plight of co-operative food crop growers has equally been answered in this Budget with the introduction of the Food Crop Insurance Scheme which will cover some 27 food crops such as potatoes, onions and tomatoes. A sum of Rs15 m. has been provided for this scheme.

Various representations from the co-operators who are involved in potato and onion production relate to high cost of seeds and planting materials. To these worries, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment has provided for a Seed Potato Scheme of Rs25 m., which will cover 80% of the cost of seeds purchased, as an advance to be refunded at harvest time.

Similarly, an Onion Seed Purchase Scheme at the cost of Rs5 m. is being introduced to cater for liquidity problems amongst onion planters. These two input

support schemes will, no doubt, alleviate the financial burden of more than 2,000 co-operative planters. Co-operative fishermen are also being supported to acquire fibre glass boats so as to go off-lagoon.

Pig breeders have been assisted in getting back to business after the severe blow of the African Swine Fever in 2007. Infrastructure of two co-operative farms at St. Martin and Bassin Requin has been upgraded and appropriate support is being provided to professionalize pig breeding activities, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

As regards small cane planters grouped in co-operatives, derocking and irrigation facilities will be ongoing under a regrouping project so as to assist them in increasing productivity and decreasing costs of production to counterbalance shortfalls in the reduction of price of sugar.

Co-operative small cane planters will also benefit in terms of investment being made under the Sugar Reform Plan. And, more importantly, co-operative planters and small planters in general are acclaiming the exceptional measure of reducing the cess amount payable by 20%.

Insofar as trade facilitation is concerned, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has, amongst others, the mandate of promoting trade by creating a conducive environment for doing business. Government has embarked on an ambitious programme to remove obstacles related to import and export activities. These reforms are imperative to build up an efficient and responsive public sector as well as to enhance the ease of doing business in Mauritius. In line with this objective, the Permit Review Committee was established under my Ministry in the wake of last year's budget proposals. It had the mandate to review the need of import and export permits where they exist and also to submit proposals to simplified processes and procedures for the issue of such permits and clearances. The Committee has completed its report and, on its implementation, some 160 tariff lines will not require import/export permits. Further, information technology enabled platform will be used by different licence/permits issuing agencies for expediency in the processing of applications and delivery of permits. These permits issuing agencies would be required to issue permits based on principles of risk assessment, that is, they should consider issuing pre-arrival permits/clearances and conduct necessary inspections ex-post to ascertain compliance with established criteria. All these and other recommendations of the Committee will go a long way towards enhancing the ease of doing business in the economy, something which is vital to bolster economic activities in this present period of downturn.

Coming to the Competition Commission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, further, for business to thrive, the necessary environment needs to be created and maintained. While the market is self-regulating in some aspects, it does have imperfections which undermine the maximization of welfare hence, the importance of regulators to deal with the externalities of the market. Thus, to ensure fair trading practices and prevent abuse of dominant power by firms, the Competition Commission is in the process of being established in pursuance of the Competition Act. The Executive Director is already in post and other staff will be recruited shortly. The Commission will investigate the possible anti-competitive behaviour by business and take corrective

measures such as imposing fines.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for Rodrigues we have signed the Memorandum of Understanding in all aspects of co-operatives and SMEs.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in this time of crisis we need solutions. We should be united, we should have solidarity. All Mauritians should join hands together and work very hard for the betterment of the country.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(3.35 p.m)

Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière): M. le président, mon intervention va être courte pour ne pas avoir une répétition de ce que les autres membres ont déjà dit. M. le président, ce budget n'a d'autre synonyme qu'un mot: incohérence

Je vais vous démontrer lors de mon intervention comment ce gouvernement, à travers son ministre des finances, nous a offert, dans un bel emballage, une boite vide. M. le président, le gouvernement a créé le concept Maurice Ile Durable, vision du Premier ministre, comme l'a dit le ministre des finances dans son discours de vendredi dernier - le *MID*, comme on dit - pour une Île Maurice plus propre, plus consciente de l'enjeu environnemental et pour une utilisation optimale d'énergie renouvelable. Je suis d'accord avec cela comme beaucoup d'autres dans cette Assemblée mais dans le Budget 2008/2009, le gouvernement avait encouragé les Mauriciens à se tourner vers l'énergie solaire. Déjà, dans son *Amigo Plan*, le ministre avait donné le ton en annonçant des subsides de R10,000 pour tout achat de chauffe-eau solaire, à travers la Banque de Développement, pour une période ne dépassant pas décembre 2009.

Je vais, avec votre permission, M. le président, citer le ministre au paragraphe 144 du dernier budget. Il a dit ceci, je cite -

“We aim to double the number of solar water heaters by December 2009. Currently less than 10 percent of households in Mauritius use solar water heaters in contrast to up to 92 percent in countries with similar climate. To achieve our target a new solar water heater loan scheme will be offered by the DBM. The MID Fund will provide an outright grant of Rs10,000 for every solar water heater purchased through that loan scheme. This offer will be time bound until 31 December 2009.”

Or, que constatons-nous cette année, M. le président? Il y eu 29,000 demandes contre 20,000 attendues par le gouvernement. Les chefs de familles étaient très enthousiastes à profiter de cette aubaine afin de réduire leur note d'électricité qui, en cette période difficile, coûte très chère au ménage. Mais voilà que soudainement, le DBM, qui a reçu des instructions du gouvernement, a, d'un trait de plume, éliminé ce *grant* ce mois-ci bien avant la date butoir de décembre 2009, malgré le succès enregistré, et reconnu par le ministre des finances lui-même. Quelle est la raison avancée par le chef du gouvernement au public? Il dit qu'il n'y a pas de fonds nécessaires pour ce

projet. Voilà un gouvernement qui crie sur tous les toits que nous devons nous tourner vers l'énergie renouvelable, que nous devons nous instruire autour de Maurice Ile Durable, mais qui va à l'encontre même de ce qu'il prêche. Où va-t-on, M. le président? Je me pose cette question légitime: combien ce projet allait coûter au gouvernement si la DBM acceptait des applications jusqu'à décembre 2009? Les mathématiques sont simples. Une poignée de millions de roupies seulement. M. le président, comment peut-on encourager les Mauriciens à utiliser moins d'énergie électrique et moins de gaz ménager pour les besoins domestiques si en amont le gouvernement ne donne aucun *incentive* pour aller dans cette direction? Ce gouvernement, va-t-il tuer un projet qui cadre bien avec le concept Maurice Ile Durable à cause de quelques millions de roupies? Voilà la première incohérence de ce budget!

M. le président, c'est dommage que le ministre des finances mette fin à la subvention de R 10,000 pour les chauffe-eau solaires et soit très généreux envers le secteur privé. Il va investir R 100 millions pour transformer la station de St. Martin en vue du projet d'incinérateur à la Chaumière. Ainsi, M. le président, St. Martin deviendra une station transitaire de déchets qui seront ensuite transportés vers l'incinérateur de la Chaumière, un projet privé. Ce projet est actuellement contesté au Tribunal d'Appel de l'Environnement. D'un côté, le ministre des finances refuse de financer un projet qui aidait des familles à réduire le coût de leurs factures d'électricité et qui va dans le droit fil du concept Maurice Ile Durable et, de l'autre côté, il finance un projet privé contesté qui va à l'encontre du concept Maurice Ile Durable

M. le président, je viens au deuxième volet de mon intervention qui est l'éducation. Comment faire comprendre au gouvernement de l'Alliance Sociale de la nécessité de revoir sa politique de subsides aux frais d'examens de la SC et du HSC? Nous nous battons depuis trois ans au sein de l'opposition, sans succès. M. le président, le ministre des finances est fier d'annoncer la construction d'un autre campus universitaire au coût de R 600 millions qui va accueillir 8,000 étudiants. Quand je dis étudiants, je parle ici des HSC *holders*. Comment voulez-vous, M. le président, que des étudiants de familles modestes puissent un jour avoir accès à l'université sans un certificat de HSC en poche? Ces gens-là, comme le chantait Jacques Brel, ne peuvent même pas payer les frais d'examens de SC et de HSC de leurs enfants. M. le président, faut-il oublier l'accès à l'université pour cette catégorie de mauriciens? Si ce gouvernement veut sincèrement démocratiser l'accès à l'éducation tertiaire, il devrait permettre aux étudiants pauvres de poursuivre leurs études jusqu'en HSC. Pour moi, il n'y a pas d'autre alternative, M. le président. Le gouvernement devrait revenir aux subsides sur les frais d'examens comme ce fut le cas sous l'ancien régime de 2000/2005, sinon le nouveau campus n'accueillera que des étudiants de la classe possédante. Est-ce cela la démocratisation, M. le président?

Le troisième point de mon intervention concerne le logement, M. le président. Nous sommes en 2009 et au 21^{ème} siècle. L'Alliance Sociale dirige le pays depuis quatre ans, mais pas une seule maison n'est sortie de terre. Pourtant, ce gouvernement, à travers son ministre du logement, reconnaît qu'il y a une forte demande de *low-cost (Firinga type) Housing*. Ma question parlementaire No. B/1305, en date du 25 novembre 2008, concerne des maisons NHDC à Chebel. Je demandais –

“Est-ce que le ministre peut nous confirmer si priorité sera donnée

aux habitants de la circonscription No. 20 qui sont vraiment dans le besoin d'un logement.”

Le ministre du logement avait répondu –

“The policy of the Government is to give priority to people living in the drainage area, for example, in Chebel for 54 units, we have had 1,492 applications and the number of applicants who came for interview was 1,467.”

Ce n'est pas moi qui le dis, c'est le ministre qui le dit! Vous voyez vous-même, M. le président, pour 54 maisons type Firinga. L'ancien régime a construit des centaines et des centaines de maisons mais ce gouvernement n'a même pas pu les terminer. La demande est 30 fois plus. Là encore, c'est seulement dans la circonscription No. 20, mais si vous allez dans toute l'île Maurice, vous verrez combien de demandes de logement il y a. Nous, les députés des deux côtés de la Chambre, recevons nos mandants les mercredis et les gens viennent nous voir pour deux choses: l'emploi et le logement. Donc, les amis de l'autre côté de la Chambre, sont très confiants. Il y a une très grosse demande de logement, surtout pour le logement du type Firinga que l'ancien régime 2000-2005 avait fait construire. Le ministre avait promis que la livraison de ces maisonnettes serait faite en décembre 2008 mais nous sommes déjà en juin, M. le président. Je suis allé à Chebel durant le week-end, je crois que ces maisons ne seront pas livrées, peut-être après les élections, je ne sais pas!

M. le président, comme je l'ai dit, pas une seule maison n'a été construite par ce gouvernement contrairement à ce qu'avait dit le ministre des finances dans son discours de l'année dernière au chapitre 229 - Amigo Plan. Je me permets de le citer, avec votre permission, M. le président –

“This year, we are allocating Rs170 m. towards infrastructure for the construction of 774 Firinga houses on 10 sites across the island for very low income families.”

Au final, M. le président, *zero plombage low cost housing!* Je conclus que le *social housing* n'est pas dans le dictionnaire de ce gouvernement. En revanche, le ministre des finances est fier d'annoncer que son gouvernement ait pu caser 1700 familles ne touchant pas plus de R 4,000 par mois. Ce qu'il ne dit pas c'est qu'il est en train de reintroduire ce que jadis on appelait des *longères* avec quelques feuilles de tôle et des poutres. Ce type de logis, M. le président, est d'un autre temps. Ils étaient construits sur une base temporaire sur des demandes individuelles – cyclone, incendie ou d'autres cas extremes. C'est le *Trust Fund for Vulnerable Groups* qui construisait ces *longères* destinées aux personnes qui ne peuvent même pas se payer un loyer aussi minime soit-il. Voilà une autre incohérence de ce budget.

M. le président, nous savons que chaque année la population obtient une compensation salariale par rapport à la perte du pouvoir d'achat. Or, cette année l'inflation est de 7%, mais le gouvernement a décidé de s'aligner sur les propositions du National Pay Council pour donner un taux de compensation de 5.1% aux pensionnés, handicapés, veuves et orphelins. Ils ont tous été passés à la trappe sans aucun état d'âme. Ce qui est malheureux c'est que cette catégorie de citoyens a obtenu

moins que le taux d'inflation en vigueur. Le comble est que la compensation salariale s'arrête à ceux touchant jusqu'à R12,000 par mois. Cette catégorie de citoyens, M. le président, est doublement victime de ce gouvernement. D'un côté, ils sont les oubliés en matière de logements sociaux, et de l'autre côté il n'y a pas de compensation salariale. Pas une seule roupie, M. le président!

M. le président, avec tout le respect que je vous dois, est-ce qu'un chef de famille avec deux enfants ou plus à sa charge, ayant un salaire de R12,000 par mois, est un homme riche ? Pour l'Alliance Sociale c'est oui, car ils vivent loin de la réalité. Ce qu'oublie ce gouvernement c'est que ce père de famille ne bénéficie plus de subsides pour les frais d'examens SC et HSC pour ses enfants, n'a pas une politique de logements sociaux en sa faveur et, finalement, il n'a même pas droit à une compensation salariale pour la perte de son pouvoir d'achat sans oublier qu'il subit de plein fouet les augmentations de prix dans sa vie de tous les jours. Qu'ont fait ces hommes et ces femmes qui touchent plus de R12,000 pour être aussi durement penalisés par ce gouvernement de l'Alliance Sociale ?

M. le président, ce ne sont pas de nouveaux riches, loin de là. Ces hommes et ces femmes ne peuvent même pas joindre les deux bouts à chaque fin de mois. Pourtant, ce gouvernement est aveugle devant cette souffrance humaine. Savez-vous, M. le président, qu'à l'extérieur de cette auguste Assemblée - pour ne pas dire *out there*, comme dirait l'autre - la colère est grande et que nous sommes au bord d'une crise sociale. C'est avec raison que le *Leader* de l'opposition a concentré sa PNQ hier sur cette nouvelle incohérence du gouvernement. Si on comprend bien ce gouvernement dit vouloir sauver les emplois à travers son *stimulus package*. Ainsi des milliards de roupies vont être offertes au secteur privé. Malgré le fait que les patrons aient encaissé l'argent des contribuables, ils n'ont donné aucune garantie qu'il n'y aurait pas de pertes d'emploi. La cerise sur le gâteau, M. le président, est que les grands patrons vont pouvoir licencier d'une manière tout à fait légale car ce gouvernement leur a offert une arme fatale que représente *l'Employees Rights Act*. L'heure viendra, M. le président, où cette population sera prendre sa revanche sur ce gouvernement de l'Alliance Sociale et ce gouvernement le paiera *cash*.

M. le président, avant de terminer, je dirais deux mots sur ma circonscription. Depuis quatre ans que ce gouvernement est au pouvoir, M. le président, il n'y a pas eu un seul développement. Comme mon collègue Rajesh l'a dit, dans le gouvernement nous avons des ministres et des PPS. Il y avait seulement trois ou quatre PPS, mais le nombre a augmenté. Nous, les trois députés de la circonscription numéro 20, travaillons en équipe et à l'heure où je vous parle, M. le président, je ne connais même pas le PPS de cette circonscription.

(Interruptions)

Il y a des projets dans la circonscription que nous avions commencés, par le gouvernement de 2000-2005 et, aujourd'hui, quatre ans après rien, *zéro plombage* tout comme le logement ! J'espère qu'avant les élections, M. le président, les députés de la circonscription numéro 20 auront l'occasion de connaître le PPS. Nous irons alors dans la circonscription voir les différents projets, M. le président. Depuis l'élection partielle de 1999, le ministre d'alors, l'honorable Rajesh Bhagwan avait commencé à travailler

sur un projet - la foire à la résidence Barkly - mais au moment de son lancement la foire, il y a eu les élections générales. Et voilà depuis quatre ans, rien n'a été fait.

M. le président, je termine et vous remercie pour votre attention.

(4.00 p.m.)

Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): M. le président, à l'heure où je vous parle, si je demande à tout le monde de vérifier sa montre, est-ce que vous serez d'accord avec moi que l'heure qui figure sur toutes les montres n'est pas la même? Savez-vous pourquoi? A-t-on un centre de références à Maurice qui indique l'heure exacte? Dans le passé, on faisait référence seulement à la MBC/radio. Aujourd'hui, avec la libéralisation des ondes, on a plusieurs radios, et chaque radio vous donne des heures différentes. J'ai déjà adressé une question à monsieur Dowlutta à ce sujet et il m'a demandé: 'qui va répondre?' C'est vrai, qui va répondre? Cela concerne qui? Le Premier ministre ou quel ministre! Il faut une référence aux mauriciens pour corriger l'heure au quotidien. Je vous laisse réfléchir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is the fourth Budget that the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment, hon. Dr. Sithanen, is presenting to the nation since this Government is in power. It is the fourth time that this Budget is not welcomed by the majority of the population. The poor people were having hope in this Government and were wishing that their *pouvoir d'achat allait diminuer*, but *zéro plombage!* *Comme les années précédentes, c'est un budget de bluff et d'effet d'annonce.*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some days before the presentation of this Budget, the National Pay Council met in the absence of the trade unionists and recommended a salary compensation of only Rs200 for workers earning a salary of up to Rs12,000. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with this Rs200 now, what can one get in addition to his family budget? What is worse is that the hon. Prime Minister, some weeks ago, announced very proudly that *la pension de vieillesse sera doublée, et voilà que le ministre des finances leur accorde une malheureuse augmentation de 5.1%!* *Quelle trahison, M. le président!*

Amongst the list of projects mentioned in this Budget, I regret to say that not a single line has been mentioned for my Constituency except for the construction of a market fair at Abercrombie, but I need to say that this project has been announced since 2006, and up to date, we are still being fooled regarding this project.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister of Finance might not be aware of the increasing number of poor people in my Constituency. The infrastructure is in a bad state. I shall list some.

First of all, the hon. Minister of Finance stated that a sum of Rs100 m. will be earmarked for the upgrading of the NHDC housing units. May I take this opportunity to request both the hon. Minister of Finance and the hon. Minister of Housing & Lands to see to it that the NHDC complexes at Carreau Lalo, Vallée des Prêtres and Cité la Cure be upgraded? The fencing is almost rusty and the parking areas are covered by

weeds. I am of opinion that a maintenance team should be created to look after the repairs, maintenance and cleaning works of all NHDC complexes around the island. We should get rid of the syndic as I stated before in a supplementary question to a PNQ put by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are now talking of information technology. It is very sad to note that some 20 families at Cité La Cure are without electricity and water supply. I raised this issue in this Assembly and the Deputy Prime Minister is supposed to have a site visit which the people over there are still waiting for. I raised the same issue with the Chairperson of the CEB. Do you know what he told me? He told me that the Trust Fund has not settled the amount of Rs800,000 just to do the connection for electricity supply. *A cause d'une somme de Rs800,000, les habitants de la Cité la Cure sont privés d'électricité. Aujourd'hui, nous allons vers une technologie hitech! Sur notre mobile, nous avons 15 chaînes de télévision et les enfants qui y habitent n'ont pas le droit de regarder la télévision. Quelle pitié!*

As far as flooding is concerned, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are several places where flooding occurs as soon as there are torrential rainfalls. I have put a Parliamentary Question on this subject and the Ministry of Environment is still compiling the information as usual. I would like to impress upon the Minister for the need to construct drains which should be regularly cleaned and cleared.

I will come to the Congomah region. It is a region where there is not only flooding, but also poor water supply. May I ask the Deputy Prime Minister to look into the matter? There are two bridges which need to be urgently built at Congomah - one of them is at Blackburn and the other one at Paramputh. The day before, I came with a Parliamentary Question on this issue. If this is not done, I hope this Government will not be brought to task in the event of a human tragedy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the inhabitants of Le Hochet, last year, formed 'Les Forces Vives' and I was invited to one of their meetings. They raised several shortcomings which they are facing, namely irregular scavenging services, lack of street lighting, bad state of roads and also there is the problem of law and order.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, regarding law and order, I must point out that the situation is becoming worse day by day. I have asked several Parliamentary Questions about the state of the police-stations in my Constituency and the lack of vehicles at Abercrombie police-station. I would like to request the hon. Prime Minister to look into this matter. Insofar as the construction of the Cité La Cure police-station, which I raised several times in this august Assembly, is concerned, we don't want a remake of last year's disturbance, and the hon. Prime Minister should assume his responsibilities. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have also asked several questions about the law and order situation prevailing at Le Hochet. I have, indeed, stressed upon the need for Le Hochet village to be equipped with a police post but, unfortunately, Government turned down this request.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to the health sector, it is sad to note that no major project has been undertaken by this Government up to now, whilst the previous Government constructed three hospitals, namely Brown Sequared Hospital, new Casualty Block at Victoria Hospital and Souillac Hospital. During the past electoral

campaigns, promises were made to the effect that New Jeetoo Hospital would be built in six months' time. *Zéro plombage!*

(*Interruptions*)

Very soon! As usual! We are used to it! The inhabitants of Long Mountain are also waiting for the new hospital and they hope that this will be realised before the end of this Government's mandate.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I'll now come to traffic congestion. La congestion routière! Je demande l'attention de tous les membres, y compris celle du Dr. Sithanen, le meilleur ministre des finances qu'on ait dans la région. Parmi nous, il y a plusieurs médecins dans cette auguste Assemblée; et de très bons. Demandez-leur - le Dr. Hawoldar est ici présent - combien de cas dépressifs on a dans ce pays. Ces cas augmentent d'année en année. Ce matin, M. le président, j'ai quitté Vacoas à sept heures et quart pour arriver à Rose Hill une heure et demie après. Savez-vous pourquoi? Il n'y avait pas d'accident, M. le président! La circulation menant vers le pont Colville Deverell était bloquée complètement.

M. le président, l'année dernière, savez-vous combien d'élèves du *SC/HSC* n'ont pu prendre part à leurs examens à cause de la congestion routière sur le M1?

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members! Please!

Mr Jhugroo: C'est vrai, il y avait ce problème...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, try to pay attention to the hon. Member who has the floor!

Mr Jhugroo: L'honorable membre a raison. Le problème est que tous les gouvernements au pouvoir n'ont rien fait pour débloquer la congestion routière.

(*Interruptions*)

Ce qui est grave, c'est que la licence qu'ils paient pour rouler leur véhicule augmente d'année en année. Moi, je dis que si rien n'est fait, il faudrait que tous les automobilistes cessent de payer! Je pense qu'il ne faut plus payer, car les routes sont restées dans le même état. Est-ce qu'on a déjà fait une étude pour voir si on peut avoir un deuxième *highway* entre Curepipe et Port Louis? Est-ce qu'on l'a déjà fait? On avait, dans le passé, suggéré de faire construire un tunnel. Rien n'a été fait. Et maintenant, le *Dream Bridge* est devenu le *Harbour Bridge*. Et le *Ring Road*! C'est bon de se l'entendre dire, mais pour les automobilistes ce n'est pas correct. *Unfortunately the Deputy Prime Minister is not here.* Tous les matins, s'il n'est pas accompagné de son motard, il ne peut pas sortir de la rue Vandermeersch à cause de la trop grande circulation.

(*Interruptions*)

Je le sais parce que je fais cette route tous les jours. Il faut que tout le monde soit concerné par ce problème, de même que le prochain gouvernement. Il faut mettre de

l'ordre dans ce pays. Il faut faire construire des routes, sinon, avec cette congestion routière, ce sont des gens malades qui viendront travailler à Port Louis.

(Interruptions)

This bus lane est une perte de temps. This is for the short-term! We should plan for long-term solutions, just like Sir Anerood Jugnauth did. We should plan for the future, above 2050, and the best formula is LRT. Go and put it on record! LRT! This is the best formula. C'est ça qu'il nous faut dans ce pays, M. le président.

(Interruptions)

L'honorable Pravind Jugnauth viendra, ne vous en faites pas! Je lui en ai parlé plusieurs fois! Il faut mettre l'emphase sur la congestion routière. Je connais sa capacité, il peut le faire, et il le fera pour ce pays.

Venons-en à la MBC - c'est mon plat préféré. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir concerning the MBC, much has been said about one of their many scandals, namely *Pepsi Hungama*. I advise the hon. Prime Minister to have a closer look at the management of the MBC, where the financial situation has gone bad. At a time when Parliament is discussing the Budget, do you know where the Chairman of the Board, the Director-General of the MBC and the Head of the News are? *Cote zot? On dit qu'il faut se serrer la ceinture, qu'on ne doit pas voyager, et qu'on va diminuer les salaires des ministres, ceci après avoir écouté la décision prise par nous, le MSM, à St. Pierre le 1^{er} mai. C'est bien!*

C'est le MSM qui a pris une bonne décision en premier à St. Pierre, suivi par le gouvernement et, après, par le MMM. Très bien! Mais où sont les trois personnes de la MBC? A Macao! There seems to be no accountability and the Director-General, himself, has said that films have been bought for the next five years. *Cinq années!* What is the urgency? I shall also underline that the public, watching movies on the first channel on Thursdays, gets second offer rate movies. *C'est triste!* There has been a *hungama* on *Pepsi Hungama* for several reasons, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The MBC was expecting to make some money, but it lost substantial amounts. With these amounts lost, I am told, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the whole series of live football matches could have been bought, and MBC would have stood to make profits. Anyway, any other Government, in this present state of affairs, would have gone for a full-fledged Commission of Inquiry on the management of the MBC, which is financed by public money as well.

M. le président, le vice-Premier ministre croit faire comprendre que son budget va stimuler les choses dans le pays. Loin de là! Si, ici même, ses collègues ne sont pas stimulés, comment la nation Mauricienne va-t-elle être stimulée par son budget?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Silence, please! Thank you.

Mr Jhugroo: Mais, en tant que pharmacien, j'ai de bons stimulants pour ses collègues, il n'y a aucun doute là-dessus! La triste réalité c'est que la majorité des Mauriciens, depuis juin 2005, se sont appauvris aux dépens d'une poignée de riches qui s'enrichissent. Ils ont des hôtels, le projet d'incinérateur, les terres Tianli, la terre

de l'État à Palmar, IRS à Tamarin, et l'achat d'un pétrolier pour un contrat de quinze ans tandis que le prix du cargo baisse drastiquement sur le marché mondial, le projet de la cimenterie, le projet du 'Lotto', le non-paiement de la taxe sur les dividendes, et les pauvres sont épulchés financièrement à mort. A quel jeu joue le Dr. Sithanen? C'est Robin Hood à l'envers, comme l'a mentionné hier l'honorable madame Ariane Navarre-Marie.

Permettez-moi de saluer l'ancien régime! Savez-vous pourquoi ? Parce que l'ancien régime avait libéralisé les ondes. Aujourd'hui, nous avons des radios libres et moi, en tant que politicien, je félicite ces journalistes de la radio.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Silence, please!

Mr Jhugroo: Parce que nous, les politiciens, devons assumer nos responsabilités, car nous sommes payés. Surtout lorsqu'on tient des propos, il faut en assumer le contenu. Nous sommes payés par l'argent du peuple; *we are paid from public money*. Je dois féliciter ces journalistes de Radio Plus qui ont fait un excellent travail. Il faut qu'il y ait des journalistes pareils; il faut nous surveiller, parce qu'il y a des politiciens qui font des choses plus graves que ce qu'a fait l'honorable Mardemootoo. Pour lui, ce n'est rien comparé à ce que font les autres! Nous sommes des politiciens! On n'a pas le droit de faire des réunions sectaires; nous représentons toutes les communautés.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo, can we get back to the Budget, please?

Mr Jhugroo: Pour terminer, M. le président, je dirai que, si moi, j'ai affaire à ce genre de politique, je préfère retourner derrière le comptoir et vendre le panadol et le viagra à mes amis.

Merci, M. le président.

(4.28 p.m.)

Mr R. Duval (Second Member of Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) : Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I would like to congratulate my colleague and good friend, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment, Dr. the hon. Rama Sithanen, for what has been described as the most innovative Budget presented in the light of the present world economic crisis.

M. le président, il serait peut-être temps que l'île Maurice se réveille, du fait que nous traversons la pire récession depuis la grande débâcle financière des années 30 à tel point que même les plus brillants économistes de la planète ne peuvent, avec certitude, se prononcer sur la durée de cette crise, ni sur la méthodologie à appliquer pour enrayer les effets néfastes. Malgré cette conjoncture exceptionnellement difficile, nous ne pouvons que saluer le véritable tour de force réussi par le ministre des finances dans ce budget: maintenir le cap de la réforme, tout en dégageant les ressources nécessaires pour combattre la pauvreté et la précarité, et préserver les emplois. Ce qui a étonné et surpris plus d'un, M. le président, c'est que le ministre des finances a réalisé ce budget sans y ajouter de nouvelles taxes, ni toucher à la TVA ou aux impôts sur le

revenu. Il a intelligemment puiser l'argent là où il se trouve à savoir aux dépens des deux secteurs florissants du moment: les banques et les télécommunications. M. le président, il est clair que les priorités du ministre des finances étaient les seules possibles étant donné la conjoncture du moment. La préservation de l'emploi nous semble la priorité des priorités si nous ne voulons pas envoyer des centaines de familles sur le pavé avec pour conséquences une pression insoutenable sur nos tissus socio-économiques sans parler des dangers pour beaucoup de tomber dans la délinquance et autres fléaux, pour pailler une situation de précarité. M. le président, nous le constatons tous les jours depuis le début de l'année que même au niveau mondial des millions d'employés ont préféré accepter dans beaucoup de cas une réduction de leurs salaires plutôt que de se retrouver face à des licenciements. Nous saluons ici encore la mesure exceptionnelle du ministre des finances d'avoir privilégié la semaine des cinq jours de travail et deux jours de formation dans les secteurs les plus sensibles tels que l'hôtellerie et le textile.

De plus, le secteur des BPO, bien qu'en bonne santé, connaîtra aussi une mesure pour booster la formation et ainsi créer un vivier de diplômés sur lequel puiseront les entreprises de ce secteur.

M. le président, un vieil adage français dit que quand le bâtiment va tout va. Il est clair que le ministre des finances a tout compris. Il a tout compris des effets de la construction et de ses effets multiplicateurs en lançant de grands chantiers à la hauteur de plus de R66 milliards. Et là quand on parle de construction, M. le président, elle est égale à des infrastructures du pays. La construction est égale à la relance de l'emploi, M. le président. C'est la relance de l'emploi direct et indirect évidemment. La construction est égale à la modernisation de nos villes et de nos villages. La construction est égale à la continuation des projets ERS garantissant du même coup des rentrées de plusieurs milliards en FDI – *Foreign Direct Investment*. Construction, M. le président, est égale, encore une fois, aux désengorgements des axes routiers avec un gain de productivité une fois les chantiers routiers terminés. Et enfin, M. le président, comment ne pas oublier la construction qui nous tient le plus à cœur – le campus. Pour moi, personnellement, je pense que le campus au coût de R 600 millions sera quelque chose d'extraordinaire pour l'avenir de nos jeunes. L'avenir de nos jeunes, M. le président, dépend de la qualité, de l'éducation et de la formation que nous saurons mettre à leur disposition.

M. le président, nous ne pouvons que saluer cette autre mesure tout à fait innovatrice dans l'histoire économique de notre pays. En effet, M. le président, pour la première fois, un ministre des finances s'est montré sensible à la cause de nos artistes. Bravo! Il les a non seulement nommés dans son budget, mais a reconnu leurs talents et leurs contributions dans les domaines des arts, de la musique et de l'hôtellerie. Ainsi nos jeunes talents pourront se professionnaliser, participer à des forums internationaux tout en se perfectionnant dans leur métier respectif et espérons que cette mesure, M. le président, approfondira dans les années à venir pour déboucher sur une véritable industrie du loisir, pourquoi pas, où nos artistes auront les mêmes droits privilégiés et avantages sociaux pour leurs familles et que chaque employé de l'entreprise soit plus conventionnel. Je félicite et dis bravo encore une fois au ministre des finances d'avoir pensé aux oubliés, les artistes mauriciens, ces mêmes gens qui ont contribué

énormément à la promotion touristique, culturelle de ce pays. Bravo encore au vice-Premier ministre!

M. le président, il est connu et reconnu que les PMEs constituent l'ossature d'une économie, tout secteur économique confondu. L'honorable Bérenger en a parlé hier. Je suis du même avis que lui, ce qui est très rare. Elles représentent jusqu'à 50% ou 60% de l'activité économique d'un pays. Ce budget est en fait une priorité qui dégagera près d'un milliard de roupies, M. le président, pour préserver les emplois et moderniser l'outil de travail. Les PMEs bénéficieront entre autres des facilités du *business plan* ainsi que l'appui du *Business Growth Scheme* afin d'encourager et de promouvoir leur croissance. M. le président, c'est une reconnaissance encore une fois du vice-Premier ministre. Le label produit authentique mauricien reconnu. Bien souvent il y a des gens qui viennent nous voir, nous les politiciens. Ils ne sont pas reconnus, M. le président, avec leurs produits. Ils font beaucoup d'efforts et aujourd'hui je suis fier car le produit authentique mauricien viendra finalement donner une crédibilité sur la place touristique et locale.

M. le président, le programme sur l'éradication de la pauvreté sera renforcé dans ce budget pour mieux soutenir et soulager les plus démunis dans leur précarité. Plus de 1.5 milliards seront canalisés à travers le *National Empowerment Foundation* pour aider au dépistage de plus de 600 enfants du pré-primaire. D'autres enfants, en situation d'échec scolaire, recevront de l'aide pour acquérir des *life-skills* qui mèneront vers un emploi éventuel.

Enfin, saluons, M. le président, la mesure du ministre des finances qui demande aux entreprises profitables d'allouer une enveloppe de 2% de leurs profits avant l'impôt à leur projet de responsabilité sociale. Dans l'ensemble, cette mesure dégagera des sommes considérables. Il fallait le faire. Il fallait avoir l'idée de le faire. C'est facile de parler mais l'action était imminente et c'est venu de la part du vice- Premier ministre. Je le félicite encore une fois. Les plus démunis de la société en profiteront directement à travers les ONGs.

M. le président, je vais conclure en lançant un appel à chaque mauricien - il est plus qu'évident que nous, mauriciens - même les honorables members de cette Chambre - devons rassembler toutes nos compétences, quelles qu'elles soient, afin de traverser ces moments difficiles et incertains. L'heure n'est pas à la division. Ce n'est ni le gouvernement, ni le secteur privé qui, seuls, réussiront à nous sortir de la crise. C'est impossible. Il faut qu'il y ait un effort national. Il faut que tous les mauriciens s'unissent dans un même élan de solidarité et de patriotisme afin de sortir l'île Maurice de cette impasse. L'engagement doit être national, M. le président. Nous l'avons fait avant, nous pouvons le faire. M. le président, *yes we can*.

At 4.40 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.15 p.m with Mr Speaker in the Chair

The Minister of Consumer Protection & Citizens Charter (Mr S. Tang Wag Hing): M. le président, avant de prendre la parole, je voudrais

faire deux petites remarques. Comme vous savez, en tant que ministre, bien souvent, durant l'exercice du budget, on a tendance à écouter les opinions des autres. En ce qui concerne le point soulevé par l'honorable membre concernant l'ancien ministre des sports, j'aimerais lui dire tout simplement que je n'ai pas à rougir, car en trois ans, en tant que ministre des sports, en deux occasions, on a eu la médaille d'or *at the CJSOI Games* qui se sont tenus à Maurice et aux Seychelles. Je dois aussi dire que c'était la première fois en ce qui concerne le sport dans l'histoire de Maurice qu'on a eu une médaille de bronze olympique. Bien sûr, je donne maintenant le flambeau à mon ami, le Ministre des Sports, l'honorable Ritoo, pour continuer le travail.

Mr Speaker, Sir, right at the outset, I would like to express my appreciation for, and confidence in this Action Plan Budget to saving jobs, protecting people, preparing for recovery, and I wish to congratulate the Prime Minister as well as the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment for the wide and compassionate view with some 200 measures to attain the set objectives.

My colleague, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment has stated on more than one occasion that Mauritius is resilient because of the measures taken in the previous Budgets, but he has expressed that Mauritius, however, is not immune.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, the storm which was looming at large has now reached our shores and it is more severe than anticipated. Confronted with an economic cataclysm unfurling on the world on which could have dire consequence on our economy, my colleague has been able to come up with a plethora of schemes and measures that would not only halt, but reverse the trend, and would allow us to emerge from this economic blizzard successfully.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we know that highly industrialized countries considered as models of development have gone into recession. Millions of jobs have been lost. Do we realize the situation of those families where their consumer's ability has been completely eroded? Not later than yesterday, we have painfully learnt, that South Africa, the most able and promising country of the continent has gone into recession.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this reality is a cruel reminder that the world has entered into unprecedeted global financial crisis. Even in the worst severe drought, a tree has to be watered so that we may benefit from its fruits. It is not by pulling down that we may avoid starvation. The Vice-Prime Minister

& Minister of Finance has rightly stressed on the simple and realistic equation - No enterprise, No jobs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget, despite the criticisms that may come from some quarters, is one about solidarity. Its very essence, as enunciated by my colleague, is about saving jobs and protecting people.

Solidarity, Mr Speaker, Sir, is not an abstract concept. It does not appear in the thin air, but it is embodied in deeds and actions. It is nurtured and sustained through our imaginative ability, of which this Budget is a vivid example, and indeed, a particularly visible one.

This Budget is thus replete of measures to save jobs and I quote from the Budget Speech of 2009 –

“(...) about protecting the income sources for thousands of families who would otherwise have to face the indignity of being unemployed and suffer the human desolation that high unemployment always entails.’

In addition to saving jobs, many projects are also in the pipeline and will effectively contribute towards job creation. Thus, Mr Speaker, Sir, the approach is a two-pronged one. On the one side there is a job protection and on the other there is a job creation. According to official figures, the rate of unemployment for the first quarter this year is 8% as compared to 8.2% within the same period last year. Nine thousand jobs have been created. This is only one example - apart from inflation, FDI - of the benefits that the country is deriving because of the bold and original measures taken as from July 2005.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a bit saddening that, on the other side of the House, we can only hear negative echoes. I think the time is not for criticisms but for positive actions. This is what this Government is about. Even though this may hurt my friends on the other side of the House, I believe the population should thank God immensely that it is this Government who is in power and not vice versa. Let us take one example: the salary compensation. The Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment has given figures of the number of families who are going to benefit from it, both from the public and private sectors. At a time when large and wide companies have closed down in various industrialized countries, putting on the pavement millions of bread earners; can we afford in Mauritius to ignore this reality and act recklessly, imprudently and without foresight?

The country knows, Mr Speaker, Sir, that 8% compensation was given when inflation was 13.5%. The country knows also that VAT was increased on two occasions from 10% to 15% when the country was under a cloudless sky. Yet now, even in this time of high uncertainties and turbulence, this Government under the

leadership of Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam has neither increased VAT nor widened its field in order to protect consumers from further worries and anxieties.

The resources mobilized are unprecedented. I note that Rs4 billion will be used for saving jobs and Rs2.4 billion for protecting people. Never in the history of our nation has such an amount been voted just to save jobs. Among the many projects which will soon start is that of Tianli, one which this Government should be particularly proud of. It is the result of our intense economic diplomacy coupled with the personal efforts of the Prime Minister that we have been able to secure commitment of the Chinese side to implement the project in Mauritius. A project of that magnitude and scope cannot be implemented in one day. It is complex and has many aspects to it, but no one should nurture any doubt, this project will be implemented.

We cannot but be reassured when no less a person than the President of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency, Mr Hu Jintao informed Mauritius, during his official visit, on how eager he was to see this project take off and implemented. Through such types of projects, we are confident that our country is on track for economies and prosperity.

It is a well documented and recognized fact that human being is at the centre of everything. Viewed from different angles, man may be at times a producer, a manufacturer, a business person or a consumer. It is this last category which is the most vulnerable and subjected to all types of abuse.

While in his Budget, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment has given attention and covered many aspects of the various roles man play in life by any human being yet if anyone requires another tangible proof that this Government is a caring one, then the decision of the Prime Minister to create a Ministry for Consumer Protection and Citizens Charter is a clear one. Many persons may not measure the wisdom that lies behind such a decision. It means that consumer protection and citizens' rights are at the centre stage of this Government mandate and it concerns the population at large.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the consumer has a voice at the higher decision making level of the country. I am proud that the responsibility of steering this philosophy of Government and translating it in concrete action has been entrusted to me.

My Ministry is a new one, still in its infancy. It is only eight months old. In the eyes of one and many, it may appear to be a small Ministry. But let me rid you of this wrong perception. Our objectives are noble and ambitious and the tasks that lie ahead of us are manifold. Rest assured that we will not shy away from our responsibilities. We have already achieved a lot with limited means and resources. Officers of the Consumer Protection Unit have, during the past year and up to date, effected 9010 visits at trade premises and 250 contraventions have been established. 1846 complaints have been recorded and investigated. 1332 have come to positive conclusions while 514 complaints are still to be settled and the enquiries are still ongoing. We should not forget that during the food contamination crisis of melamine and rhodamine, my Ministry was on the forefront of every action taken. No stone was left unturned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, consumer protection officers immediately secured contaminated goods and removed them from the market. The population was also sensitized on the risks associated with the consumption of such products. In order to provide a service *de proximité* to the population, the services of the Consumer Protection Unit have been decentralized and in addition to Port Louis, CAB offices are being used in the four regions of the country. With additional workforce, this decentralized process will continue so that the population would be able to access our services in a timelier manner.

An important project mobilizing the attention of my Ministry is the creation of a Price Observatory. In this context of the Additional Stimulus Package, a sub-committee has been instituted to look into ways of protecting the purchasing power of the population. One of the identified ways of doing so would be the setting up of a Price Observatory. The purpose of a Price Observatory, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to try to update the knowledge of the population on the variable that goes into the prices of goods, typically of differences between prices of basic products from source to destiny and publicizing the price structure as much as possible.

A Price Observatory tries to favour transparency and rationality in the commercialisation of products in free markets, contributing to the price stability of products, increasing the amount of information about products.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it also improves the competition in the different phases from the commercialization process and in the different times and locations, to the benefit of all the intervening agents in the chain, especially of the consumers. However, this project is still in its early stages, but we hope to bring it to fruition not so far in the future. Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the benefits of the Price Observatory is that it would enable my Ministry to detect possible cases of dumping of products on the local market. My Ministry is presently represented on the committee instituted, under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, to work on anti-dumping issues and we intend to make sure that the interest of consumers are fully protected in any legislation which may come into force.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Citizen's Charter concept ranks very high on the agenda of this Government. The project started in the late 1990s as part of the Public Sector Reforms Programme and was implemented by the then Ministry for Civil Service Affairs & Administrative Reforms. In 2005, when we assumed office, it was clearly spelt out in the Address of the President that the concept of Citizens' Charter will be fully implemented. The creation of a specific Ministry to take the project forward demonstrates the importance of this concept in the eyes of the Government.

Until today, except for seven Ministries and Departments, all the others have published their charters. 27 have displayed them on their websites and 85 parastatal institutions have published their charters. As can be noted, Mr Speaker, Sir, a large majority of the public institutions has a Citizen's Charter. However, in order to ascertain whether there is adherence to the provisions of the Charter, my Ministry is contemplating the possibility of carrying out an audit in some public institutions to determine the extent to which there is compliance with the provisions of the Charter and the changes brought in terms of the quality of service delivery.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the other hand, in order to enlarge the concept of Citizen's Charter, consideration is also being given to extend it to Government-owned companies and to some institutions in the private sector on a purely voluntarily basis. The intention is to create a public/private sector synergy that would ultimately benefit the citizen. Soon, an Advisory and Grievance Handling Cell would be set up at the level of my Ministry and any member of the public, who feels aggrieved by the quality of the service delivered by any institution which has a published charter whether private or public, would be able to channel his complaint through my Ministry. This will automatically trigger an investigation and the organisations concerned will be requested to take corrective measures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to make the operation of the system more effective, I will seek the collaboration of all Ministries and Departments to designate a Liaison Officer to handle all complaints and grievances regarding the operation of their respective charters. Mr Speaker, Sir, in the long run, it is my intention to create the required technological framework whereby the public could interact with my Ministry *via* phone, email and even short message services (SMS).

Mr Speaker, Sir, Consumer Protection and Citizens Right hinge on one important element, that is, the statutory framework in place. Some preliminary works, carried out at the level of my Ministry, indicate that some of the legislation in place does not necessarily address the new business landscape which is unfolding itself in this era of globalization. The consumer, therefore, becomes vulnerable and there are situations that have occurred where consumers could not be adequately protected in the face of abuses. Arrangements are in place to change the legal provisions as and when required. Mr Speaker, Sir, one such example concerns the safety and security of consumers. Recently, my Ministry has been made aware of the poor quality of low pressure regulators available on the market. Action to remedy the situation is being taken. However, we consider that a total review of the legislation in the specific area of Consumer Protection is more than warranted. Action has been initiated to enlist the support of the Law Reform Commission to carry out such a task. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a daunting challenge, but my Ministry considers that, if consumers are to be adequately protected, then this exercise is a must.

Consumer Education and Information: Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the fundamental rights of the consumer is the right to be informed. An informed customer is an intelligent buyer. I consider that consumer information should be one of the foremost obligations of my Ministry. However, I also consider that the right to be informed must go hand in hand with the obligation to be educated. Information and education are not alien concepts, they could be considered as the two sides of a single coin.

Mr Speaker, Sir, consumer education and information remain high on the agenda of my Ministry and are an integral part of our core activities. Officers of the Consumer Protection Unit have delivered 147 talks in the course of this year. However, this is the traditional manner, which, though efficient, yet has limited coverage. The audience covered consists mainly of people who attend community centres. Mr Speaker, Sir, we want to innovate and break a new ground. When the Ministry for Consumer Protection and Citizens Charter was created, the hon. Prime Minister expressed the wish that the Magazine modelled on the "Which" magazine or

the “*Que Choisir?*” be published.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this wish did not fall on deaf ears. Work has already started and soon the first issue of a magazine would be a reality.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition, as part of the programme under the Additional Stimulus Package, my Ministry is planning an Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign for the population with particular focus on financial education. This will be carried out with the collaboration of the two NGOs engaged in consumer protection and the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, this year’s World Consumer Rights Day, which was celebrated by my Ministry, focused on healthy eating habits and particularly stressed on the dangers of junk food. An intense and aggressive campaign was carried out targeting the school population. Here, I must thank my colleagues, the Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources, and the Minister of Health & Quality of Life for their collaboration and support. Lectures were delivered in around 15 primary schools and 500 primary school children attended an Open Day at Ebène where they were sensitised on the dangers of consuming junk food.

Last, but not least, Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry would soon be embarking on the project of ISO certification for all its services. As we are in a growth stage, we consider that it would be advisable to implement such a project now rather than wait for full maturity to do so. In so doing we want to avert any imperfection that would have crept in our system and which would be difficult to get rid of at a later stage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as you would have noticed, despite the young age of my Ministry and the limited resources at our disposal, we are battling on different fronts concurrently, but we are confident that we will succeed, because, as I said earlier, our objectives are noble and lie at the heart of every action undertaken, that is, consumer protection. Given that this Budget is about protecting people who are primarily consumers, then I can only acclaim it.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me end with this lofty quotation attributed to Mahatma Gandhi. I quote –

“A consumer is the most important person on our premises.

He is not dependent on us.

We are dependent on him.

He is not an interruption to our work.

He is the purpose of it.

He is not an outsider in our business.

He is a part of us.

We are not doing him a favour by serving him.

He is doing us a favour by giving us the opportunity to do so.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope these lines will find an echo in the business community. Thank

you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(5.40 p.m.)

Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Mr Speaker, Sir, at the time the Government decided that the fiscal year should coincide with the financial year, thus breaking away with an old colonial tradition which had existed because sugar cane was being reaped and the revenue of the country was coming from sugar, little did we suspect that, within two years, the world economy would deteriorate to the state it finds itself today. What started as a sub-prime crisis in the United States has ended up into a world economic crisis.

It is perhaps a coincidence, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, here in Mauritius, within a lapse of 12 months, the present Government is having the opportunity to present three budgets to face the changing patterns of the world economy as a whole. The Stimulus Package presented at the end of 2008 was a mini budget in itself. We are having a second Budget this week and, obviously, we will have a third Budget at the end of the year. I know many hon. friends on the other side of the House would smile when I say that. But let me reassure them that we are going to have the third Budget at the end of this year, whatever happens, Mr Speaker, Sir, because we are sure that our Prime Minister will lead this country for the next five or ten years to come.

It is obvious, Mr Speaker, Sir, being given the circumstances, Government programmes have had to be altered, a new approach has had to be adopted and, obviously, measures have had to be taken. In this whole context, it is good, Mr Speaker, Sir. I had the opportunity of listening to hon. Members from the other side of the House, and I would refer to the speech made by hon. Bodha, by my good friend, hon. Bhagwan, by hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo, and my good friend, the pharmacist, hon. Jhugroo. It is a good thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we heard from Members on the other side of the House that political mileage should not be sought in the present circumstances, that the whole country should stand united, and that, as we have faced problems in the past, we should stay together to weather the difficult conditions in which we find ourselves today. Of course, we believe that the whole nation should stand together, and we believe that we are going to weather those conditions. I also believe that what they have said came straight from their heart, Mr Speaker, Sir. But, nevertheless, I heard some comments from hon. Members which, I must confess, make me a little bit concerned about the genuineness of their commitment. We should not fight about this, but I would like to give you some examples.

I heard one statement saying that *le gouvernement est en train de faire le contraire de ce que faisait Robin des Bois, c'est-à-dire, prendre des pauvres pour donner aux riches.* I must concede, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I have not found that in the Budget Speech. It may be a misinterpretation of facts, and I wish that it is not a voluntary deviation to create doubts in the heads of the population at large. If we go to paragraph 24 of the Budget Speech, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister has clearly defined what he means to do with the Stimulus Package. This morning, in an answer to the PNQ from the hon. Leader of the Opposition, he again redefined what was in his mind, what was in the Government's mind when they decided to come up with the Additional

Stimulus Package. I believe that things have been cleared on this issue.

I was glad also, Mr Speaker, Sir, to find out that all hon. Members in this Assembly are worried about the welfare of the poor and the needy, and it is a very good thing, Mr Speaker, Sir. When we come back to the statement about *Robin des Bois*, I would not be nasty, but I would like to remind Members on the other side of the House how they had reacted or never reacted at all when the Illovo deal was struck. Late at night, Mr Speaker, Sir, if we can parody on what Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had said, when the whole of Mauritius was asleep, when Members of the then Government were also asleep, there was a dealer striking a deal with five families, where so many acres of land changed hands, and when we made the calculations, Mr Speaker, Sir, that land came up to Rs42,000 an *arpent*. The same land, Mr Speaker, Sir, was sold to the SIT, to BPML at the rate of Rs120,000 an *arpent*, plus financial commitments in terms of VRS and the rest of it. The same land again, Mr Speaker, Sir, changed hands and was sold to the small planters, those poor planters bought this land for Rs375,450 an *arpent*. These can be verified to date, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I fail to understand how the same hon. Members could have accepted such a deal without reacting and I hope, and I wish that, today, really, they are worried about the state of the poor and the needy, the people who find themselves at the lowest rung of the economic ladder in our country.

Another example, I will take, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that letters were sent to old age pensioners, threatening to send them to prison if they didn't give all the information required and, thank God, the then Government wrote to them and apologised for the tenure, the language which was used towards the senior citizens. I do hope, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, here also, they have changed. I am glad it is the Labour Party which increased the basic pension, doubled it at one moment, and then added more to it. Today, even in the face of serious economic difficulties, they are still getting an increase in their pension. We do hope, Mr Speaker, Sir, that as the situation gets better, Government can do still more for the senior citizens, for the needy, for those at the lowest rung of the ladder.

I would like also, Mr Speaker, Sir, to remind my hon. friends on the other side of the House that we know that the compensation given this year is 5.1% when inflation is 7%. I would like to just ask them a friendly question. If we take from the year 2000 to 2005, where there was no world recession, where there was no economic downturn, I would like to know if they could quote to me the yearly inflation and the yearly compensation given by the then Government between 2000 and 2005; and if they could clear - just refresh my memory - how the PRB was paid up compared to what this Government did last year when the PRB was published.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would ask you to kindly bear with me as well as hon. friends. Probably, I'll tell you a small anecdote, if you would allow me. Last evening, my friend, hon. Rucktoo, told me that he was in a predicament and said whether I would be willing to talk today. Seeing his face, I told him that if he didn't find somebody to talk, then he could put my name. I went home and came back this morning. When I saw him, I asked him whether he had put my name on and the answer given to me was this: 'Either you speak today or you don't speak at all'. So I would ask you to bear with

me, because I have just some notes, and I'll refer to them while I address this august Assembly.

I also listened to hon. Bhagwan. I want to repeat it again; I remember, I said it during the last Budget speech, Mr Speaker, Sir. We know that he wants the sessions of the Assembly to be televised, and I don't believe that, on this side of the House, we would have any objection to that. But I wish to remind hon. Members that, to keep the dignity of this House, we have, as Members, to assume our responsibility in that Members from both sides of the House do not use the parliamentary immunity that they have to give names of people or companies, to make certain insinuations, because they are aware that whatever they say inside here, they cannot be brought to court for it. This is an attitude, this is a habit which, Mr Speaker, Sir - I am sure you would agree with me - has to change. We cannot take the name of somebody or blame him without having any proof. The next day, obviously, it goes to the press in a modified way. We are not being fair to our own compatriots by doing these things.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I listened carefully to my good friend, hon. Bodha and, at the beginning of his speech, he said himself that Mauritius being what it is we don't have to copy what other countries are doing, we have to do things in the Mauritian context. And I fully agree with him. But what puzzled me a little bit, Mr Speaker Sir, is when he went on with his exposé and, at one time, he said that we should do like what is being done in the United States and the UK - give cash money to persons, provide the same facilities as being given there, get the cash to flow and all the rest - unless I missed the philosophy, unless...

(Interruptions)

Alright, hon. Bodha! But, the question I was going to ask is: being given that we are in a different context to what is existing in the UK and the United States, do they in the United States, Mr Speaker, Sir, have free transport given to students as we are giving here in Mauritius? When comparing the two countries we should compare on an equal basis. What are we giving here? Do they, for example, give so much of social aid as we are giving? Do they give free medical health at any one point, at any time to all the citizens of their country? We are one of the rare countries of the world Mr Speaker, Sir, where coronary artery bypass is being performed free for every citizen of this country. If you go to UK today but do not have £15,000 in your pocket, you don't get your bypass done. And these are facts! So, what I just mean to say is that, when we just see things and compare in terms of cash given, we should also consider what Government is already giving on site to make the life of our citizens better. We cannot equate the services with a money package. Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to say also that we have to be careful in a small country like ours. Giving cash - and I'm going to be very honest about this - for any small thing that happens can cause the population of this country to develop a mindset, which makes them become *un peuple d'assistés*. There is abuse when you give liquidity to persons. We are aware, on both sides of the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that when there were floods which came in, I was, myself, surprised to note that, in a storeyed house, somebody, staying on the first floor, received compensation because of flooding, and the person on the ground floor never received any compensation. I fail to understand their logic. This is why I say we should be very careful before giving cash, because we won't like, at least, I won't like – not my

children because they are big enough - neither my grandchildren or my grand grandchildren to develop *ce qu'on appelle cette mentalité d'assistés*.

When the problem of pig breeders cropped up, there were questions and PNQs asked about it. The then Minister of Agriculture said that what they are going to do is to empower these people. I still remember the Chinese saying, Mr Speaker, Sir: "giving a person a fish will feed him for one day, but teaching him how to fish will feed him for a whole life." This is the experience that we have lived with the pig breeders and we are proud. All citizens of this country should be proud that the pig breeders today are standing on their own feet and we want the same thing to happen to the fishers and to all those people who are toiling hard. The philosophy of this Government is to give them the means, the technical help and the tools so that they can stand on their feet. *Un vrai homme d'un peuple civilisé, M. le président, vit debout et il meurt debout.* This is what we want to do to this nation and what the hon. Prime Minister wants to do to this nation. He says he wants to change and modernise this country. We know that changing the mindsets of people will take time, but we are going to persevere, Mr Speaker, Sir and I hope we shall be able to make it. Talking about modernisation, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very unfortunate sometimes - when Government comes up with any one project, with any one suggestion, with anything which concerns the future of this country - to have a group of people who would stand up and oppose it. It has become almost a habit without even sometimes thinking of the rationale behind the decision taken. This resistance, if we can call it so, has got to change if we want to develop and modernise this country. I was, myself, a little bit surprised. One example that really puzzled me was the suggestion made by Government to ask all workers in factories to contribute 1% of their salary to help in their empowerment in case they lose their jobs or to have a pay packet, of course, a percentage of their salary over a number of months, till they can find a new job. Everybody objected to that, Mr Speaker, Sir, saying that 1% of their salary is too much and they would not be able to do this sacrifice. This was the argumentation that we heard and to my surprise, when Government gives 5.1% compensation, everybody says it is too little. I can't understand the reasoning in terms of money and in terms of mindsets. How is it that 5.1% of a salary is just too little compared to 1% of the same salary which is just too big?

Mr Speaker, Sir, what would have been the ideal situation for this country today in face of the threats in front of us? Every one of us would have liked so many things to be done. What would have been the ideal thing to do today? The ideal solution, Mr Speaker, Sir, would have been, firstly, to decrease VAT and give more purchasing power to our people. The next good thing would have been to give a full compensation to all the workers of this country. The third thing would have been to give more subsidies on flour and gas to make their life easier. The fourth thing would have been to decrease the income tax so that they pay less to Government. The next thing would have been to raise the cap of Rs7,500 to pay for student fees and increase it to Rs12,000. Everybody would have liked it. We could have decreased direct and indirect taxation also. But the question that is being asked is how do we do it? How do we proceed to do all those things at one time when we know that we have to make a package and what we don't know is the length and the depth of the present crisis? How

do we proceed?

In this context, in my humble view, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Prime Minister first and the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment because I know that for the last more than two or three months, there have been regular meetings between the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance. The Prime Minister has piloted the whole thing. Meticulous as he is, he wanted to make sure that the package is something which can help our people for the moment, but also keeps a reserve in case the situation gets worse than in the past.

When hon. Bodha was speaking about absolute debt, I know he did not get the answer to that and I am not the one to give it to him because even I don't know what it is in absolute terms. But if we give all these and increase the debt to a level which is not sustainable for a developing country, what else do we do? How do we leap jump once this recession is over? This is something we have to think about. Do we dig into our international reserves and decrease the amount that we have there and then I know, outside everybody will go and say, we don't have enough reserves to buy food and we are going to have a shortage of food in this country. This is how rumours run in this place.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we can't jeopardize the future of this country. We can't do anything which may jeopardise the future of the generations to come and I believe that, in the circumstances, what has been done is good enough and it is unfortunate that we cannot do better. We have also heard, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition and hon. Bhagwan when they were talking about infrastructural development. They were even claiming that nothing has been done. Mr Speaker, Sir, when you travel from Curepipe to Port Louis and when you look on both sides of the road, nobody has got to give you a report, you can see how this country is changing. When you travel from the North to the South, from the East to the West or along the coast you can see how things are moving and changing.

Obviously, hon. friends on the other side of the House have also been in Government. We would have wished, Mr Speaker, Sir, that things go faster than they are going, but we are all aware of the heaviness of the bureaucracy, of the red-tapism that exists, and of things that we know are happening but we cannot interfere. This has been the experience of all Governments. The Tender Board was changed into the Procurement Board with the idea that things might go faster and today we have changed the sums from Rs15 m. to Rs50 m. just to make things go faster.

If you are an optimist, you would love it; if you are a pessimist, you would always say if this sum is going in one contract, then there will be bribery. So, we have a choice; either we don't do anything and stick to the old tradition and we go on crawling as we have been crawling over a number of years, or we try something else, which can get things moving at a faster rate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to what was said about infrastructure, we were stuck by the remarks made by the Opposition unless we do what some Members in the previous Government did when, two weeks before the elections, orders were given to go round retarring a number of roads. I asked a Parliamentary Question on this in 2005, Mr Speaker, Sir. A sum of Rs100 m. was to be spent in a lapse of two weeks

before the elections to make people happy, to win votes. When an engineer, in a meeting, Mr Speaker, Sir, asked how to proceed - because no assessment had been done, no costing has been done - the answer which was given to him was "*pas casse to la tête, faire ça toujours, après pou mesurer, après pou payer*". This is something we don't think should have happened, and this is something which, we will make sure, won't happen again, Mr Speaker, Sir.

We also had the schools, Mr Speaker, Sir. Actually, many of them were concrete structures, which had been put up, and which this Government has completed. Some of them were virtual schools, Mr Speaker, Sir. People in my Constituency were admitted in Form I to SSS Vacoas on paper, but the college didn't exist; they had to go to Quatre Bornes or Belle Rose. So, we have to be careful. This population is not dupe, and cannot be fooled. Mr Speaker, Sir, my dear friend, hon. Bhagwan, isn't here. He also made a remark, saying that Members on this side of the House cannot go out, cannot go to '*haldi*', to '*safran*' and all the rest, because people are wild. I work in the Constituency where I stood as a candidate, Mr Speaker, Sir. I meet people of my Constituency from Monday to Saturday in-between my patients and I have not felt this. But, I'll ask the hon. Member just one question, Mr Speaker, Sir: If they are so strong, if all the people are with them, what happened to the by-election in Constituency No. 8, Mr Speaker, Sir? One should not go on repeating a false statement with the intention that, at one time or another, it is going to become the truth. Unfortunately, this has been the tactic, the policy adopted by certain Members of this Assembly to try and poison the minds of people, a little of a Marxist System which existed in Russia a hundred years ago, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at a time when things look difficult, at a time when we don't know what is going to happen the next day, the next week, the next month or the next year, I believe the whole population should stay united to face the problems boldly. We had problems in the past, we had problems after independence and we managed to weather these conditions. Even great economists at that time, after our independence, Meade and Titmus, said that there will be no future in this country and yet, in our own way, we have become a little giant in this region of Africa, Mr Speaker, Sir. We must have the faith, the patience, the will, and, with the leadership that we have, with the economic diplomacy that we have cultivated over a number of years, I am sure, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are going to weather this storm.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I won't take the time of the House longer, but I would like to mention just a couple of things before I resume my seat. There is one comment also, Mr Speaker, Sir, from Members on the opposite side of the House, which I have been hearing for a number of months and years and with which I wish to disagree. It seems that people are associating *la dégradation des mœurs avec la situation économique*, *M. le président. C'est quelque chose qui est répétée tous les jours. Nos grands-parents étaient venus dans ce pays il y a 100 ans ou 150 ans de cela, soit comme des esclaves, soit comme des laboureurs, et leur situation économique n'était pas meilleure que la situation dans laquelle on se trouve aujourd'hui. C'était pire, M. le président! Pourquoi, à cette époque, il n'y avait pas de vols, il n'y avait pas de crimes?* How do you explain this situation, Mr Speaker, Sir? So, mixing up *cette dévaluation des mœurs avec la situation économique* is, in my opinion, a fallacy. It is being exploited

for political reasons, Mr Speaker, Sir. Look at Rodrigues today! We are facing the same dilemma. How is it that people in Rodrigues go to work, leave their doors open and don't lose anything? The answer, in my humble view, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that there has been a failure in the transmission of values from one generation to the other. *C'est ça qui explique la dégradation des mœurs dans ce pays, M. le président.* When we went into industrialisation, without realising it - I must admit - we made a big mistake when we broke the family unit and started building flats, where the youths who got married left their family to go and stay. The grandfather and the grandmother were not there, the aunties and uncles were not there, and those children grew up alone because their parents were working from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and there was nobody at home to transmit values. When we look at the history of this country, during the last 40/50 years, Mr Speaker, Sir - I can speak for the Hindu religion - how many *baitkas* have been closed down during the last 25 years? I was telling that to my hon. friend, Anil Bachoo. If you plot a graph in terms of degeneration of values and the closure of the *baitkas*, I am sure we are going to find a relation on that. So, binding issues for political reasons are wrong, Mr Speaker, Sir. We should go deeper to find the cause of the problems.

Coming to my Constituency, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the present Minister of Public Infrastructure, previously Minister for NDU and Environment, and to thank also the present Minister of NDU & Environment. I know and you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that it was in a big mess in the beginning. We had to come with Parliamentary Questions, pestering the Minister. I am happy that things are moving now. I am happy about the way the infrastructural works are going on and I am sure that both Opposition Members, hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun and hon. Soodhun, will also make their contribution to the works that are left to be done. We will never finish, but we know that the Ministry is cooperating to finish the infrastructural work in the Constituency.

I also hope, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, at the end of this year, hopefully, the city of Highlands will start and that will help give more jobs to our people.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you.

(6:20 p.m.)

Mr J. A. Nancy (First Member for Rodrigues): M. le président, avec votre permission, je vais commenter la partie consacrée plus ou moins à Rodrigues, et je vais décrire brièvement, en quelques mots, la situation dans l'île, et comment Rodrigues est gérée actuellement tout comme elle a été gérée Durant ces trois dernières années.

M. le président, en écoutant hier l'honorable Léopold, je suis d'accord lorsqu'il disait qu'il nous faut donner les moyens afin de faire face à la crise économique. M. le président, j'aurais, moi-même, souhaité qu'on nous donne beaucoup plus que les R 163 millions qui nous ont été allouées dans le *Capital Budget*. Mais, M. le président, est-ce que l'actuel exécutif va pouvoir les utiliser en totalité et efficacement? C'est cela le problème. Je dis cela parce que, suite à une question que j'ai posée en mars de cette année, l'honorable ministre des finances m'a répondu que l'exécutif de Rodrigues a

dépensé, de juillet 2008 à mars 2009, presqu'une année, R 118 millions sur les R 300 millions octroyées l'année dernière pour le *Capital Budget*. Là, il y a un problème. Si, de juillet 2008 à mars 2009, l'Assemblée de Rodrigues – ils ont fait leur budget le 17 avril, c'est-à-dire, 17 jours après – n'a utilisé que R 118 millions en Budget capital, je me demande si plus de R 163 millions devraient être accordées pour les six mois. Si, en un an, ils ont utilisé R 118 millions, et on leur donne R 163 millions pour six mois, j'aurais aimé qu'on nous donne plus. Le problème est là! La capacité d'utiliser de l'argent à Rodrigues actuellement! C'est cela le gros problème. Hier l'honorable Léopold a clairement fait comprendre qu'il y a en ce moment un tas de problèmes à Rodrigues. Il s'en est pris vigoureusement au gouvernement et il a même extrapolé jusqu'en 1982, disant que depuis 1982 c'est le gouvernement central qui ne nous donne pas assez d'argent.

Je suis heureux, car il a fait un virage de 180 degrés. Auparavant, dans tous ses discours, il ne parlait que de l'OPR, notamment que L'OPR n'arrivait pas à développer Rodrigues et, maintenant, qu'ils sont au pouvoir, ce n'est pas nous le problème mais le gouvernement central.

M. le président, en ce moment, la vie semble s'être arrêtée à Rodrigues. La population vit dans le désespoir, attendant toujours l'indépendance économique prônée par le Chef commissaire de Rodrigues. Actuellement, c'est le contraire qui se passe malgré certains efforts déployés par le gouvernement central. Malheureusement, on a assisté pendant ces trois dernières années à des tiraillements, à des incompréhensions entre l'Exécutif Régional de Rodrigues et le gouvernement central. Pour citer un cas, le gouvernement régional a même été en cour suprême contre le gouvernement central pour ce qui est des pêcheurs. Il doit y avoir des problèmes, effectivement mais, ce qui est pire, c'est qu'il y a des tiraillements, des menaces, des motions de blâme du parti au pouvoir contre leur propre Chef commissaire. Là, il y a un gros problème. Comment expliquer cela, M. le président?

N'est-ce pas hier que l'honorable Leopold disait qu'il y a des problèmes? N'est-ce pas en voulant mettre une motion de blâme contre leur propre Chef commissaire? N'est-ce pas un aveu d'incompétence de l'Exécutif actuel? M. le président, entre temps que se passe t-il? Entre temps, aucune entreprise ne voit le jour à Rodrigues. Celles qui sont existantes ferment leurs portes. 8,390 rodriguais plient bagages, laissant leurs femmes et enfants seuls à Rodrigues et migrent vers Maurice. J'ai eu le chiffre de 8,300 en réponse à une question parlementaire ici en mars de cette année. Plus de 8,000 personnes sont venus de Rodrigues par bateau en une année, c'est-à-dire, de janvier 2008 à février 2009. Tout récemment, avant la crise économique, 8,000 personnes, sur une population de 36,000, se sont déplacées de Rodrigues pour venir à Maurice. C'est un record qui n'a jamais été atteint, même avant 1982. Autant de déplacements vers Maurice en une année!

M. le président, pendant ces trois dernières années, 2,855 familles ont été déconnectées du réseau électrique à Rodrigues - c'est une question posée à l'Assemblée Régionale de Rodrigues cette année - mettant au moins le double en nombre d'étudiants dans le noir pendant ces trois dernières années. Les entreprises M. le président jettent l'éponge.

Des compagnies d'Etat avec, à leur tête, des *chairmen* grassement payés, font surface. Les *chairmen*, ce sont de petits copains et des candidats malheureux des dernières élections, ont été casés. Des compagnies privées ont fermées et le plus surprenant c'est que les millions en budget capital sont sous-utilisées et atteignent le chiffre de 38%, c'est-à-dire de juillet 2008 au 30 mars 2009, exactement 16 jours avant la présentation du budget régional. Le 17 avril ils ont présenté leur budget. L'Exécutif de Rodrigues a utilisé seulement R118 millions, comme je l'ai déjà dit, sur les R300 millions, somme votée ici l'année dernière.

M. le président, pour les deux budgets précédents, on a assisté pratiquement à la même chose. La question qui se pose: *who is to be blamed?* Le gouvernement a mis à la disposition de Rodrigues, l'année dernière, R187 millions sous l'item *Food Security Fund*. A-t-on eu jusqu'ici un plan détaillé venant de l'Assemblée Régionale sur la relance agricole a être financée par ce fonds de R187 millions? Jusqu'à maintenant la somme de R187 millions est restée intacte. Je donne un exemple chiffré de ce que j'avance.

Voilà la question que j'ai posée à l'honorable ministre des finances en mars de cette année sur les R5 millions qu'ils ont *budgeted on agriculture and development project in Rodrigues*, ils ont utilisé R557,000 jusqu'au 30 Mars 2009. En une année ils ont *budgeted* R5 millions pour l'*agricultural and development projects* ils n'ont utilisé que Rs557,000. Sur une somme de R 5 millions budgeted for foodcrop and livestock production, ils n'ont utilisé que R4.8 millions et là il ont fait un effort pendant une année R4.8. C'est bien! Mais il reste encore R200,000 à être utilisées mais si on leur donne R100 millions, R200 millions - là c'est R5 millions pendant un année - auront-ils la capacité d'utiliser R100 millions? C'est ça la question ici et ce sont des chiffres qui ont été fournis par l'Assemblée de Rodrigues au ministère des finances. L'irrigation, M. le président, est primordial; on en parle tout le temps à Rodrigues depuis des années. Ils ont mis R1 million sur l'irrigation mais ils n'ont utilisé pendant une année que R457,000. L'honorable Léopold en demande beaucoup plus mais est-ce-que l'Exécutif a la capacité d'utiliser cet argent? Voilà ce sont des chiffres que je compare pour donner des exemples concrets de ce qui se passe dans l'île!

(Interruptions)

Est-ce que cela est *cheap* M. le Président? M. le Président, se sont des chiffres officiels. L'honorable Léopold, lors de son discours, has welcomed the measures proposed at paragraphs 81 and 82 of the Budget speech regarding Seed Potato Purchase Scheme, Foodcrop Insurance Scheme. Je suis d'accord mais, à Rodrigues, il y a un *policy decision* sur l'agriculture et R 187 millions avaient été données pour le *Food Security Fund*. Il y a le policy, il y a l'argent. Qu'est-ce qu'on fait? On l'utilise. Mais pourquoi l'argent est resté intact? Mais on n'a plus ces R187 millions, le ministre des finances a déduit Rs100 millions qui ont été attribuées au National Empowerment Foundation for *Stimulus Package*, et c'est avec raison je crois. Actuellement le ministre des finances est en train de mettre une antenne de la NEF à Rodrigues pour gérer ces Rs100 millions. Pourquoi? L'Exécutif n'a pas la compétence, ils ont la loi, c'est l'autonomie, ils doivent gérer tout, maintenant dans le budget, le ministère des finances cite qu'une antenne de la *Food Security Fund* gérera le fonds. Que va-t-il se passer? Il y aura une administration parallèle entre l'Exécutif qui n'arrive pas à

dépenser de l'argent et les différents fonds mis en place à Maurice. J'espère pas que cela ne dégénère pas entre les deux.

M. le Président que se passé-t-il avec les dépenses courantes? Les dépenses courantes au contraire accelèrent. Je vais donner quelques exemples. A Rodrigues actuellement on multiplie et on divise les voyages à l'étranger entre Commissaires. Le Commissaire de la santé de Rodrigues, lorsque son tour fut arrivé, part mission de promotion touristique en Afrique du Sud parce que tout simplement son tour de voyage était arrivé et il est parti. Actuellement deux Commissaires, le Chef Commissaire et le Commissaire d'infrastructure publique sont en Australie avec leurs épouses pour une mission de l'UNDP financée par l'UNDP. Est-ce que ce seront quatre jours de missions et 12 jours de vacances? C'est payé par UNDP, c'est l'argent des bailleurs de fonds internationaux. Quel signal sera donné à ces bailleurs de fonds international?

Deuxième situation, l'État verse une allocation mensuelle comme *petrol allowance* aux sept Commissaires tout comme pour les ministres et les députés. Cela totalise approximativement R 40,000 payées annuellement du *recurrent budget*. Ces mêmes Commissaires se font payer, du même *recurrent budget*, R 700,000 annuellement pour l'achat de diesel pour aller travailler. Mais que font-ils de leur *petrol allowance*- le directeur de l'Audit l'a mentionné en deux fois dans son rapport : 'c'est illégal' N'est-ce pas là un abus, M. le président?

Le FRTU est une unité de recherches et de *training* du *Fisheries Department* à Rodrigues. Ce département possède deux bateaux. Le Conseil Exécutif a lancé un appel d'offres à l'unique soumissionnaire, le *Road Fishing Company*, qui est une compagnie d'État et les actionnaires sont quelques petits copains qui sont proches du pouvoir. Cette compagnie a obtenu le *tender to train fishermen in outer lagoon fishing*. Alors que les deux bateaux de cette unité restent à quai, le contrat est alloué à une autre compagnie d'Etat privée. Voilà ce qui se passe, M. le président!

L'industrie touristique à Rodrigues est un supplice. Rien ne marche, les usines se ferment, les dettes s'accumulent, les hôtels licencient mais bizarrement certains fonctionnaires du MTPA, la branche locale à Rodrigues, touchent plus de R45,000 d'*overtime* par mois, fait rapporté par le directeur de l'audit. Ils dépensent plus de R30,000, par mois en diesel pour rouler le seul véhicule de la MTPA à Rodrigues. Est-ce possible, M. le président?

L'année dernière l'Exécutif de Rodrigues a dépensé R 24 millions pour la construction de trois murs à Baie aux Huîtres. Les trois murs sont restés là pendant un an et demi, presque deux ans et cela a coûté R 24 millions à l'État. C'est resté tel quell et je ne sais pas ce qu'ils vont en faire, si ce sera pour l'aquaculture ou autre chose mais R 24 millions ont été dépensés!

M. le président, tout ceci est chagrinant. Deux écoles primaires sont restées à l'abandon depuis 2006 lorsqu'on a été chassé du pouvoir deux ou trois ans après.

L'eau est une denrée rare et limitée. Plusieurs réservoirs ont été construits jusqu'à maintenant et le Conseil Exécutif octroie un permis à un Commissaire pour exploiter un *borehole* à titre personnel sur son terrain loué à bail sans condition et sans procédure comme stipulé dans le *Ground Water Act*. Le *borehole* est fouillé devant

chez lui et il obtient dix mètres de cubes d'eau par heure, c'est-à-dire, plus que les boreholes du gouvernement qui n'ont que deux à huit mètres de cube d'eau par heure. M. le président, qu'est-ce que ce 'Monsieur' va en faire ?

M. le président, je ne vais pas en dire plus, mais ce qu'a révélé le directeur de l'audit, dans son dernier rapport qui a été déposé à l'Assemblée, n'est que le sommet de l'iceberg. Je vais vous rappeler deux petits exemples bien simples et vous allez comprendre tout ce qui se passe. Premier exemple, *I will quote, Mr Speaker, Sir, "an amount of Rs181,000 was paid to a contractor in June 2006 for the supply of 11,250 units of blocks four inches. At July 2008, two years later, the materials have not been delivered."*

Deuxième exemple: '*a contractor gets a contract to deliver 2000 metre cube of lagoon sand at a rate of Rs358 per metre cube; five months later, the contractor has not delivered the 2000 metre cube lagoon sand*'. He has delivered only 56 metre cube of lagoon sand. Five months later he asks the Commission to cancel the contract. The Commission cancels the contract and another quotation was launched to supply the 2000 metre cube of sand. The same contractor gets the contract, but now instead of R358 per metre cube, R428 per metre cube. Cela se passe cinq mois après.

M. le président, je vais terminer par deux points. Ce que je crains c'est qu'en voulant mettre trop d'antennes à Rodrigues pour les différents fonds créés : NIF, Trust Fund, Food Security Fund - peut être pour mieux maximiser l'efficacité de leur utilisation, certes c'est ça puisqu'on voit ce qui se passe - n'est-on pas en train de démanteler l'autonomie? En mettant des corps parallèles substituant le rôle de l'Exécutif actuel, c'est peut être avec raison si on voit ce qui se passe, mais ces antennes s'installent à Rodrigues.

M. le président, c'est vrai que l'industrie touristique est un pilier de notre économie, c'est la base même de l'économie de Maurice. Tout en dépend: les marchands de légumes, les pêcheurs, l'artisanat, les produits agro alimentaires, les gîtes, les hôtels en terme d'emplois. L'île Rodrigues entière dépend de cette industrie. Aussi petite qu'elle soit elle est très vitale pour Rodrigues. C'est le cerveau de notre petite économie. On a grandement besoin que les gens d'ici, nos frères et sœurs de Maurice, viennent en masse à Rodrigues pour acheter les produits rodriguais, pour faire démarrer efficacement cette industrie. L'argent va directement aux employés, aux hôtels, aux différentes personnes et c'est ainsi que la base de cette économie va grandir. Mais comment le faire, M. le président? Ce n'est pas en retirant R 150 par billet qui est le prix d'un café à l'aéroport qu'on va pouvoir le faire. Pourquoi ne pas s'attaquer au *fuel tax*? Je crois qu'il y a la marge qu'on peut le faire mais la question est: comment? Par exemple, je propose qu'on rassemble l'argent non-utilisé dans le budget. Là, on voit que pour chaque budget il reste R100 millions ou R182 millions. Si on fait des économies en empêchant des dépenses abusives et inutiles comme, par exemple, les R700,000 additionnelles payées pour véhiculer les Commissaires, les voyages des commissaires sont réduits au strict minimum, les heures supplémentaires grassement payées sont réduites. Les économies sont versées dans un fonds qui, par la suite, financera en partie - en partenariat avec le ministère des finances - et efficacement le retrait partiel du *fuel tax de trois-quarts* ou de moitié de ce fait sur le coût du billet d'avion sur Rodrigues. Là on est sûr et certain que l'argent va

directement à tous les niveaux de l'économie et je suis persuadé que cela va être efficace, M. le président.

Je vous remercie.

The Minister of Health & Quality of Life (Dr. R. Jeetah): Sir, I beg to move that the debate be now adjourned.

Mr Dulull rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Ministry of Industry, Science & Research (Mr D. Gokhool): Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 29 May 2009 at 3.30 p.m.

Dr. Boolell rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

(6.54 p.m.)

MAURAS SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY – STUDENTS - REGISTRATION

Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix): May I, with your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, raise an issue which I consider of great importance and which has been raised earlier in this Assembly during Parliamentary Questions time.

M. le président, cela concerne le ministre de la santé car cela implique 16 étudiants du MAURAS School of Dentistry. M. le président, après avoir terminé leur internat, ces étudiants se trouvent toujours dans la même situation. Ils n'ont pu se faire enregistrer au *Dental Council of Mauritius*. Au cours d'une question parlementaire, le ministre avait répondu qu'il était en train de *monitor* la situation et il avait informé l'Assemblée que les autorités en Inde avaient déjà fait une notification. De plus, le Dental Council de Maurice attendait que ce soit publiée dans le *Government Gazette of India*.

M. le président, le ministre nous avait assuré qu'il allait suivre de près cette situation. J'ai le plaisir d'annoncer, M. le président, que la notification est déjà publiée dans le *Government Gazette of India* depuis le 15 mars 2009. Après leur internat, ces personnes sont toujours en attente, depuis bientôt un an maintenant, pour pouvoir pratiquer leur profession.

Je demanderais au ministre s'il aurait pu *look closely into the matter* et venir avec une solution pour ces étudiants.

Merci, M. le président.

Dr Jeetah: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am well aware that it has been gazetted. I have been told of that. Now it is just a question of time; the Dental Council will have to look into the matter and I hope we will have a positive outcome. Thank you.

At 6.56 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 29 May 2009 at 3.30 p.m.