

**SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY****PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)****FIRST SESSION****MONDAY 14 JUNE 2021****CONTENTS**

MOTION

BILL (*Public*)

ADJOURNMENT

THE CABINET

(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity
Hon. Louis Steven Obeegadoo	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism
Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology
Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management
Hon. Alan Ganoo	Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy	Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, GCSK	Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
Hon. Soomilduth Bholah	Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives
Hon. Kavydass Ramano	Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
Hon. Mahen Kumar Seeruttun	Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance
Hon. Georges Pierre Lesjongard	Minister of Energy and Public Utilities
Hon. Maneesh Gobin	Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security

Hon. Jean Christophe Stephan Toussaint	Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation
Hon. Mahendranuth Sharma Hurreeram	Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development
Hon. Darsanand Balgobin	Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn	Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training
Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal	Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah	Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Teeruthraj Huroyal	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage
	Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

Mr Speaker	Hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, GCSK, GOSK
Deputy Speaker	Hon. Mohammud Zahid Nazurally
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Sanjit Kumar Nuckcheddy
Clerk of the National Assembly	Lotun, Mrs Bibi Safeena
Adviser	Dowlutta, Mr Ram Ranjit
Deputy Clerk	Ramchurn, Ms Urmeelah Devi
Clerk Assistant	Gopall, Mr Navin
Clerk Assistant	Seetul, Ms Darshinee
Hansard Editor	Jankee, Mrs Chitra
Parliamentary Librarian and Information Officer	Jeewoonarain, Ms Prittydevi
Serjeant-at-Arms	Bundhoo, Mr Anirood

MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 12 of 2021

Sitting of Monday 14 June 2021

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

MOTION
SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, 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 Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(11.33 a.m.)

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2021-2022) BILL 2021
(NO. X OF 2021)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Appropriation ((2021-2022) Bill 2021 (No. X of 2021).

Question again proposed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly, I will start with a complaint. The Budget was read on Friday, finished around 7.00 p.m. On Monday, at 11.30 a.m., we have to start our Budget debates and our speeches. That does not give the Opposition even one full working day to study the Budget, and especially myself, not even one full working day.

Now, normally, the Budget is read on a Thursday and the Opposition Leader speaks on a Monday. If it is read on a Friday, the normal courtesy is for the...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... speeches to start on a Tuesday. We have not been given this courtesy, Mr Speaker, Sir. I wanted to register that and I hope that in future, we return to the normal courtesies that are due in this House, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, the annual Budget exercise, what is it? It is our local state of the nation's speech. It should be, Mr Speaker, Sir, - and we have said - a frank and open discussion. This is the situation in the country. This is the problem that we are facing, and the population must be told what the real situation is, what the real issues are, what are the challenges ahead of us. And it should not just, Mr Speaker, Sir, be given as a pill to put everyone to sleep.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we should treat Mauritians with respect. They should and they must be told the actual situation and the truth, and it is the responsibility of the Minister of Finance to speak to the nation with candour, give the bad and the good news. And the truth is that things are getting from bad to worse. And the worst thing is that this Budget does not, in any way, address the real issues that need to be addressed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a Budget Speech is in reality a patriotic act. We do it because we feel that we need to redress the situation and bring the nation to a better future. That is what a Budget Speech is. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, I deplore that the Minister of Finance, the Government has not acted with courage, has not assumed its responsibilities. And again, Mr Speaker, Sir, the venerable office of the Minister of Finance has a responsibility in front of the nation and you cannot shirk away from that responsibility.

What sort of Budget is it? In one line, it is a Tax and Not Spend Budget. Usually, we have heard of a Tax and Spend Budget. This, Mr Speaker, Sir, like the previous Budget, last year, is a Tax and Not Spend Budget.

Mr Speaker, Sir, PwC - I have the report here - has done a very good exercise at summarizing the Budget and they picked up quite rightly that of the amounts voted for COVID-19 last year - whether it is in the MIC, whether it is in the Special Funds or whatever they were - Rs122 billion remained at the end of the year unspent and, again, put in the MIC, put in the Special Funds. In the Special Funds, Mr Speaker, Sir, would you believe that after a full year of crisis, we are opening the Special Funds with Rs35 billion of unexpended money?

So, last year, various provisions were made to set aside Rs145 billion for COVID-19. This is why the Minister of Finance said, in his very first line, Mr Speaker, Sir, that according to him, we were in the top four, with the largest COVID-response in the world. But, as usual, it is a half-truth because of that top four, 32% of GDP that he put aside, only a quarter has been spent. The rest is in the coffers and I will tell you why, in a moment, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we have, two years running, a Tax and Not Spend Budget.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in my opinion, what is happening is that the Government, through these taxes, through these raiding of the Bank of Mauritius, is building a war chest. This is not an economic Budget. This is a political Budget. Its aim, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to amass as much money as possible in the MIC, in the Special Funds, so that when we come - next year, we know the Budget will be 2022-2023 - to the eve of the election, then, Mr Speaker, Sir, what will happen? It will be generosity, giving millions of rupees left, right and centre, masking the fact that we are in deep economic trouble. This is, Mr Speaker, Sir, next. So, we are preparing, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is the first act in what has been called money politics because next election, it is clear to me, what this Government is preparing is a huge war chest, that it will be able to give the PRB, it will be able to increase pensions, it will be able to do everything that it wants not because the economy is *florissant*, not because the economy is healthy but because we have been fooled all the time, because the Bank of Mauritius has been raided and we have been fooled all the time, all along. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am willing to bet that in the Special Funds at the end of the next financial year, the Rs20 billion that is being budgeted, in fact, is going to be Rs40 billion because most of the funds that have been earmarked will not have been spent. But, anyway, we will come to that in a moment. So, for me, Mr Speaker, Sir, the aim of this Budget is to build up sufficient amounts of money for political purposes, to build up a war chest, to thwart democracy at the next election.

Mr Speaker, Sir, failure to tell the truth to the population will bring a disconnect with the population and, in fact, the Budget Speech becomes a meaningless exercise. And you see, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the population, most people were out doing their shopping; very few people actually were listening to the Budget Speech, because you cannot trust the figures that are provided. It destroys the whole credibility of the Minister and the Ministry and the Government itself for the Budget exercise. You cannot trust the figures. Then, you will say: well, you cannot trust anything.

So, Mr Speaker, giving the wrong figures, to me, shows that Government has many things to hide. It cannot face the facts and, therefore, it cannot change the situation, but it can change how it portrays the situation. And there are some examples in this Budget; glaring examples. One, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the current year's budget deficit and the public debt. We all know that the Bank of Mauritius, on 07 May 2021, issued a public notice in relation to the Rs60 billion that it had contributed to Government some time back, and it said quite clearly, Mr Speaker, Sir, that of that Rs60 billion, only Rs32 billion was a gift to Government. The rest of the Rs28 billion is, according to the Bank of Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir, an advance, a

loan against future dividends payable. So, the Government will get dividends in the future, 10 to 30 years from now, and it will be using that dividend to repay the loan that has been granted. It is quite clear what it says here. The Minister of Finance is saying no. We will see what the Director of Audit has to say about it because neither you nor I will, in fact, finally decide. So, for any Accountant, anyone who understands finance, a loan is a loan, an advance is an advance. You give something to someone and if you deduct it against future salaries, it is still a loan that you have given, say to your employee.

Now, the first issue of ignoring this loan of Rs28 billion, that is Rs28,000 m., is to falsify the budget deficit. The budget deficit announced by the Minister of Finance, of 5.6% must, in fact, be doubled to nearly 12% because the Rs28 billion - and he still does not understand. I think, genuinely, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development does not understand, and that is worrying me a lot, because the Rs28 billion represents 6% of GDP. That has not been granted to you as revenue, hon. Minister of Finance; that has been given to you as a loan. Therefore, a loan goes in the deficit. The deficit, therefore, is not 5.6%. It is 11.9%, and that is, therefore, the first untruth that has been put in this Budget.

It is a loan that needs to be repaid from future profits and the Bank of Mauritius quite clearly sets the Rs28 billion, in its balance sheet, as an asset. The Rs32 billion has disappeared from its balance sheet because it is giving it free, but the Rs28 billion remains in the balance sheet of the Bank of Mauritius as an asset. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, - I do not know if hon. Minister Bholah will reply, someone else will reply, but it needs to be replied - where have the Rs28 billion advanced loan given to the Government been? Where is it? Because I cannot see it anywhere. Now, it could be that it has been deducted from deposits that the Government has at the Bank of Mauritius. That could be, but that needs to be shown also if that is the case, and it just cannot be netted off. It is against any financial practice to net off. And anyway, you cannot net off Rs28 billion of a loan against deposits of Rs33 billion; it is not the same figure. There is Rs5 billion somewhere hanging around. So, what has happened to that? And so, Mr Speaker, Sir, let us hope that we get clarification. Otherwise, definitely, I will send a letter to the Director of Audit - I trust him - to tell him what I think has happened and to tell him to give us his opinion, in due course, when he certifies the accounts probably, what has happened. But it is extremely worrying, Mr Speaker, Sir. There have been years and years of debate on how the budget deficit is being manipulated, how the public debt of Government is being manipulated and here, we have a glaring example and we want the

Government to reply, the next speaker after me, himself, is a qualified Accountant, and I am sure that he would have been briefed to reply to this issue. Anyway, it will be very disappointing if he does not give a proper reply.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another point where figures cannot be trusted, and that relates to unemployment; unemployment, an extremely important figure because it relates to people not working. Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have, for some time now, had two categories of people unemployed, and conveniently the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development only looks at one category. He will provide the figure of unemployed people, 52,200, 9.2% of the working population. He forgets to give you another figure of 42,000 people, which is, in fact, people who are available for work, according to Statistics Mauritius. They are available for work but not working, but for some reason, they are not included in the figure for unemployment. When you add the two together, do you know what figure you get, Mr Speaker, Sir? You get 94,000 people, very close to the 100,000 people that the hon. Minister himself had predicted.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, even that figure is understated, and we can say for sure that the unemployment figure has gone past the figure of 100,000 in Mauritius today. Now, here is the paper; it is produced by Statistics Mauritius, it was published on 18 May, it shows quite clearly that the number of unemployed is 94,000, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, these people available for work, why do I say it was manipulated? It is by magic, it is 42,000 today. Do you know how much it was last year, Mr Speaker, Sir, at the same time? 2,400. So, we have 2,000% increase in people available for work and, in fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, these people should be fully described as unemployed and, therefore, the rate of unemployment in Mauritius can be easily proven to be 16.5%, according to what Statistics Mauritius itself has produced. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, when you look at the number of jobs lost in that one year only, it is 33,000 jobs lost. Mr Speaker, Sir, that is the second point regarding truth in the Budget. Had we been told that this is the real unemployment problem, then we would know what to face, and not told, in fact, that it is still manageable, *bla bla bla*.

And the third thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, is GDP growth. Now, why is GDP growth important? GDP growth is important because it is the basis of preparation of the Budget. Once you put a figure of GDP growth, it generates the income tax you will receive, it allows you to spend, it actually reflects itself upon the expected deficit of Government. It is all pervasive, GDP growth. If actually you get that wrong, you destroy the whole structure of the Budget.

The World Bank has given, for the calendar year, 3.6% expected GDP growth for Mauritius. For the Financial Year, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development forecasts - predicts probably is a better word, like you look at a magic crystal ball - a GDP growth of 9%. What is it based on? Tourism? Yes, of course, *la mesure phare, c'est les drains*, but we will talk about *drains* later.

Mr Speaker, Sir, 9% based on GDP and the Land Drainage Programme. Now, Tourism, Mr Speaker, Sir, 650,000 in the next 9 months. I had the occasion to be on radio a few days ago with the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism and I asked him: 'how did you calculate this figure? How many are coming from 15 July to 01 October? How many are coming after'? Do you know what his reply was, Mr Speaker, Sir? He said: ask the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. That was the reply. You should ask the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development; the figure comes from the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. That is not how you build, Mr Speaker, Sir, an economy. Now, 650,000 tourists may be...

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Jamais mone dire sa!*

Mr X. L. Duval: It is on record. 650,000 tourists...

Mr Speaker: Do not interrupt!

Mr X. L. Duval: Three of us were there. 650,000 tourists, Mr Speaker, Sir, may be an aspirational figure. You may try and put it up for PR sake. Okay, let us try and do this. But to build the structure of your Budget around that, Mr Speaker, Sir, is irresponsible. It is irresponsible. We are still in the throes of COVID-19. In the last, I think, five days, we had nearly 200 cases of COVID-19. Anything can happen. Anything can happen in the next few months, next few weeks, over the next year. You have to be reasonable; you have to be prudent when you build a forecast figure. Otherwise, people will just laugh at you, and this is what is happening, nobody believes, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we will achieve the 650,000 tourists. And I understand that neither the Ministry, the Government itself, Mr Speaker, Sir, have not even spoken to the airlines to see what are the expected services to be provided to Mauritius in terms of air services over the next year, and I will talk about Air Mauritius a little bit later on.

Now, as far as the Land Drainage Authority is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir...

An hon. Member: Drainage!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...let me say this. Historically speaking...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: Is something wrong? What is wrong? Is my English not good?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is happening now?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, historically, if you look at the Director of Audit's Report in February 2019, two years ago, it showed clearly that 50% of whatever...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Toussaint!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... was meant to be spent on drains...

Mr Speaker: Last warning!

Mr X. L. Duval: Last warning. On the amount voted to be spent on drains, only 53% was spent. So, the likelihood, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that growth will be much less, tax received will be much less; the budget deficit will be higher.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No conversation!

Mr X. L. Duval: The only thing to be expected, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned, is that a lot of the expenditure on Capital will not be effected and will be carried forward.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the last thing I wanted to talk about the figures was inflation. Now, just check and you will find out that, as far as the US Dollar to Rupee rate is concerned, Rs36 bought one US Dollar in November 2019.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the honourable gentleman will give way. I would wish to refer to what he said earlier before he moves on to inflation. The Leader of the Opposition alleged that, outside this House, I would have stated that to be explained the figures relating to tourism, he should go to the Minister of Finance. Now, I did not say that and I believe this is an attempt to place me at odds with what the Budget Speech states, and I would request the Leader of the Opposition, unless and until he can prove what he is saying, to withdraw what he has alleged.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, he asked me to give way. I am not withdrawing anything. We have plenty of witnesses. But I would say though, that he was unable to provide any explanation at all; any explanation as from 15 July to 30 October, he said: "I don't know, I can't give you any figure." And from my recollection, from 01 October, he said: "I don't have that figure either". He didn't give any explanation and, in fact, it comes from the Ministry of Finance. But we will check that, and then he will get a chance to correct himself, if there is any need to. Mr Speaker, Sir, we will go back, but I was kind enough, as you know, to give way; that is the right thing to do.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now, I will come back to inflation. In November 2019, Rs36 would buy you one Dollar. In June 2020, Rs41 will buy you the same Dollar. That is a depreciation; even you can say a devaluation of 14% since the last election in the last one and a half years. Euro is even worse. Euro, Mr Speaker, Sir, in November 2019 was Rs40 to the Euro. In June 2020, it is now Rs50 to the Euro; 25%. And we know that mostly everything that we spend our money on, 70% or more of what we spend our money on is imported in Mauritius. And in the face of such devaluation of our currency, depreciation of our currency, when we are saying that the inflation is under control, that it is only going to be 4% over the next year, that, Mr Speaker, Sir, is an insult to the poor consumers of Mauritius who are struggling every week when they go to the supermarket to fill their baskets to feed their families. Mr Speaker, Sir, again, inflation rate, as it stands, uncorrected, the basket as it is for COVID-19 related expenditure, which has changed with COVID-19, as it is, Mr Speaker, Sir, no one believes the inflation rate as given by this Government. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as construction costs are concerned especially, they have gone through the roof and whatever 5% of reimbursement that the Minister of Finance is proposing is not even going to cover, firstly, for most cases, the tax, and certainly not going to cover the huge increase in expenses that has already occurred and is to be expected.

Now, the current talk is that the Dollar will be worth Rs45, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the near future, and that, when you look at the receipts of the Bank in the Budget, when you look at the vast increases in value added tax, etc., it is clear that the Government is banking on an accelerated depreciation of the rupee such that any imported item, obviously, is valued in rupees, 15 % tax is put on an item and, therefore, value added tax increases by huge amount.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have finished with the figures. I will come now to the situation in the country. There is no doubt that the country is in a big mess, and it is not just the

Opposition saying that, Mr Speaker, Sir. All reputable organisations are saying exactly what the Opposition is saying, even worse than what we are saying.

Now, the Financial Action Task Force, in February 2020, a full five years after this Government took office, put us on the grey list. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is considered by the Financial Action Task Force to be a danger to the global financial system. And what reasons? Out of the five reasons that were given, four reasons were directly related to institutional failure, the inability of the Government to create, manage, and promote institutions that will ensure that we are not a danger to the global financial system. And I will read just one, the first of the five; I don't want to do all five because of time. I will just read the first one that FATF said. The first reason is deficiency, and I quote –

“(...) deficiency in demonstrating that the supervisors of global business have implemented risk-based supervision”.

That was the first of the five reasons given by the Financial Action Task Force, and the rest of the reasons, I have them here, are basically in the same vein. The problem is institutional and the problem is not anywhere else but institutional.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in March 2021, Moody's downgraded Mauritius. When I was Minister of Finance, and it was 2012, we were lucky enough for Moody's to upgrade Mauritius in 2012 from Baa2 to Baa1; we were very proud of that, Mr Speaker, Sir, because as a Financial Centre, it is good that you are a credible Financial Centre. Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have been downgraded back to Baa2 from Baa1 and, worst of all, with a negative outlook, that is, Mr Speaker, Sir, another downgrade is likely; another downgrade to Baa3, which is just above junk status. Imagine, Mr Speaker, Sir, the effect on our Financial Services Centre on the billions of rupees held by foreigners in our banking system if we are downgraded, as it looks probable, to Baa3 or even to junk status, with a corresponding effect on the grading of all the banks in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I move on from Moody's to the IMF Article IV Mission. We expect the full report in a few weeks, but it is clear there that the Minister of Finance had totally ignored whatever the IMF had suggested or recommended, such as prioritizing expenditure, reforming the Bank of Mauritius Act to prevent further transfers. He said, in one line, ‘that the Bank of Mauritius Act is expected (...)’. We do not know what is going to be there. We don't know what's going to be. He hasn't said so. And also it said, Mr Speaker, Sir, and that he hasn't done, that financing the Mauritius Investment Corporation should be through the

Consolidated Fund and not through the Bank of Mauritius because, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bank of Mauritius is a regulator, it is not an operator, and you cannot have an operator and regulator under the same roof. It cannot regulate itself and, therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, the IMF and the World Bank have requested that we change our policies in this respect.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the World Bank Country Report, delivered a few weeks ago. Referring to the title, Mr Speaker, Sir, it says: ‘in the Eye of the Perfect Storm’. Now, Mauritius, according to the World Bank, is in the eye, not only of a storm, but of a perfect storm, which is 10 times worse than a storm; 10 times more dangerous than a storm; 10 times more fatal than a storm, and that is according to the World Bank, Mr Speaker, Sir. And who prepared that Report by the World Bank? 55, Mr Speaker, Sir, renowned specialists contributed to this Report. In all sectors: tourism, environment, solid waste collection, whatever you like; economists, 55 of them. And the Government just puts that Report in a drawer and ignores it, as if it never actually was given.

But we go on, Mr Speaker, Sir, to the Mo Ibrahim Report on African Governance. We were *l'enfant gâté de* Mo Ibrahim. He even came to Mauritius to have a conference when we were in Government to congratulate Mauritius. Now, what does Mo Ibrahim say, although he still maintains Mauritius as No. 1, but the gap is fast changing between us and Cape Verde? Nevertheless, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will quote directly from the Report of Mo Ibrahim –

“Mauritius moves in the opposite direction. Its overall governance score declines at an increasing rate.”

Mauritius moves in the opposite direction, that is, in a bad direction, and our overall governance score declines at an increasing rate. This is what the independent Mo Ibrahim, who used to love Mauritius, says.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not be too long, but I will take this issue of drugs. And, here, the Global Initiative against Transnational Crime, two reports dealing with Mauritius; April and June 2021. I will come back to that in a moment, but this is a quote I am going to use at this stage –

“The pervasiveness of drug-fuelled corruption is the single biggest obstacle to an effective response to the drug scourge.”

It is not the Opposition saying that; it is not Xavier Duval, it is not anyone here. This is a respected international organisation; two reports, and if you read it, it is even worse. I have not taken the worse bits, and that is what they said. And we can go to the V-Dem

Report – we have dealt with it here; that we are now a major autocratic State and, to top it all, we had the ICTA Consultation Paper which brought us ridicule and anger throughout the world.

But, still, Mr Speaker, Sir, these are the problems that Mauritius is facing, whether it be economic, whether it be governance, whether it be social, whether it be drugs, whether it be democracy, and these are international organisations telling us. And what did the Minister of Finance have to say about all these problems? The answer is simple, zero. These problems were not dealt with either directly, maybe indirectly here and there, by the Minister of Finance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us take drugs. Mr Speaker, Sir, if we live in Mauritius, we can see for ourselves the extent of drug problems in Mauritius; everywhere you go. Places that were decent a few years ago are now infested with drug peddlers and drug addicts.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will tell you this – I have made some research. Despite the massive seizures that we have seen - we have seen massive seizures, we must agree with that - heroin continues to flood our country at an even greater rate. Prices of heroin – because that is a good barometer of how much is around; prices of a dose of heroin, I am told, Mr Speaker, Sir, have fallen now to only Rs200, despite all the massive seizures; tons almost. Not tons but hundreds of kilos of drugs, Mr, Speaker, Sir.

Again, I quote from that Global Initiative Report of June 2021. This is what they said on Mauritius –

“The Seychelles and Mauritius have some of the highest rates of heroin use in the world (...).”

We have some of the highest rates of heroin use in the world, and hardly a word in the Budget; in a country which has one of the highest rates of heroin use in the world. And that is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to speak the truth to the people. We have to tell them, we have a drug problem. This is how we want to address it. Now, we know that there has been lip service paid to the Report of the Commission of Enquiry, but the major recommendations, we know, have not been implemented or, at least, have been implemented with little effectiveness, for reasons I do not know.

Now, I am told, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the number of ADSU Officers, 425, is almost the same number as the number of VIPSU Officers; there are 400. Now, VIPSU Officers

protect about 30 VIPs. ADSU Officers protect the whole nation of 1.3 million and they have the same number of people or virtually the same number of officers attached to them.

This Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, ignores the drug problem entirely and gives no hope to tens of thousands of drug users. Even gives no hope to hundreds, I presume, of people who suffer from various diseases, which would be of help by medical cannabis. Even that, now that it is legalised, if you say, by the World Health Organisation, Mr Speaker, Sir, is not mentioned.

So, we have a Police Force dramatically undertrained and underequipped, not undermanned; we have 13,000 policemen, which represents one policeman for every 100 population. That is a very high number, and soon, Mr Speaker, Sir, we will have another 4,000 new recruits when we know, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is the number of policemen that matter, it is how they are equipped, how they are trained, how they are motivated, how they are rewarded; that is what matters. And nothing, Mr Speaker, Sir, on how we are going to reform the training of our Police Officers. I say this again, Mr Speaker, Sir, when I went to Germany, I was asked to go to Germany to look at their system there, a German Police Officer had three years of training before he joined the Force as a Constable; in Mauritius, six months of training. Do you think they can be as effective as a German Police Officer? And when you look at their equipment, you would think you live, Mr Speaker, Sir, in a different world. Anyway, that is drugs, completely ignored.

The other issue, Mr Speaker, Sir, is youth unemployment. Now, youth unemployment in Mauritius currently about 36%, it hovers around that figure, 25, 26 over the years, Mr Speaker, Sir. That is one in four persons, according to Statistics Mauritius. And the Budget here offers more of the same; Graduate Scheme here, there. And what the World Bank has asked us to do is to revamp, re-energise that system and provide dynamism. And whilst we have not done that, whilst our universities are some of the worst in Africa, are some of the worst in the world, Mr Speaker, Sir, according to Webometrics, which is a respected ranking firm. According to Webometrics, Mr Speaker, Sir, the University of Mauritius

ranks 2,276th in the world; the University of Technology, Mauritius ranks 6,949th in the world; Open University, 16,316th in the world. Now, this is the sort of university education we are giving to our graduates. At the same time, now, we say that we are going to open massively to overseas, foreign youth to come to Mauritius, either in the Financial Services Sector, where the requirement for the Occupation Permit has been reduced to Rs30,000 per

month or after doing only three years to become a graduate in Mauritius. These youths, Mr Speaker, Sir, they need to be trained to compete, they need to be given the tools to compete, and we are not doing that. We are opening them dangerously to foreign competition to destroy all their joyous prospects without giving them the education, especially tertiary education, but even secondary education that is required to allow them to compete.

And so, Mr Speaker, Sir, you have the young Mauritian guy who comes out of his university which is 16,000th in the world and suddenly he will have someone coming to work in the financial services from UK, from France, from South Africa, coming from the best universities because that is what their country has given them, whereas this is what we are giving to our country. The opening that is being proposed by the Minister of Finance can be given; it can be given after we have done the necessary to train and educate our youth to compete with people in the world. Otherwise, Mr Speaker, Sir, it will just be a massacre.

When I was Minister of Tourism, I actually prevented foreign managers coming to Mauritius because I had seen, Mr Speaker, Sir, that people were coming to work in Mauritius as managers while they were Europeans. Our tourists are Europeans. Obviously, if you are a manager, a hotel owner, you will take that sort of person to welcome your tourists. Even a bartender will do better if he is European, facing Europeans, than a Mauritian.

So, we had to stop that to give Mauritians a chance. And today, when you look at the hotel sector, I am proud to see that we have many Mauritian managers that we did not have before. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have *gradués chômeurs* and that is going to look much more likely that we will have thousands more of *gradués chômeurs* in the years to come if this policy is not abandoned.

The two policies that I mentioned, one is the 10-year work permit after only three years' study in Mauritius. I looked at the situation in Canada, I looked at the situation in Australia, I looked at the situation in UK and, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you study in these countries, you get two to three years of work permit. Singapore, Mr Speaker, Sir, you get only one year. Here, in Mauritius, for some unknown reasons, we have decided to give ten years of work permit to anyone coming to study. You can see that people will not be coming to study; they will be coming to work. Study will just be an excuse to work in Mauritius and you will be able to attract lots of people from these countries with high unemployment and they will come pretending to study but, in fact, they will be doing the 20 hours which is hard to control and then the 10-year work permit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, perhaps the biggest omission of all is that the Minister of Finance has not spoken about the fight against COVID-19 except to tell us that he will be taxing us on our petrol to pay for some vaccines, although he does not need the money at all and it can be easily demonstrated. Not a word, Mr Speaker, Sir, on how we are going to fight COVID-19, I mean, the health issues related to COVID-19.

I understand that the Government is not proud of its record. Far back as December 2020, when we requested the Government to pre-order vaccines because that was what many enlightened countries were doing, we were told that our request was stupidity. On 04 February of this year, the Minister and his Adviser, Mrs Gaud - in fact, in February of this year - both of them, and the Minister on 04 February said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there was no urgency to order vaccines for Mauritius. We have moved on February to no urgency to what the Deputy Prime Minister admitted some time ago: *sel solution, vaccination*. So, we moved, in the space of a few months, from no urgency and stupidity to *sel solution, vaccination*. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was a real negligence in ordering, pre-ordering vaccines from a list of vaccines that were likely to be approved, as many other countries have done.

And then, we moved, once we got the vaccine, to a totally unnecessary, probably illegal, Total Disclaimer Form, saying that it is absolutely my own personal responsibility if I accept to take the vaccine. The Government, the manufacturer, anyone has no liability at all, even if they put the greatest rubbish in my arm. That is what the Total Disclaimer Form was meant to achieve. And, of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, many of our people in Mauritius were reluctant to be vaccinated in the face of such a Total Disclaimer Form, which tended to say: "You know, we really don't know what we are doing, but if you want to be vaccinated, be vaccinated." So, that was the Total Disclaimer Form and vaccinations took off on the wrong footing in Mauritius.

And then, of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, fight against COVID, there was a policy of vaccinating. Every country in the world has chosen to vaccinate the old first. The older, the earlier, and, secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, those with comorbidities. In Mauritius, it was different; we decided to vaccinate employees of Business Mauritius first. God knows why. That was the only country to do that policy.

And even today, Mr Speaker, Sir, when we are vaccinating, we have hundreds of people, old people being vaccinated in the morning usually. They are left to stand in the rain, in the sun, some people faint, one person has died; they are not even given chairs to sit on.

That is what is happening every day in the morning; in the afternoon, we continue with the policy of vaccinating young people. I do not understand this. It is obvious that we should adopt international practice, even World Health Organisation practice and vaccinate the old and those with comorbidities first. So, now, Mr Speaker, Sir, we put our old people in buses, we get them to stand in long queues in the rain, and that is our new vaccination policy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, had the Government listened to the Opposition at the time, had they not been stubborn in their inaction as they are today with this Budget, we would have been out of the crisis. And let us hope that we can all get vaccinated before we actually reach 01 October, but I have my doubts given the past record. But let us hope that this can be done, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I mentioned, we have a surge of cases at the moment.

Of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, the opening of our borders is heavily reliant on the vaccination of our population. When are we actually going to open the borders? Apparently, partially on 15 July; we don't know what is going to be the outcome of that, and then, probably on 01 October, a full opening. Mr Speaker, Sir, that does not answer everything.

(Interruptions)

What is the problem? Is there a problem, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Mr Speaker: You have 10 minutes to go.

Mr X. L. Duval: Why 10 minutes?

Mr Speaker: This is the paper I received from the Whip, and one hour...

Mr X. L. Duval: No, Mr Speaker, Sir. I was told it is unlimited. This is not right.

Ms Ramyad: Mr Speaker, Sir, it was agreed that it is unlimited.

Mr Speaker: Unlimited?

Ms Ramyad: Yes.

Mr Speaker: So, what is this paper you issued?

Ms Ramyad: It is only indicative to work on the time, but it is unlimited. It was agreed.

Mr Speaker: So, you don't have the floor, you make a change language. Continue, unlimited!

Mr X. L. Duval: Thank you very much. Like Government spending! So, tourism, Mr Speaker, Sir, depends on the vaccination. Let us hope we get the doses and we actually vaccinate people.

Now, when we open on 01 October, we are told now the Wage Assistance Scheme will cease. Now, on 01 October, suddenly all our restaurants will be full? All the leisure parks will be full? All the boat houses will be working as they were? All the beach hawkers will be selling as they need? All the pleasure crafts will be full of tourists? It is not likely to be the case. Although the Minister of Finance is very optimistic, it is likely to take a lot of time because even his figure is about 60% of the normal tourists that we receive in a year.

So, how can the Wage Assistance Scheme stop on 01 October? It cannot stop on 01 October. It may need to be tweaked, it may need to be amended, but it cannot stop. If it stops, we are going to go to vast unemployment in the Tourism Sector. Let us hope, therefore, the way that has been stated gives rise to misinterpretation and that that is, I presume, not the intention of the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism, and that again he comes and clears that issue, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, on tourism, that is one point.

Second point, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are going to now increase the percentage of rooms that can be sold under the Invest Hotel Scheme to foreigners. Now, let us understand what is the Invest Hotels? We thought it was there for a reason because they were many hotels which needed help. What is the Invest Hotels? It is, in fact, a disguised name for time sharing, and all of us know in Mauritius, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism, maybe, does not know, but all of us know in Mauritius that time sharing was prohibited in Mauritius for a long, long time. Why is not time sharing allowed? Because, in fact, when you build a hotel room and then you rent it out to the tourist, you have two sources of income; one, when the income comes, the FDI, hopefully, to build the hotel room, and secondly, when the tourist comes to rent the hotel room; you have two. Whereas in Invest Hotel Scheme, whereas in time sharing, the money only comes once. The same person who would build the house will stay in the room six months or more now, for he only gets one income. So, tomorrow, if all your hotels were to become Invest Hotels, your tourism receipt would fall to a trickle, because all of them, in fact, would have invested only in the rooms to build, not in the rooms to rent. Whereas you want people to invest in a room to build and secondly, people to rent your rooms, you have two sources of income. So, I hope

Mr Speaker, Sir, that this Invest Hotel Scheme, as being suggested, will be reversed. This is not acceptable, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another thing I want to talk about is branding. We were courageous enough at the time - it was 2010 - to enter into a branding exercise. Now, what is branding? People do not understand what branding is. Branding is not just about a logo or about a caption. It is how a country lives, it is the culture, the religion, the inter-communal, it is about the environment, it is all the things that define a country. And so, the Government does not agree with what we did. Okay! But it still uses our logo Mauritius. Okay!

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, the most important aspect of a branding exercise is the brand book that defines the country and defines the way that you have to continue forward in a country and then you will have the logo, and then you will have the slogan. What surprised me is, I think, EDB. Government, anyway, launched a branding exercise in the face of COVID-19, as if someone could come to Mauritius, some well-known agency, and tell how Mauritius ticks, how we work, when the country is in confinement, when there is no culture, when there is no religion, when there is no interaction, when everybody is more or less confined apart from walking to the house or to the shopping centre. It is not serious! It is ridiculous! How can you do a branding exercise *en plein confinement*? And now I understand, I am not sure, that the branding has been abandoned. But the mere fact of launching a tender during a confinement period to brand Mauritius makes us a laughing stock, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, let us hope, as I said, that we can open on 01 October because I understand today, Boris Johnson in UK is going to postpone the full opening of his country by another month because the herd immunity that we are all caring about, we all put so much emphasis on, is not working in the UK, especially against the Indian variant. So, he is postponing full opening. Let us see what he does in a moment to at least another month. And so, for us to bank on 15 July or 01 October for the 650,000 tourists, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is why it is absolutely unrealistic and this is why we ought to have put, maybe half, 300,000; 400,000 would have been an optimistic number to achieve in the nine months to June 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what does tourism rely on? It relies on civil aviation, and have you noticed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that not a single question is replied to in this House on Air Mauritius, but that civil aviation policy does not even warrant one paragraph in the Speech of the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development? Does he know that Air Mauritius exist? Does he know that we need air services and that Air Mauritius caters for 55

or used to cater for 40% up to 60% of our tourists coming to Mauritius? Well, it does not seem to be the case. We are not given any clarity at all about what is to happen to Air Mauritius, what is to happen to civil aviation and how the 650,000 tourists, how all the exports of the EPZ or the Mauritians who need to travel will do over the next few months and years. We are not told anything, Mr Speaker, Sir, about drugs; we are not told anything in the Budget Speech about COVID-19; we are not told anything, Mr Speaker, Sir about civil aviation. These are three elephants in the room that the Government is ignoring.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us come now to the environment. Now, what has been the defining event concerning the environment over the last year? Since the last Budget, what has been the defining event? Mr Speaker, Sir, Wakashio has been the defining event over the last 12 months. Do we hear anything like that? Anything that shows that we have learnt the lessons of Wakashio? That we have respect for the 150,000 people that marched on three occasions to protest against how Government handled Wakashio? Nothing! Not a word, Mr Speaker, Sir! But that is a huge *manquement*, a huge failure because we need to prevent another Wakashio. We need to be able to say that wherever a ship, now, is disabled or there is a drunk captain or whatever there is, whenever that ship threatens Mauritius, we will be able to counter it, and there are ways to counter it. It is just as if Wakashio never existed for Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to be able to protect our environment. That is important, Mr Speaker, Sir. What could have been done? The Budget ought to have announced a new Maritime Zones Act to prevent ships crossing the Indian Ocean to enter into our 12 mile nautical zone. We ought to have proposed that. Other countries, Mr Speaker, Sir, delineate what route a ship uses for innocent passage. We need to urgently prevent ships, dangerous ships, from passing too close to our shores.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 26 May, Berje Jaya nearly had the same fate as Wakashio, and we were, in fact, lucky that its engines restarted and, therefore, it saved us another Wakashio. But, as I say, Mr Speaker, Sir, what are the lessons that we have learnt? Apparently, no lesson! So, no change proposed to the Maritime Zones Act, no consolidation of the Merchant Shipping Act, of the Fisheries Act, of the Ports Act. All need to be modernised, all need to be harmonised, Mr Speaker, Sir, before we can say that we can prevent another Wakashio; and that is an important message to give.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I was the last person who bought tugs for the MPA; that was years back. Since that time, there were no tugs. We need to buy, and I thought the Minister would have announced that the MPA is buying one or two oceangoing powerful tugs that tomorrow can act to protect our country. So much money is being spent left, right and centre, we cannot find a few hundred million rupees to buy a powerful tug on standby here? We cannot?

Mr Speaker, Sir, our helicopters at the airport, it is time that they are 24/7 operational. We cannot act like in the 1960s, that is, it is only operating up to 7 p.m. and then the pilots go home, and then, if ever we need them, there is a big issue. People are dying at night around our shores and the helicopter service has got to step up with not only the pilots but also crew that can act all through the night on a 24/7 basis, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, maybe one last thing. In this country, hundreds of ships go by every month, thousands of ships every year, near to our coast. Isn't it time that we buy a proper lifeboat, like you see overseas, that can go out in any weather to save people? We had, very near to my house, two dramatic incidents over the year; one is the Tug Sir Gaëtan Duval and the other one is the loss of a fisherman, Mr Carosin, some weeks ago. One reason why is because the Poudre d'Or Coast Guard is so ill-equipped, with only one wooden pirogue and one little outboard motor that they carry on their shoulder to put on the pirogue, and that is meant, Mr Speaker, Sir, to deal with any accident at sea. And you would have thought that with two accidents at sea, in the same area as the Poudre d'Or Coast Guard, you would have had a change, and that has not happened and nothing is mentioned in the Budget Speech. Mr Speaker, Sir, the modernisation of our sea rescue service is an industry in itself which could promote not only to ensure security in the ocean, but also to protect our environment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, staying on the environment, I am happy when we recruit people; it makes me happy, but we do not just recruit people and then we do not equip them. Now, I am going to table a picture I have taken myself; I have blacked out the faces of the persons. About 15 people cleaving in the north of the island a few days ago - 15 of them - and you can see one of them had a *faucille*, another one had a *sabre*; none of them had any equipment. Are we saying that, for instance, Landscope is going to recruit 2,000 people - I am not sure they were Landscope, but they were Government these guys; 2,000 people, and not give them the right equipment. They are going to be given *faucilles*, and that is how we are going to achieve a clean Mauritius, that is how our tourism industry is to be protected? So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will table that because no one would believe that this picture was taken in 2021; maybe in 1950s, *trois jours à Paris, quatre jours à Paris*, we could have done that, not

in 2021, and this is not acceptable. Not only is it a total waste of public money, but it is so totally ineffective, and this is why the country is so dirty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the World Bank has been very harsh on Mauritius, not only saying that we are in the eye of the perfect storm, but this is what it had to say as far as the export industries are concerned. The title is 'From decline to collapse'. That is the title of that section dealing with our export competitiveness. So, this is an extremely serious issue. What is export competitiveness? What is it? It is, in fact, when either your prices are too high or your quality is not good enough. That is what is meant by export competitiveness. You cannot produce sugar at the right price or our textiles are not the right quality or are too expensive, etc. And same for the tourism: our rooms are too expensive; the quality of the destination is not good enough. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, the World Bank says this: 'the deteriorating external competitiveness of Mauritius warrants attention'. Did it get any attention in this Budget? No! Not a single thing to improve our export competitiveness, which means that we can look forward, probably, Mr Speaker, Sir, to much more unemployment in the coming months and years. On textiles, not a word again, completely ignoring textiles. It used to employ about 9,000 people. Now, it is struggling to employ even 4,000 people. FDI hardly coming in. Last year, the Minister of Finance promised us a report to foster transformation of textiles. Where is that report? A year has gone by. Where is the report on fostering transformation of textiles? I will tell you where it is. I think, two weeks ago or one week ago, ISP issued an Expression of Interest; it said: 'let us have an Expression of Interest to have this done'. But, obviously then, it shows only that the Minister of Industry did not think there was any urgency to it. If he has taken 11 and a half months to actually commission or even to ask for an Expression of Interest, when will a tender be allocated, when will the report be given? We do not know and the textile industry is slowly dying. This is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, we say that this Budget has ignored the problems, whether it is economic or whether it is social.

What about sugar? I welcome the price of Rs3,300 per ton of sugar to be paid to bagasse producers; I welcome that. It has been on the cards for a long time. But then, again, there is a Report of the World Bank on sugar. Where is that Report? Aren't the employers, the employees, the planters, small and big, the millers, all the workers wherever they are, in the fields or in the mills, entitled to know what the future is made of? They are not entitled to have, even us as Parliamentarians, a copy of the World Bank Report on the sugar sector, what is it suggesting, what is it recommending, what is wrong, what is right, what needs to be done. Again, it is a lack of respect to these thousands of people whose future depends on

sugar and who, up to now, have been living on subsidy, hopefully a bit less now with the increase in the price of bagasse. But, we need to know, Mr Speaker, Sir, what the experts have said, and it is a duty of the Government to publish the World Bank Report on sugar.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I come now to the pensioners and I wanted to say a few things. This is the second year running with no increase, whilst there have been huge increases in the cost of living, including the cost of purchasing medicines. But I wanted to say one thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, because we have been criticised all the time, saying, you know, the pension was so low in the previous Labour Party/PMSD Government. But we forget, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we had for one year, for one Budget, one Minister of Finance named Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. And he actually decided on the rate of increase, and you can check, Prime Minister. He decided on the rate of increase to be given in that year, in his Budget Speech of 2010, to give to poor pensioners for the year 2011. And do you know how much was given? Do you remember? Rs98, Mr Speaker, Sir. Rs98! It was only Rs10 more than inflation.

Obviously, we were together in 2014. We know how it came that the Rs5,000 offer was made to pensioners for the increase in pensions. We also know that this is being used now as an electoral ploy, Mr Speaker, Sir, for the vulnerable groups. So, let's keep things reasonable. Let's not always blame the past because you were also part of the past. You should not forget that.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned, there is so much money floating around that it probably will be used in the end to pay, at least for the one year, after we don't know. But it is interesting to read the submission of Business Mauritius in the Courts as to the likely future to be reserved to *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, and this is what they said, Mr Speaker, Sir, after study. They said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that to be able to pay the full pension that had been promised by the Government, to be able to pay the full increase in pension of Rs4,500 in 2023, to be able to pay that, he will need to double the rate of *CSG*. Double the rate that is payable on to the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, which is just a pure tax, that is, for the lower income, it will move from 4.5% to 9% and for the middle and higher income, it is going to move, Mr Speaker, Sir, to increase from 12% to 24%. Can you imagine? This is what Business Mauritius has submitted after its calculations; that to be able to pay the full increase of Rs4,500 promised by the Government, the *CSG* will have to be increased to 24% of salary. Can you imagine? You pay 24% of salary, you pay your tax, you pay solidarity income, you pay your VAT. What is left, Mr Speaker, Sir? It will all have gone to the Minister of Finance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I'm going to end by saying that we have had a lot of reports overseas to support everything that the Opposition has been saying about the state of our nation. It is highly regrettable that none of the issues that matter for our daily lives, that matter for the future of this country, none of these issues have been treated or considered in this Budget Speech. They have pretended to ignore the hugely important problems facing our country, whether it is the environment, whether it is drugs, whether it is youth and unemployment, whatever it is. This Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, offers no hope to the people who are suffering from drugs, to the unemployed, to anyone else. Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget offers no solution to the loss of competitiveness, therefore, loss of jobs, loss of profits, in all our export sectors. This Budget, proposes no structural reforms, capable of creating prosperity. This Budget, in fact, is just a shopping list of things that Government will do for political reasons.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what this Budget does, is announce Rs65 billion of spending on projects which will have no impact at all on revenue generation. We can be thankful that he is not actually proposing any white elephants that we've seen before - Safe City, Côte d'Or Stadium, etc., and even the 50-storey building seems to have disappeared from the Budget. So, there seems to be no white elephants, but nothing in the Rs65 billion that is being proposed is going to generate any revenue which will help us to pay off the debts that will be taken to carry out these projects. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, perhaps worst of all, nothing in this Budget will stop the slide of the Mauritian Rupee against all the other currencies, which is going to have a devastating effect on purchasing power, on the living standards of Mauritius and, in the future, the acceleration of the depreciation of the rupee is something that is already now a fact.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to finish, the population has rejected this Budget. It has felt clubbed by more taxes at a time of spiralling inflation, it knows that they have been fooled with lots of projects that will never see the day.

So, to finish, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will say that we, on this side of the Opposition, we totally reject this Budget as it is totally inadequate for the challenging lives that we live.

Thank you, Sir.

Mr Speaker: In view of the time, I will suspend the Sitting for one and a half hour.

At 12.50 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.39 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Bholah!

The Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives (Mr S.

Bholah): M. le président, permettez- moi tout d'abord de transmettre mon appréciation à mon collègue, le ministre des Finances, pour ce budget osé et juste. Un budget qui courageusement vise à répondre à nos aspirations et nos espérances par ces temps difficiles.

Le deuxième budget de ce gouvernement est présenté dans des circonstances exceptionnelles où tous les gouvernements du monde font face à deux défis majeurs -

1. combattre la pandémie,
2. remettre l'économie sur les rails.

Depuis l'éclatement de la COVID-19, l'économie mondiale s'est effondrée. Nous faisons face à une crise sanitaire sans précédent qui a provoqué un arrêt brutal de la vie, de la normalité sur l'ensemble de la planète. A Maurice, des efforts considérables ont été déployés pour sauver des vies, sauvegarder les emplois, maintenir le niveau de la consommation, aider les entreprises en difficultés, stimuler et protéger les plus vulnérables. Ces efforts exceptionnels sont reconnus, même au niveau international où Maurice est cité comme exemple.

La bataille, M. le président, se poursuit. Heureusement qu'on voit se dessiner un espoir à l'horizon. Un espoir pour nous tous et pour le monde : les Vaccins. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes bien plus confiants d'affronter l'avenir. Et c'est fort de cette confiance, j'en suis convaincu que le ministre des Finances a présenté ce budget, un budget qui traduit aussi la vision du Premier ministre d'une économie résiliente, durable et inclusive qui soutient davantage ceux au bas de l'échelle. Tout le monde s'accorde à dire : la pandémie est là pour durer, mais nous parviendrons à la maîtriser.

Il est grand temps d'apprendre à composer avec le virus, relancer l'économie, se reconnecter avec le monde, avec une réouverture graduelle et réfléchie des frontières et bien sûr, des garde-fous nécessaires. M. le président, pour arriver à cela, il nous faut aussi et surtout une prise de conscience individuelle et des efforts collectifs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now reply to certain points that have been raised by the previous intervener, the hon. Leader of the Opposition whereat he mentioned about a forthcoming study on the whole industry sector, a study which will be financed by ISP. Let me remind him that when I assumed duty, there was already ongoing a study undertaken by

(UNCTAD) United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the report was launched in December last, in December 2020. This study was headed by a South-African National, Professor Barnes, with whom I had the privilege to interact and following the report, I have already set up an Industrial Policy Executive Oversight Committee which is headed by my Permanent Secretary. There are 22 major recommendations under five important pillars. Of course, the implementation of this report will imply mobilising Finance. Rs5 m. under the Transformation and Modernisation Scheme and I will appeal to operators in the Industry sector to apply and make available of finance under this Scheme. I have no problem, I have no qualm with many more reports, so far, there is goal congruence between any two or more reports.

Mr Speaker, Sir, throughout the dispose of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, we have felt, in fact I have felt, that he has displayed a sense of nostalgia especially regarding to ratings of the past. He has spoken about Moodys, Mo Ibrahim but is he aware that we are living in a pandemic which has impacted heavily on the economy? Now, he has spoken about inflation, let me remind him when he was at the helm of the Ministry of Finance and a gentleman called Mr Manu Bheenick was at the Bank of Mauritius and I will not talk about the relationship they have had, this is what the hon. Leader of the Opposition, then the Ministry of Finance, had to say –

“Inflation is not an issue. *Je suis plus concerné par la croissance.*”

Et, dans un Communiqué en février 2014, voilà ce que l'honorable Duval disait –

« La BoM va systématiquement surestimer le taux de l'inflation ces dernières années, pas qu'en 2013. »

This says a lot, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is happening?

(Interruptions)

Mr Bholah: When you meet the guy next weekend, you can talk to him.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has also requested me to comment on the Rs28 billion

Mr Speaker: Now, you are starting with a fight.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bholah: The hon. Leader of the Opposition has also commented and requested me, personally me, to comment on the Rs28 billion of finance as advanced by the bank. I will refer him to the notice of the Bank of Mauritius, where it is said that this is not a loan and it is to be recouped, to be amortised from future...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Bholah: *Je ne peux pas être plus royaliste que le roi...* Just refer to the..

Mr Speaker: You made your point this morning!

Mr Bholah: ...notice from the Bank of Mauritius. Speaking of projects, Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Duval also mentioned that there are certain projects that are taking time. Again, I will say that he has been at the Ministry of Finance, he is a former Minister of Finance and he knows how intricate it is in order to come to the implementation of projects and here I have a Report of the PAC (Public Accounts Committee) Report 2015 whereat, the Committee examined the Reports of the Director of Audit for years ended 31 December 2012 and 2013 and let me quote –

“Your Committee found it unacceptable that with regard to projects implemented under the Emergency Rehabilitation Programme, there has been a delay of up to 675 days, Mr Speaker, Sir and further the Report says the delay of 675 days, that is almost 2 years, is very irresponsible for Emergency Rehabilitation Works, aimed at risk reduction and protection of human lives.”

In fact, this Report was referring to all the works under the Emergency Rehabilitation Programme following the deadly flash floods of February 2013.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the pandemic has impacted severely on all our main economic indicators with a noteworthy drop in GDP in 2020. True it is that we have witnessed substantial downturns in key sectors like Tourism, Manufacturing, Trade and Construction. True it is that unemployment rate which stood at 6.7% in 2019 has increased to 9.2% in December 2020 but, Mr Speaker, Sir, we should not forget we have had two complete lockdown periods over a year. What would have been the consequences had Government not promptly provided various support measures to businesses and the self-employed since March 2020?

What would have been the state of employees in the Tourism Sector and related Sectors? What about their families and dependents? We would have been facing social collapse. Critics voice out that our debt to GDP ratio is high. In fact, it has reached 95%. Mr Speaker, Sir, could it have been otherwise? When exceptional circumstances warrant exceptional responses, we had to react, and quickly as all responsible Governments are doing.

Governments around the world have been mobilising funding and resources to a scale never witnessed except during war times. To name a few, in the U.S., President Biden has introduced an unprecedented Economic Aid Package of USD 1.9 trillion. The UK Government has spent £41.4 billion so far, to support some 9.5 million employees through its Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme resulting to a debt to GDP ratio of 98.5 % in April 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not dispute higher debt to GDP ratios are worrying. Nevertheless, there are various angles to look at debt and which the hon. Leader of Opposition, who has been Minister of Finance has not mentioned. Our repayment capacity, gauged by the interest payments as a percentage of GDP, is only 2.8% of GDP for fiscal year 2020/21. This is well below the ceiling of 3.5% set in the previous Budget.

Furthermore, we should consider the composition of our debt. It has to be noted that some 74% of the public sector debt is domestic debt, that is, borrowed and to be repaid in Mauritian Rupees.

Only 26% of the public sector debt is from external sources and which would likely be subject to exchange rate and interest rate risks. Compared to our African peers, we are of the few countries to have an investment grade status with regards to our sovereign debt ratings. Moreover, we should not forget that the country possesses some 18 months of imports in our gross official international reserves, which is largely above the 3 months required by the IMF and which the hon. Leader of Opposition has not mentioned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is an enviable position to be in despite the rhetoric of the hon. Leader of Opposition to paint a black picture of the state of the economy. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, we should not be apologetic and diffident that we introduced the Fourth Largest Package in the world in terms of share of GDP.

Mitigating distress, misery of common people and thousands of families have no price. Preserving the productive capacity, support services and logistics of a nation also have no price.

Hopefully, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is increased optimism over the global economic outlook. In its latest Global Economic Prospects report, the World Bank projects the world economy to grow by 5.6% in 2021, upgraded from its January 2021 projections of only 1.5%. The IMF, for its part, has projected a global output growth of 6% in 2021. While a GDP growth rate of 5% is envisaged for calendar year 2021 for Mauritius, preliminary estimates for GDP growth for fiscal year 2021/22 is at 9%, all other things remaining constant. This means that as from January next year, the economy will gather momentum. However, we need to re-adapt, re-engineer and re-model.

M. le président, je tiens, ici, à saluer la faculté d'adaptation remarquable des entrepreneurs mauriciens, grands, moyens ou petits.

« Chacun peut gouverner lorsque la mer est belle », disait le poète latin, Publius Syrus.

Mais quand nous naviguons dans des eaux incertaines, alors que l'économie mondiale tourne au ralenti, notre priorité des priorités devrait être de mener à bon port notre pays et nos citoyens.

Voilà pourquoi j'accueille avec optimisme ce présent budget, bâti autour de la consolidation de nos piliers économiques, de la diversification, de l'innovation au service de la relance.

M. le président, je vais à présent toucher aux mesures relatives à mon portefeuille ministériel, à commencer par le développement industriel.

The manufacturing sector, as one of the main pillars of the Mauritian economy, contributes around 12.1% to Gross Value Addition and accounts for 17% of total workforce.

Export-Oriented Enterprises (EOE) in the manufacturing sector, which was the main generator of foreign exchange earnings in 2020, registered a rather satisfactory performance despite being directly impacted by the severe market contractions in Europe and the US, our main trading partners.

While it was projected that exports revenue would fall by around 30%, the decrease has been contained at 11.7%, Mr Speaker, Sir.

It is worth noting that since the beginning of this year, the EOE sector has shown positive signs of recovery and major operators in the sector have experienced increases in their orders.

EOE exports to our main markets of the UK, France and South Africa witnessed an increase of 19.9%, 5.9% and 33.5% respectively. I urge the hon. Leader of the Opposition to check again his figures. It is gratifying to note that exports of medical devices have surged by 28.2%.

The promotion of vaccines and pharmaceutical production in Mauritius coupled with generous corporate tax reduction from 15% to 3%, provided by the present Budget, will give additional boost to the export sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this positive performance of the export sector has not occurred in a vacuum. It is the result of a sustained effort and commitment displayed by this Government over the years in collaboration with the major stakeholders involved in the export sector.

Government stepped forward with a plethora of measures to address the vulnerability of manufacturing enterprises during the difficult period, especially with the Wage Assistance Scheme.

I personally ensured that during the lockdown, assistance was provided to enterprises to expedite matters relating to Access and Business continuity. This enabled some 50% of enterprises in the EOE sector to maintain their activities, fulfil their export orders and earn foreign exchange for the country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we were proactive in addressing the bottlenecks faced by our business operators. To cite a few, the Support for Trade Promotion & Marketing (STPM) Scheme was readjusted to boost up exports to our traditional markets. It also helped in acceding new and emerging markets such as Africa, Australia, Japan, Middle East countries and Vietnam.

For the period July 2020 to May 2021, almost Rs116 m. was disbursed to 69 manufacturing enterprises.

To stimulate exports and diversify markets, we are pursuing extensively our Africa Strategy. In this respect the Freight Rebate Scheme greatly helped enterprises to export to Africa, Madagascar, Seychelles, Comoros Island and Reunion Island.

For the period July 2020 to May 2021, 50 manufacturing enterprises took advantage of this Scheme. Disbursement of around Rs20 m. was made. It is worthy to note that the present Budget has extended this scheme until June 2022.

All the above are clear evidences that Mauritius has maintained its reputation as a credible source market.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this year marks a historic milestone in the field of bilateral cooperation. The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with India, the Mauritius-China Free Trade Agreement and the UK-Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) open up considerable export opportunities for our Enterprises. Additionally, the implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement constitutes new market opportunities in Northern, Western and Central Africa for products such as sugar, canned tuna, textile and clothing and medical instruments, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am in touch with key private sector institutions to come up with concrete actions in respect of provision of market information, technical products requirements and establishment of contacts with buyers for selected products. It is worth mentioning that for the period January to May 2021, 5 companies in the textile and apparel sector have been issued 47 Certificates of Origin by the MRA under the Mauritius-China FTA for exports to China.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to strengthen our foothold and increase competitiveness of Mauritian products in African markets, an Africa Warehousing Scheme has been put in place in Tanzania. The Scheme operates on a cost-sharing basis, with 60% of the costs being borne by the Government. This warehouse is already operational.

The Industrial Policy & Strategic Plan was launched in December last year. I just mentioned about that. Consequently, the manufacturing sector is called upon to undergo a structural transformation. Presently, the sector has to grapple with numerous challenges which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new Strategic Plan has come at an opportune time to address issues relating to –

- (a) upgrading of value chains;
- (b) increasing local production;
- (c) enhancing regional and local exports, and
- (d) the adoption of sustainable and advanced technologies, notably Industry 4.0.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the introduction of the Modernisation and Transformation Fund under the new Industrial Financial Institution (IFI) demonstrates that Government is fully committed to implement the recommendations of the Industrial Policy & Strategic Plan. This is a revolution for the industrial financing landscape in Mauritius as it will offer manufacturing enterprises smoother access to financing.

Concurrently, the annual interest rate under all 3 Leasing Equipment Modernisation Scheme (LEMS) has been reduced by 1% Point.

The financial package of Rs5 billion earmarked under this scheme will help manufacturing enterprises to improve their productivity, reduce their cost of production and thus enhance profitability. It is also expected that the demand for new technology and equipment, including digitalisation will have a positive impact on start-ups. I, therefore, again appeal to all operators to make full use of this scheme

Mr Speaker, Sir, the introduction of the Export Development Certificate by the Economic Development Board (EDB) will bring new dynamism to our export sector. Holders of this certificate will benefit from a preferential 3% income tax on profits, the Freight Rebate Scheme, the Trade Promotion and Marketing Scheme, subsidy on the cost of Credit Guarantee Insurance Premium and preferential port and handling charges. It will also encourage new entrants to step forward and engage further in export activities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now comment on the key contributions of support institutions pertaining to Industrial Development falling under the aegis of my Ministry.

(i) Mauritius Standards Bureau (MSB)

Markets in Africa offer vast economic opportunities in Mauritius given our proximity in the region. In that context, MSB has entered into several Memoranda with Standards Bodies in Africa, namely Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Madagascar, to build capacity in standards and conformity assessment activities.

The MSB Act will be amended to enable the Bureau to move with a new strategic orientation in line with the rapidly evolving socio-economic development of Mauritius and to continue assuming its multi-functional role in the national economy.

(ii) Fashion & Design Institute (FDI)

The Fashion and Design Institute (FDI) is reorienting its strategy towards restructuring and rebranding of the institution to adapt to global changes in the field of fashion and design education.

It is also extending its activities to Rodrigues in an inclusive strategy. The National Productivity and Competitiveness Council (NPCC) is playing a catalytic role to instil productivity and quality in all spheres of the economy to chart out a productivity improvement roadmap for the country in the years to come. The NPCC is also working on a flagship report on productivity with the technical support for the World Bank.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now move to another important segment of my ministerial portfolio, the SMEs. There is unanimity that SMEs are and will for long remain a major engine for growth and development of our economy. They provide 50% of all employment; contribute around 36% of the gross value added and 12% to exports. I know that year in, year out, some Members from the Opposition side, always claim that we had in our Budget 2015 stated that we will come up with a SME Bank, which, unfortunately, has not happened. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition is not here but I wish to remind the House what in the Budget 2012 “growth for the greater good” at paragraph 98, this is what hon. Xavier Duval stated –

“We have begun the search for a specialised private financial institution to undertake the transformation of the DBM into a micro, small and medium Enterprise Bank.”

This is what he stated in 2012 and up to 2014 no such Bank has come out of Earth.

Aware of the systemic and structural vulnerability of SMEs, and to prevent closure and preserve jobs, Government has committed some Rs13 billion to support some 285,000 employees. The reimbursement of the monthly salary compensation amounting to Rs375 per month, has been extended to June 2022. Credit facilities of up to Rs1 m. are available for business continuity.

Since March, 2021, the DBM has approved 1,250 applications for a total amount of Rs335 m. Nearly Rs6.8 billion have been disbursed to SMEs by local Commercial Banks as credit facilities since 2015 to date. These figures come from the Bank of Mauritius.

We honestly have to appreciate that for a small island economy like ours, facing a daunting situation of a scale never seen before, these are indeed very courageous measures and equally of a scale never seen before.

Mr Speaker, Sir, outreach for sensitisation, sharing of information and support are crucial for the development of entrepreneurship. To constantly improve our customer experience and support, SME Mauritius has been upgrading each of its 4 regional business support centres of Coromandel, Goodlands, Bel Air and Rose Belle.

For Rodrigues, last year's budget provided funds for its full upgrade and revamping. I am pleased to inform the House that true to a pledge I made to entrepreneurs in Rodrigues three years ago, I will be inaugurating the new offices as soon as flights resume.

In order to support the sustained growth of SMEs and help them develop resilience in the face of constantly changing market dynamics, SME Mauritius introduced 5 schemes, namely –

- Internal Capability Development Scheme;
- Technology and Innovation Scheme;
- SME Marketing Support Scheme;
- Inclusiveness and Integration Scheme, and
- SME Utility Connection Assistance Scheme.

For Financial Year 2020/2021, SME Mauritius has assessed, approved and committed a sum of Rs32.6 m. for 732 projects benefiting 635 SMEs. These SMEs have a joint turnover of Rs3.4 billion and support around 4,000 employees. I am pleased to inform the House that Rs17.8 m. of the sum committed has already been disbursed.

In line with the strategy of upgrading of equipment and adoption of technology, the Technology and Innovation Scheme which covers website design, development of mobile apps and acquisition of new machine and equipment had the highest uptake with 552 beneficiaries. 58% of beneficiaries are from the manufacturing sector, 22% from the services sector, 13% from the Agro Business and 7% from construction. It is heartening to note that 40% of the beneficiaries are women-led enterprises.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the SME Employment Scheme has been a resounding success in both conception and delivery. While the initial objective was the placement of 1,000 graduates, SME Mauritius has, since inception, placed 1,300 graduates and 319 diploma holders in SMEs. Today, 354 graduates and 122 diploma holders remain in place while the rest have moved on after acquiring industry experience.

The Employment Scheme has just been extended to June 2022 to cater for an additional 700 graduates and 300 diploma holders to bridge the skills gap and further reduce unemployment among youth. My Ministry will also enlist MQA approved holders of TVET Level 3 qualifications in plumbing, electrical, culinary skills, automotive mechanics, and electronics, amongst others, to be placed in SMEs. I would strongly appeal to both SMEs and qualified vocational qualification holders to enrol for this program.

SME Mauritius will also continue to dispense relevant and appropriate training. During the current Financial Year, 1,400 aspiring and existing entrepreneurs have been trained in crafts and skills and management courses. 180 entrepreneurs have followed online courses which were held during confinement. It is encouraging to note that 33% of those trained have set up their own businesses.

Access to international markets remains a challenge for the SMEs. They lack market information, which severely impacts on their competitiveness and market development capabilities. To address this issue, SME Mauritius has, in collaboration with the SADC Trade related unit, coordinated training for more than 40 enterprises on “Productivity Improvement Programme for Manufacturing Companies in Mauritius.”

Although registration is not mandatory, I wish to make an appeal to SMEs to register themselves with my Ministry, to avail themselves to various incentives and schemes available; it is free of charge.

For year 2020-2021, 4,262 certificates of registration have been issued to SMEs compared to a 2,508 for the previous year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at this stage, I wish to share projects in the pipeline which will pave the way for a new ecosystem. The Mauritian Leather Sector is being revived and revitalised. It will provide opportunities for local entrepreneurs enter niche markets. More than 100 SMEs have already been trained in the design and production of leather items. A common facilities centre has already been developed on the premises of SME Mauritius at Coromandel. It will house a Leather Studio, a Jewellery 3D printing and a CNC/industrial 3D printing studio. And despite supply chain disruptions, I am pleased to inform the House that the studios for Leather and Jewellery 3D printing will be operational as from next month.

To expand the market reach of SMEs, my Ministry is collaborating with Mauritius Post Ltd on an appropriate e-commerce platform. This will enable SMEs to market their

products across 660,000 postal access points across the world, hence, boosting their development and growth.

My Ministry is also coming up with an Online Business Directory of SMEs. This will facilitate interaction between public, suppliers and SMEs. Some 1,000 SMEs have shown their interest already.

In line with our policy for import substitution and food security, a provision of Rs4 m. has been made for the setting up of 4 mini fruit processing plants to transform surpluses of tropical fruits. This is an opportunity to be seized and to all patriots I will say "*anou ress lwayal, anou konsom local.*" The green economy also has tremendous opportunities for new and existing SMEs.

Mr Speaker Sir, I will now come to the cooperatives sector. For the past 108 years, cooperatives have facilitated job creation, economic growth and social development. Today more than ever, cooperatives are called upon to be economically viable, innovative and competitive. To this end, my Ministry has already embarked on various initiatives to modernise the movement. The existing Regional Cooperative Centres are being revamped to improve their service delivery. In that context, the 12 Regional Cooperative Centres across the island will be regrouped into 5 Cooperative Business Centres with modern facilities including digital interconnectivity.

In order to boost food production, the Boost to Local Production Scheme, the Boost to Local Production Scheme was introduced last year. The scheme finances 90% up to a maximum of Rs150,000 to cooperatives engaged in agricultural production and livestock. So far 37 applications were approved surpassing the Rs3 m. initially earmarked for the scheme. An additional amount of Rs5 m. for the continuity of the scheme has been provided in the budget.

Pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding with the Agricultural Marketing Board to ensure regular supply of potatoes and onions at competitive prices, the Mauritius Consumers Cooperative Federation Ltd has set up a number of sales outlets around the country.

In order to revive the cooperative retail shops, the La Flora Cooperative Store Ltd in collaboration with the Mauritius Consumers Cooperative Federation Ltd was launched under a major franchise. The model of "cooperative superette" will be replicated in other regions, namely at Bambous and Camp Fouquereaux. Furthermore, for financial Year 2021/2022, a

series of regional cooperative market fairs are being envisaged subject to sanitary conditions in place.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Cooperative College is instrumental in imparting training and promoting cooperative education. Some 30 training programmes are available at the National Cooperative College. These include organic farming, hydroponics food production, culinary, textile recycle craft, garment making, amongst others. For the last 9 months, around 3,000 participants have been trained at the National Cooperative College. The *Maison des Éleveurs* at St. Pierre is being renovated and converted into a Cooperative Common Facility Centre. This will cater for -

- a Cooperative Business Point ;
- accommodating the offices of the Mauritius Cooperative Alliance Ltd, which is the mouthpiece of the cooperative movement;
- providing meeting room for cooperatives societies;
- a mini food processing plant, and
- setting up of a showcase for aquaponics and a model organic farm to be used by NCC for practical training sessions.

The provision of Rs1.5 m. earmarked in this budget will definitely help the Ministry in initiating works for the above mentioned project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the interest of fishermen cooperative societies has always been taken into high consideration. However, I feel aggrieved by the financial difficulties being currently faced by the fishermen cooperative societies since the past years due to the limited stock of fish, mainly by-catch and for which the Mauritius Fishermen Cooperative Federation is appointed as the exclusive administrative agent of the Agricultural Marketing Board. The AMB is mandated for the enforcement of the by-catch regulations but unfortunately it applies only to licensed fishing vessels.

It has been my continuous effort to support the Fishermen Cooperative Federation to overcome its financial difficulties mostly relating to by-catch. But Mr Speaker, Sir, this would not be possible without the inclusion of non-Mauritian licensed fishing vessels in the said regulation. The solution resides in ensuring that all fishing vessels calling at Port Louis, whether licensed in Mauritius or elsewhere sell their by-catch imperatively to the Federation through the AMB.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the *Maison des Pêcheurs* at Tamarin was set up to provide infrastructure to fishermen for the reception, storage and distribution of fish and to remove the fishermen from the grip of unscrupulous middlemen. I appreciate that an amount of Rs15 m. has been provided in this budget for the renovation of the *Maisons des Pêcheurs*. This will not only increase the quantity of fish on our local market but would also enable the Fishermen Cooperative Federation to become self-sustaining.

The cooperatives movement has already embarked on the path of sustainability, especially in the production of green energy. Under the Solar Photovoltaic Rebate Scheme, 19 cooperative societies have already benefitted from the installation of solar photovoltaic kits. Now is the time for cooperative societies to engage in green energy production on a large scale. Land is already available as a result of many planters pulling out from cultivation of sugar cane.

Mr Speaker, Sir, cooperatives help women co-operators in strengthening their economic capacity. Over and above, training and capacity building programmes, my Ministry will provide financial assistance to women cooperatives who intend to open tailor shops. Funding of up to Rs200,000 will be provided for purchase of equipment for garment making/tailoring shop, rental and signage and advertising materials.

In all our endeavours, we are ensuring that the cooperative societies in Rodrigues are also part of the re-orientation plan. Thus, discussions are underway to boost meat production and supply. The *Fédération des Associations Cooperatives des Éleveurs de Rodrigues Ltée* and the Rodrigues Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Federation Ltd are very receptive to the idea of engaging into fruitful partnership with their Mauritian counterparts with a view to producing and supplying meat, which are of good quality and reasonable price. These federations are willing to produce up to three times of their local capacity for export to Mauritius.

M. le président, alors que nous subissons une pandémie mondiale sans précédent dont l'ampleur, la portée, les effets et les conséquences présentes et futures, pour la plupart, restent encore indéterminés, il nous reste qu'à rester fidèle à notre mission de servir le pays, et de servir notre peuple ! Rien ne changera si nous nous croisons les bras ou si nous reculons vis-à-vis des critiques vils, tristes, souvent injustes! Rien ne changera sans la solidarité ! Et ce de tout un chacun ! Ce budget présenté par le ministre des Finances repose sur du concret, d'une vision réfléchie et partagée, des ambitions mesurées et la réalité des attentes de nos citoyens.

Il nous incombe à épouser les nouvelles donnes et ce rapidement ! Il n'y a que le travail acharné et assidu! Et l'effort de tout un chacun qui nous mèneront vers cette relance économique dont nous aspirons!

Merci, M. le président.

(3:11 p.m.)

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): R 419 milliards, c'est le montant officiel de notre dette publique. Si on ajoute les R 28 milliards que le gouvernement a obtenu de la Banque centrale, cela fait R 447 milliards, soit plus de 100% de notre Produit Intérieur Brut. R 419 milliards de roupies, M. le président, c'est à peu près R 350,000 par habitant. Chaque enfant qui naît dans notre pays aura à rembourser aujourd'hui R 350,000.

En 2015, lorsque ce gouvernement accède au pouvoir, le ministre des Finances d'alors, M. Lutchmeenaraidoo, présentant le budget, eut ceci à dire concernant la dette publique –

“When measured, using IMF definition, it has reached an alarming level of 61%.”

Le niveau de la dette était de 61% en 2015 et le ministre parlait de chiffres alarmants. Six ans plus tard, notre dette publique est passée de 61% du PIB à presque 100% de notre PIB. Si le niveau de la dette était alarmant en 2015, que dire aujourd'hui ? Et qui va rembourser cette dette ? Certainement pas nous ! Il incombera à nos enfants et à nos petits-enfants.

Et en écoutant le discours du ministre des Finances vendredi dernier, on a eu l'impression que la dette publique diminuera dans les années à venir. En vérité, la dette publique se détériorera davantage pour atteindre R 500 milliards en 2023. Oui, c'est à la page 15 des *Estimates*.

Donc, ce gouvernement a l'intention de nous endetter davantage, et pourtant, M. le président, toutes les agences internationales indépendantes et crédibles ont déjà tiré la sonnette d'alarme, à commencer par l'agence de notation Moody's qui, le 4 mars 2021, nous rétrograde, *downgrade* à Baa négatif, notamment à cause de, et je cite –

“high public debt relative to peers.”

À noter que ce rapport de Moody's est sorti avant le deuxième confinement, le *lockdown* du 10 mars. Le rapport lance une mise en garde au gouvernement en ces termes suivant, et je cite –

“A continued deterioration in debt metrics, beyond our current expectations, would likely lead to a downgrade. A deterioration in the country’s balance of payment position could also lead to a downgrade.”

Donc, une deuxième rétrogradation, *downgrade* par Moody's est possible et aura définitivement un impact majeur pour le pays et surtout pour notre secteur bancaire. Après Moody's, ce fut le tour du Fonds monétaire international, le FMI, de tirer la sonnette d'alarme. Dans un communiqué de presse émis le 7 mai, le FMI dit, et je cite –

“The Government should prepare plans for fiscal consolidation to stabilise debt in the medium-term once Mauritius has firmly emerged from the pandemic to preserve fiscal sustainability and build buffers given the substantial increase in public debt level”.

Donc, le FMI aussi, M. le président, dans un langage un peu plus diplomatique, demande au gouvernement de revoir sa stratégie qui consiste aujourd'hui à endetter davantage le pays. Même son de cloche pour la Banque mondiale qui, dans son rapport intitulé *“Mauritius Through the Eye of a Perfect Storm - Coming Back Stronger from the COVID Crisis”* en date d'avril 2021, nous rappelle, et je cite au paragraphe 21 –

“Public debt was on the rise even before COVID-19.”

Et c'est bien dommage M. le président, c'est bien regrettable que le ministre des Finances ait choisi de faire fi de tous ces conseils. Il n'y a pas eu de réformes tant attendues. Le ministre des Finances a choisi la facilité ; la dette publique continuera à augmenter et ce sont nos enfants et nos petits-enfants qui auront à rembourser cette dette, car toute dette est un impôt sur la génération future.

Talking about taxation Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development was careful on Friday not to mention that he intends to finance his budget deficit through increase in taxation. When we look at the Estimates, we see at page 462 that Government is expecting a substantial increase in tax revenue. For year 2020-21, tax revenue is estimated at Rs83 billion and for next year, it is expected at Rs110 billion; an increase of about 33%. Most tax revenue will come from VAT, Rs11 billion and more than last year.

The hon. Minister of Finance Economic Planning and Development also announced a new levy of Rs2 on each litre of gas and Mogas. The levy is supposed to be used to buy vaccine. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, in January this year, when Government refused to increase pension of old age persons, of handicapped, of widows and orphans by the Rs375 compensation, what was the reason given by the Government then? That money was needed to buy vaccine! That was in January; that was the first dose of tax. Now, Rs2 levy, a second dose of tax, *double dose*. *Double dose* just like the vaccine has *double dose*, so has the taxation. But was the taxation necessary?

When we turn to National COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Fund at page 498 of the Estimates, we find that today there is already Rs847 m. in that Fund dedicated to purchase vaccine; already Rs847 m. Vaccine will cost Rs1 billion. So, the shortfall was only around Rs153 m. Yet, the levy is going to bring to the Government Rs750 m. this year and Rs1 billion next year, and at the end of the next year, there would be a surplus of Rs622 m. left in that Fund. So, why tax us more?

When we look at the Special Funds at page 485 of the Estimates, we see that as at 30 June 2021, there will be a balance of Rs35 billion in Special Funds. Rs35 billion which could have, which should have been spent last year but which the Government did not spend. For the Government had the money, Rs35 billion; there was no need to tax us more.

The Government is also taking money from parastatal bodies to finance its expenditure. Government is taking an aggregate of Rs9.4 billion from them according to Estimates. At page 467 of the Estimates, we see that Government will take Rs1.1 billion from Mauritius Port Authority. Rs1.1 billion, Mr Speaker, Sir, at a time where the MPA ought to have renewed its tug fleet and brought new equipment. Rs1.1 billion which could have been used to replace Sir Gaëtan tug. Rs1.1 billion which if it had been well spent could have saved life.

The Government is also taking Rs3.5 billion from the Central Electricity Board. Again, funds which could have been used to reduce the electricity bill of thousands of users; funds which could have been used to upgrade its power generation capabilities and invest in renewable energy.

Finally, Government also planned - I say planned - to take Rs2.1 billion from the STC. I say 'planned' because as hon. Members know, the Privy Council today has just announced that the judgment of the Supreme Court has been set aside, and as a consequence,

the STC and this Government is going to have to fork billions of rupees in damages to Betamax. Billions of rupees being forked out because of the, I am not going to say stupid decision of Government, but it was the same decision, same Government, one Government ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Uteem: The judgment of Betamax which is going to cost us billions of rupees comes after another decision of the Government which has already cost us above Rs20 billion, namely the dismantling of the BAI Group.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development told us that the funds will be used to construct drains in flood-prone areas, but this Government in particular has been saying the same thing in every single Budget since they took office six years ago. Yet, every year, there are floodings. This year, the regions of the south and south-east were hit. Last year, it was the north, Cottage, Fond du Sac. The previous year, it was another region.

We have a Land Drainage Authority. Every year, we vote billions of rupees to construct drains. We know the flood-prone areas. As far back as 2008, following the tragic death of little Laura Paul during the flood at Mon Goût, the report of the Fact Finding Committee, chaired by the then Justice Domah, had not only identified flood-prone areas, but also highlighted the problem of bad planning as well as drains not being properly cleaned and maintained.

Thirteen years later, we are still talking about construction of drains. Thirteen years later, we still have floods. The problem, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that every year, during Budget time, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development enumerates a list of

projects. It is all music to the ears. It gives the impression that the Government means business. It gives the impression that the Government is working for the people, but, then, the Government does not implement these projects. They have the money, we voted the money, they do not spend it, and I am not just talking about drains. Let us take a few examples of projects which were announced last year in the Budget and have still not seen the light of day. Rs12 billion for the construction of 12,000 social housing units across the island. How many social houses have we constructed out of these 12,000? Zero! Construction of Rivière des Anguilles Dam at an estimated cost of Rs7.5 billion; this is in the Constituency of the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. So, I am sure he has vested interest that the Rivière des Anguilles Dam be built. Yet, zero! And worse, this year, he announces that there will be the construction of Rivière des Anguilles Dam and treatment plant, but instead of Rs7.5 billion, now the budget has escalated to Rs9.4 billion, 25% more.

Y a-t-il anguille sous roche?

Rs6 billion for urban terminals along Port Louis and Curepipe corridor. Again, this year, at paragraph 24, we see not Rs6 billion but now Rs8 billion for development of urban terminals in Vacoas, Rose Hill, Quatre Bornes and Curepipe; 33% hike in price.

Last year, he announced that Rs2.2 billion will be invested in breakwater, fishing port and cruise terminal building; zero spent. This year, he did not even bother to budget anything for that project.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No conversation here!

Mr Uteem: Construction of New Eye Hospital, construction of New Cancer Hospital, construction of New Hospital in Flacq, all announced in last year's Budget and repeated in this Budget. Civil Service College, I do not know how many times this has been announced in so many Budgets. ICT Academy, again announced in so many Budgets. Now we have a new Minister, so the name is changed, it is called, Digital Industries Academy, but it is the same thing. Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, the list is too long. The bottom line is that this Government does not deliver on its promises; money earmarked for projects are not spent, projects are not implemented.

This is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am extremely sceptical when I hear the hon. Minister of Finance announced that he is expecting a 9% growth this year. We all know the track record of this Government when it comes to economic growth. In six years, never, I repeat,

never has this Government been able to attain the growth objective that it had set, not even during pre-COVID years. Last year, at a Press Conference on 11 November, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development announced a projected growth of 10% for this year; 10%. According to the estimate, the growth in GDP will be only 5.4% and, for last year, the economy contracted by 14.9%, and these figures actually are far more optimistic than the projection of the IMF and of MCB. Government was not able to achieve its target despite receiving Rs60 billion from the Central Bank and despite the Bank of Mauritius putting Rs80 billion in the Mauritius Investment Corporation to help the private sector.

Talking about the MIC, not a word in this Budget as to what will happen to the funds in the MIC, save and except that Rs1 billion would be invested to address water shortage issues in Rodrigues.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No conversation! No conversation! Allow the Opposition to make their speech.

Mr Uteem: Thank you. We all know that the IMF recommended that the Central Bank should relinquish ownership of MIC and financing of the MIC should be provided through budgetary process. The World Bank was also very critical of the involvement of the Central Bank in the operation of the MIC, stating at paragraph 81 of their report, and I quote

—

“Such an agenda is not within the mandate or expertise of the Central Bank tasked with conducting independent monetary policy.”

Just like the IMF, the World Bank also advocated a reversal of policy as regards the MIC, and the Central Bank recommended limiting the role of the MIC to the immediate COVID crisis response and reversing the provision included in the Bank of Mauritius Act through the COVID-19 Bill, that allows Central Bank transfers to the budget. In effect, both the IMF and the World Bank blamed the hon. Minister of Finance and the Central Bank for using the funds of the Central Bank last year to invest in private companies. Both the IMF and the World Bank had the same line of reasoning as we, on this side of the House, had last year when we criticised this unprecedented decision of the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development to get the Central Bank to finance his Budget.

At paragraph 210 of the Budget Speech, the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development announced, and I quote –

‘a new Bank of Mauritius (BOM) Bill and Banking Bill will be introduced reflecting best international practices.’

I have perused the annex to the Budget Speech, but it is not clear from the proposed amendment in that annex to the Bank of Mauritius Act whether the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development intends to implement the recommendation of IMF and the World Bank and reverse the effect of the amendment which was brought about through the COVID-19 Bill. I hope it does. I hope that there will be transparency in the use of funds of the MIC and I hope that going forward, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development will not refuse to answer PQs on MIC, as he has not done so far.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I will now turn to some of the sectorial measures announced in the Budget. The announcement of the gradual opening of our borders was welcomed by operators in the tourism sector, which has been most badly hit by the pandemic. Extending the Wage Assistance Scheme and Self-Employed Assistance Scheme to workers in this sector till September is also welcome. Government is targeting 650,000 tourists over the next 12 months. *C'est bien de placer la barre haut*, but how does Government intend to do so without the help of Air Mauritius? Yet, not a word in this Budget about Air Mauritius. Last year, we voted Rs9 billion as rescue package for Air Mauritius. Answering a PQ which I addressed to him a few days ago, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development explained that only Rs3 billion have been disbursed in the form of Wage Assistance Scheme and guarantee payment to IATA. But what is the strategy of Government when it comes to Air Mauritius? Air Mauritius has been in voluntary administration for over a year now, and except for blaming employees and making them redundant and forcing them to take pay cuts, nothing so far has transpired about the future of Air Mauritius. The administrators were supposed to hold a watershed meeting and propose a deed of arrangement to creditors of Air Mauritius, but this watershed meeting has yet again been postponed to next January. Is the Government aware that all the employees of Air Mauritius, who agreed to an early retirement, still have not received their lump sum payment because they were told that they have to wait for the watershed meeting? As majority shareholder and a major creditor of Air Mauritius, is the Government satisfied with the administrators' work? Because, so far, there is absolutely no visibility about what will happen to Air Mauritius, and the least the Government could do is, at least, tell us how much

is being paid to the administrators of Air Mauritius. Yet, all experts in the field agree, Mr Speaker, Sir, that Air Mauritius can be very profitable. It has suffered from bad management, namely the decision to increase its fleet, including by this Government, but, above all, it has suffered from constant political interference in its affairs. So, I hope the hon. Prime Minister, when he intervenes on the Budget, will give us more insight as to what will happen to Air Mauritius and what will be the role of Air Mauritius in transporting the targeted 650,000 tourists.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we welcome the decision of Government to promote green energy industry. In particular, we welcome the decision of Government to increase the share of renewable energy to 60% and to eliminate the use of coal by 2030, *mais que de temps perdu!* So many years wasted because of the obsession of the CEB and the Government to use Liquefied Natural Gas, which is a form of fossil fuel. Despite numerous reports, namely from Poten & Partners, Inc., questioning the viability of the use of LNG, CEB launched tenders for combined cycled gas turbines; *un projet défendu bec et ongles par l'ancien DPM*. However, after a change at the helm of the Ministry and CEB, the LNG Project has been abandoned, *mais que de temps perdu!*

Renewable energy, Mr Speaker, Sir, in Mauritius constitutes of hydro, wind, landfill gas, photovoltaic, bagasse and fuel wood, but bagasse remains the main source of energy supplies and contributes to around 82.8% of the local renewable source. According to a report published by Statistics Mauritius just a few days ago, on 07 June, the main energy source of electricity generation in 2020 was first coal 39.5%, followed by fuel oil and diesel 36.6%, and renewable energy 23.9%.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has taken a commitment under the Paris Agreement COP 21 to increase the share of renewable energy to 35% by year 2025. Last year, the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development went a step further and stated that we need to increase the share of local renewable energy to our energy mix to 40% by 2030. And this year, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development stated that we must produce 60% of our country's energy needs from green sources by 2030. So, under the Paris Agreement, the target was 35% by 2025, last year it was 40% by 2030, and this year, it is 60% by 2030. But how exactly does Government propose to increase the share of renewable energy from its current level of 23.9% to 60%? The hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development announced that Request for Proposal has been launched to set up a 40 Megawatt wind farm. There is definitely potential for wind farm, not just onshore but

offshore as well. But this is not a new idea. What happened to the wind farm at Plaine Sophie Project? Several PQs were asked on that project and there is another one under my name on tomorrow's Order Paper, and frankly, Mr Speaker, Sir, I never understood the obsession of this Government and of CEB to go ahead with the Plaine Sophie Project despite the promoter systematically missing the deadline for implementation of the project and worse, despite serious allegations that the promoter had used forged documents. Again, after the change at the end of the Ministry of Energy and CEB, CEB has decided not to go ahead with that project. But I hope the hon. Minister of Energy, when he intervenes on the Budget, will tell us what action CEB has taken against the promoter of the project. *Encore une fois, que du temps perdu.*

Next, at paragraph 98 of the Budget, we are informed that CEB will be setting a solar farm of 10 Megawatt at Tamarind Falls, Henrietta; nothing new, Mr Speaker, Sir. Last year also, the same projects were announced, 2 Megawatt in Tamarin, 10 Megawatt in Henrietta, nothing was implemented. CEB will also increase battery capacity to some 40 Megawatt. Last year, it was announced that they will invest in 14 Megawatt. Today, we know that instead of 14 Megawatt, we have only 4 Megawatt. So, again, the Ministry could not buy 14 Megawatt; now, they are going to buy 40. But all these projects, Mr Speaker, Sir, will not be sufficient to significantly increase the share of renewable energy. All these projects will not be able to replace the share of coal producing energy. What we need, therefore, is to encourage the use of biomass, bagasse, cane tops, leaves and other form of biomass. Until this Budget, there was no incentive for independent power producers to use biomass instead of coal. So, I'm glad that the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has announced that bagasse will henceforth be remunerated at Rs3.50 per kilowatt/hour for all planters and producers.

Let me ask the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development who fixed the price of Rs3.50? We amended the law to provide that it is the Utility Regulatory Authority that fix tariff? The Utility Regulatory Authority Act was voted in 2004, 17 years ago. Answering a PQ on 08 December last year, the current Minister of Energy and Public Utilities informed us that the current Chairman was appointed in 2018 and one of his Commissioners was appointed in 2016. We were informed that the Chairman earns a monthly fee of Rs110,000 and each Commissioner is paid a monthly fee of Rs60,000. We are spending a lot of money on this Utility Regulatory Authority, and what do they do exactly? Are they not the one supposed to fix the price? So, why is it that it is the Ministry of Finance,

Economic Planning and Development who is announcing the price of Rs3.50? And then, when the Minister of Finance announced the Rs3.50 per kilowatt/hour, he announced it for all planters and producers. But what would be the share for the planters? What would be the share for the producers? Would it be equal? How would it be shared? Maybe the hon. Minister of Energy will enlighten us in his intervention.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the truth is that currently we do not have sufficient bagasse and biomass to replace the amount of electricity generated by coal, especially during intercrop season. This is why the Minister announced the setting up of a National Biomass Framework. But, again, this is not a new idea. In the Budget Speech of 2019-2020, two years ago, the Prime Minister had already announced the creation of a National Biomass Framework, but, again, like so many other measures, nothing has been done.

So, I would hope now we will encourage the plantation of high fiber crops such as *fatak*. But, realistically, due to scarcity of land, we may end up having to import biomass. That is not a bad thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, because it opens up whole new opportunities. We should negotiate with our African neighbours for the use of their land to grow high fiber crops, which we can then use to produce biomass.

Africa. Not a word in this Budget on our Africa Strategy. Does this Government have a strategy for Africa? Mr Speaker, Sir, I was shocked to learn from the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development on 15 May, last month, that the Mauritius Africa Fund is now going into real estate business in Mauritius instead of concentrating on its core objective of helping Mauritian investors to invest in Africa. On that day, the Minister of Finance requested to reply to questions addressed to him out of turn because he had to participate in the *Sommet sur le Financement des Économies Africaines*. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, this *Sommet* was attended by Heads of States and Heads of Governments of major African Nations, but our Prime Minister chose not to attend and sent the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development instead. And we received criticisms for this lack of interest of our Prime Minister. But, unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not the first time. When the African Continental Free Trade Agreement was signed a few years ago, again the Summit in *Niger* was attended by Heads of States and Heads of Government of African Nations. It was a landmark decision. Everyone wanted to be present to have his photo taken there. And who represented us at that Summit? The hon. Prime Minister? No. The Minister of Foreign Affairs? No. We were represented by a simple diplomat.

A few years ago, the then Deputy Speaker even had the nerve to write to the Speaker to complain that he was being sent on mission only to Africa. Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to change our mindset once and for all about Africa. I have been a Member of the PAN African Parliament for five years, and let me tell you something. Africa has so much to offer. But we need to nurture relations that we have with our brothers and sisters from the African Continent. Truth be told, Mr Speaker, Sir, if it were not for our African brothers and sisters, we would never have managed to get the resolution through the United Nations for recognition of our sovereignty over Chagos, not once, but twice. We are part of the African Union, member of SADC and COMESA. Yet, we do not seem to have any African strategy. How many times did our Prime Minister attend the Summit of the African Union? How many times did he attend the Summit of SADC or COMESA since assuming office? We are talking about opening our borders and targeting 650,000 tourists. Why aren't we targeting African tourists other than South African tourists? They are closer to our borders. There are many affluent Africans living on the continent. Why not target them? Many Africans cannot travel to Europe because of travelling restriction due to COVID-19.

It would have been a perfect timing to attract them to Mauritius. Mauritius can be a shopping paradise for these African tourists. We have many unemployed graduates. Why don't we target Africa's service sector? Already, a few accounting firms have branches in African countries. We need to do more. We need to encourage them to expand and we need to give them the necessary fiscal incentives to do so. Why not, for example, exempt African source income from profit in Mauritius? Why don't we develop our Port facilities and increase the movement of ships between Port Louis and the African ports? Why not provide funds to Offshore Management Companies to do marketing in Africa, to look for new clients and new markets? Because while we are sleeping on our laurels, other African countries are taking the lead. Rwanda has set up its financial centre and is becoming a serious competitor for attracting inward flows into Africa. We have the know-how; we have the manpower to take a leader's role in Africa. All we need is for this Government to believe in Africa.

Mr Speaker, Sir, just like in all other Budgets, this Budget has a number of social measures which are all welcome. I am sure that other Members of the House, especially those coming from the Government's side, will enumerate them one by one and I will not take the time of the House to go through the list because I do not have any issue with them. In fact, I am very happy that the Government is coming up with all these measures, but what I would like to do is to say a few words on measures announced to eradicate poverty.

Increasing the amount of financial assistance to persons on Social Register is fine but is not enough. We need to integrate them in society. We need to fight exclusion. We need to ensure that they have the same equal opportunities as other Mauritians who happen to be less unfortunate than them.

The World Bank, in its report, devotes considerable attention to the poorer members of our society and makes several very interesting recommendations to improve their lots. It is not a coincidence, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the majority of children from families registered on the Social Register attend the worst performing school at PSAC level. There is a disproportionate number of school drop-outs among these children. These children simply cannot be excluded from the system. The World Bank recommends, for example, that they be given access to pre-schools and Child Day-Care Centres to boost their brain and language development.

Today, these children cannot attend pre-schools because they cannot afford to pay the fees of these pre-schools, which are all privately run. This puts them at a disadvantage compared to other children. So, the Government should either administer, set up pre-schools, *crèches*, or subsidise the fees to give these children a better chance. The World Bank also recommends that more emphasis be laid on second chance; second chance to be given to early school drop-outs to upskill themselves.

Poor children, according to statistics, tend to drop out from schools without the necessary technical skills demanded by the private sector, and this, according to the World Bank report, explained their high unemployment rate, their high inactivity rate. They simply cannot get a job because they do not have the necessary qualifications, they do not have the academic background, they do not have the technical skills. The National Apprentice Programme is a step in the right direction, but I would like to know from the hon. Minister of Finance, why should a student attending an Apprentice Programme, get a monthly stipend of Rs5,000, when his friend who is graduate will obtain a monthly stipend of Rs15,000? Why this policy of double standard? Why discriminate between students if the aim is to better equip them to find a job, whether the apprentice or the graduate? They are all unemployed. They all want to be trained. They all have the same living needs. So, why give one Rs5,000 and the other one Rs15,000?

In the same reasoning, I could not understand why give Self-Employed Assistance Scheme only Rs5,000 whereas for Wage Assistance Scheme, you can provide up to Rs25,000.

So, why this bias towards people employed in the formal economy when we all know that the poorest members of this community are in the informal community?

Many families, Mr Speaker, Sir, on the Social Register are unemployed and find it difficult to get a job. Most of them cannot apply for jobs in Civil Service because they do not have the necessary academic qualifications. Yet, not every job in the Civil Service requires academic qualification. Hasn't the time come, Mr Speaker, Sir, to change the criteria for recruiting people to work in Civil Service? Hasn't the time come to have positive discrimination? Should not Government come up with a scheme to encourage enterprises to recruit workers from the Social Register instead of leaving them to join informal sectors, with no job security, where they are exploited? If Government intends to recruit 4,000 Police Officers, should not physical criteria be given sufficient weight in the recruitment exercise? It is all well to have a higher education, a higher School Certificate or a degree, but can you run fast enough to catch a thief? Can you swim well enough to rescue people at sea? Do you have enough strength to restore order and disarm an offender? The point I am trying to make, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that any policy towards eradicating poverty, absolute poverty, should not be limited to hand-outs, but we need a policy to integrate the poor in mainstream. We need an inclusive society.

I will not be too long, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to talk about one thing which is seriously missing in this Budget, and that is the fight against fraud and corruption and wastage of public funds. Nothing, not a single word on how to improve the effectiveness of our law-enforcing agencies on their fight against corruption and money-laundering. Nothing, despite the fact that we are on the grey list of the FATF, precisely because of major deficiencies in the ability of law-enforcement agencies to conduct complex investigation. We all know the fight between law-enforcement agencies, whether it is the fight between ICAC and the FSC on documents relating to insider trading, whether it is the fight between ICAC and the Integrity Reporting Services Agency on exchange of information. Our law-enforcement agencies are competing against each other instead of working in collusion and yet, not a word in this Budget as to how to improve the system, except one line that the Financial Crime Commission is back on track for, I think, the 6th time. But according to the Budget Estimates, there is only Rs10 m. earmarked for that project, not the Rs300 m. that was earmarked a few years ago. So, we all know, nothing will happen to the Financial Crime Commission.

There is also nothing on how to reduce wastage of public funds, nothing on reform of

the public sector and parastatal bodies. Where are the 25% cut in budgetary expenditure which was announced earlier? Nothing also on the reform and consolidation of the numerous councils, authorities and other public bodies with overlapping functions. Do we need so many boards? Do we need so many Chairmen? Do we need to spend so much money on their fees? Do we need to give them all chauffeur-driven cars? Do we need to give them duty free cars? This is one way of reducing Government expenditure and maintaining fiscal stewardship. But, again, not a word because obviously, this Government does not want to displease any of their *protégés*.

Every year, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Director of the National Audit draws our attention to misuse of public funds and wastages. Years go by, nothing changes. But, this year, the Report has been particularly critical when it dealt with the Emergency Procurement during last year's COVID-19 pandemic. We cannot go on as if it is business as usual. We need transparency. We need accountability, but, above all, we need sanctions. We already have laws to sanction corruption and undue influence by Public Officials, but we do not have laws to sanction wastage, *dilapidation des fonds publics!*

Is it not high time, Mr Speaker, Sir, to have a Fiscal Responsibility Act? Is it not high time for civil servants to become accountable for their decision or the lack of decision or for blindly following orders from above?

Mr Speaker, Sir, one way to ensure transparency is to have the same rule applied to everybody: objective criteria, no discretion, and a mechanism for any aggrieved party to be heard. This is why I cannot understand how Government can come up with the Premium Investor Certificate announced at paragraph 84 of the Budget Speech. According to paragraph 84, and I read it because this is what the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development said –

“The Premium Investor Certificate will allow companies investing at least Rs500 million to benefit from negotiable incentives, upon recommendation of a Technical Committee and approval by the Minister.”

It is not clear who is meant by Minister; whether it is the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development or it is the Prime Minister? But, it is the first time that I see, in a Budget, a Minister of Finance giving himself the right to negotiate incentives for big investors, because we are not talking about Rs1 m./R2 m. We are talking about projects worth Rs500 m. and above. So, why does the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning

and Development have such discretion? What happens if this discretion is abused? Why do we have laws? Why do we have investment criteria? All an investor needs to do, is call the hon. Minister, meet him, discuss over a cup of coffee or a drink, and the hon. Minister will give you whatever you want; no investment criteria. You do not want EIA? Okay, you do not need to have EIA. You do not want to pay tax? Okay, you do not need to pay tax. So much discretion! And the beauty of it, he does not even have to make it public because he does not need to publish any regulations. He does not need to go through Parliament and there is absolutely no possibility of any aggrieved investor to challenge his decision. Is that what this Government understands by transparency? Is that what this Government understands by accountability? And it is certainly not an idea which came through thin air, Mr Speaker, Sir, because when you look at paragraph 178 of the Budget Speech, this is what the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development said –

“All companies engaged in the manufacture of pharmaceuticals and medical devices will be eligible to a premium investor certificate.”

So, they already have something in mind. You know, last year, the Pharmacy Act was changed. There have been Parliamentary Questions here; we saw how tender procedures were flouted when it came to awarding contracts to certain pharmacy. We saw how certain civil servants refused to take delivery and signed papers. And, today, we are told that there would be the production of pharmaceutical products. We are told that we are going to produce vaccine. We are told that the Government is going to invest Rs1 billion and we are told that the investor will come and negotiate terms with the hon. Minister. And that is normal; that is absolutely normal, unsolicited bids!

This is what we call tailor-made incentives, *taillé sur mesure*, and I think that it is a most dangerous measure and I think it should be scrapped altogether, scrapped just like the measure announced at paragraph 248 to allow spouses of holder of an Occupation Permit to be exempt from applying for an Occupation Permit or a Work Permit.

Did not the Government learn its lesson? There was a Parliamentary Question a few years ago on this very subject. The spouse of a holder of an Occupation Permit turned out to be a convicted drug trafficker, and now Government wants to automatically allow anyone to come and work here without any due diligence? This is totally unreasonable and this is clearly discriminatory because hon. Members will recall that not so long ago, this Government caused us to amend the law to require the spouse of a Mauritian citizen to apply

for a Work Permit to work in Mauritius, targeting a particular pilot. So, now, if you are married to a Mauritian, you cannot work in Mauritius, you need a Work Permit. But if you are married to a foreigner who has an Occupation Permit, then you can work; any work, no restriction, you do not need any permit. Is it not that discriminatory? I suppose that this measure clearly has not been well thought of, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Another measure which does not seem to have been well thought of is the 10 years Occupation Permit to foreign students, I do not have any issue if we are dealing with students who have studied in scarcity areas, where there is a lack of available manpower in Mauritius such as the ICT sector. But we have already right now more than 10,000 graduates who are unemployed, according to the latest figures published by Statistics Mauritius last month. Already, 10,000 unemployed graduates and now you want foreign students to compete with Mauritian graduates for a job? Where is the logic in that? So, I would urge the Government, even if EDB wants to come up with such a policy, to limit it, give the Operation Permit only in scarcity areas, only where there is a shortage of skilled labour in Mauritius, not generally, and if you want to encourage foreign students to study in Mauritius, there are much better ways to attract them. Start by providing a first-class university education because, unfortunately, today, our universities, be it the University of Mauritius, UTM or *Université des Mascareignes* are far down the list in the ranking of best universities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Budget was presented on 11 June, exactly 39 years after the MMM/PSM Alliance led by Sir Anerood Jugnauth and hon. Paul Berenger won the historical landslide victory at the General Elections of 1982, 60-0. Sir Anerood Jugnauth went on to become the longest serving Prime Minister and later President of the Republic. We may not have agreed with all decisions he took, we may not have agreed with his style of Government, but we cannot dispute that his economic and social policies transformed Mauritius, and I join my voice to all those who paid tribute to him last week in this august Assembly.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to respectfully disagree with the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development when he says that this Budget follows the philosophy of Sir Anerood Jugnauth. Sir Anerood Jugnauth believed in low taxation and in fiscal discipline. He would never have allowed public debt to reach the level that it has under this Government.

Thank you.

(*Applause*)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Hurreeram!

(4.02 p.m.)

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram):

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. We could have played the hon. Member last year's debate and no one would have noticed as it is the same performance year in year out. Much like their leader, they have a different version of the same old song every year which they wrongly think is *séga de l'année*. One year it is *confetti* and the next year is *réchauffé*. Hardly do they realise that they are the ones actually serving us *du réchauffé* year on, while they themselves lie scattered around the benches of the Opposition, like *confetti* after the party is over.

Let me remind them of their frenzy and panic when they thought we were facing an *état d'urgence économique* for so much less.

Tel un certificat d'échec qu'on s'est auto-octroyé, histoire de saboter sa propre campagne électorale et sceller le sort de son parti à jamais.

In contrast, we have witnessed last Friday, yet another calm and composed financial strategy being laid out by my friend the hon. Minister of Finance and his team at the helm of the Finance Ministry.

I can understand the position of the hon. Member of the Opposition. Obligated to find something to criticise must not be an easy task; especially after this Budget. But you have been a *prophète de malheur* for more than a decade now; that's 11 consecutive Budgets and the rhetoric does look rehearsed. Well, except maybe in 2014. That year, you did not worry too much about the absence of a Budget or that the National Assembly had met only 8 times for a whole year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since last year's budgetary exercise, Government has acted swiftly to counteract the effect of the closure of our borders which has incapacitated the tourism sector by injecting considerable resources in another economic pillar which is our construction sector. With the pandemic raging for over a year now and the world travel at a standstill, with hindsight, *avec du recul*, the investment in our construction sector has been a brilliant move.

In the current Budget, my Ministry, which has under its aegis departments, such as the Road Development Authority, the National Development Unit, and the Land Drainage

Authority, has been entrusted with an envelope of more than Rs20 billion over the next three years. I can only humbly presume that my Ministry and my team have passed its one year test successfully and shown that the trust by the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister is not misplaced.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as my learned colleagues will know, building and constructing our infrastructures is a complex endeavor and does not only involve contractors, but also consultants, experts, engineers, quantity surveyors, architects, masons, artisans, and all the supporting cast such as office workers and drivers. It is also important to highlight that it also involves other stakeholders such as the suppliers and retailers of all types of construction materials and other related accessories. In parallel, it also creates a need for food catering, transport, banking, and insurance just to name a few.

It is vital to understand that there is a whole supply chain that is linked to these projects. This represents thousands of employees and thousands of households who in turn contribute to our economy. Therefore, boosting this sector has helped us preserve thousands of jobs through two lockdowns, as well as creating new ones.

Mauritian adaptability and resilience is well-known, Mr Speaker, Sir, and many have actually seized the opportunities to embark into a reconversion and are now thriving in this growing sector and its related activities.

One of the major reasons for the increased construction growth rate in 2017 is the Government's massive investments in major infrastructure projects, namely, the Metro Express project and the Road Decongestion Programme. Other Government projects, such as the construction of a sports complex at Côte d'Or, construction of Bagatelle Dam project, including treatment plant and other associated works, NHDC housing projects, port development and utilities projects have had a significant part to play in the higher growth rate. The higher growth rate is also attributable to some extent, to the heavy investments by the private sector, mainly under the Smart Cities Schemes pioneered by our Prime Minister.

At this pace, it was expected that the construction growth rate would hit a two-digit figure in the forthcoming years. Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, the unexpected advent of the COVID-19 pandemic seriously hampered the expected growth and an eventual and unavoidable decline was noted in 2020.

However, today, thanks to our efforts since June 2020 and the previous budgetary exercise, and while the whole world is at a halt, the construction sector in Mauritius is

thriving once again. What seemed impossible only a year ago is now a reality and just like in 2017 when this vital sector of our economy took off, we are on the rise once again. This is no coincidence, but it has been achieved through hard work, determination and smart thinking.

Much has been said, Mr Speaker, Sir, about the coming amendments to the CIDB Act. We live in a dynamic world, and we need to adapt to the changing realities of the industry. But, most importantly, we need to ensure that we achieve three major milestones. Firstly, ensure the integrity of the sector by making sure we filter out the non-desirable elements. Secondly, a harmonisation of the different overlapping legislations to ensure facilitation of the operators. And, thirdly, the democratisation of the sector to attract a new generation of builders and professionals and providing them with an opportunity to bid for a piece of national projects.

The CIDB Amendment Bill has been introduced in the National Assembly on 6 April at First Reading stage, because there is a need to review urgently the existing legal framework governing the construction sector. The current legislation comprises major shortcomings that must be remedied urgently for the country and local entrepreneurs to reap the maximum benefits from this boom that the construction sector is experiencing. Furthermore, the CIDB certainly needs to be empowered and adequately equipped to help it deliver on its mandate more efficiently and effectively. All Parties have been consulted lengthily and I do understand, and it is normal that there are certain apprehensions. Nonetheless, at Second Reading stage later this year, we will be able to debate on this piece of legislation and we will provide better clarity on every aspect of the changes to all of you.

With the stated aim of facilitation and democratisation of the process, contact allocation for infrastructure projects and building projects in general, we have also decided, Mr Speaker, Sir, to review our grading system for the contractors. At present, we have 1,459 contractors repartitioned into 9 grades from A⁺ for the largest, to H who are lower down the turnover ladder. It is key to note that the entities with the highest grade make up only for 3% of the total number of contractors whilst the lowest grades represent 85%, which then causes a disparity in the selection process.

This grading system has caused much frustration among contractors who miss out on a contract since they could not meet the many requirements to belong to a better grade. It has created a glass ceiling for them and this must change.

We are now proposing a simplified three-tiered graded system, namely large, medium and small contractors.

The new system would entitle contractors to venture into bidding for higher value projects, if they consider they have the capability to do so, without any constraint from a grade ceiling perspective. It would also encourage more healthy competition and, hopefully, lead to more competitive bids for national projects from local contractors. It should also ease the pressure on these contractors to constantly seek and upgrade in order to be able to bid for higher value projects. This new system would open opportunities, in particular, for SME contractors to secure more projects within their capability and expertise.

This shift in approach will warrant amendments to the CIDB Act. Such a change would also require a review of the registration criteria for each new grade which can be done as a CIDB Council policy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me now to move to another important issue. Dare I say, the most important global change of our times.

Climate change is more than ever a national concern. We are now faced with an unpredictable and capricious Mother Nature, being now recognised global phenomenon with frequent disastrous events noted around the world.

Recently, we had experienced flash floods in the south-east region of the island with a total amount of 400 millimetres of rain registered in just 6 hours. Unprecedented to date, but I fear it will not be unique.

Earlier, the hon. Member who spoke before me was talking about building drains year in, year out. I think he is getting it totally wrong there. I would like to take an example. In Singapore, for instance, one of the countries which has a drain system which we can classify as world class, they have 11 kilometres of drain per square kilometre of territory, as compared to Mauritius we have only 1 kilometre per square kilometre. Nevertheless, a few days later after other flash floods that happened in the south-east, they suffered the same fate. There was like water everywhere in Singapore despite that drainage system.

So, the solution does not lie only in drainage system and we must agree that there will be no dry feet policy, as we will have to take decisions. At some point in time, it will rain 100 millimetres, 200 millimetres, those drains maybe will work, some will not and then we'll have to evacuate. So, it is giving the wrong impression to the population that this problem will be solved just by building the drain.

A bit further down South, Mr Speaker, Sir, New Zealand experienced weather conditions which have been categorised as a “one-in-a-hundred year -deluge”.

In Brazil, last week, Mr Speaker, Sir, 280 millimetres of rain in 24 hours has caused flooding in the region of Santa Catarina. At the same time, the City of Ankara in Turkey was swamped; similar events have been witnessed in India and Australia.

The list can go on, but the point is, Mr Speaker, Sir, the whole world is facing this unpredictable weather phenomenon. The years of prosperity, have indeed given us years of demographic growth but there has been leniency on the way these developments were done. We have now heavily built up areas over natural watercourse, unfortunately, or with very limited space to operate.

It is, therefore, fundamental to point out that the task at hand is to mitigate the impact of climate change in our country. We are talking about mitigation.

Take my constituency, for example, Mr Speaker, Sir. Following the events of April, many regions have been inundated. However, thanks to the drain projects currently under construction in Mare Tabac, Trois Boutiques and Plaine Magnien, we have avoided the worst. And I would like here to thank my two hon. friends, hon. Toussaint and hon. Kavy Doolub for their unflinching support. Even hon. Ramful has been on site, especially at Plaine Magnien, where he stood in one of the drains and shared picture on the social media and everything; criticising the design. That is fair political game but I believe he was not ill-intentioned. Maybe he was misinformed by some people who are confused between what is an absorption drain and a carry away drain. But I can reassure the Member and my constituents that the Rs594 m. of drains in Mahebourg/Plaine Magnien will be put to good use to reduce impact of heavy rainfall to a minimum.

Our main objective is safety of our inhabitants and to save lives because once again, I wish to insist on the reality of the situation, the zero risk does not exist anymore. Nonetheless, we will ensure that we are better equipped and better prepared to cater for the storms that await us.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this starts with better planning and ever since its setting up in 2018, the Land Drainage Authority has been on the forefront to build our resilience against flooding and taken ground-breaking, and innovative measures to combat the effects of climate change in our country.

We have now a Digital Elevated Model, which provides us with a more detailed picture of the topography of Mauritius and Rodrigues. With this, we have been able to identify flood prone areas across the island; 294 flood prone areas. And even single out regions where there are risks of loss of life. 48 such sites have been declared high risk flood prone areas. Emergency projects have been initiated and have reached either design stage, construction stage or have been completed.

We currently have around 1,400 kilometres of drains around the Island. The unpredictability of heavy precipitation and water accumulation ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No conversation!

Mr Hurreeram: ...has shown that this is not enough.

With additional funds provided in the budget for construction of drains, we believe we can easily double this figure to improve considerably our resilience to natural calamities such as flash floods.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, constructing drains is no easy feat. As mentioned for decades, haphazard constructions on natural water courses have been tolerated and now this mismanagement heavily impacts the daily lives of our citizens.

We note as well that nowadays our rivers easily outflow during heavy rainfalls and it is a lengthy process to obtain permission from the Supreme Court under the Rivers and Canals Act to promptly implement practical solutions. The Land Drainage Authority has held, up to now, only an advisory role and that could only make propositions and recommendations without the power to enforce.

I am very pleased to note that this situation has been remedied in this budget with six different legislations which will be amended to give more power to the Land Drainage Authority to ensure proper maintenance of drains across the island, implement projects on rivers and canals and intervene on private owned lands to construct drains where the risk of flooding is high.

Furthermore, the LDA will become a full-fledged member of the *Morcellement* Board which will provide the LDA the capacity to ensure that projects do take the safety concerns into consideration. Already several requests for *Morcellement* permits have been rejected

based on the recommendations of the LDA due to non-adherence to or absence of a drainage plan.

In line with the same thinking and vision, a member of LDA will now sit on the board of the Road Development Authority and therefore ensure that our drainage policy is also applied on our roads and thus guarantee uniformity across the whole island.

Since the precedent budgetary exercise, we have embarked into a new era of economy; a rebuilding process. We are remodelling the Mauritius of tomorrow. Despite the obstacles such as the COVID-19 pandemic, we have turned such negative situations into opportunities.

In line with our philosophy, there is an opportunity for the public and private sector alike to embark on the path of a new and modern Mauritius with state of the art infrastructure. A country which is resilient and sustainable.

The MSM, Mr Speaker, Sir, has always been the party to initiate such paradigm shifts and accompany the country into new eras. We are reminded of the economic boom of the early eighties, followed by the accession of Mauritius to the status of Republic in 1992, the Cybercity in Ebène in 2000 which was the cornerstone of our ICT sector today and now we are sending a Mauritian satellite into space, and the 2030 vision which saw the emergence of smart cities. Those major transitions in our economy were made possible by the MSM party, and the then Leader and Prime Minister, the late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, throughout his 18 years of Prime ministership.

Following in those footsteps, our current Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, delivered on his promise as Prime Minister, by introducing the long-awaited minimum salary. This marked a new chapter in our beautiful history, when, together with the negative income tax, over 100 thousand Mauritians benefitted from a landmark social measure.

Up to then, Mr Speaker, Sir, there were men and women who were earning barely Rs1500 monthly. An injustice was aptly corrected and that will be noted highly in our history. Moreover, old age pension has tripled in six years and despite a tough economic situation, it has remained untouched.

In 2017, it is hon. Pravind Jugnauth, who set the ball rolling for major infrastructural development in the country with the Road Decongestion Programme. This not only showed his vision for better mobility in our economy but also the need to ease the lives of the citizens.

The vision we had four years ago is being already materialised, with new roads in Grand Baie and Rivière du Rempart already operational, as well as the A1 A3 which has now connected Gros Cailloux to Coromandel.

Very soon, what he has sowed upon his accession to the post of Prime Minister in 2017, will bear new fruits, with the Pont Fer/Jumbo/Dowlut grade separated junctions and with the Hillcrest flyover due to be operational.

The A1M1 Bridge, a structure which will be a first in Mauritius, and the Indian Ocean, will allow inhabitants of Bambous, Gros Cailloux, Albion and other surrounding regions, through the A1A3 road, to connect to the motorway in a matter of minutes. This is a bold project which once again highlights the heights to which this Government is taking our country.

The next phase of this major road infrastructural development is the La Vigie/La Brasserie/Beaux Songes Link Road which will be extended to Flic en Flac. In so doing, we will connect the central part of the west coast to the motorway. The next phase of the M4, from Pont Blanc to Forbach, will be initiated in this current financial year.

We will, through thick and thin, pursue with this Government endeavour to alleviate traffic all along the motorway at strategic points. Flyovers at Quai D and Wooton will soon be a reality. As for the Ebène flyover, a holistic approach will be adopted so that its reconstruction benefits not only Ebène but the whole surroundings.

The impact of reduced travel time and enhanced mobility is very significant on the economy and the lives of people. It is expected that the savings to be in billions which is otherwise lost due to the workforce stuck in traffic. All these projects, Mr Speaker, Sir, form part of our Master Plan for roads which will serve its purpose for generations to come.

In comparison, what have – let us face it – the Labour, PMSD and MMM Governments contributed to this country? The PMSD has always been a “*béquille*” every time they were in Government and their last notable achievement dates back to when Sir Gaëtan Duval was in Government in 1988. The MMM has nothing to boast about for the past 16 years, and their last major contribution to this country was thanks to the MSM.

This leaves us with the Labour Party, *gaz ménager* at Rs330, hedging, a coffer full of secrets, bank notes and local and foreign, stimulus packages to party members, fake tertiary education. Hon. Uteem was just mentioning the standard of our universities but there, it was fake universities, Mr Speaker, Sir. A new airport for “we know who”. But we need to be fair

to them; we have to give them the credit for the effort in the M3 Terre Rouge/Verdun Road which collapsed unfortunately. And again, it was the MSM Government which had to go and fix that and make it work of course.

This is what differentiates our leadership from theirs, Mr Speaker, Sir. Back in the 80s, Sir Anerood Jugnauth was wise enough to create the National Development Unit in order to bring development at the doorstep of our citizens. This department has been responsible for thousands of community projects across the island, including small roads, drains, and amenities such as football and volleyball pitches, and children's playground. CAB offices followed in order to provide Mauritians an easier way to communicate with the Government with regard to difficulties they meet in their daily lives.

Our current Prime Minister took this brilliant measure to the next level by creating the CSU portal. Now, for every problem, the solution is just a click away. During the previous financial year, the NDU completed around 140 small projects all over the island, and another 250 projects are currently ongoing. Maybe my friend, hon. Uteem, did not have that piece of information.

Moreover, the NDU is the strategic arm of the LDA in the implementation of our emergency drain projects in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget epitomises this Government's philosophy of being innovative, bold and pragmatic and I want to say to the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, being a Minister of Finance in these trying times is not an easy job. It is easy to sit behind your computer, behind Facebook, behind TikTok, and what not and criticise year in, year out but being there, *tini pwalon la*, that is totally different ball game and to him I will say, history will remember you. With the amount of money ...

An hon. Member: *Bizin vande pwalon la.*

Mr Hurreeram: ... being injected...

An hon. Member: *Bizin vande pwalon la...*

Mr Hurreeram: *To pou aste?*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Hurreeram: *Li pou aste?*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea, we spoke!

(Interruptions)

Mr Hurreeram: With the amount of money being injected in the construction sector and the amount of projects entrusted upon the RDA, the NDU and the LDA, we will now run at a rate of 2 new projects a day for the next 3 years. This is an unprecedented wave of progress and development. For a Government to deliver, not one, but two consecutive optimistic budgets, in such a dire time, it is testimony of our ability to guide our country to prosperity again.

Late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, in his last Budget Speech in 2019 said the following and I quote –

“I have always believed that one’s ego cannot override one’s patriotism and duty towards the motherland.”

I think this is some food for thought for some Opposition Member. I can assure the House and the population at large that this Government, under the Prime Ministership of Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, will never let you down. We are here to serve our country. We are here to preserve our country from this world crisis. We are here to lay the foundations for future generations and we will leave no stones unturned until we reach that goal.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(4.36 p.m.)

Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): M. le président, Mieux Ensemble, voici donc la destination que s'est fixée ce gouvernement et le ministre des finances à travers ce budget 2021-2022. Et afin d'assurer une traversée à bon port, nous avons au menu, reprise, relance et résilience.

M. le président, même si un certain *Tonton Cigare* a fait part de son mal du voyage concernant notre trajectoire lors de sa déclaration alors qu'il réagissait au budget et même si certains membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre ont laissé percevoir leurs agacements par leurs commentaires tels que - «*dire Maurice entier*» ou encore «*dire tous circonscriptions*» alors que le ministre des Finances listait les différents endroits qui bénéficieraient du programme de gestion des inondations lors de sa présentation du budget.

Je tiens à souligner, M. le président, que cet itinéraire a été planifié afin que toute la nation mauricienne soit partie prenante de ce budget et qu'aucun endroit ne soit lésé car au sein de ce gouvernement c'est pour chaque citoyen mauricien que nous œuvrons. Je dois aussi

dire que la population a été ravie d'apprendre que leur endroits surtout ceux qui sont affectés par les inondations passeront sous le *National Management Flood Programme*.

M. le président, R 11,7 milliards alloués à la construction et à la mise à niveau de projets de drains à travers l'île, jamais aucun gouvernement n'est venu de l'avant avec une mesure d'une telle envergure pour la gestion des inondations à Maurice. Hors, nous le savons tous et nous le voyons tous ce désespoir qui se lit sur les visages des familles mauricienne qui souffrent de plus en plus de problèmes d'inondations. Cette démarche remarquable, M. le président, démontre que nous sommes un gouvernement à l'écoute et qui fait preuve de compassion et qui a la capacité de comprendre ce que peuvent ressentir ces familles du jour au lendemain quand ils font face à la désolation, quand leurs maisons, leurs entreprises ou leurs plantations sont anéanties par des trombes d'eau. Si certains ressentent un énorme soulagement et reprennent espoir en l'avenir grâce à cette mesure, j'ai aussi eu l'occasion d'entendre l'avis de certains qui pensent que l'aménagement des drains ne sont pas une priorité et ne traduit pas notre nouvelle normalité pour le moment. À cela, M. le président, j'aimerais partager avec eux ce que nous ressentons et ce que nous vivons quand nous sommes aux côtés de nos mandants quand ils doivent faire face aux crues subites lors des grosses pluies. C'est la panique, la peur, le découragement et la tristesse.

Afin d'évoluer dans une île Maurice plus inclusive, renforcer notre résilience et mieux se préparer à la relance, il est d'importance capitale que chaque famille puisse se sentir en sécurité dans sa maison. Nos enfants ne doivent plus aller au lit à l'annonce de grosses pluies avec la peur au ventre craignant que leurs demeures pourraient être envahis par l'eau et qu'ils se réveilleront probablement dans un centre communautaire le lendemain au lieu de prendre le chemin de l'école, ayant été forcés d'évacuer leurs maisons.

M. le président, plusieurs endroits dans ma circonscription ont longtemps et beaucoup soufferts d'inondation. Nous avons fait plusieurs représentations et consultations auprès des autorités concernées et les habitants, plusieurs visites des lieux afin de trouver des solutions pour mieux gérer les inondations dans la circonscription no.4. Si le projet de 140 million à Morcellement La Vallée à Sainte-Croix a entamé depuis presqu'une année maintenant, avance sûrement, est-ce que là aussi il y a anguille sous roche M. le président ? C'est avec le sentiment du devoir presque accompli que mes collègues, l'honorable Lesjongard, l'honorable Subashnee Luchmun Roy et moi-même nous nous réjouissons à l'annonce de l'allocation d'un cachet de R559 million pour l'implémentation de projet pour une meilleure

gestion des crues soudaines pour les régions de Chitrakoot, Vallée des Prêtres, Sainte-Croix, Crève-Cœur, Congomah, Riche Terre et Terre Rouge.

M. le président, maintenant permettez-moi brièvement d'être la porte-parole de notre jeune vice-présidente du village de Crève-Cœur, Bhavna Gungabissoon qui en tant que jeune a tenu à sa façon de participer au débat budgétaire et de nous faire part d'un de ses avis. Ainsi je cite –

“Being the Vice-President of Crève-Cœur and a youth who devotes and contributes for the development of projects in my village, I can undoubtedly say that the funds allocated for the construction and upgrading of drains will be a huge relief for us. We are often affected by floods and it is heart-breaking for me to see the hard-earned properties and possessions of many inhabitants get destroyed before my eyes. I firmly believe that the allocation of a budget as part of corrective measure for the drain projects in my village will mitigate the accumulation of water and halt soil erosion. I commend this measure of the Government not only for my village but in several regions across the island which will be relieved by the construction of some 1500 drains which will be spearheaded by the capable Land Drainage Authority.”

M. le président, avant de poursuivre mon allocution, permettez-moi de féliciter le ministre des Finances pour ce budget. La survenue et la persistance de la COVID-19 ont infligé à l'économie mondiale un choc sans précédent. Et même si la reprise s'annonce poussive et hétérogène, l'honorable Renganaden Padayachy a été très perspicace et a montré une gérance avisée en confectionnant ce budget 2021-2022. Il a su répartir les portefeuilles afin que personne ne soit laissé pour compte et que tous les secteurs socio-économiques s'y retrouvent. Je tiens aussi à saluer le travail en amont abattu avant ce budget par le ministre des Finances et toute son équipe qui ont eu plusieurs représentations auprès des différents acteurs afin de prendre connaissance de leurs requêtes et ainsi ils se sont donnés les moyens de mieux jauger la situation dans son ensemble et aboutir à un exercice budgétaire juste et équitable. Et en tant que jeune parlementaire, nous aussi nous avons eu l'opportunité de participer à des sessions de travail pour ce budget, où nous avons fait part de nos doléances et de nos aspirations. Je dois avouer que je suis rassurée de voir que le ministre des Finances ainsi que le Premier ministre ont été à l'écoute et ont accédé à ma demande pour les habitants de Vallée des Prêtres et de Cité La Cure. Le paysage de cette région verra bientôt la mise sur pied d'une station de police pour la sécurité des habitants et l'assainissement de ce quartier.

M. le président, si le précédent budget, dans un environnement très compliqué, imposé par les conséquences de la pandémie, avait comme prérogative de protéger des vies et les moyens de subsistance, de maintenir la capacité de production, de sauvegarder la stabilité de notre économie et chercher à soutenir ainsi qu'à améliorer le quotidien de nos citoyens, ce budget 2021 s'inscrit à nouveau dans un contexte inédit. La poursuite de la crise sanitaire ayant affecté les bases mêmes de la croissance et du développement de notre économie, il fallait donc que le ministre des Finances vienne de l'avant avec un budget à la mesure du défi imposé par les conséquences de l'événement, mais aussi en adéquation avec les aspirations du peuple. Nous le voyons clairement car ce budget gravite autour de trois axes principaux –

- (i) impulser à un rebond exceptionnel afin d'encourager l'investissement ;
- (ii) des réformes structurelles et dynamiques pour façonner un nouveau modèle économique, et
- (iii) restaurer la confiance.

M. le président, les conséquences économiques et budgétaires de cette crise sont majeures avec la plus forte récession mondiale depuis 1929 et un déficit budgétaire sans précédent. Nous avons été marqués par deux périodes de confinement inédites et le contexte budgétaire est devenu plus contraignant, mais ce n'est pas autant que cette situation...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Last warning!

Mrs Tour: ... doit nous conduire à manquer d'ambition et de créativité. Ce gouvernement a été aux côtés du peuple face à tout écueil, et aujourd'hui, plus que jamais, par le biais de ce budget, nous réitérons notre engagement envers nos concitoyens, ainsi restons fidèles au programme sur lequel le gouvernement de l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth a été élu. Nous nous tenons plus que jamais au service des Mauriciens et de nos acteurs économiques, tout en mettant en valeur notre capital humain et l'ingéniosité de l'industrie Mauricienne.

M. le président, le pays dispose désormais d'un plan efficace pour sortir de cette crise sanitaire et nous espérons la sortie progressive des difficultés d'ici la fin de l'année avec le déploiement des vaccins dans notre pays, et la réouverture de nos frontières, un plan qui vise à accélérer le rythme de la reprise et construire une résilience robuste, orientée vers une trajectoire de croissance plus soutenue à long terme. Il nous fallait un budget pour la reprise

économique, encourager l'investissement, mettre en avant des réformes structurelles et assurer la transparence en matière de services financiers. Ce présent budget, M. le président, nous assure tout cela, et en plus la philosophie qui a toujours démarqué l'action de ce gouvernement et de notre Premier ministre, c'est-à-dire, être aux côtés des plus vulnérables de la société.

M. le président, je vais maintenant m'appesantir sur ces mesures préconisées qui prônent la justice sociale et viennent apaiser les appréhensions de la population en général, mais surtout ceux dont l'emploi est menacé par l'impact de la pandémie. R 23,5 milliards ont été injectées afin de minimiser le licenciement de ceux qui se sont retrouvés au chômage technique. Le *Wage Assistance Scheme* et le *Self-Employed Scheme* ont maintenu les moyens de subsistance pour quelque 450,000 concitoyens. L'aide exceptionnelle pour l'industrie du tourisme et les petites et moyennes entreprises sera prolongée car nous sommes conscients que ce sont les secteurs les plus affectés. La compensation salariale de R 375 par mois sera étendue pour le prochain exercice budgétaire et, M. le président, dans le souci de préserver une approche holistique et soutenue pour la sauvegarde de l'emploi, nous prévoyons 4,500 recrutements dans la force policière, l'éducation et la santé.

Ce budget vise aussi à créer un environnement propice afin d'encourager le secteur privé à investir davantage, optimisant ainsi les nouvelles opportunités d'emploi pour la jeune génération dans les secteurs, telles que l'économie, la croissance, l'économie de la croissance, l'industrie pharmaceutique, la biotechnologie, les énergies renouvelables, entre autres.

M. le président, personne ne peut dire de quoi sera fait demain. Afin que les travailleurs indépendants puissent bénéficier du montant d'aide calculé en fonction de leur revenu, il faudra que ces derniers s'enregistrent auprès la *MRA*.

Placer le peuple au cœur de notre vision, M. le président, a toujours été un peu l'ambition de ce gouvernement. Donner à chaque famille un toit décent est une politique qui démontre cette ambition. Lors du précédent budget, le gouvernement avait pris l'engagement de construire 12,000 logements sociaux à travers l'île pour répondre aux besoins des plus vulnérables, mais aussi à des familles à faible et moyen revenu. Le budget actuel vise à favoriser l'accession à la propriété et l'accès au financement sera rendu plus facile, rapide et efficace. Les mesures budgétaires prévoient aussi des *incentives*, tel que le remboursement de 5 % du coût de la propriété allant jusqu'à R 500 000 pour un acheteur particulier qui compte

acquérir un appartement ou un terrain pour construire une résidence. Il est impossible de prédire si la vie reprendra son cours normal. Il est donc impératif de faire face à la complexité de cette crise et de s'adapter à ces temps difficiles. L'île Maurice est aujourd'hui confrontée à des urgences sanitaires, économiques, sociales et qui doivent être traitées conjointement pour endiguer la COVID-19. L'impact combiné de ces chocs représente un défi de taille. Lors du budget, au lieu de se lancer dans des analyses et des comparaisons farfelues de chiffres, le ministre des Finances s'est contenté de nous présenter un budget réaliste et a concentré toute son énergie visant à mieux protéger la population. À ce jour, R 550 millions ont été dépensées pour l'acquisition de vaccins et il est prévu que la vaccination sera gratuite pour tous ; à rendre l'accès aux soins de qualité plus accessible, à rendre les produits de première nécessité plus abordables pour tous, et pour les enfants inscrits sur le registre de la *SRM*, il prévoit des exemptions du paiement des frais d'examen du *MITD* ; des serviettes intimes pour les jeunes filles des grades 6 à 13 ; des lunettes de vue pour les enfants jusqu'à 18 ans. Et malgré une situation économique extrêmement difficile, le gouvernement a maintenu les pensions de base à R 9,000 par mois pour ceux âgés de 60 ans.

M. le président, à l'entame de la dernière partie de mon allocution, j'aimerais traiter le chapitre de la jeunesse, du sport et des loisirs. Je me réjouis de constater que les loisirs et les activités physiques demeurent l'une des priorités sur l'agenda de ce gouvernement. R 327 millions au total seront investies dans des infrastructures sportives modernes à travers l'île afin d'encourager les citoyens à faire du sport et à donner à nos athlètes les moyens de s'entraîner et améliorer leur performance. M. le président, les jeunes représentent notre avenir. Il est donc impératif de leur donner le support adéquat pour leur plein épanouissement. R 165 millions seront investies afin de renforcer le *National Youth Council* et aussi à transformer le Centre de Jeunesse en hub moderne, non seulement pour guider nos jeunes vers des programmes sportifs, mais aussi dans les filières professionnelles afin que nos jeunes deviennent des acteurs du monde de demain.

M. le président, la nation mauricienne est fière de la performance de nos athlètes d'élites qui font flotter notre quadricolore à l'international. Nous allons continuer les subventions uniques de R 10,000 à 125 jeunes athlètes de haut niveau afin qu'ils puissent se procurer leur équipement pour les compétitions. L'aménagement du centre de Côte d'Or à un *High Performance Centre* sera un tremplin pour donner un support holistique à nos athlètes. Ils bénéficieront d'un soutien scientifique, médical et d'une technologie de pointe.

M. le président, tout athlète a soif de compétitions. C'est ce qui les motive à aller plus loin dans l'effort et à se perfectionner. C'est ainsi que ce budget fait provision d'un quantum de R 10 millions pour la préparation des Jeux des Iles de l'océan Indien 2023 et que le Comité Paralympique de Maurice se positionnera pour accueillir le quatrième Championnat du monde junior de para-athlétisme en août 2023, afin d'attirer plus de compétitions de haut niveau à Maurice. En tant que représentante de la jeune génération de politiciens, M. le président, il est de notre devoir de représenter la jeune génération au Parlement et de faire entendre leur voix.

Avant de conclure, M. le président, permettez-moi de donner l'opportunité à quelques jeunes de ma circonscription de s'exprimer sur ce Budget 2021-2022.

I will now speak on behalf of Akash Seetaram from Terre Rouge, and I quote -

“Being a young environmentalist, I am optimistic about the establishment of the National Biomass Framework. According to the International Energy Agency, the energy mix in Mauritius is dominated by oil and coal and only 10% of energy consumption is generated by renewable energy sources. Thus, this Framework will allow our country to meet its national demand and to change our fossil fuel consumption pattern. To sum up, upon success, Mauritius will promote the Sustainable Development Goal number 7, that is, ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me now to quote a young social worker, Patrice Eleonor, a student from Ste Croix -

“I am confident in the progressive measures brought by the 2021-2022 annual Budget. Mauritius economy has suffered from the slowing down of activities over the past year and since then the Mauritian Government seems to place its faith in local economy and the power of the people to redress the economy. Measures have been adjusted and implemented to extend the significance of the Mauritian agricultural sector and the creation of an export development program, displays the will of the Government to transform Mauritius into an exporting nation. It is of interest to outline that the consistency of the welfare measures and the ongoing improvement through the years, taking into account the delicate situation of our economy, investment has been made towards inclusive and progressive measures namely, the provision of sanitary towels, glasses and access to the internet to the deprived families who,

maybe, would not have access to those without public assistance. The hardships that Mauritius has to face over the last year seem to have brought change to which the Government seems to adapt while maintaining its goal towards economic growth and social inclusion.”

Je rejoins, M. le président, un jeune de Vallée des Prêtres, Sheik Khodabacus, qui trouve que la démarche du gouvernement de rendre les plages accessibles aux personnes en situation de handicap, un grand pas pour promouvoir l'inclusion afin que personne ne se sente laissé-pour-compte.

M. le président, c'est ma façon à moi en tant que jeune parlementaire d'associer la voix de notre jeune génération à la nôtre afin qu'ils se sentent partie-prenantes du ce Budget 2021-2022. M. le président, face à tant incertitudes, il est donc impératif d'entamer des mesures prioritaires pour faire face à la complexité de cette crise et de s'ajuster à une nouvelle normalité. Il n'y a pas de formule magique. Si les moyens octroyés de ce budget visent à amortir l'impact dévastateur sur les personnes et notre économie vulnérable, il faudra l'engagement de tous pour refaçonner l'avenir de la nation mauricienne et ce budget a le mérite de répondre aux impératifs actuels.

Je conclurai donc en félicitant le ministre des Finances pour sa vision, son courage, son sens de l'abnégation et son humanisme. Effectivement, M. le président, fidèle à la philosophie de ce gouvernement, ce budget place l'humain au coeur de l'action. Je vous remercie pour votre attention.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. At this stage, I suspend the Sitting for 30 minutes.

At 4.57 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.36 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated. Hon. Mohamed!

Mr S. Mohamed (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):
 Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I have listened with - as usual when I listen to everyone speaking in this august Assembly, to a lot of interesting remarks that Members of Parliament have made on both sides of the House. I have also, same as you, same as the population listening to us, listened to those very complicated things on those terms as the hon. Minister of Finance likes to say, *une question technique*. So, all those issues about GDP, deficit and what not, I see that on the other side and on this side, accountants on the contrary, are so used

to those terminologies that they feel very comfortable, but the people outside, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, would like us to be able to explain to them what is in there for them in this Budget.

We expected the Government, when dealing with a pandemic of this magnitude, as the Prime Minister of Singapore stated in a recent declaration –

“A pandemic that is being clearly converted gradually by *la force des choses* is becoming endemic.”

Those are his words but we will have to adjust, not necessarily about humans adjusting to the way we live, social distancing, being masked, and what not. But every single element of our lives needs readjustment. And when I mean every single element, I mean, even our approach to economics, our approach to policy making, our approach to the good governance issues, our approach to running the affairs of the country and even the expectations of the inhabitants of the Republic of Mauritius. We have to adapt to it as they also have to adapt to certain new realities. That is the truth of the things. But in order for us to adapt and in order for us to be able to tell inhabitants that they also need to adapt, we have to start somewhere, which is by being truthful about the reality of the situation. It would not help any Government to try to play politics with budget at this time of our history. It does not in any way help any Government to try to pretend that everything is okay and it is business as usual. And this is precisely what this Government has done.

This Government has sugar-coated the truth. I do not want to use any other terminology that shows wrongdoing on the part of Government or ill intent. Let me use the very diplomatic term, they have sugar-coated reality and at the end of the sugar-coating, the sourness, the intention was for the sourness to disappear, the truth to disappear. The truth of the matter is the world at large is suffering. The truth of the matter is that no country can pretend that we have managed to contain the effects of COVID-19. No one can pretend that we managed - no country, no democracy, not even an autocracy can pretend that we managed to contain *les effets négatifs économiques du COVID-19*. It would be a lie to say so.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the role of a Government, whatever they do today, will have an impact in the future. Whatever decision they take today, will have an impact later on down the line. Everything they do, will come back to bite them. Reality always catches up. The truth always catches up. I have noted with a lot of interest that this Budget has been built upon assumptions. Whenever the Minister of Finance says, I am expecting to have 650,000

tourists, that is an assumption; that is not a figure that he is guaranteed to have. No Minister of Finance can come and say: I am guaranteed to have 650,000 tourists a year. Impossible! That is impossible! On what does he base those figures? I don't know. That there was a need to reopen the economy is a fact but there is no need to reopen the economy by sugar-coating the truth. It is based on the assumption that those 650,000 tourists will indeed come to Mauritius that they will spend X amount of money, they will contribute to the economy. It is also based on the assumption that we would see 9% growth. And that assumption is also based on other assumptions. It is phoneup for no reason at all that we find in columns of the budget that a lot of figures are simply estimates and revised estimates. That is the truth. It is also based on the assumption that we will not have a new wave of infections of COVID-19. It is based on the assumption that we will have a proper vaccination campaign. It is based on the assumption that we will reach herd immunity sooner than later. It is based on the assumption that there is no additional burden that would be placed on taxpayers' backs and shoulders because of mismanagement on the part of the Government. Those are all assumptions. And the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Let me establish for you today how this Minister of Finance has managed with a lot of ability to ignore what was about to happen to him, showing that his assumptions clearly are frail assumptions. If we are to believe him, then we have to look at what he has done in order to see whether his track record shows that his assumptions are correct. First question: why did he not, in his assumptions, consider the possibility of losing the case at the Privy Council, concerning Betamax? First assumption, first question! It was logical for any responsible Minister of Finance to have factored in that possibility. But he did not factor in that possibility.

Let me go back to history. Back in 2015 and, let me say here, *je dédouane le ministre des Finances actuel parce qu'il ne peut pas être responsable de quelque chose* when he was not even in Government in 2015.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Bhadain ti la.*

Mr Mohamed: He was not.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Mohamed: Whereas the actual Prime Minister was, whereas the actual Attorney General was or he was part of the same Government but I can see how he says no, no, no. He tries to run away. Why does he try to run away from such a truth? And the way his finger tried to say: Mr Speaker, Sir, no, no, no. I love that. But then again, was it an astute use of the finger? That is something else. What about hon. Dhaliyah? Was not he part and parcel of this whole issue? Let us not forget about those amazing speeches that he pronounced. Let us not forget. Was not hon. Callichurn part of the play? I see his silence is quite amazing, interesting, hiding away behind his mask. I thank him for the social distancing but I invite him not to social distance himself from the responsibility that he holds. Do not take distance from that. There is what we call collective responsibility.

(Interruptions)

I cannot also blame the Deputy Prime Minister because in those days, he did not form part of the Government. He was, on the contrary, outside, criticising what the actual Government was doing. Silence! I love that.

Let us look at this hon. Member who reminds me of what hon. Hurreeram does. He speaks faster than he thinks and that is dangerous. That is dangerous! And to even call him Lucky Luke could be a compliment. To speak faster than you think is dangerous. I cannot blame hon. Ramano because he forms part of the good guys, may I call it. He was on this side, criticising what the other people were doing because he was dead against what was done before on Betamax. He was dead against the rash acts and doings of the Government of the day. Today, he sits there and he keeps quiet. But then, I guess I am impressed by his staunch brawl. Once upon a time, he was against, now he keeps quiet. He cannot say he is for. Good. I cannot blame hon. Dr. Jagutpal. You know why I cannot? Because he has got enough on his plate. He has got enough on his plate to be blamed for, so why should I add to his burden?

(Interruptions)

Let us look at page 25 of this judgment. Let me remind you that this Government headed by Sir Anerood Jugnauth, together with the actual Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, the same people who were in charge of the kitchen then, still responsible, maybe they have gone up in the hierarchy as far as kitchen hierarchy is concerned, but they are still there. Those people, in 2015, decided to come to TV of the Press conference and shoot down a contract between STC and Betamax. They called it unlawful. They called it illegal. They accused the Labour Party of having stolen money. This provoked the arrest of the Leader of

the Labour Party, two provisional charges for supposedly having used his Office for gratification. They went on and arrested the then hon. Baichoo when he was Minister. And, they made politics about this. They tried to convince *la population que le Parti travailliste avait fait quelque chose de mal, que le Parti travailliste avait fait quelque chose d'illégale*. And then, when they won their Appeal at the Supreme Court, they made politics again, coming and going for Press conferences and showing how the Labour Party was wrong, the Leader of the Labour Party was dirty.

But when you read the judgment here, at page 25, let us see. Is there anything illegal that was done? What does the Privy Council say? The Privy Council, I quote, says -

“The Board will nonetheless set out the reasons for its view that the Arbitrator was correct in the conclusion he reached that the COA was exempted from the PP Act and PP Regulations and...”

I read and look at that -

“... was therefore not illegal under those provisions”

The Privy Council, the Law Lords say that whatever was done was therefore not illegal under those provisions. Whatever those Ministers, whatever that Government did by destroying that contract for purely political reasons and nothing else, to satisfy the blood-thirsty politicians in order to have political supremacy whereas they put on the back end of their interests, the advancement of the Country. Today, the Privy Council comes and condemns that Government decision by saying there was nothing illegal about it. Will we hear an apology on the part of those who formed part of that Government?

An hon. Member: *Faire zot payer!*

Mr Mohamed: That is not enough. Let us go further at page 40 of that judgment and I ask the hon. Ministers who look down, tell me and convince me that when you look down and do not hear that you are not looking down and turn away in shame.

It is simple, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to know that we can have a Government in 2015 that could take political decisions that would have budgetary implications in 2021, political vengeance, *vendetta*, to destroy a contract and call it unlawful. Today, *ce sont* the taxpayers, *les citoyens de l'île Maurice, chaque enfant, chaque enfant qui n'est même pas né, chaque jeune, chaque moins jeune, chaque habitant de cette île Maurice aura à payer pour la politique dégoutante et revancharde, dangereuse d'un gouvernement de 2015 qui*

est nul autre que ce gouvernement, une émanation du même gouvernement ou une extension of the dirt of 2015.

When you read page 40 of that Judgement, I quote -

“As the Board is of the view that the Supreme Court was not entitled to review the findings in the Award on illegality and that the COA was not in any event illegal, it is neither necessary nor helpful to address the third issue in the appeal.”

Very simple English. In other words, whatever this Government, headed by Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Minister Lutchmeenaraidoo, Minister Ravi Yerrigadoo, Minister Pravind Jugnauth, all of them who were there are members, part of the Executive, they were all wrong. And when they told the people of this country that the Betamax issue was unlawful, they were not speaking the truth because the truth is, in fact, and finally in the Judgement of the Law Lords of the Privy Council, delivered today, 14 June 2021 and it is, at the same time, a finger of blame towards this old Government.

In creole we say: *mone fer zot compte la. Pourquoi est-ce que ce sont les taxpayers qui doivent payer pour la négligence criminelle de ce gouvernement de 2015 ? Pourquoi ?* Is not this *faute lourde, négligence inacceptable de la part des ministres du gouvernement de 2015 ?*

Regardez-moi, M. le président, comment les ministres qui formaient partie de ce gouvernement n’ont même pas l’audace ou le courage de faire face à la réalité. J’aimerai bien que chacun d’entre eux, au moment de faire leur discours ici, ils viennent présenter leurs excuses à la population.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order over there! Hon. Assirvaden!

Mr Mohamed: It would take 53 years for every single Minister, every Member of Government who would accept to be honourable enough to be responsible for that wrongful act *de payer pendant 53 ans leurs salaires de ministre mensuellement pour arriver à un chiffre de R 4.5 milliards.*

Mr Mohamed: 53 years! *Mais au lieu de cela, ils vont simplement se servir de mon bon ami, le ministre des finances et se servir de son ingéniosité et de sa capacité de jouer avec les chiffres, capacité que je n’ai pas parce qu’il manipule et maîtrise avec une certaine dextérité les techniques économiques que je ne veux pas pourvoir maîtriser parce que it is*

beyond my capacity and even if I had that capacity, I would not go his way and I will get to the second page of my intervention to explain why.

They will use him in order to come and take the blame, just like they used hon. Jagutpal to come and change a decision for a Fact-Finding Committee. Then again, if you have dignity, you resign, if you do not, you do not resign. *Il faut tout pour faire un monde!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: So, let us look at them and I am happy hon. Callichurn is here who is a good friend, who is known in the public as someone who does not hesitate to have proper constructive debates on issues and I would like to underline that and I am not saying that to embarrass him even though if he may feel embarrassed, that was not my intention because very often people do not like it that on the other side, we can have debate with people on this side, specifically me, but anyway, I guess they are afraid. Now, let us look at the document because the hon. Minister of Finance has another assumption.

The hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development says that there are only 52,200 unemployed in Mauritius and not more than 9%. I put it to him, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that his contention is fraught with irregularity and inexactitude. That is also me trying to be diplomatic. Last year, I would have used another term but I think I have to be diplomatic when you are fraught with irregularity and inexactitude, you know exactly what it means but when you do it *en connaissance de cause*, that is the danger.

Let us look at the first document, the document Labour Force Employment and Unemployment Year 2020 and this is from the Statistics of Mauritius and I am going to use that document to prove today that what this Government headed by Sir Anerood Jugnauth's heir, the actual hon. Prime Minister said, is not true and I will say how.

I put it to him that today, we have almost 100,000 people who are unemployed. 100,000 people unemployed. *On a à peu près 100,000 chômeurs à l'île Maurice et je vais le prouver en utilisant ce document qui est le document produit par Statistics Mauritius du ministère des Finances.*

Look at the first document on there, the first document which is the key figures and it refers here to the figures of 2020, labour force of which employment and it says here, clearly that there has been minus 33,400 people. Next change in employment level here and it shows it is equal to employment creation minus employment losses. So, are there or are there not figures produced by this Government to show that there are employment losses? Yes, minus

33,400 that is in 2020. Those are official figures. This is clearly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, an underestimation and I will say why because those figures do not concern January to June 2021, those are figures that were produced by Government for last year, in 2020, but the figures of this year, interestingly enough, are not produced.

So, it is logical to conclude that more destruction of jobs have occurred, more than 33,400 if you include the six months of 2021. Now, with regard to the other issue, employment-to-population ratio, there is another issue there.

What is employment-to-population ratio? I am reading here a document from the ILO and it says here, a high ratio means that a large proportion of a country's population is employed. Whereas a low ratio means that a large share of the population is not involved directly in market related activities because they are either unemployed or more likely out of the labour force altogether. That is the definition that is given and then, let us look at another part of that document and I read –

“The employment-to-population ratio provides information on the ability of an economy to create employment. For many countries, the indicator is often more insightful than the unemployment rate.”

Why do I say we have to look at this figure first, because the unemployment figure, easy to manipulate and I say it, is being manipulated by this Government in order to hide the truth and to sugar-coat the reality. As it stands here, using this document from the ILO, I go to the other, which is, employment-to-population ratio, it shows a massive drop of minus 3.6. There has never been in the past 20 years, a drop of that magnitude. A drop of that magnitude clearly indicates according to the document of experts of the ILO and not politicians here who have an interest of their own to serve and who manipulate figures, it says here that it shows the ability of an economy to create employment.

So here, this is the truth. Mauritius is unable to create employment. See? Let us go to another issue now. Employment-to-population ratio, it shows here, as I have said, the massive drop that has never occurred ever in the last 20 years. You look at the statistics of the last 20 years, it has always been in the region of 0.4-0.5. For the first time ever, it has dropped by minus 3.6 that shows that this country is unable to have jobs for our citizens, that is the truth. So, you cannot manipulate that figure. Thank God!

Next issue, which I think is very important to talk about and to use their own figures, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is the following –

“The unemployment figure 52,200”

It is important to say that also, that excludes 2021 figures. The hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development should walk and go to the Redundancy Board once in a while. The hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development should maybe go instead of his own Office and meeting big corporates, go and see how those, *les travailleurs de ce pays sont en train de perdre leurs emplois* in masses.

How fathers and mothers, *les parents, les jeunes, les moins jeunes, les artisans, tous ceux de ce pays sont en train de perdre leurs emplois et c'est une réalité*. When you add their own figure in that very document of Statistics Mauritius, outside labour force, of which potential labour force, 42,000, an increase by 39,600 and what is exactly potential labour force, it shows here that those are people who are not in employment. Why does the hon. Minister of Labour, Human Resources Development and Training and the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development together agree with something that is totally inexact and hiding the truth? Can you imagine a record increase of 39,600 for people who are outside labour force, of which potential labour force and it is explained as potential labour refers to persons not in employment and who are not actively looking but were available for work.

En d'autres mots, ils étaient sans emplois and when you add the 52,200 to 42,000, it is 94,200 unemployed people in Mauritius today. That is the reality, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development cannot run away from and the truth of the matter is, those are figures of last year, January, February, March, April, May, June, those are not even computed in there. In other words and I say it without hesitation, we have more than 100,000 people unemployed today in this country. Unemployment of the youth, hidden, barely touched by the hon. Minister, ignored by the orators of Government. Why do the orators of Government refuse to talk about youth unemployment? A record increase of +3.3%! From 2019, 22.8% to 2020 with 26.1%. In other words, as we speak today, ladies and gentlemen, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, *plus que 1 in 4 youths, more than 1 in 4 youths unemployed in Mauritius today*. The situation is even more catastrophic for women unemployment. Women unemployment: record breaking figures. You can try to sugar-coat as much as you want, but it does not help policymaking if you do not have the courage to speak the truth. It does not help medium-term and long-term planning. It cannot help us to get out *du gouffre où on est aujourd'hui si on ne dit pas la vérité à la population. N'oublions pas quelque chose, M. le président. Tout ce que je vous dis en ce qui concerne les chiffres du*

chômage, vertigineux, et aujourd’hui le gouvernement ne peut pas le nier. We are doing this and the prescribed period *le ministre du Travail doit le savoir*; *le* prescribed period by regulations is coming at an end on 30 June 2021. So, all the stops that we are putting to stop employers from sacking people for economic reasons will no longer exist after 30 June 2021. And as the Minister of Finance said, they will implement a new regulation in order that those people cannot be sacked unless they go and take financial assistance. No? Why is it not referred to? Why did he not say that we will have an extension of that? But, on the contrary, what he says is that only the Wage Assistance and Self-Employed Assistance Scheme in the tourism related companies will be extended *jusqu’à septembre 2021*. What about all the rest? I say it clearly. With avoiding the truth, with sugar coating, with not telling the people and not having the courage to tell the people *la vérité*, that as from the end of June 2021, the figure of more than 100,000 *chômeurs va augmenter de façon vertigineuse* and we are going to hit the 150,000 *chômeurs* in no time, because this Government did not have the courage to face *la vérité en face*. But, instead, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition said, they chose to sugar-coat in order to prepare a re-election in 2024. That's all their interest. It is not the interest of the people. They will not even sacrifice power for the benefit of the country. They will concentrate on the necessity to retain power, even if it is *au détriment de la République*.

So, when I hear those speeches of the young Members of Parliament from the other side, posterity will run after you one day; history. People will run after you one day and tell you: “why is it that you did not have the courage to tell us the truth?”

Something else I would like to also say. Why is it that the figures of the Statistics Mauritius do not refer to underemployment anymore? The ILO says that you need to include underemployment. I am referring, today, to the document of the Mauritius Commercial Bank Focus. In 2018, we had labour underutilisation of 168,000. And how do we get to that figure? And I think that the hon. Minister of Finance, honestly, will be interested to know that. Underemployed in 2018, 124,900, plus 40,100 unemployed, plus potential labour force 3,800, equals to labour underutilisation *de 168,800 en 2018. On est en 2021; le* underemployment *aujourd’hui*, wrongful use of resources, in other words, you cannot create employment for those who are qualified. They have to accept any employment; underemployment, not an efficient use of your resources. Mismatch; not addressed by the Minister of Labour ever since 2015. So many years have passed. Today, *on a un* underemployment *de beaucoup plus de 150,000 citoyens. On a un* unemployment, *d’après vos chiffres, de 52,200. On a un* potential labour force *de 42,000. En d’autres mots, quand on*

ajoute tout cela, on est à 244,200 of labour underutilisation. Peut-être c'est trop technique, M. le ministre des Finances, mais cette technicité, quand on évite de le regarder en face, it is committing suicide, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. When you do not face the reality, you're killing the country. Yes, you may fool one, two, three, ten! You may get re-elected, but you will be remembered, Sir, as the one who did not look at reality and have the courage to take decisions. Why has the Minister of Commerce forgotten about something?

On a le toupet de venir nous dire, M. le président, que le prix des commodités, inflation is under control? All of us here, tous ceux qui me regardent aujourd'hui le savent; quand on va faire nos achats, on sait que les articles, food commodities, on average, there is an increase of 20 to 25%. That is a fact in our bill when we look at it at the end of the month; it has increased by 20% à 25 % ou même 30 %. It's a fact! From milk to meat, chicken, dairy products, it's all increased, and we are going to have an increase of fuel again, Rs2 on each litre to pay for vaccination and the surplus he is going to keep, en d'autres mots - he didn't tell us about that - and, maybe because of Betamax, il faut mettre encore R 2 ou R 3 pour pouvoir payer les erreurs du passé de ce gouvernement.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have people outside of this Assembly who can't afford to eat properly, who can't afford to eat as they used to in the past. Their children have to sacrifice themselves because of *la cherté de la vie*. That is the reality. As I said, the bread-and-butter things; as my hon. friend, Dr. Boolell always says, the bread-and-butter things in politics, nothing else. *Emploi, coût de la vie.*

Today, when the hon. Minister of Finance sends his officers at the end of the month to supermarkets to have a survey, at the time when supermarkets are having promotions, and you are going to have a manipulated inflation figure, very good, maybe that will satisfy his ego; maybe that will satisfy the ego of the Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth; maybe that will satisfy those who are behind the curtains, but the reality is, *et même aux jeunes membres de l'Assemblée nationale, même s'ils sont de l'autre côté de la Chambre, je ne mens pas quand je dis que la cherté de la vie* is a serious issue today. We cannot pretend that it's not. You have to face your constituents; every one of you has to face their constituents, we have to face our constituents, and the common denominator is employment and a lack of ability of Government to create productive industries, nothing in the Budget to create employment. You talk about pharmaceutical industry; you are talking about manufacturing vaccination in Mauritius. When will that see the day? Two years, three years' time with a tax holiday of 3% over eight years? What will this bring to the country? Friends of Government

will have the contract, then what? No transparency! MIC will put in money, then, we can't put questions in Parliament? No transparency, no accountability? This is what you are telling us will create employment? So, I say again, to Members of the other side, the young backbenchers, I am not taking away from them their right to love their Party, their loyalty to their Party; I salute you for that. But I ask you that you should show loyalty to the people first, not party politics. The people come first, not the Party. For the people out there, you will need to answer these questions: why is it that no jobs are there? Why is it that decisions were taken to indebt each child, even the unborn by almost Rs5 billion and the interest is going up every day? Why did you keep quiet and sit down, in other words, participate to the crime? You will have to answer one day, maybe not now, maybe in 5 years' time, maybe in 10 years' time, your names will be written, not in gold.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am looking at hon. Hurreeram here and it reminds me that he also was sitting down next to the former Minister of Commerce, saying how happy he was that the Labour Party was wrong and Government was right when he won their case at the Supreme Court; Press Conference. I remember him. What is he going to do now? Have a Press Conference? *Maaf kar dijiye humko, hum ne galat baat bola?* (please forgive me, I have spoken wrongly).

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Katori* (bowl).

Mr Mohamed: And that is a very interesting remark. You see, if we have remarks of that nature, then our country has a bright future.

(Interruptions)

You see, the bright ability of this person to contribute economically to the debate is amazing, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. That is what gives me confidence.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Mohamed: You see?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: So,...

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: *Bizin vann tou pou peye !*

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Mohamed: Let me say something else, and I will conclude on that.

An hon. Member: *Vann Sun Trust pou pey sa.*

An hon. Member: *Dieu merci!*

An hon. Member: *Vann Sun Trust pey sa la !*

Mr Mohamed: Let me conclude on that, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. When I say that we need to put country first and Party last, I am very serious about that.

(Interruptions)

When I say that we need to put country first and Party last, I am very serious about that.

An hon. Member: *220 millions, nous pe met country first?*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Mohamed: Has anyone been found guilty of anything? Let us talk about the BAI case, where you belonged to. And when you sat in the Bank of Mauritius, accepting all the wrongdoings! You wanted me to come after you? I will come after you!

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Mohamed: You are also party of that!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed!

Mr Mohamed: *220 millions! 220 millions!* That's the problem!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Hon. Boolell!

Mr Mohamed: When you have people who do nothing else ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: Sun Trust! Sun Trust...

Mr Mohamed: Nothing else!

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: Eh!

Dr. Padayachy: *Sa fer dimal!*

Mr Mohamed: Hold his..... Pull the list that there is...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Dr. Padayachy: *Fer dimal.*

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Assirvaden: *Sun Trust 1.2 milliards!*

The Deputy Speaker: Order, hon. Assirvaden!

Mr Mohamed: Can I continue, please?

An hon. Member: *Contractere ta!*

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy! Hon. Assirvaden! That is the second time I am calling your name! Do not point me anywhere!

An hon. Member: *Al get Jugnauth so kass, apre to kozer!*

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed! Hon. Mohamed!

Mr Mohamed: Tell him to be quiet! I did not interrupt him. Tell him not to interrupt me.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed!

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: I am here to regulate the conduct! Please let me!

Mr Mohamed: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please continue!

Mr Mohamed: I am concluding!

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, and address me.

Mr Mohamed: Thank you, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr Mohamed: I will address you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I mean, you understand the concept. And I know for a fact that you understand the concept that one has to put country first in moments of such difficulty of COVID-19.

The Deputy Speaker: No, no. Do not go about like what I understand. Stick to the debate!

Mr Mohamed: Alright! Fair enough! Let me just say I hope we all understand that.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr Mohamed: When I look at figures in this Budget, for me, I am convinced about one thing. There is the need, as a lot of experts say, *d'être audacieux*. *Audacieux* why? As I have started out, I will finish on that same note. There is the need for us, politicians, to be able to show that we cannot simply divide the public sector and the private sector in terms of treatment. We cannot give security of tenure to some and then make others suffer financially. We cannot basically have two-tier citizens and discriminate amongst our people. What I ask Government to do is to realise that, yes, and we accept that we are living through difficult times. And I believe that, just like I am the father of 4 children, many of us have families living here. We want our country to do better; full stop. I am not bothered about the colours here, red, *mauve*, blue or orange. This is not the point. The point is, in the years to come, I am going to be 53 and I hope that one day, my children will not have to have to pay the consequences of negligence on the part of those governing the country.

I am not saying this Government, I mean any Government. There needs to be more responsibility and accountability because what is the bad news today, let alone the Budget, is the ease with which this Government - I do not find them at all bothered by this bill that is being slapped on the people of this country for almost Rs5 billion because of their negligence. This has to change.

If we are to go for a law that calls for responsibility and accountability and not Ministers hiding behind their Permanent Secretaries or Chief Executives and where Ministers are made to be able to be sued and prosecuted for wrong actions of this nature, it has to happen. I am not saying there are not going to be Ministers who will do wrong again in the

future. I hope it does not happen, but if it does, there needs to be a change in the law and a change in mentality in order to discourage such actions.

So, we were at crossroads, and I think that the hon. Minister of Finance has not shown him courageous enough. Now, I do not blame him personally. I think that he has obviously got his marching orders. He has to ensure that elections are won, even if the country comes last; he must ensure that they can stay in Government. Power! They can stick to it! Hold on to it! Not go! As long as the country suffers, we will pretend and try to sugar-coat it again and again, and again. Let us not forget that excess sugar does make people vomit, and I am about to vomit when I live that Budget.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Gobin!

(6.19 p.m.)

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to start by setting the context in which we are, once again. Because, in all the debate, what is happening, the people out want to understand what is happening. So, it is important that we set the context, once again. Many many orators have today and many more will do so in the coming days, stress on the difficult situation, in which the country is. We will all speak of unemployment, *le cout de la vie, l'emploi, la cherté de la vie*. We will all talk about the debt to GDP ratio.

I say yes, we are in a difficult situation and nobody, on this side, pretends that we are not in a difficult situation. Yes, our debt is high but can somebody name me a country in the world, anywhere, where debt is not high and going even higher? *Est-ce qu'il y a un pays quelque part comme ça? Est-ce qu'on est le seul pays à emprunter?* Where debt to GDP is reaching record-high, yes it is reaching record-high, yes, but name a country where it is not! Cost of living is going high, yes. Name me a country where it is not!

So, this is the context. When early 2020, we heard of the first case of COVID-19 in the province of Wuhan in China. Nobody could predict what was going to unfold in the year 2020. And in the year 2020, apart from lockdowns, we had no other option. The only thing we could do was lockdown and we did.

We managed to contain and then we managed to reopen later in 2020 and Mauritius had only its own domestic market to sustain its economy.

Our tourists' arrival reached a grinding and immediate halt. We could not import certain products for some time. Maritime lines had stopped, airlines had stopped flying. But then, late towards 2020, the whole world saw a ray of hope and that ray of hope came with the first vaccines. In 2021, therefore, when we start the vaccination campaign as in many other countries, we do so with the hope that there will be better days ahead. This is the context not only here in Mauritius, but in any other country, any other country is looking at better days ahead and we are all cautiously optimistic.

It is in this context that we say to the people of Mauritius that we should be together for better days ahead and it is now that we need to reboot the economy. It is like rebooting your computer, you start again. And how do we reboot an economy? It is, of course, by public sector expenditure. If there is public expenditure, it is once again to reboot the economy, and this is what this budget is about. It is to reboot in the hope that *les économies de plusieurs pays vont repartir*, that we will have once again access to our traditional markets; that tourism will pick up again, we will have arrivals and with arrivals the economy, especially in the tourism sector, will rebound. So, *ça ne sert à rien de faire un* blame game. We are in this country together and we should work together to reboot our economy for the sake of our country, and for the sake of our children. And in these difficult times, this Government as always, has never shied away from its responsibilities on the social justice front.

We have not reduced in any way the allowances that are paid whether it be pensions or to the vulnerable citizens. We have not. We have maintained everything as they are. But what we have done also is year-on-year we bring innovation despite difficult times. The House will recall year-on-year, this Government has brought innovation. My colleague, hon. Hurreeram, mentioned it earlier. In the year 2016-2017 we heard for the first time about the minimum wage. Year-on-year we had such measures, after that we heard of the negative income tax and not to mention the pensions. And this year, there is a landmark announcement in the budget and that landmark announcement which I call a game-changer, concerns the biomass framework.

In our common kreol language, bagasse means what it means, it means bagasse, *quelque chose qui n'a pas de valeur*. We bring a paradigm shift; today, Government

announces that bagasse has a value. There has been debate about it for a number of years, but we take the courageous step of ascribing value to our bagasse and it has multiplier effect. The more we use bagasse, the less we will import coal or HFO and the less we import coal and HFO, the less we will spend on our foreign exchange and bagasse is home-grown. If today, it is bagasse, tomorrow it will be biomass. Yes, it will be. I heard earlier that nothing is mentioned about the biomass, it will move on incrementally, I can assure the House. Now, it is bagasse, tomorrow it will be biomass.

Number of reports have been, for instance, written on the other plant called the Arundo Donax, I think, there is still debate about it. There is no agreement up to now but there are other plants where we will be able to use in the biomass framework. And with this landmark measure, all the captains of industry say now that yes, sugar has a future because of this additional Rs3,300 per ton of sugar produced.

This takes me therefore to this very important sector of our economy, which is the sugar sector. We have not reduced the Rs25000 for the first 60 tons of sugar produced. This is a subsidised price, yes, and it will continue to be so not only for the price of sugar, but Government has also waived as it is announced in this budget, the cess which is payable under the MCI Act for 2021. Government also waives the premium payable to the SIFB.

This is the situation of the sugar sector. Let me give some more details therefore on this sector. For the price of sugar, the House will appreciate, in April of this year; the Mauritius Sugar Syndicate has revised the estimate for the price of sugar payable to planters for crop 2020. It was estimated at 12,000 but actually reached 13,000 per ton of sugar which represents an increase of 50% as compared to the lowest price recorded during the past 12 years. And we are expecting, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a further increase in the price when it will be finalised around mid-July of this year. The situation is therefore encouraging when we compare the price of sugar for crops 2018 and 2019, which were respectively 8,686 and 11,384 per ton respectively.

So, therefore, despite the difficult situation, Government maintains all the assistance that it has provided, namely, the guaranteed price of 25,000 per ton of sugar, for the first 60 tons and the advance on fertilisers provided to 7500 planters and the amount of money provided for under the Cane Replantation Scheme so as to encourage planters to replant their abandoned fields. And in addition, funds were provided under the COVID-19 Projects Development Fund for the same purpose.

Now, it is important to recall that in order to alleviate the problems of cooperatives during harvest, Government had allocated Rs15 m. for the purchase of a harvester. That harvester, I am pleased to announce, has already reached Mauritius and is being assembled to be used, at least, for the next harvest but not in the immediate future, maybe towards a bit later on in the year and this is happening under an MoU signed between the MCIA and the Mauritius Cooperative Agricultural Federation for the management of that harvester. We have faced, of course, a number of difficulties because of the fact that we are under lockdown and we could not bring the engineers from the manufacturer but that has been delayed, he will be coming soon.

We are putting through the Centralised Digital Land Bank of Land Scope, land to be put for agricultural purposes. The House will also recall that Government has provided money to pay for transport and associated cost for the sugarcane under the Medine factory area. Why, because we know that Medine factory has closed and cane has to be transported to the other three millers.

Government has also doubled all the efforts it has put under the hon. Deputy Prime Minister's chairmanship, to complete all the VRS, ERS and blueprint projects which have been delayed for more than 12 to 14 years. Earlier this year, in February, we had remittance of title deeds for the VRS in Piton. Now, we have the VRS in Bonne Mère which is ready, it is just a question of organising a ceremony for remittance of title deeds. All these, we are completing when in fact it ought to have been completed 14 years ago. Next one on the list for the VRS in the sugar sector would be at Bambou where 115 VRS beneficiaries from Medine Sugar Factory will receive their title deeds.

Government is also now, as announced in the Budget, putting the necessary funding for the tea sector. A sector, as my good friend, now Ambassador to Washington, hon. Mahen Jhugroo used to say –

“Tea sector had been in the Intensive Care Unit for a number for a number of years”.

Completely neglected and here, once again, it is important to remind the House of the historic measure announced for the payment of a winter allowance to tea growers to cover for the winter period where there is no revenue at all to tea growers and this year, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has announced also necessary funding for tea cooperatives to purchase a harvester. Now, this grant to purchase the harvester helps to alleviate the problem of labour shortage in the tea sector. So that, growers therefore

will not abandon their fields and for those who think that the tea sector does not have a future, I would humbly invite them to read the recent report which was commissioned by my Ministry and which was undertaken by the FAO to evaluate the economic sustainability of the tea sector. What comes out of that report is that the tea made in Mauritius has unique characteristic which is pesticide-free, which means that it can fetch very high price, indeed.

What is important also to remind the House in the context in which we are, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that COVID-19 pandemic has made us realise how vulnerable we are as a net food importing country. If we do not produce what we consume and we do not consume what we produce that makes us dependent on imports and Government is leaving no stone unturned to fund the non-sugar sector as well for local production of fruits, of vegetables and of meat. I say this in the context of the Agro-Processing Project which is a national priority for Government.

We have seen for far too long, for far too many years that when there is good production, when the harvest is good, we unfortunately see *que les légumes frais après seulement quelques jours sont jetés*. Why is this happening? Because we do not process our fresh products enough for conservation. *Il faut éduquer nos producteurs et les* Small and Medium Enterprises that it does not require complicated machinery to do agro-processing. So what Government is doing, therefore, is around the national wholesale market which is situated at Five Ways, Wooton, a project which was initiated by my very able predecessor, hon. Seeruttun, and which is nearing completion this year.

What we build around the national wholesale market is an agro processing zone. The vision of my Ministry and the vision of this Government is that, the same way as we had the EPZ in the past, we can have our APZ which will make us secure in terms of our demands for food and food security therefore comes very high on our agenda. Food sovereignty, if I may say, comes very high on our agenda. There are like this Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a plethora of measures and I prefer not to waste the time of the House going through it one by one, it is all set out in the Annexes and in the Estimates. The point I want to drive at Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that we are putting a lot of effort to reboot our economy while at the same time supporting our citizens, the vulnerable groups and we are supporting those in the production of fruits, vegetables and our friends, the animal breeders. This takes me to the next point I want to address concerning breeding activity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in this Budget, Government is doubling the subsidy provided for animal feed. This may not sound as if, I mean to say Rs20 million, does not sound a lot of money compared to the billions you hear here and there but what it means to that animal breeder, means a lot and I will explain why and I will explain the story why this measure has been included in the Budget.

On a particular field visit I had, I met with a few animal breeders and in particular one cooperative in the region of Mahebourg. I met a young gentleman who introduced himself as a young graduate. He explained to me that despite being a graduate, he did not stop with the family business he had with his brothers and his parents, of breeding. He had *une vingtaine je crois, une vingtaine de vaches*, if I recall correctly and, of course, some other animals in his farm. The young graduate, that young gentleman made a passionate plea on the field visit and his plea was that 70% of their expenses as breeders go to the purchase of animal feed. 70%! And his only request was for Government to increase the subsidy for the purchase of animal feed. The purchase of animal feed works as follows. Whenever the breeder purchases animal feed, he used to get, and he gets until now Rs4 per kilogram of animal feed purchased. That is the subsidy which Government pays out to the animal breeder. His plea was to increase it so that breeders could receive an assistance from Government. I took this request to my colleagues, and in particular to my colleague, the Minister of Finance. In this Budget, the Minister of Finance has not merely increased the subsidy, but he has doubled that subsidy. It does not sound a very shiny measure, but to that breeder, I say once again, it means a lot, and people out there follow what happens in this House, because when that measure was being announced by the Minister of Finance on Friday, within minutes I received an SMS on my phone from that gentleman saying, ‘on behalf of all breeders, I want to thank you.’ This goes in line with our food security programme. If we do not support breeders in Mauritius and Rodrigues, we will no longer have breeders in this country. *Ils étaient des laissés-pour-compte*, but no more. Therefore, when we are in this context...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Please, honourable, just listen. Let us listen to him. Minister!

Mr Gobin: I have almost done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I do not want to say more, the context has been set. We have had for two consecutive years, *une contraction*, if my memory serves me right, it was 7%, and then 6% *contraction* in two consecutive years. And if we do not work together as a nation to rebuild our economy, to reboot our economy, we

will all be in difficulty together as a nation. This is why we need to come together and stop the blame game.

My learned friend hon. Mohamed said, ‘put the country first’, yes, we should, and we should work together to make this Budget a reality. We should all work together. On this side of the House we will leave no stone unturned, we will work day and night *à la réalisation des mesures annoncées dans le Budget et je remercie mon collègue, le ministre des Finances, pour ce Budget.*

J'en ai fini. Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Rawoo!

Dr. I. Rawoo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, hon. Members of the House, today it is with great humility for me to deliver my second Budget Debate Speech in this House to address you on the National Budget presented by this Government for the period 2021-2022.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I take this opportunity to join voice and pay a tribute to late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, the architect of the economic miracle which has led our nation today to modern Mauritius. It is a Budget which follows the philosophy of Sir Anerood Jugnauth.

M. le président, la nation mauricienne a perdu un de ses plus grand fils du sol. Sir Anerood Jugnauth était le père fondateur de l'île Maurice moderne et l'architecte du miracle économique dans les années 80-90 à travers l'implantation des zones franches d'exportation. Si le pays a pu diversifier son économie en s'appuyant sur d'autres secteurs, tels que le textile, le tourisme international, l'offshore financier au lieu de la canne à sucre, c'est grâce à Sir Anerood. Il a donné un rayonnement mondial à Maurice, très présent aujourd'hui dans les enceintes internationales. Encore une fois, c'est grâce à Sir Anerood que notre pays a pu développer son premier CyberCité, notamment à Ebène. Cette région était critiquée comme l'éléphant blanc par certains mais c'est devenu une capitale économique et numérique, où travaillent plusieurs dizaines de milliers de familles mauriciennes. Si nos villages ont pu s'aligner aux infrastructures et facilités, jadis exclusivement réservées aux villes, c'est grâce à Sir Anerood. Son engagement fut celui d'une vie au service de son pays et de sa population. C'est grâce à Sir Anerood que notre pays est fier d'être une République souveraine aujourd'hui. C'est grâce aussi à Sir Anerood que l'île Rodrigues a accédé à l'autonomie aujourd'hui. Il s'est battu avec vigueur et détermination à l'ONU pour récupérer la

souveraineté de Maurice sur les Chagos et pour le retour des Chagossiens dans leur pays. Sir Anerood est parti mais son parcours hors norme ne sera jamais oublié. Je présente mes sincères condoléances au Premier ministre et à Lady Sarojini et à sa famille endeuillée.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will join hands with my colleague, hon. Maneesh Gobin. I will say, yes, we are in difficult times. We are in very difficult times, but, undoubtedly, we are currently facing an unprecedented global crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One and a half year ago, who would have predicted that one day half of the global population would have been in total confinement, a situation which has led to a global economic paralysis. The world has suddenly stopped to a halt; all major economies put to a stop, leading to a major global economic crisis. In a span of few months, tens of millions of people worldwide have lost their jobs; thousands of businesses have been forced to close down, leading to unprecedented global economic crisis. The IMF and the World Bank have predicted no return to normal before 2024. COVID-19 has been costly for many Governments with an oversized role to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Around the world, the race is on; the race is on for vaccination. Vaccinating the population, this is the race against COVID-19. A year now from the start of the pandemic, many countries are still struggling for the fight of vaccines, but here, in Mauritius, we managed to get 500,000 more vaccines to vaccinate the population and we are still finding more to protect our population.

With the world turned upside down, the odds were stacked up against the Government. The pandemic, still in its full swing, is forcing us to think pragmatically to counter its immediate effect on our economy. Unfortunately, our country endured a first half of 2021 with a more challenging than expected with a second wave of COVID-19, and resulting lockdown against a backdrop of increasing pressure to open our borders to tourism after over 15 months of closure. The effects of the extended lockdown, as well as the borders' closure meant bigger downturns for the country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are currently living in exceptional times where exceptional measures need to be taken to restore economic growth and investors' confidence. My first word must be a tribute to both our Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance and last but not least to the whole staff of different Ministries, all stakeholders who have been working hard to come up with an exceptional Budget in these exceptional circumstances. Our country will have to reinvent itself in order to achieve sustainable growth in a post-COVID world.

M. le président, dans le monde entier, nous sommes en train de vivre des moments très, très difficiles. De ce fait, il est important de consolider notre économie. Ce budget vise à stimuler l'économie et l'investissement et contient plusieurs mesures sectorielles pour relever le défi et créer la dynamique nécessaire dans les secteurs émergeants. Il y a certains grands axes prioritaires qui sont l'investissement, les exportations, l'ouverture, la gestion de l'endettement, les énergies renouvelables et la facilitation des affaires qui va soutenir la reprise et permettre la transition à long terme.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in these unprecedeted difficult times, this Government is doing its utmost best to safeguard jobs and save businesses from bankruptcy. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have at heart and the whole Government has at heart the whole nation of Mauritius. We, at the Government, we care for our people and we are totally concerned for future generations. Covid-19 is an existential crisis. It is severely testing our social, economic, and political resilience. In a post COVID-19 world, we will have to rethink many prior assumptions and find new balances for individual and collective behaviour. We will need to develop strategic and in-depth approach to human development, regional integration, digitalisation, industrialisation, economic diversification, fiscal and monetary policies and international solidarity.

This Budget Speech enables a more positive outlook with the availability of vaccines. The budget measures for long recovery, revival and resilience in the expectation of vaccination being the game changer amidst prospect of strong recovery globally. The measures centred around an ongoing economic agenda resting on three main pillars being a boost to investment, shaping a new economic architecture and restoring confidence, key to this are massive investments in public infrastructure, strengthening social protection and opening up of the economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, unemployment is a key concern and the fairness of the distribution mechanism for a Government and support matters most. In this context, the Government is coming with sensitive measures to tackle these concerns appropriately. The Travel and Tourism Industry has been the most severely hit by this pandemic. In this respect, the Government has substantial support to maintain the capacity for this industry to bounce back. In fact, more than Rs8.5 billion have already been spent to sustain, to assist some 50,000 individuals in the sector through Wage Assistance Scheme and Self-Employed Assistance Scheme. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the components to re-launch the tourism sector is the reopening of our borders. We are preparing for a gradual and sustained recovery

of the sector aiming at 650,000 tourists over the next 12 months. The EDB will set up a special desk aiming to attract at least 50,000 foreign retirees in Mauritius during the next financial year through a targeted marketing campaign in collaboration with the MTPA. To this end, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Tourism as well as the Minister of Health and Wellness held extensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders to establish a calendar as well as the appropriate protocols to ensure the safe and productive opening of our country to the world.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in this respect, the Government is upholding his full support to the tourism sector by -

- (a) extending the Wage Assistance Scheme and Self-Employed Assistance Scheme to tourism sector companies for the three month period up to September 2021;
- (b) by differing the payment of lease on State land to June 2022;
- (c) by waiving the rental fee of counters by hotels and operators at the airport for the period April to September 2021;
- (d) Government is also reducing the registration tax on transfer of lease of State land from 20% to 10% for hotels for a two-year period.
- (e) Moreover, the DBM will introduce a tourism business continuity loan for SMEs at a rate of 0.5% per annum.
- (f) In addition to that, Government will also provide for the upgrading of leisure facilities on a phased basis in four major public beaches, namely Mon Choisy, Flic en Flac, Belle Mare and La Prairie.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the surge in public sector investment over the next three years will be a tremendous stimulus to the construction industry. The Government's willingness is to give a boost to residential construction project and support Government's vision of a more inclusive society by making home ownership affordable for all.

In this respect, in addition to the 12,000 social housing units being constructed, Government is earmarking Rs2 billion to support the purchase of residential land and property as well as a construction of housing units by individuals. Moreover, an individual buying a house, apartment or land to construct his residence in the financial year 2021-2022 will benefit from a refund of 5% of the cost of the property up to a maximum of Rs500,000. Those contracting a home loan to construct their residence will benefit a refund of 5% of the home loan up to a maximum of Rs500,000. Government is also reviewing the exemption of

registration duty for the first time buyers. Henceforth, the exemption shall apply on the first Rs5 m. of the cost of a built up residential property. Previously the exemption was restricted to properties the value of which is below Rs5 m.

Furthermore, some 2000 lots will be put on sale by the SIC and the Rose Belle Sugar Estate for residential purposes.

M. le président, la pandémie de COVID-19 a enseigné aux dirigeants du monde entier de précieuses leçons sur l'importance d'une économie autosuffisante. Conformément à la vision de notre Premier ministre, nous continuerons à soutenir et développer davantage le secteur agricole.

In this respect, Landscope, through the centralised digital land bank, will make available some 1000 acres of land to private growers and with a view of boosting agricultural production. Moreover, Tea Cooperative will be provided a grant of Rs10,000 on the purchase of tea harvesters. Tea growers will continue to benefit from the winter allowance just as hon. Maneesh Gobin mentioned.

Furthermore, Government is maintaining the 50% subsidy on the price of potatoes and onion seeds. This subsidy will be extended to seeds for the production of garlics and pulses. The AMB is coming up with a guaranteed price mechanism for onions, garlic and potatoes for producers.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government is also extending the sheltered farming scheme to charitable institutions, primary schools and colleges. Moreover, we are also increasing the maximum loan under DBM Backyard Gardening Loan Scheme from Rs20,000 to Rs100,000. Planters will be eligible for the following loan scheme from the DBM, Rs100,000 interest-free loan for cashflow issues and 0.5% COVID-19 Special Support Scheme of up to Rs1 m. Furthermore for planters facing difficulties in repaying loan overdue, the DBM is coming with an amnesty programme.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as my constituency No. 13 is concerned, I am very pleased to see various projects and budgets allocated in different areas of relevant importance. Just a few weeks ago, our country and our citizens have been under severe stress with flash floods in the South, in the South Eastern region, and the Central region of the island. While the risk can never be fully eliminated as hon. Bobby Hurreeram mentioned, it is never fully eliminated.

We need to build up resilience to flash floods and cyclones. In this respect, Rs780 m.

allocated for Massive Flood Management Programme will be spearheaded by the Land Drainage Authority for villagers of Château Bénarès, Batimarais, Britannia, L'Escalier, Rivière des Anguilles, Tyack, Camp Diable, Grand Bois, La Flora, Rivière du Poste, Souillac and St Aubin. It is a huge task for implementation of those projects. As hon. Bobby Hurreeram mentioned, all PPS here, we will join forces for making those projects to be implemented.

Nous sommes des bâtisseurs, M. le président and we are real achievers. This Government remains committed to deliver on its engagement to provide regular water supply to the population. Rs9.4 billion will be invested in the construction of Rivière des Anguilles Dam and its water treatment plan, not like Bagatelle Dam, it was only the dam with no treatment plan. But here, we have a plan to distribute the water in the southern region, in the eastern region and everywhere. This will ensure reliable water supply in the southern region of the country. This project will definitely boost both local and national development for the benefits of all citizens. Undoubtedly, the construction of the dam will create employment, both directly and indirectly.

The construction of the Rivière des Anguilles Dam is a long-awaited project for the inhabitants of the whole southern region of the island. There will be a 2 KM long work field dam across the Rivière des Anguilles Dam. The dam will have a capacity of 14mm^3 with an annual yield of about 15mm^3 . The maximum dam height will be around 55 m. The construction of the dam will definitely ensure the meeting of the potable water in the southern region. This project will start very soon and will end in this mandate itself. Hence, Mare aux Vacoas will ensure the supply of water to the inhabitants of the lower and upper Plaine Wilhems more effectively, reducing drastically any water shortage.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Government is also investing under the Economic Recovery Programme, in community development projects across Mauritius to improve the quality of life of all our citizens. In this respect, Sub Halls in my Constituency will be constructed at Rivière du Poste and Bénarès village.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the COVID-19 pandemic has put health care resilience around the world to the test. Our health care professionals have made a formidable effort in dealing with the pandemic in Mauritius. This Government will continue to provide all the required infrastructure and equipment to protect our health care personnel and better respond to the needs of our population. In this respect, a mediclinic will be constructed at Grand Bois.

Moreover, there will be acquisition of high-tech medical equipment, including a CT scan at Souillac Hospital and the acquisition of 80 haemodialysis equipment for the Souillac Hospital and five regional hospitals.

This Government, under the leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, has adopted a zero tolerance approach in the relentless fight against drug trafficking and criminality. Our efforts are paying off and we are continuously stepping up our fight. In this budget, Government will give additional means to the Police force which has been working tirelessly for a safer Mauritius. In this respect, there will be construction of a new Police station at L'Escalier.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget sets the stage of sustainability, transition programmes, major landslide stabilisation works will be conducted at Le Batelage, Souillac and Souillac bridge.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as part of the new economic architecture, the focus of the Government is to have 60% of our energy generation from green sources and the use of coal has to be phased out by 2030. This is an ambitious policy target and will trigger a strategic response from existing power producers. More importantly, this will lead to reduce dependency on important fossil fuels and a reduction in the related foreign currency outflow. It is an industry which will have significant impact on our economy, boost our GDP growth and most importantly create new job opportunities. There is already a guaranteed local demand of some Rs20 billion for energy in our economy, most of which are imported as fossil fuels. We have all the renewable sources needed to produce our own energy; be it biomass, solar, wind or wave; we have the human resources expertise and means to do so.

M. le président, permettez-moi de conclure avec ces quelques réflexions. Notre nation doit être unie dans ces moments difficiles, sans précédent. Nous Mauriciens, nous devons être unis et mener ces combats ensemble. Notre gouvernement a confiance en son peuple et connaît les capacités de nous, Mauriciens, à nous réinventer et à prouver le monde entier, même si nous sommes une petite goutte dans l'océan, nous pouvons montrer au monde entier que nous sommes un exemple à suivre malgré des ressources naturelles limitées. Notre principale ressource, c'est nous. Nous, les Mauriciens, luttons ensemble contre ce défi de l'unité.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, no one will help us if we do not help ourselves. As I have mentioned before, there is no right solution to this global pandemic until we reach national and global herd immunity. Let us set all differences aside and work together, just like hon.

Maneesh Gobin just mentioned. Let us work together and at the end, one day, the future generation will always remember us for our united determination to save and rebuild our country despite all odds against us.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Dr. Ramdhany!

(7.10 p.m.)

Dr. A. Ramdhany (First Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as First Member of Constituency No. 6, I have the privilege to be participating in Government as Member of MSM. MSM is the legacy of our inspirational Late Sir Anerood Jugnauth who has laid the foundation of a modern Mauritius and I am proud to be addressing this august Assembly from this side of the House and I dedicate my intervention to the Late Sir Anerood Jugnauth.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, after the presentation of the budget, I had the opportunity to move around in my Constituency during the weekend to meet my constituents. I can assure this House that I have sensed a profound sense of satisfaction and relief among our citizens. They had serious apprehensions with regard to the very difficult context of the second budget with the backdrop of the first confinement and with the second wave at the centre of the stage. I felt a sense of relief among the people in my Constituency after the budget document became public.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for the brilliance with which he is steering the economic affairs under the leadership of our Prime Minister. We are at an unprecedented juncture when we are expected to do much more with very much less. This budget has the right responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic and lays the foundation for responses to recurring challenges, ahead as the virus is a part of our reality and that of our countries, both rich and poor.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as a responsible Government, we have been providing income support to our labour force for more than a year now. We are living a time of high vulnerability, unprecedented and unimagined uncertainty, serious complexity and profound ambiguity. However, we have been taking care of the livelihood of our population who has been exposed to the severity of an economic standstill in different export oriented sectors; in the hospitality and informal sectors.

Over and above handholding our citizens and their families during the very hard times, this Budget is also taking care of the need for an economic take-off and recovery in a very short term. To this end, this Budget has provisions for the necessary support to industries. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while not relenting efforts to protect lives and livelihoods, this Budget is further consolidating the welfare state with a set of provisions through the Wage Assistance Scheme, Transitional Unemployment Benefit and now very sensitive measures such as access to free sanitary towels from Grade 6 to Grade 13 and free optical glasses up to the age of 21 for children from the most vulnerable segment of our society.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my constituents are pleased to note the far-reaching provisions in this Budget to empower and motivate families to have access to decent housing either through the Social Housing Programme for the most vulnerable segment or the incentive package for the acquisition of a residence or residential land and through the participation of Government in the acquisition and construction cost up to Rs500,000. This is a very brilliant move towards a more inclusive society.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the 9-year schooling and the National Certificate of Education are a reality today. There is no doubt with regard to the two streams at upper secondary level. These two streams clearly allow to consolidate the potential of our children. We are providing the avenues to them to unleash their full human potential by pursuing their learning journey either through the academies or the Technical and Vocational Education and Training. Despite the pressures for funding from the different sectors of the economy, this Budget makes a laudable move by increasing the provisions by Rs2 billion to empower the Education sector to –

1. set up new infrastructure and upgrade existing ones;
2. provide the necessary facilities to the student population all the way through the different stages of their learning journey;
3. make specific provisions to support special education needs of our children who are physically, visually, economically, and psychologically challenged, and
4. make the necessary recruitments at all levels to ensure effective delivery of programmes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to be a member of this Government which is not sparing the least effort to support our fishermen, livestock breeders, agro business entrepreneurs who have experienced very difficult times during the two lockdowns. They deserve the support and attention of our Government as they have the solution to the home-grown food security strategies when country boundaries and domestic markets are closed. We have all seen how these entrepreneurs have strategized to sustain the availability of food throughout the whole island-wide door-step stalls to ensure that households have vegetables, fruits, fish and other alimentary products.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I come from a coastal region and interact with vegetable growers, micro-level livestock breeders and fishermen. I have no doubt that the DBM Amnesty Programme will certainly bring relief to our small entrepreneurs of both the agri-business and other sectors and motivate them to make effective use of opportunities for the agricultural and livestock sectors in this Budget. It is interesting to note that there is provision for 500 additional fishermen cards along with an increase in the bad weather allowance.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to share my heartfelt condolences to the Capiron family of Grand Gaube who lost their loved one during a tragedy at sea.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I trust households will take advantage of the DBM Backyard Gardening Loan Scheme, planters will make the most of the schemes that will facilitate their operations through agricultural equipment and leasing facilities for acquisition of single or double space cabin vehicles. Cooperatives will be sensitive to the opportunities in the Agro-processing sector and fishermen will take advantage of facilities to acquire semi-industrial vessels.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I understand that we are experiencing a situation where globalisation, as an economic strategy or panacea, has been challenged by a micro-organism invisible to the human eye. Country boundaries could not remain open. While free movement of goods and people across country boundaries could not happen without risk of further outbreak of the pandemic.

Actions against nature and the environment have reached distant shores to affect small island economies. Economic model in place had to be reviewed as the neo-classical model could no longer provide solutions to the challenges imposed by the Coronavirus. I understand that we are today using a more pragmatic and hybrid model with a touch of Keynesian economics to sustain livelihoods and boost employment.

Climate change is our new reality and flash floods are the new normal. There is not much in the powers of the Government to reverse the process of environmental degradation and global warming in the short and medium terms. However, we may not remain insensitive to the challenges of this new normal. We are also conscious of the targets set by the UN in its sustainability agenda 2030.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am very much sensitive to the contributions that our small economy can make to contribute towards addressing the challenges posed by climate change.

We are also concerned with the ecological legacy our generation will leave for future generations. I am, therefore, reassured by the provisions in this Budget for the greening of our economy after the programmed phasing out of non-biodegradable plastic bags. I am very pleased to be associated with a Government with a clearly defined agenda for a sustainable development strategy.

Here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am referring to the provisions for the gradual phasing out of energy sourced from coal, investments in renewable energy, optimisation of the wind and solar potentials in this sub-tropical island and the facilities for electric vehicles for both private and public use.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I represent a Constituency with many wetlands, regions with water-tables not very deep below the soil surface and where there is a lot of pressure for residential and commercial development projects.

Many of the coastal localities are recurrently flooded and remain flooded for prolonged periods after each downpour. As Parliamentary Private Secretary, I receive representations from citizens and economic operators to provide sustainable solutions to the flooding problem for which we may not have a quick-fix low-cost solution in absence of direct outlets. While the Wastewater Management Authority is massively investing in a sewage network to cover Pereybere, Bain Boeuf and Cap Malheureux, I am pleased to note that the

Budget is dedicating funds for a comprehensive island-wide Land Drainage Programme including Rs389 m. for my Constituency.

I am conscious that despite the economic constraints resulting from the pandemic, this Budget is making provisions for Rs11.7 billion in the Flood Management Programme. Under the same subject, I am pleased to inform the House that the first phase of construction of flood mitigation measures at Fond du Sac are nearing completion.

This Government has worked hard to address the problem at Fond du Sac and I am also pleased to announce that the National Development Unit is exploring solutions to implement the second phase of this project.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, such a project would not have seen the light of day without the participation of land owners and people of Fond du Sac. A special mention is necessary and I wish to extend my gratitude to the land owners who have been required to forego part of their agricultural land in the interest of this major drain solution. I believe that there will be similar participation at the level of other regions which have suffered from devastating floods we have seen very recently.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while we are on this very sensitive problem, I wish to call for the understanding of Members of both sides of this House that it is high time to reflect on the engineering component of construction in environmentally sensitive areas. I wonder whether we should continue to construct on concrete basements in localities such as Grand' Baie, Pereybere, and Cap Malheureux, amongst others.

I also appreciate the provision with regard to rivers and canals implying that there will be no need to go to the Supreme Court while working on drain solutions to address flooding and I welcome the restriction of constructions on water courses. These provisions and the funds committed to the next three years, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, clearly demonstrate the sense of commitment and sincerity of purpose of this Government. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt that we need to dedicate resources more importantly to restoring confidence and accelerating economic recovery.

We are also conscious that we need to construct internal access roads in the different regions whereby households have put up residential buildings. I am sure my colleagues PPSs will agree with me that we need clearly to define road alignments by Sworn Land Surveyors in order to construct new roads. I believe that we need to develop alternative approaches for smarter strategies as we are in an economically constrained situation. I wonder whether we could propose re-profiling and compacting of track roads to render them *carrossable* pending any ultimate solution in the form of asphalt laying which would depend on availability of road alignment.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Quiet! Continue, Minister! Continue!

Dr Ramdhany: Any problem, honourable?

(*Interruptions*)

An hon. Member: *Pena manièrè!*

An hon. Member: Shame!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, no more comments. Order! No more comments from this side, please!

Please, hon. Dr. Ramdhany, continue!

(*Interruptions*)

Order!

An hon. Member: *Ale dir Paul Berenger ta boufon!*

The Deputy Speaker: Look at me! Continue the debate!

Dr. Ramdhany: I am sure that we may provide comfort to many households along such roads awaiting to be constructed. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, many plots of agricultural...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea! You want to address me?

Mr Ameer Meea: You? I am...

The Deputy Speaker: Why are you addressing over there? Or are you talking to yourself?

Mr Ameer Meea: I am not addressing anyone...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea, I just saw you whispering to yourself or to somebody. Please don't do that again nor do you comment on what I have said. Please!

Mr Ameer Meea: I was not commenting nor whispering. I don't know what you heard, but I was not addressing to you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Continue!

Dr Ramdhany: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I hope you see that he needs to put his mask well; he is not. I don't know what he is doing here in the Assembly...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Dr. Ramdhany: He needs to put his mask well sitting here...

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

(*Interruptions*)

Order!

An hon. Member: *Carrosse so la tête aussi ensam.*

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

(*Interruptions*)

Hon. Assirvaden!

(*Interruptions*)

Order! Hon. Assirvaden! Last time I hear you uttering any kind of words!

(*Interruptions*)

No, no, don't tell me!

(*Interruptions*)

Hon. Assirvaden, out! Hon. Dr. Ramdhany, withdraw the word 'couillon'. Straight away!

Dr Ramdhany: I withdraw ...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Out! Continue!

Dr. Ramdhany: Many plots of agricultural land of small planters have remained unexploited for many years for many reasons, including –

1. the respective owners have grown old and their children may not be interested in agricultural activities for different reasons;
2. the children of the aged land owners have settled down in other countries and may not return in the foreseeable future;
3. the operational cost for small plots is no longer cost-effective;
4. the unavailability of labour and difficult or costly access to mechanical equipment, and
5. the returns from sugarcane is no longer attractive for smaller plots.

I wonder whether we could strategise to create clusters of such unexploited land and make them available to youth cooperatives with the benefit of technical support from graduates in agricultural science.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while we have been hit by the pandemic, we have not put a halt to infrastructural development. The National Development Unit, Road Development Authority, the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit and the local authority have been collaborating effectively to produce new road infrastructure and upgrade existing ones. We are also increasing the stock of community amenities.

I note with much appreciation that my constituency has benefitted from the effective collaboration of these institutions. The RDA upgraded many classified roads such as Goodlands, Daruty, Sottise, Vale village and, as PPS, I appreciated the cleaning of drains of many main roads of Goodlands after a long time and it helped to drain rain water without any difficulty.

My constituents and economic operators of the region are very pleased to note that a new bypass has been constructed to connect Pavillon, Cap Malheureux to Anse La Raie, St Francois and Calodyne through a more direct and shorter road infrastructure and the widening of Chemin Vingt-Pieds Grand' Baie is welcomed by all.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the TMRSU will be constructing a bus terminal with associated facilities near the Poudre d'Or Hospital to provide comfort to patients and their respective families as well as residents of the region. This has remained a long standing infrastructural gap in this part of the country, which will be effectively addressed throughout the collaboration of different agencies. The TMRSU has also reshaped a section of the road near the Belin Kovil to improve road safety as this black spot has witnessed many road accidents. The light emitting road studs which are solar operated in line with the Government's green energy policy placed along the classified roads are of great help to drivers, especially between sunset and sunrise by clearly defining the road boundaries and I am very grateful to the TMRSU for these improvements in the constituency. And not to forget the bus shelters that have been built around the constituency, for example, the bus shelter at Cap Malheureux built near a local dispensary in view of helping our elders.

In Fond du Sac, there was a great concern by inhabitants about the pollution caused by five stone crushers around the village. Let me assure the House that a restrictive sign board of 12 tonnes on Forbach Lane and Branch Road have effectively reduced the pollution

and decreased the risk of accidents. The Rivière du Rempart District Council has constructed roads and resurfaced while much on-site progress has been noted with regard to the construction of the Goodlands Market. A new parking space completed at Multipurpose Complex of Petit Raffray and a new one is near completion next to the cemetery of Cap Malheureux. With the economic recovery programme by the Government to the local authority and my recommendations, many roads have been resurfaced and a new road, namely Iranien Road in Reunion Maurel was constructed after more than 20 years.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as a doctor previously working as '*médecin à domicile*', I had to use the link road between Melville and Goodlands (also known as Kallee Road) whereby the state of the road was not in a good condition. As a PPS, I have worked relentlessly with the officers and the hon. Mahendranuth Sharma Hurreeram, Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development, to be able to resurface the road. Today, I am pleased to announce that Works Order is being issued to construct the link road. Possibly, works will start in July.

To be noted, this is a very critical connecting road between the coastal regions from Calodyne, Grand Gaube, Melville and will prove to be of great importance for connectivity between the regions to access the Goodlands market awaiting completion in 2021-2022. It will also ease the life of planters and fishermen who make daily use of this link road.

The NDU is also working on possibilities of constructing Reservoir Road at Roche Terre over nearly 0.5 km which will greatly improve connectivity between the different localities and reduce pressure on the traffic along the main road between Grand Gaube, Roche Terre and Goodlands.

I propose that the construction of a football ground at Roche Terre and a multipurpose complex be positively considered as soon as the economic situation improves, whereby financial clearance is already given to the Beach Authority to complete the levelling and turfing of Melville and Pointe Aux Canonniers football ground.

Over and above the afore-mentioned construction of flood mitigation measures at Fond du Sac, I wish to inform the House that the NDU has constructed a major drain network across the locality opposite Pereybere Public Beach.

The NDU will further appoint a new consultant and contractor to complete the works remaining in Camp Carol Drain Project.

It is a pleasure to resurface the School Lane of Petit Raffray and Roche Terre villages for the benefit of many students who are going to resume school.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am also pleased to inform this House that the NDU is working on providing mini-soccer pitches at Sottise, Réunion Maurel, Petit Raffray and Pointe aux Canonniers for which we certainly need the financial support with improvement of public finance.

My constituency also needs a swimming pool at St Antoine, Goodlands where land is already available. I hope that this project will positively be considered when the economy takes off.

With these words, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I propose to end my address in this august Assembly. I remain grateful to my constituents for having me elected to represent them at this level. I wish to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for meeting the daunting challenges to present the economic roadmap with such brilliance amidst highly turbulent, volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous global and domestic economic environment.

I should not end my exposé, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, without thanking you for your patience and my gratitude goes to the hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Prime Minister of Mauritius, for the trust he has laid in allowing me to represent his Party in the last General elections.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. We'll break one hour for dinner.

At 7.37 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 8.44 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated. Hon. Fabrice David!

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West: M. le président, j'interviens pour la deuxième fois dans le cadre de la présentation du budget de l'État. Et il y a exactement un an et deux jours, je clôturais mon premier discours sur le Budget 2020-2021 en me référant à la *Mauritius Investment Corporation* et je me cite, moi-même, chose que je n'ai pas pour habitude de faire –

« (...) comme un monstre qui va jongler avec nos milliards dans l'opacité la plus totale. »

Le mois dernier, le 7 mai pour être précis, le Fonds Monétaire International émettait un communiqué de presse pour remettre les pendules mauriciennes à l'heure des bonnes pratiques bancaires internationales en demandant à la banque de Maurice de se désengager de l'actionnariat de la *MIC* et en réclamant que son financement passe par le processus budgétaire de l'État.

Par conséquent, on se serait attendu en toute logique que le ministre des Finances vienne nous expliquer dans son discours sur le Budget 2021-2022 comment il envisageait de restructurer la *MIC* pour prendre en compte les recommandations du FMI et comment l'État allait prendre le relais pour respecter l'engagement déjà pris par la *MIC* auprès des sociétés sous perfusion. À mon grand étonnement, dans le budget, la *MIC* n'est mentionnée qu'une seule fois et là encore au sujet d'un investissement d'un milliard de roupies afin de remédier à la pénurie d'eau qui sévit depuis longtemps à Rodrigues. Alors il s'agit évidemment d'un bon projet mais avec le mauvais financement. Nos frères et sœurs de Rodrigues ont, bien entendu, besoin de finances publiques pour améliorer leur accès à l'eau mais dois-je rappeler que la *MIC* avait été créée spécifiquement pour aider les entreprises systémiques affectées par l'effet économique de la COVID-19 et en plus dans une logique de retour sur l'investissement. Où se trouve donc la cohérence de cette démarche?

Cela ne nous suffisait-il donc pas d'être sur la liste grise du groupe d'action financière et sur la liste noire de l'Union européenne des centres financiers. Le Trésor public cherche désormais et ouvertement à croiser le fer avec le Fonds Monétaire International. Pour couronner le tout, il ne manquerait plus que ce soit également la *MIC* qui fournisse les R 5 milliards que l'État devra verser à Betamax suite au jugement rendu aujourd'hui par le conseil privé.

Si la *MIC* ne figure qu'une seule fois dans le budget, l'*Economic Development Board*, l'EDB, est quant à lui omniprésent. Il est mentionné à 12 reprises dans le discours du ministre et 18 fois dans l'annexe principal à tel point qu'on a l'impression que le ministère des Finances, du plan et du développement économique a abdiqué devant ses responsabilités.

A la section 86 du budget, nous apprenons que l'EDB mettra sur pied des commissions pour la facilitation du Commerce et des affaires, les exportations, l'investissement, le développement sectoriel et les services financiers. En gros l'EDB va tout

faire. Mais augmenter les pouvoirs d'une telle institution qui n'est pas redevable au Parlement, c'est d'accroître l'opacité dans laquelle s'organise la relance économique du pays. Pourtant cette relance, nous y sommes condamnés car l'île Maurice est aujourd'hui économiquement à genoux et nous attendions évidemment beaucoup de ce budget 2021/2022 car il intervient à un moment de notre histoire sans précédent marqué par une pandémie qui a pris en otage notre planète.

Je dois avouer que j'ai eu de l'espoir en entendant au début du discours du ministre, les trois axes stratégiques de ce que je pensais être les contours d'une nouvelle vision pour faire face à une nouvelle normalité, Redressement, Renaissance et Résilience. Mais, malheureusement, j'ai vite déchanté lorsque j'ai écouté et entendu une série de mesures palliatives à portée limitée, sans réelle vision d'ensemble et souvent sortie des catalogues budgétaires précédents et présentée sous un nouveau *packaging*.

M. le président, avant d'aborder quelques secteurs spécifiques de ce budget, je souhaiterais dire quelques mots sur les items qui concernent la circonscription 01, GRNW/Port Louis Ouest, j'ai pris note dans le discours sur le budget des R 343 millions allouées à la construction et à la modernisation des drains à Pailles, Plaine Lauzun, Cité Richelieu, Pointe aux Sables et la Tour Koenig et j'ai d'ailleurs une question parlementaire à ce sujet adressée demain au ministre des Infrastructures nationales et du développement communautaire. Et bien que j'accueille favorablement la mise en place d'un projet MUGA à Pointe aux Sables, j'espère que l'annonce dans le budget de la construction et la rénovation des 25aires de jeux pour enfant, 35 terrains de mini-foot et autres infrastructures sportives ne laissera pas en bord de route les familles et les enfants de ma circonscription.

J'ai d'ailleurs soulevé dans cette Chambre le 25 mai dernier, l'état de délabrement du jardin d'enfants de la Butte et d'autres espaces publics municipaux qui ont un cruel besoin d'être réhabilités et verdis. Et justement ce ne sont pas uniquement nos villes et nos villages qui ont besoin de se faire verdir mais c'est toute notre économie, ce qui m'amène à mon premier volet sectoriel, celui de l'économie verte.

L'économie verte qui n'est d'ailleurs jamais mentionnée en tant que telle alors qu'elle est visiblement appelée à être un nouveau pilier économique. Mais elle n'est, malheureusement, pas présentée comme un modèle économique mais plus comme un chapelet de bonnes intentions qui sont souvent déconnectées entre elles.

La principale concerne l'industrie des énergies vertes. J'ai pris bonne note de deux ambitieux et nécessaires objectifs à l'horizon 2030, à savoir la montée en puissance des sources d'énergies renouvelables à hauteur de 60% dans notre bouquet énergétique et l'élimination totale du charbon. Il s'agit évidemment d'une finalité louable mais je peine à croire à une réelle transition énergétique lorsque je note que les deux précédents budgets prévoyaient déjà une part d'énergies renouvelables à 35% pour 2025 annoncée dans le Budget 2019/2020, puis 40% pour 2030 annoncée dans le Budget 2020/2021, alors que *Statistics Mauritius* nous informe que nous plafonnons difficilement à 23,9% d'énergies renouvelables pour l'année 2020. La feuille de route prévoit donc de passer de moins de 25% à 60% en 9 ans alors que les budgets se suivent en tournant en rond sur plusieurs projets verts.

Le budget de l'année dernière avait annoncé, par exemple, la mise en place du *Scheme Medium Scale Distributed Generation* pour les entreprises à hauteur de 10 mégawatt photovoltaïques afin de permettre aux bénéficiaires de produire de l'électricité pour leur propre consommation et de vendre le surplus au réseau national. Un an après, l'étude technique approfondie de ce *Scheme* démarre à peine au niveau du CEB. L'ancien budget prévoyait l'installation de 25 mégawatt de panneaux solaires en toiture des bâtiments publics et résidentiels. Un an après, les toitures elles sont toujours bien là, fort heureusement, mais sans le moindre panneau photovoltaïque installé.

Le budget 2020-2021 proclamait fièrement la mise en service d'un système de stockage d'énergie par batterie d'une capacité de 14 MW pour intégrer davantage d'énergie renouvelable intermittente.

Le budget 2021-2022 essaie subtilement de masquer le fait que seuls 4 MW de stockage ont été mis en place et je préfère ne pas évoquer l'avant-dernier budget qui présentait le volet énergétique des *Smart Cities*, censées générer une partie de leur propre électricité à partir de sources renouvelables. Aujourd'hui, le concept de ces nouvelles villes dites intelligentes et vertes ne figurent même plus au budget national, ce qui d'ailleurs est une incompréhensible contradiction par rapport à la relance économique qui, nous dit-on, va être alimentée par le secteur de la construction.

Comment croire donc, M. le président, au passage de 25% à 60% d'énergies renouvelables et de 40% aujourd'hui à 0% de charbon dans notre mix énergétique d'ici 9 ans, lorsque ces mesures sont annoncées dans un budget où pas une seule fois la *Mauritius Renewable Energy Agency* (MARENA) n'est mentionnée ? Cette agence s'étant aujourd'hui

d'ailleurs le reflet d'un flagrant aveu d'inaction et d'échec. Mon collègue, l'honorable Osman Mahomed, y reviendra d'ailleurs dans son intervention.

Comment comprendre les enjeux environnementaux et les gains économiques de l'efficacité énergétique lorsque le dernier rapport disponible de l'*Energy Efficiency Management Office* date de 2018 ? Comment croire à une transparence politique tarifaire de l'énergie dans notre pays alors que l'*Utility Regulatory Authority (URA)* n'est mentionnée qu'une seule fois en annexe du budget, et là aussi pour annoncer simplement une révision de la composition de son *board* ?

Au chapitre de la gestion des déchets solides, le dernier rapport du directeur de l'audit vient pointer du doigt la démesure des dépenses gouvernementale, ainsi que l'inefficacité du processus. Sur les quatre dernières années, l'État a dépensé en moyenne R 738 millions par an et à cette somme se rajoutent R 990 millions, presqu'un milliard de roupies de dépenses des collectivités locales pour les services de collecte des déchets. Le rapport de l'audit précise d'ailleurs que le ministère de l'Environnement ne semble pas avoir de plan efficace pour transformer le processus de collecte et d'élimination des déchets solides.

Alors certes, j'entends régulièrement le ministre défendre une recommandable économie circulaire et j'ai pris note dans le budget 2021-2022, de l'enveloppe de R 200 millions pour la mise en place de trois déchetteries, six usines de compostage, 400 éco-poubelles autour de l'île et 50,000 poubelles pour les ménages.

Pour autant, je me pose la question, à quoi servent des poubelles de tri des déchets lorsque nous n'avons pas de système efficace de collecte sélective et que nous n'avons pas de réelle industrie de recyclage sur place ? Il nous faut booster le partenariat public-privé sur cette question cruciale pour l'état insulaire que nous sommes, avec un principal centre d'enfouissement à bout de souffle.

La gestion des déchets, c'est la gestion de l'espace, de la matière et des ressources. Formons nos jeunes aux technologies de l'environnement, invitons les sociétés qui ont de l'expérience en matière de recyclage, créons nos propres entreprises locales, développons les métiers verts et dynamisons une réelle économie du déchet. Et je vais même aller plus loin, M. le président, en affirmant que nous devons nous décomplexer sur la question du *waste to energy*, et encore plus à la lecture du rapport de la Banque mondiale d'avril 2021 sur la sortie de crise de la pandémie pour l'île Maurice. Ce rapport mentionne à la section dédiée à la *National Solid Waste Management Strategy and I quote -*

“The sector could benefit from recognising the energy generated from waste to energy facilities as renewable power that counts towards the country’s renewable energy goals. This, coupled with feed in tariff for electricity generated from waste processing facilities, could provide strong system support for solid waste project development.”

M. le président, contrairement à ce que certains peuvent penser, la valorisation énergétique n'est pas un opposant de l'économie circulaire dans la mesure où elle concerne essentiellement des déchets qui ne sont ni recyclables, ni compostables et nous pouvons prendre exemple sur le Singapour qui, malgré sa surface, exploite quatre unités de *waste to energy*. Alors oublions nos querelles du passé à ce sujet pour nous concentrer sur les solutions de l'avenir et cet avenir, M. le président, passe par un leadership convaincu et convainquant pour une authentique et transversale économie verte.

Ce que préconisait précisément le rapport du Programme des Nations Unies *Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE)* auquel a participé notre pays en 2014 sous l'impulsion de la commission Maurice île durable et Maurice était alors l'un des cinq pays participant au *PAGE* avec le Burkina Faso, la Mongolie, le Pérou et le Sénégal. Le programme *PAGE* était une réponse au document final de la conférence des Nations Unies Rio+20, intitulé « l'Avenir que nous voulons », qui reconnaît l'économie verte comme un vecteur de développement durable et d'éradication de pauvreté, tout en promouvant de nouveaux emplois et des technologies propres et en réduisant les risques environnementaux.

Il s'agissait d'un véritable projet de transformation de nos structures économiques avec une approche holistique intégrant sept secteurs : l'agriculture, l'énergie, l'industrie manufacturière, le tourisme, le transport, l'eau et les déchets. Le rapport de l'époque faisait des recommandations ingénieuses et pragmatiques dans chaque secteur en matière de fiscalité, de financement, de législation, de réforme institutionnelle, d'éducation et de formation. Et selon les analyses de ce rapport, les investissements dans cette économie verte auraient contribué à de fortes retombées économiques pour notre pays, générant un PIB supérieur de 6% en comparaison avec un scenario d'investissement de *Business as usual* à l'horizon 2035.

Mais nous connaissons l'histoire en 2015, le nouveau régime en place a souhaité à tout prix éradiquer les projets portant la marque du Dr. Ramgoolam et en comparaison, 6 ans après, nous nous retrouvons avec un budget qui prévoit la création d'un *National*

Environment Cleaning Authority avec un capital de départ de R 100 millions sous l'égide du bureau du Premier ministre, pour être le fer de lance du programme national de nettoyage alors que le budget 2019-2020 prévoyait déjà un *Centralised Cleaning Coordination Committee* sous l'égide du ministère du *Local Government*, qui était censé faire exactement la même chose.

Il ne s'agit donc pas là d'économie verte ou même d'économie circulaire mais de la circularité d'une économie qui tourne en rond et qui nous mène en bateau. Et c'est ce même bateau qui m'amène à notre océan, censé représenter un autre pilier important de notre économie et là encore, M. le président, je me dois de préciser que l'économie bleue comme le précise à juste titre le rapport d'avril 2017 de la Banque Mondiale « *The Ocean Economy in Mauritius : making it happen, making it last* » a été initiée à Maurice en 2013 sous le Gouvernement Travailliste à travers le *Ocean Economy Road Map for Mauritius*. Il s'agissait d'une feuille de route sur 12 ans avec l'objectif de doubler la contribution de l'économie bleue au PIB à l'horizon 2025, créant au passage 35,000 emplois.

Imaginez donc, M. le président, si le gouvernement *Lepep* avait eu la décence et l'intelligence de suivre ce *Ocean Economy Road Map*, nous serions aujourd'hui fort probablement en train de récolter l'or bleu de notre océan pour naviguer moins aléatoirement vers une sortie de la crise. Et contrairement à ce que laisse penser le budget 2021-2022, l'économie de l'océan ne se résume pas seulement à l'industrie de la pêche mais recouvre également d'autres produits de la mer, les énergies renouvelables marines, les services maritimes, les activités portuaires, la biotechnologie marine ou encore le pétrole et le gaz *off-shore*.

Alors, tout cela peut nous sembler bien éloigné de notre réalité aujourd'hui et pourtant l'île Maurice est considérée comme l'un des plus grands territoires économiques au monde avec une superficie totale de zone économique exclusive de 2,3 millions km² comprenant 396,000 km² de plateau continental géré conjointement avec la République des Seychelles. Et le plus navrant pour nous, pour ne pas dire le plus insultant, c'est que l'existence des produits pétroliers dans la zone d'exploitation commune a été évoquée par des experts internationaux et que le gouvernement seychellois a déjà alloué des permis d'exploration à deux entreprises internationales. Les Seychelles et le Japon ont même conclu un accord pour entamer des recherches pétrolières conjointes pour sonder la zone économique exclusive des Seychelles car dans ce pays il y a une véritable politique déployée autour de la potentielle découverte de gisements d'hydrocarbures, de pétrole et de gaz dans les eaux territoriales des Seychelles.

À Maurice, le seul hydrocarbure marin que le gouvernement semble avoir songé de regarder et là aussi tardivement, c'est celui déversé dans nos eaux par le Wakashio. Et là aussi, je note une grande omission dans le discours sur le budget, aucune attention particulière pour les professionnels de la mer et les habitants de la zone côtière du Sud-Est victimes de la plus grande marée noire de notre histoire. Pour retrouver les seules deux mentions du Wakashio dans le Budget, il faut aller explorer non pas les fonds marins mais un document qui s'intitule : *Public Sector Investment Programme 2021-2026* à l'annexe 3, du *National Environment and Climate Change Fund*, qui d'ailleurs je me rends compte s'appelle également le *National Environment Fund* dans certains documents, où un montant de R 60 millions est alloué au cours de l'année financière 2021-2022 dans le cadre du programme de *monitoring* environnemental. Et en ce qui concerne la communauté des pêcheurs, et plus précisément l'attribution des 500 cartes professionnelle, j'inviterai évidemment le ministre de la Pêche à faire preuve de transparence et d'équité, car il y a selon moi plus de 2000 pêcheurs en attente de régularisation.

De plus M. le président, le montant forfaitaire de R 52, 500 proposé dans le Budget pour chaque pêcheur âgé de 65 ans qui rend ou qui transfère sa carte de pêcheur est évidemment dérisoire. Imaginez trente secondes un professionnel qui au bout de cinq décennies de pénible et dangereux travail ne reçoit que l'équivalent de cinq mois de salaire minimum. Et justement au sujet de la dangerosité du métier de pêcheur, je regrette n'avoir absolument rien trouvé dans le Budget et ses annexes concernant la mise à disposition d'équipements et de dispositifs de sécurité pour les pêcheurs, alors que nous continuons tragiquement de perdre des hommes en mer.

Par contre, ce que j'ai bien retrouvé dans l'annexe principal du budget, c'est la surprenante abolition du *Fisherman Investment Trust*. Ce fond d'investissement lancé en 2006 et entré en vigueur en janvier 2007 est un autre héritage du Parti travailliste que le gouvernement *Lepep* de 2014 n'a pas su ou n'as pas voulu entretenir, alors qu'il était une source de soutien financier pour notre secteur de la pêche. Le *Fisherman Investment Trust* avait un capital autorisé de R 65 millions composé de 6,5 million d'actions évaluées à R 10 chacune. Le gouvernement du Dr. Ramgoolam avait alors souscrit 1,5 millions d'actions au nom des pêcheurs enregistrés de Maurice et de Rodrigues qui sont donc aujourd'hui actionnaires de ce fond. Alors que le gouvernement du jour prévoit de démanteler ce fond, il doit d'abord nous en expliquer la raison, venir dire à la population le montant des capitaux et surtout donner la garantie aux pêcheurs qu'ils percevront tous leurs dûs.

Je veux également avoir un mot, M. le président, pour nos gardes-pêche qui souffrent également et cruellement d'un manque de matériel adéquat.

D'ailleurs, le dernier rapport du directeur de l'audit viens épingle le ministère de la Pêche qui a dépensé R 59 millions pour l'acquisition de bateaux patrouilleurs entre juillet 2016 et juin 2020 alors que sur les 20 bateaux disponibles au poste de *fisheries*, seuls 8 étaient opérationnels et j'ai appris récemment que ce nombre a encore diminué et je préfère ne pas évoquer davantage que nos *fisheries officers* n'ont pas reçu d'uniforme de travail depuis cinq ans et que les nouveaux arrivés ne reçoivent aucune formation de ce nom. Pour avoir discuté avec certains, ils ont l'air complètement perdu, ils ne connaissent même pas leur mission première.

M. le président, à vrai dire les budgets de ce présent régime se suivent et se ressemblent dans le mirage économique autour de ce qui se vante être le pilier bleu de notre croissance. Le Budget 2020-2021 avait annoncé un montant de R 2,2 milliards comme investissement dans un brise-lames, un port de pêche et le terminal de croisière et à ce jour, les tonnes de thons pêchés dans notre zone économique exclusive vont être débarqués dans le port de pêche de Victoria aux Seychelles pour être traités avant d'être embarqués sur un navire frigorifique qui après revient vers nous pour la mise en conserve. Une véritable aberration économique et écologique. Avec une telle approche locale, nous resterons fermés à cet or bleu qui nous échappe d'année en année alors que notre océan lui, nous est ouvert.

Et en parlant d'ouverture, M. le président, ou plutôt de réouverture, nous avons tous pris bonne note de celle de nos frontières par étape et à partir du 15 juillet prochain. J'ai notamment lu comme tout le monde dans le Budget, l'objectif visé de 650, 000 touristes au cours des douze prochains mois, ce qui correspond, j'ai fait un petit calcul rapide, à l'arrivée de 1,780 touristes par jour, autrement dit, à l'atterrissement quotidien de six gros porteurs remplis à 80 % et de cinq avions régionaux. Je n'ose imaginer que cette reprise de notre activité aérienne et touristique puisse se faire dans le dos d'*Air Mauritius* qui transporte généralement plus de 40 % des touristes qui visitent notre pays.

Or, dans son discours sur le Budget 2021-2022, comme l'a souligné également l'honorable Uteem, le ministre des Finances n'a pas une seule fois fait référence à notre compagnie d'aviation nationale et ce qui interpelle encore plus, M. le président, c'est qu'alors que nous ouvrons nos frontières aériennes dans un mois, la *Watershed Meeting* qui devait se tenir au cours de ce mois-ci et qui devait décider de l'avenir de notre transporteur national à,

quant à elle, été repoussée de sept mois. En janvier 2022, cela fera donc vingt mois que *MK* sera sous administration volontaire. Vingt mois d'asphyxie pour notre Paille en Queue, vingt mois de détresse financière et psychologique pour les employés d'*Air Mauritius* et d'*Airmate*, vingt mois d'honoraires pour les administrateurs.

Le Budget 2020-2021 nous avait fait espérer à hauteur des R 9 milliards alloués au titre du *National Resilience Fund* pour notre compagnie d'aviation nationale et qui devait prendre, selon les propos du ministre des Finances dans son intervention du 23 juin 2020 je cite –

« La forme d'une injection de capital dans la société »

Et ce qui m'avait frappé à l'époque quand j'avais lu ce *Budget Estimates*, c'est que cette ligne de R 9 milliards avait été soigneusement libellée comme - *support to national air carrier* et non pas comme *support to Air Mauritius Ltd*, au cas où le *rescue plan* des administrateurs ne recommande la création d'une nouvelle société, comme par exemple, *Mauritian Airways*. Ce qui serait pour moi une monumentale erreur de stratégie car elle balayerait d'un revers d'aile cinq décennies de réputation et de visibilité de notre Paille en Queue dans le ciel international. Alors certes, le ministre des Finances nous a détaillé lors de sa réponse à une question parlementaire, les sommes déboursées par l'État pour aider *Air Mauritius*. Mais R 14 millions de soutien pour opérer cinq vols de fret vers Paris, ce n'est pas une injection de capital, M. le président. R 558 millions pour le *Wage Assistance Scheme*, ce n'est pas une injection de capital, M. le président. R 1,9 milliards fournies au titre d'une garantie à l'Association internationale du transport aérien, ce n'est pas une injection de capital, M. le président. Pourquoi donc n'avoir pas injecté les R 9 milliards pour soutenir financièrement notre compagnie d'aviation comme le font d'autres gouvernements qui sont dotés d'un transporteur national ? Et je note au passage dans le *Budget Estimates 2021-2022, 2022-2023*, que rien n'est prévu cette fois pour notre *National Air Carrier*.

Hasard du calendrier, si toutefois le hasard existe, M. le président, j'interviens sur le budget de l'État précisément le jour où *Air Mauritius* célèbre, aujourd'hui, son 54^{ème} anniversaire. À sa création, le 14 juin 1967, je n'étais pas né ; comme d'ailleurs la plupart des membres de cette Assemblée.

An hon. Member: *Dinozaure !*

Mr David: Certains l'étaient visiblement ; devant être assez jeunes à l'époque...

An hon. Member: *Mo pa dinosaure ein !*

Mr David:... et aujourd’hui, 54 ans après, notre Paille en Queue symbole de notre rayonnement à l’international, pièce maîtresse de notre patrimoine national et moteur incontournable de notre relance économique, se retrouve en grande détresse à cause d’une pandémie, qui est venue amplifier les effets d’une mauvaise gestion. Alors évidemment, il faudra identifier les responsabilités, mais l’heure immédiate est au sauvetage de notre compagnie d’aviation nationale. Il faut sauver le soldat MK, et avec lui, ses troupes qui arborent le même uniforme.

M. le président, avant de terminer, en cette période de pandémie, à un moment où notre pays continue de subir les conséquences sanitaires, sociales et économiques de cette deuxième vague de COVID-19, je ne veux pas terminer mon propos sans exprimer une pensée solidaire aux familles qui ont perdu l’un des leurs durant ces dernières semaines, et je pense notamment aux proches des patients dialysés qui ont perdu la vie ; et nous avons d’ailleurs tragiquement appris ce matin même, le décès d’une patiente dialysée de 44 ans. Depuis le 5 mars dernier, M. président, date à laquelle nous avons été frappés par une nouvelle vague pandémique, 1,061 personnes ont contracté la COVID-19 dans notre pays et Maurice compte à ce jour 378 cas actifs selon le service d’information gouvernementale, dont 54 qui sont toujours au *New ENT Hospital*. A chacune de ces personnes hospitalisées, j’adresse mes sincères souhaits de guérison, et à notre personnel soignant et vaccinant, j’exprime mon ovation la plus vive.

Pour revenir au budget et pour clôturer mon intervention, M. le président, je termine avec une citation d’Albert Einstein, qui disait la chose suivante sur la résolution des problèmes, *and I quote –*

« We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them. »

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our National Budget is no longer about even thinking out of the box, but it is about throwing the box itself and creating a new one. À celles et ceux de l’autre côté de la Chambre qui nous gouvernent aujourd’hui, je leur demande donc non pas une mise à jour mais un changement de logiciel. Et Mesdames et Messieurs de la majorité, en attendant que nous vous remplacions très prochainement, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr David:...de grâce...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr David:...de grâce...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Continue! Continue!

Mr David:... faites donc preuve d'audace politique et d'innovation économique car le monde de demain frappe à notre porte dès aujourd'hui.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister Jagutpal!

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am addressing this House today with a sense of great pride, a sense of feeling of hope for a brighter future for our country, for our people.

Before I get to my speech, I would like to react to some of the remarks made by Members of the Opposition. I am referring to hon. David and to other Members of the Opposition who kept on criticizing the economic incentives in this Budget on debt, on unemployment, on figures of unemployment, on Wakashio and on Blue Economy. At the same time, I hope that they realise that no country in the world has been spared with COVID-19, with the economic downturn; Mauritius is the country that has been able to sail through these difficult situations, at the same time, preserving the socio-economic balance.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will also refer to what the Leader of Opposition, hon. Xavier-Luc Duval has said. He kept on saying that we should have pre-ordered vaccines. At the same time, it is good to remind the House that, at a time, when dozens of vaccines were at an early stage of clinical trial, we were called to order vaccines. Would you imagine, if these vaccines would not have been approved, the same Leader of Opposition would have come and tell us that we have wasted taxpayers' money and we have ordered vaccines.

Now, again, I will come to another Member who also stated about the Fact- Finding Committee and that I have enough on my plate. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in my plate, I can assure the House that there is no *tradic d'armes*. In my plate, there is no *tradic d'armes*, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and this is where dignity matters.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me come back to my speech. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir,

...

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Mohamed: *Dir zot ki figir to ti pe kozer...*

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir...

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Mohamed: *Dir zot ki figir to ti pe dir!*

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Mohamed: *Dir zot!*

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some Members or any Member who is feeling aggrieved, this is not my problem. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is not my problem...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed!

Dr. Jagutpal: ...if any Member is feeling aggrieved.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed! Hon. Mohamed...

(*Interruptions*)

Order!

An hon. Member: *To kav ecoutter aster!*

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Mohamed: *To pena mem couraz ...*

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order, hon. Mohamed!

Mr Mohamed: Tell him first, order!

(*Interruptions*)

Tell him!

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order in the House!

Mr Mohamed: He makes allegation...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order in the House!

An hon. Member: *To pe envi al lakaz boner!*

An hon. Member: *Pann cite to nom!*

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Jagutpal! Hon. Members!

(*Interruptions*)

Hon. Members! I require this debate to be conducted in an orderly manner. No personal attack. Thank you very much.

Hon. Minister!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, coming back to my speech, the hon. Minister of Finance has, once again, ...

Mr Mohamed: On a point of order! If he says he did not mention my name, tell him to say when he talks about *tradic d'armes*, was it me or ...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

(*Interruptions*)

Order!

Mr Mohamed: Tell him to say was that meant for me.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed! One second, ...

(*Interruptions*)

Order!

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Mohamed: Coward!

(Interruptions)

Coward!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Let's everyone take a break!

At 9.24 p.m. the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.29 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much! We have an orderly conduct, no point of order! Please continue hon. Minister.

Mr Mohamed: No point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

The Deputy Speaker: You have...

Mr Mohamed: Yes, I have ...

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, please, let's hear you.

Mr Mohamed: My point of order was very simple. The hon. Member said only one thing. There are two things in his speech. He said that he was referring to someone who said: he has enough on his plate. The only speech today where someone said that was me when I referred to him by name having enough on his plate. And he said at least he does not have *tradic d'armes*, thereby meaning that I am an arms trafficker. If he did not...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Mohamed: If he did not mean it was me, at least, he can clarify. So, otherwise it would be imputing motives and that would be against the Standing Order. That was simple and direct.

The Deputy Speaker: I got it. Hon. Minister, did you impute anything of that sort of hon. Mohamed being an arms dealer?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have referred to myself, what is in my plate. I have never referred to it ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have not referred to anyone's plate neither to your plate, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is my plate. I have referred to my plate.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! I think he made himself quite clear. He was ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, he did not.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: You asked him a very simple question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir,...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Mohamed: You asked him a simple question.

The Deputy Speaker: Order! I have not given anybody the floor. I am clear that you did not refer at all to hon. Mohamed. Are we correct?

Dr. Jagutpal: I am referring to myself.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much unless you have...

(Interruptions)

Thank you very much.

(Interruptions)

No commenting, please! Fair enough! You have done. Hon. Minister!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we all have to go home. Tomorrow we have to work. We have to work on the budget. . We have got a lot of work to do, especially Members from this side of the House.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister of Finance once again succeeded in presenting a realistic budget in this very challenging context. This budget builds on strong foundation already laid during the last financial year 2020-2021. Under the able guidance of the hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, we have been able to preserve the health and wellness of our citizens amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Mauritius is recognised as one of the most efficient in the world.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, during the first episode of COVID-19 circulation in Mauritius, our Government was faced with a tough choice. On one hand, there was the necessity of preserving the health and safety of our citizens at all costs, on the other hand that of maintaining normal economic activities at the expense of public health.

The Prime Minister, who chairs the High-Level Committee on COVID-19, made no compromise and the health and well-being of the population was safeguarded.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, vaccination enabling our immune system to produce antibodies and sanitary measures are proven tools at our disposal to fight the deadly enemy. Similarly, Budget 2021-2022 will be another precious antidote at our economies disposal for the revival of the economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, health is closely linked to economic growth and prosperity. Government remains committed to sustain the provision of necessary primary, secondary and specialised services, free of cost.

For the Financial Year 2021-2022, my Ministry has been allocated a financial envelope of Rs14.5 billion, out of which Rs10.7 billion have been earmarked for recurrent

expenditure and Rs3.8 billion for infrastructural projects and acquisition of medical equipment and other logistics.

Per capita Government expenditure on health for Financial Year 2021-2022 will be more than Rs11,000 as compared to more than Rs9,000 for the current Financial Year.

My Ministry also undertakes annual evaluation of the Public and Private Health Costs in respect of services offered through the National Health Accounts which is regularly published.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, healthcare costs in Mauritius will continue to rise as the country is highly dependent on the importation of goods, such as pharmaceutical products, medical consumables and equipment.

The high prevalence of NCDs, the long-term management of chronic diseases, emerging and re-emerging communicable diseases, advances in medical technologies and new treatment are also considered as the primary drivers of increasing health care costs in Mauritius. In spite of these rising costs, this budget shows the commitment of Government to continue to invest in high quality healthcare for Mauritians.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, over and above managing the COVID-19 situation since the past year my Ministry has continued to sustain its normal activities and is implementing its policies and projects. For the very first time, the Ministry of Health and Wellness has been able to finalise and launch a Health Sector Strategic Plan in September 2020.

The Strategic Plan covering years 2020 to 2024, proposes a comprehensive set of actions to re-engineer and revamp our healthcare delivery services. In that plan, a lot of emphasis has been placed on customer care, enhancement of primary health care, health promotion, preventive medicine, specialised services and on improving our response to the resurgence of communicable diseases. A Steering Committee set up at the level of my Ministry is already overseeing the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic last year, infrastructural projects undertaken by my Ministry have encountered delays in their implementation. Construction schedules have had to be reviewed but the projects will be implemented in the near future.

Let me now elaborate on some of these projects. Phase I of the New Cancer Hospital at Solferino, that is the renovation of the existing building, has been completed and is already

operational for providing chemotherapy treatment and inpatients services since October 2020. As for Phase 2, construction works of the new building will be completed by October 2021.

The construction of the first phase of the new state of the art Regional Teaching Hospital at Constance, Flacq has started in September 2020, contrary to what hon. Uteem has said that this project has not started. Estimated costs stand at around Rs2.3 billion and works are expected to be completed in 2022. The second phase of the project which comprises a teaching block, an Auditorium and a Super-Speciality Block, is presently being conceptualised. In addition, a new hospital, dedicated to eye care, will be constructed at Réduit Triangle to the tune of around Rs723 m.

Tenders have already been launched and it is expected that construction works would start before the end of this year. Tenders were launched last year but there was no responsive bid.

In line with our decentralisation strategy, the construction of four Mediclinics are expected to be completed by the end of this year, namely at –

- (i) Quartier Militaire;
- (ii) Stanley;
- (iii) Bel Air, and
- (iv) Coromandel.

My Ministry has already awarded contracts for the construction of five new Community Health Centres. These projects are as follows –

- (i) Grand Bay Community Health Centre;
- (ii) Trou d'Eau Douce Community Health Centre;
- (iii) Pointe aux Sables Community Health Centre;
- (iv) St Francois Xavier Community Health Centre, and
- (v) Roche Bois Community Health Centre.

Moreover, renovation works are being undertaken at the former Central School of Nursing in Candos, where the Virology Department of the Central Health Laboratory will be relocated.

My Ministry is also working for the refurbishment of an unused floor at the new building of the Victoria Hospital. Tenders were launched in December 2020 but there were no responsive bids. Same has been reviewed and launched again. Once this floor is operational, it will allow us to increase bed capacity at Victoria Hospital.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, my Ministry is also encompassing the Green Energy concept in our infrastructural projects. In this context, the Development Bank of Mauritius is implementing the installation of photovoltaic panels at the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital.

In October last year, my Ministry also embarked in a vast process of the upgrading and embellishment of our health facilities. Funds were made available under the COVID-19 Projects Development Fund – Economic Recovery Programme. Works are ongoing and they are being carried out by the maintenance teams at hospital level and private contractors.

Thanks to a grant generously offered by the Government of India, action has also been initiated for the construction of six additional health institutions namely –

- (i) Grand Bois Mediclinic;
- (ii) Chemin Grenier Mediclinic;
- (iii) Plaine Magnien Area Health Centre;
- (iv) New Grove Area Health Centre;
- (v) Cap Malheureux Area Health Centre ;
- (vi) Henrietta Area Health Centre, and
- (vii) Bambous Area Health Centre.

My Ministry is also committed to set up a modern warehouse of international standards for the storage of essential drugs, medical consumables and equipment.

In order to meet the growing needs of the country and current standards of safety and compliance, quality and the criteria for accreditation, the construction of a new National Health Laboratory Services Centre will be as well be initiated. This Laboratory with international norms and standards will become a reference in the region.

We will also cater for the increasing number of patients requiring urgent and complex cardiac surgery. In this respect, my Ministry is going ahead with the implementation of a modern Cardiac Centre.

These three projects namely, the modern warehouse, the National Health Laboratory Services Centre and the Modern Cardiac Centre will be implemented at Côte d'Or. In this respect, a lease agreement with Landscope Mauritius Limited for 30 acres of land was signed not later than last week.

For patients undergoing dialysis treatment, a new full-fledged Renal Transplant Unit will be constructed at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital.

The ongoing pandemic has also highlighted the need to set up a dedicated hospital for the treatment of communicable diseases.

My Ministry has thus approached the Development Bank of South Africa to fund the consultancy services for the setting up of an Infectious Diseases Hospital.

My Ministry has besides also embarked on the National e-Health Project to improve the quality and responsiveness of health care services. E-Health services shall enable to digitalise our health record system which will enhance our quality of service.

The e-Health Project would cover all the hospitals, Area Health Centres, Community Health Centres.

The UNDP is assisting my Ministry for the validation of the technical user requirements prepared by the CIB. This process will be finalised by July and I wish here to highlight the precious collaboration of the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, particularly the hon. Minister, who has been helping us in preparing the project.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, COVID-19 might have hindered our time-frame but our resolve remains intact. Our infrastructural projects are on the right track and I wish to heartily congratulate my staff for their dedication in working for the country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the on-going situation also has considerable bearings on worldwide logistics and supply chain. Nevertheless, my Ministry has been able to procure all essential medicines, medical disposables, laboratory supplies and other medical requisites in order to ensure smooth delivery of services.

Moreover, in view of the forthcoming opening of borders and attaining herd immunity through vaccination, my Ministry in collaboration with other Ministries and organisations has relentlessly pursued its efforts to secure adequate quantities of COVID-19 vaccines from various sources.

With the support of the World Health Organisation (WHO), the National Deployment and Vaccination Plan was developed this year. Based on the plan, 400 medical and paramedical staff were imparted appropriate training to carry out the vaccination. At international level, the first COVID-19 vaccines were administered in December 2020. Our vaccination campaign started only few weeks after, in January 2021.

As at this afternoon, some 380,362 persons have already been administered the first dose of vaccine of which 218,501 have already received their second dose.

A National COVID-19 Vaccination Fund has been set up since 30 December 2020 to mobilise and manage funding for the National COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

A Pharmacovigilance mechanism has been put in place with the main objective to facilitate the early detection, investigation and analysis of Adverse Events Following Immunisation.

With the scaling up of the vaccination programme, the need to increase the number of personnel was felt. My Ministry has therefore enlisted the services of 275 Medical and Health Officers and Nurses on contract. In addition, the services of 30 young people under the Youth Employment Programme were enlisted.

Moreover, during this financial year itself, my Ministry, in collaboration with the WHO is implementing the District Health Information Software “DHIS 2”. This open source, web-based, Health Management Information System platform is currently deployed in more than 100 countries.

This E-Reporting System Tool is essential for the strengthening of the Public Health Information Systems, particularly with regard to disease surveillance and the Expanded Programme of Immunisation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our medical and paramedical staff had to carry out a number of new duties which were not anticipated such as –

- (i) contact tracing and screening;
- (ii) counselling contacts of positive cases;
- (iii) securing quarantine facilities;
- (iv) conveyance of persons to be quarantined;
- (v) quarantine duties;

- (vi) carrying out PCR tests;
- (vii) treatment and management of COVID-19 patients, and
- (viii) vaccination in specific conditions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, an Infection Prevention and Control “IPC” Committee has been set up at my Ministry this year with the purpose to provide guidance and directives on infection prevention and control activities across public health care centres in Mauritius. The Committee will ensure that the risks caused by the transmission of preventable infection is minimised.

IPC Sub-Committees have been set up at all regional hospitals and are conducting regular visits to introduce, review and monitor compliance to infection prevention policies and procedures.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as part of the Operational Plan against COVID-19, the Central Health Laboratory in collaboration with the UNDP has implemented the COVID-19 Laboratory Information Management System “LIMS”.

As at end May 2021, some 265,000 records have been created in the COVID-LIMS for the registration of PCR tests. The Airport Health Laboratory set up last year is also using the COVID-LIMS to register PCR tests of inbound passengers.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, an important component of the COVID-LIMS is the introduction of a digital Public Health Passenger Locator Form. This form will replace the four different health forms presently being used to gather information on inbound passengers. The four forms are the –

- (i) Public Health Passenger Locator Form;
- (ii) Public Health COVID-19 Passenger Self Declaration Form
- (iii) COVID-19 Laboratory Request Form, and
- (iv) Health Declaration Form.

Comprising a QR code component, it will need to be filled by passengers prior to travelling to Mauritius and will streamline the entry process at the Airport.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Central Health Laboratory has started conducting COVID-19 sequencing tests for identification of COVID-19 variants. Prior to that, all

COVID-19 positive samples were being sent to WHO collaborating centres abroad for sequencing.

It is worthy to note that Mauritius is among the few countries to have carried out the largest proportion of sequencing on COVID-19 positive cases.

Furthermore, funds have been provided for the upgrading of the E-System at the National Blood Transfusion Service “NBTS” to improve the safety of blood and blood products. Both the National-LIMS and the NBTS systems will be integrated in the National E-Health Project.

As stated earlier, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has been no disruption in the delivery of service and supply chain throughout my Ministry. The same applies to the Pharmacy Sector. Several measures have been taken to ensure effective pharmacy services, including storage and distribution of drugs and medicines.

Some of these measures are as follows –

- (i) The Central Supplies Division at Plaine Lauzun has been decentralised to Castel Warehouse. The Reefer Container for the storage of drugs requiring cold chain has been relocated to the Castel Warehouse. Arrangements have also been made for the installation of a cold room at Castel;
- (ii) The opening of the Castel Warehouse has enabled my Ministry to evacuate part of the warehouse at Coromandel which was not suitable for the storage of drugs;
- (iii) The warehouse at Guibies has been renovated for the storage of medical disposables;
- (iv) The warehouse at Guibies is also being used for the storage of containers which are removed from the Port Area in a timely manner in order to reduce payment of demurrage fees. This has enabled my Ministry to make savings of Rs1 m. monthly;
- (v) The Electronic Inventory Management System developed by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development in January 2020 is being introduced in all our hospital stores.

- (vi) A new triplicate prescription form for Schedule I and II of the Dangerous Drug Act in order to have better control when prescribing dangerous drugs has been introduced last month;
- (vii) For better monitoring of import of precursors and their use, last year, an online platform has been established with the Customs Department of the Mauritius Revenue Authority. This platform will also be used to monitor dangerous drugs, and
- (viii) The Code of Practice for pharmacists under the Pharmacy Council Act is also being finalised.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as part of the strategy to upgrade the health services in the public sector, my Ministry has, inter alia, acquired 90 haemodialysis machines and two Water Treatment Plants for different hospitals and a lithotripsy machine for Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital which is operational since last week.

Moreover, 6 haemodiafiltration machines equipped with portable water treatment plants have already been ordered. These machines will be installed in the ICUs of different regional hospitals and at Souillac Hospital.

My Ministry has also already ordered –

- (i) a 128 Slice CT Scanner for Victoria Hospital which is expected to be delivered by the beginning of August 2021, and
- (ii) a video endoscopy set for Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital is expected to be delivered shortly.

Besides, one Digital Mobile X Ray Machine has already been delivered at Victoria Hospital.

As regards the Trust Fund for Specialised Medical Care, one heart lung machine was installed in 2019 at the Cardiac Centre, Pamplemousses. A second heart lung machine and an Angiography machine are being procured this year.

The Indian Ocean Commission has donated one “ECMO apparatus” for the ENT Hospital. The Indian Ocean Commission will donate one additional ECMO for the Cardiac Centre. The ECMO machine allows for artificial oxygenation of blood. For the better management of healthcare waste, the contract of the installation of a new incinerator at the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital has been awarded. Works have already started.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, under its Economic and Social Development Programme, the Government of Japan is providing equipment worth 300 million Japanese Yen, which consist of thermography units, negative pressure booths, angiography and radiography machines, portable ultrasound scanners and a blood gas analyser.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, for having provided Rs40 m. under the Economic Recovery Programme and Rs50 m. under the COVID-19 Solidary Fund in addition to our yearly provision under Vote and item for acquisition of medical equipment.

As announced by the Minister of Finance, 80 additional haemodialysis machines will be acquired. Moreover, the acquisition of a high tech medical equipment, including a CT-scan for Souillac Hospital and a Cyberknife Robotic Radiosurgery System for advanced cancer treatment for the new Cancer Centre will be effected during the forthcoming financial year.

Regarding patients awaiting surgery, public health institutions have conducted around 47,000 surgeries in 2020 and in spite of lockdown. Yearly average in normal times is around 50,000 cases. 840 open heart surgeries, more than 5,700 cataracts and 580 AV Fistula were carried out among others. From January to April 2021, around 12,500 operations have already been performed.

The Cardiac Centre has been conducting one open heart surgery daily even during confinement. Waiting lists are being closely monitored and extra sessions are carried out in the evenings whenever required to reduce waiting time. Moreover, for procedures such as CT-scan, endoscopy, lithotripsy, MRI, extra sessions are being carried out in order to reduce the waiting list. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me once more to insist that all this were done in very challenging times, when health systems elsewhere were collapsing. Again, I wish to congratulate the medical and paramedical staff of my Ministry.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has developed for the first time, a set of Clinical Guidelines in respect of 36 specialities for the better and harmonised approach for the treatment of patients in hospitals. This guideline is a standardised collection of the *savoir-faire* of our specialists, our consultants and our doctors. They have translated their know-how, their experience into a comprehensive document which will bring equality in the treatment of each patient.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, epidural anaesthesia will be introduced in our public hospitals, once additional posts for anaesthesiologists will be created. Spinal surgery unit at Victoria Hospital and laparoscopy services at the Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital have already been set up. These specialised procedures are carried out by our local doctors.

The Medical Council Act is also being amended in the Finance Bill to make provision for the registration of doctors who have graduated in France. The current Overseas Treatment scheme, currently only applicable to families with a household income ceiling of Rs50,000, is being reviewed. I welcome the raising of the income eligibility criteria for households to Rs100,000. Moreover, my Ministry will work out a framework agreement with private clinics under the same scheme to allow patients to undergo treatment locally if the services are not available in our public hospitals.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, access to market for the procurement of safe and efficient vaccines against COVID-19 is still proving to be a herculean task worldwide. The decision to boost our Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical sector by moving for the setting up a COVID-19 Vaccine manufacturing plant in Mauritius will prove to be a game changer. In this respect, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry welcomes the initiatives announced in the Budget Speech in relation to setting up of Pharmaceutical and Biotechnology industries. The legislative framework voted in the COVID-19 Bill last year already provides for the manufacturing of Pharmaceutical Products in Mauritius. One company has already been issued a licence to set up a pharmaceutical manufacturing plant. However, my Ministry is also coming up with a Medical Healthcare Product Bill this year to replace the Pharmacy Act, and it is in the drafting stage.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our Primary Health Care services are being re-engineered. Maternal and child health services have been upgraded and a Maternal and Child Health Handbook has already been prepared and disseminated in as from February this year. Likewise, with a view to improve the outcome of pregnancy and new-born health, a preconception care policy is being worked out. In this regard, couples planning for pregnancy will be encouraged to attend preconception care clinic. Sexual and reproductive health services will be further enhanced by providing training to all the staff engaged in sexual and reproductive health programmes to respond to the needs of our society. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office will embark on a targeted sensitisation programme on health promotion. Moreover, the "Mauritius Wellness" application to sensitise the community will also be implemented. Since last year, an

“Empowering Programme for Housewives on Healthy Lifestyle” to equip young women and housewives with updated scientific and evidence-based nutrition knowledge and skills is being dispensed.

Cervical Cancer Screening Programme is being carried out according to guidelines laid by experts for early detection and treatment. The screening of cervical and breast cancers is already being carried out in dedicated sessions in all primary health care centres. The exercise will be extended to cover oral and colon cancers also. At present, my Ministry is working on a protocol for a National Screening of Cervical and Colon Cancer.

Action has been initiated for the setting up of a National Cardiac and Renal Registries this year to collect data concerning all patients suffering from cardiac and renal diseases for planning and management of patients. The registries will also enable monitoring, evaluation and policy decisions. The assistance of WHO has been enlisted for the elaboration of a National Service Framework for NCD. As for the next NCD Survey, it is scheduled to start around October/November this year.

My Ministry is also finalising the regulations under the Human Tissue Act to enable renal transplantation in the near future.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a known fact that people with type 2 diabetes are prone to develop renal impairment. With a view to prevent such renal impairment, my Ministry will be introducing new medicines for the management and care of diabetic patients.

The existing regulations for tobacco control are being reviewed for more rigid restrictions in order to curb the importation, sale, consumption of tobacco. Henceforth, plain packaging will be introduced with a new regulation. I welcome the increase in the rate of excise duty by 10% to discourage the consumption of tobacco and alcohol. This month itself, my Ministry opened a new tobacco cessation clinic at Dr. Yves Cantin Community Hospital. More staff will be trained to provide tobacco cessation counselling and advice. New regulations regarding advertisement, sponsorship and restriction on sale and consumption of alcohol and tobacco in public places have been worked out and would be gazetted soon.

Regarding HIV/AIDS, 8,113 cases have been detected among Mauritians. However, it is estimated that the number of people living with the HIV above the age of 15 in Mauritius is 14,000. To eliminate HIV/AIDS by 2030, 95% persons living with HIV should know their status, 95% of those tested positive shall be on Antiretroviral Treatment and 95% of those on treatment shall achieve viral suppression. My Ministry is taking appropriate measures to that

effect. A pilot project for HIV screening and testing of all patients attending the accident and emergency at the Victoria and Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospitals has started since last year.

My Ministry has recently acquired a dedicated caravan to offer better comfort and a package of services in full confidentiality to HIV patients. This caravan will help to screen HIV Syphilis and Hepatitis C.

My Ministry has set up a multi-sectoral HIV Committee to ensure the collaboration of all stakeholders, including NGOs to eliminate HIV by 2030.

As regards the Hepatitis C elimination programme, the treatment has been expanded to all those in need with the collaboration of the civil society. As at now, more than 250 patients have received Hepatitis C treatment. As the programme is rolling out, the Unit is being reinforced to scale up the services offered provided we obtain the required personnel.

A communication campaign through the Health Information, Education and Communication Unit is being worked out to target not only patients undergoing treatment in the Harm Reduction Unit and the AIDS Unit, but also the public at large, including prison inmates. It is expected that Hepatitis C would be eliminated in Mauritius well ahead of the WHO target of 2030.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Dental Services have existed for more than 5 decades. Initially the Dental Services used to provide only extraction. Dental Services now provide a comprehensive oral health package, including oral health promotion and specialised dental services free of charge. My Ministry is planning to introduce a new service for the provision of dentures.

Moreover, specialised Dental Services have already been decentralised to one Mediclinic and two Community Health Centres. These services will be further decentralised to other Mediclinics.

In 2019-2020 Budget Speech, the Government announced the setting up of a Food Standards Agency. A Food Standard Agency Bill is actually under preparation with the help of a WHO Consultant. This Bill will look into all aspects of food safety, that is, from farm to fork, and will situate the responsibilities of each Ministry which will form part of the Food Standards Agency. The Food Standards Agency will be set up in the coming Financial Year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, last year, in November, amendments have been brought to the Food Regulations 1999 to render it mandatory that all freezers and chilled cabinets found

upon commercial premises be equipped with a temperature monitoring device. Temperature monitoring of cold chains of food storage facilities in commercial premises is a crucial element in food control systems which ensures food safety and curb wastage. My Ministry and the WHO Consultant have also prepared a new Food Bill which will be finalised and introduced in the National Assembly shortly.

In order to ensure that drinking water being supplied conforms to the established norms, my Ministry conducts independent tests daily. From July 2020 to May 2021 about 3,600 drinking water samples were collected and analysed.

My Ministry also has nine sound level meters to measure the noise intensity in decibels. The squad for noise monitoring after office hours has carried out a total 329 noise assessments, in addition to attending to 424 noise complaints received from July 2020 to May 2021.

From July 2020 to May 2021, my Ministry has attended to more than 200 odour complaints, carried out in 213 visits to wastewater treatment plants, 289 to water treatment plants and 358 visits were made to ensure proper environmental sanitation in various other public places.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in line with the recommendations of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Drugs, amendments are being made to the Dangerous Drugs Act to monitor precursors among others. Precursors are substances which can be diverted and used for manufacture of drugs. A Technical Committee has been set up at the level of my Ministry to look into the medical use of Cannabis.

Likewise, the Dangerous Chemicals Control Act will be amended to harmonise the existing collaboration between my Ministry and the MRA. The Dangerous Drugs Act will be amended to the same effect. The Pharmacy Act will be amended to take on board recommendations in the 2019/2020 Report of the Director of Audit.

Some 5,800 beneficiaries are currently benefitting from the Methadone Substitution Therapy Programme at 46 dispensing sites across the island. To avoid diversion, my Ministry is installing cameras in the methadone dispensing caravans.

In addition to the existing 2 Residential Rehabilitation Centres at Mahebourg and Long Mountain, 3 Methadone Day Care Centres and 5 Addiction Units, a Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre is operational at Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre as from today. The Centre offers a range of treatment services

for synthetic drug addiction as well as heroin addiction and an Integrated HIV and Harm Reduction Package.

In addition, a Youth Empowerment Programme Against Drugs – the YEPAD, in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office, has been introduced with a view to sustain drug prevention activities across the island since the beginning of this year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like, at this point in time, to thank my colleague, the Minister of Finance, for providing funds for upgrading works to set up a Day Care ward for autistic children in a dedicated centre. My Ministry will give priority of consideration for these works to be carried out at the soonest.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is also currently working on a Human Resource Plan for a more efficient and effective service delivery. To that effect, my Ministry plans to build capacities in different areas of specialisation for the various medical, paramedical and support staff in collaboration with local and foreign educational organisations.

Moreover, my Ministry has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Polytechnics Mauritius Ltd for the training of paramedical staff of the Ministry and will enter into an ensuing clinical training Agreement this year.

My Ministry and the University of Mauritius are also collaborating to identify the adequate training required by our staff and for the Human Resource Planning of our Public Health services.

The Minister of Finance has fully acknowledged the importance of the health personnel through the provision of funds for recruitment of additional medical and paramedical staff.

I wish to thank again my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance for this laudable consideration.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for the various projects earmarked in our Constituency. Projects aiming to minimise the impact of floods will better the lives of many. The Rivière des Anguilles Dam will also greatly improve the distribution of water in this part of the island. Other community projects will improve the lives of inhabitants of my constituency.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government stands guided by strong values and its utmost priority is to work for the welfare of the citizens. These guiding principles are embedded in our DNA, they are the legacy of late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, one of the most prominent patriots this country has ever known.

Sir Anerood Jugnauth was a visionary leader who came up with new pillars of the economy. His vision for a modern Mauritian society shall continue to lead and inspire our actions.

Our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth is made of the same mettle; his dedication for the betterment of the lives and livelihoods of our population is unmatched. We are indeed blessed to have an able, daring and courageous captain at the helm of Government. We will pursue the infrastructural and socio-economic development of this country because, *M. le président, nous sommes des bâtisseurs et nous le serons toujours. Merci.*

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Dr. Mrs Chukowry!

Dr. Ms Chukowry: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 15 June at 11.30 a.m.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

Adjournment Matters, hon. Osman Mahomed!

MATTERS RAISED

(10:13 p.m.)

**VALLÉE PITOT - COVID-19 RED ZONE - SELF-EMPLOYED
ASSISTANCE SCHEME & WAGE ASSISTANCE SCHEME**

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you. I would like to address the hon. Minister of Finance tonight regarding the payment of Self-Employed Assistance Scheme and the Wage Assistance Scheme due to those eligible beneficiaries of Vallée Pitot which was declared a COVID-19 red zone between 24 May to Friday 11 June, 19 long days during which people could not work for their living. Until now, they have not received the payment. I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Finance whether MRA will commence accepting their applications soon and when payment will be made, being given that many inhabitants are in a dire need for this sum of money. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. Minister!

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): M. le président, je remercie l'honorables membres pour la question. Je tiens à le rassurer que la MRA est en train de travailler dessus et d'ici la fin de la semaine, ce sera fait pour les paiements que ce soit pour le *Wage Assistance Scheme* ou le *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme*. C'est le principe concernant toutes les zones rouges à Maurice.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Mrs Tour!

RAGOON LANE, TERRE ROUGE – FLOODING

Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development regarding a request by the inhabitants of Ragoo Lane to raise the level of pavement on the entrance before the Adventist Church in Le Hochet, Terre Rouge. Whenever it rains, the water from the main road flows into the church yard and also floods a few houses along the church. Can the hon. Minister do the needful to relieve these families, please?

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

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for giving me advance

notice of this question. The RDA has been informed of that situation and tomorrow there will be a team going to inspect the sites and propose solutions. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

VALLÉE PITOT – RED ZONE – CWA & WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I would like to raise an issue which is addressed to the hon. Minister of Energy and Public Utilities. During the confinement, the red zone of Valley Pitot, there has not been any work carried out by the CWA and the Wastewater Management Authority. There are number of complaints like pipe has burst and leakages, namely in the region of Napoleon Bonaparte Street and in Boulevard Victoria. So, all these complaints have been recorded by the Waste Water Authorities on the main line, as well as on the CWA but work had not been done because Vallée Pitot was red zone. So, now that the red zone has been lifted, I will be grateful if the hon. Minister can talk to the people at the CWA and Wastewater Management Authority to get the work done. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): I thank the hon. Member for coming forward with the complaints from the inhabitants of Vallée Pitot. They were in the red zone, and we do understand that officers from the CEB and CWA could not attend to complaints, and I understand the complaints were reported to the hotline. I will look into it and request the CEB and the CWA to attend to those complaints. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

CEB ROAD, GOODLANDS – WATER DISTRIBUTION

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Energy and Public Utilities. A few months ago, I asked a PQ on the erratic distribution of water in Constituency No. 6, I expected the matter to be resolved but on the contrary, the situation has not improved in certain regions.

The Deputy Speaker: No, make your request.

Dr. Gungapersad: I have received several complaints from some inhabitants of CEB Road, Goodlands. The water pressure is so low that it is not enough to fill even a water tank at ground level. Several complaints have been made at the level of Customer Service Unit.

The Deputy Speaker: Make your request, hon. Dr. Gungapersad.

Dr. Gungapersad: So, I would be grateful if the Minister could look into the matter and do the needful.

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

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I said that last time if there are several complaints which have been made and which have not been attended and if the hon. Member wants those organisations to react urgently and he wants to go through the Ministry, he can give me a phone call and I will attend to that. It is very simple.

(Interruptions)

Yes, please, but, anyway, I will request CWA to look into that.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

(Interruptions)

He will. He will. They can deal with that outside the Chamber. Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

CONGOMAH, LES MARIANNES – STUDENTS & ELDERLY PEOPLE

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My address tonight is to hon. Alan Ganoo. It is on behalf of the inhabitants of Congomah, Les Mariannes, especially the students and the elderly people, the students who have to attend the Munrakhun College and the elderly people who have to attend the Long Mountain Hospital. They have to go from Congomah to Terre Rouge and take another bus to go to Long Mountain, while the distance is only 6 kilometres, so, the request if you could just look into the matter, especially for the students who have to go to college, the Form One students. Thank you.

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

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for raising this issue. I will certainly look into the matter.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Quirin!

DR. FERRIERE STREET – CHEBEL – POTHOLES

Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Merci M. le président. Ma requête ce soir s'adresse au Ministre des collectivités locales qui malheureusement n'est pas dans l'hémicycle et concerne la municipalité de Beau Bassin/Rose Hill.

En effet, M. le président, les résidents de la rue Dr. Ferrière à Chebel ont attiré mon attention sur des nids de poule qui ont occasionné un accident hier soir où un motocycliste s'est retrouvé sur l'asphalte après avoir été déséquilibré en roulant sur les nids de poule. Je dépose ces deux photos prises ce matin afin que l'honorable ministre ou son suppléant puisse avoir une idée de ce que j'avance. Merci au ministre concerné de demander à la municipalité de Beau Bassin/Rose Hill de remettre en état cette partie de la route à la rue Dr. Ferrière à Chebel afin d'éviter que d'autres accidents se produisent. Merci

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you much. Hon. Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Education!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): I will refer the matter to my colleague.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you much. Hon. David!

MBC - EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES - BROADCAST

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): M. le président, ma requête de ce soir s'adresse à Madame la vice-Première ministre et ministre de l'Education et concerne la diffusion d'émissions éducatives sur les quatre chaînes de la MBC, MBC 2, MBC 3, Senn Kreol et Bhojpuri Channel.

M. le président, il s'avère que différentes émissions pour différents Grades, notamment les Grades 1 à 6 sont régulièrement diffusées exactement aux mêmes horaires sur différentes chaînes, ce qui pénalise évidemment les familles qui ont deux enfants ou plus alors

qu'elles n'ont qu'un seul téléviseur à la maison. Puis-je solliciter, madame la ministre pour que son ministère fasse le nécessaire soit pour réorganiser la diffusion des émissions, soit pour proposer ces mêmes émissions sur les chaînes vidéos du web, je pense notamment à YouTube. Merci

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

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun Luchoomun): M. le président, je voudrais faire ressortir que l'année dernière nous avions eu le même problème et qu'on avait discuté avec la MBC de sorte à ce qu'on donne la possibilité que ces cours soient dispensés à travers la MBC mais aussi sur les *devices*. Ils ont une technique particulière où ils arrivent à faire la transmission de ces programmes au même moment sur différents *devices* à travers *MBC Play*. Je dois m'assurer que cela se reproduise cette fois aussi.

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

ROSE HILL, QUEEN STREET AND REMONO STREET – TAXI OPERATORS

Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to raise an issue addressed to the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail. It concerns the taxi operators of Rose Hill, taxi operators used to work as from Queen Street and Remono Street. Since some weeks, those two roads have been marked with yellow strips, thus preventing taxi operators to work. Those operators have contacted me and asked me to make a request to the hon. Minister to come back on this decision or else find a suitable alternative place so that they can work as usual. I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for giving me a chance to answer to this issue raised by the hon. Member. In fact, I am very aware of the situation. The problem is that there are taxis that are based at other localities and they usually come and drop their passengers along Remono Street near Hassamal Shopping Centre when they come to Rose-Hill.

In fact, several representations have been made by these taxi operators. I have myself, personally carried out a site visit with officers of my Ministry and the request was

made by the taxi operators to allow them to pick up and drop off their clients, their passengers along Queen and Remono Streets but there is no proclaimed taxi stand at this area and I am given to understand because there were several meetings at my Office, at the Ministry, there was a consensus to allow these taxi drivers to disembark their passengers along a single yellow line but I understand now, that from what the hon. Member, the point he is making, now, seems to me that the taxi drivers have come back on this agreement to which they agreed.

So, I will have to discuss with officers of my Ministry and the NLTA because according to law, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, taxi operators cannot have two bases of operation. They are not supposed to park along Remono Street and they have asked the NLTA to set up a parking area, an official parking space here, near the Hassamal Shopping Mall but I understand that this is not possible. So, the solution would be for them to continue disembarking their clients although there is a single yellow line which is permissible by law and wait for a few minutes and this also is permissible because it is not a double yellow line but if this is not agreeable to them we will have to find another solution.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much! I see no hand raised. Have a safe trip back home.

At 10.25 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 15 June 2021 at 11.30 a.m.