

**SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**PARLIAMENTARY
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(HANSARD)**

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(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
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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
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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
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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

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 15 of 2021

Sitting of Thursday 17 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)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

BETAMAX LIMITED –LEGAL NOTICE – SUM CLAIMED FROM STATE TRADING CORPORATION

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the legal notice served by Betamax Limited on the State Trading Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to the –

- (a) total sum claimed;
- (b) date limit for payment thereof; and
- (c) means by which the Corporation intends to finance the said payment.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2006, the then Government constituted a Steering Committee for the implementation of a feasibility study regarding procurement of a medium sized container vessel, chartering of a product carrier/oil tanker and stabilisation of maritime freight rates.

After an invitation for expression of interest regarding “Investment Opportunities in Tanker Project” launched by the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Bhunjun Group (Betonix) responded to the invitation in the project.

In November 2009, Government agreed that a Contract of Affreightment be signed between the State Trading Corporation and Betamax Ltd for a period of 15 years for the transportation of petroleum products from Mangalore, India to Mauritius.

The annual requirement of petroleum products for Mauritius is around 1.1 million Metric Ton. Prior to 2009, STC used to charter vessels for the transportation of petroleum products under a G to G agreement that existed between the Government of India and the Government of Mauritius. The STC had contracts with two shipping companies in India, namely Pratiba Shipping and ST Shipping for transportation of petroleum products and the freight rate payable at that time ranged from USD21 to USD26 per Metric Ton.

The total capacity of the vessel of Betamax Ltd, the Red Eagle, as it was named, was 64,300 Metric Tons (MT) and the freight payable for each consignment of Red Eagle was made up of the following costs -

- Basic Freight – USD18 per MT for year 2015 (with a provision for escalation of 1.5% as from year 6 to year 10 and subsequently an increase by 2% as from year 11 to Year 15).
- Bunker cost – for 700 MT Fuel Oil and 22 MT Gas Oil at the price prevailing on arrival date.
- Port Dues at Loading and Discharge Ports – USD145,000 per voyage.
- Demurrage Costs – USD42,500 for each day pro rata for the first 5 years.

The total freight, including all the above costs paid for Red Eagle during the period 2011 to February 2015, worked at an average of USD30.79 per MT as opposed to the USD21 per MT under the previous arrangements.

Notwithstanding any fluctuation in prices and regardless of whether the vessel carried full load, STC had to pay Betamax Ltd a fixed freight rate and any demurrage fees had to be paid by STC. Betamax Ltd was also granted a right of first refusal for transportation of any petroleum products which STC would import in excess of Red Eagle's capacity. Thus, the contract guaranteed Betamax Ltd an annual rent of USD17.6 Million for 100% of the freight capacity of its vessel, regardless of whether the vessel carried a full load for an uninterrupted period of 15 years plus costs of fuel, port dues and demurrage charges irrespective of fall in world prices of freight and lesser number of trips undertaken from Mangalore to Mauritius.

Furthermore, they had the guarantee for increase of 1.5% from year 6 and by 2% as from year 10. This meant that Betamax would be shielded from any downward fluctuations in freight rates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, let me remind the House that, in 2009, the Contract of Affreightment was, unfortunately, very much skewed in favour of Betamax Ltd at the detriment of the State Trading Corporation.

It was clear that the contract was tailor-made for Betamax Ltd so that in case of a scenario of termination of contract, it was guaranteed an out of an ordinary payment up until the end of the contract.

Betamax Ltd would have had to be paid as if their services had been undertaken for the whole period of 15 years. Since STC was paying more for freight with Betamax Ltd than it could have paid on the spot market and after considering the abusive clauses of Betamax Ltd, in December 2014, Government decided to renegotiate the contract.

In this connection, three meetings were held with Betamax Ltd to review the Contract of Affreightment. However, Betamax Ltd did not demonstrate any genuine willingness to renegotiate the Contract. Thus, on 30 January 2015, the Government took a decision in the public interest for the STC to terminate forthwith the Contract of Affreightment with Betamax Ltd.

Betamax Ltd then filed a Notice of Arbitration with the Singapore International Arbitration Centre as provided for in the dispute resolution mechanism under the Contract of Affreightment. Betamax Ltd also claimed a sum of USD176,345,494.52 plus interest, legal fees and costs. On 05 June 2017, the Singapore International Arbitration Centre issued an award in favour of Betamax Ltd ordering STC to pay damages of USD115,267,199 (approximately MUR 4.7 billion) with costs and interests.

In August 2017, STC lodged an application to the Supreme Court of Mauritius to set aside the Award pursuant to Section 39 of the International Arbitration Act 2008. In September 2017, Betamax Ltd applied to the Supreme Court of Mauritius for recognition and enforcement of the Award. And on 07 September 2017, the Supreme Court of Mauritius granted a provisional order for the recognition and enforcement of the Award. On 19 September 2017, STC made an application to set aside the provisional order granted by the Supreme Court of Mauritius. On 31 May 2019, the Supreme Court of Mauritius delivered judgement in favour of STC setting aside the arbitral Award issued on 05 June 2017 and the provisional order granted by the Supreme Court of Mauritius on 07 September 2017 for recognition and enforcement of the Award.

In September 2019, the Supreme Court of Mauritius granted Betamax Ltd final leave to appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council against the judgement delivered on 31 May 2019 by the Supreme Court of Mauritius.

The case was heard before the Privy Council in January 2021. On 14 June 2021, the Privy Council rendered its judgement and set aside the order of the Supreme Court of Mauritius and allowed the application of Betamax to enforce the Award given by the Singapore International Arbitration Centre. The reasons put forward by...

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. We are already 8 minutes into the PNQ and the Minister has not addressed one part of the question yet.

Mr Callichurn: I will address shortly. Let me just finish with the historic, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you allow me.

The reasons put forward by the Privy Council for their judgement are as follows -

- The Supreme Court was not entitled to review the decision of the arbitrator on the legality of the Contract of Affreightment under the public procurement legislations in place in Mauritius, and
- The Contract of Affreightment was not in breach of the public procurement legislations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to parts (a) and (b) of the question, the total sum claimed by Betamax Ltd, according to a legal notice served on the STC on 15 June 2021, amounts to around Rs5.68 billion as follows -

- i. damages in the sum of USD115,267,199, that is, approximately Rs4.7 billion;
- ii. the legal and arbitration costs incurred by Betamax Ltd in the arbitration in the sums of USD2,823,547.20, which is approximately Rs116.3 m., SGD272,077.79, which amounts to approximately Rs8.6 m., and GBP880,296, which comes up to Rs51.3 m., and
- iii. interests at the rate of 3% per annum of the sum above, from the date of the Award to the date of full payment, which as at 15 June 2021 amounts to USD14,287,362.61 (about Rs588.6 m.) and SGD 32,917.69 (about Rs1 m.) and GBP106,503.76 (about Rs6.2 m.).

That figure excludes the legal costs associated with the hearing of the review before the Supreme Court of Mauritius and the appeal before the Privy Council, which are not yet known. According to the Legal Notice, payment should be effected on or before 22 June 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the STC will honour its obligation to Betamax Ltd. The payment modalities are currently being finalised in consultation with the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

Payment will be financed partly from STC reserves and from Government resources.

I am done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister had, in his long answer, given his side of the story as to the advantages, disadvantages of Betamax, as to how the negotiations about breaking the contract were held after the election of 2014. He did not say anything, I think, about the legal advice from Stephenson Hardwood or from the Solicitor General.

So, my first question is: will the Government agree once and for all to appoint a Commission of Inquiry, headed by a sitting Judge, so that your side of the story can be heard, everybody else's side of the story can be heard, and we will know once and for all who is to be blamed and who is not to be blamed?

Mr Callichurn: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not within my prerogative to set up an inquiry, be it a Commission of Inquiry or whatever inquiry. But, if there is a need for a Commission of Inquiry, I take note of your suggestion, I will apprise Cabinet of same, and we will take a collective decision regarding the setting up of whatever inquiry.

Mr X. L. Duval: I can see no reason, if there is nothing to hide, that there should not be a full-fledged Commission of Inquiry provided, of course, that it is headed by a sitting Supreme Court Judge, because otherwise the others cannot be trusted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he will table the legal fees paid by STC all through, from the Stephenson Hardwood coming right through to now, the amounts paid, probably hundreds of millions of rupees, and to whom this was paid? Will he agree, in the name of transparency, that he will table this, please?

Mr Callichurn: Unfortunately, I am not in possession of documents quantifying the fees paid to Legal Advisors of STC. I shall enquire and if the need arises, I will table.

Mr X. L. Duval: It is not if the need arises. I am asking; it is a request. Will he agree to the request or not to table the fees paid to everyone?

Mr Callichurn: I will have to seek legal advice first regarding fees paid, Mr Speaker, Sir. If the legal advice obtained is in favour of what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has asked, surely, I will do so.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, there should be no need for legal advice for transparency in this Parliament. I am sure you will agree. So, I cannot see why we need legal advice with taxpayers' money that has been paid, hundreds of millions, and it should be disclosed, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I hope that the Minister will do so. I cannot see any reason for legal advice in respect of that. Will the hon. Minister just confirm the figure? I am not sure I

heard properly, that interests of some Rs580 m. has to be paid to Betamax since the first arbitral judgment. Is that the figure that you gave, hon. Minister?

Mr Callichurn: Yes, the interest which has been calculated at the rate of 3% per annum from the date of award to the date of full payment, which stands at 15 June 2021, amounts to USD14,287,362.1, that is, Rs588.6 m. Adding to that, there are other costs also. There is another figure here which amounts to Rs1 m. and Rs6.2 m. So, we need to add the figure of Rs588.6 m. to the Rs1 m. and Rs6.2 m.

Mr X. L. Duval: Can I ask the hon. Minister, apart from the figure he has given, a huge amount of money that we have to pay now to Betamax, that there is some Rs200 m. or Rs300 m. expected concerning their costs to do with the Supreme Court appeal and the Privy Council appeal? So, you are still waiting for that to add to the figure to be paid to Betamax?

Mr Callichurn: Yes, that is right, Mr Speaker, Sir. The figures are not available. When it will be made available, we will add that figure and then pay the full amount to Betamax Ltd.

Mr X. L. Duval: Can I ask the hon. Minister, concerning the ability to pay by STC, what are the present cash balances available at STC and how much will have to be forked up by the Ministry of Finance?

Mr Callichurn: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by STC that for Financial Year 2018-2019, the reserves of STC were at its highest, that is, Rs4.1 billion. STC has transferred dividend of around Rs3 billion to Government since 2015 and, as at now, reserves of STC amount to Rs3.6 billion, out of which Rs1.6 billion is necessary as working capital to maintain its commitment without affecting the operation of STC.

Mr X. L. Duval: The question was not reserves; we can have a technical problem again. The question is: how much money, cash balances does STC have at the moment? Because it will have to write a cheque to Betamax.

Mr Callichurn: Yes, like I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, after we transfer from the Rs2 billion, we will have a reserve of Rs1.6 billion. The figures asked for, unfortunately, are not available at the moment.

Mr X. L. Duval: The cash balances.

Mr Callichurn: I do not have the figure of cash balance.

Mr X. L. Duval: There is a difference between that and reserves.

Let me ask a question that is in everybody's mind, Mr Speaker, Sir. How much will the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development have to contribute or is STC able to pay all of it? All the 6 billion.

Mr Callichurn: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, we will transfer Rs2 billion out of the Reserve Account of STC and then the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development will chip in the balance to pay the full amount of compensation.

Mr X. L. Duval: So, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development will pay the 4 billion that is remaining to Betamax. This is what, I think, I have understood. Now, there is a lot of worry in the population that this will be another occasion for the Government to increase the price of petrol, whether it is Mogas or diesel or even the price of rice and flour. Can the hon. Minister give this House a guarantee that these commodities which are imported and traded by STC will not be touched to pay for the damages to Betamax?

Mr Callichurn: Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have heard a lot about it during the past days and I have heard Members here as well during their intervention on the budgetary debate. I need to reassure the House. They are thinking that Government does not have any other alternative than to pass on this award to the consumer. I wish to say, in no uncertain terms, that Government will not amend the price structure of Mogas and Gasoil and will not pass on the cost to consumers, contrary to what was done in 2009 by the previous Government in relation to Hedging. The obligation to Betamax will be met by STC from its reserve and Government funds.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: I think the hon. Minister does not understand what happened in the Hedging. Perhaps, one day, we can also have a Commission of Inquiry on that because not exactly, at all, what you think happened. Now, can I ask the hon. Minister whether the Rs1 billion that was paid by STC on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Wellness for the famous or infamous Emergency Procurement issues - not for want of a better word - whether the Ministry of Health and Wellness has fully settled that one billion? Your colleague is next to you; whether his Ministry has settled the Rs1 billion that was due; Pack & Blister, etc.?

Mr Callichurn: I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the full amount has been settled, that is, has been paid back to the STC by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Mr X. L. Duval: It is still a waste of money, but it has been paid. Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether the payment to Betamax will be in cash, as a cheque, or not in cash as buying a Porsche?

Mr Callichurn: It is an offence under FIAMLA to take cash, obviously.

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: It was different types of cash. Mr Speaker, Sir, what is wrong with hon. Dr. Padayachy? He did not have a chance yesterday to speak enough? Okay, you had your chance yesterday. Now, I ask the hon. Minister whether it is in cash or it is going to be in terms of assets or something like that, in order to reduce the impact of the cost onto the taxpayer.

Mr Callichurn: Well, I cannot speak...

Mr X. L. Duval: And whatever...

Mr Callichurn: I cannot speak on behalf of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Planning, but I presume, like any other transaction where the State was involved - I presume, I say - it will be through bank transfer.

Mr X. L. Duval: One last question before I get my colleagues to come in. I would like to ask the hon. Minister how will all these payments to Betamax affect the ability of the State Trading Corporation to trade, whether it is going to be able to carry on purchasing petrol for us and foodstuffs, etc.? Whether it will have any impact or whether you have calculated it properly so that there is no impact on its ability to trade. We will not have STC going bankrupt.

Mr Callichurn: I can assure you, we have sufficient working capital and after transferring the 2 million from the reserve, we have sufficient cash, that is, 1.6 billion, and it will not affect the operation of STC. This, I can assure the House.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the Estimates, the Budget provides for Rs2.4 billion which were supposed to be received from the STC by Government and finance the budget, can I ask whether this is still on? Has this been discussed with the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development; whether these Rs2.4 billion that were supposed to be received will be received or whether the budget deficit will be increased by so much?

Mr Callichurn: Well, the issue was discussed with the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, and I am informed that any excess amount to be transferred to the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development will be assessed on the case of commitments and will be considered on a case to case basis. So, such transfer, if any, will not happen on 01 July 2021 but over the Financial Year 2021-2022.

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister, when answering a question, referred to three meetings that were held between the Government representatives and the representatives of Betamax before Government terminated the contract. Is the hon. Minister aware that during the last meeting, the Minutes of meeting provides, and I quote, that the representative of Betamax said –

“He was willing to continue working with the Government and was willing to consider any proposal from the Government and before any proposal was made by the Government, the contract was terminated.”

What does the hon. Minister have to say about that?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, the first time I heard about it was yesterday on radio, through their Legal Counsel and the legal representative of Betamax – I will not name the gentleman. But had it been the case, if the Government was not in favour of their proposal at that time, surely they would have made it known; surely they would have communicated to the Government. There is nothing in writing to suggest that they made a counter proposal or they proposed other favourable terms, as the gentleman said yesterday, to the Government. There is nothing on record, and it is only yesterday that we came to know about it.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that this hell let loose and people out there are fuming with rage? Can I ask him whether this is the price to be borne by taxpayers over the politics of vengeance and spite? And I hold this Government responsible for this, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not true to say that ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Silence!

Mr Callichurn: ... it was a *politique de vengeance* behind the resiliation of the contract between STC and Betamax. The STC received legal advice to that effect, that

Betamax Ltd contract was against public interest, and advice was tended along those lines by local Senior Counsel and Senior Attorney. Advice was also given by a reputable law firm which is specialised in maritime and insurance law that is ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Parliament was going on smoothly! Parliament was going on smoothly!

(Interruptions)

The last question to the Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I was saying that the advice was given by a reputable...

Mr Speaker: Excuse me! You said, '*bandit' kouma twa?* Withdraw that word immediately!

Dr. Boolell: I withdraw the word, but he...

Mr Speaker: But what? Unconditionally! Unconditionally, okay?

Dr. Boolell: I withdraw.

(Interruptions)

Twa, to lombraz pa suiv twa!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have had...

Mr Speaker: Time is already...

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes. Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to draw your attention to what hon. Uteem has just said concerning the existence of Minutes which he has in his possession

concerning the meeting with Betamax by the then Committee. You have also said other things, that you do not know whether these things exist or not. We know the existence of legal advice from Stephenson Harwood against going along the way that the Government has gone. This is the reason, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I am reiterating my request for a full-fledged Commission of Inquiry. You come up with your side, everybody will come up with what they have to say and we will see there what has happened and how we have reached the stage where Rs6 billion or more of Government money is to be spent and paid regrettably to Betamax.

Mr Callichurn: Like I said earlier, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will apprise the Cabinet of the hon. Leader of the Opposition's concern and then we will take a decision, if the need arises.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition; you did a very good work, except some noises somewhere. Time over!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, you did very well today. You did very well too today!

Mr Speaker: Thank you! We did well, except ...

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 Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(12.03 p.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. Mrs Mayotte!

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Merci, M. le président, de me donner l'opportunité de m'adresser aujourd'hui à cette auguste Assemblée dans le cadre des débats budgétaires 2021-2022. Mais avant, si vous me le permettez, j'aimerai ouvrir une petite parenthèse. Depuis le début des débats sur le budget, nous avons entendu à plusieurs reprises les membres de l'opposition dire que nous devons dire la vérité. Mais, M. le président, l'opposition n'a pas le monopole de la vérité. La vérité, ce sont les propositions, les actions et l'implémentation de ce gouvernement. La vérité, ce sont ces milliers de citoyens qui bénéficieront de ce budget. La vérité, ce sont ces milliers d'entreprises qui bénéficieront également de ce budget. La vérité, ce sont ces milliers de SMEs et ceux qui '*travay gramatin pou manz tanto*', qui bénéficient du *Self-Employed* et du Wage Assistance Scheme.

La vérité vérifique, M. le président, c'est que nous traversons un moment de crise exceptionnelle et que nous avons besoin de plan de relance. C'est ça la vérité, M. le président, et il n'y a pas que la vérité, il y a aussi la sincérité de nos propos. Et nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, nous disons la vérité avec sincérité dans nos propos. Le temps jugera, la population jugera, et aujourd'hui j'aimerai bien inviter mes collègues de la Chambre à réfléchir ensemble. Ceux qui défendent la vérité, ont-ils le courage de venir dire qu'il faut couper toutes les dépenses que le gouvernement envisage de faire, que ce soit dans le domaine de l'éducation, de la santé, de la sécurité sociale, entre autres ? Si c'est ça qu'ils veulent, si c'est ça pour eux la vérité, et bien, qu'ils viennent le dire directement sans passer par la démagogie ou la politique de bas étage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this present Budget is the second one which my colleague, Dr. the hon. Renganaden Padayachy is presenting to this House and to the nation, but this second Budget inscribes itself into a wider vision for continuing growth for the welfare of the nation. Under the able Primeministership of the hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, not only has the country embarked on a transformative journey, but it is an inclusive journey; a transformative journey wherein each and every citizen is being provided with tools, enabling capacity and, more importantly, the equitable chance to contribute to bake the national cake. The headline, 'Better Together,' transcribes perfectly the philosophy of a Government which values each and every citizen, a Government which believes in the capacity of each and every child of the republic to keep Mauritius great.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the World Bank is predicting average global growth to be at 5.6% for 2022, but it is also forecast that recovery will be uneven between economies. Some will be

doing better and others not. The Gross Domestic Product for the Mauritian economy is expected to grow by 9% during the fiscal year 2021-2022 under scrutiny. The Budget being presented before this august Assembly, Mr Speaker, Sir, is not one which speaks only to accountants and economists, to CEOs and to board rooms, the successive Budgets of this Government have been setting the scene to project Mauritius into an era of dynamic, accelerated, even aggressive, and yet, inclusive, sustainable and human-phased development.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we can imagine how challenging it must have been for the hon. Minister of Finance during these extremely difficult times to strike a balance between maintaining *une économie de la vie*, decent, safe and sustainable livelihood for the whole population, while at the same time, ensure that the economic mechanisms continue to go on instability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, no, pensions for the elderly, the poor, the vulnerable, the deprived, the sick, the widow or the orphan have not been decreased. No, Mr Speaker, Sir, Valued Added Tax, Income Tax and even Corporate Tax have not increased. We shall succeed through enhanced recovery, innovative revival and resilience together. One of the major pillars of our economy, the travel and tourism industry has been at full stop since a year now. Nonetheless, this Government has been caring since the very first days COVID-19 hit that industry. Government supported some 50,000 workers of the sector with more than Rs8.5 billion through the Wage Assistance Scheme and Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, and this Government is taking the pledge to continue to support the sector. Mais face à cette pandémie, M. le président, le gouvernement veut placer la vie au-dessus des ressources et la santé au-dessus de la dette. Si nous ne vainquons pas collectivement le Coronavirus, nous ne vaincrons nulle part ailleurs dans le monde. Il s'agit d'un défi qui exige que tout le monde soit sur le pont. Aujourd'hui, plus que jamais nous devons être les gardiens de nos frères et sœurs. Il n'y a pas un Coronavirus pour les pays développés et un Coronavirus pour les pays en développement et un autre coronavirus pour d'autres petites îles. Alors, il faut aussi se dire qu'il n'a pas un Coronavirus pour le gouvernement et un Coronavirus pour les membres de l'opposition. Nous sommes tous dans le même bateau. Le tourisme est l'un des secteurs le plus durement éprouvé par la crise. Plus d'un an après le début de la pandémie, les chiffres sont sans appel. A l'heure où elle trace les voies de la reprise, cette situation est très préoccupante pour notre économie. Sous l'impulsion du secteur public et du secteur privé, le tourisme constitue non seulement une source cruciale de devises étrangères mais parce qu'il renforce les chaînes d'approvisionnement, améliore la productivité des entreprises locales,

crée de l'emploi, fourni un revenu aux hommes, femmes et aux jeunes, il peut également servir de levier au développement. Et aujourd'hui si vous me permettez, M. le président, je pense humblement qu'il est important de revoir la politique du tourisme post COVID-19 pour repartir sur des meilleures bases.

M. le président en tant que citoyen, nous allons devoir améliorer la confiance des voyageurs. Il nous faudra également comprendre et suivre les nouvelles tendances du marché et les moteurs de la demande et dans une perspective de plus long terme nous engager à bâtir le secteur touristique plus résilient et inclusif à la faveur de la remontée en puissance de l'enjeu de la durabilité. La résilience n'est également de la priorité accordée à l'environnement, aux populations et aux moyens technologiques permettant de se préparer aux changements climatiques et aux autres crises. Mais ce touriste qui a passé plus d'un an, confiné, isolé, masqué, préférerait peut-être le plein air, les arts, la culture, les traditions et surtout la convivialité aux formules standards que nous offrent les institutions hôtelières. Ce tourisme post-COVID, sera l'occasion pour notre gouvernement de revoir la politique de ce secteur, pilier de notre économie et les nouvelles opportunités qui s'offriront à nos jeunes en termes d'hospitalité et d'emploi. Alors, faisons de l'île Maurice une île d'expérience.

Mr Speaker, Sir, climate change is very critical, especially for Small Island States and our beloved country makes no exception. We have lately felt the devastating effects only some months ago and the hon. Minister of Finance was right weighting the losses of the economy in terms of productive days at work, stress to the population, cost of activation of the Rescue and Disaster Management forces as well as the physical damages to the country.

Là, je voudrais m'associer plus que jamais à la crainte des habitants de Chamouny, de Chemin Grenier où il pleut des cordes depuis ce matin aujourd'hui, de Chamarel, de Coteau Raffin, Case Noyale, La Gaulette pour ne citer qu'eux.

Le gouvernement vient avec un programme national sans précédent de gestion des inondations à hauteur de R 65 milliards sur 3 ans pour apaiser les difficultés de la population. Les habitants de ma circonscription ainsi que ceux résidents dans des zones à risques seront bientôt soulagé de solution à long terme aux problèmes de drainage des terres.

M. le président, le budget 2021-2022 accentue l'effort amorcé plutôt pour proposer des logements abordables mais décents à toutes les sphères de la population. R 12 milliards seront dédiées à la construction de 12,000 unités résidentielles. Des logements sociaux étant mis à la disposition de la population, M. le président, le gouvernement rassure en apportant

des solutions intégrées de logement, les maisons livrées comprennent actuellement le système de gestion des eaux usées, des réservoirs d'eau et même certaines avec des chauffe-eaux-solaires et des bacs à composte. Je suis certaine que l'honorable vice-Premier ministre et ministre du Logement ainsi que l'honorable ministre de l'Environnement et du développement durable veilleront à ce que cela devienne bientôt la norme.

M. le président, posséder un logement, c'est un rêve pour la majorité de mauriciens, quelle que soit la classe sociale. C'est aussi une réalité pour plus de la moitié des ménages aujourd'hui propriétaires de leur logement. De manière générale la propriété rassure, en particulier, les personnes dites nécessiteuses qui ont l'opportunité d'accéder à la propriété, même dans des environnements difficiles, manifestent moins d'inquiétude sur l'avenir. Le fait de posséder son logement renforce le sentiment de confiance en soi, de détermination et d'optimisme. Dans les dessins d'enfants, la maison est représentée comme un individu à qui on attribue une personnalité. Plus tard, l'individu adulte projette symboliquement plus ou moins consciemment le même schéma, c'est-à-dire l'image de soi dans son logement, sa ville, son pays ou sa nation. Or, le logement n'est pas un bien matériel, ce n'est pas un achat comme un autre. Il est source d'émotion, de projection de soi et d'organisation de vie. *Enfin noun gagn nou ti lakaz. enfin nou ena ene twa lor nu latet.*

Et, aujourd'hui, c'est le rêve, le rêve de tout parent de pouvoir léguer un terrain sinon une maison à ses enfants et petits-enfants et c'est aussi le rêve de la jeune génération de devenir propriétaire.

To give access to finance to even those at the lower tier of our society, Government is coming forward with mortgage schemes that self-employed and contractual workers can benefit from 80% of the mortgage under the scheme.

Moreover, an individual buying a house, apartment or land to construct his residence in the upcoming financial year 2021-2022 will benefit from a refund of 5% of the cost of the property. Those casting a home loan to build their house will benefit from a refund of 5% of a home loan up to a maximum of Rs500,000. Never has home ownership been so close to be materialised for thousands of families who, some days ago, could not even dream of it because of so many conditionalities thanks to this Government.

This budget is one that continues to open opportunities for each and every *fils et fille du sol*. One will only need to take the decision and become an active and productive member.

M. le président, je tiens à remercier du fond du cœur le ministre des Finances d'avoir pris les mesures nécessaires pour fournir sans frais des lunettes de vue pour les enfants jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans et surtout de mettre à la disposition des jeunes filles de Grade 6 à 13 des serviettes hygiéniques. C'est cela *Putting People First*. Il existe effectivement à Maurice ce que nous appelons la précarité menstruelle, Cela signifie que bon nombre de jeunes filles n'ont pas les moyens d'acheter des serviettes hygiéniques ou d'en changer autant qu'elles le devraient. La précarité menstruelle reste encore un sujet tabou, malheureusement. Or, on sait qu'elle peut poser des difficultés sociales, obligeant certaines jeunes filles à rester chez elles dans ces périodes particulières. Le gouvernement va changer les règles.

Mr Speaker, Sir, beyond the sugar sector wherein still more facilities are being extended so that more and more Mauritians can come back to the soil. The non-sugar, livestock, and fisheries sectors are offering appealing opportunities. I will there make an appeal to the hon. Minister of Agro-industry and Food Security to ensure that sensitisation and information sessions on the facilities offered by his Ministry are ventilated to the whole of the population in all the nooks and crooks of the country because what is being proposed as schemes and support is simply unbelievable. I will briefly enunciate some of these -

- 1,000 arpents de terre seront mis à la disposition pour booster le secteur agricole ;
- subside de 50% sur le prix des semences pour l'ail, la pomme de terre et l'oignon entre autres ;
- 500 pêcheurs additionnels seront enregistrés comme professionnel ;
- subside sur la nourriture animale, et
- la DBM qui offre des emprunts à un taux professionnel de 0,5% l'an pour ne citer qu'eux.
- Et, bien sûr, on n'oublie pas le *bad weather allowance* pour nos amis, les pêcheurs.

Au fur et à mesure que l'économie bleue se développe, je demanderai humblement au ministre de tutelle de ne pas oublier les cueilleuses d'huîtres qui ne sont actuellement pas reconnues comme professionnelles de la mer en raison d'un problème de définition dans la loi. Au nom de la Fédération des pêcheurs de Rivière Noire, je voudrais dire merci d'aider à la réhabilitation de la maison des pêcheurs de Tamarin. Ce complexe, maison des pêcheurs à Tamarin est un atout important pour la communauté des pêcheurs. Il n'a pas été utilisé par la société coopérative depuis plusieurs années. Bien qu'un atout très important qui devrait

desservir la communauté des pêcheurs, ce complexe a besoin d'une grande rénovation, rénovation du bâtiment et également en termes d'équipements, de réfrigération et de stockage.

M. le président, avant de terminer, dans son élocution, le ministre des Finances a signifié l'intention fort louable du gouvernement de poursuivre son objectif d'élargir et d'approfondir les compétences et les talents dans l'écosystème des arts et de la culture. Effectivement, M. le président, l'art et la culture constituent une extraordinaire force pour l'épanouissement et le développement de la société. Les arts et la culture occupent une place prépondérante dans la vie de plus de 90 % de la population.

Cette crise sanitaire et ses conséquences économiques pour le secteur de la culture, va un jour s'estomper. Du moins, nous l'espérons. Mais une crise qui dure un ans ou plus, est-elle encore une crise ou bien une nouvelle donne? Quelle pourrait être une politique culturelle de sortie de crise qui ne serait pas là simplement pour maintenir à flot un secteur mais pour imaginer sa réinvention après tant de bouleversement? Et bien, en toute humilité, je parlerai de l'éducation artistique et culturelle qui est indispensable à la démocratisation culturelle et à l'égalité des chances. Le parcours d'éducation artistique et culturelle, accompli par chaque citoyen, se construit de l'école primaire au collège. Nous pourrions, par exemple, nous engager résolument à agir en faveur de la créativité, de l'éducation, de l'amélioration de la qualité de vie, de l'innovation et de l'adaptation dynamique à un monde en constante évolution.

M. le président, l'île Maurice est un chantier et nombreux sont les projets d'infrastructure en voie de réalisation. Ces mêmes infrastructures qui marqueront l'histoire de ce pays, ces infrastructures, aujourd'hui, ces projets de développement, je parle, par exemple là, de la construction des hôpitaux bientôt et aussi de ces *urban terminals* qui sont en voie d'ouverture. Eh bien, ces mêmes projets de développement qui feront la fierté des Mauriciens sont là les réalisations de ce gouvernement et dans de nombreuses années, ces bâtiments deviendront ce que nous appellerons des patrimoines historiques et marqueront l'histoire de la contribution de ce gouvernement dans le développement de notre pays.

Alors, je demanderai humblement à ce que nos artistes puissent également y laisser leurs empreintes comme, par exemple, les inviter à venir inscrire leur créativité et leur histoire dans les *urban terminals*, introduire des salles de lecture dans les hôpitaux, introduire aussi ce qu'on appelle le *art therapy* dans les hôpitaux, dans les salles spécialisées pour les

maladies mentales et aussi, pourquoi pas donner accès à la lecture, à la peinture et autres créativités pour les enfants, dans les salles dédiées aux enfants dans les hôpitaux.

M. le président, il y a des saisons dans l'évolution d'un pays où des défis fondamentaux doivent être adressés et ainsi faire les choix judicieux afin de poser des bases solides vers un nouveau cap durable. Notre détermination, nos valeurs, le fondement même de notre existence sont mises à l'épreuve avec la situation sanitaire qui prévaut. Nous aurions pu choisir la voie du changement cosmétique, facile, et d'un conservatisme figé mais nous choisissons de tracer une voie qui mènera à une refonte fondamentale au renouveau et au retour de l'espoir. Nous agissons. Ne pas agir, ce serait de renoncer aux valeurs et qualités intrinsèques de notre gouvernement : La compétence, la résilience, la compassion et l'espoir.

Le Premier ministre et son gouvernement déploient tous les moyens nécessaires pour gérer ces états de circonstance, à la fois sans précédent et imprévisibles. Comme l'a dit si bien le ministre des Finances dans son allocution, nous serons mieux ensemble. Eh bien là, ce sont des mots qui me font penser toute suite à ce proverbe africain :

« Seul, on avance plus vite, ensemble nous avançons plus loin. »

Ce proverbe illustre la vie en équipe, le passage du 'je' à 'nous'. Elle illustre de manière claire, l'incontournable investissement dans les interactions humaines et permet également de percevoir la puissance du 'nous', qui porte le 'je' pour une île Maurice durable et rentable.

Je terminerai, M. le président, par cette petite citation -

« Nous travaillerons ensemble pour soutenir le courage là où il y a la peur, pour encourager la négociation là où il y a le conflit, et donner l'espoir là où règne le désespoir. » (Dixit Nelson Mandela)

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha!

(12.25 p.m.)

Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): M. le président, un débat budgétaire, c'est un moment important dans la vie d'un État et aussi dans celle d'une Assemblée Nationale et de ses élus.

Cet exercice crucial permet une allocation réelle des ressources humaines et financières pour faire fonctionner, de façon efficace et efficiente les finances publiques, la machinerie de L'État et ses services, et la mise en œuvre des projets de développement pour le bien-être durable de sa population. C'est pour assurer, sans équivoque, cette responsabilité que les électeurs et électrices ont placé dans ces fauteuils en confiant leur argent. Mais ce moment peut aussi parfois être un moment de déception.

M. le président, ayant vécue et grandi dans un milieu sportif et, pour y avoir consacré une bonne partie de ma jeunesse, je ne peux pas me permettre d'en faire impasse.

Une de 3 valeurs Olympique est le respect, le respect des règles de conduite, le fairplay envers l'adversaire, que ce soit sur le court ou dans la vie. M. le président, le respect des règles est nécessaire pour une vie sociale harmonieuse du pays. Cela se traduit par le respect des institutions, du Parlement et de tous ses membres. Le respect des règles de la bonne gouvernance et de la méritocratie. Le respect de la vie et de la communication privée. Or, ce n'est pas toujours à cela qu'on assiste.

D'abord au niveau de la gouvernance financière, le gouvernement financera ce budget à travers les taxes que paieront les citoyens, à hauteur de R 110 milliards, à comparer à R 82 milliards l'année dernière. La population paiera donc 33% de taxe de plus!

La dette nationale représente déjà 100% du PIB, tandis que paraît-il, il y a certaines qui prendront 147 ans pour être remboursées. Est-ce cela, le respect de l'argent public, M. le président?

La deuxième valeur Olympique est l'excellence, encourageant les athlètes à toujours se surpasser. L'excellence opérationnelle vise l'optimisation de la productivité de l'État, en effectuant la chasse aux gaspillages liés au fonctionnement. Faut-il se rappeler, encore une fois, les trouvailles impensables du Directeur de l'Audit par rapport au gaspillage?

M. le président, jusqu'à présent, les débats sont centrés autour de l'environnement économique sans précédent et inattendu. Rien de plus vrai, M. le président. Mais encore plus vrai, *even prior to Covid-19 and other events of 2020, Mauritius was on an increasingly fragile development trajectory* selon le Rapport de la Banque Mondiale.

M. le président, la troisième valeur Olympique est l'amitié, la solidarité. Rien de plus urgent et indispensable avec la Covid-19. Cette pandémie n'est pas que chiffres et nombres, M. le président, elle a un visage, un regard qui en dit long sur la peine, les épreuves et la douloureuse incertitude qui s'installe ici et ailleurs. J'ai une pensée spéciale pour ceux qui ont

vécu des drames, silencieusement, esseulés, dans le confinement, dans le sillage de cette pandémie: décès, séparations des familles, précarité, pertes d'emploi, *receiverships* et des centaines d'autres situations pénibles.

La COVID-19 a entraîné dans son sillage ici, et partout ailleurs dans le monde encore plus des tragédies humaines. Je revois ces images à la fois choquantes et tristes. Que pouvons-nous faire pour éviter et atténuer de tels drames? Pour que le choc ne soit pas aussi brutal, pour que notre système de santé publique soit en mesure d'atténuer de tels risques, il nous faut un *longer term preparedness plan* afin de protéger plus efficacement la population.

Et, il serait souhaitable qu'un *Select Committee* de la Chambre se penche sur la gestion de la pandémie afin de faire des recommandations pour affuter notre *preparedness*.

Une chose est sûre, M. le président, la COVID-19 est venue chambouler la vie de tous et ses effets sont les plus palpables dans le secteur de la santé et du tourisme.

M. le président, cette crise a mis le système de santé publique sous les feux des projecteurs et force est de constater ses failles multiples. Le dernier rapport de l'Audit fait même état, dans ses principales conclusions, du non-respect des obligations légales au cours des procédures d'achats d'urgence, des "*Emergency Procurement*" durant le premier confinement. Pas de documentations adéquates, pas de registres appropriés, de compte rendu, une opacité totale.

M. le président, le système de santé publique, avant même la pandémie, avait du mal à remplir sa mission d'être accessible et efficient. Les hôpitaux sont plutôt réputés pour leurs longues files interminables et les listes d'attente démesurées et la pandémie est venue exacerber cette situation déjà existante.

Les hôpitaux ont vu leur personnels soignants réduits pour cause d'infection à la COVID-19 ou en quarantaine après avoir été en contact ou avoir prodigué des soins aux patients positifs. Des fois même, des départements et des hôpitaux entiers se sont retrouvés en quarantaine et dont les soins rendus inaccessibles. Ce qui engendre encore plus de délais dans les consultations et diagnostiques. Les autres malades sont devenus les dommages collatéraux de la COVID-19.

Les patients les plus vulnérables, à l'exemple des patients dialysés et atteints de cancer, ont été contaminé en se faisant soigner dans les centres de santé publique et certains ont, par conséquence, malheureusement perdu la vie. Y a-t-il eu négligence? Y a-t-il eu un

manque de protocole sanitaire? Tout cela aurait pu être évité par une mise en application rigoureuse des mesures sanitaire strictes pour tous les patients, visiteurs et personnel.

M. le président, le pays tout entier a été témoin du drame vécu par les patients dialysés, il serait temps de mettre les bouchées doubles pour que les transplantations rénales se fassent localement dans nos hôpitaux.

M. le président, années après années, le budget annonce l'achat de nouveaux équipements médicaux modernes et sophistiqués, mais souvent l'effet d'annonce reste sans suite et la mise en action ineffective. Et cela, le directeur de l'Audit l'a dénoncé dans son dernier rapport que durant les 5 dernières années, 30 % du budget alloué à l'achat d'équipements médicaux n'a pas été utilisé.

Les équipements médicaux sont fréquemment hors d'usage pendant de longue période car ils sont souvent achetés sans service après-vente adéquats. J'en ai fait aussi état de ça l'année dernière. Ajouté à cela, la non-acquisition d'équipements médicaux essentiels entraînent de longue liste d'attente pour les diagnostiques des maladies. À titre d'exemple, le rapport de l'Audit mentionne qu'en janvier 2020, la liste d'attente pour une échographie à l'hôpital Victoria était de 3,500 patients avec des délais de 6 mois. Ces délais de durées exorbitantes peuvent entraîner de graves conséquences sur la santé des patients, M. le président, dû à la détection tardive des maladies.

M. Le président, le projet de *L'E-Health* est aussi de ceux, qui revienne année après année. D'ailleurs, à l'année dernière, suite à une de mes questions parlementaires, la question No. B/318 lors de la réponse, nous avons appris qu'aucun fond n'a encore été déboursé du budget alloué, et cela, malgré que chaque année, *L'E-Health* fait partie du budget du ministère de la santé. *L'E-Health* serait indispensable dans le but d'une refonte de notre système de santé, afin de le rendre plus efficient et innovant.

M. le président, soucieuse de la santé de nos compatriotes, j'espère que le nouveau “Food Standards Agency” que le budget prévoit, emmènera les garde-fous nécessaire contre les méthodes d'agriculture intensive qui emploient de grandes quantités de pesticides et d'engrais.

Avec cette pandémie, la santé mentale de nos citoyens est soumise à rude épreuve. Ils sont proie à la peur du virus, le chômage, l'insécurité financière, l'angoisse d'un avenir incertain, l'isolement, le manque de loisirs et les restrictions de mouvement. Par conséquence, un plus grand nombre de personnes souffrent d'anxiété et de dépression. De ce

fait, cela me désole que ce budget ne prévoit rien pour la santé mentale. Quant au contraire, les services de santé mentale aurait dû voir leurs allocations augmenter.

M. le président, cette pandémie a mis en lumière le rôle primordial de nos professionnels de santé, qui forment parti de nos *frontliners* face à cet ennemi invisible. Ils ont été en première ligne durant cette deuxième vague et durant cette période de confinement et il nous faut prendre conscience de leur dur labeur et de leur contribution pour prodiguer des soins à toute la population. Il est nécessaire de les protéger et les apprécier à leur juste valeur et les récompenser à juste titre et je salue, par la même occasion, les autres *frontliners* qui assurent la sécurité et le bon fonctionnement des services essentiels.

M. le président, le tourisme est sans nul doute, le secteur le plus durement éprouvé par la crise. À genoux, mais qui résiste encore, mais pour combien de temps?

Le tourisme constitue non seulement une source cruciale de devises étrangères mais crée directement et indirectement environ un emploi sur 5 et l'effondrement du tourisme a mis en péril les moyens d'existences de plus d'une centaine de milliers de nos citoyens. Employés d'hôtels, d'agences de voyage, de restaurants, plaisanciers, chauffeurs de taxi, artistes, artisans.

Le sésame reste l'ouverture des frontières, une ouverture que tout le monde souhaite qui se fasse dans les meilleures conditions, dont sanitaires. Le pari est difficile, mais il faut le prendre.

Le budget ne fait, par contre, aucune mention *d'Air Mauritius*. L'absence *d'Air Mauritius* serait un handicap certain car avoir un transporteur aérien national est essentiel à notre industrie touristique. Comment espérer atteindre l'objectif des 650,000 touristes en un an?

En raison de l'aggravation de la pandémie avec des vagues de cas et l'émergence de nouvelles variantes, de nombreux pays ont réintroduit des restrictions de voyage plus strictes, notamment des tests et vaccins obligatoires, des quarantaines et dans certains cas une fermeture complète des frontières, le tout pesant sur la reprise des voyages internationaux. En outre, la vitesse et la distribution du déploiement de la vaccination ont été plus lentes que prévu et assez inégales selon les pays et les régions.

M. le président, R 420 millions ont été allouées à la MTPA pour la promotion et le marketing. Les travers du passé ne doivent pas se répéter, à l'exemple, des promotions rocambolesque et insoutenable comme les R 400 millions au *Liverpool Football Club*, qui n'a

porté aucun fruit. Où les exercices de communication ratés comme le slogan “*SUS Island*” du *Sustainable Island Mauritius*.

Je me réjouis par contre de la promotion du tourisme culturel qui met en valeur notre patrimoine, nos produits locaux et artisanaux, nos talents et artistes et notre cuisine locale à travers le tourisme gastronomique.

M. Le président, le succès de la relance touristique dépend sur l'image que notre pays projette. C'est aussi pour cela que c'est sur de nouvelles bases qu'il faut faire repartir le tourisme. L'année dernière j'avais mentionné que le moment était opportun de diversifier notre gamme de produits et de services car le tourisme connaît aujourd'hui des évolutions.

Cela me désole que ce budget n'a rien prévu pour l'éco-tourisme sachant que désormais les jeunes préfèrent se tourner vers un tourisme vert et solidaire. Ces jeunes ont soif d'authenticité et de nature et il nous faut promouvoir la construction des écogites qui seront respectueux de l'environnement et offrir des incitations fiscales aux promoteurs de ces hébergements écologiques et durables. C'est dans ce même contexte qu'il nous faut aussi développer les loisirs sportifs de nature.

M. le président, permettez-moi de dire quelques mots sur les femmes et les enfants. C'est une évidence que cette pandémie a un effet dévastateur sur notre société et notre économie, mais elle impacte de façon disproportionnée les femmes.

Afin de réussir ce grand défi pour une vraie relance économique, nous avons besoin qu'un maximum de nos ressources humaines contribue à l'économie. Et pour cela, nous avons besoin de plus de femmes sur le marché du travail, afin d'utiliser au mieux notre capital intellectuel et nos compétences pour une économie plus efficiente, plus productive et atteindre notre plein potentiel.

Selon *Statistics Mauritius*, seulement 46% des femmes en âge de travailler, sont sur le marché du travail, à comparer à 73% des hommes. Les inégalités hommes-femmes existaient déjà de longue-date, et dans le monde du travail, ces inégalités se sont amplifiées avec la pandémie, car en situation de crise, ce sont les femmes qui sont les premières à souffrir de licenciements et de chômage. Chiffres à l'appui, *Statistics Mauritius* démontrent que le taux de chômage féminin est en hausse, avec 11,1% de femmes au chômage en 2020, contre 10,2% en 2019. Et le taux de chômage des femmes représente 61% du chômage total.

Avant même la pandémie, les femmes souffraient de discrimination et d'inégalités professionnelles. Elles occupent des postes moins qualifiés que les hommes, cela en dépit de

leur niveau d'études plus élevés. Les métiers les plus féminisés tendent à être les moins rémunérateurs et les femmes ont plus difficilement accès aux postes de décisions. Les femmes sont aussi traditionnellement plus largement assignées au travail non-rémunéré dans le rôle domestique et la prise en charge de la vie familiale pesant essentiellement sur elles. Nous devons en finir avec ces inégalités et afin d'atteindre nos objectifs de relance, notre société a besoin que plus de femmes contribuent à l'économie du pays.

C'est dans cette optique que le budget aurait dû faire provision de mesures pour encourager l'embauche des femmes, ou même de décourager les discriminations envers les femmes au moment de l'embauche, et cela, à travers –

- Un partage plus égalitaire des congés parentaux, qui permettrait aux femmes de réaliser des carrières plus rémunératrices ;
- Un quota plus élevé de femmes dans les *board* des grandes et moyennes entreprises, et enfin
- former les enseignants pour que, dès l'école, casser les stéréotypes de genre pour éviter une orientation professionnelle différente pour les filles et les garçons.

M. le président, afin de permettre à plus de femmes de contribuer davantage au développement économique du pays, le budget aurait dû apporter le soutien nécessaire aux mamans, comme l'instauration des crèches dans les institutions gouvernementales et parapubliques et même au sein de notre Assemblée nationale.

Une des plus grandes inégalités dans le monde du travail est la discrimination salariale envers les femmes, où, pour travail égal, elles perçoivent une rémunération moins que celle des hommes. *Statistics Mauritius* démontre encore une fois que pour travail égal, à travers toutes les catégories professionnelles, en 2019, les femmes touchaient 76% du salaire des hommes. Malgré les lois déjà existantes, les inégalités persistent. J'espère, donc, que le *Gender Equality Bill* annoncé il y a plus d'un an de cela déjà, et inscrit une fois de plus dans ce budget en tant que stratégie 2021-2024, viendra remédier à tout cela, entre autres.

M. le président, en ce moment de crise socio-économique, une deuxième vague et un deuxième confinement, les tensions au sein des ménages sont exacerbés, la dynamique familiale difficile et par conséquence, le nombre de violence domestique ne cesse de croître. De ce fait, cela me désole de constater que la protection des personnes vulnérables et le combat contre la violence domestique n'est pas un élément prioritaire à ce gouvernement,

quand une seule mesure a été consacrée à la violence domestique. Quand les femmes victimes de violence sont toujours celles qui sont arrachées de leur chez-elles, quand leur bourreaux, eux, jouissent du confort de leur chez-eux. Quand elles sont confrontées à des policiers insuffisamment formés au moment des dépositions aux postes de police et par conséquence les actions appropriées ne sont pas prises et quand les femmes sont blessées ou même abattues par leur bourreaux, malgré une *protection order*.

M. le président, le dernier rapport de l'UNICEF, démontre qu'investir dans la petite enfance, c'est non seulement investir dans l'avenir de l'enfant mais aussi dans celui du pays. Le financement des programmes pour la petite enfance a des retombées extrêmement positives, notamment une élévation du niveau d'éducation, une amélioration de la santé, une baisse de la criminalité et une hausse des revenus individuels. Le pays bénéficiera d'un capital humain plus qualifié et donc de revenus, et une compétitivité économique accrue. À l'opposé, négliger d'investir dans la petite enfance a comme conséquence des enfants en mauvaise santé et moins aptes à apprendre, avec une capacité de gain réduite. Cela signifie également une économie affaiblie et une charge plus importante pour les systèmes éducatifs, de santé et de protection sociale. C'est un investissement tellement crucial qu'en 2015, le développement de la petite enfance a été inclus dans les objectifs de développement durable des Nations Unies.

Il serait, donc, non seulement primordial d'augmenter la part du budget consacrée à ces enfants mais cela me désole que le budget ne prévoit rien pour nos très jeunes enfants, quand les études ont démontré que 80% du cerveau d'un enfant se développe avant l'âge de 3 ans. Il faut mettre sur pied des programmes de communication aux parents et lancer des campagnes d'information au public, afin de contribuer à une meilleure compréhension de l'importance critique de la nutrition, la protection et de la stimulation pour que les enfants atteignent leur plein potentiel.

M. le président, la plupart des crèches pour les enfants de 0 à 3 ans sont privées et payantes. Si nous souhaitons vraiment donner une chance égale à chacun de nos enfants et leur donner un départ optimal dans la vie, il est du devoir du gouvernement de mettre en place des crèches publiques ou de subventionner les frais de crèches. Et dans la même foulée, cela aidera aussi plus de mamans à prendre un travail et de contribuer à l'économie.

Par ailleurs, il serait du bien-être de nos enfants que les établissements de crèches et pré-primaire bénéficient d'examens médicaux de routine, comme c'est le cas pour les écoles

primaire à monter. De plus, les politiques essentielles à mettre en place dans le monde du travail pour le développement idéal des enfants sont des installations permettant l'allaitement, des pauses rémunérées pour l'allaitement durant les 6 premiers mois, ainsi que des services de garde d'enfants sur les sites des entreprises et des programmes d'apprentissage précoce pour les enfants des employés.

M. le président, l'exposition d'un enfant à la violence peut être lourde de conséquences sur sa santé mentale tout au long de sa vie. Des études démontrent qu'un enfant ayant connu des périodes d'insécurité prolongées sera 2 à 5 fois plus fréquemment hospitalisé pour maladies et problèmes de santé, qu'un enfant ayant grandi dans un univers sécurisé. Les récents cas bouleversants d'infanticides et le nombre croissant de maltraitance envers les enfants démontrent que le combat contre les abus envers les enfants doit être intensifié.

C'est dans ce but que j'espère que le programme d'Accompagnement des Familles, va inclure l'éducation parentale pour protéger les enfants de la violence. Et j'accueille favorablement qu'un *Community Child Protection Programme* soit mis sur pied dans les zones vulnérables pour sensibiliser les membres de la communauté à la détection des abus sur les enfants. Mais je suggère néanmoins qu'un programme soit aussi établi pour former le personnel médical, particulièrement pédiatrique, dans le diagnostic et repérage de maltraitance sur les enfants qui sont de passage dans les centres médicaux, car les abus sur les enfants ne viennent pas uniquement des zones vulnérables.

M. le président, c'est un soulagement qu'à travers le *Children's Act*, malgré que la promulgation de celui-ci se fait toujours attendre, le châtiment corporel et le *bullying* seront des graves offenses punies sévèrement par la loi. Il faut donc investir davantage pour former les enseignants à la discipline positive et sensibiliser les parents à l'éducation bienveillante.

Pour conclure, M. le président, j'ai évoqué au début de mon intervention les 3 valeurs olympiques : respect, excellence et amitié.

Je souhaite sincèrement que ces valeurs puissent inspirer ceux qui prétendent nous gouverner. Les électeurs et électrices s'attendent à ce que le gouvernement assume cette responsabilité à faire fonctionner de façon efficace et efficiente les finances publiques, la machinerie de L'État et ses services de façon sans équivoque.

Le bien-être durable de la population doit demeurer à la base de l'action de l'État. Le monde post-COVID exige que les gouvernements aient un nouveau regard, une nouvelle approche et une nouvelle détermination pour faire face à cette nouvelle réalité.

Pour que notre système de santé publique soit en mesure d'atténuer de tels risques et de disposer d'un *preparedness plan* adéquat afin de protéger plus efficacement la population.

Ici, dans cette Chambre, on parle chiffres et pourcentages. Mais au sein des foyers c'est leur existence même, leur emploi, leur avenir qui se jouent. Agissons, avec ces valeurs en tête, par respect pour les enfants de notre République.

Merci.

Mr Speaker: Will you be long?

Ms Ramyad: No, I will not be long.

Mr Speaker: Please!

(12.52 p.m.)

Ms N. Ramyad (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle): Mr Speaker, Sir, as I start my intervention today, allow me to have a special message to the youngsters joining either primary, secondary schools or academies. They are heading to new pastures in view to securing the right potentials to evolve in this emerging world of newness and to become citizens of the world. I am sure the new teacher would ask the new students in their new classroom and schools about what would they want to be or aspire to become when they grow up. I do hope many would say politicians, ministers and why not Prime Minister. They will not be influenced negatively by the standards of those politicians who insult and bully their fellows in the House and take pride in doing so. They will not qualify politics as being cheap and lowly. Their engagement, patriotism and innocence would not be tainted by the arrogance of seasoned politicians who vent their superiority complex.

I would hereby refer to the speech of the First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East, who unluckily is not here, who found it fun and satisfying with an undefined ease to treat the young elected Members on this side of the House with disdain and inelegance, far from any respect to the decorum of the House and individual personalities.

Some Members easily forget that they too were once a newbie on the political scene. This is the reflection of one's lack of substance, which some try to hide by using fake eloquence as well as exaggerated theatrics.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now come to the gist of my speech. Let me first and foremost, thank you for the opportunity to intervene on the Budget 2021/2022 and at the same time, congratulate the Minister of Finance for presenting a Budget based on recovery, revival and

resilience. A post-COVID-19 budget could not have a better foundation than that addressed in each line and paragraph of the Budget Speech, that of togetherness.

The COVID-19 has taught us many lessons but the main one is that it isolates countries. It casted away the concept of globalisation and the often used expression, that the world is just a village.

When a pandemic strikes, every leader has the instinct of first securing his people and his country. And to face this reaction, our countrymen understood that we are better off only if we fight together as one people as one nation; fighting for common cause, thriving and surviving the various economic and social impacts that this pandemic has brought in its strike. Many orators before me, especially from the Opposition side have painted a dark picture of the economic setup. They have gone into the technicalities of macro economy and forgone to discuss the importance and the focus on the microeconomic incentives. These are the ingredients to a *reliance* in the economy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will make my point in a simple language, the language of the common people. I will highlight what this Budget 2021/2022 brings to the population. It will have a positive impact on people's daily life and will instill hope; a hope for a better future only if we live, work and think as one.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the budget is one which empowers the younger generation. Let us first start with the most discussed concept of youth unemployment. Mr Speaker, Sir, there is only one truth and that truth does not need to be sugar-coated. And that truth is that the unemployment rate of people above 16 in Mauritius reached 52,000, which represents a statistic of 9.2% according to Statistics Mauritius.

However, amongst the unemployed, youth unemployment rate is 26.1%, which represents approximately 7,200 youths aged between 16 years to 24 years. And among this total of 52,200 registered unemployed persons above 16 years old 10,300 which is approximately 20% are those youths who have been awarded a tertiary level education. That is they are university graduates.

I have listened to the Leader of the Opposition who tried to brush a negative portrait of the World Bank report by mentioning only part of the title, but failed to give the right colouring. I mean the second part of the title, that is, I quote –

“Coming back stronger from the COVID crisis.”

The hon. Leader of the Opposition failed to look at Section 153 and 154, which state that –

“The number of low skilled occupations has declined and changed in character.”

It further goes on –

“The labour market since 2008 has not kept pace with the transformative pressure of the economy, leading to friction such as structural unemployment, skill mismatches and high inactivity rate. Several factors account for this mismatch, namely the rapid transformation in labour demand, education system, particularly technical and vocational education and training that failed to respond to industry’s needs and a local workforce less willing to work in low-skilled segments of the labour market.”

And, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Budget 2021/2022 has taken into consideration same. And I have to say that there has been a continuous framework since 2015 to address this issue of unemployment in-depth and with responsibility. Various measures have been taken in both educational and training sector as well as in diversifying the knowledge based educational framework on which the economy is directly reliable. Not only the curriculums have been reviewed at all levels, we have shifted from a rigid structure to a dynamic culture with the introduction of new subjects, learning process, adaptation to new tech teaching methodologies and learning process and more importantly by the introduction of Digitalisation Information Technology since 2015.

The same dynamism was also adopted at the tertiary level but this budget is reinforcing and strengthening the technical and vocational education and training in order to reduce the skill mismatch. The setting up of an Institute of Technical Education and Technology to provide technical education at Grades 10 and 11 should be welcomed and thanks to the Minister of Finance, the School Certificate will no longer be a prerequisite to get a good technical education and this will be the gateway to potential occupation, thus reducing unemployment.

I take note that the Minister has also positively addressed the issues raised at Paragraph 178 which mention, I quote –

“On average 11% of 16 year-old students and 30% of 18-year old students leave school prematurely. These youth attempt to join the workforce without the necessary technical skills demanded in the private sector, explaining the high unemployment and inactivity rates.”

And it further states that out of the 16 to 24 years old who have dropped out, only 38% mostly young men, are engaged in work. The rest are neither in employment, education or training. Many unqualified young women in particular, may simply stay out of the formal force.

At this stage, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to pause and state that to overcome unemployment, the Minister of Finance has taken in consideration what I have just mentioned and has addressed those issues by making massive investment in training and I commend him for that. The Minister of Finance did not hesitate to come forward with the construction of a new Technical Education Centre and the extension of Polytechnics Mauritius Ltd Campus as they are pillars to a generation of skilled workers which will be tailored for the need in the labour force.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now coming to the unemployed graduates, they represent some 10,300 in number according to Statistics Mauritius. There are various measures which will absorb unemployment at a very high proportion. In order to enhance the skills of our labour force, so as to match our economic ambition and in view to train with skills and redirect some 10,000 individuals, with this budget the Minister of Finance has come up with the following measures –

The National Training and Reskilling Scheme will cater for some 6,000 unemployed individuals;

A National Apprenticeship Programme will be launched for the training of some 750 apprentices with a monthly stipend of Rs5,000 and a travelling allowance of Rs1,000;

The Youth Employment Programme will be extended for another year for some 2,250 individuals;

The SME Graduate Scheme will cater for some 1,000 students, and will also cover vocational training.

It also goes without saying, taking into account the various measures from the last budget; the Minister of Finance has engaged himself into the continuity of empowering youth to tackle the issues of unemployment and this is in line with European Union Policies to reduce unemployment and having the youth at heart.

In the same vein, it is a commitment to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good offer of employment or a continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at this stage I have to thank the Minister of Finance for his trust in the youth and for addressing the issues of paragraph 166 of the World Bank Report that states that employers reported the lack of soft skills as an important constraint to hiring young people. Employers value not only technical skills but also soft skills including interaction skills during interviews, planning, tolerance to pressure and frustration, perseverance, their ability to work as a team and their communication skills. Therefore, weak technical and soft skills play heavily against the odds of obtaining a job among low skilled youth. Once potential candidates are placed in a job, employers often complain about the lack of workplace values and interpersonal skills as challenges to maintaining these positions, not to mention about career growth.

The budget caters for such a need by the introduction of medium to empower youth. You will see, Mr Speaker, Sir, at paragraph 337 of the Budget Speech, the Government's vision that our youth is our future and their needs, interests and hopes have to be at the centre of our decision making. It is noted with appreciation, that there is an investment of Rs165 m. in order to deliver the priorities on our youth.

The National Youth Council will be strengthened to transform the current Youth Centres into modern hubs over the next three years. The hubs will be community focal points delivering and matching our youth to appropriate programmes, activities, counsellors, careers and sports to further enhance their lives. The hubs will also engage our youth in issues related to the environment. Outdoor Education Programmes foster this talent management initiative and the fostering of soft skills since the early age. I commend the Rs37 m. earmarked for the success of this project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, active competition, proactiveness and adaptation are the words to adapt to the new normal. When the world is entangled in a war with an invisible and unpredictable enemy, we are forced to step up to new challenges by being creative and innovative in our approach. *C'est sans doute le moment pour la jeunesse de se projeter, se contourner des chantiers traditionnels et de s'engager de pied ferme tout en hésitant pas à affirmer leurs idées, à prendre des risques mesurés afin de construire une nouvelle ère.*

It is the right time for unemployed graduates who have acquired analytical and synthesising skills and knowledge to make use of the different opportunities given by the Government. The Budget Speech 2021-2022 puts forward many initiatives to boost up entrepreneurship amongst youngsters. The measures enumerated in the transformation and modernisation are the keys to boost creativity amongst the youth active communities. Small businesses need fostering, care and sometimes full support when starting.

Many persons, many young persons who have good and innovative business plans and the motivation and willingness to invest themselves fully often face the hurdles of administrative, financial, and legal process and compliance as they do not master the whole aspect of business and project management. This is why I welcome the initiatives stated in paragraph 85 of the Budget, subject to being registered with the EDB, businesses will avail themselves to initiate to incentives and schemes introduced by the Government. There will be business support facility providing facilitation and advisory services to business and it was long awaited.

Now, the entrepreneur will have dedicated Accounts Manager to accompany them to growth perspectives and adapt to international practice and he can opt or plan to venture in the regional, national and international fields. There are opportunities to have access to capital and land which will encourage entrepreneurship. There are 1,000 *arpent* of land which are being made available to private growers by Landscape Mauritius, together with different capital incentives such as loans, grants, amnesties and supports. There are also budgetary measures and facilities in agriculture, livestock production and the blue economy, and it is for the professional skilled and unskilled youth to seize the opportunity to embark in entrepreneurship.

We also have the new pillars, green energy industry and the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry that represent an enormous opportunity to young professionals to make use of their creativity and innovation capacity to their level best. Those new pillars will create new possibilities of jobs and as such will foster entrepreneurship and *débrouillardise*. The ICT BPO Sector demonstrated the emergence of young entrepreneur over the years and today in spite of pandemic, the sector has performed well, with a growth rate of 5.9% in 2020.

There is also the Digital Industries Academy which will be set up by the EDB. The digital transformation incentives and business advisory services are initiatives which promote

new and young entrepreneur in the industry. There is also the regulation of virtual assets and a full-fledged engagement in the FinTech and Artificial Intelligence which are the keys to promote investment and the engagement of young professionals in an emerging new economic pillar.

The FinTech Innovation Lab stated at paragraph 211 is the key to encourage the entrepreneurship culture in the field. The main argument of the apocalyptic champions would be that these measures are impossible and void. Mr Speaker, Sir, to these horsemen of the apocalypse, I would refer them to paragraph 234 to 237 of the Budget Speech. There will be a proper structure and framework to promote this culture of entrepreneurship. The Mauritius Research and Innovation Council will reinforce the EDB, SME Mauritius and the Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives, in stimulating this culture and boost up entrepreneurship. The MRIC's seven different innovation and commercialisation schemes were already sound business development assistance and the focus was on newness, innovation and creativity. The National Incubator Scheme which provides coaching and mentoring to business start-ups, as early as the idea stage, was already a realistic and successful step in promoting entrepreneurship. Now, through the Budget 2021-2022, with the addition of a pool of researchers who will respond to research needs of businesses, important steps in the oceanographic research and agricultural avenues may be tapped. I commend the Rs125 m. earmarked to foster research and innovation. The Emerging Technologies Council is a prominent addition to the research landscape especially in new technologies such as Blockchain, AI and IoT.

The Budget 2021-2022 aims to help modernise employment and social policies, improve access to finance and promotes the setup of micro and medium companies. These enumerated measures were not electoral marketing tools as the Opposition Members tried to define them but soundly pondered measures stitched in a full-fledged and structured network to boost youth economic engagement in our society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot forget to thank and commend the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for giving new opportunities to young couples and professionals who contribute actively in the national economy. Home ownership is the wish and aim of every active and inspired young people when joining the labour market. This has always been the most strenuous step in personal and family management and development. Housing loans and personal loans are the means for most to accede to this dream of personal independence and well-being. The Government has shown that sharing is caring. As we share

the burden and care about each one's dream, we establish a bridge of support and accompaniment.

Paragraph 187 to 195 of the Budget states that an individual buying a house, apartment or land or contracting a home loan to construct a residence in this Financial Year, will benefit from a refund of 5% of the cost of the property up to a maximum of Rs500,000.

The exemption duties for first-time buyers, access to 2,000 lots which will be put in sale by government institutions, like State Investment Cooperation and Rose Belle Sugar Estate ensures that access to land and finance is easy, swift and efficient. It is a sound step to democratisation of land access. There are many other social aspects which will empower vulnerable groups, middle-class income earners and young professionals all along within the whole Budget Speech. My friends elaborated on many of those in details and will continue to do so when they present landmarks in the development of the country with inclusiveness at its core.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now conclude by commending the hon. Minister of Finance for having measured the vulnerability of our south-eastern coast; a Coast that has been hit by the accidents of the MV Wakashio, by flood of June 2021 with 400 mm of rain in two hours that has stricken and surprised the inhabitants and it was urgent to address these cumulative problems and tackle them at the core. This is why I welcome the short-term and long-term plans enumerated in the Budget. The Rs1.2 billion investments in the rehabilitation and protection of our coast line, the construction of waterfronts at Deux Frères and Rivière des Créoles, the investment of Rs1.5 billion in drain construction and upgrading are measures which will help change the physical set-up of the region. This will also empower the communities residing in the region by creating new jobs, and giving new avenues for entrepreneurship. I personally welcome the advent of *Fêtes de l'Art dan Vilaz* as they will give the dose of boosting cultural exchanges between regional partners and cumulatively grow in national and international exchanges.

I will now stress on a very simple but important fact. The Leader of the Opposition talked about revamping, re-energising and providing new dynamism. The Budget 2021-2022 shows that we are leading to it and my speech enumerates only some of the measures to prove them. So stay assured, nous arriverons à destination malgré vos démagogies, vos demi-vérités et la peur que vous essayez d'instaurer. We are all speaking of a new normal; the new normal should first be encrusted in our way of life, beliefs and actions. It is only then that we

will be able to step up to the new challenges. Time and again, the Mauritian society has shown its resilience, its will to adapt, its readiness to stand up to world challenges and its habit to adapt to change. So, once again, together we will achieve.

I will now end my speech by quoting the concluding note of the Budget Speech of hon. Paul Bérenger as Minister of Finance under the Prime Ministership of Sir Anerood Jugnauth. In his Budget Speech of the 20th August 1982, I quote –

“As the *reliance* gathers momentum, there will be a multiplier effect on the creation of jobs and the improvement of living standards. It will take time for concrete results to be achieved. I would appeal to all sections of the economy to participate in a spirit of national solidarity so that the *reliance* will quickly gather momentum. It is important that groups with well-founded grievances such as the unemployed, taxpayers, graduates in search of employment and others should not lose heart and expect results too soon. We are a socialist Government and we are very deeply conscious of their problems. This is why the Government has placed such emphasis on building a national consensus favourable to the *reliance*. The greatest danger to the *reliance* would arise if any group loses patience and takes any action in support of its own interests which would undermine national solidarity.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will leave you, the House and the population to ponder on this conclusion which was and is still relevant in situations where a country is emerging from a crisis.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

At 1.26 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.58 p.m., with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

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

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are a few Members on the other side of the House, some more vociferous than others, who keep accusing the Opposition as doomsayers, and we just heard, as apocalyptic champions. When we point at the vacuity of the Budget Speech, when we point that the Budget Speech is used as a political tool for political propaganda and spin doctoring, more than addressing the systemic shortcomings of our fiscal and economic situation, Members of the Government get fidgety, restless and nervous.

My good friend - he is not here - hon. Maudhoo, went on to literally accuse the Opposition for celebrating each time bad things happened to the Government. I do not know whether he was referring to the Rs5 billion to be paid to Betamax. Hon. Maudhoo, we on this side of the House, I have to tell him, we did not wish it. It happened because of political arrogance and the vengeance spree of this Government, after '*vire mam*', '*riyer mam*', '*kot mon fauter mam*', now it is, '*payer mam*'.

Hon. Maudhoo, be it in English or French or Bhojpuri, because he said it in Bhojpuri, this is called karma and when karma hits back, it is really painful. By the way how we call it, Privy Council *vous a claqué*; in Bhojpuri, how we would have said it, '*chatkan ke gounj sunle hawasa, niman se chatkan se milal*.' But the population is asking, '*kot nu fin fauter*' and it is unfortunately the population which will have to '*payer mam*'.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on Monday, one of the speeches which marked me was that of Dr. the hon. Mrs Dorine Chukowry, where she told hon. Fabrice David, 'if you can't beat them, then join them.' I was flabbergasted to hear such an advice. Hon. David knows whom to join and whom never to associate with. But this whole idea of "cannot beat them", yes, we cannot beat them in corruption, yes, we cannot beat them in nepotism, yes, we cannot beat them in money and ethnic politics, but we will not join them. I will refer to Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, verse 38 –

"Fight for the sake of duty,
Treating alike happiness and distress,
Victory and defeat."

I will advise everyone, especially youngsters, to stand up for values and principles because victory and defeat are part of life but never to forsake values for ephemeral power.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is little in this Budget 2021-2022 which prepares the country for a post-COVID-19 economic recovery. Almost nothing has been said on how to improve efficiency, boost up productivity, enhance capacity building, develop economic resilience and address the innumerable challenges facing us as a nation. Has not the Minister of Finance missed the golden opportunity to gear the nation towards a new paradigm where an increased focus on accountability and transparency, a relentless quest to fight corruption could have been unleashed? Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government is very generous in making false promises but very poor in realising them.

Let me refer to the Budget Speech 2021-2022, Item 284 under the heading, Tertiary Education, where it is mentioned that –

“I am also providing this year Rs70 million for the construction of the Civil Service College at Réduit.”

This measure was already announced in the 2016 Budget and an MoU had even been signed between Mauritius and India regarding an amount of Rs175 m. which was then earmarked for the construction of the Civil Service College at Réduit. Today, only Rs70 m. has been earmarked for the same project! Mr Speaker, Sir, even independent observers, who have nothing to do with politics, have been very skeptical regarding this budget.

Let me refer to Mr Anthony Leung Shing, country partner of PwC, Mauritius, who puts it -

“Overall, the Government is pumping more money into the economy but more is required to get ahead of the pandemic. In the immediate term, we need to do more with less. Unfortunately, the Budget fails short of that.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now refer to my constituency Grand' Baie/Poudre d'Or. I welcome the infrastructural measures earmarked for my constituency spanning over the next three years. A few of them are long overdue and I only hope they will be undertaken completely, even if it is completed on the eve of the next general elections, which I'm sure, will happen when a festival of *coupe riban* will surely take place. I want the inhabitants of Grand' Baie/Poudre d'Or not to feel bad that Côte d'Or is not in our constituency. Today, massive investments take place there in Côte d'Or for political reasons more than anything else. Côte d'Or has become the political capital of capital projects worth billions and billions whether they turn out to be *éléphants blancs* or not, hardly bothers this Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the constituents of Grand' Baie/Poudre d'Or are waiting for the past seven long years that this Government is at the helm of the country for –

- (i) the completion of the Melville-Goodlands Link Road as announced in the budget;
- (ii) for a regular water supply, even if it is not on a 24/7 basis, as promised in their Electoral Manifesto but at least for a few hours per day, they want the Customer Support Unit to be more effective;

- (iii) to have access to the beach passage at Pointe aux Cannonniers, as promised by the Minister of Tourism here;
- (iv) for the Belmont incinerator to be operational, as promised from July this year;
- (v) the inhabitants of Grand' Baie/Poudre d'Or will be happy if the fight against the rampant, proliferation of drugs, especially synthetic drugs lead to a real reduction in the number of drug consumers Today, many laugh when the Prime Minister regurgitates that "*mo pou casse les reins ban trafikan.*";
- (vi) next, they will be grateful if the recurrent wastewater problem in Camp Carol, Grand' Baie is resolved once for all;
- (vii) they hope to have a futsal in Vale and Petit Raffray near Moulin à Vent and expect the Petit Raffray Dispensary to be upgraded;
- (viii) they will be happy if Roche Terre is equipped with a football ground and the Belin and Belmont football grounds are upgraded, and the health track in Trois Bras is long overdue and the market in Fond du Sac takes shape.

Mr Speaker, Sir by the way, there are many students of Goodlands SSS (Boys) who sent me messages saying – *dire gouverman la pa pran nissa ar nou*. The multi-purpose hall promised to them since 2016 or earlier seems to be as old as the dodo.

Mr Speaker, Sir, many small planters had pinned a lot of hope from the budget. I had the privilege to have long discussions with small planters of my constituency and elsewhere about their needs and how they expected the budget to address those needs. Most small planters complain, and rightly so, that most measures announced in the Budget Speech are rarely translated into reality. For example, the National Agri-Food Development Program, the Farm to Fork concept, regional storage facilities to improve on shelf life for seasonal crops, price guaranteed mechanism for producers to earn a sustainable flow of income, upgrading of irrigation system and the list of good intentions and lofty promises goes on and on. Then, how are we going to aspire for self-sufficiency and put into practice measures to ensure that we produce what we consume and consume what we produce.

In the Budget Speech, you must have heard a few measures regarding potato, onion and garlic. But what is the reality regarding these commodities? Let figures talk –

- in 2014, we produced 20,000 tons of potato and this figure dropped to 15,000 tonnes in 2019 while our importation of potato increased from 7,500 tons in 2014 to 9,000 tons in 2019;
- in 2014, we produced 6,000 tons of onions and this figure dropped to 3,500 tons in 2019 while our importation which was 11,000 tons in 2014 simply increased to 15,000 tons in 2019;
- in 2014, we produced 160 tons of garlic and this dropped to only 50 tons in 2019, while our importation, which was 1,600 tons in 2014 increased to 1800 tons in 2019.

I intentionally stopped at 2019 so that you cannot blame COVID-19 as the scapegoat or hold us responsible to be demagogues. What does this budget propose to mitigate the impact of climate change on food production? What does this budget propose to make the agricultural sector more resilient to disruptions caused by floods, lockdowns, thefts and rise in cost of production? What incentives are being given to youngsters to join the agro business? How many primary schools and colleges are embracing the Sheltered Farming Scheme as proposed in the budget? What measures are being taken to provide training and capacity building in this sector? What measures are being taken to reengineer, revamp and dynamise the sector? What measures are being taken to control the price of fertilisers, insecticides and other equipment and tools needed in the agricultural sector? Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget fails to propose these measures.

I will now move on to the educational sector. Mr Speaker, Sir, education will and should be at the centre of human resource development. It is imperative to ensure that we guard against all forms of financial waste, lapses in procurement and financial procedures, inadequate control mechanism, and delays in the execution of projects. The Reform of Education, especially the Nine-Year Schooling, was presented as a miracle panacea to cure our system of education from the many weaknesses afflicting it. Whether it is domestic violence or gender inequalities; whether it is the proliferation of drugs or rise in violence; delinquencies, illicit businesses, it is primarily because of the motto – *Moralite na pa ranpliant*, that we fail.

We need to go back to the basics. Tagore said that the principal aim of education should be development of moral and spiritual aspects of the child's personality. For this, he emphasized upon inner development, attainment of inner freedom, inner power and enlightenment. We need to realize that 21st Century Education is one that should respond to

the economical, technological and societal shifts that are happening at an ever increasing pace. It is the type of education that we provide to our children which will help them succeed in a world where more than half of the jobs they will have over their careers, do not even exist today. We need to increasingly focus on the four C's for 21st century learning: Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration and Creativity.

Aristotle said that educating the mind without educating the heart, is no education at all. In fact, education is the means to combat inequalities. The multi-dimensional aspects of education- developing the head, heart and the hand has propelled many pedagogical reforms. It is important to provide pupils a variety of learning experiences along with the co-academic programme, inclusive education notwithstanding transacted way of loving effectiveness. Gandhi wanted to establish a coordination with parallel development of head, heart and hand. It means to intellectual, emotional development which work culture of human together.

Now, let us ask a few questions regarding the Reform. Has the Reform met its main objectives? Have we addressed the issue of competition? Have we made the lives of our kids any better? Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to cater for the needs of an elite, without neglecting the interests of other children who may not be academically endowed. Striking the balance should be the concern of policymakers, who should care for all the children. How to do it? This is where we have failed our slow learners, those having learning disabilities.

What type of quality assurance exercise takes place in private pre-primary schools as 80% of the 22,000 kids get their education in these institutions? When we talk of holistic education, I would like to know how many children have been able to get an inkling of what drama and music are in our primary schools. Now that the *Natation Scolaire programme*, which is a very good proposal, has been mentioned again, I would like to know how it will be implemented in reality. How many Secondary School students will leave the system after having been exposed to extra-curricular activities? Have we been able to strike a healthy balance between academic development and holistic education? Have we adapted our system to meet the emerging challenges facing all of us? Are our children's creativity and full potential fully tapped? Why many feel the Reform which was heralded as the miracle solution by many seasoned pedagogues, are today, disillusioned? Has the Reform addressed the issue of mismatch that exists between our labour force and our labour market? Have we carried out any needs analysis, in terms of labour market requirement? Are we preparing our students to embrace emerging technologies? What measures have been taken to boost up the teaching and learning of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics?

Mr Speaker, Sir, now I will devote some time on the Extended Programme which was presented and introduced as an ambitious effort on the Mauritius Nine Years' of Continuous Basic Education Reform to provide underperforming primary school leavers with additional support to get back on track during the lower secondary years.

Next year, our Extended Stream students will be taking the same exams, the NCE, just like the Mainstream students. How can I sit here in this Chamber and keep quiet when I see the pedagogical injustice, pedagogical disservice being done to those children who need our attention, our care, our love, our support? How can we condone what is pedagogically unacceptable and almost insane? How have we asked extended stream students to take the NCE after their fourth year? How can we ask them to do that? Why is there not another or parallel assessment route for them? Why are we bent on exerting pressure on these kids? Who are the Extended Stream students? They are those who fail to reach the minimum academic requirements in English, French and Maths for the PSAC exams. For example, 75 to 85% of these students, failed to reach the minimum benchmark of 30 points in the 2017 PSAC at the end of primary school. These are students who obtained the lowest scores in Mathematics. Is it pedagogically sound to ask these students to take the NCE after four years in the Extended Stream?

At present, out of the total population entering Secondary education, approximately 30% of students join the Extended Stream. What does this indicate? Three out of ten Mauritian students fail to reach the minimum benchmark of 30 points per subject in the PSAC exams? Does not it show the systemic weakness within the primary education system? What measures have we taken to address this issue? Has the Early Support Programme yielded positive results? Has any survey been carried out in low performing schools? What is the Minister's response to SeDEC request to manage the low performing schools in the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire*?

I know that SeDEC will do a good work. Why does not the Ministry learn from the good practices of SeDEC, MGI Schooling System and even some private secondary schools for the benefit of our children? Mr Speaker, Sir, I request the population at large, but pedagogues in particular, to ponder on the following questions-

- 1) What is the evidence that Extended Programme students are progressing as intended?
- 2) What are the main Extended Programme implementation challenges that

stakeholders have encountered to date, including contextual issues and factors related to the education system itself?

- 3) What guidance or support is given to teachers, school leaders and parents to help them contribute to the success of the programme?
- 4) To what extent have appropriate facilities and pedagogical tools, curriculum, textbooks, progress book, a student individualised plan, ICT, been made available in a timely manner?
- 5) To what extent is the teaching and learning programme suitable for the Extended Programme students?
- 6) To what extent is the process of selection of teachers and facilitators into the Extended Programme appropriate?

The extended stream is a pedagogical aberration. I want the nation to ask themselves what this Government has proposed to our kids who have not been able to meet the basic learning competencies, like numeracy and literacy. How far has the Extended Stream helped to address their learning difficulties?

Let me refer to the Report jointly prepared by the World Bank and MIE entitled “Mid-Term Evaluation of the Extended Programme 2018-2020,” published in June 2020, and which must be lying somewhere in a drawer –

“Most students within the Extended Programme who were functioning academically at a primary school level, several grades levelled behind, where they should be and learning improvement had not taken place at a sufficiently rapid pace.”

This is what this Report says. This is the World Bank Report, which must be lying somewhere in a drawer. “The curriculum was not fully adapted to the needs of Extended Programme students with only 40% of students of teaching time dedicated to literacy and numeracy. This was insufficient for addressing the accumulation of learning deficits exhibited by many Extended Programme students. The short comings in the curriculum was exacerbated by an infrastructure that was not always well adapted to Extended Programme functions and next, most teaching was traditional, teacher centred, frontal, limited to lower order skills such as memorisation. Many teachers found classroom management to be difficult. The community of practice workshops did not provide teacher training to help teachers with class management or to deal with students with low performance level and behavioural issues.”

I will now move on to Education and Technology. Mr Speaker, Sir, at the outset, we need to commend the use of technology in our quest to enhance our system of education. In recent years, we have invested massively in equipping our schools with technological devices to support teaching and learning. So far, have we devised, have we developed, have we worked on any strategy towards the development of a partnership between the Education sector and the technology industry in order to drive further progress in the use of Education Technology for schools, further education, higher education and other providers?

There is a clearly lack of vision, lack of leadership at the helm of the Ministry, which is blocking the way forward, which is impeding development, innovation and progress. What has happened to the E-Learning platform which was promised in the last Budget? Was it only a mere promise, like so many other promises which are never implemented? Why is it so difficult to drive change and implement projects at the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology? Let me give one example where the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology has seriously *fauté* and I want everyone to take note of it. In the Report of the Director of Audit, on page 244, we can read the following –

“Besides, two school terms had already elapsed and there is a high risk that implementation of the project for Grade 4 pupils would not be finalised by the end of the third term.”

Let me ask the hon. Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology to inform the House, why tablets could not be used in Grade 4? What was the technical hitch which impeded Grade 4 students from using tablets? Why Grade 4 students could not log in their tablets? Why was there a coding issue? How come a whole cohort of students, the 2020 batch of students has been denied the possibility to use tablets? *Pas fauté meme?* This is a serious fault. Our students will never get that opportunity, the whole cohort of Grade 4 did not and was not able to use tablets and the tablets were there in the school. How come a whole year in the lives of these Grade 4 students has gone by without being able to use tablets which were there at school? Who is to be blamed? Did the hon. Minister deem it right to carry any survey?

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am quite worried when on page 2 of the World Bank Report, on an investigation of the Early Learning Project and Early Support Programme, dated June 2020, I find a few alarming findings -

- 1) “Almost half of classroom teachers reported needing ICT support and they were unable to get timely support in many cases;
- 2) Almost one quarter of teachers’ reported issues with the installation of equipment such as lack of internet, access or projectors;
- 3) Teachers reported significant loss of time during distribution and collection of tablets. The physical placement of charging stations and projectors also interferes with the optimal layout of the classroom for teaching purposes, and
- 4) More than one third of classroom teachers felt that the training did not give useful preparation for the classroom use of the tablets. Most of the tablets application were not used because they were deemed not to be necessary or helpful.”

By the way, I hope that the hon. Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology has carried out a proper survey to find out how many students actually followed the online classes during the first lockdown and will inform the House about same.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know what is the Ministry’s approach towards regional State Secondary Schools? And here, I would like to pay tribute to hon. Steven Obeegadoo because when he was Minister of Education, this came forward and today, what is happening? I would like to congratulate the 30 Regional Secondary Schools which obtained more than 95% in the recent NCE examinations.

Nearly 2,200 students have left these regional schools for Academies. I would like the hon. Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology to tell us why lateral transfer has been prohibited? How come in a country where transfer from regional to Academies is officially approved but transfer from regional to another regional school is not deemed acceptable? Why vacancies in a few regional secondary schools cannot be filled? What is the rationale behind this? Has the Ministry undertaken any survey to help out low performing secondary schools should improve? Has the Ministry planned an inquiry to look at how the outbreak of COVID-19 is affecting all aspects of Education Sector and children’s social care system and will scrutinise how the Educational Sector is dealing with the situation? Has any attempt been made to examine both the short term impacts such as the effects of school closures and examination cancellations, as well as, the long term implications, particularly for the most vulnerable children?

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me briefly refer to the technical and vocational education and training sector as mentioned in the Budget which is planning the setting up an Institute of Technical Education and Technology (ITET). Can we know how many new training courses will the ITET provide? New training courses, which are not being provided so far, how will these new courses answer to the new needs of the labour market by the ITET? But what about the human resources, we need clarifications on this issue. It concerns the future of those staff members working in different capacities in the institutions which will henceforth be managed by the ITET. Why introduce the ITET when MITD is already conducting vocational training. Additional training tasks could have easily been assigned to the MITD without any problem.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when we look at the system of education today, we ask ourselves one question – is it better today than it was in the past? Or there is that beautiful saying –

“Or was it better when it was worse?”

Many observers decry the system of education that we have for its relentless decline in its quality. More and more parents are opting for private fee-paying schools rather than public ones. Why? Most of them feel and, rightly so, that their kids will get better education in private fee-paying schools.

And here, I would like, again, to refer to the former Minister of Education, hon. Steven Obeegadoo, who, in *Le Défi* of 24 September 2015, already had said –

« *Le projet de 9-Year Schooling est mal parti.* »

Et il part maintenant.

« *Steven Obeegadoo est d'avis que le système proposé « maintient la pression exercée sur les élèves par l'examen du Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) » qui est néanmoins reporté en Grade 9 et accentue aussi la pression sur les élèves entre Grades 6 à 9.*

« *En fait, le CPE ne sera pas aboli et changera de nom », déplore l'ancien ministre de l'Education.* »

Et si vous allez regarder la photo, est assise à côté du ministre, notre chère collègue, l'honorable Dorine Chukowry, à l'époque.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Don't embarrass the Member!

Dr. Gungapersad: At the end, to conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are in a season of vaccination. We need to vaccinate our system of education against the inability of this Government to implement policy decisions effectively.

To end, let me refer to John Kennedy, who said –

“Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream, which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.”

God bless all the children of this country. God bless Mauritius.

Thank you, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I really appreciate the silence from both sides of the House and I expect the same thing for hon. Callichurn.

(3.33 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training and Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Mr S. Callichurn): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me start by saying that the title “Better Together” and the philosophy of this Budget are in line with the spirit with which late Sir Anerood Jugnauth who has made this country what it is today. The credit goes to him and may his soul rest in peace.

Since the beginning of the budgetary debate, every Member who has intervened before me took the time to elaborate on the difficulties which we have been experiencing since last year. The pandemic has caused unprecedented disruptions to both supply and demand in the world and Mauritius has not been spared. Measures announced last Friday by my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, are meant to achieve recovery, revival and resilience.

Mr Speaker Sir, according to ILO, it is estimated that around 114 million jobs were lost in 2020 alone and it is projected that in 2021, there would be a continued loss in employment corresponding to 90 million full-time jobs.

Unfortunately, Mauritius has known the same fate. Two years running our economy has suffered from severe contractions which have impacted on the labour market leading to an increase in the unemployment rate from 6.7% in 2019 to 9.2% in 2020. The validity of these figures has been accepted by international institutions such as, the World Bank and IMF.

Mr Speaker Sir, the figures compiled at the level of my Ministry show that last year, in 2020, 8,439 people lost their jobs for economic reasons, related to COVID. Further 9,166 have been dismissed for non-economic reasons. So, for the year 2020, 17,605 redundancies were recorded at my Ministry.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, to clarify some points regarding the figures of unemployment raised by some Members of the Opposition in this august Assembly since the very beginning of the debate. I have listened attentively, in particular, to the explanations of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and hon. Shakeel Mohamed who said that this Government is skewing the numbers. It seems that these honourable Members are obsessed with the figure of 100,000 unemployed. This number is like a stain they want to put on the back of the Government.

I would like to reiterate here, that the figure of 100,000 unemployed was given by the Minister of Finance, Dr. Padayachy, last year when he was asked about the possible consequences of economic crisis due to COVID on employment. He replied, I quote –

“Potentially we could end up with 100,000 unemployed”.

I am minded here to say that he, like other economic observers, was forecasting the worst scenario.

Under the given circumstances we simply could not sleep on our laurels and do nothing about it, we had to act. That is why in the last Budget we introduced bold measures specifically to avoid the worst. In reality, this Government did everything that was required under the circumstances to protect as many jobs as possible. Amongst others, non-conventional measures such as the Wage Assistance Scheme and Self-Employed Assistance Scheme were introduced to relieve workers from the dread of being laid off. Like it or not, people in the tourism sector have been paid their salary up to an amount of Rs25,000. This is exceptional and I can't recall of any other African countries which have done the same. And we are not stopping here; we shall continue to pay the salary of the workers in the tourism sector till the end of the September 2021. Today, we can take pride in having successfully kept the mass unemployment at bay, thus avoiding a social crisis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that for a continuous period during the Labour led Government, recruitment in the public sector was almost freezed. Instead of substantive and pensionable positions, people were unfortunately being offered merely temporary jobs as a result of poor policy making.

I take pride to say that this Government, since assuming office, has given prominence to the filling of vacancies in the public sector through the permanent recruitment of persons at all levels. It is now announced the Government will recruit a significant number of persons in the public sector soon.

Now, I come to this figure of 100,000 unemployed, as mentioned by some Members of the Opposition. As announced, the number of unemployed is 52,200 which is equivalent to 9.2% which Statistics Mauritius computed in its yearly household survey. According to the Members on the other side of the House, the figure of 52,200 should have been added to the figure of 42,000, that is, those falling in the category of "potential in employment" in order to obtain the real figure of unemployment which, according to them, should have been oscillated around their magic figure of 100,000 unemployed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind them that according to ILO, unemployment is defined as someone who is available for work and actively looking for job as compared to potential labour force which refers to a person in unemployment and who is not actively looking for a job.

Mr Speaker, Sir, therefore, logic would dictate that had it been the case as showcased by the Opposition, Statistics Mauritius would have taken into account this particular fact and it goes without saying that the unemployment rate would have been estimated much above 9.2%.

The wrong interpretation of the official stats by a former Minister of Finance and former Minister of Labour is wrong in principal and it tantamounts to casting doubt on the integrity of the office of Statistics Mauritius which compute unemployment rate according to international standard, taking into consideration, for example, indicators on International Labour Organisations Conventions.

Actually, I would say that they have been astounded by the fact that we have been able to contain the unemployment rate and thus preventing a social crisis although the economic indicators are in the red.

Mr Speaker, Sir, having said so, unemployment remains a major concern for us and new policies and ideas are becoming necessary. Hence, to be in line with those needs, we introduced in 2017 the *National Employment Act*, which made provisions for the setting up of the National Employment Department (NED).

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must admit that there has been a delay in the implementation of this project due to the fact that capacity building of the staff by *Pôle Emploi* was ongoing and the restructuring exercise was in the process of being completed. The new department will have as objective to collect and analyse data on any employment related matters in order to address the needs of the labour market, including skills mismatch, under-employment, unemployment and future employment prospects and to anticipate future needs and expectations of job seekers and employers.

The NED will also provide for a modern e-platform posting of vacancies by employers as well as registration and placement of jobseekers. Among other new service delivery, there will be counselling, meeting with employers, close follow-up to empower jobseekers to join the labour market. Here, I would like to thank the cooperation of the French Authorities, the Government of France and *Pôle Emploi* for their technical support, in that respect.

The National Employment Act also provides for the setting up of a National Employment Advisory Committee. The main functions of the Committee will be to advise on employment policies and strategies, employment opportunities, both local and overseas, training and placement schemes and most importantly linkages between the education and training systems and the workplace.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as you are aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a massive economic and social shock due to business interruptions and shutdowns thus questioning our livelihoods, training and skills development ecosystem. As such, this pandemic has put to the fore the importance of the skills strategy that is also structurally responsive to external shocks, as well as being flexible enough to accommodate dynamic demands and growing unemployment.

The strategy will attempt to address the existing structural challenges in our skills development ecosystem. My Ministry is finalising the National Skills Development Strategy 2021-2025 which will provide a basis to bring about changes across the system. This strategy has been developed with the technical assistance of the AFD (*Agence Française de Développement*) to provide for an overarching strategic framework to further promote skills development, bearing in mind the current and upcoming challenges. An action plan has been developed to enact the strategy with the collaboration of key stakeholders such as the

Ministry of Education and other institutions. The strategy articulates around three main clusters, namely -

- Improving skills system effectiveness;
- Tackling skills imbalances; and
- Strengthening the Educational and training system to prepare and empower our youth for the future.

My Ministry has been nimble to act prompt and within the Economic Recovery Programme. Realising the urgency to tackle job losses and reskilling, the Government is reinforcing investment in the National Training & Re-skilling Scheme (NTRS). To improve the efficacy of the scheme, MITD has been given added responsibility to implement the targeted sectors of the NTRS where it has training capabilities.

We have started implementing the National Training and Reskilling Scheme targeting some 6,000 unemployed persons to be trained in fields including construction, manufacturing, logistics, ICT/BPO, agro-industry, renewable energy and circular economy for a duration of up to 6 months as announced previously. Participants will be eligible to a training stipend of Rs10,575.

Under this scheme, 25 projects have already been approved for training of more than 2000 unemployed people have been earmarked. The projects span across sectors I just mentioned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, many employers are having economic difficulties to sustain their workforce and as such, they can benefit from the employability schemes of my Ministry. We will facilitate the participation of employers by integrating the employability schemes on a single platform for the exchange of information.

Due to the effects of the COVID-19, the number of private employers who are facing financial constraints and willing to benefit from the Youth Employment Programme (YEP) has tremendously increased.

Since the launching of YEP in January 2013 up to May 2021, I can say that some 23,981 youths have been placed out of 39,738 registered. And today, 95% of those who have completed their one-year's placement have been employed due to their employability skills acquired during their placement. The extension of another year, as announced in the Budget Speech, for some 2,250 trainees will be a boost up for the programme.

As you are aware, the unemployment rate among women is high. Study shows that women have been employed in traditional sectors like agriculture, textile and services. Statistics have shown that during the years, there has been a drop in women employment in those sectors. There are other sectors where women can be employed and also be an entrepreneur in fields like hairdressing and beautician amongst others. Through, the Back to Work Programme, my Ministry is providing tailor-made courses for these women so that they can meet demands in the programme. Here, I welcome the increase of the monthly stipend from Rs6,000 to Rs10,575, as this will give them an opportunity to have a stipend which is equal to the national minimum wage.

Since the introduction of this programme, Mr Speaker, Sir, some 300 employers have participated in it and 1,325 women have been placed in productive employment. The aim is now to attract more women to be trained and placed in employment in order to curb down the rate of unemployment amongst women.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is also a need to promote labour migration. In this context, my Ministry will set up a Labour Migration Unit to look for overseas employment prospects.

M. le président, au paragraphe 91 du Budget, il est question d'un nouveau pilier économique basé sur l'énergie verte. Que ce soit avec l'éolien, la biomasse, *wave energy* ou le solaire, cette nouvelle industrie a un fort potentiel et nécessitera de la main-d'œuvre. Pour garantir que Maurice bénéficie de la transition vers une économie verte, un ensemble d'offres de formation techniques doit être mis en place. J'invite le *CEB* à collaborer avec le *HRDC* pour mener à bien cette initiative. Le *MITD* appuiera aussi cet effort en proposant deux types de programmes de formation à savoir -

- Technicien en électricité avec cours en énergie durable, et
- Technicien en énergie solaire.

Ces cours prépareront les stagiaires à travailler sur des projets d'efficacité énergétique et d'énergie renouvelable.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Budget 2021/22 has announced additional measures to complement the ongoing schemes and programmes to curb the skills mismatch issues, such as the setting up of the digital skills academy. The HRDC, being under the aegis of my Ministry, will be a major collaborator to jointly implement this programme. This will dovetail and complement existing initiatives of digitalisation momentum.

Furthermore, a National Apprenticeship Programme will be launched for the training of 750 apprentices who will get a monthly stipend of Rs5000 plus a travelling allowance of Rs1000.

My Ministry is also reinvigorating the importance of Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) in the skills development landscape of Mauritius. We have mounted vocational courses from low skills up to vocational masters to curb the issue of skills mismatch.

Similarly, in line with the strategy of my Ministry to reform TVET, the role of MITD has been heightened to provide training in specific areas and to complement skills development initiatives provided by Polytechnic Mauritius and ITET.

The MITD will be given a different impetus. It will streamline and consolidate its training centres, with synergies across trade area and training programmes that aim to develop a multi-skilled workforce to meet the needs of the industry. Clustering of training centres into regional ones would result into economies of scale and resource sharing. Furthermore, the MITD is establishing training schools to cater for the weakest profile of students in the school system. These schools will not aim to cover academic subjects too extensively, but will incorporate basic technical and life skills module to help weaker students access semi-skilled jobs in the economy.

The MITD is working in close collaboration with the business sector to ensure training is aligned with the industry needs and will continue to play an important part in the skills development of school leavers and unemployed for enhancing their employability in the reskilling and upskilling of those who are not fully employed because of the economic crisis.

TVET which is an essential instrument for reducing youth unemployment and also for addressing issues of poverty by empowering the socially and economically disadvantaged population. In order to widen access and enhance the employability of the down trodden one, exceptional measures have been announced. The beneficiaries of SRM will be exempted from examination fees if they are pursuing studies to acquire specific skills at the MITD.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the HRDC which is also implementing the National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) and the Graduate Training for Employment Scheme (GTES) to train unemployed youth and graduates to develop better and match their skills with the demand of enterprises. These programmes comprise two essential components namely demand-led training and industrial placement. Projects are mounted in such a manner to

favour and support prospective employment, as they are demand-led. These programmes are also contributing to job creation, which is crucial in our current environment. Since its inception, more than 8000 youths have been trained and with more than 5000 of them placed in meaningful employment. The flexibility of such instruments, also make them amenable to support new economic pillars enunciated in the Budget.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the requisites of a rapidly changing world-of-work as a consequence of frenetic digital industrialisation, increased automation, coupled with foreseeable occurrences of shocks, for e.g. COVID-19, impact of climate change, amongst others, needed to be tackled by Government.

We, as a responsible Government, are investing in human capital and human capital formation. We are strategically doing so at a structural level through a systematic implementation of the National Skills Development Strategy 2021-2025, and at the operational level through the implementation of the skills development measures enunciated in the Budget Speech and the strengthening of existing ones.

Such an approach will help us address current issues that are subsequent to the pandemic, as well as more medium to long term ones and are fundamental to our economic recovery and subsequent economic growth.

Right now, we should all be engaged, focused, driven while being nimble and flexible to adapt to forthcoming hazards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now come to the measures announced to further protect our workers in line with the philosophy of this Government.

We are maximising efforts to reinforce the protection of workers in Mauritius. Unfortunately, there are some unscrupulous persons who employ foreign workers without a valid work permit.

The number of foreign workers who are today missing as reported yesterday by the Prime Minister in his PNQ because they are presumably working illegally elsewhere is estimated to be around 2000.

We have come up, after long-standing consultations with all partners from private and public sectors, with a set of reforms, including legislative amendments which are being recommended to overturn this situation.

I am therefore reconciling the increase in penalties with the provision of special humanitarian permit for workers who have been victims of ill-treatment by their employers in Mauritius. This permit is the first of its kind in Mauritius and will be our best ally in our fight against human trafficking and ill treatment of workers.

M. le président, en tant que ministre du Travail, je suis bien placé pour dire que c'est ce gouvernement qui a le plus accompli en termes de protection des travailleurs. Rehausser le niveau de vie de nos concitoyens demeure la priorité gouvernementale.

M. le président, l'arsenal légal mis en place depuis 2019 pour protéger les emplois a été renforcé en 2020. Cette année-ci, nous avons étendu l'interdiction de licencier jusqu'à fin Décembre 2021. Un règlement a été préparé en ce sens et publié le samedi 12 juin 2021. Il entrera en vigueur le 1^{er} juillet 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government also made some major amendments to the Workers Rights Act (WRA) so as to harness new measures made necessary or inevitable in the wake of COVID-19.

Allow me to elaborate on their significance here. From the main amendments brought under the COVID-19, we had introduced the concept of work from home by way of Regulations in September 2020 to provide an opportunity to businesses to continue to operate and help protecting employment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the main amendments to be brought to the Workers' Rights Act through the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2021 which aim at addressing practical hurdles in the proper enforcement of the existing provisions of the Workers' Rights Act and further protecting the rights of workers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Workers' Rights Act will introduce the provision of compromise agreement with a view to protecting workers drawing a salary at a rate not exceeding Rs600,000 in a year, against abuse by unscrupulous employers. An agreement which is not vetted by the Ministry will be deemed to be null and void. However, there have been several cases of employers circumventing this provision by resorting to an agreement defined as a "transaction" under the Civil Code. Currently workers are being made to sign an agreement unfavourable to them and the Ministry has no jurisdiction to vet such amendments.

To prevent such abuse, a provision is being made in the Act so that Article 2044 and 2052 of the Civil Code shall not apply to a worker drawing up to Rs600,000 a year.

With a view to safeguarding the rights of workers regarding the recovery of unpaid remuneration, the scope for the application of a Protective Order would be extended to the following situations, namely where workers are not paid their dues following an order of the Redundancy Board or a judgement of the Industrial Court, and in cases where they do not receive a gratuity on retirement payable under the Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund.

It has also been observed in the recent past, workers of companies going in insolvency without an order from the Supreme Court were being penalised as they were not entitled to payment of an unpaid remuneration up to an amount of Rs50,000 as guaranteed by the Wage Guarantee Fund Account (WGFA). The proposed amendment will enable workers to obtain their dues under the WGFA once a company is considered to be insolvent.

Moreover, in the case of laid off workers who are not entitled to the Transition Unemployment Benefit since they cannot make their application within the prescribed period of 60 days, although they showed good cause that they were sick or have sustained injury. With a view to addressing this anomaly, provisions would be made for the entitlement of the Transition Unemployment Benefit to this category of workers.

Enquiry has revealed that some employers are making an abuse of the Workfare Programme Fund by regularly laying off their workers and re-engaging them on new terms. Thus, the Workfare Programme Fund is being used to pay the wages of the workers during the period they have been laid off. A new provision is therefore being introduced whereby in cases employers would be required to refund the amount of Transition Unemployment Benefit paid to these workers to the Workfare Programme Fund.

It has also been brought to the attention of my Ministry that some employers are not complying with the new provision of the Workers' Rights Act regarding the requirement to submit information or document related to a charge against a worker appearing before a disciplinary committee and the minutes of proceedings of that disciplinary committee. It is to be noted that this provision was introduced to ensure that workers are provided with necessary information to defend themselves. Provisions are therefore being made so that non-compliance shall constitute an offence and on conviction, employers would be liable to a fine of Rs25,000 or a term of imprisonment of 2 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the tragic incident at Champ de Mars on 15 May 2021 which caused the death of a Mauritian jockey, I have received representations from a group of jockeys, in respect to their conditions of employment more particularly regarding the non-

payment of retirement gratuity upon their retirement. It is to be noted that this category of workers is not classified as workers on the standard employment contract or as atypical workers since they are required to pay an insurance premium. The Government has not remained silent to their legitimate qualms; hence provision will be made for them to be entitled to a payment of a gratuity under the Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund.

Mr Speaker Sir, up to last Friday, 361,000 people have had their first dose of vaccine. while 218,000 Mauritians had already got their two doses. Without all the controversies fuelled by the Opposition, we would have vaccinated many more people but the Government is doing the necessary to achieve its goal, that is, vaccinate as many people as possible so that all economic activities can restart normally. To this end, it is also of pivotal importance to ensure that employees work in a safe environment. Hence, the Occupational Safety and Health Division (OSHD) of my Ministry has been and is still playing an active role in the prevention of COVID-19 infection at workplaces by carrying out regular inspections and investigations into complaints for non-compliance with sanitary protocol under specific regulations. The OSH Division is also conducting national sensitisation campaign on the pandemic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now go through some measures concerning the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection. I am taking much time because I have two Ministries, otherwise I would have ended in 30 minutes and I beg for your indulgence.

The minimum shelf space for locally manufactured products in supermarkets will be increased from 10% to 40%. This measure is expected to boost local production by providing an incentive through higher visibility for local products. Yesterday, hon. Yeung Sik Yuen, who is not present today, presented to this House a list of products whose prices have known an increase recently. Concerning increasing prices of commodities, he should know that pricing of most goods in Mauritius are determined and influenced by market forces though there is also a price control on a selected number of products in accordance with the Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act.

M. le président, c'est un fait que l'appréciation du dollar et d'autres devises étrangères vis-à-vis de la roupie se traduit par une augmentation de prix des produits, notamment ceux importés. Cela aussi, l'honorable Yeung Sik Yuen doit bien le savoir, il lui suffit de demander aux distributeurs qui fournissent des produits au Sik Yuen Supermarket à Curepipe, mais imaginez ce qu'aurait été la situation si le gouvernement n'avait pas pris

aucune mesure pour introduire le contrôle des prix d'un certain nombre de produits de base ? Que ce soit durant la première vague ou la deuxième vague du Covid-19, ce gouvernement est intervenu pour s'assurer, d'une part, que le pays est approvisionné, et d'autre part, qu'il n'y ait pas des abus.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the price of 26 products is controlled under this mechanism, for example, rice, white and brown flour, gas, etc.

M. le président, la *Consumer Affairs Unit* s'assure que les commerçants travaillent selon les termes prescrits. Les officiers de mon ministère sont sur le terrain et, de juillet 2020 au 4 juin 2021, pas moins de 16,388 visites ont été effectuées dans divers commerces. Près de 1,300 contraventions ont été dressées pour non-affichage de prix et pour prix abusifs durant la même période.

Face à la démagogie de nos adversaires, je tiens à rappeler que dans le budget présenté l'année dernière, le gouvernement avait déjà prévu R 2 milliards de subsides pour maintenir le prix de détail du riz et de la farine à leur marché actuel et le prix de la bonbonne de 12 kg de gaz ménager a été réduit de R 210 à R 180. Nous avons cette année introduit un subside sur le sac de 25 kg de farine. Une famille fera des économies dorénavant grâce à cette mesure.

Dans la lignée du new normal et face à une augmentation des prix des produits que nous importons, il est souhaitable que les Mauriciens revoient aussi sa manière de consommer. Voyons un peu ce qui se passe ailleurs et inspirons-nous de ces pratiques. Beaucoup de familles ont créé leur propre petit potager et à Maurice, rappelons-nous de l'époque quand des milliers de familles élevaient des poules qui leur assuraient de la viande et des œufs. Mon collègue Maneesh Gobin en tant que ministre de l'Agriculture n'a pas cessé de militer dans cette direction et c'est une initiative forte louable.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Members of the House, as well as the general public, are well aware that the State Trading Corporation (STC) has gone through some extremely turbulent times over the past years or so. I do not intend here to go back into the causes of this situation. I am informed that the National Audit Committee has recently completed its audit exercise at the Corporation and soon will be providing its findings to the Management. The recent judgement of the Privy Council in favour of Betamax has further increased the challenges faced by the Corporation. However, as I stated earlier during the PNQ session, the STC will

honour its obligations towards Betamax and although we are still of the opinion that the contract was tailor-made to favour the latter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in these challenging times, I have instructed the management and the Board to take all necessary steps to strengthen the resilience of the corporation in the face of the immediate emergency, while it strengthens its capabilities and organisation flexibility to measure up to the forthcoming emerging internal and international environment which will certainly have an impact on the scope of its future role as a trading arm of the Government.

We are all aware of the huge disruptions which have marked global trade in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and as many authorities on the matter seem to agree, these will most likely have a permanent impact in shaping the new normal post-Covid global trade scenario. We have already witnessed the immediate impact of this situation and how it has negatively affected the movement of ships and cargo in the region. In what they describe as a rationalization of the routes served by them, the major shipping lines are more and more reticent to visit the ports of Small Island Developing States such as Mauritius and are inclined to consolidate and focus on a regional strategy. On the other hand, there is also a rising expectation that the post-COVID era may witness a fundamental change in global trade patterns as countries decide to procure goods and services from source geographically closer to them. In such a context, there will be huge potential for substantial increases in South-South trade.

Mr Speaker Sir, one of the most under-rated achievements of this Government over the past year or so has been the unprecedented success of our economic diplomacy leading to the ratification of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with India coupled with the Free Trade Agreement with China. Add to this the fact that the African Continental Free Trade Agreement of which Mauritius is a party has come into force as from the 1st of January this year and we have a perfect cocktail of opportunities as opposed to the storm of challenges that I have mentioned earlier.

To come back to the STC, Mr Speaker Sir, this is the wider context in which the corporation will be called upon to constantly adjust its mission and objectives as well as its day-to-day operations to continue to serve the nation by contributing to consumer welfare, by ensuring the continuous supply of necessities to the population and creating the conditions for greater competition among economic operators.

In conclusion to this chapter concerning the STC, allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to share the conviction which has motivated me since I have been entrusted the portfolio of Minister for Commerce and Consumer Protection, and I sincerely hope that beyond sheer cynicism and political partisanship, my hon. colleagues will agree that *ce qui est mauvais pour la STC est mauvais pour le pays et ce qui est bon pour la STC est bon pour notre pays*.

Let me conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, because if I continue, I will take another, I would say, 15 minutes. I have been long enough.

M. le président, en conclusion, je dirai que le Premier ministre, Pravind Jugnauth et le ministre des Finances ont agi avec promptitude quand le besoin s'est fait sentir. La croissance que nous espérons tous pour que notre économie décolle à nouveau sera possible que si nous faisons force commune. L'île Maurice doit se remettre au travail. *Ensam Tou Possib* – ce n'est plus seulement un slogan de campagne, c'est une nécessité et c'est dans cet esprit-là que nous remettrons le pays sur les rails.

Let us all join hands together and make it happen. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bodha!

(4.15 p.m.)

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci M. le président, de me donner la parole pour dire ce que je pense de l'exercice du ministre des Finances pour l'année 2021-2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are in the midst of a pandemic, we are at the end of an economic cycle and we are seeing also the growth of a black economy and what is needed, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a bold paradigm shift. The Members of the Government have been commenting on a number of measures, mostly the social ones, on the modernisation of the country, I will speak on that a bit later, but when we see they say that we have painted a very gloomy picture of what Mauritius is, when we say that Mauritius is in a very bad and dark patch, the International Monetary Fund, Mr Speaker, Sir, the World Bank, Moody's, the global initiative to combat organised crime, V-DEM, the FATF, they are not in the Opposition...

(Interruptions)

They are not in the Opposition. They have done their homework and they have painted a picture. For example, the World Bank says, 'by using the current crisis as a wake-up call, we must unlock investment, restore competitiveness, mainstream, inclusiveness and do more

with less', and it says, 'but this not an easy task.' The task, Mr Speaker, Sir, belongs to strong independent institutions with men and women of competence and integrity. In my speech, I will raise this issue of integrity and competence throughout.

Un budget, c'est une responsabilité envers la nation, M. le président, c'est une responsabilité envers l'avenir, et la première responsabilité du ministre des Finances c'est de dire la vérité. Dire la vérité, de voir les analyses qui ont été faites par les institutions internationales, par les observateurs économiques, les *captains of industry*, de nous dire la vérité concernant les chiffres. Nous savons ce qui s'est passé avec les réserves de la Banque de Maurice. Nous savons quel est le protocole exigé maintenant par les institutions internationales concernant le *MIC*. Nous avons aussi quel est le niveau de l'endettement, R 400 milliards. Nous avons aussi que le ministre prévoit un endettement autour de R 500 milliards dans les années qui viennent, 70 % du PIB, il dit 2030. Nous savons aussi, M. le président, que nous avons reculé d'à-peu-près de 15 %, et il annonce une croissance de 9 %, ce qui est au-dessus de ce que les observateurs et les institutions internationales ont dit. Et quand on lui a posé la question, comment vous allez arriver à ces 9 % - pour demander donc cela, pour qu'on parle de la philosophie de la rationalité de ce budget, des objectifs, il dit que, 'ma mesure phare c'est les drains.'

It is for this reason that I am saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we need a bold paradigm shift because we are at the end of a cycle, sugar is no longer king, textile is competitive just because of the devaluation, depreciation of the rupee, tourism is on its knees, ICT is just there, the financial sector will have this huge issue FATF and the European Union and the UK listing. And does this project does this budget raise the issue of the emerging sectors? Our resource throughout the years, Mr Speaker, Sir has been our human capital, *le génie Mauricien. La capacité du Mauricien à acquérir la technologie, à la maîtriser et de passer d'un stade de développement à un autre.*

J'ai bien écouté l'honorable Dr. Gungapersad sur le système d'éducation, c'est clair notre système d'éducation ne peut pas aujourd'hui fournir les compétences, les *skills* de demain. Et qu'on continue à mettre en place un système qui ne correspond plus aux exigences de la compétitivité et de la diversification d'aujourd'hui.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our human capital is all that we have and I am going to raise this issue of unemployment, the issue of redundancy and we have to see to it; how do we home our new skills?

Mr Speaker, Sir, le ministre a parlé du chiffre de 42,000 personnes qui ne veulent pas travailler ou qui veulent travailler mais n'arrive pas à trouver du travail, ou cherche du travail mais n'arrive pas à travailler. L'explication qu'il a donné c'est la pandémie et l'explication qu'il a donné c'est que nous sommes en train de faire – la critique qu'il a faite – de la démagogie dessus. Mais je pose la question, l'année dernière c'était 2000. Donc on est passé de 2,000 à 42,000. Maintenant, c'est vrai qu'on parle de statistiques quand on parle de chômage, c'est vrai qu'on parle de pourcentage. Mais derrière chaque chômeur il y a une famille. La question que je me pose, c'est que comment vivent ces 42,000 familles qui, d'après l'explication, cherchent du travail et n'en trouvent pas ou en trouvent mais ne peuvent pas travailler ? Ça c'est une question, j'aimerais bien que le ministre nous réponde, parce que c'est une question qui a une portée sociale extrêmement lourde étant donné la situation actuelle.

Now let me address the issue of redundancy, Mr Speaker, Sir. De novembre 2019 à mars 2000, période pré-conditionnement, une quinzaine d'entrepreneurs ont fait appel au *Redundancy Board*, c'est-à-dire, ont signifié leur intention de licencier leurs employés. Au total, autour de 300 employés – c'était en période de pré-confinement donc on comptait les cinq premiers mois. J'ai travaillé ces chiffres, M. le président. De mars 2000 à mars 2021, les cas ont explosés. Des 15 cas en cinq mois (moyenne de 3 cas par mois) on est passé à 230 cas en 15 mois, au total 2,900 employés concernés. C'est au *Redundancy Board*. Le ministre n'a pas parlé de ce phénomène et dans le total de ces 250 cas, autour de 150 concernent la *Redundancy of Workforce, Closure of Enterprise* ; les secteurs sont : le secteur manufacturier, le voyage et le tourisme. Mais demain quand il n'y aura pas le *Wage Assistance Scheme*, le *Semi-Employed Assistance Scheme*, à ce moment-là, il faudra voir qu'est-ce qu'il va se passer. Parce qu'on est passé, comme je l'ai dit, de 15 cas à 230 cas et maintenant ces cas concernent les entreprises qui ont plus de 15 employés. Donc, ne sont pas comptabilisés dans cette liste les entreprises de moins de 15 employés. Donc, qu'est-ce qui va se passer dans les mois qui viennent ? C'est ça ma question. Concernant le chômage, j'ai évoqué la question de 42,000 emplois.

M. le président, il y avait donc l'obligation de dire la vérité sur les chiffres et il y avait l'obligation d'expliquer qu'est-ce qui va se passer dans les années qui viennent, dans les mois qui viennent concernant l'emploi, concernant l'investissement, mais avec toutes les analyses des institutions internationales, des observateurs, des *Captains of Industry* qui prédisent que nous sommes dans une situation extrêmement incertaine. Il y a en toile de fond un chiffre, M.

le président. Et ce chiffre, c'est un trésor de guerre de R 122 milliards qui est disponible pour le ministre des Finances aujourd'hui. Et quand on est en train d'annoncer les mesures sociales, quand on est en train d'annoncer la modernisation de l'infrastructure, quand on est en train de dire tout ce que ce budget propose, la question qui reste c'est que le ministre des Finances avait, a R 122 milliards *in a war chest. And that is why I am saying that he could have had a bold paradigm shift to put the country on track for the next decade.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, il y a eu beaucoup de mesures sociales qui ont été annoncées et on a annoncé aussi les mesures *to prevent workers and their families from falling into the trap of poverty* et on a applaudit ; je pense que c'est une bonne chose. But Mr Speaker, Sir, as a Government in a pandemic, our pledge, our priority is to shield the most vulnerable sections of our society. Many say that we are doing it, but we have to do it, if we do not do it now, when are we going to do it? In the Budget of 1983, Mr Speaker, Sir, there were three priorities, the first one was to correct the imbalances of the economy, that is, the major indicators. Second was to promote investment and create jobs and the third one, in 1983, was to shield the most vulnerable segments of our society, but this has been there and if we do not shield the most vulnerable segments of the society in times of pandemic and we have Rs122 billion, it is our duty – so, when my hon. friends on the other side they are all the time saying we are doing this, it is a listing of things which have to be done and they have to be done. We owe it to our nation; we owe it to our people in the times of pandemic. So it is a question of responsibility of a Government, Mr Speaker, Sir.

And all Governments which are a caring Government, in Mauritius, elsewhere, they are doing it. So, we have been doing it over years. There are a number of new schemes, new ideas, which is a good thing and I hope that these new schemes will be implemented and, as I said, we welcome all the measures taken to prevent workers and their families from falling into the trap of poverty because we need to have social stability in the country and this is a price to pay for social stability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Wage Assistant Scheme and the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme have been extended for the tourism industry. I will say a few words about the industry. But I will make as request to the Government, just like after a surgery, the ventilator has to be switched off slowly to stabilise the patient to recovery. Some form of assistance will have to be given to the sector, that is, the tourism sector and other sectors depending on how and when the tourism industry is going to be revived. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is an extremely

sensitive issue when the scheme is stopped; I know that it costs about 500 billion, and when the industry, we hope, we all wish that the industry is revived.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister mentioned about the price, the price issue, *le pouvoir d'achat des familles*. Nous savons ce qui se passe, L'inflation est un chiffre pour les comptables, pour les ministres, pour les statisticiens. Mais pour la famille, le pouvoir d'achat est une question de survie, M. le président. Et avec la dépréciation de la roupie, je me pose une question, je parle à tous ceux qu'on mettrait dans une catégorie de la classe moyenne, qui prévoient d'envoyer un de leurs enfants faire des études secondaires dans les années qui viennent. Comment peut-il aujourd'hui, en fonction de la volatilité, de la parité de la roupie, comment peut-il aujourd'hui faire des économies pour envoyer son enfant faire des études en 2022, 2023, 2024 ? La roupie sera où ? À quel niveau ?

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, the problem is that most families, we have the median in Mauritius about salaries, I think it is about 16,000 per worker. We know what is happening. Everybody is saying that once I go to the supermarket and then the next week; there is something which is happening and everybody is bearing the brunt of it. Now, there is something else, Mr Speaker, Sir. In the past, when we were poor, we did not have the means, we would be happy to have basic ingredients. But today the children of vulnerable families, they know about Kentucky; they know about fast food; they know and they see it in front of them. So, we have a huge problem with regard to the purchasing power of most of the Mauritians and we have the issue of the poverty trap for those who are already in the low scale; and we have another issue is that the middle class finding themselves in a very bad batch, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mes collègues de l'autre côté de la Chambre applaudissent beaucoup quand il s'agit de la modernisation du pays. Alors, on a mis des milliards et on annonce les projets et on dit que c'est une question de vision, c'est-à-dire on va faire ceci, on va faire cela. Mais là encore, je vais expliquer ce que c'est qu'une vision. Là encore, c'est une nécessité continue de venir avec des projets pour améliorer la qualité de la vie des Mauriciens, d'améliorer l'environnement des affaires pour assurer la logistique pour les secteurs productifs et les projets doivent continuer. Et on regarde, par exemple, dans les budgets consécutifs, le même projet qui revient parce que le projet n'a pas été réalisé. Je vais dire un mot tout à l'heure sur ce que j'appelle le *project management*, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Alors, le ministre a dit que son projet phare, sa mesure phare c'est les drains ; 11 milliards en trois ans. Alors, je voudrais demander au ministre, s'il pourra répondre, quel est l'effectif de la *Land Drainage Unit* pour assurer les drains pendant trois ans pour 11.17 milliards ? Nous avons essayé tout le temps de faire avancer les projets, *and I think I am somebody who likes to drive projects*.

M. le président, on a annoncé 1500 projets concernant les projets d'infrastructures, quel est l'effectif de la *NDU* ? Ma question est simple, il ne faudrait pas que l'année prochaine on arrive pour dire qu'on avait 3. quelque chose milliards de drains à construire mais qu'on n'a pas pu gérer ce projet. Alors c'est très bien de dire qu'il y aura un *Land Drainage Unit* avec 11 milliards avec un effectif de quelques techniciens seulement.

Who is going to drive the projects, Mr Speaker, Sir? This is an extremely important issue. I would like to say a few words on the Road Decongestion Programme que j'avais piloté et le *Urban Terminal* de Victoria parce que je vois qu'on a mis 8 milliards pour les quatre Urban Terminals dans Upper Plaines Wilhems. Je vois les échangeurs de Phoenix, les auto-ponts de Sorèze, le Pont de A1 M1 de plus de 300 m de long et 100 m de haut. À l'époque, on avait imposé trois critères –

- (i) quality of works;
- (ii) no cost overrun, and
- (iii) no time overrun.

And I would like to know whether this is being done. We see the projects; *les projets arrivent à maturité* ; *c'est la transformation de l'île Maurice moderne*. Nous sommes heureux, j'en suis heureux. Je vois que le ministre pilote les projets, il continue à les piloter. Et les projets sortent de la terre et on voit une autre île Maurice.

Je voudrais dire un mot sur l'échangeur de Hillcrest qui sera complété dans les jours qui viennent. Je me souviens des grandes critiques ici, dans la Chambre, concernant la sortie de St. Jean et La Louise. Et on avait parlé à l'époque des deux voies du métro et les deux voies concernant le trafic routier. Et c'est là que j'avais demandé à la *RDA* de proposer la solution de Hillcrest, c'est-à-dire l'entrée dans Quatre Bornes sans passer par forcément St. Jean. Et demain, avec 1 km de Hillcrest jusqu'à Huang Luang, le rond-point, on pourra à ce moment-là joindre et Moka et Ebène dans le cadre d'une plus grande mobilité.

Let me now say one word about the Urban Terminal, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Urban Terminal of Victoria is coming up beautifully. It is 5 *arpents* of land, 600 buses, 1000 hawkers, but it took 2 years, Mr Speaker, Sir, to bring everybody together and to manage this project because it is a project of Rs2 billion; and it will transform the whole of this area with 80,000 people coming everyday. But how was this done? Trust, coordination and competence, and it took 3 years, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, when I see the hon. Minister saying that *nous allons avoir 8 milliards d'investissements avec les Urban Terminals de Vacoas, de Curepipe, je le souhaite - la question c'est la confiance de l'investisseur dans le projet, M. le président. Et je souhaite pour les villes dont on a parlé que ça se réalise.*

Let me now say one thing about vision, because I heard that this is the vision of the Prime Minister, the vision of Government; we are doing this. Vision is something else. In the 1980s, we had the vision to bring the factories to the people. C'est-à-dire, les entreprises vers les bassins de main-d'œuvre ce qui a évité à Port Louis de devenir ce que toutes les capitales deviennent, c'est-à-dire il y a une hypertrophie, toutes les unités de production se trouvent dans la capitale et tout le monde vient travailler dans la capitale. C'était une vision géniale d'amener l'entreprise à Roche Noires, à La Flora et faire de l'île Maurice une zone franche parce que la zone franche est une question de territorialité et à ce moment-là concernait exclusivement à l'époque Coromandel et Plaine Lauzun. *This is vision.*

Another vision, Mr Speaker, Sir, is when you have 50 *arpents* of land in Ebène and you decide that you will make it become a Cybercity. You come up with a plan, you go to India and you come up with Rs1 billion and Indian technology and expertise and today, we have what we have in Ebène, with 20,000 young people working in a Cybercity. This is vision, Mr Speaker, Sir, and this is exactly what we require today. When I speak of a paradigm shift, is a paradigm shift which changes the destiny of the people and the lives of generations to come. These are the ideas that we need today, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, when I see my hon. friends on the other side of the House, they are saying this is the vision of the Prime Minister, this is the vision of Government. The vision would be when tomorrow, *l'île Maurice devient un pays phare incontournable entre l'Asie et l'Afrique. La vision serait quand le port de Port-Louis devient le port incontournable pour tout trafic maritime entre l'Indo Pacifique parce qu'on parle de l'Indo Pacifique maintenant, on ne parle plus de L'oceaan Indien. La vision serait quand les Mauriciens vont partir dans les pays*

Africains avec leurs expertises pour créer des entreprises et amener la richesse à Maurice. C'est de ce genre de vision dont on a besoin, M. le président, aujourd'hui.

Now, let me just say a few words about the opening of frontiers. Everybody has talked about it. Opening of frontiers sadly has been an antagonistic debate between Government and the captains of industry in the hotel industry for too long. The opening of frontiers is a national issue. We should open the frontiers for the country, for the nation, for the survival of the tourism industry. Now, we have decided, we have given dates, but then everybody has said it, how can we have opening of borders and expect 650,000 tourists without an efficient, competitive Air Mauritius that is a national carrier. It is impossible.

Aujourd'hui, il faut absolument consolider les marchés traditionnels, mais aller chercher les marchés émergeants. Je pense à la Corée du Sud, je pense à la Scandinavie, je pense à certaines villes en Allemagne. *And this can only be done when the national carrier becomes the engine of that policy. And today what is happening, Mr Speaker, Sir?* C'est un véritable désastre et nous savons aussi comment ce désastre est venu, comment on a nommé des gens qui ont fossoyé *Air Mauritius*, qui ont pris des décisions qu'il ne fallait pas, qu'on a nommé politiquement. Je veux revenir là-dessus, la nomination politique et le rôle des institutions, M. le président.

Alors l'industrie touristique, il faut la réinventer. C'est l'occasion de le faire. Il faut retrouver les marchés, il faut reconquérir les marchés traditionnels, les segments qu'on n'avait pas touchés. Il faut revoir le produit et il faut le faire dans le dialogue avec tout le monde. J'ai rencontré quelques représentants des compagnies aériennes et je leur ai demandé : où vous en êtes ? Ils disent : on ne sait pas, on nous a pas parlé, on apprend les choses dans la presse. 650,000 visiteurs, M. le président, c'est à peu près 2000 vols. En 10 mois, c'est 200 vols par mois, c'est six à sept vols par jour. Qui va venir six à sept vols par jour, et les vols remplis. D'où, M. le président ? Nous aurons souhaité, nous souhaitons que l'industrie touristique reprenne parce qu'au-delà de l'industrie que j'appellerai le *hardware*, l'hôtellerie, le voyage, qui prennent peut-être 70% de cette économie-là, il y a 30% qui irriguent la vie de 50 000 personnes. Le plaisancier, le chauffeur de taxi, le marchand de plage, ceux qui fabriquent, produisent les produits artisanaux.

M. le président, comme on dit, *lelefan laguer lerbe kraze*. Au départ, il y avait cet antagonisme entre le monde hôtelier et le gouvernement, et c'était au détriment de toutes les petites gens, qui eux, ils attendent la réouverture des frontières. Donc, il faut absolument

régler le problème d'Air Mauritius le plus vite possible. Maintenant, j'ai appris que le *watershed meeting* aura lieu en janvier 2022 et que l'ouverture des frontières est prévue pour le 1^{er} octobre.

Deuxième chose, M. le président, le port. On en a longuement parlé. Notre quintessence géopolitique a été le port, M. le président, à travers les siècles. Nous avons été sollicités pour le faire que nous nous retrouverons entre deux continents, et aujourd'hui on parle de l'Indo pacifique. À l'époque, l'Inde et la Chine n'étaient pas les économies émergentes qu'on voit, les géants qu'on voit aujourd'hui.

But what has happened to the Port, Mr Speaker, Sir? Who controls the Port today? Who takes orders? Who is running the Port, Mr Speaker, Sir? And I am coming again to this issue of institution. You cannot nominate a person who does not have the expertise or the competence to run a fundamental infrastructure like the Port. We know what is happening in the Port area. And then, there is something else, Mr Speaker, Sir, the ships formerly - numbers were given, I think we have talked 30,000 - called in Port Louis. Now, they are not calling in Port-Louis anymore, they go to Durban, they go to Cape Town, they go to Madagascar and they leave their containers there and another ship carries them to Mauritius, why? Because the slots which are allocated to ships today, often because of what is happening in the Port area, the slots are not regular and the boats prefer to go straight to South Africa or elsewhere. *Il faut revoir le port.* And in the new paradigm shift where we are going to position Mauritius as *le pays phare de l'océan Indien entre les deux continents*, the port has an extremely important role to play. Once I said as regards the drug problem, we have the pandemic but drugs are still coming, the airport is closed, so where are they coming? What is the role of the Port in all this? *On a verrouillé politiquement le port, mais on en a fait une passoire pour la drogue, M. le président.* And, if we want to have this new paradigm shift where you will have better management, efficiency, where we become the port of call and we become the hub. We have been trying for a whole year to find a ship to connect Mauritius to the East Coast of Africa - I would say one word later on our Africa Strategy - nothing has been done. In this paradigm shift, Port Louis has to become one of the engines of growth. *Un emploi dans le port entraîne cinq à six emplois dans d'autres secteurs, M. le président.* Alors, au lieu d'en faire une plaque tournante, a Port of call qu'il faut absolument visiter pour les bateaux, on a fait une plaque tournante pour la drogue. Et aujourd'hui c'est l'importation et la réexportation de la drogue entre l'Asie, l'Europe et l'Afrique. Tout à l'heure je vais dire un mot sur le rapport du Global Initiative to Combat Organised Crime.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think that I have spoken about the port, I have spoken about the projects. Let me say something which is extremely important in my mind, is about institutions, competence and integrity, Mr Speaker, Sir. Whatever we do, whatever be the projects, however brilliantly it is being delivered, however brilliantly the ideas are, we need the people to drive them. We need the Institutions to see to it that good governance and accountability are there, Mr Speaker, Sir. Otherwise, we know what is going to happen, wastage, corrupt practices, inefficiency, no good quality of works. It is not just saying that a project should be a project is not enough. We need the institutions to see to it that all good governance and accountability are there. *Il nous faut une réforme drastique et profonde de nos institutions au niveau de la gouvernance*, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Therein lies the success of project management and the safeguard of the interest of the people as regards public funding. We have the National Audit Report, we have a number of cases where we are losing billions, *c'est la priorité des priorités, dans le New Paradigm Shift, c'est à dire des institutions ou il y a la bonne gouvernance, l'accountability, il y a la compétence et l'intégrité* and it is high time, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we put the right person at the right place at the head of our institutions and our projects and this is one of the weaknesses that we see. *C'est ce que j'avais appelé le système cadenassé et là les deux dernières nominations au port et à la LGSG nous démontrent encore que cette pratique, cette philosophie continue* and it is high time that we have the right person. *Nous avons des Mauriciens qui sont brillants et pour ce paradigm shift, M. le président, vous savez ce que je propose?* Instead of saying that *ma mesure phare c'est les drains, moi je propose qu'on appelle les têtes les plus brillantes de Maurice aujourd'hui et on leur demande comment sortir de cette crise-là ? C'est une crise nationale qui nous concerne tous, c'est notre avenir, l'avenir de nos enfants. Asseyez-vous, mettez la tête ensemble et proposez nous comment avoir ce paradigm shift.* This is what I am proposing, Mr Speaker, Sir, because often they say we are just criticising, let us take the best brains policy. Other countries do it. How do we get out of the financial services sector the problem that we have. Let us take the people who know about it, do not just nominate people at the head of an institution because he is a friend of yours, or close relative of yours or because he will execute what you are asking him to execute.

Je demande un changement profond ce que j'appelle le paradigm shift because if you put somebody who cannot manage a project, it is a disaster for the nation and as I said it is high time that we put the right person at the right place and I mention the Land Drainage

Unit. Who is to drive the Land Drainage Unit with Rs3.4 or Rs3.5 billion every year? Who is going to drive the Rs12 billion housing problem, housing issue and what we see, Mr Speaker, Sir, the listing of the budget with the names of all the localities where drain works are to be done was done on a constituency basis from Constituency No.1 to Constituency No.21. That was in a budget and we started with that.

Something else, we have 12,000 houses to be built. They are going to be built 600 per Constituency. I am a time planner, Mr Speaker, Sir. You do not have the same availability of land, you do not have the same facilities, you do not have the same demand in each Constituency, then we know that the whole thing, that the two main pillars of this budget, that is Rs11 billion for drains and Rs12 billion for housing, they are politically oriented, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The 12,000 houses, it is an urban issue. It is not having 600 families because with the 12,000 households, you have to have the schools, you have to have the facilities and you have to provide them the quality of life, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is not just saying *12,000 maisons* and saying that yes we will provide housing facilities for the young couple, this is alright. All the fiscal incentives, this is alright but it is in the implementation of the project, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, let me come to the financial services because I would like to say a few words about what I called the black economy

Mr Speaker: But I will ask you to conclude because you have already taken the time allotted to you.

Mr Bodha: I have finished!

Mr Speaker: Almost, I think it is over, so I will allow you five more minutes to conclude. You are a very resourceful person; you have a lot to say but unfortunately.

Mr Bodha: But then, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will, if you allow me, at least this time to say a tribute to Sir Anerood Jugnauth, but before that I will say, *je voudrais parler du poids de l'économie*, the black economy, *dans notre société*. My friend, hon. R. Duval mentioned horse racing and the bets, Rs6 billion with the bets which are illegal betting, I think it is the double. We have had drug seizures to the tune of Rs6 billion, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, we can see how heavy, *vous me mettez dans une situation extrêmement embarrassant, M. le président, je suis désolé*.

Mr Speaker: I have been very generous to you and you know my generosity.

Mr Bodha: Je suis désolé. And black money, corruption money is entering our mainstream economy, Mr Speaker, Sir, and this is being done *avec les ramifications entre l'argent de la drogue, l'argent des paris illégaux et l'argent de la corruption*. Recently, the President of FATF wrote this when they were addressing the issue of money laundering –

“Even as the world battles COVID-19, criminals and corrupt officials are misappropriating funds and misusing government contracts for personal gain. This damages our communities. Money is flowing out of our economies at precisely the time health services need it most. As long as it remains profitable, corruption will continue. That is why stopping money laundering is vital to making sure corruption does not pay”.

And we are still on the list of the EU, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we hope that sanctions will be taken by the Courts and we will be able to get out of the list. Mr Speaker, Sir, I will end paying a tribute to, a few words to Sir Anerood Jugnauth.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have had great Stalwarts from the Bissoondoyal brothers, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, Sir Satcam Boolell, Sir Gaëtan Duval, Sir Abdool Razack Mohamed, we have to stand on their shoulders, we have to be inspired by them. I have learnt a lot from Sir Anerood Jugnauth. I know he became angry when I left but then some time back he had said that he held no power anymore to change the course of action of the Government. He had the broad shoulders of leadership. He had the eagle’s eye to scout competence to deliver because he was an achiever. He had the wisdom to delegate, Mr Speaker, Sir, to his companions and officers and gave them the possibility to give their best. He loved his country and he wanted at all times the betterment of his people, but above all he was a man of trust, a man of discipline and a man of rigour. And this is the most important thing for me, he was, as Sir Maurice Rault described him in the Commission of Drugs Report 1986, he was a man of uncommon integrity. All this is lacking so sadly today Mr Speaker, Sir. We can lock the control of power for a few. We can think that the country belongs to us, we can do whatever we like, in particular, as regards to public funds.

Mr Speaker: But now it is not a tribute. It is politics. Okay. If you have more tribute to pay, I will...

Mr Bodha: No, I will just end up, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I will give you one minute.

Mr Bodha: Mr. Speaker, Sir, we not only need a COVID-free country for Mauritius. We need a corruption-free Mauritius. We need a drug-free Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No. Your time is over. I am sorry. I am suspending the Sitting for 30 minutes.

At 5.02 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.40 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Collendavelloo!

Mr I. Collendavelloo (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hil): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, I will start, first of all, by watching my time. I have been allotted 38 minutes. I will start by congratulating Government for the measures contained in the Budget, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance as well as all other Ministers who have worked very hard together to rise up to what I call the greatest challenge of our generation. One word for the hon. Minister of Finance! This year has been worse than last year. We had a respite from COVID but we must concede that we thought that we had been saved. We let our guard down. We stopped wearing masks. We congregated instead of distancing ourselves. We started going back to old habits, social and religious gatherings and finally, the virus struck again. Whole villages had to be cut off, whole sectors of the economy came to a standstill and frontiers remain closed. And now we debate our financial situation.

I must record the impressive time that has been allotted to, by the Minister of Finance to listening to key stakeholders. This results in a budget that covers our most critical concerns. I have turned to the Estimates, Macroeconomic Framework and I have seen how the Minister of Finance stresses that Government revenue has considerably contracted and spending has increased. Expenses for medical equipment and facilities have increased and Government has supported the population with schemes such as the Wage Assistant Scheme and the Self-Employed Assistant Scheme. The figure is staggering when I'll read it. Between March 2020 and June 2021, these two schemes amount to more than Rs22 billion.

In other words, whilst major economic activities were at a standstill, Government has supported the poor, the vulnerable, the workers, self-employed people and it has maintained social benefits. It has, by these support schemes, prevented massive loss of employment by part financing wages of workers and self-employed.

In paragraph 15 of the medium term Macroeconomic Framework, we read that the total revenue is estimated at Rs155.5 billion, that is, Rs7.4 billion less than forecast and expenditure will be around Rs180 billion, which results in a budget deficit of about Rs25 billion and it is that deficit which will be financing all the social support being provided by Government. Now, how do you finance that deficit now? Well, not only Governments, families also face that sort of dilemma - loses his job, he has no income. And even if he has a small vegetable garden, it must run on an overdraft in the hopes of better days to come. And Government is the same, revenue is not enough. So, we have the debate that we have had in this House on the public debt.

According to the Minister of Finance, our public sector debt is 91%. Economists vary on the figures but let's say it is 90% and whatever the exact percentage, everyone agrees that it is too high. I listened to the fourth Member for constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West who made an attack on the proportion of that public debt and so did the second Member for constituency No. 2.

They think - and that is the classical view that it is an indicator of financial instability. They think it is bad for us to have a debt running that high. That is an opinion. I don't agree. Whenever there is a catastrophe, you have to borrow. You buy your goods on credit, the shopkeeper gives you credit and he gets credit from his supplier or whatever it is. And repayment is a burden on your income.

Now, I have read an extract and I'm quoting an extract from the Fiscal Monitor Update of the IMF published in January 2021.

“The COVID-19 pandemic – says the IMF - has posed a severe challenge to public finances. The contraction in output and ensuing fall in revenues, along with emergency lifelines, boosted Government deficits and debts beyond levels recorded during the global financial crisis.”

That not even in 2008 did we have that sort of deficit and public debt. It is not only in Mauritius. Mr Speaker, Sir, the global public debt has reached 98% of total GDP. Yes it looks amazing and on that score, those who spoke on the public debt on the other side of the House, hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie and hon. Uteem are right to be concerned. But we cannot look at it in terms of percentage. Zimbabwe has got a debt to GDP ratio of 2.4%. Are we going to say that Zimbabwe is a model of governance and financial stability? Afghanistan has got a debt to GDP ratio of 7.8%, Congo: 16%. They are unstable financially and politically and the

result is that no one wants to lend them money. Take on the other hand, France, France has a debt to GDP ratio of 118% and President Macron has said that he is not going to do anything to reduce the public debt because he is running on the debt. He is financing projects on this.

I'll read another article in the Business Edition of India, its Business Edition, it was on 23 March 2021, and it reads more or less along the lines that we heard from the two hon. Members I cited just now. Classical line run by classical people: the lower the ratio itself, the healthier is the Government's finances. Go and say that to Zimbabwe! Since it reflects public debts potential to create higher value in terms of GDP and hence generates higher revenues which enable the government to repay its liability. But we are no longer in the classical model. The IMF recognises now that countries need to run up their public debt if they are to support their population. The global classical view of what government should do is now considered in the context of the pandemic. We have to sustain our population. We have to sustain our population and money does not fall out of the trees and it is not printed, however much the temptation may be high!

The Minister of Finance tells us in Paragraph 24 of the prelude to the Estimates that public debt remains sustainable because of its low costs and risks. What is our saviour is that 79% of our public debt is local, which means that our financial institutions have trust in Government and we are borrowing in rupees and repaying in rupees, not in USDs or Euros. And in addition, we have to face the Betamax Bill.

I have noted the tone and the tenor of the PNQ. The Judgement of the Privy Council shows that in 2015, - which was in contrast with one supplementary question which we heard - we were facing and we had entered into an Ironclad's contract, designed on purpose to obtain maximum benefits to a very small group. Not a Standard Contract. Perhaps if an enquiry is made, the circumstances of that contract will be revealed. This is why there was probably the change of tone between the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Labour Party. The future will tell.

The Minister of Commerce gave us certain details. It was what is called a Leonine Agreement. One party, the Government had given the lion share to the other party. In law, we know that we are going to comply with the decision of the Privy Council, but we will have to analyse what is behind the whole Betamax affair. But, as we know the total bill will run to a quarter of the money earmarked to pay social benefits, that is, from the Rs22 billion, there are Rs5 billion which will go to Betamax.

Now, I come to vaccines. Finance, vaccines and COVID-19 are inextricably linked. There is a race now. We are engaged in a race to get the maximum vaccination to our population, and that is all over the world. I will not get into the debate on pre-orders, the Minister of Health has amply explained why he did not fall in the trap of pre-orders and many of the European countries also did not do this. We are going to purchase vaccines. There is a campaign currently going on 'My Body, My Choice'. I have no problem with that campaign although I am mesmerised by the number of billboards which are put up on this matter. They obviously do not have a problem of debt to GDP ratio. But I am happy that they have not been able to persuade or to dissuade the population from being vaccinated. The rush for vaccinations has not stopped and very good for the population and for the country.

Of course, I do not deny the basic constitutional right of the protection to one's body and to one's life, but the public interest requires that the State, that Government, protects the life of its population from infection by a communicable disease. And, if there is one which is extremely nasty, it is that virus. Our Constitution is clear, laws can be passed to curtail the right of people to refuse to vaccinate. It is not an absolute right and we have not made vaccination compulsory; but you would not be able to enter a school, you would not be able to enter a school bus if you are not vaccinated because or else, you run the risk of spreading contagious disease to our children.

I have read and I am sure many of us have read a very interesting article by former Supreme Court Judge Boolell. He analyses and it is good that he has been able to find this old decision, ten years ago - the European Court of Human Rights had a case to deal with vaccines. The European Court of Human Rights was clear. You cannot take people and forcibly inject a vaccine in their body. Of course, you cannot do that. But, your right, this constitutional right is not absolute although mandatory vaccination interferes with the person's right to integrity but such interference may be justified if considered a necessity to control the spreading of infectious diseases. And that is exactly what the Minister of Health has been doing by the use of powers conferred on him by the Quarantine Act. Probably, he read the Judgement on the European Court of Human Rights but he knew sense that this was what the population required.

The State must take appropriate steps to safeguard the lives of those within its jurisdiction and that is a classical debate of the balance between the right of a citizen and the duty to protect others and to protect the public interest. Let me say as I talk of this, let me have a word for the parents and children who have taken part in primary and secondary

school level examinations. They have had no problem to respect our sanitary requirements as specified by the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education. They took their examinations without any problem and I am sure that many persons could try and learn and draw lessons from the praiseworthy conduct of our young people who understood, from that age, the necessity of protecting themselves. This is why all MPs, most I am sure, vaccinated themselves when their turn came because we do not want to contaminate others and we do not want to be contaminated by our neighbours. That is the whole issue.

Let me add my congratulations to those children who passed their exams. As I talk of children, I think I should have a word on the sad exchanges between the hon. Fourth Member for Vacoas and Floréal and the hon. Minister for Gender Equality, Third Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart, on the question of the children at the CDU. I have listened to the hon. Fourth Member for Grande Rivière North West and Port Louis West who made a passionate plea on that CDU issue. I have also and I am sure many of us have heard stories on the forcible removal of children to the family.

This must be addressed, but it must be addressed in a dispassionate way. It is not a partisan issue and it is certainly not a question of personalities. It is a question which relates to our children, as the hon. Minister said, it is one third of our population.

I discount the exaggerations which are made, one part or the other, but when we average what we hear, it is clear that there is a problem in shelters, in the way children are taken. I saw a video, which was astounding, of an Officer doing *kouk kasiet* or *kouk galoupe* with a child, taking her forcibly to be removed from a shelter. I watched a Press Conference of the Director of the CDU and I was surprised by the unsavoury attacks she made on certain members of the legal profession. That is not in keeping with the very high standards which civil servants normally display in public and in private. I hope that we will recover from this acrimonious exchange and that we will try and put together our minds to see whether there is a problem, first of all and if there is a problem, how to cure it.

For the moment, I believe we could try and see if there cannot be a review mechanism to review any decision taken by CDU Officers, who mostly act in good faith, and make recommendations on a case-by-case basis. Let us not forget, if a family or a mother or a father is aggrieved by a decision of the CDU Officer, I have checked, it costs at least Rs50,000 to go to Court. People do not have that money. So, children are left in shelters

when they should not be put in shelters and in conditions, which if I hear what everybody says, are deplorable.

Let me take the opportunity to express my gratitude to health personnel, Police staff and other officers, front liners, supermarket employees, transport employees, bus conductors who work in these very difficult times.

Now, I come back to the vaccine. In order to get money to buy vaccines, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development is going to make us pay Rs2 per litre of mogas and diesel, whatever it is. Well, somebody has got to pay for vaccinating the population and we have already seen the Budget deficit and the State has got, what is now established, to be a constitutional duty to protect life through a thorough and efficient vaccination campaign and this is what the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development together with the Ministry of Health and Wellness are trying to do in this Budget. The COVAX initiative led by the WHO will assist us but in a very minor way. G7 has pledged 1 billion vaccines, four days ago, Gordon Brown told us that the G7 summit, I quote –

“will be remembered as an unforgivable moral failure because the G7 has failed to finalise a plan to vaccinate the world against COVID.”

And, the next question will be whether vaccination should not be liberalised just as the flu jab that allows the pharmacies to buy vaccines and to vaccinate people at a cost, of course, at a price regulated or not, but at least we do not put that stress on our health services only. We allow it to pharmacies or private practitioners as it is done in many countries of the world to purchase their vaccines from their wholesalers and they sell it for whatever the amount costs. It is Rs300 in clinics now, probably Rs600.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the pandemic will be defeated sooner or later, rather sooner than later. Last year, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development in paragraph 20 of his Budget Speech, predicted that we would rise together to, what he called, the new normal. I note how the Prime Minister of Singapore, a few weeks ago, has used the same phrase, the new normal, i.e. the Prime Minister said it in a press conference, we are going to live with the virus but we have longer term issues, sustainable development, flood flashes, dry seasons, prolonged dry seasons, coastal erosion, mounting waves, all these. Now, we have measures in the Budget which put an enormous amount of money, billions of rupees, in matters to protect the sustainable development of Mauritius and we must go much further,

pesticides, let us try and make our country a pesticide-free country and not a pesticide-controlled country so that when somebody comes to Mauritius he knows that when he is eating vegetables, he knows what is the sort of vegetable he is eating.

I turn out to the hon. First Member of Constituency No. 2, who said that this Government and it is his traditional mantra now, on every Budget Speech, to speak of the defunct Maurice Ile Durable (MID) with some nostalgia, I understand him, but I do not share his views. Nobody killed MID; MID died by itself! It died a natural death. The MID could not have survived within a government that was promoting city power. These two are antonymous. One is Maurice Ile Durable and then the next day, you are coal generation. So, you could not have survived with this and in fact, I come to this interview of Professor Joël de Rosnay, 21 May 2014 –

“Je suis déçu, frustré et inquiet côté gouvernement, gouvernement travailliste, malgré un affichage médiatique et politique, parfois important, des actions en profondeur ne sont pas entreprises. On se contente des annonces, dépourvues de suivi pratique. »

This is not an opponent; this is not *lepep* talking. This is Professor Joël de Rosnay talking of MID.

So, it has been seven years ago, let us put that in the past and look to the future. The Budget contains several measures which are worthy of debate on and I am sure, on occasion arising, the debate will be ahead. I have heard also the protests on the extension of the MRT; call it metro, tram, train, whatever you want to call it. We have gone down that route a long time when we started the Rose-Hill- Port-Louis line.

Today, the people of Quatre Bornes are anxiously waiting for next Sunday because they want to see at long last, because they have seen our people of Rose-Hill in my Constituency, have benefited from the metro. They want also to benefit from the metro and they are waiting for next Sunday, there will be the inauguration and we will have a proper network.

Réduit and Ebène are adequately served by bus transport. There is no quarrel about this, but that does not mean that the metro cannot also serve as a greener mode of transport to go to serve what is after all the education hub of our country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will try and curtail my speech to make up for time taken previous to me. I am a better speech planner than my predecessor on the floor. He could do speech planning as he does town planning, but I will conclude.

I will, of course, conclude by regretting the absence of Sir Anerood Jugnauth. I have the very fitting tribute paid by hon. Bodha. Yes, it is true; I understand hon. Bodha had a very difficult tightrope walking exercise to do, and we are engaged in a paradigm shift. Yes, it's true, we all share the same dream of a COVID-free, drugs-free, corruption-free, etc. We need to bolster our institutions. We will do that. It is on the record, the Government is there, the Prime Minister is there as witness to the fight which our institutions are engaging. How did it happen that the Police got hold of that huge amount of drugs? It means that the ADSU is efficient or else whatever billions of drugs would have been on the market today. So, of course, there is much to be done on the race course. And let's not forget one thing, the mafia is always one step ahead in all countries of the world. You catch up with them after some time because we have to protect human rights, we have to make sure that there is fairness in investigations and we have to modernise our investigation techniques when they have already modernised their own techniques.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am done. I hope the best for our financial situation in the next year and I am sure it will be what hon. Bodha called 'a huge paradigm shift' for Mauritius. I am done.

Mr Speaker: At this stage, I will ask the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

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

(6.13 p.m.)

Mr S. Ramkaun (Second Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, having obtained your permission, I begin my speech with profound respect and gratitude to the Father of the Nation, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Former President, Former Prime Minister and man of the soil who passed away on Thursday 03 June 2021. We shall remember him as an immortal hero of the soil, one of the architects of modern independent Mauritius, paving the roadmap for independence of this Island, Father of economic development in the eighty's, visionary and that person near and dear to all.

My family and myself would like to convey our humble respect to Lady Sarojini Jugnauth, our Prime Minister and family for having always been by his side.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, the nationwide lockdown imposed due to the corona virus pandemic caused an economic slowdown, the impact of which is quite significant, resulting in such a contraction in our economy.

To come out of extraordinary circumstances, it is often required to take extraordinary measures. To deal with the economic slowdown due to lockdown, following COVID pandemic, it was evident for the Minister of Finance to provide significant budget for the development and construction such that the maximum workers be recruited in the construction industry and helping in the alleviation of the poverty. Over the past year, we have experienced a very different life. The pandemic has aggravated the economic recession. Face masks have become a daily necessity and we have spent more time at home, but having fewer opportunities to gather with our relatives and friends.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, year 2020 has become over common memory now. The pandemic has made us realise that globalisation is not only a driving force for economic development, but also key to victory in the fight against viruses and epidemics. No place on earth can stay aloof and remain unaffected. Only with certain efforts, we have successfully beaten this pandemic of the century that has plagued the whole world.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the presentation of the Budget is always a D-day for a country and ours happened to be on 11 June 2021 for the Financial Year 2021-2022. More than one year has elapsed since the pandemic COVID-19 is causing unprecedented havoc to the world of economy. In this context, each and every country is handling its socio-economic battle in its own way by taking into consideration the new normalcy.

In his speech, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has epitomised the Budget 2021-2022 with 3 R's: *Relance, Reprise et Résilience*. This is so because perhaps the Minister of Finance had the fourth R, that is, 'Rambo' high at the back of his mind during the course of the budgetary exercise. I express my kudos to the Minister of Finance for the lots of measures announced for implementation during the course of the financial year.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, under the actual circumstances whereby the world is undergoing the worst of time, I believe the budgetary proposals, as enunciated, are most welcome to pave the way forward.

Investment of Rs65 billion for public infrastructural works spanning over 3 years coupled with social measures, sundry aids and assistance schemes to the enterprises and employees are not only humane, but also challenging. Compared to the last year's Budget, this Budget enables a more positive outlook with the availability of vaccines. The budget measures, recovery, revival and resilience in the expectation of vaccination being the game

changer, amidst prospects of strong recovery globally. As stated by the Finance Minister, the measures are centered on an economic agenda resting of three pillars –

- (i) boost to investment;
- (ii) shaping a new economic architecture, and
- (iii) restoring confidence.

Key to this, are massive investments in public infrastructure, strengthening social protection and opening up the economy. Significant infrastructural projects have been announced relating to land drainage, improving the road network, social housing, building of additional sports and recreation facilities, as well as projects targeted to general establishment of Mauritius. This will impact positively on the construction sector with a linkage to consumption.

Out of the Rs65 billion, it is noted that Rs11.7 billion for a nationwide flood management programme for the three consecutive financial years spearheaded by the Land Drainage Authority.

Hon. Nandcoomar Bodha just stated that the budget earmarked for Land Drainage Authority is too much for them to execute the projects. But can you imagine for 3 years, it is Rs11.7 billion and per year, it should be Rs3.9 billion and divided into 21 constituencies. I think it is a just amount that has been given to the whole country, including Rodrigues.

This budget includes Rs559 m. for constituency No. 4 and Rs872 m. for major drain works for constituency No. 5. Constituents from Chitrakoot, Vallée des Prêtres, Sainte Croix, Crève Coeur, Congomah, Riche Terre and Terre Rouge of constituency No. 4 and constituents from Baie du Tombeau, Pointe aux Piments, Terre Rouge and Pamplemousses for constituency No. 5 have always had confidence in this Government and they were sure that these projects already under final design stage and tender stage will be floated in days to come.

Projects value of more than Rs200 m. has already been awarded in this Financial Year for the construction of an attenuation basin at Belle Source, Pamplemousses, which will collect all run off from the Mont Piton catchment area and this run off will be channelled through proper drains to Canal de la Ville Bague near motorway M2. This will spare residents of Pamplemousses and Avenue Belle Source from future flooding.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, construction of drains reminds me of a statement made on a daily Press by the ex-Minister of Environment and National Development Unit, Mr Anil Baichoo from the previous Labour Party Government. He stated that his Government had already completed all the drains during their mandate. Residents from Piton, Gokhoola, Amitié, Cottage and Rivière du Rempart can confirm how many times these regions have been flooded after the construction of these inadequate drains.

As PPS for Constituency Nos. 5, 6 & 7 under the leadership of our visionary Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, during the previous mandate, adequate sized drains have been constructed in these localities, including that of Fond du Sac and now we are sure that these localities will not be affected any more.

Residents of Narainen lane, Terre Rouge, Cité Roma, Cité la Cure, *Morcellement* Raffray and Le Hochet will rejoice those drains already under construction in these regions.

Other projects already awarded in Constituency No. 5 are the Road Widening, Health Track and Drain works at Jouvance, D'épinay and a Health Track along Bypass Triolet.

The mission statement of the National Development Unit falling under Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development with our colleague Minister, hon. Hurreeram, being, and I quote –

“Bring the benefits of socio-economic development to the doorstep of people and protect the population from flooding and natural disaster.”

This Government is bringing development to the doorstep of every resident of this Republic. A very long list of projects has been proposed for this financial year and projects shortlisted for constituencies under my responsibility are as follows –

- 72 road projects, 42 drain projects, and 6 amenities for Constituency No. 4 , and
- 48 road project, 28 drain projects and 13 amenities for Constituency No. 5.

Without, of course, forgetting the Multi-Purpose complex “Triolet Arena” for which a sum of Rs225 m. has been provided. Regarding this same project, a *Député correctif de la circonscription No. 3 avait mentionné que c'était dans le mandat du gouvernement précédent 2014 et ce projet était déjà sur leur agenda*. I would like to inform him to go and check in how many Budget Speeches the Multi-Purpose complex at Triolet appears. And it is only just

before the election of 2014 they could manage to put a sign board that the Multi-Purpose construction will be held at that place.

As proposed, the atmosphere is conducive to ensure economic growth to the tune of 9% for fiscal year 2021-2022.

Among others, the Budget also makes the following proposals which have been highly acclaimed by the population –

- (i) setting up of 12,000 “*logements sociaux*” costing Rs12 billion targeted within 3 years and other numerous housing schemes. On this item, as an engineer, we know how a project is implemented. We are talking about 12,000 houses and you require land for that. And compulsory acquisitions of land will, of course, take time. After acquisition of land, we have already the consultant for the design and tendering stages. So, it is not that it can be constructed within a day, or a financial year. I still recall in Constituency No. 5, there are Cité Longères and Cité Tôle, constructed in 1994 after Cyclone Hollanda. Government under Sir Anerood Jugnauth constructed the Longères Tôle as a temporary shelter for these 150 families who were there. Last time, the hon. First Member for Constituency No. 2 said he has been here for the recent 4 mandates. But being here for the four mandates does not mean great. And you could imagine the situation these people were living in Baie du Tombeau. It is only when we came in 2014, we started construction of houses for these 150 families. With the help of Mr Soodhun who was there as the Minister of Housing and Lands at that time, the Prime Minister and now hon. Steven Obeegadoo, we have been able to construct all the houses. 96 of them have already been delivered and the rest are going to be delivered soon;
- (ii) other new and attractive measures to encourage investments from foreign investors, retirees and professionals,
- (iii) opening of frontiers to eligible tourists as from 15 July 2021 in the first instance. As from 01 October 2021, tourists who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 and holding a valid negative PCR Test Certificate will be allowed to enjoy their stay in Mauritius without restriction. In so doing, the tourism/hotel sector will be endowed with a new lease of life. The air of prosperity will again blow in the atmosphere of the Island;

- (iv) launching of a series of Training/Apprentice/Professional Formation/Dual Training Programmes against payment of monthly stipends as appropriate Graduate Schemes are, *inter alia*, proposed to combat unemployment;
- (v) Other proposals are: proposal to recruit 4,450 persons in the Public Sector;
- (vi) funds to be made available in connection with the publication of the PRB Report, and
- (vii) massive considerations paid to the Education, Health, Agriculture, Gender Equality, Child Development & Family Welfare, Arts & Cultural Heritage, Environment, Local Government, Social Security, Social Integration, Youth & Sports, Rodrigues, Senior Citizens, Law & Order, Metro Operations and several other sectors which fall under the purview of different Ministries.

During my discussions with my constituents, they have all appreciated the announcement of the two more pillars included in the economy namely -

- (i) Green & Renewable Sources of Energy with the target zero coal use by 2030, and
- (ii) Production of vaccine and pharmaceutical products of industrial level. A sum of Rs1 billion has been earmarked.

SMEs are the main pillars of the economy and we welcome the initiatives of the Government to support them in this precarious environment. Amongst others, the refund of salary compensation, amnesty of trade fees, grants and interest free loans will be very helpful.

The extension of the Tax Arrears Settlement Scheme (TASS) for SMEs up to 31 December 2021 remains an attractive measure. Hopefully, the Mauritius Revenue Authority will support taxpayers to take maximum profit of such incentives.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Members of the other side of the House have spoken a lot on increase in debts which the Finance Minister has had recourse to. Under these exceptional circumstances, the ratio of debts to GDP will also increase as already indicated in the Annex to the Budget. I hope hon. Members have also had a glance at the situation in other countries.

Japan - 237% of GDP

Venezuela - 214% of GDP

Sudan - 177% of GDP

Greece - 117% of GDP

Do you think that those countries are going to crash or their finance are going to crash? I do not think so.

We, on this side of the House, welcome the proposals of the Budget and we are confident that we shall work together to overcome these challenges.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, even the Deputy Manager of the International Monetary Fund, Mr Okamoto made the following observations in the 2021 Public Debt Management Forum -

- (i) The global outlook has improved dramatically thanks to the breakthrough of Vaccine developments as well as extraordinary monetary and fiscal policies.
- (ii) Debt managers need to ensure everyone has a fair shot at receiving vaccine and benefitting from the recovery and achieving future goal, and lastly
- (iii) He expressed the importance of debt transparency in these uncertain times.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would join the Deputy Manager to say that we have several challenges which seem very daunting, we shall all work together to exit the pandemic and return strong, sustainable and with balanced growth. *Ensam tou posib!*

With these words, I thank hon. Members for their attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. I see several Members not wearing their masks properly. Hon. Vice-Prime Minister, your mask!

Thank you very much. Hon. Nagalingum!

(6:35 p.m.)

Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Last year, when at around the same time we started to engage into the debates on the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill, we were just out of confinement after having been completely shattered by the devastating effect of COVID-19 pandemic and we were mourning our losses but we were also full of hope and optimism, we were cautiously confident that the future would be brighter and that the days after would be better.

Since then, we have been on a sort of a rollercoaster ride with ups and downs. We enjoyed a very rare and envied COVID safe end of 2020 and beginning of 2021 until we were hit by the second wave of the pandemic in March this year. This brings me to say that although from a historical perspective, the month of March is supposed to be joyous and festive for us, it may be time for us to start paying heed to the premonition and warning of Shakespeare's Cobbler in Julius Caesar. Indeed, we may have to beware March.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have listened attentively to the hon. Minister of Finance on Friday last and I did last year and I am bemused. Last year's budget was supposed to be -

“La relance de l’économie.”

It was the budget of structural reforms and of sustainable and inclusive development. It was the budget that was supposed to confront the new normal and get us out of the pandemic and into a new economic cycle.

The Minister of Finance wishes to preserve the stability of the economy by invoking three words: Recovery, Revival and Resilience. These are not magic words. We cannot win a battle on a mere slogan. The Minister of Finance should know that what is needed is hard work, discipline, integrity, creativity and rigorous reform in our procedures and institutions.

Unfortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister of Finance does nothing to inspire the population. None of this has happened and, therefore, it is not out of place to say that last year's budget has been a disappointment and I find it much regrettable that the hon. Minister of Finance has not been sufficiently honest to admit it outright. Instead, he pompously said that he has gone the extra mile and will continue to do so. He did not even take off and he is talking about extra mile.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the preparation of my speech I made a point of consulting the speech I gave in the House on 2020-2021 Budget at this specific time last year. One observation jumped out at me, nothing has changed in a year. The problems facing the country are the same today. The problem of unemployment has not been tackled, high prices affecting the population are still there, drugs continue to spoil our lives, corruption remains, crimes go unpunished and the list goes on.

This Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has done nothing but copy and paste measures already announced in previous budgets or elsewhere and make them appear as new. Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the 2021-22 Budget is a compilation of measures already announced, a combination of small measures that are supposed to address to all constituencies in their

country and traditional sectors of political patronage and the Minister of Finance knows it well that this Budget is a disappointment.

A dull image of a real budget and even though we could not see the expressions on his face as he read the speech, we felt from his voice that he had no enthusiasm, no conviction. It was like he was reading a text in which he, himself, did not believe.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our population was expecting that the Government takes appropriate measures to redress the economy. Government has done nothing to tackle the economic problems faced by the majority of the population. The rising cost of living caused by staggering prices of commodities has a crushing effect on the population. How to feed the family when the breadwinner cannot make the ends meet? The situation is already dramatic for the low-income group and is gradually affecting the middle-income group. There is not one single article which has not increased, almost all basic products' prices have increased, some by 10%, some by 50% and some even by 100%. The situation is even worse as regards the increase in the price of medical products, the population is suffering.

Go and talk to the people outside and they will tell you how difficult and painful it is for them. I think Dr. the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has not sensed the pulse of the population to announce remedial action in his Budget. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when the Minister says that the Budget is low tax budget, having put taxes only on alcoholic beverages and cigarettes is economically with the truth. In fact, the State through the MRA is collecting a lot more revenue on the application of VAT on the increase retail price.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the proposed budget for Financial Year 2021-2022 leaves me with an expression of *déjà-vu*. I am sorry to say that, the hon. Minister is only repeating himself with his recovery, revival and resilient. These three keywords, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, were already in his speech last year. If he has any doubt about that, let me remind him, they were in the same order as follows –

- (a) economic recovery plan, today, replaced by recovery;
- (b) major structural reform replaced by revival, and
- (c) sustainable and inclusive development replaced by resilient.

In addition, the Budget of last year gave place of pride to the construction industry which was supposed to be the catalyst for economic recovery, that of course did not happen

although the cost of construction material has drastically gone up, thus making it less affordable for those at the lower level to construct or to renovate.

For the coming Financial Year 2021-2022, again emphasis is laid on construction projects. The drain rehabilitation is ambitious at the cost of 8.5 billion but it is not realistic and implementation is as always fraught with problem of capacity, delays in escalating costs. Similarly, for road, public infrastructure, education and health, and sewage, years after years huge sum are appropriated but the spending capacity remains slow and implementation is delayed and in some cases projects are abandoned. Upgrading of beaches or the implementation of community development projects are not new. Similarly, the conversion of Youth Recreational Centres like Pointe Jerome and Anse La Raie into National or Regional Outdoor Education and Recreation Centre lacks coherence and seriousness.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a budget is not an exercise in discourse, it is not a *grand oral*, it is a tool, a plan and a vehicle for socio-economic development. Unfortunately, this Budget does not have a spirit or a common thread. It lacked both vision and destination. Measures are announced in a fragmented manner without coherence. I also wish to say something on the special fund and it is a valid example, as sometimes good intention can turn into bad outcomes. In the past, we have had many of these like, the *Maurice Ile Durable* Fund or the National Environment Fund, where again the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development is providing 2.2 billion in Financial Year 2021-2022 and now, all of a sudden we see the creation of a Modernisation and Transformation Fund. I think I need to do justice to the hon. Leader of the Opposition for uncovering this matter. It seems that money is put in such fund as a budgetary measure and then the condition and eligibility criteria are so rigid that very few organisations access this fund for development purpose and we do not know what happens. Hon. Reza Uteem has also talked and rightly show about the Rs18 billion which were put in a Special Reserve Fund to finance the debt and which, accordingly to him, was not used for the purpose.

On the question of COVID-19 vaccine, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government is start doing what it ought to have done a long time back by giving itself the mean to accept vaccines internationally. It is late already and time to catch up the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic is not an individual fight, it is the fight of the whole nation. We should stand united not divided. In this respect, I humbly believe the contribution of the public towards the COVID-19 Vaccination Fund ought to have been symbolically rather than anything else.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is very sad for the country that this Budget has not been able to bring some balm to all Mauritians who not only are all victims of COVID-19 but who are suffering from acute unemployment. Daily increases in the price of consumer goods; the country was expecting some relief. It has on the contrary been hit more than once on the head with the new budget.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what is more scandalous is the Rs2 tax on petrol and diesel to supposedly finance the cost of vaccine. During the first confinement, certificates of urgency were given to purchase of drugs and medical equipment for the country. Close friends, government political cronies lavishly benefited from these contracts. At the end of the day, Government has lost some half billion Rupees in these transaction. And today, without any *pudeur* we come to ask all citizens to pay for their vaccines.

Another contradiction and short-sightedness of this Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerns the proposal to deliver a 10-year work permit to foreign students, my friends already commented on this issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the plain truth that comes out of this 2021-2022 Budget is that it recognised the lack of seriousness in this Government. How? We only have to register the number of time that the Economic Development Board is mentioned in the Budget, some twelve times that is almost every time a supposedly new economic proposal is formulated. EDB is now the new government but EDB, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is not as far as we know a democratically-elected institution. How can then, that it is called upon to perform what is Government duties.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget is globally very poor in its proposition and is poorer, still, as far as local administration is concerned. For years now, I have personally *tiré la sonnette d'alarme* on the death of our local administration institutions, on the plan and of local democracy. This year we have witnessed more political and administrative move and action to reduce the already weak powers and role of local administration and this Budget has gone the same way. Municipalities, district and village councils, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are considered as insignificant bodies and even as cumbersome bodies by central Government. Our towns and villages are slowly dying, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and this is intentionally planned by some people in Government. History is here to prove how Mauritian administrators in local government institutions have contributed to the development and enhancement of our towns and villages. There were grassroots political representatives who

responded brilliantly to the expectations of the citizens. They knew for whom they were working and at what end. Today is a feeling of pity that results when going through our towns and villages. It is desolation everywhere and Government is responsible for this. The new Budget has, once more, forgotten our local government, and it is very sad, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you will be surprised and the House will be surprised also to learn that, instead of giving sufficient fund and incentives to boost up the implementation of projects in local authorities, instead the Government has taken all the money from the Reserve Fund of these local authorities. How can we expect that local authorities deliver in terms of projects?

For the last part of my speech, allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to dwell on some issues pertaining to my constituency, Stanley/Rose Hill, namely the state of roads, the drug problems, poverty and law and order. For years, for months, my colleague hon. Paul Bérenger and I, we have been drawing the attention of authorities concerned on the very bad state of roads in Rose Hill, more particularly the jungle that these roads were turned into after the CWA works. I put many PQs in this Assembly, I talked to the press, to social media and had numerous meetings with the inhabitants and of local authorities concerned; so many accidents occurred and many vehicles are broken down due to the state of the roads some days back after the CWA has replaced the water pipes; the RDA has started repairs. And I insist, there are repairs most of the time and not complete resurfacing, which should have been done. Those repairs will not last for long as the roads will be damaged again, only patching works are done not resurfacing. NDU says it is a question of budget. And since we are talking of budget, the hon. Minister of Finance may have provided this year a complementary budget for the complete resurfacing of these damaged roads.

Drug problems and law and order! Stanley/Rose Hill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is not spared by the problems of drugs and law and order. The problem is becoming more acute and represents much more nuisance to the lives of the local inhabitants. People feel in danger, people fear to walk on the street after dark. Today, with only a little knowledge in chemistry one can make a youngster a synthetic drugs' producer and this is what is happening actually in our country. In our Constituency, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the social problem resulted on the synthetic drug and its wide addiction among youngsters are more than dramatic. Families are broken, wives and children are abandoned by their husbands and fathers; the number of young people aggressively asking for money in public is alarming. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir,

drugs are the enemies of ambition and hope, and when we fight against drugs, we are fighting for the future. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have reported this new phenomenon in the town to authority concerned, but to my utmost deception, things are getting worse. A special brigade should be put on foot to fight against this social problem and prevent it from taking more dangerous proportion.

Another issue I want to raise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerning my Constituency No. 19, there has been a Coordination Committee chaired by the Mayor of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill on a daily basis during the implementation phase of Metro Express Phase 1 with all stakeholders. Have the taxi operators been participating to those meetings? The concept has been to involve everyone in the new multi-model public transport system with the Metro Express, buses, main companies, individual operators, shuttles to connect all the region of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill and taxi operators. We note that the new Metro Express station of Rose Hill will be a new urban terminal project. We will request the promoter of such a project to see to it that the taxi system is fully integrated. There is a need for dialogue and consultation with the taxi operators so that they can participate in such a project. There will also be the disturbance during the period of construction later. We request that the hardship of taxi operators as well as their well-being is considered in any project.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has been a project to implement a cashless system in the public sector transport by the NTA. I believe that such a system will be very helpful to travellers using the different modes of transport, the Metro Express and the bus industry. I am of the opinion that to integrate fully all stakeholders, a cashless system should include all the operators, including the taxi operator. Thus, with only one smart card, a traveller would be able to use the Metro Express, all buses and also the taxi to move from one place to another and increase mobility.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to note that the hon. Minister of Finance has retained in his Budget a proposal that I made during my speech on the 2020-2021 Budget last year. I am referring here to the proposal I made, 1,000 *arpents* of cultivable land available to those who wish to start plantation. I said, and I quote –

“Call on the unemployed to register to be part of the cooperative group and lease a portion of land to be cultivated. Those chosen will benefit from training in agriculture and a non-refundable budget for the launch of their businesses. It is understood that these lands are leased at a nominal rate and must be returned to the State if not

utilised. Mr Speaker, Sir, we kill two birds with one stone, we give jobs to the unemployed and we ensure our food security.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at paragraph 3 of his Budget Speech, the Minister of Finance said –

“Our priorities are to protect lives and livelihoods, maintain the production capacity and preserve the stability of our economy.”

Can the budgetary measures help to achieve these objectives? I am asking that question. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we know from the different reports of the Director of Audit that projects’ management and implementation has always been the subject of severe criticisms. Millions have been thrown down the drain because of corrupt practices, non-compliance with procurement rules and lack of accountability. How much money will again be wasted? The Minister of Finance briefly mentioned the setting up of a project implementation and monitoring agency without giving any detail on its structure, mandate and staffing.

Will the Agency be given access to all files? Let us not forget that despite being the holder of a constitutional force, the Director of Audit complained in his last report that he was denied access to some files. Will the Agency have more powers than the Director of Audit? What about much expected reform in the public service cash liabilities? Again, no word from the Minister of Finance in his Budget Speech! How do we moderate the public service to respond to the numerous COVID-19 challenges? We do not introduce the relevant reform; it is a service omission in the Budget Speech, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Minister of Finance, at Paragraph 238, speaks about the need to restore confidence. How does he win back the confidence that he has lost from last year's Budget Speech? The absence of reform will not help to restore confidence. On the contrary, it will inspire the public officers and the population. Talking about public sector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there should be fundamental reforms at all levels. The public sector should be a mirror of our society and reflect the different communities forming part of our society.

Reform should be brought in the recruitment process as well as in promotion exercise. The confidence of the population is sacred and must be earned by seriousness of purpose. I wish that the Minister of Finance take stock of the weaknesses of his speech and the legitimate reaction of the population and come up with additional measures in his binding up speech to alleviate the burden of the low and middle income group.

A few weeks back, the Minister of Finance, in one of his speeches referred to the theory of creative destruction enunciated by a famous economist called Schumpeter. He may have been inspired by Schumpeter in his present Budget Speech but I would wish him to be guided by the profound thought of the genius that Einstein was. He said, I quote –

“The significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them.”

M. le président, le mot « crise » veut aussi dire opportunité. Covid-19, tout en étant porteuse de bouleversement, présente aussi une occasion en or de revoir de fond en comble après plus de 50 ans d'indépendance, notre conception très réductrice de la démocratie, nos institutions publiques, notre modèle économique et sociale afin de nous réinventer en tant que nation face à un futur à construire.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Nuckcheddy, please!

(7.04 p.m.)

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. First of all, I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for this budget. Prior to the speech of 11 June, I was a bit worried. I was just asking myself, how is the hon. Minister going to present and prepare this budget? What has he got in reserve for us? But I must say I was again, like several of our fellow citizens, amazed by the measures presented. The budget carries the following principles -

- expansion of opportunities for growth;
- new opportunities for the youth;
- new meaning to human resource;
- progress towards modernization, and
- new reforms.

It is a proactive budget that provides a boost to wealth as well as wellness. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, when on Friday, everyone was pleasantly surprised by the measures announced and all that without imposing any new tax, I personally believe that our friends on the other side of the House, at least this time will be honest to themselves and the people they represent. But that is not the case. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Especially, while going through the newspapers of Sunday 13 June, I saw hon. Dr. Boolell classified this budget as *un budget sans tête*. Malheureusement, il n'est pas présent dans la Chambre en ce moment sinon j'aurais bien aimé de lui fixer les regards pour voir s'il a une tête lui-même. Et s'il a vraiment une tête, s'il a vraiment quelque chose à l'intérieur.

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Continue, continue!

Mr Nuckcheddy: M. le président, il faut qu'on se rend compte que ...

(*Interruptions*)

Le Leader de l'opposition a peut-être compté le nombre de têtes ...

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Nuckcheddy: ... que l'honorable membre a, mais, malheureusement, moi je ne l'ai pas fait.

M. le président, il faut qu'on se rend compte que notre pays a été touché par deux confinements avec les frontières fermées et la quasi interruption dans nos échanges commerciaux internationaux et que notre économie en subie ses effets. C'est qu'on a besoin en ce moment c'est une reprise et ce budget vient justement avec des mesures sociales et économiques.

I also read in *Le Mauricien* the hon. Leader of the Opposition, this time instead of counting the heads, stated the following, I quote –

« *C'est un budget qu'il faut regarder et lire attentivement dans les détails, car connaissant ce gouvernement, c'est un discours rempli de mensonges, de faux projets et de fausses promesses.* »

Now, what does that mean? Does it mean that the hon. Leader of the Opposition cannot believe that this Government had been able to come with excellent measures but he has not got the guts to tell the truth?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, notwithstanding what the hon. Members of the Opposition have to say, the fact remains that for years to come, we will have to give consideration to the disruption caused by the COVID-19. I know the hon. Members of the Opposition are not too happy when we talk about the COVID-19 but the fact is, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that history will remember the coronavirus pandemic as one of the biggest black swan events. The economic and social disruption caused by COVID-19 is expected to be far worse than that of

the 2008-2009 Global Financial Crisis and perhaps might even beat the great depression of the 1930s.

Whatever we do today and even in the coming days, we have to consider the effect of the waves of the COVID-19. COVID-19 has impacted the entire humankind and this budget brings forth Mauritius self-belief.

And that, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, does not apply to us only but it is a worldwide fact. We have gone through tough times in the past; we have been able to turn the corner and defy the darkest predictions, including those of the Nobel Prize winner in economics, the British James Meade, in 1961.

The Government is already on site. We realise that the task is not easy but squaring the circle is our habit. At a time where other countries are thinking to go back where they were before the pandemic, we, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are devising strategy with a clear roadmap to go beyond where we were. It is the time for us to strengthen resilience against future pandemics like it was recommended in the last G7 summit held last weekend. We have to learn from the pandemic and look forward to promote future prosperity, tackle climate change and champion global shared values.

The objective of the Government, through this Budget, has been to put all Mauritians together. Better Together. Our priority was only to make sure that we come up with a Budget which will help the recovery. I think, honestly speaking, the hon. Minister of Finance, has come with a meaningful and impactful Budget. In a situation where the contraction has been more than what you predicted, to save the life of our citizens, courageous measures have been taken and the Debt to GDP ratio is high, we admit, but, we managed to contain our unemployment.

Our Government has the duty to not only encourage investment but also motivate its people on self-reliance. We have been talking lots on Globalisation as the world being but one village, the upturning of the pandemic did not spare that as well. This emergency has shown that countries are on their own. At the beginning of the crisis, countries shut their borders and focussed on their own survival.

It is the need of the hour that we start the value addition to our land and human resources and take the country to new heights. A land of achievers and of achievements, we can achieve. I acclaim the measures concerning the agricultural sector. In addition to various

measures announced to sustain the Sugar Industry, the hon. Minister did also come with several measures to enhance our non-sugar agricultural production. Measures such as -

- (a) Providing Rs36 m. to renew the fleet of tractors of the Agricultural Management Unit under the MCIA.
- (b) Extending the benefit from the Land Mechanisation Support Scheme, to planters having recourse to MCIA registered private tractor operators.
- (c) Grant of Rs10,000 on the purchase of tea harvesters.
- (d) Maintaining the winter allowance to tea growers.
- (e) Not only maintaining the 50% subsidy on prices of potato and onion seeds, but extending it to seeds for the production of garlic and pulses.

These are measures, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that will help us to become self-reliant. The issue of 500 additional fisherman cards, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the opportunity to make efficient use of our sea and its resources. While I am going through this measure, my late grandfather came to my mind who used to jokingly say the following lines in Bhojpuri. He said -

“Likh ba, Pahar ba, bhooke pet marba, machi marba bhar pet khaiba.”

Qui veut littéralement dire, M. le président, que celui qui s'adonne à la pêche mange toujours à sa faim.

Our Agenda is not and should not be about the pandemic but rather about the world that is coming into being as a result of the pandemic and more importantly, our responses to it. The Government's priority and our hon. Prime Minister's ideology, is to take care of the people at the bottom of the pyramid and, at the same time, respect wealth creators. La croissance post-COVID-19, M. le président, passera par la productivité.

Our economy was showing signs of flickering life in January 2020, and we now see itself bracing itself due to the global disruption. The positive news of 1.6% GDP growth in the March quarter over the same period last year has already been superseded by the second COVID wave.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for us to move forward, for us to implement the budgetary measures, it is important that we contain the pandemic. As we said: *Sel Solision, vaksinasion.*

Vaccination is the game changer. Our Government did a lot and is incumbent to do more, whether be it in terms of preserving employment or working towards an economic growth.

In such a situation, the financing of vaccine shall be a solution and not a problem. In order to bear the cost in a sustainable manner, the hon. Minister of Finance announced the introduction of a levy of Rs2 per litre of fuel for the purchase of vaccines. For this laudable act, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our population will pay the price of Rs50.40 per litre of Mogas and Diesel will be sold at Rs37 and that will be as from 1 July 2021. Some people including some hon. members of the Opposition are against the increase in price of these two commodities, but Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the price of Mogas and Diesel were at Rs52.25 and Rs43.95 respectively in July 2014 and at that time, they were happy. That was the time during the on and off period. It was the time where there was the *koze koze*.

Hon. Shakeel Mohamed even added and assumed that further taxes will be added on these commodities so that the Government can collect funds for Betamax. At a time when we are talking of a Tax-Free Budget, they are becoming Betamax-free because several of the hon. Members of the Opposition, were party to the deal. Like the Leader of the Opposition, he was in Government in 2005 when the deal was made. He was in the Government in 2015 when the contract was terminated and this morning, he was criticising -

“Mo meme donne, mo meme kaser, mo meme kritike.”

This is the type of Opposition we have. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, such statement coming from someone who kept quiet when we were asked to pay for hedging is shocking. At that time, he had nothing to say. In a PNQ raised on 26 March 2013, by the then Leader of Opposition, hon. Ganoo, the then Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection, hon. Cader Sayed Hossen replied and I quote -

“I am informed by the STC that hedging losses amounted to Rs4.739 billion in July 2009. The interest paid on lines of credit used to repay the hedging losses amounted to Rs237 m.”

And that was in 2013. Today, we are in 2021. Those experts on the other side of the House can calculate the Net Present Value of this amount. I am sure the NPV of Rs4.739 billion, 12 years after, will be much more than that. At that time, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, he had nothing to say. He kept quiet - I mean the hon. Shakeel Mohamed - and today he asks us to show allegiance to our country first and party, last.

He did not walk his talk when his Party was putting his own people first. He was putting his party first when they were not able to even handle a simple epidemic.

So, this is the type of Opposition we have Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, very selective in action and decision. Hon. Shakeel Mohamed, again, claimed that this budget is on assumptions but Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, all budgets are based on assumptions. Budgets are predictions and assumptions based on certain conditions. However, hon. Shakeel Mohammed, *rusé comme le renard qu'il est*, seems to forget that we are not in a normal situation.

In such a situation this Government has preserved employment. He wants us to talk about employment, so here we go. The hon. Member was the Minister of Labour in 2013 when people in my Constituency were losing their jobs in the Hotel Sector after serving for 25 and 30 years. At that time, he was happy about it and he was part of such inhumane decision.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since last year we are and, not only us, but the whole world in a period of crisis. We had two lockdowns, two times our country was at stand still and when I listened to hon. Uteem, it seemed to me that he is not aware of this fact. He does not seem to be aware that the whole world went and is still going through a *Temp Mort*.

As he listed several projects which according to him were announced in the last budget and have still not been realised, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member should know that projects take time. Let me take the example of 12,000 social houses, he has cunningly tried to show that nothing is being done.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, despite the pandemic, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism, in a Specific Matter during the adjournment session of 20 April 2021, went in all depth and breadth to explain where we stand on the road map.

However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me go back to 2009 on Tuesday 24 November 2009, while commenting on the then budget, hon. Shakeel Mohamed, the then Third Member of Constituency No.13, Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac, thanked the then Minister of Finance for announcing that there will be a national stadium in that Constituency.

Today, we are in 2021 where is the stadium? This is only one of those such projects only announced Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, during those dark days when the Labour Party and

the PMSD were in power and the hon. Member in the session of 20 June 2019 with a similar argument, he came to this House and asked the then Government –

“Where are the bicycles, where are the motorcycles, where are the tyres, *où sont les jantes*”.

and I will not go any further because I have got some decency for those people who are listening to us at this very point of time.

Hon. Uteem did not see any *anguille sous roche* at that time when hon. Shakeel Mohamed was looking for *jantes*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these are things that happen, conditions change, assumptions change. In the Current contest we must accept some sacrifice and expect better days ahead. In my Constituency No. 9, Flacq & Bon Accueil, for instance, we were expecting a swimming pool but today we cannot afford it but let us work together, let us work for our country and I am pretty sure that the days will come when the Constituency will have its swimming pool.

However, I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development as despite the fact that the Members on the other side of the House have been shouting *effet d'annonce* but in my Constituency, I am happy to see that the Modern hospital announced in last budget has started, the M4 Motorway has started and even other infrastructure projects are due to start. I have visited the Public Procurement Office website and saw that the tender of Quay D flyover is under adjudication, so projects are moving.

The Opposition is talking of sugar coating. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government is sugar coating, but we are only sugar coating smarties because after the sugar coating is over and smarties, you still got the chocolate, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. When they were in power it was then that sugar coating was used to coat the bitter measures.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have still not forgotten and neither the people of this country have forgotten when bread was snatched from primary school students, when interests on savings was taxed, when the financial support for School Certificate and Higher School certificate examination fees were cancelled, that was sugar coating, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Do not worry, the Government is going to pay for your treatment.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Labour Party Government has committed crimes against us and this reminds me of William Shakespeare in Macbeth, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, where Lady Macbeth repents on the murder of King Duncan and says, and this applies to the Labour and PMSD Government, –

“All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.”

By coming here yelling and shouting, you are not going to make people forget what you have done. The Opposition especially, hon. Bhagwan and hon. Richard Duval, with care that he might get diabetes, are more concerned about horse racing and nothing else interest them, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if it is not horse racing.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, lots of measures have been announced which will really bring relief to our fellow citizens and here Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am thinking of measures like which have been announced for the country as a whole and there are certain measures which concern my Constituency No. 9. Allow me Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to convey my heartfelt thanks to the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for that.

As the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development mentioned that the risk of flood can never be fully eliminated but we need to build up resilience to flash floods and cyclones and Rs401 m. has been earmarked for the construction of drains in Central Flacq, Poste de Flacq and Queen Victoria.

The Government's commitment Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on water supply, construction of service reservoirs at Salazie and Eau Bouille and replacement of 300kms of defective pipes are going to further relieve the inhabitants of the east in regards to water supply.

Housing, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is said that the lack of affordable housing is the foundation of many social problems, including poverty, homelessness, educational disparities, and health care. Shortage of housing, particularly social and genuinely affordable housing does create social problems and the Government is adamant on providing affordable houses to our citizens and some of the additional 2,025 social houses will be constructed at Argy.

Construction of roads, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is something which the former Government, I mean the Labour and PMSD Government mismanaged and it is interesting

that I remind the House that in a reply to a PNQ on 24 May 2016, hon. Bodha mentioned the following I quote –

“The Road Decongestion Programme is one of the most important road infrastructure projects ever embarked by any Government. It will lay the foundation of a modern Mauritius and it will help to alleviate the road traffic congestion problem”.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, even if he has now left the road himself, but the team is continuing on his journey to modernise the country and the M4 project, a motorway between Bel Air and Forbach will definitely provide a good road network in the East. This is what we call ‘*un projet de société*’, *M. le président*.

Lorsque l’honorable Bodha était tout près de vous, je crois qu’il était à la première rangée, à ce moment-là il n’avait aucun projet de société à nous proposer parce qu’il avait toujours la tête baissée et les yeux fermés ; et là, même qu’il est bien loin de vous, toujours la tête baissée et les yeux fermés, et tout d’un coup il commence à parler de projets de société, mais l’honorable membre should have had proposed *his soi-disant projet de société* in the Cabinet and other platforms, not at Caudan Arts ; and definitely, not on ‘*Plateforme d’opposition*’.

Construction of road between Dubreuil and Montagne Blanche, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will be widely used by the inhabitants of the East. MUGA project in Flacq is a long-awaited project. Children playground, mini soccer pitches, football grounds, gymnasiums and other projects under the Community Development Programme is the vision and legacy of Sir Anerood Jugnauth, who, as a Prime Minister, filled the gap between the urban and rural areas of our island. Bringing such facilities in rural areas is a bright way of paying tribute to that great man of vision, Sir Anerood Jugnauth.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to foster an economic recovery we need investment and investment in our economy is dependent on our business environment.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment Bill will be introduced, so as to prepare the required infrastructure for investments. The green energy industry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will be a new economic pillar that will boost our economy and also create new job opportunities. The plan is to use our renewable resources to produce our own energy, and ultimately, the use of coal will be totally phased out before 2030.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to add a few words on the Government’s vision to make home ownership affordable for all. The construction of a house is the most expensive

investment for lot of our fellow citizens. We also realise the ownership of a house provides a dignity to a person and this is one of the basic human needs. Putting it in the language of Bollywood, it is the '*roti, kapra aur makaan*', that is, food, clothing, and housing.

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.

Si l'honorable Dr. Boolell aurait été là, je lui aurais posé la question : est-ce que c'est toujours un budget sans tête ?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me conclude with those measures concerning our citizens who are in needs –

- (a) The grant to NGOs running SEN schools will be increased from Rs138 m. to Rs151m.;
- (b) An increase from Rs5,400 to Rs6,000 for the Basic Grant component in the grant-in-aid formula for each student;
- (c) An increase in the meal allowance for students attending SEN schools from Rs60 to Rs75 per day, and
- (d) Those of our citizens who need overseas treatment, the eligibility criteria which was Rs50,000 per household income will be increased to Rs100,000.

Unfortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do not have unlimited time like the hon. Leader of the Opposition had for his intervention and the list of excellent measures is too long and I won't be able to touch all the measures nor to refute all the demagogies. But I am happy to see that despite the difficult situation, despite all those obstacles, despite various '*la marche*', despite various '*levé de coup de poing*', we are making our way to take our country to a new height. The Government can't stop the rain, but it can provide you an umbrella to stand the rain. That's what this Budget is, an umbrella. Late Abdul Kalam said –

"Confidence may not bring success but gives us power to face any challenge in life".

And this Government is facing the challenge with confidence.

We are going to BBB. BBB is not about the three hon. Members of the Opposition who were expelled lately: Hon. Berenger, Bhagwan and Boolell. In fact, it is the resolution of the last G7 Summit which is, Building Back Better. That's our Plan, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to be BBB.

Thank you for your attention. Long live Mauritius!

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. We will break for one hour for dinner.

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

On resuming at 9.22 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY - LUNCH ROOM - INCIDENT

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

Hon. Members, I have to inform the House that I am in presence of a written notice from –

- the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development, hon. Hurreeram;
- Dr. the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, hon. Dr. Jagutpal;
- Dr. the hon. Ramdhany, Parliamentary Private Secretary;
- hon. Deputy Chief Government Whip, hon. Dhunoo, and
- hon. Doolub

wishing to raise a privilege complaint arising out of an incident which occurred today, at about 5.25 p.m. in the Lunch Room of the National Assembly, as reported in the said written notice.

Having regard to the objectionable words having allegedly been uttered in the course of the said incident, I do not propose to refer thereto in my ruling, but I am causing copy of the said notice to be tabled.

I have considered the circumstances of the matter reported to me and I am of the view that same may amount to an offence in breach of Section 6 of the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the light of your ruling, I move that the incident which occurred today in the Lunch Room at about 5.25 p.m., whereby hon. Shakeel Mohamed misbehaved in a disorderly manner against Dr. the hon. Minister of Health and

Wellness, Dr. the hon. Ramdhany, hon. Dhunoo, Deputy Chief Government Whip, hon. Doolub and myself, as expatiated in the written notice, in breach of the provisions of Section 6 of the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act, be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for appropriate action, pursuant to Standing Order 74(4) of the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly (1995). Thank you.

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready to continue with the debate Dr. Farhad Aumeer?

(9.26 p.m.)

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to share my views and opinions with regard to the Budget that has been laid out last Friday.

I have listened to many speeches and opinions made by various speakers on both sides of the House. And as a new elected Member, I was expecting a more objective, purposeful, valuable and analytic speech from particularly seasoned politicians on the other side of the House and also the newcomers like myself, on the other side. Unfortunately, it was more about self-congratulation, pat on the back and adulation, just to be on the right side of their Leader.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has been a lot of comments throughout the speeches so far; lots of metaphors, plates and guns, flattening of curves, flattening of people, looking at some in the eyes. Maybe, we have, today, somebody who was very concerned about those whose eyes are closed and eyes are open; maybe, he is new ophthalmologist in the making.

However, I will get to my speech and I would like to comment that during last Tuesday's speech, when a hon. Member of the House, hon. Richard Duval was questioning the Minister of Finance about the source of revenue to maintain the budget, there was a flying comment coming from the Government side, particularly on the backbenchers' side, whom I do not want to name to avoid embarrassment, but who said, about the questioning of where finance will come, "*plitar noua gete, pa kass latet, apre noua geter!*"

This reminds me of a telling phrase that was mentioned during the Budget Speech on 12 June 2017 regarding the verdict of the Singaporean Tribunal, whereby Rs4.5 billion were to be paid. Unfortunately, with due respect, late Sir Anerood Jugnauth said, and I quote –

“S’il faut payer, on va payer ; on paiera.”

Cette semaine, le jugement du *Privy Council* dans l'affaire Betamax est une gifle magistrale à cette équipe gouvernementale d'alors, animée par la vengeance personnelle, l'arrogance, la vendetta politique et la haine contre la personne de l'ancien Premier ministre, le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, qui, n'oubliions pas, n'a pas été trouvé coupable dans aucun des 11 cas qui lui étaient imputés. Et je peux dire aujourd'hui, qu'en tant qu'ancien chef d'Etat, malgré qu'il a été vulgairement arrêté et humilié, aujourd'hui, de par ses contacts, il entame déjà des pourparlers avec le *Financial Action Task Force* et la Communauté européenne pour nous sortir de la liste grise. C'est cela la grandeur de l'homme. Effectivement...

(Interruptions)

Effectivement...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: *Pe deranz zot ...*

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Let Dr. the hon. Farhad Aumeer continue with his speech!

An hon. Member: *Pa rakont palab!*

Dr. Aumeer: Et c'est là, la grandeur de l'homme qui a pu mettre sa patrie devant son égo. Et aveuglément, ceux qui étaient au gouvernement dans ces temps ont pris de décisions catastrophiques qui vont compromettre l'avenir de nos enfants, nos petits-enfants, et aujourd'hui se rejettent mutuellement les torts ; *pa mwa sa, li sa ! Et sûrement, ce sont les contribuables qui devront mettre la main à la poche. Et si ce rulling n'est pas une leçon or an awakening call surtout pour mes amis de l'autre côté de la Chambre, les jeunes. Alors, je vous invite à réfléchir sur cette phrase : « Qui sème le vent récolte la tempête. »*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before we hear *aster chacha, maintenant* we will hear *aster payer.*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Dr. Aumeer: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister of Health, during his speech, made a very verbose list of to do, being done, will do and intent to do. A repetitive list of what was enunciated last year, but what he failed to do with so much money, as to why no single mention has been made about the absence of an MRI scan, a CT scan, a Mammography at the Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital which deserves a population of more than 200,000 people in the eastern district of the country.

Is it because there is an arrangement with a private institution to deliver these services, institution run by a blue-eyed boy of Emmanuel Anquetil Building? I will await your response. And the New Flacq Hospital is not going to be the answer that will keep me quiet.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would also comment on hon. Bablee's yesterday's intervention about his very enthusiastic and skewed opinion about renal services in this country, giving an impression that nothing has been done before except the current Government since 2015. I would humbly request hon. Bablee to have a look at the Audit Report, subsection 13.2, page 266 - I have a copy if needs be - where he will have an understanding of the shortcoming of renal services over the last three years.

And also, I will take him down memory lane where exactly on 11 April 1995, the said Government of the time refused to offer dialysis services to one unfortunate person in the name of Malinee Paupiah, who, unfortunately, passed away. Just for Rs1,500 per session, the Government of the time could not afford to pay for her services for dialysis and as it was said and quoted -

“This was a deliberate death warrant that was signed by the Government of the time.”

I do not think you should be proud of that. Luckily, time evolves, elected Members change, Government too changes. And in 1995, with the advent of the new Government led by, once again a Statesman of the caliber of Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, dialysis services were introduced free for the population of this country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it hurts I know. It is once again that time of the year when expectations are so high in the public in anticipation to goodies that will be offered by Government through the Minister of Finance and also the deflated response that ensures when the reality of measures kick in on the monthly expenses of every single Mauritian, that is the *corbeille ménagère*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, budget presentation nowadays can be summarised as a public relation exercise. But the economic truth, unfortunately, it appears that we are heading in the debtor's club.

M. le président, j'entamerai le langage du ministre des Finances maintenant. C'est le deuxième budget qui nous est présenté pendant l'ère Covid et nous faisons face à de nombreux défis mais je précise que notre économie était déjà en soins intensifs bien avant l'avènement du Covid-19 et la pandémie. Or donc, la situation est devenue encore plus difficile. A ce rythme, on n'est pas loin d'avoir recours à un respirateur pour soutenir cette économie et que Dieu nous protège, pas de respirateur de *Pack & Blister*.

M. le président, le manque d'action courageuse de ce budget risque de mettre nos économies à genoux et on n'a qu'à faire référence aux dix dernières pages du dernier rapport de la Banque Mondiale pour avoir une idée de l'état alarmante de notre économie.

Une décroissance de 15% de notre PIB, avec un trou de plusieurs milliards de valeur ajoutée, l'augmentation de la dette publique, l'augmentation des dettes d'entreprises, l'augmentation de l'endettement des ménages, dépréciation de la roupie qui a un effet sur l'importation des produits de base, baisse de notre balance commerciale, un taux de chômage qui ne cesse d'augmenter et envoisine, que ça ne plaise ou pas, les 100,000 direct et indirect malgré les mathématiques qui nous ont été prodiguées cet après-midi par le ministre du Travail.

L'inflation, au chiffre qu'on nous a promis, n'a aucune comparaison avec notre corbeille ménagère qui dans une année a connu une ascension incroyable, des prix alimentaires allant jusqu'à 100%, des prix des médicaments 200%. L'inflation dont parle le ministre des Finances ne peut donc être réelle et ajouter à cela une population vieillissante.

M. le président, le manque de courage dans ce budget dans un climat je dirais d'austérité et de sacrifice, est évident car des mesures spécifiques qui devraient être adressées, ont été tout simplement ignorées. Parmi, j'énumère : aucune action concrète pour diminuer le gaspillage, comment venir de l'avant avec une idée ou un projet de construire un bâtiment de cinquante étages à Côte d'Or.

Qui sont ces conseillers fous qui peuvent conseiller dans un climat d'austérité qu'on est car il y a beaucoup d'autres priorités à voir. On n'a pas pu voir dans ce budget, aucune recommandation du rapport pour mettre les recommandations du rapport de l'audit en pratique.

Comment l'État a investi R 30 milliards avec des retours presque nil ? Le manque de transparence pendant l'exercice de *Procurement* l'année dernière. Etait-ce le rôle du MIC d'investir dans le tout-à-l'égout ou dans d'autres projets ou c'était plus de venir en aide aux entreprises systémiques ?

La restructuration de notre économie, pilier de notre économie, le tourisme. On n'a pas eu un plan vraiment structuré bien que l'intention soit bonne sauf que les touristes devraient être vaccinés, baisser le prix de vente des villas pour une petite catégorie de touristes riches. Où sont les nouvelles approches et d'idées pour rivaliser avec des pays à vocation touristiques tels que les Seychelles, Maldives qui ont déjà relancé leurs activités ? Par exemple, est-ce qu'on n'a pas pu trouver des solutions en avoir à offrir les hôtels à meilleur marché ; une meilleur accessibilité aérienne malgré l'état comateux d'Air Mauritius ; une meilleur offre et service à la destination mauricienne, qui est parfois incroyable et déraisonnable ; améliorer notre visibilité et la valorisation des atouts verts de l'île ?

M. le président, l'économie océanique semble avoir tout bonnement été oubliée, il faut se rappeler que nous sommes le 11^{ème} pays au monde à avoir la plus grande superficie de la mer et nous ne sommes pas en train de maximiser ces ressources. Un manque de leadership dans ce secteur ? Je me demande.

Il n'y a pas seulement le secteur de la pêche, M. le président, mais beaucoup plus d'opportunités en perte d'exploitation hydrocarbure, création d'énergie tels que des parcs éoliens en mer, le stockage d'énergie tel que le système de stockage de batterie à titre d'exemple Elon Musk ou encore l'émission des obligations vertes à la population afin de stimuler l'investissement mais rien en ce sens.

M. le président, on nous parle de nouveaux piliers de l'économie, la création d'une économie basée sur des énergies vertes bien que c'est ce même gouvernement qui, encore une fois par vengeance et égo, a mis un terme au concept Maurice île Durable en 2014 et pour venir aujourd'hui la revaloriser comme un nouveau pilier de l'économie, c'est du réchauffé six années plus tard.

Suite à une question parlementaire que j'avais posée il y a quelques semaines B/408 au ministre du Transport, le fait que les ministères n'ont que trois véhicules, c'est un très mauvais exemple. Qui dit d'exemple devrait venir d'en haut quand on est signataire de l'Accord de Paris COP 21 et de l'Accord de Kyoto. Ce n'est pas en achetant 25 autobus électriques pour la Corporation Nationale qu'on deviendra soudainement verte.

Mais il faut avoir un plan bien ficelé, comme jadis - Projet Île Durable pour pouvoir atteindre l'objectif. M. le président, un autre aspect innovateur mentionné concerne l'industrie biotechnologique et pharmaceutique avec un capital investissement d'un milliard pour son implantation. Comment s'assurer que des compagnies hautement réputable dans le domaine pharmaceutique et non pas des compagnies bidons ou de prête-noms vont bénéficier de cet avantage.

M. le président, qui décidera qui sera les entreprises ou investisseurs qui auront le droit de s'y installer quand le parfum de la protection des petits copains, surtout au cinquième étage d'Emmanuel Anquetil est très frais. L'ascension fulgurant d'un professionnel expatrié extrêmement proche du pouvoir qui a bénéficié des faveurs pour l'installation des logistiques pour le traitement du cancer et qui a aussi un penchant et un appétit gigantesque pour la pharmaceutique ne devrait pas être privilégié au détriment des plus méritants.

M. le président, le ministère de la Santé a-t-il commandé une étude de faisabilité concernant la masse critique pour la production des vaccins ? Et aussi, est-ce qu'il y a eu une étude pour voir s'il y a l'intérêt de grosses pointures internationales dans ce domaine, par exemple, Pfizer-BioNTech, Johnson & Johnson, Bharat International parmi tant d'autres, avant d'investir un montant si énorme dans ce projet car rappelons-nous bien que le Ghana nous a déjà devancés dans cette optique en signant un accord avec la communauté européenne pour la production de vaccins pour l'Union africaine et les autres pays africains.

M. le président, R 1 milliard dans ce projet ferait miroiter déjà ces compagnies sans scrupules qui souvent fréquentent les couloirs de l'hôtel du gouvernement et qui par miracle deviendraient subitement des experts dans le domaine de la production de vaccins. L'histoire très récente se rappelle de la fameuse compagnie Nitelec en expertise de gardiennage, les quincailleries et bijoutiers parmi plusieurs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now focus on the health service which attracts a colossal sum of approximately Rs14.5 billion nearly 9.5% of the whole budget. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the precious principles of public life enshrined in a ministerial code, integrity, objectivity, accountability, transparency, honesty and leadership in the public interest must be honoured at all times as must the political impartiality of our much-admired civil service.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the flawed Machiavellian argument that the ends justify the means, should concern every single Member of this House, particularly on the other side of the House, because establishing that there has been no misuse of taxpayer money particularly

at the Ministry of Health and Wellness and no actual or perceived conflict of interest is of paramount importance. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do, now take the opportunity to salute the outstanding performance of our frontliners and healthcare staffs and workers during the difficult period of this pandemic and also the sacrifices they made only for our safety and well-being.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will discuss five main topics regarding the Ministry of Health and Wellness –

- (a) a far from flattering latest Audit Report regarding the Ministry of Health and Wellness;
- (b) wastage of public funds in regard to procurement during the first wave;
- (c) the trial and error vaccination programme;
- (d) the one death, too many, of dialysis patients at Souillac Hospital, and finally
- (e) cancer patients, and
- (f) concrete blocks versus health screening.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, year after year the Ministry of Health is criticised in the Audit Report and yet it appears that these recommendations fall on deaf ears. From failure to implement voted, budgeted amounts with regard to medical equipment, approximately 30% of the budgeted amount, serious gaps in overall renal management to poor critical assessment of procurement for medicine during COVID-19. And worse, the repeated delay to set up a Neuro-interventional Suite in Mauritius is still pending despite announced in budget before and highlighted in the Audit Report of 2018 and 2019. Such unacceptable delay and prioritising other projects are mentioned in the Audit Report because of COVID-19, *comme diraient certains, le Covid-19 a bon dos*, clearly demonstrate the Ministry's uncaring response to patients having major neurological complications and needing advanced surgical care.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now go into some details regarding the squandering of public funds that was managed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness during COVID-19. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Health's approach to Emergency Procurement during the pandemic is marred by a toxic mix of misspending and cronyism. The unacceptable handling of procuring ventilators for the very sick COVID-19 patients is revolting.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the panic buying of chloroquine and azithromycin medication from the blue eyed company, Hyperpharm, without going through any normal procedures despite its use and efficacy to treat COVID-19 patient were highly questionable and today, not only are we stuck with an unused stock that cannot be used because it has never been proven in medical practice this can be used but you have spent a lot of taxpayers' money on it. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the lack of transparency and accountability of COVID-19 related contracts given by his Ministry to political cronies and companies with no business experience in the field of supplying medical supplies and equipment should have been condemned by one and all in this Government, particularly by the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development during his Speech. What I witnessed so far has been self-congratulations and happy clappers. We can all understand that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness was and is dealing with many pressing issues, but transparency, accountability is important and matters.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now highlight the whole toxic circumstances that were party to the use of Emergency Procurement under section 21 of the Public Procurement Act. We have all witnessed *le grand déballage* of the contract that has been awarded during the very period of March 2020 for nearly four months by the State Trading Corporation with the covert approval of the Ministry of Health. We have seen over the last couple of days though, it is sub judice, of what is happening in the Moka tribunal court.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, how can the hon. Minister play ignorance and shield behind the famous rhetoric - I do not interfere in allocation of contracts. But his Ministry is disbursing nearly not Rs1.5 m. but Rs1.5 billion.

Rs1.5 billion, for the procurement of masks, PPEs, drugs, ventilators, COVID-19 testing kits, thermal cameras and medical disposable equipment. This was only possible, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because the Health Minister had abdicated his role during the crisis which were undertaken by the two Senior Advisors at the Prime Minister's Office and the High-Level Committee chaired by the hon. Prime Minister. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, many of those 19 related contracts were awarded, somebody talked about coating smarties before, but many of these COVID-19 contracts were awarded like smarties in fact.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Farhad Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: I will ask you to trend very carefully because I am aware there is inquiry with regard to this matter.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: So, just be very cautious about what you are doing and where you are going!

Dr. Aumeer: I am not going to mention who are those who got those smarties.

The Deputy Speaker: No! Just be careful about not discussing anything that is under inquiry. Please!

Dr. Aumeer: Yes. So, when the whole population of this country was requested to make enormous sacrifices, unable to work, self-employed depending on the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, business closures particularly those depending on touristic sector, lockdown restrictions and friends and cronies were awarded very juicy contracts on the back of an already suffocated population.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, only between May and June 2020, nearly a billion, this was confirmed this morning itself, that it had been paid back to the STC by the Minister of Health, had already been dispersed to companies like Hyperpharm, Rs96 m.; Evi Techno, Rs271 m.; Pack & Blister, Rs477 m.; Gitanjali, Rs10 m.; Kammal Trading, Rs12.5 m., Maestria, Rs5 m. All of them have had one common denominator: they had never been registered as a supplier for supplying medical items to the Ministry of Health.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Rs1.2 billion, in addition to Budget Estimates was again voted last year as Supplementary Expenditure, and while COVID-19 was a moment of sacrifice and prayers for the whole population, for the cronies and friends of certain, it was bumper crop since there was no regulatory control, except administrative clearances from the Ministry of Health, with prices quoted well above in the excess of normal.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one item that has attracted many Parliamentary Questions, media coverage and public outcry is now known as the ‘Ventilators Mega Scandal’. There is truly a need to have a sufficient number of ventilators to cope with a very demanding viral infection. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Rs77.9 m. were paid on 02 April 2020 to a company of the name of Pack & Blister, a foreign company which had never supplied the Ministry of Health with regard to medical supplies which, overnight, claims that it can deliver within

three months items which our usual local supplier could not match. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Pack & Blister was dealing directly with the Senior Advisor of the PMO, Dr. Joomaye...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Farhad Aumeer, again, I have ruled politely, informed you that matters under inquiry by authorities of this country are not matters to be debated upon.

Dr. Aumeer: I am quoting from the National Audit Report.

The Deputy Speaker: As long as that is the case, I will allow it, but again, when I see you treading towards talking about something which is under inquiry, it is my duty to stop you.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you for your sound advice. I am just quoting the facts. I am not going to quote at all, even if it is in the Audit Report about the circumstances these were given.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, they were dealing directly with the Senior Advisor, Dr. Joomaye, and as per mail exchanges on 29 March, the deal was approved within three hours. Specifications of ventilators were exchanged following approval by Senior Anaesthetists ...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Farhad Aumeer, I am quite sure the Audit Report never mentioned Dr. Joomaye.

Dr. Aumeer: Okay, I withdraw the name of Dr. Joomaye, Senior Advisor.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, thank you very much.

Dr. Aumeer: The net consequence today, following those famous Sundays, no functioning ventilator or commissioned ventilator from Pack & Blister in service today. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am sure myself, Members in this House, or even some on the other side of the House, I can assure you, and the public in general, are asking questions. And the questions, there are a lot of answered ones since it is taxpayers' money which is involved and the Minister is directly responsible to account, because there has been so much gross mishandling of public funds. Who is the person responsible to have bridged connection between Government and Pack & Blister and holds the key to all questions being asked? Who is he or she and why that person is not being brought forward for his/her role in the squandering of public money? Did the Ministry of Health, before confirming such a deal and

dispersing such a huge amount of money, ensure that a proper KYC and due diligence was made on Pack & Blister, and if not, why?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, was the Ministry aware that one of the Directors of Pack & Blister was condemned for fiscal fraud of 3.2 million dollars and given a sentence of 13 years imprisonment? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, who is that smart pseudo engineer at the Ministry of Health who ensured that the model specification changed from Aero Duro to Aero Duro Pro, which later proved to be totally incompatible with all our system in ICU in our five regional hospitals? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this amount to the most profound fault of ministerial call possible. It is, therefore, no surprise that his Ministry has been badly criticised in the latest Audit Report. The Report speaks lengthily about the poorest Government practices in the country. Newsletter of the Office of the DPP on 03 April this year also mentioned poor practices in awarding contracts on a general basis under the aegis of emergency procurement and, to add insult to injury, procurement files from the Ministry of Health have been seen and are now being investigated by ICAC.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there was no handbook on COVID at the start of the pandemic; there are lessons that should have been learnt from research and experience and from our own mistakes or successes of others.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now comment on the trial and error vaccination programme and procurement. Just remember, billions of vaccines are being manufactured across the globe, and yet Mauritius, with a population of 1.3 million and expecting a herd immunity of 70%, tallying down to approximately 780,000 people needing two doses of vaccines, making it roughly 1.5 billion if we want it triple dose, that makes it 2.25 million, are still relying...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer, I am just being indicated by the Whip of the Opposition that you should just watch your time; try to wrap up, please.

Dr. Aumeer: Okay. And still relying on donor countries is beyond belief. How much time am I left?

The Deputy Speaker: It is about thirty-one minutes that you have been speaking and I think you are awarded about thirty minutes.

Dr. Aumeer: I have been told thirty-seven minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: Thirty-seven minutes?

Dr. Aumeer: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: May the Whip of Opposition confirm? Thirty-seven? So, you have six more minutes.

Dr. Aumeer: Okay. The Minister approached to reply to PNQs and PQs regarding pre-ordering vaccines is tantamount to grotesque offence.

Vaccins non validés et toujours en essai furent autorisés, double langage et induire la population en erreur. Il fallait bien écouter peut-être le *Deputy Prime Minister* qui venait avec son slogan : ‘*Sel solution, vaccination.*’ Aujourd’hui, on est forcé de payer R 2 par litre de pétrole pour avoir environ R 1 milliard qui a déjà été dépensé, mais on est toujours en attente des comptes qui pourraient justifier cette dépense. Probablement, le ministre des Finances, en nous demandant d’ajouter R 2 par pétrole c’était préparer pour le *ruling du Privy Council*, qu’on a eu il y a quelques jours.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, issues such as allergies, anaphylaxis reaction, pregnant women, future risk of infertility, clotting issues have triggered serious doubts and concerns in the general public, and yet, no clarification so far. Who said vaccines not validated by the WHO will not be used? It was both the Minister and his advisor that came up with such flimsy excuses.

The population, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is requested to pay for vaccine and probably in the future for the booster and it is their legitimate right that they are given the same initial vaccine that they had, and I repeat it, it is their legitimate right to get the same initial vaccine since we were all paying for it. Who will be responsible in the future for cross immunological reaction? Have we had preparedness right and advice given was heeded, we should have needed at the most, two types of vaccines only.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now address the very serious issue regarding services to our renal patient. It is worth noting that one of the reputed medical journals have recorded our country as the second worst in terms of highest mortality to chronic kidney disease.

The tip of the iceberg regarding the efficiency and efficacy of dealing with dialysis patients came to light in March this year, where, unfortunately, dialysed patients died in very doubtful circumstances and when requested to have an enquiry, the hon. Prime Minister *a du remonter les bretelles du ministre de la Santé* for a setup of an inquiry which he persistently refused to do. It is, therefore, no surprise that this year's budget has been earmarked of 80 haemodialysis machines. As at today, there has been no progress in the implementation of a

transplant unit nor even in the legislation to amend the Human Tissue Act to be proclaimed for cadaveric donors. Had a renal transplant been done, I am sure we would have one less death on the list.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the bottom line of these very high risk dialysis patients is that they are more prone to death if they get infected. Were certain measures taken to prevent infection in this group? The answer is no because there is absolutely no excuse for such shortcomings and poor policy and the result of failure to prioritise dialysed patients for vaccination against COVID-19 result in a carnage, a term used by a senior Member of the party in Government. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, dialysed patients deserve respect and their relatives deserve the right to know why they die because taxpayers' money have been voted for their welfare, health and safety and they were denied of it.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will complete the talk on cancer patients in our country if you bear with me a little bit. I have short circuit a bit of my speech. The absence of a proper national cancer screening service, particularly for cancer that has an early detection phase such as breast, bowel, cervix as part of the Ministry of Health and Welfare future plan, does not fit in line with the policy of just having a new cancer hospital. Clinical screening in Area Health Centre, Community Health Centre for breast and cervical disease is a very far cry for modern cancer screening. This is not political. This is for the welfare of women, the welfare of the population in this country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while the Minister is proudly announcing and I congratulate him for that bit, robotic cyber knife surgery but which demand a very specific clinical expertise and which we do not have and it is limited worldwide. And yet the Ministry of Health and Welfare does not have a single trained reconstructive plastic surgeon which he said, himself, a couple of days ago for our ladies who had undergone major breast surgery. Our sisters and mothers are waiting helplessly for a service to restore their feminine body.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the number of women that we have in this country above the age of 40, we have only two mammography for breast screening. Two mammographies only! This is shocking. We need to have at least one in every regional hospital so as to acclaim that we are moving in an era of screening and depicting early phase diseases while billions of rupees have already been allocated for upgrading and building hospitals. Claiming people first and particularly the mothers and daughters of tomorrow is far from the real truth.

Finally, I will conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, by informing the House that our health system is going through challenging times. I had wished to speak more widely about these challenges but time is my limiting factor. All major health indicators by which a health service is evaluated, are deteriorating. Just erecting new buildings will not redress the situation. More than ever, we need visionary leadership at the head of the Government and the Ministry of Health. Unfortunately, I have to say that in his stewardship of COVID-19 situation locally, the present Minister, together with his Government has failed to demonstrate such qualities and I fear for our future. This is a budget of putting concrete first rather than people first.

Thank you.

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

(10.05 p.m.)

Mr N. Ramchurrun (Third Member for Savanne & Black River): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is with an immense and honour to be able to address this august Assembly tonight to share my humble views on the Budget 2021-22. This budget marks the stepping stone towards those attempts to rebuild our economy into a better, stronger and fairer one.

Et là, M. le président, j'ai une pensée spéciale pour feu Sir Anerood Jugnauth. M. le président, nous avons vu dans la presse, des politiciens et des économistes qui se demandent comment le ministre des Finances va financer ce budget et j'avoue que la présence de Sir Anerood Jugnauth me manque face à de ce genre de propos. Car en 1982, après un long règne travailliste depuis l'indépendance, nous avions autant de problèmes économiques à régler et il a fallu un homme qui a su tenir tête à tous les obstacles d'alors, qu'ils soient économiques, sociaux ou politiques pour réaliser un miracle économique. Pour qu'il y ait un miracle, il faut savoir du chaos. La pandémie du COVID-19 a créé un chaos sans précédent et nous avons aussi au sein du gouvernement des hommes et femmes qui ont à cœur ce pays. Si nous avons de rejeter le dictat de la FMI, Fonds Monétaire International, en 1982, nous rejetons cette fois-ci le pessimisme de ceux qui pensent qu'on ne s'en sortira pas ou même jamais. Sir Anerood Jugnauth n'est plus là, mais sa philosophie et l'idéologie demeurent à jamais au sein de MSM et de ses alliés et nous remporterons cette bataille économique.

M. le président, en 1982, on avait plus de 100,000 chômeurs, des milliers de personnes vivant dans des cages en paille, *lakaz lapaille nou dire*. Mais la vision de

SAJ a transformé ce pays en un vrai sentier. Nous allons reproduire cet exploit, M. le président, car nous avons le même amour pour notre peuple et ce pays.

Now before delving into the Budget, I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Finance and the hon. Prime Minister for their arduous work in delivering this road map. I would also like to acknowledge the staff of the Ministry of Finance and all the other Ministries and their staff for their contribution in crafting this exceptional budget, hence, ensuring that our economy can position firmly to secure and grow during these tough local and international economic turmoil.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Budget 2021-2022 will undoubtedly contribute towards speeding our recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through initiatives aiming at assisting, our economy to be more productive, sustainable and equitable. Why equitable, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? Only because our Government is well aware that the hardest hit by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are often those least equipped to deal with. This budget is, in fact, half of the puzzle which ensures that over the next days to come, month and year, our implementation of the measures announced completes the puzzle to keep Mauritius and Mauritians recovering and moving again.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since our country recorded its first COVID-19 case last year, our Government has left no stone unturned to protect our population and the economy. The national lockdown was one of the most dramatic moments faced by many Mauritians for generations. Our country faced historical twin crises, namely a public health emergency and an economic emergency. Our Government has been relentless in supporting Mauritians and Mauritian businesses throughout the crisis. A year on, our businesses are ready to grab the new opportunities created by the crisis after one of the most comprehensive and generous Government support packages was created.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, according to the World Bank, Mauritius COVID response was the fourth largest in the world amounting to 32% of our GDP. Without this unprecedented Government support, the two consecutive contractions of our GDP in fiscal years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 would have led to 100,000 unemployed people, that is 20% of our labour force. Yet, we managed to keep unemployment at 9.2%.

This Government, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has announced billions to support & protect jobs by keeping businesses afloat and helping families get by. Despite this unprecedented response and reactions from Government, the damage this pandemic has done

to our economy has been significant. The economy has shrunk as never before and it is going to take this country and countries across the world a long time for recovery, from this extraordinary economic situation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, however, we are now in a position to rebuild our economy through the first bricks laid by the Budget through the business consolidation and protection measures announced. Within the next few months, the road map will guide our businesses when our country reopens to the world on 15 July 2021. Hence, our country will be in a position to stand on its own feet once again and build back better from the pandemic, stronger, safer and greener for a better Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while we continue to support our fellow citizens through the current phase of the crisis, this Budget adds more financial support schemes for SMEs and businesses to the long list of measures already rolled out last year. Hence, the Development Bank of Mauritius (DBM) is again proving to be the powerhouse of the Government in driving its range of financial measures for the businesses at different levels across the island. I wish to thank the DBM and its employees who are relentlessly helping to process the thousands of applications they are receiving.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, through the DBM, planters and fishermen will benefit from over Rs100,000 interest free loan to manage their cash-flow issues as well as be eligible to apply for the 0.5% COVID-19 Special Support Scheme of up to Rs1 m.. These financial packages will provide a breath of fresh air to the thousands of planters and fishermen whose incomes have been impacted.

I also welcome the key measures which will again impact thousands of breadwinners, namely the setting up of an Amnesty Programme by the DBM for planters, breeders and fishermen who are struggling with long overdue loans. I can confirm to the House that many of my constituents who fall under the impacted sections have already contacted me to enquire about the details of this Amnesty Programme of which, we are eagerly awaiting the detailed plans from the DBM.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the DBM is also at the forefront of the provision of financial support packages to households with a view to help them become more independent financially. For instance, the loan of 2% to allow household to purchase solar kits to lessen their dependency on fossil based electricity. Moreover, more importantly the DBM Backyard Gardening Loan Scheme will be increased to Rs100,000 per application which will

considerably improve the attractiveness of the scheme and also allow a greater leeway for the households to engage in medium sized home gardening initiatives, hence paving the way to becoming more self-sufficient, both financially and in their consumption's patterns.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Tourism Business Continuity loan for SMEs, at a rate of 0.5% per annum is also another laudable scheme being rolled out by the DBM which will give more breathing space for micro and small tourism entrepreneurs who have been the worst affected industry across the island following the closure of our borders.

I would also request the hon. Minister of Finance to consider an Amnesty Scheme for those same micro and small tourism operators who were unable to recycle into other economic sectors and hence, are struggling with their sometimes long overdue loans as well.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in addition to the existing scheme of security-free loan being provided to women entrepreneurs, I welcome the special consideration to existing women entrepreneurs who are struggling with their businesses and who will now benefit with a lifeline in terms of the Rs100,000 interest-free loan to manage their cash flow issues as well as the 0.5% COVID-19 support scheme of up to Rs1 m..

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget also caters for the merging of two existing entities namely, the Investment Support Programme and the SME Equity Fund which will undoubtedly lead to the creation of efficiencies and synergies. Hence, the newly created Industrial Financial Institution will be handed a war chest of Rs5 billion to accompany businesses through sound advice and supporting their financial needs for transformation through innovation and efficiency initiatives. In the same vein, the Leasing Equipment Modernisation Scheme will provide new leasing facilities at 2.5% per annum over nine years as well as the three existing leasing schemes will have their interest rate reduced.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the 2021-22 Budget will protect, build, and grow Mauritius. It will also protect our citizens through the pandemic as more vaccines are given and life will begin to return to normal. It defeats proponents of austerity and provides for record levels investments in health care, education, social services, and the protection of the vulnerable people of our society.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, throughout this pandemic, we have witnessed the resolve of our people who have made the sacrifices required to protect not only themselves but also their families, friends, neighbours, and co-workers. When this pandemic is conquered, we will witness our country's renowned resilience as our economy recovers and grows, as

businesses reopen and more people return to work leaving us in an even stronger position than we were before.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in relation to this pandemic, there has been many responses to this crisis around the world and has there been any crisis perfect? Any comment perfect about this crisis? Most certainly not! We have gone through a steep learning curve as we find our way through each of the last 12 months. We have managed to keep our deficit to within 5% of GDP. While the path economically looks long and slow, we still sit in a relatively favourable position compared to our peers.

Opposition has suddenly been high on their horses, through their PNQ *fizet* on budgetary deficits as newly self-appointed guardians of the Budget. Did they ask themselves what they achieved when they were in power? They could not even manage to balance a budget in the best of economic times. In fact, the MSM gave them a lesson about budget surpluses back in 1987, when, under Sir Aneerood Jugnauth's Prime Ministership, Mauritius achieved its first budget surplus since independence.

Moreover, I find it disappointing from the Opposition Members who are inventing stories with regard to the budget deficit. According to their reading, we should have aimed at closing that budget deficit by forgoing the massive investments we proposed and curtailing the social measures announced.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, clearly, they suffer from a severe case of empathy deficit and unfortunately there exists no cure and not even a vaccine. The Opposition Members have excelled in finding all the negative terms available in the English and French dictionaries to describe this Budget. None of them were satisfied with the range of social measures announced.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from free broad men to households on the SRM, increase allowances to orphans of SRM eligibility or even the Rs845 m. to NGO's to combat poverty, this Budget has indicated a strong emphasis on the most vulnerable citizens of our country. However, still, the Opposition was not satisfied, their hands did easily *tap la table* though, when the famous Budget was passed to *rass dipain pou ban zenfants l'école ZEP*, they forgot, but these children will never forget, we will never forget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they have even criticised the Budget following the project to construct 12,000 social housing units.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, 14,000 were built in 10 years. Rome was not built in one day, but 12,000 houses will be built by 2024 and locations in my Constituency have already been identified for nearly a thousand units. I thank the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development and thank the hon. Deputy Prime Minister as well for the efforts of looking for locations of the houses units in my Constituency.

M. le président, l'opposition s'attendait à un budget d'austérité avec des mesures autoritaires sur notre population. Le MSM est un parti guidé pour les socialistes, la justice sociale et la solidarité dans les moments durs. Le ministre des Finances a bien fait de présenter un budget qui vise à soulager notre nation suite à la pandémie de Covid-19, on aurait pu venir avec un budget d'austérité et on aurait été ensuite accusé de gouvernement sans cœur. Ce budget est courageux et comme il disait l'ancien président du Parti socialiste Français, Jean Jaurès, je cite –

«Le courage, c'est d'agir et de se donner aux grandes causes sans savoir quelle récompense réserve à notre effort l'univers profond, ni s'il lui réserve une récompense ».

M. le président, rien ne peut justifier une politique d'austérité au lendemain de la crise. Ce serait répéter les erreurs commises par des grandes puissances au lendemain de la grande dépression de 1929 et au lendemain de la grande récession de 2008, la grande leçon de ces périodes et que les politiques d'austérité aggravent la situation tout en favorisant la hausse de l'endettement. La priorité absolue est de soutenir la croissance par tous les leviers macroéconomiques disponibles. Il serait impossible d'avoir une croissance si on n'a pas la confiance de notre nation, on a confiance en notre nation, aux citoyens honnêtes de ce pays qui ne pensent qu'à se battre pour garder ce pays en bonne santé économique et sociale.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the PPS of Constituency No.14, I am proud that more than Rs2 billion worth of projects have been catered for the in the Budget.

M. le président, je voudrais remercier le ministre de Finances, nous avons entendu les cris de mes mandants de la circonscription No.14. Merci de nous avoir accordé des fonds pour des projets de développement, surtout en ce qui concerne les drains. Certains politiciens dans l'opposition écoutent les bulletins de météo pour savoir qu'en est-ce qu'il va avoir de grosses averses et s'attendre à des inondations pour ensuite faire de la politique mais l'oubli qu'après le mauvais temps, le soleil revient. Il revient toujours et je suis ravi que des drains

seront mises en place à Bambous, à Rivière Noire, Chamarel Chamouny, Surinam, Cité La Ferme, Coteau Raffin, Flic-en-Flac et Pierrefonds au coût de quelques R 572 millions.

Il est aussi question de moderniser les infrastructures du réservoir de la ferme, en espérant que l'opposition va la fermer face à de tels projets. Ce budget fait aussi provisions des stations de filtrage pour que l'approvisionnement en eaux s'améliore dans les régions de Rivière Noire et Chamouny. Ensuite, le développement routier pour que la région l'ouest soit connecté et là, je pense au projet de La Vigie/La Brasserie/Beaux Songes Link Road.

Merci, M. le ministre des Finances, pour la construction des logements sociaux à Cascavelle, à La Valette entre autres. La rénovation du pont de Chamarel, le Mediclinic à Chemin Grenier et le complexe polyvalent à Surinam. Du côté environnemental, la décision de vouloir planter 15,000 mangroves dans les différentes régions de l'ouest est très bien accueillie par mes mandants.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, two new economic sectors were announced by the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development namely the BioTech and Pharmaceutical Industry and the Renewable Energy industry. The Renewable Energy industry opens many new avenues such as green finance and the greening of the Government's own energy infrastructure. For instance, can the Government consider spare-heading the adoption of gas, of electric cars for its own fleet of vehicles given it has the largest fleet of vehicles in the country which uses fossil fuel based energy. Can the Government also, for instance, study the potential financial savings by adopting greener ways of cooling and heating its own buildings to lessen our dependence of huge air conditioning and heating systems?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the MSM-led Governments of Sir Anerood Jugnauth dared to create new sectors such as the Textile, Financial Services, Manufacturing and ICT industries and will again succeed with a Biopharmaceutical and the Renewable Energy industries even if, hon. Dr. Boolell, thinks they will not succeed while ignoring that his Labour party has a track record of miserably failing with economically but happily *tap la table to rass dipain zenfants l'école*.

On this side of the House, through this Budget, we have reiterated our beliefs in the potential of every Mauritian, irrespective of their age and competencies as the famous Greek philosopher Socrates famously said –

“In every person there is a sun, just let them shine”.

And we will all shine, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Sometimes people forget that just beyond the cloud, the sun is shining.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is through the same resourcefulness that the late Sir Anerood Jugnauth transformed the country as Prime Minister, even if the defeatism of the then Labour Government was obvious. Mauritius had been doomed by Professor Mayday, Professor of political economy at the University of Cambridge, where in 1960, he described Mauritius as –

“A small and isolated economy marked by a very rapid rate of population growth by an extreme concentration on a single primary product, namely sugar and by a great diversity of racial, religious and linguistic groups in the population.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the 1990’s, Mauritius had been admired as a model of economic, social and democratic success, hence, defeating the doom and gloom. As Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, in 1991, Sir Anerood Jugnauth ended his Budget presentation by mentioning the following words, which still bear its full significance and drive our people in Government in overcoming the challenges ahead of us.

I quote –

“What we are now setting out to achieve in this decade is, of course, ambitious.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, industrious as we are and as we should continue to be a nation, we have the imagination, the drive, the resourcefulness and the will to achieve results. That is why, I have the firm conviction that our ambition are not beyond our reach. When Sir Anerood Jugnauth became Prime Minister in 2014 and set out the Vision 2030 in this very august Assembly, it did not matter for him that he would have been 100 years old when the milestone would have been reached. What was crucial was that, as he had throughout his life, he had a vision and he stuck to his principles and sheer determination to achieve his vision.

Through this Budget, this Government, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, has a clear vision and path, and from the heavens, he will have Sir Anerood Jugnauth’s guidance. His presence was so immense that his absence in this House will be felt even more immensely. However, as the longest serving Member in the history of this House, to which he dedicated a colossal 56 years of his life, his presence and blessings, similar to the sun, will always illuminate us.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, resolve and resilience, a strong recovery, and a strong Mauritius, that is what we have to look forward to in the months ahead as we emerge from the pandemic. That is why this Budget's first priority is to protect Mauritians through the rest of the pandemic.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, an important moment is upon us; an unprecedented one which none of any Government in the country has faced before, a moment of challenge and of change, of difficulties, yes, but of many possibilities as well. This 2021-2022 Budget by the Minister of Finance, Dr. the hon. Padayachy, is one that meets that moment and I commend it to the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Better Together for a Better Tomorrow. God bless Mauritius. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Mrs Diolle!

Mrs Diolle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move for the adjournment of the debate.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to tomorrow, Friday 18 June at 3.00 p.m.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

Adjournment Matters! Hon. Uteem!

MATTERS RAISED

(10:33 p.m.)

MONSEIGNEUR LEEN AVENUE, PORT LOUIS - SEWAGE

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The issue I would like to raise concerns the Minister of

Energy and Public Utilities and it affects the inhabitants of Avenue Monseigneur Leen near Signal Mountain. There is a big sewage issue. The houses are not connected to the main pipe and they use septic tanks. Very often, these tanks are overflowed and causing smell and health hazards. Although sewage suction trucks do periodically empty those septic tanks, they don't do it all the time. So, we really need, hon. Minister, a long-term solution to connect these houses to the main pipes along Harris Street. I have raised this matter in the past informally with the hon. Minister and I hope that he will take it up with the Wastewater Management Authorities to alleviate the suffering of the inhabitants of Avenue Monseigneur Leen in Port Louis.

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 thank the hon. Member for raising this issue, which is an important one with regard to health problems. I understand from him that there is a main pipe. I need to ask the Wastewater Management Authority to carry out a survey to know how far it is from the inhabitants of Monseigneur Leen Street. Then, I'll request them to prepare an estimate and move forward so that they can be connected to that main pipe. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Mrs Tour!

CITE LA CURE/CARO LALO/PORT LOUIS - BUS SERVICE

Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My query is addressed to the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, hon. Ganoo. I would like to inquire on behalf of the inhabitants of Cité la Cure.

There used to be a bus service from Cité La Cure to Port Louis going through Caro Lalo. This service is no more available and it makes it difficult for the students and elderly to commute. Would the hon. Minister kindly look into reintroducing the service on the above-mentioned route? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, please!

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 for raising this issue, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. As far as I know, this is a route which is served by a private bus company. I will certainly look into the matter and I will contact the NTA

tomorrow and do the needful to re-establish the service which the hon. Member just mentioned.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Osman Mahomed!

RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES - WIDOWS - PENSIONS

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 a proposition that Jummah Masjid has made to him about two weeks ago, in writing, in the context of the Budget presentation, an issue which I have also canvassed on two occasions in the House last year.

It concerns some 600 to 1,000 widows whose religious marriages are duly registered in the Nikah Register of Mosque but however not recognised by the Muslim Family Council as there was no obligation for same at the material time, that is, in the 1980's. The consequence of this is that these widows are deprived of a Widow's Pension and they, thus, face great hardship.

My request to the hon. Minister of Finance tonight is to kindly consider, together with the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Social Security, the eventuality of normalising this situation, and a pension payment be made to these widows as per normal. 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'honorabile membre pour cette question. Il m'avait prévenu en avance sur cette question. Nous avions reçu un courrier daté le 2 juin au niveau du ministère des Finances et suite à ce courrier, nous sommes en train de travailler de concert avec le *Prime Minister's Office* et aussi le ministère de la Sécurité Sociale pour essayer d'avancer sur ce dossier et arriver à trouver une solution qui soit juste et équitable.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Nagalingum!

LA CHAUMIERE – WILD VEGETATION, SLABS & DRAIN PROBLEMS

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 Environment. I have received a complaint from La Chaumière vegetable planters. In fact, after those recent heavy

rains, the wild vegetation has grown to a dangerous height along the La Chaumière Road and this hinders the circulation of vehicle users. Furthermore, the slabs for the drains on this road have not been laid yet. The problem of slabs was already risen by me in December last at Adjournment Time and nothing has been done till now.

May I request the hon. Minister to consider this matter as urgent? Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): M. le président, il y a deux ou trois items qui ont été mentionnés par l'honorable membre. En ce qui concerne les points soulevés qui concernent le ministère de l'Environnement, ce sera avec beaucoup de plaisir qu'on va prendre la question sérieusement. En ce qui concerne l'aspect des drains, les *slabs* qui doivent les couvrir, etc., bien sûr, je vais référer la question aux autorités compétentes.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

SAINTE CROIX WELFARE CENTRE - RELOCATION

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare. On behalf of the senior citizens and women association of Sainte Croix, in view of the forthcoming MUGA project at Sainte Croix, *plus précisément* Ducrais, requiring, the refurbishment of the area. May I request the hon. Minister to relocate the activities of the Welfare Centre to the Women's Centre at Abercrombie which shares the location of CLAC, which is under the aegis of the Ministry of Arts and Culture. Thank you.

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

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank my hon. colleague for raising her suggestions to me and I will definitely look into the matter. We have to obviously ascertain that Abercrombie Centre can accommodate that number of women. I will look into it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Today, you are the last one, and I will accommodate a longer request probably.

PAUL ET VIRGINIE STREET, PLAINE VERTE – REINSTATEMENT

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):

Thank you. The request I am raising tonight is addressed to the hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure and though he is not here, I am sure his colleague will take good note of it. It is in relation to a street called Paul et Virginie Street, which is found in my Constituency, Constituency No.3 in Plaine Verte. It is in relation to the very bad state of this road; it is a very busy road. So, my request is for the resurfacing of this street, and also if this could be included in the list of NDU this year.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

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

The Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation (Mr S. Toussaint):

M. le président de séance, j'ai bien entendu la requête de l'honorable membre. Je vais passer l'information à mon collègue, le ministre des Infrastructures nationales.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Have a good night.

At 10.42 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 18 June 2021 at 3.00 p.m.