



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

MONDAY 08 JUNE 2020

CONTENTS

PAPERS LAID

MOTION

BILL (*Public*)

ADJOURNMENT

THE CABINET

(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

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

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

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

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

MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 15 of 2020

Sitting of Monday 08 June 2020

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Papers have been laid on the Table.

A. Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping

The Annual Report 2015 of the Mauritius Oceanography Institute.

B. Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare

The Annual Report 2016/2017 of the National Women's Council.

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.

(11.33 a.m.)

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2020-2021) BILL 2020

(NO. III OF 2020)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 (No. III of 2020).

Question again proposed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is true that the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 (No. III of 2020) has been presented at a time of unprecedented crisis and it is also true to say that this unprecedented crisis is without any doubt one of the worst in modern history. I will agree that just a few months ago, no one would have imagined that we would be faced with such a calamity and that nearly half of the world's population would be confined in their homes. However, this is where I start disagreeing with the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

Indeed, we need to go back to the beginning of the year and understand what went wrong in our country. We need to go into the circumstances which brought the Coronavirus into Mauritius. And I am of the view that this Government is responsible for three blunders for which, Mr Speaker, Sir, they will have to answer one day. The first one is when in a Press conference held in the presence of the hon. Minister of Health, the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and the CEO of Air Mauritius, it was forcefully stated that it was out of

question to stop flights from China, even if it was known that the Coronavirus was killing hundreds of Chinese citizens. The second blunder was when in another Press conference, the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that it would be out of question for Mauritius to close its frontiers despite the spread of COVID-19 virus internationally. The third and last blunder of the Government in the handling of the virus was its failure to ensure proper monitoring and surveillance of incoming passengers with the announcement of the sanitary curfew on 18 March.

This morning, Mr Speaker, Sir, I read that New Zealand was almost out of the woods and its last patient has recovered from Coronavirus. And I look forward to the day when our last patient would recover and I pray that our friends who are coming from overseas, who will land in Mauritius, I hope when they are moved to the quarantine, that they will not be charged with any fee. I have been told that each one of them will have to pay more than 1,300 dollars to be quarantined; those working on cruise ships. I thought, at one time, that there was already an agreement that they would be airlifted without any cost, but we will look into this when they arrive.

Now, the joy of the Minister of Finance is that he is a great Manager. He has been able to unite the whole country against this Government, although it would not have been an arduous task because they don't have the popular support. But, anyway, it is good to remind him that he tried to justify a number of unjust, arbitrary, unacceptable, unfair and inequitable measures under the garb of the Coronavirus. In my discourse, I will uncover his deceits, where he was deceitful, his half-truth, unanswered question, where he failed to enlighten the population when he ought to have. The Coronavirus must not be a catchphrase, the excuse or the pretext for inequitable or inappropriate measures to be inflicted on our citizens.

The Members on the other side of the House, I am sure, over the next 10 days, will brag about the palatable measures contained in the Budget, but as we say, the devil is always in the detail. But the country must realise and people do, people are being made aware and they are taking stock of the harsh realities, that these measures have only been made possible by snatching away R60 billion from the Central Bank. And when you add these Rs60 billion to the Rs18 billion at the beginning of the year and to the Rs80 billion announced this month, it is clear that this Government is jeopardising the future in a very short term.

Already, the hon. Minister showed tragic sense of humour when he stated that he has presented a balanced Budget. He meant the Rs158 billion taxpayers' money forcefully gifted

to Government by the Bank of Mauritius. Later on, we will come to coercive measures, Mr Speaker, Sir. As if you are taking dividends from your own company and say that it will have no impact upon your balance sheet nor on the company itself. What is the policy of this Government? Spend, spend, spend and spend taxpayers' money till there is no fiscal space. This is reckless, Mr Speaker, Sir!

No one is against the Bank of Mauritius fulfilling its role as a lender of last resort, but taxpayers, irrespective being large, medium or small, feel aggrieved when Government acts as a big spender and spends money that belongs to the nation in all opacity. This is a Government - and we heard the Minister when he delivered his speech - which reads poetry, but governs in opacity.

Do you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that South Africa Central Bank has ruled out financing Government? The Bank of Mauritius, as I said, is a lender of last resort, but is not a spender, even if it has to finance loan or subsidise loan or support the planters' only bank, it has to be done in accordance with the provisions of the Banking Act. And as a former Minister of Finance of India, Mr Sinha, who was also Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated, the Central Bank can monetise debt subject that it is secure, that it is liquid and has return on its investment. South Africa Central Bank rules out financing Government through loans to fund its runaway Budget deficit. And I read what the Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of South Africa stated: 'If we were to finance Government directly, there would be no pressure on Government to manage their cost in any way.'

Mr Speaker, Sir, unlike New Zealand, Mauritius went on a spending spree and opted for a free takeaway from the Bank of Mauritius. The Minister can mislead himself or mislead his friends in Cabinet or his parliamentary friends, but he cannot mislead the population. He has no legitimate right to mislead the population. He has been elected to represent the people of this country to voice out, to speak with a mind which is reflective of the well-being of the population, and if unpalatable statements have to be made, they have to, but you don't lull a population. And as I say, unlike New Zealand, public debt, as a percentage of GDP, is certainly not what New Zealand has, certainly not less than 35%.

They like to compare between what happened when we were in Government and since they took over in 2014. Let us look at the income per capita of our great little country. It has remained at 10,000 dollars since 2014 to pre-COVID. Why? Because Government became a big spender instead of acting with restraint to encourage savings and investment. It

did not broaden the economic base and failed to have a growth of over 5% which he promised when the alleged dream team led this Government.

In 2008, Mr Speaker, Sir, under the Labour/PMSD Government, the growth rate was 5.8% when it faced the triple shocks, the food, the fuel and the finance. I am not saying that circumstances which prevailed then are the same that we are currently going through, but the fact remains that there was no problem in respect of payment of PRB or end-of-year bonus. And this morning, I heard Mr Imrith over the radio. It is sad that somebody representing the core of the Civil Service, spokesperson for the Civil Service, was not even called by relevant parties in Government to discuss a matter which is fundamental. And what is he saying? We are not saying that money should be disbursed, but as representatives of workers of Civil Servants, they have a right to be heard. When called upon to make sacrifice, everyone is willing to make sacrifice, but you cannot treat the representative of workers with disdain or with contempt. It goes against good governance, Mr Speaker, Sir.

During the duration of the two years of the financial crisis, there was no loss of employment and Government had the fiscal space to come up with two stimulus packages, and the Bank of Mauritius was not under siege, Mr Speaker, Sir. What was the rate of growth in 2018-19? 3%. What was forecasted when they took over and after the Budget was presented? That, as from 2015 onwards, growth would reach 5.7% of GDP. But it has remained below 3.2% till December 2019, and the dream team brought a nightmare. What was not promised! Construction of houses for low-income group, galore, but was delivered, hardly any core housing unit. They promised job creation. What did we end up with? 25% of unemployed amongst the youth and the incidence of unemployment in the women workforce was constantly on the rise.

Now, we agree that the sanitary measures have provoked an unprecedented economic psychosocial and financial hardship. But Government is indifferent, insensitive, continues to be reckless and rules by opacity. Today, Government is reckless with money required to secure the future of our children. As matter stands, each child has a mounting debt of more than Rs350,000, and it is a debt which is bound to go up. But the people are tired; they don't want to tolerate a Government which flies on a culture of opacity. Government may be Government; Government is Government and Government so decides to run this country with extra budgetary Special Purpose Vehicles. And what are those co-called Special Purpose Vehicles? They are adding more and more when we look into the Budget Estimates. These are Special Purpose Vehicles outside the purview of the scrutiny of Parliament. And what we

have been told are that out of the Rs60 billion which they snatched from the Bank of Mauritius, Rs27 billion have been earmarked for Capital. As far as we know, when there is a call for financing of Capital projects, usually we take loan which is allocated to countries on a concessionary basis and the repayment is long-term. I would like to know on what basis such sum has been allocated for Capital Expenditure and for Recurrent Expenditure. I think we have to know on what basis has this allocation been done.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we know the habit of this Government; it has to pay for largesse because no savings has been made and, on the other hand, expenditure for Capital project will be channelled by Special Purpose Vehicles. Therefore, taxpayers' money, yet again, will be used with little oversight. As responsible parents, Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not know of anyone who takes savings from the piggy bank of our children or are the parents encouraged to raid Central Bank. This is not the legacy that we will bequeath to our children, in our humble opinion. The money has to be borrowed albeit at a very concessionary rate as it is done in all countries where there is separation of powers, good governance and oversight. Of course, the volume of loan has to be bound and time bound. Under exceptional circumstances, exceptional measures are taken, but the risks should not be exceptional. They should be measured. Hence, the provision for Government to borrow, in exceptional circumstances, up to more than 25% of its Recurrent Expenditure. But the regime wants freebies. Make no mistake that it has dispensed no favours to the population with alleged populist measures; simply, it's money that has been disbursed from the Bank of Mauritius that has been used lavishly to meet unnecessary expenditure because this Government does not have a culture of restraint, and COVID is mere pretext to squander taxpayers' money. Let me remind the House of the Rs4 tax on the litre of fuel oil, which is indeed a tax burden. The depreciation of the Rupee is an additional tax and as a net food and fuel importing country, all prices have gone up massively. When they took over, Mr Speaker, Sir, US Dollar was selling at Rs33, whereas on 04.06.2020 it was selling at a shocking price of Rs40.15. During the course of the debate, hon. Yeung Sik Yuen will produce a price list, much to the delight of the House.

Fraud and corruption, wastage, all these are additional financial burden on taxpayers, tantamount to additional taxes. When the Minister of Finance announced that the price of the 12 kg gas cylinder has gone down, there was applause. But little did they realise that if Government has been able to bring down the price, it has nothing to do with Government. It is largely due to the levy that has been imposed at the petrol pump, Mr Speaker, Sir. Did our friends on Government bench ask of the massive windfall gain made by STC and CEB? Did

the backbenchers lobby for a decrease in utilities bill? I am sure Ministers go to supermarkets or chemist shops unattended and they walk freely among the crowd, though they go unrecognised when they wear the mask. I don't know whether they have to wear protective helmets to protect them from the angry crowd. But can anybody justify the massive increase in prices?

Let me, Mr Speaker, Sir, dwell briefly on the *plat de résistance*, which I will develop later. *Le plat de résistance* is the Rs18 billion, whose objective was initially announced in the communiqué issued by the Bank of Mauritius to salvage enterprises with turnover of Rs100 m. in two strategic sectors with systemic problems like tourism and textile and garments. Now, if the cycle is widened to include food sovereignty, ICT or blue economy, there is no harm. But when Government gives firm instruction to bring in doubtful investors who have already obtained tax holiday certificates since 2017, then it stands to reason that the Mauritius Investment Corporation will never be answerable to Parliament. As of now, no PQ, I have been told, is allowed in relation to SBM or even on Air Mauritius despite that Air Mauritius is no longer listed on the Stock Exchange.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't want to sound nasty. But as matters stand, and I have been told - and rumours are floating - that the strip of the asset is likely to conclude a strategic partnership with a big entrepreneur from Madagascar to set up an Air Mauritius Regional Airline, and I hope this is not true. The Minister should not forget that we are under the constant gaze of international funding agencies, credit rating agencies, and we are bending backwards to the EU to convey strong signals that we are new normal and will be in the vanguard of the fight against money laundering and combatting financing of terrorism. I hope all the deficiencies will be plugged, though it is never too late. And it is good to note that the Prime Minister - I do not know what has been the outcome of his phone conversation with Mr Michel, but I hope that there will be outcome, provided, of course, all the deficiencies are plugged. But as you say, there are miles to go and a long way to go, and I will come to this at a later stage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government has been passive to the decline in tourism and export earnings, foreign disinvestments on the Stock Exchange, and is responsible for the negative impact of the EU blacklisting on external capital flow. With the COVID-19, matters are exacerbating and the impact, of course, is felt on our balance of payment. MRA will forego Rs15 billion, if not more, in tax collection by December.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if we refer to EPZ sector, in the 3rd and 4th quarters of 2019, there is a respective decrease, when we look at the figures, of 10% and 11% respectively. The trade deficit in 2019 stood at Rs120 billion and stands to reach Rs130 billion for year 2020; net export down by Rs25 billion. In other words, we have access to remunerative markets but, since 2015, we have not been able to grasp opportunities to increase our export of seafood, sugar, textile, garment and other products. Usually, our positive balance of trade in services uses to make up for shortfall in trade of goods, but our reduced capital inflows and possible outflows have worsened the situation, and the consequences are far-reaching.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since there is no revenue from tourism, travel and leisure, the tourism being the cornerstone of our economy, the shortfall is from a net receipt of Rs63 billion. Air Mauritius transports 50% of our tourists and airlifts our cargo to many destinations. In comparing year to year, tourism recipients are likely to go down by Rs40 billion, direct investment lower by Rs10 billion, net export lower by Rs25 billion, resulting in a total worsening of Rs75 billion. Instead of a surplus, balance of payment could register large deficit of at least Rs40 billion, not counting capital outflow. Balance of payment for this year will engulf Rs1 billion from Bank of Mauritius import cover and over the two years can be as high as Rs80 billion. Mr Speaker, Sir, 30% of workforce is affected in the sector and I hope that recovery will start soon. And as a Small Island Developing State, if we don't export, we die.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with respect to COVID-19 Programme Development Fund, which is an SPV, an extra budgetary, Government, as you say, is Government and Government so decides. We know that sizable expenditure in relation to Safe City Project at a cost of Rs18 billion has in front line the Mauritius Telecom while Government is making smaller payments to Mauritius Telecom over several years. The manipulation of public debt data to dissimulate the runaway expansion of public spending has proved more difficult than cloaking the deficit. Official public debt has continued to go in the past years to reach 70% of GDP, pre-COVID, including the undisturbed debt commitments taken by SBM for Metro Express or Mauritius Telecom for Safe City and Côte d'Or projects and borrowing from non-financial public sector entities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, Mauritius Telecom and other companies are finding it difficult to procure dollars on the market for repayment of loans. As I say, only an opaque Government will shift the blame of mismanagement of the economy on the contagion of COVID-19.

Let me compare the expenditures of Financial Year 2018-2019 to 2020-2021. I have avoided Financial Year 2019-2020 because of COVID-19. We will look at specific items. Rs8 billion earmarked to support workers who are furlough that is, on technical assistance, but we don't know for how long, whether this amount will be extended to self-employed and to those in informal sectors who find it very difficult to eke out a living. The only thing that we know is that each individual in traineeship, formal and informal sectors, will have a TAN number.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my worry is that since there is no buoyancy in the economy, revenue has remained the same, and I am comparing to Financial Year 2018-2019, and it cannot be sustained. Debt cannot be sustained and our gross public debt as a percentage of GDP is 83% and consolidated deficit is about Rs71 billion. As some friends would say, we are no longer on a helicopter but on a Soviet Sirius heading for a crash.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have given you a foretaste of the voracious appetite of this Government as a big spender; the Rs158 billion is, indeed, a lot of money. Who cares about debt or lack of fiscal space? Live recklessly today and leave the repayments of debt to the millennial. And the transfer of the Rs60 billion from the Bank of Mauritius as Budget revenue is a travesty of fiscal reality. In fact, it is simply a financial transfer and not a revenue. The consolidated deficit of Government inclusive of off-budget expenditure of special funds for 2020/21 stands at about Rs71 billion or 50% of GDP, assuming the customary shortfall in capital spending, the deficit would be 14% of GDP, and this huge deficit has to be financed and it would be financed by money which they obtained from the Bank of Mauritius and support loan from *Agence Française de Développement* for Rs13 billion. And it was Minister Bodha who, with an effortless sense of superiority, stated in this very House, when he intervened on COVID-19 and Quarantine Bills, that Government would not have recourse to external funding agencies, and yet, when we look at the Estimates, not only they are borrowing from *Agence Française de Développement*, potential lenders of *la Banque Africaine de Développement* and the IMF. And time will tell they will borrow money from IMF because we know what conditions will be imposed upon.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for how long will Government use helicopter money to finance shortfall in revenue? Bonanza money does not last and we don't know what will happen next year. Gross public sector debt is expected to increase from Rs329 billion in March to Rs390 billion in June or by about Rs60 billion. Gross public sector debt will thus reach a record level of 83% of GDP and the Budget Estimates project that public debt stabilises at the level

of Rs390 billion until June 2021. Irrespective of figures submitted by the Minister, the inflationary situation fed by free money creation from the Bank of Mauritius will harm the prospect for a strong economic recovery post-COVID.

It is now clear why the prescribed public debt ceilings in the Public Debt Management Act were abolished. The newly defined cash and cash equivalents, including any equity investment held in any private sector entity is a colourable device to artificially reduce gross debt, and this concoction of a whopping Rs50 billion in June 2020 has been estimated and is referred in the Budget Estimates at page 432. This is why we must continue to focus on gross and not net public debt. As Warren Buffett famously remarked - and I know the hon. Minister is a great disciple of Warren Buffett; I am sure he has taken cognizance of what Warren Buffett said. Not only that he is willing to pay taxes, as he said, but this is, I will quote –

“You will see who is swimming naked when the tide runs out.”

The tide and time is running out for this Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government is, in the words of the former Governor of the Bank, a reeling drunkard, who after dry spell will go on a binge and will drink like a fish. Unfortunately, the Bank of Mauritius is not an ocean and there is no untapped delivery and if there is, it is limited, Mr Speaker, Sir. And the reason is simple. The Bank of Mauritius has been unable to raise a single rupee on Savings Bonds of the Special Relief Programme of Rs5 billion for onward lending to commercial bank. The State Investment Corporation has equally failed to deliver with its redeemable preference shares. How on earth will the Bank of Mauritius mop up, as loan, the Rs40 billion on domestic capital market in exchange for Bonds when it has failed with the sum of Rs5 billion? Some will argue that if this is done, it goes against quantitative easing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I suspect that they will have no alternative than printing money, and it will increase depreciation and inflation. Three weeks ago, the reserves were down by Rs700 m. and the rupee is expected to depreciate by another 20%. And what it means? It means when we go to the chemist shop, prices have gone up, there has been erosion in our purchasing power, with the consequence that we are getting poorer and, of course, we know that inflation is an additional tax, a heavy burden upon those at the lower rung of the ladder especially.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind the Minister also that, according to IMF, our reserves are barely adequate and if we refer to the latest IMF Report, we have been called upon to

build our reserves, and if we don't reverse gear and address macro-economic fundamentals and come with an adequate framework and show our goodwill to rein in expenditure, we are in big trouble. As of now, problems are compounding and certainly we are not the blue-eyed boy of any institution; let alone the difficulties that we are facing as a tax haven, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not something that we wish nor we would like to happen. We certainly don't want to see any capital leaving our country. But one thing is certain. Not much is coming into the country also, and we know the relevance and importance to our economy of capital inflows, Mr Speaker, Sir. And we have to be able also to make the difference between what is in the Bank of Mauritius and what is capital inflow and what is the volume of money that global business brings into the country. I would hate to say that it comes easy and it goes out very easy also. That's why the reputation of our country as a financial centre has to be a centre of repute.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me turn to pension, another instance of half-truth or no truth, clear example of opacity which can mislead the average Mauritian. The Minister's averments at pages 21-22 of his speech may well mark the end of the non-contributory universal pension which was introduced by the Labour Party years and years ago. The non-contributory universal pension which has ensured the livelihoods of hundreds and thousands of pensioners over the years is possibly now endangered. And when we talk of basic pension, Mr Speaker, Sir, this pension also helps those who are physically handicapped, widows and orphans, people who are bed-ridden. But our pension system is being rocked aside. Non-contributory pension, that is, pension for those who are 60 and up to 65 years old - they will apparently earn only Rs9,000 per month, and this is to be found in paragraph 164 of the Minister's speech. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not a favour being dispensed to pensioners or to those who need pension because of the undue hardship they are facing physically or mentally. This is not a favour; it is a right. Under this Government, it looks that old age pension will no longer be universal but will be targeted. As I say, is it the beginning of the end of non-contributory universal pension? And what did the Prime Minister promise on World Elderly Day in October of 2019? A progressive increase in pension of Rs9,000 from 2019 up to Rs13,500 in 2024. Yet, at paragraphs 165 and 166 of his speech, the Minister of Finance announced that, henceforth, all increases in benefits to our elderly will be paid through a contributory system; *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*. This seems to imply that payments above Rs9,000 per month will only be paid by way of this contributory mechanism called *Contribution Sociale*

Généralisée. What is worse is that it appears that additional guaranteed monthly income generated through this contributory system will only be paid to citizens above the normal retirement age of 65 years old. This appears from paragraph 167 of the Budget Speech. Worse still, according to paragraph 168 of the Budget Speech, the first payments of benefits under this contributory mechanism will be in July 2023. Let us put basic question, Mr Speaker, Sir, and ask whether this is one of the recommendations of the Pension Reform Committee set up by this Government in 2016. Has there been consultation with all stakeholders or is it that the arrogance will have it that no discussion is required? Be it as it may, this House, the country and the nation need to know whether Government has started targeting and is not going to pay the promised increases to those aged 60 to 64. If that reading is right, more than 225 old age pensioners will be penalised over the next four years and, worse of all, will have been lied to by no less than the current Prime Minister of this country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, people want to know what will happen to the assets of the National Pension Fund. They have invested in MCB, in SBM; we know that they have invested in hotels in exchange for bonds. They have non-cash assets. They are owners of buildings, but these assets belong to the nation, not to the Government. Government cannot claim ownership of what belong to the people of this country. There is a call for accountability, for transparency, and this money has to be accounted for. It's hard earned sweat, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, questions have to be answered. One simply cannot just make up one's mind, take a decision when the interest of the country is at stake. There is a call for discussion at the bar of public opinion. The nation has the right to know because this money belongs to the coffers of the people, Mr Speaker, Sir. And in addition to this, I have raised a question, which is the concern of many people. The effective purchasing power of our elderly if Government, as I said, does not rein in its expenditure. It is alright to say that by 2023 - you know, as we say the devils are in the detail, but we know the reason as to why 2023 is the year when disbursement will be made. I do not know how many of them will be in this very House by 2023, Mr Speaker, Sir. But even if they decide to go along and disburse the pension, what will be the weightage of the currency? How far will the rupee last, knowing perfectly well that there is depreciation of the rupee, that cost of living is going up? I hope we do not reach the stage where, like in Zimbabwe, a person cart away wheelbarrow full of Zim dollars. I hope not, Mr Speaker, Sir. And as I say, there is a gap to be filled in the NPF, Government will have to assume its responsibility, but there is a call to convene a meeting of all stakeholders for onward discussion to see how best this issue can be addressed. The

Contribution Sociale Généralisée is not the alternative to National Pension Fund and will penalise workers who don't even know what their lump sum would be.

At least on one thing I tend to agree with the hon. Prime Minister and I am glad that measures announced by the hon. Prime Minister for National Pension Fund to invest into Mauritius National Investment Authority never came to fruition because there would have been lack of oversight.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the new Pension Scheme will increase pressure on companies which have to pay 6% towards employee contribution with no upper limit, and this is a hidden tax. It may also lead to the demise of private companies. The new system reboots any upper limit, as I said paid, and will place a burden on companies with reduced cash flow and profitability, especially the SMEs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what will happen if the employer and the employee fail to contribute? Will the employee still benefit from the basic pension? How will any shortfall be funded? A responsible Government would have produced a white paper and called for wide discussion with all the stakeholders to look at the best ways to secure our pension.

There is a mandatory five-year actuarial review of our National Pension and National Savings Fund. It is the contribution, as I said, of all workers to a Pension Fund and has to be managed judiciously, managed by experts. The population has taken good note that the Minister has described National Pension Fund as *injuste*, unfair *et régressif*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, notwithstanding the MCB/NPF saga, I must say that it has been well managed. It has a low cost of management and I would like to pay tribute to those who managed the Fund. And I hope the Minister will have discussions with representatives of the Civil Service to know exactly what will happen to the Fund, what are the transfers of undertakings given to those employees. And there is nothing mentioned as to where the money of the NPF will go. Will the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* be credited to the Consolidated Fund? These are questions that deserve answers, and we are not talking of a small item which can look insignificant. We are talking of contribution made to a common Fund by all employees, Mr Speaker, Sir. But this Government has chosen to dismantle a pillar of economic and social justice to be replaced by *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, which is controversial and has been the subject of much debate even in France.

There is reason to reform but not to dismantle, and if we have reached this stage, it is largely due to the irresponsibility of this Government in its endeavour to spend, spend and

spend without any culture of reining in expenditure. This is where we have landed today. Today, we are able and we can afford to get money from the Bank of Mauritius. Tomorrow, what will we do when the tide runs down, Mr Speaker, Sir? Who are we going to solicit? Are we going to go like Oliver Twist, looking all over the place frantically and asking for more and more or are we going to trade our sovereignty for a few dollars more? This is where we have reached. Today, it is our sovereignty which is under siege, largely to the responsibility of this Government and there is a heavy price to pay for it. We are citizens of a country, proud to be Mauritians, but under no circumstances will we go with a beggar's bowl asking for more and more and more, Mr Speaker, Sir. Either we live up to the expectation of the people or we condescend to the level of having to ask for more and more, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I say, this Government has chosen to be a big spender and, of course, they will be subject to scrutiny by Parliament, but we know that it has the tyranny of numbers and it can flout the law and act indiscriminately. The Budget, as I see, is flawed on several accounts and if corrective measures are not taken, we are heading for social chaos and should not - I know our good friend is a specialist in micro economy and a strong proponent of Modern Monetary Theory. But let me ask him one thing. Is there any provision in the Budget for a shelter and accompanying measures for battered women?

Even the Minister of Sports was shocked when he learned - I am sure when he was told in Cabinet - that a paltry sum has been earmarked only for the preparation of athletes for forthcoming games. My friends will elaborate, Mr Speaker, Sir. And this Budget fails on sectorial reform and introduces a solidarity levy, which has created an uproar among professionals, which attacks massively at the rate of 25% on the excess amount of chargeable income plus dividends in addition to the rate of income tax of 15%, making a total of 40% and, with contribution to Pension Fund, it can reach up to 45%. I have listened to the good hon. Minister justifying the reasons for this measure which has been announced in the Budget. But we will live in a country where there is parity of esteem, and if you want to attract foreigners, don't think that they will be happy if there is a disparity between what a Mauritian should earn and what he or she, as a foreigner, should earn, working in sectors where there is a shortage of Mauritian skills. Nobody is against making a contribution to a Solidarity Fund. Nobody is against! But one has to be just and fair. There is a call for discussion at the bar of public opinion. It is the way you convey the message and you talk to people. And there is a report. I read a comment in relation to those working in Mauritius, foreigners working in Mauritius, who enjoy the trappings of living on this beautiful island,

who rub shoulder with Mauritians, and they feel embarrassed that there is what I would call an apartheid tax regime amongst professionals.

And in this sector, people have learnt to take the rungs of the social and economic ladder. Its services sector, its brain power has nothing to do with rent-seekers. Why do you have to be unfair? But if you had conveyed message and said: “Well, there is a call to make contribution, that tax, call it a solidarity levy, will not last *ad vitam aeternam*”, that there is a cut-off point and cut-off time, so be it. But why don’t you say it? Why being unfair to taxpayers? We are not here to make a case for those who are big earners. Big earners or small earners, they all have rights in this country and rights are not given by any political party. These rights are enshrined in our Constitution. So, that is why I make an appeal to the Minister to ponder wisely and if he has to make a U-turn he has to, because he has to bear the consequences. And let me remind him: Keep in mind, Minister, the velvet revolution has started. And I always say, when you sit on a powder keg, don’t keep a box of matches in your pocket. In the light of the fury this Budget has unleashed, no sensible person can remain indifferent or insensitive. The velvet glove has been removed and it is time to fight this Government with bare knuckles.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I read the speech with the support of friends. I look at all the items in the Budget. My good friend, hon. Ramful, reminded me that there was a big omission in the Budget. I asked him what was that omission and he said: “There is no provision for the holding of local elections which are due to be held next year.” I thought they were strong proponents of democracy, that they believed in the electoral process, that they were ready to face the electorate at local elections, be it in rural or urban areas. What is happening? Where is the provision in the Budget for the holding of local elections? I seek that provision here, I seek it over there, but it is neither here nor there. I don’t know whether I have to search in the pocket of the Minister or somebody else to find out where is the provision for the holding of local elections due to be held next year. Are you scared to face the electorate? Are you scared? Are you running away? But, if not, stand up and be counted, and impress upon the Prime Minister that there should be provision in the Budget for local elections to be held. My good friend, the Chairman of the Labour Party, hon. Patrick Assirvaden, MP, is reminding me of what recently happened in Rivière Noire. They had a taste of their own bitter medicine. What happened? My good friend, hon. Ganoo, who is always in the forefront, in the vanguard of his Constituency! What has happened?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: When the people decide to speak up and speak out, you will land into deep trouble, and it is the new beginning and they started to speak without fear or prejudice. We know that this Government didn't have the support of 75% of the electorate. 63% of the electorate voted against this Government! 63% of the electorate! Mr Speaker, Sir, they can. . .

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: This is the only perimetry where they can shout and be heard. The tyranny of numbers will not scare anyone of us and, as I say, the fight will be conducted in the House and out there! And out there!

(Interruptions)

Oh my God! Who is talking? Mr Spender, big spender! That's the one who is talking now!

(Interruptions)

Macaroni! At least, this is people's diet! People enjoy *plat* of macaroni or spaghetti. What about you?

(Interruptions)

Pas expiré!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: You are 'sale by date' my friends! They are 'sale by date', and they know it. You are young. Acquire the skills which I have acquired over the years in this very House. We are all on the learning curve and a bit of restraint is good for all of us. Humility is the soul of wit my friends!

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, the velvet glove has been removed and time has come to fight this Government with bare knuckles. And I make a plea: make provisions for the holding of local elections.

(Interruptions)

Ah! Join the crowd.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now also, I was taken aback, surprised that there was no provision in the Budget for the setting up of a Constitutional Court. Whether we like it or not, there are

electoral petitions which have been filed before the Supreme Court since late January and they have to be heard. I hope that matters will be expedited, and being in winter, Mr Speaker, Sir, this winter of discontent will have political fallout and Government has every reason to think twice before coming with any Finance Bill which is tailor-made to meet the expectation of their friends. Last year's Finance Bill was tailor-made to respond to the needs of a big punter or somebody who had the monopoly in fixed-odds betting. Now, I hope the Finance Bill will respond to the needs of the people and will not be geared or specifically tailor-made to meet the expectation of those who are close to our friends sitting on the other side.

Mr Speaker, Sir, equitable burden sharing - we are all for equitable burden sharing - is an act of patriotism, but the purpose is defeated if strategic partner is left behind. The object, and this is the object of one and all and it is the prayer that has to be answered. This is the ardent wish of the people of this country. The object is to keep enterprises afloat and safeguard jobs. And I would advise the Minister to read the communiqué issued by the Bank of Mauritius, which made it clear that it will support strategic sectors of tourism, travel and leisure, and textile. Through the interval till we are COVID-free, there is a window of opportunity to remodel the product and to reskill our workforce. And the Minister has stated in no uncertain words that any company which opts for financial support from State Investment Corporation, one of the established conditions is the safeguarding of employment. And I am glad the hon. Minister is acknowledging. This is very important, and as for those who are going to be furloughed or laid off technically, of course, they will be entitled to a financial support.

But I would appeal to the Minister. And whether we like it or not, recovery is well on the way and I am glad that in our great little country, people are back to work. I do grant you that the tourism sector is the one which is going to be worst affected because according to the IMF, take-off will only happen or take place in three years' time. And, in the meantime, during that interval, we have to rebrand, we need to look at the skill of the workforce and, in fact, we need to come up with a new product, which is the product of a new normal. And as many of us have stated, we hope that we will be able to sell Mauritius as a COVID-free destination. We need to take risks, but, of course, we need to minimise risks. But, under the pretext of the COVID virus, we have to make sure that the acquired rights of employees are maintained. And we have to make sure that the resources which are being disbursed will be used for specific purposes, which have to be clearly defined. I am glad that Mauritians, as you say, have started to kick the can, well, for good reasons, not down the road, but some of

them are going to spend weekends in hotel. It is a good sign, it is a good signal, small but meaningful, and I am confident that this great engine of growth will regain its pride. The branding, as I say, is the name of the game, notwithstanding all the necessary precaution and measures that have to be taken, we are looking forward to welcome the tourists. But, I am appalled, shocked to read that the budget of the MTPA has been reduced by 47%, and I expected my good friend, hon. Joe Lesjongard to be more forceful, to be more reactive, to fight for what he considers to be just, to fight for a sector which is the engine of growth, a sector which needs to be rebranded. And when he intervened in the debates on the Presidential Address, he was full of zeal...

(Interruptions)

I don't see...

(Interruptions)

No, you have toned down a little bit; stand up and be counted. We have known each of us since a very long time. I know him to be very zealous. What happened? You have lost a little bit of your shine and glitter. Fight for a sector which is the engine of growth; fight for a sector which can generate employment; fight for a sector which has a multiplier effect! But you have been, unfortunately, very quiet, Minister.

Let me come to the *plat de résistance*, the Mauritius Investment Corporation. The Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, provides no transparency on how the funds will be deployed. And we are told that there will be investment made in Africa. I am not saying that we should not, but this is not the optimal choice. We need to have more clarity around governance, financial investment rules, where the fund will be invested.

Hon. Duval, on several occasions, has stated that the MIC should be accountable, like everybody else, to a Select Committee of Parliament and not to operate as an investment arm of the Bank of Mauritius. The latter, as we know, is a regulatory body and is not an ATM, development bank or investment bank, and as long as the Mauritius Investment Corporation is under the purview of the Bank of Mauritius, the element of doubt lingers. We know what are the consequences. And where there is doubt, there is grey shade, and where there is grey shade, we know things certainly will go wrong because there is no accountability, there is no transparency.

And as the hon. Minister of Finance reminds us, he was Deputy Governor of the Bank, Chairman of the FSC and then, of course, the former CEO of the FSC is now the

present Governor. Now, I am not going to highlight the merits of what they have done, but, certainly, the demerits of what they did, far, far outweigh any merit, Mr Speaker, Sir. We know the situation that the FSC is into; we know that it cannot live up to the expectation of the players and certainly there is a lot of room for improvement.

Let me remind our friend that the Mauritius Investment Corporation will bend backwards on instruction of the Executive. Make no mistake, as you say: Government is Government and Government so decides. And on the radio, the Governor of the Bank stated that more than 15 companies which have turnover of Rs100 m. have submitted their application to be scrutinised by the Technical Committee and then referred for scrutiny to the Assessment and Investment Committees and, if all is well, will be approved and, if not, set aside by the Board chaired by Academic Lord Desai. Mr Speaker, Sir, who does not like Lord Desai? But, between you and me, with all due respect to the hon. gentleman, do you see this gentleman examining recommendations made by the Board in detail?

This is a new Corporation and I hate to say, and I have to say it loud and clear, it should not operate under the aegis of the Bank of Mauritius. As to whether it is a mirror image of State Investment Corporation, time will tell. But it has to be transparent, it has to be accountable and it has to be managed by professionals. As of now, instructions are being given by the Executive in relation to an application that has to be processed, - and I will come to it later on - in relation to an application submitted by somebody who wants to set up a pharmaceutical company in Mauritius. And we know the axis of that partnership; people close to the rank and file of this Government. I simply won't drop names, but we know who they are. And one of the applicants, who is in partnership with somebody very close to our friend sitting on the other side, has a case because he was allegedly involved in a shady transaction. I am sad to say that we have not learned from past experiences, from what we went through when investment bank licence was issued to the like of Sobrinho, Mr Speaker, Sir. I impress upon Government to tread cautiously, to err on the principle of caution, to see to it that the procedures are followed and that licence is not given simply to please people who may be of shady characters.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have stated what others have stated in relation to our deep-seated concern, because we are talking of taxpayers' money - I won't use the words 'doled out' - which will be allocated by the Mauritius Investment Corporation. It will act as a bank; it will allocate the funds. As for the rules of governance, we don't know how it will be done. But I draw the attention of Government, as I said, to tread cautiously. Even though it will not be

under the purview of Parliament, and scrutiny of Parliament is in line with the electoral democracy, with parliamentary democracy, but we certainly will raise our voice when there is the least concern or where there is any deep-seated concern. And I issue a note of caution to those sitting on different committees to tread cautiously and to see to it that the business is conducted in all transparency, because we know what happened to the SIC. We know that SIC, despite having a Financial Analyst, has been the subject of criticism due to investment in companies which did not have viable structural plan. And there is a legitimate question which has been put, which earlier I highlighted: will those companies which are distressed - I don't know whether they have undergone any stress test - be able to refund the financial support in due time, though they can always say that they are cash poor, and eventually the quasi equity or equity or loan will never come to fruition and MIC may sustain loss? And there are lessons to be learned from investment made by NPF in the hotel sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a consequence of sanitary emergency and economic crisis may lead to financial fallout. That's why, be it MIC or any relevant investment corporation or for that matter, the Bank of Mauritius, they have to assume fully their responsibilities. Unfortunately, their independence has been eroded. MIC has comparative advantages as it can squeeze bank initially to buy the debt at low market value, which will be a key driver of returns, and banks cannot get away with bad risk taking and it is in their interest to be a good player for a nice haircut and to equitize debt. MIC cannot afford to mess up. There are signs of recovery, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I hope MIC will live up to the expectation because recovery means that we don't have to disburse a huge amount. So, let's wait and see.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we would like also to know whether MIC will give loans in foreign currency, and that also has to be told because we know it is getting its funding from foreign reserve. Some people may say that the Bank of Mauritius can create the money and credit it to MIC, but we want to know if it is going to allocate loans in foreign currency. This is yet to be told.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as matters stand, we are all worried because Government is trying to buy its way out of recession by printing money. Dipping too much in the reserves can lead to what we call the Greece Syndrome or the Venezuela Syndrome. I am not going to cite Zimbabwe. This is a very sad case. Zimbabwe used to be the London of the region, especially Harare. Now, today, it has become a breadbasket turning into a basket case. But we all have to understand the new normal also means productivity, competitiveness and less depreciation of the rupee.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as we say, if we want to be role models or if we want to show cause for a good cause, we should be the first to take decisions which initially will be painful, but I think it is a decision worth taking, and I am referring to what many countries, many Governments have done, not only in New Zealand, but in many African countries. Reducing in the Budget, the Minister has said that overseas missions will be reduced and Ministers will renew their official cars every five years. I mean, I don't want to sound nasty, but this is game for a laugh. I think they should set the good example and do what the Prime Minister and Ministers of New Zealand have done. They have agreed to a 20% cut in their salaries. This is the way forward. In fact, Cabinet should have been reshuffled and the number of Ministers should have been decreased, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a responsible partner and patriot, we all have to do our fair share and, as we say, the burden has to be eased off. But there should be equitable sharing of this burden and, as responsible partner and patriot, shareholders of corporate sector have to transfer some of their profits from overseas to recapitalize their businesses. The effort has to be collective and I am hopeful it would be. According to a former senior staff of the Bank of Mauritius, High Net Worth individuals and enterprises have invested massively in different portfolios overseas and have huge reserves in foreign banks. Of course, the MRA has the power to gather the relevant information and in times of needs I expect that everyone will assume one's responsibility, and I hope that we won't reach the stage where like the US Federal Government, a decision was taken to impose a levy of 2% on money deposited overseas by the citizens of America.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are not going to stand by and allow Government or corporate sector to have a big helping of the cake which is getting smaller, and we cannot expect workers also to be happy with the crumbs that will fall off the table. Since things are getting better, I hope that perception and reality and fear that we don't know what will happen to those who are trying to earn a decent living, we don't know what will happen to those who are worried about their jobs, but our prayers, hopefully, are going to be answered and I hope that they will have a job to go and will have food on the table. And the measures announced in the Budget to safeguard jobs, unfortunately, are not reassuring. And the Minister has to be very clear in respect of assistance that has to be disbursed, not only to those who are going to be furloughed, but, as I said, to those in the informal sector and to those who are self-employed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to acquired rights. We are all very worried in relation to companies which have filed for redundancy because allegedly they are insolvent. I hope the Minister will tell us as to the number of companies which are allegedly insolvent and as to the assistance which is being disbursed to them and whether the stress tests have been carried out. My fear is that we cannot, under the pretext of COVID-19, lay off workers, workers who have worked for several years, who have binding royalties to the companies and out of the blue an amendment has been brought to the Workers' Rights Act, 72 (a) to do away with their acquired rights.

Mr Speaker, Sir, - I hope - this amendment certainly can be repealed. I see no reason why we cannot reverse a legislation which has been brought under the pretext of COVID-19. And I will refer to what a lady has stated with respect to the relation between trade unions and Government. The trade unions have to be heard; otherwise, as the lady said, there is no balance of power vis-à-vis the employer. And as signatory to the ILO Convention, the Minister of Labour should be fully supportive of the stand taken by the Committee of the Freedom of Association of the ILO. The right to collective bargaining is a legitimate right. There cannot be draconian amendment, and whatever draconian amendment has been brought, as I said, should be repealed. I would like to know what advice has been tendered to the Attorney General's Office by the ILO in relation to the legislation concerning acquired rights of workers. That has never been said in this very House, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said it in Press conference, I have said it in several fora, the concern expressed over Air Mauritius. Air Mauritius is down but should never be out, and our prayer is to see to it that it reaches cruising speed and we hope that our flagship will remain a flagship.

I was a bit concerned earlier in relation to an alleged setting up of a company to serve the region and I have also been told of people who are likely partners in the company. So, I hope that people who have access to privileged information in relation to Air Mauritius don't grasp the opportunity and set up companies to serve their own interest. I hope when those who are conducting enquiries - they have taken an oath of loyalty and that there should be no disclosure of sensitive information. Past experiences tell us that such things have happened, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, I hope those who are looking at facts, figures, or allegedly will do their level best to save Air Mauritius as a flagship, that they will not set a parallel company to be in competition with Air Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to reward. During the contagion, the front line workers have reminded the nation that, in the conveyor belt of progress, all workers irrespective of status are a major force to be reckoned. And I am glad that the plea made by one and all to reward them has been entertained. My appeal is that we should not leave out those who are equally deserving. The risk takers put the lives of their families at risk, from crew members of Air Mauritius to employees of hypermarkets, hospital attendants, garbage collectors, fire-fighters, postmen and many others. I hope they all will be rewarded.

While our front line workers are fighting the contagion, there was another category of persons who were equally at risk, if not more, because they were too poor to have protective wear and they had to move on State lands out of necessity and not choice. Their tin houses were pulled down, much to the dismay of the population during the COVID period. This is inhumane, and I am always in the habit of saying what the point of being human beings if we are not humane. Of course, we should not encourage people to squat on State land, but those who took the action, those who saw to it that draconian measures should be taken, that the houses should be pulled down, that fear should be instilled, without any support to the children who have been traumatised. And I did not hear the hon. Lady responsible for family welfare and the other hon. Minister, former Vice-Prime Minister, as we say, paying a visit to those people. Despite appeal that there should be a child psychologist to support those people, no one has attended to the fear of those people and it has remained unaddressed. And I am not going to highlight the plea, the cry from the heart made by the lady from African town. It is sad. I would have expected our friends who have always stood up and fought for the rights of the deprived, those from the low socio-economic group - I would have expected them to create the enabling environment, to bring these people into the mainstream of society. No society can thrive if people are marginalised. Under the previous Labour Government, we set up a Ministry called the Ministry of Social Integration. We became the regional observatory for poverty alleviation.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No crosstalking!

Dr. Boolell: But I will tell the hon. Minister what we did for the poor. Had it not been for us, people would have never been full-fledged owners of the houses that they are staying in, the CHA houses.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No crosstalking!

Dr. Boolell: My friends, I would advise you to think twice, because I hail from a Party which puts a lot of premium on values and the reason why we need to put people first. Let me remind you. You will never be able to worship the ground that we tread upon. So, don't make uncalled remarks. So, that's why I say, Mr Speaker, Sir, either this Government cares or certainly has become the most uncaring Government. When it comes to housing units for the low-income status group, how many houses have been constructed for the low-income socio-economic groups? How many houses? Where are those houses? Year in, year out in the Budget, under specific items, billions of rupees are earmarked, and you seek those houses, they are neither here nor there. How many houses were promised? Almost 7,000 houses, two years ago. How many have been delivered key in hand? *Niet*, hardly any, Mr Speaker, Sir. And you tell me that this is a caring Government! You tell me that they will blurt out that they have given negative income support. But what is the point of giving negative income support when the rupee has shrunk; when you are going on a spending spree; when today, we know what is happening to our National Pension Scheme, Mr Speaker, Sir? You are turning this country into a country not dissimilar to Zimbabwe, where people will carry money in a wheelbarrow. This is what you are doing to our country, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, live and let live, but live well and be caring, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, people's lives matter, as we say, whether the black, brown, yellow, white, but do not hit hard at those who are at the lower rung of the social ladder. In fact, we need to empower them - there is a call for a *cahier des charges* - and impress upon them that children have to go to school, that they have to take up employment, that they have to raise their profile. There should be a trade-off, I agree with you, but do not treat people with contempt and do not allow people to be marginalised. Be careful! As I say, we don't want this country to sit on a powder keg, because there are people who have matches in their hands. And when I hear so many uncalled remarks from so many different quarters, I fear for my country. That's why I make an appeal to one and all. As responsible people, let us live up to the expectations of these people, but we have to empower them to be responsible. That is the purpose of empowerment, Mr Speaker, Sir, and not like somebody is loaded with money, dish out a few sweeties here and there as if, you know, you are helping people. No, that is far from it. Always bragging that we have given negative income support. What is negative income support if you are not dignified? What is the purpose of life if you have no dignity?

Mr Speaker, Sir, on this score, I would like to congratulate all those sitting on the Opposition bench who went to dispense support to all our friends. I have in mind my good friend, hon. Fabrice David.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am almost coming to the end of my speech. Let me say a few words on *relance*, implementation of capital projects, which are essential for productivity, growth and competitiveness in the long-term, more so in Mauritius which is a small economy and has a vulnerable index. The multiplier effect of additional capital expenditure on growth is weak because most inputs are imported. Despite Metro Express and other projects, growth in 2019 declined to about 3%. There is no clear and immediate impact on short-term growth and employment. Mindless spending on capital projects often result in white elephant - Côte d'Or, Metro Express, I am sorry to say, will not generate positive returns for many years and will be burdened on public finances. The choice and allocation of projects are important and, in Mauritius...

(Interruptions)

You will be stuck in spaghetti junctions, my friend! Hold on, hold on!

In Mauritius, we do not have a proper public investment management process, as underlined by IMF. Under exceptional circumstances, there is a need to freeze non-job-related items such as Rivière des Anguilles Dam or metro from Curepipe to Rose Hill. This would save Rs12.5 billion and resources could be allocated to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, on retail, tourism, textile or food sovereignty and agro- processing. The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises employ 50% of the work force, but compared to the Rs80 billion to be invested in the big companies which have a turnover of Rs100 billion, unfortunately, the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises have been allocated only Rs10 billion of facilities.

Notwithstanding the procedures which are very heavy, find out, Minister as to the number of persons who have been able to take advantage of this loan. But the priorities, not loan, the priorities cash flow, the priorities to keep them surviving, the priority is to enable those people; they are the ones who generate employment, as shapers and movers of their enterprises, they create jobs. And if you want to deliver on 'Made in Mauritius', first and foremost, extend the hand of support to the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises so that at the end of the day they can raise the fist and say: "We believe in a hands-up policy." So that they can say: "We don't need any support from Government, now we can take off." In the

past, there was allocation of resources without any conditionality attached. Yes, some people did take advantage, but the majority of those who were committed, who had a sound business plan, their businesses succeeded and there was a multiplier effect, and they have been successful. We need to revisit the allocation of resources which are being disbursed to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have stated that New Zealand is coming out of the woods and its last patient has been cured. I am sure we are monitoring the situation, we are seeing to it that there is flattening of the curve, and we have to see to it that it is being sustained and that we are relentless in relation to test, tracing, tracking and isolation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I stated earlier that with respect to the amendment to the Pharmacy Act, and when you look at the amendment in relation to Pharmacopoeia - unfortunately, the Minister is not here - I would advise Government to have a fresh look at this. What it means is that we are going to manufacture drugs which are not of quality. You know, each drug has many side effects, and I am sure you have heard of counterfeit drugs. You are opening a door to countries, and I have a lot of respect, of course, for countries which manufacture drugs, and had it not been for countries like India, the price of drug to fight HIV and other viral infections would have been difficult. In respect of HIV, I am talking of palliative drugs which are being used. But we have to be careful in relation to counterfeit drugs and one of the persons, as I have stated, who will go into partnership with people close to our friends on the other side, and I will not ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Now, I will say that you are repeating yourself.

Dr. Boolell: No, I have to repeat it; I have to reinforce it.

Mr Speaker: Go to the debate!

Dr. Boolell: I have to reinforce it because this is very relevant. It is the debate; it has to be reinforced. We have to say it many times over and over. We have to say it here and outside I will say it because they are going to manufacture drugs, allegedly below cost, but of poor quality. And these people are going to have funding from the MIC. So, it is taxpayers' money which is going to finance the setting up of a company which will not live up to the expectation of a nation; a company whose credibility is in doubt, Mr Speaker, Sir. And we are talking of a market of Rs1 billion. So, we have to tread cautiously. People in the medical

field, people in the pharmaceutical industry, people who are pharmacists are worried and their concern is deep-seated, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to the European Community blacklist of third countries. We pray that there will be an outcome. That is our ardent prayer because there are more than 15,000 people working in the global business sector. We pray that we will be able to address fundamental issues in relation to deficiencies to the Financing of Terrorism Act and Combatting Money Laundering. We pray, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in relation to the effectiveness rating, we will address those issues forcefully. To a large extent, the European Union also has not been fair to us, but we have exposed ourselves to unfair criticism and to fair criticism by the European Union. And we are in the list of FATF; I don't see the European Union removing us from the blacklist. I hope that borders will open, but when borders do open, I don't know whether it will happen before October, but I impress upon Government, be it at the highest political level and at ministerial level, that there should be a troika team travelling to different European countries and telling our friends, the European: why is it that you have differential treatment when it comes to Saudi Arabia, which was involved in the sale of arms and which is responsible for the maiming of innocent people in Yemen, when it comes to Saudi Arabia being involved in the murder of a journalist? You have to tell them how is it that Saudi Arabia has been removed from that blacklist, but you have to have the guts. We need to have the guts to tell them that there cannot be differential treatment in respect of countries which have violated human rights. It is not because Saudi Arabia can afford to buy arms from European countries that Saudi Arabia should be exempted. But we need to stand up and say it loud and clear, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is not earned, but at the same time, we have to take corrective measures to address the situation. Otherwise, we are not a responsible Government. We cannot be like lap dogs to those countries, simply for a few dollars more. Either we are dignified or we are not dignified. It is the interest of Mauritius which is at stake. It is the interest of those people who work hard to take the rung of the social and economic ladder, working in a sector where there is brain power and no rent-seeker, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, either we live up to the expectation of those people working in the sector or we remain quiet and prefer to be lap dogs of countries which allegedly have dollars to dispense.

Let me, Mr Speaker, Sir, make an appeal to all of us that, under no circumstances, should we trade, concede or cede any part of our territories for a few dollars more. And I will appeal to Government to read the Sino-British Treaty and tell the UK Government that when

it comes to their interest in Hong Kong, then they stood up and said that this Sino-British Treaty was approved by UN Security Council and the UN Assembly. The Government has to stand up and say what is good for Hong Kong is equally good for us when it comes to our territorial integrity, Mr Speaker, Sir. The time has come to stand up, but fight on issues which are relevant and not antagonise countries which are likely to be our friends.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to stand up and at the same time reach also self-sufficiency or what I call food sovereignty, produce what we eat and eat what we produce. This matter has been debated in this very House when Bills on non-sugar sector were introduced, on good agricultural practices. But what we need to have is to set up a land bank, but that land bank cannot be entrusted to Landscape Mauritius. Of all institutions, how can you entrust a land bank to Landscape Mauritius? This is the wrong scope, because we don't know their scale and debts of what they can do to the land, Mr Speaker, Sir. Institutions have to serve the interests of deserving cases. Institutions have to serve the interests of people who have gone through hardship, and there are many young people who are willing to move into the agricultural sector.

Today, we talk of polytonal agriculture; we talk of agriculture with the support of Internet of Things. Today, we talk of Market Intelligence. This is the kind of agriculture we want. But, for God's sake, let us know where the land is. Let us come with accompanying measures, dispense training, disburse the appropriate financial resources, but let us cluster our strength, come up with a coherent plan, identify where the land is, knowing perfectly what can grow in this particular area and what can be grown elsewhere.

I would appeal to our friends, when people sow seeds in the land, when people prepare the land through sweat and tears, whether they are occupying State land or not, and if they are not, under any circumstances, disturbing the life of others, let them grow. Growing is livelihood; growing is life. It is the seed of life that has gone into that land, Mr Speaker, Sir. You do not treat them with contempt, you do not harass people, you do not use coercive measures, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this country belongs to all of us and all of us have a legitimate right in this great little country of ours. As I stated earlier, the Government has to revisit its policies. The Minister's sneeze he has to make a huge U-turn, but be responsive to the needs of our country. The country does not belong to any particular family, any particular Party; it is the country of one and all.

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you need some rest. I am suspending the sitting for one hour.

At 1.22 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.32 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Bholah!

The Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives (Mr S. Bholah): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Allow me, at the start of my intervention, to commend and congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for his maiden Budget Speech, and I am sure that in the coming years there would be more to come.

In fact, there is a common thread underlying all the budgets presented in this House where hon. Pravind Jugnauth has been on the Government side.

Special attention has always been provided to those at the lower rung of the ladder, to our senior citizens, to the needy. All the while, in a spirit of inclusiveness, laying sound bases for a sustained economic development of the country. There are so many such measures in this budget.

I have listened to the intervention of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. In his intervention, he spoke about the management of COVID-19 or mismanagement of COVID-19, intervention of the Bank of Mauritius, management of the economy, taxation, gas price, Air Mauritius, pension reform, and it goes on. Regarding the Bank of Mauritius, the amount received from the Bank of Mauritius, as it is the case today, all the central banks around the world are coming to help their respective economies. And what the hon. Leader of the Opposition said that in back 2009, during the financial crisis, the then Minister of Finance had no recourse to the central bank. But let me remind him, what measures he took when there was the financial crisis: abolition of SC/HSC fees, introduced tax on interests, abolished duty free on planters' vehicles *tout-terrain*, introduction of NRPT, refusal to consider rate of inflation to calculate salary compensation, *et cerise sur le gâteau*, snatching bread from the hands of schoolchildren. It is Pravind Jugnauth who after 2010, restored all the above.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the Budget, I have not heard anything positive coming from the hon. Leader of the Opposition and there is a saying that goes like this: those with dirty eyes see everything dirty.

What are the actions that we have taken during COVID-19? We have delivered old-age pension at doorsteps. We have distributed food packets to those registered on the SRM Register. There have been door-to-door vaccines to our senior citizens. There has been timely ordering of PPEs, medical supplies. We have set up promptly quarantine facilities. Daily meetings have been held under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. We have reengineered the retail activities so that people can procure basic necessities. Cabinet met over and above the frequent Friday meetings, even on a Saturday and on a Sunday, and yet, the hon. Leader of the Opposition follows his leader, the Labour Party leader to say that there has been gross mismanagement. Many people have shown appreciation towards the good action taken by this Government during that period. The international Press has acclaimed Mauritius about the management of COVID-19. Oxford University came with a study and praised Mauritius and the Government of Mauritius for all the actions taken. The World Health Organisation also has praised Mauritius for the management of COVID-19.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all these actions, they are here, they are evident, they are visible. True it is that we have asked people to wear masks to cover their mouth and their nose, but it seems that some people have covered their eyes and their ears as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I won't take all the points raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, but let me come to the management of land which is a measure by Landscape Mauritius, and he talks about a possibility of nepotism. Who has forgotten about the *Festival des terres* under the Labour Government, *les agents, les activistes du Parti travailliste, les terres qui ont été distribuées à, précisément Palmar, Balaclava, Trou aux Biches, Mont Choisy. Il faut vérifier les listes de ces bénéficiaires*, and you will be surprised to see who are *ces ti copains, ti copines*. Even cooperative societies, which fall under my authority, has not been spared.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is an interesting case about a cooperative society. It was formed between 2005 and 2010 with only 11 members; 11 only. The minimum required is five and there is no limit to the maximum. With 11 members only in the region of Piton du Milieu, what the Labour Government gave as State land, *75 arpents sous contrat et 200 arpents* under letter of intent. *275 arpents* to cooperative society where the members were *des*

ti copains, ti copines, and this cooperative society is presently my target because we have discovered that there is a lot of *maldonne* and malpractices.

Mr Speaker Sir, the COVID-19 pandemic has left everybody worried. Worried for their health, their families, their jobs, their income, their businesses and their financial security, amongst others.

Waking up every day to news on markets collapsing or recessions looming ahead, made things sound even more gruesome.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is an issue above party politics.

As a Government, our main concern was to do everything to protect our country, keep our people healthy and financially secure.

In the face of great uncertainty, real danger, and collective apprehension, it was imperative for Government to set out its economic response so as to bring stability, security and to ensure social cohesion.

The Budget 2020-2021 incorporates the right mix of policy responses and measures for economic stabilisation, the safeguard of employment and most importantly, the wellbeing of our citizens.

Economic recovery will reside, not in the post-COVID-19 growth pace, but in the acceptance that economic paradigms have shifted.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has already predicted that owing to the Great Lockdown, the world economy is heading towards a recession, a recession, Mr Speaker, Sir, which will be even worse than the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Financial Crisis of 2009.

Around 150 countries, irrespective of their level of development, will find themselves in a tailspin situation.

As far as world GDP is concerned, a major contraction of 3% is being forecasted for 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius, as an open and globally interdependent economy, will, undoubtedly, face the brunt of this health crisis. Our economic growth is linked with the performance of our trading partners.

Our major trading partners are already in a slump. For 2020, UK, France, Italy and the USA are projected to post unprecedented negative growth rates.

Closer to us, South Africa will experience a contraction of 5.8% in its output according to the IMF World Economic Outlook of April this year.

Latest indicators reveal that Mauritius will experience a GDP contraction of up to 11% for this year.

An optimistic return to normalcy is not expected before 2022.

Allow me to provide an overview of the manufacturing sector, which is one of the direct victims of COVID-19, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The manufacturing sector accounts for 12.6% of Gross Value Added, 17% of employment and 87 % of domestic exports.

This sector has registered an average growth rate of about 1% over the past five years. Manufacturing output increased from Rs127.2 billion in 2015 to reach an estimated Rs131.4 billion in 2019.

Domestic exports which stood at Rs51.3 billion in 2015 decreased to Rs45.4 billion in 2019.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the effects of COVID-19 unfold, the manufacturing sector continues to flounder, such as loss of orders, cash flow problems and supply chain disruptions.

According to a preliminary analysis undertaken by my Ministry, it is estimated that the manufacturing sector may experience a contraction of up to 30% this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that during the difficult times of lockdown, my Ministry has maintained a constant dialogue with our main stakeholders to take stock of the situation.

I have personally been chairing meetings with MEXA, the MCCI, The Association of Mauritian Manufacturers and the Economic Development Board.

At a time, when we were in dire need to protect our citizens, I note with satisfaction that the private sector has been ever present.

Some of our *avant-gardiste* economic operators have shown their sense of patriotism and *débrouillardise* by stepping up efforts to support our front liners by producing facemasks,

personal protective equipment, sanitizers and face shields. Some 2.1 million units of masks have been produced for the population and some have been given free of charge to our front liners.

I seize this opportunity to salute these operators for their proactiveness and technical expertise in supporting authorities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today the main concern of our manufacturing sector is on how to rebound and increase its resilience.

The textile and clothing sector may be witnessing a decrease in orders particularly due to recession in our main export markets. But we can still rely on the agility and versatility of our operators to convert challenges into opportunities.

For example, one of our leading textile and clothing companies is in the process of developing “anti-bacterial” shirts mainly for exports.

Others are fully leveraging on technology to sustain orders through the holding of digital fashion shows to showcase new collections.

Sub-sectors such as fish and fish preparations and medical devices are posting a more optimistic outlook as they do not foresee major disruption in terms of demand.

M. le président, la situation engendrée par la COVID-19 nous a démontré l’importance d’avoir une base manufacturière solide pour soutenir la demande locale des produits essentiels et pour assurer la sécurité alimentaire.

Le moment est opportun pour stimuler la production locale.

M. le président, j’ai eu l’occasion de suivre la déclaration du Leader du MMM, l’honorable Paul Bérenger le 25 mai dernier sur Facebook, qui a fait un plaidoyer pour augmenter la production locale ainsi que consolider la sécurité alimentaire. Il a parfaitement raison.

Mais je peux lui dire que mon ministère lui a précédé dans cette voie. On s’est déjà embarqué sur une campagne nationale, intitulée “*Nou Res Loyal, Nou Konsom Lokal*”.

M. le président, il est temps d’éveiller ce sens du patriotisme économique. L’industrie locale est notre richesse et notre identité.

J’applaudis ainsi toutes les mesures annoncées par le ministre des Finances pour faire rayonner notre industrie locale. Notamment –

- des lois appropriées pour l'imposition des quotas pour promouvoir le label '*Made in Mauritius*' ;
- l'accès aux marchés élargi pour les produits locaux qui devront occuper au moins 10% d'espace sur les étagères des supermarchés ;
- l'obligation de 30% de produits locaux dans les approvisionnements faits par les ministères et entités publiques ;
- une marge préférentielle de 20 à 30% sur les achats publics pour toutes les entreprises manufacturières locales, y compris les PME ;
- l'augmentation de la dotation de R 50,000 au lieu de R 5,000 aux PME désirant la certification '*Made in Moris*' va aussi dans cette même direction, et
- tout comme l'augmentation de la marge de préférence de 30 à 40%.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government came up with a timely host of support measures for our economic operators, in the wake of COVID-19, under the '*Plan de Soutien aux Entreprises*'. To name a few, a Special Relief Fund of Rs5 billion as well as a Revolving Fund were set up to mitigate any liquidity crunch that could affect our enterprises.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Budget lays the basis for a solid foundation to increase the resilience of our economic operators in a post-COVID-19 phase. This will be done through modernisation, broadening of the manufacturing base, moving up into high-value added activities, market diversification and quality enhancement.

The investment tax credit, the Export Credit Insurance Scheme bear testimony to this fact.

The support of Government for the first two years of operation of a '*Made in Mauritius*' warehouse in Tanzania and Mozambique is highly commendable. It is a major stepping stone for stimulating exports to the region. There have been a lot of talks about the African market, but no one has dared to come forward with any measure. Now is the time because there lies a big market, the African market. We need to walk the talk, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Upgrading of the quality infrastructure is a *sine qua non* condition to increase confidence in our locally manufactured goods. This Budget goes a long way in this direction through the provision of various measures, particularly, double deduction on the cost incurred

to comply with international quality standards and norms and a 50% refund on the costs of certification, testing and accreditation of local laboratories.

A landmark measure has been provided for the medical devices sector which shows great growth potential. Our national certification and accreditation bodies will henceforth provide international recognition for the manufacture of medical devices in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I can assure Members of the House that at the level of my Ministry, all efforts are geared towards supporting enterprises navigate this difficult phase.

We are having regular consultation with the private sector associations and I am personally chairing a Standing Committee which has the mandate to identify concrete policy actions for the resumption of a full-fledged industrial activities post Covid-19 confinement.

My Ministry is also in the process of elaborating a new Industrial Policy and Strategic Plan 2020-2025 with the assistance of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). This roadmap will chart out the future contours of industrial development for the next 5 years. The report comes at an opportune time as it will specifically address the new permutations which have arisen with the Covid-19 health crisis.

Sustainable production is at the centrepiece of our new industrial development paradigm. My Ministry has recently embarked on a UNIDO funded project for the greening of our industries. The project aims to investigate the cost burden of solid waste management in manufacturing enterprises to improve their competitiveness.

On the export and investment fronts, we are engaging along with the EDB in a revamped export promotion strategy that will target niche client bases in the Middle-East, neighbouring African countries and other emerging markets such as Australia, Japan, Canada and Russia.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to comment on the key role of the support institutions falling under the aegis of my Ministry such as the MSB (The Mauritius Standards Bureau) and MAURITAS.

During the lockdown period, the Mauritius Standards Bureau played a catalytical role by providing free access to international standards to enterprises wishing to embark on the production of face masks. I am informed that the organisation is contemplating to enhance its testing facility to support local manufactures in the production of medical face masks and personal protective equipment in the future.

A new project for the certification of Good Hygiene Practices is also in the pipeline to certify that organisations are implementing sound sanitary practices to ensure that there is no risk to employees and clients in the wake of Covid-19.

The MAURITAS, our national accreditation body, has maintained the international recognition of 31 conformity assessment bodies and will ensure that the development of an accreditation programme initiated over the next financial year for assisting the medical devices sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the need of the hour is more than ever propitious to adopt technologies associated with industry 4.0 and embed automation in production processes to increase agility and flexibility. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Augmented Virtual Reality and Cloud Computing have the potential to increase our preparedness when coping with any unprecedented crisis.

The new Data Technology Park at Côte d'Or epitomises Government's commitment to accompany enterprises in their digital transformation drive through the provision of an adequate ecosystem for the adoption of industry 4.0 technologies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to the well-documented measures targeting SMEs under the *Plan de Soutien*, the current Budget has earmarked Rs10 billion to support SMEs.

Loans up to Rs10 million at a concessionary and historically-low rate of 0.5% per annum will be provided by DBM.

In order to further facilitate and accelerate funding under Government sponsor schemes and guarantees, the Budget has made provision for a new Credit Check system to be introduced by ISP Ltd to assess the creditworthiness of SMEs and MMEs. The latter will also obtain a grant from ISP Ltd for the Credit Check report.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has continued to work in the strategic direction chartered out in the 10-year Master Plan for SMEs.

Five new schemes for our SMEs have been developed, namely –

- (i) the Internal Capability Development Scheme;
- (ii) the Technology And Innovation Scheme;
- (iii) the SME Marketing Support Scheme;
- (iv) the Inclusiveness and Integration Scheme, and

(v) the SME Utility Connection Assistance Scheme.

Some 300 SMEs have already applied for these schemes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, under the existing SME Development Scheme Certificate, some 441 Letters of Intent have been issued for a total project value of Rs1.6 billion, with an expected employment creation of 2,900.

To this effect, loans to the tune of Rs454 m. from MauBank have been approved for some 200 SMEs.

To further foster entrepreneurship and ideas, the Technology and Innovation Fund announced in the current Budget will certainly help SMEs with equity up to Rs2 m. in their projects.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since its creation in January 2018, the SME registration Unit has issued 5,127 certificates of registration to SMEs, including 128 for Rodrigues. Business counselling was individually delivered to some 11,500 persons.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to further bringing together diverse, SME-related stakeholders, existing potential entrepreneurs, support institutions, buyers, sellers and training cell, SME Mauritius came up with a full-fledged SME Portal since last financial year.

The SME Portal has since been enhanced with features including live chat module, fora for mentoring and coaching and catalogue for SME products, among others. On a weekly basis, some 200 users are interacting through the Portal.

SME Mauritius is also looking into the possibility to link the SME Portal with renowned peer institutions such as the Virtual Technology Exchange Centre (VTEC) of the National Small Industries Corporation of India. This linkage will assist the local and Indian SMEs to further develop their businesses through networking and exchange of crucial information.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Covid-19 pandemic has urged the necessity for Mauritius to become self-sufficient mainly in the agricultural sector, with a special focus on the production of vegetables and fruits.

Trade figures from Statistics Mauritius revealed that importation of vegetables and fruits has increased by 12% over the last 5 years. This represents a huge amount of Rs397 m. on our import bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry had already solicited the expertise of an Indian Consultant through the African Asian Rural Development Organisation (AARDO) to conduct a study on the setting up of Mini Fruit Processing Plant in Mauritius. The exercise was conducted in November last year, spanning over a period of 3 weeks.

The Consultant recently submitted a Comprehensive Report. It depicts how Mauritius being a country with an abundance of tropical and seasonal fruits, can encourage its entrepreneurs to tap in the various opportunities.

This will enable our entrepreneurs to play an integral part in the transformation of raw fruits into new innovative value-added agricultural products. In the longer run, such a step will increase the share of SMEs contribution to the economy.

To that effect, my Ministry will set up a High-level Steering Committee, comprising important stakeholders such as SME Mauritius, Cooperatives and Industry Division of my Ministry, Ministry of Agro and Food Security, FAREI and the Mauritius Standards Bureau to look into the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the Report.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with the Import Substitution Strategy for Mauritius, the leather sector can be considered as a potential sub sector for our SMEs.

As part of the capacity building strategy for operators in that sector, training programs on wood, leather craft products and tapestry for some 30 SMEs have been conducted in August and October last year.

SME Mauritius has further started the profiling of some 100 SMEs in leather and leather related products since February 2020 regarding their manufacture, internal structure, export capabilities and environmental issues, amongst others. Findings will inform further policies and actions.

In order to further improve and encourage the creative and innovative capabilities of SMEs, a common shared facility Centre will be established at Coromandel. To that effect, an amount of Rs9.5 m. has been earmarked as capital expenditure in this Budget, the Budget 2020-2021.

The latter will host working spaces where entrepreneurs will be able to innovate, invent, and co-create while using state-of-the-art technology put at their disposal.

The Centre will also host Jewellery and other innovation studios, providing necessary tools to tailor and customise products with digital fabrication of prototypes and printing.

The Centre, thus, will play a crucial role in the transformation of the SME sector by significantly reducing the entry and prototyping costs and catalysing technology led innovation for entrepreneurs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, presently some 100 SMEs are operating in different SME Parks around the island with associated facilities. For the next financial year, DBM will construct two new SME Parks at Plaine Magnien and Vuillemin.

I am informed that necessary bidding documents have been prepared and shortly same would be launched. Existing industrial buildings will also be acquired and converted into SME Parks at Coromandel, Terre Rouge, Vallée des Prêtres, to further enable the establishment of dynamic SME communities.

In order to further strengthen the protection of our local handicraft sector, my Ministry in collaboration with SME Mauritius launched a distinctive hologram, acting as an identifier with an already registered logo containing high security features.

As at June 2020, some 71 SMEs have already benefited from the hologram and some 410 products have been referenced by same.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a SME Observatory Cell has been set up at SME Mauritius. Its primary objective is to collect information and data on new technology development, market trends, investment flows, economic trends of competitors, trade agreements, amongst others.

As at now, the SME Observatory cell has embarked on five informative surveys namely – Effectiveness of schemes at SME Mauritius;

Mr Speaker: No conversation in Parliament!

Mr Bholah: National Minimum Wage; Needs of SMEs involved in Primary Agricultural Production for Further Value Addition in Mauritius; National Leather Value Chain, and Focus group to understand the need and expectation of the potential entrepreneurs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with Government's philosophy to promote Human Capital Development, my Ministry has and will continue to provide training facilities to current and potential entrepreneurs.

For the period June 2019-July 2020, some 1,500 entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs will have been trained in crafts and Management skills.

For calendar year 2020, a range of 15 innovative skill courses has been launched by SME Mauritius and made available at the regional centres of Rose-Belle, Bel Air, Goodlands and Coromandel. The courses available cover fields such as Aquaponics, both backyard and commercial, Expressive Arts, Grooming and Beauty Care amongst others.

Furthermore, to improve innovation of products offered by local entrepreneurs and artisans, advanced training in the field of painting, fibre extraction and leather craft have been conducted by foreign experts.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to further emphasise Government's stated objective of inclusive development and opportunities for all, regional offices of SME Mauritius are being readied to offer high tech-based co-working facilities free to potential and existing entrepreneurs who will also benefit from backup services and training facilities.

We want to be closer to SME community around the island to provide them with a broad spectrum of services both technological and technical while improving their capacity and resilience.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to the Cooperatives Sector, which has its fair share of the measures announced in the Budget 2020-2021.

The absence of cooperative stores in the lockdown period has been strongly felt. The number of contraventions issued by Inspectors of the Ministry of Commerce betray the greed for unreasonable profit margins over basic food items by some unscrupulous retailers.

Cooperative federations are seriously contemplating to bring back cooperative stores in the retail network.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Covid-19 has taught us that we should not only think locally, but act locally in paving our way to self-sufficiency.

It is worth reminding that most of our meat consumption, with the exception of chicken, is imported from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Mr Speaker, Sir, can't we reverse this trend? Our friends from Rodrigues and their Cooperative Societies can assist us in the production of livestock and we could provide them with a reliable market and obviously some price guarantee. Rodrigues is already blessed with the appropriate climatic environment for this to happen.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Officers of my Ministry, in association with the Ministry of Agro Industry and Food Security are currently performing an audit of all unused/abandoned lands

allocated to cooperative societies. Same shall be reallocated to people who have a willingness to invest in food security, but also have the necessary entrepreneurial thrive.

Mr Speaker, Sir, 62 cooperative societies were registered during period 01 July 2019 to 02 June 2020.

During that same period, 37 Cooperative Market Fairs, Women Cooperative Market Fairs, Regional and National Cooperative Market Fairs were organised to provide free marketing outlets to co-operators for the sale of their produce.

Additionally, statutory audits of the Financial Statements of 525 cooperative societies were carried out. 57 sensitisation programmes were held on Cooperatives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, land to an extent of 60 perches was provided to the Mauritius Cooperative Agricultural Federation Ltd in April 2019 for the setting up of a Seedling Production Unit at Henrietta.

The Seedling Production Unit was set up by Mauritius Cooperative Agricultural Federation Ltd and was launched in February 2020 in the presence of hon. Prime Minister who, I must say, has always been very considerate towards the cooperative movement.

We are currently in the process of providing nine Cooperative Societies with equipment and fishes to start ornamental fish farming as a business activity.

With the world turning towards bio-organic product, a Training Course on Bio Organic Farming is presently held by the National Cooperative College and the Falcon Bio Organic Cooperative Society Ltd in collaboration with my Ministry. The course started on 05 of February this year and is being attended by 46 participants. The course comprises both theoretical and practical aspects.

The Ministry in collaboration with CEB (Green Energy) Company Ltd worked out a project on production of green energy by cooperatives using photovoltaic panels. The CEB (Green Energy) Company Ltd is installing roof-mounted grid tie PV kits of 2 kilowatt peak (kWp) capacity for some 20 cooperatives. The cooperatives would not incur any investment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, special support is provided to women cooperatives in terms of financial and technical assistance, training, access to markets and development projects.

To assist our co-operators in the Tourism Sector, financial assistance is provided to the Mauritius Women Entrepreneurs Co-operative Federation Ltd to operate a Cooperative

Shop - the Elle Co-op Shop and a tailor shop at Port Louis and a shop in the Craft Market at Flacq to provide a permanent place for women co-operators to sell their products.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to capacity building, I am happy to announce that the National Cooperative College (NCC) has conducted 31 non-award training programmes which were attended by some 2,900 participants. The National Cooperative College has already started running Diploma award courses in Cooperative Business Management (Online Course). 40 participants have already been enrolled.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am very delighted to note that along with SMEs, cooperatives will also be able to avail of the Rs10 billion envelope through the DBM. The grant of Rs50,000 to cooperative societies for the purchase of livestock and acquisition of equipment for production of food items is the only way to achieve this. To help cooperative societies to enter the food processing sector, waiving of the fees for Building and Land Use Permit will further encourage new cooperative entities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it goes without saying that the centralised digital Land Bank will encourage co-operators to go into the Agricultural Sector, as they would be able to avail themselves of unused land, which currently stands at 20,000 acres. It really saddens me to note that acres of fertile land in the East Coast, around Belle Mare, which have been our major source of onions, are nearly abandoned. This is not because of the land issue, but more to do with the unavailability of good quality seeds. To this end, the fivefold increase in subsidy will motivate our co-operators to plant potatoes and onions in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a few of our co-operators have tried to go into the production of fruits, but due to the problem of bats, they are unable to reap economies of scale. I am happy to know that under the Fruit Protection Scheme, 60% of permanent netting will be provided to cultivators. This should decrease our dependency on imported fruits.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Cooperative Movement has many more glorious years ahead. With this Budget, the cooperative sector has been further empowered to be a major partner in achieving socioeconomic growth.

M. le président, le budget de ce gouvernement, présenté dans un contexte inédit, marqué par une crise sanitaire globale, est tout de même ambitieux. Ce budget, c'est celui de la confiance en l'avenir. Nous croyons en une île Maurice plus créative, offrant des produits et services de qualité. Nous croyons en une île Maurice prête à se relever et à affronter toutes les adversités. Nous avons tous des atouts pour construire une économie durable, une société

prospère et juste, avec un Etat répondant aux besoins de ses citoyens. C'est tout le sens de ce budget.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as pointed out by the IMF, and I quote –

“We are living in a moment that tests our humanity and it must be met with solidarity.”

I would like to end by citing a few words from the UN Secretary-General, Mr Antonio Guterres, and I quote –

“What the world needs now is solidarity. With solidarity we can defeat the virus and build a better world.”

Thank you for your attention.

(3.13 p.m.)

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): R 158 milliards! C'est le montant du butin que ce gouvernement a puisé des caisses de la Banque Centrale depuis les dernières élections. R 158 milliards ! D'abord, il y a eu les R 18 milliards des *Special Reserve Funds* qui auraient dû servir à rembourser notre dette publique et c'était avant COVID-19. Et puis, il y a eu le *grant* de R 60 milliards, un *grant* au gouvernement non-remboursable. Et finalement, 2 milliards de dollars, soit 80 milliards transférés au *Mauritius Investment Corporation, MIC*, pour ne pas dire comique.

R 158 milliards, c'est beaucoup d'argent, M. le président. A titre d'exemple, le montant global des revenus de l'Etat. Je parle ici des taxes, des *grants*, des autres revenus de l'Etat s'élevaient à R 108 milliards l'année dernière et à R 101 milliards pour cette année. Donc, R 158 milliards, c'est plus que notre budget national. On a beaucoup parlé de *helicopter money*, la manne qui tombait du ciel. Mais avec R 158 milliards, ce n'est pas un hélicoptère, c'est carrément des jets privés. Jamais dans toute l'histoire de l'île Maurice, un gouvernement, un ministre des Finances n'a eu autant d'argent à sa disposition. Oui, je suis d'accord qu'avec le COVID-19 on fait face à une crise économique, mais ce n'est certainement pas la première fois qu'on fait face à une crise économique. On a certes perdu l'habitude, mais l'île Maurice, dans le passé, a eu à faire face à plusieurs crises économiques. Certaines toutes aussi sérieuses que COVID-19. Les plus anciens d'entre nous, M. le président, se souviendront des conditions économiques pénibles qu'ont dû faire face les mauriciens dans les années 70 et dans les débuts des années 80. Et les gouvernants d'alors

avaient dû prendre des décisions difficiles, des décisions impopulaires. Certains gouvernements et ministres des Finances ont dû dévaluer la roupie, ont dû introduire la *sales tax*, ont dû introduire la TVA, augmenter les imports et autres taxes, mais ils ont assumé leur responsabilité et ils ont même eu à payer le prix fort au moment des élections. Je ne suis certainement pas contre le fait que la Banque Centrale vienne en aide au gouvernement, au contraire il est du devoir de la Banque Centrale de nous aider à sortir de cette crise économique, mais R 158 milliards, c'est beaucoup d'argent ; et d'un seul coup. La banque aurait pu échelonner le décaissement sur une période de deux, voire trois ans, mais non, le ministre des Finances a voulu tout rafler tout de suite. On aura à payer le prix de ce transfert car un repas gratuit cela n'existe pas. Et le cout de transférer autant d'argent d'un seul coup, c'est la dépréciation de la roupie.

En décembre 2014, lorsque le gouvernement remporte les élections, le dollar s'échangeait à moins de R 32. Aujourd'hui, le dollar se vend à plus de R 40.50, soit une dépréciation d'environ 27%, je dis bien 27%. A titre de comparaison, en octobre 1979, lorsque le gouvernement travailliste dévalue la roupie pour la première fois, c'était de 22.9 %, alors qu'en septembre 1981, la dévaluation de la roupie était de l'ordre de 16.7 % ; donc, 22.9 et 16.7%, mais jamais 27%. Et l'histoire retiendra que c'est ce gouvernement qui a battu tous les records en termes de dépréciation de la roupie.

M. le président, le problème avec la dépréciation de la roupie c'est que nos importations couteront forcément plus chères. Nos médicaments couteront plus chers. Notre nourriture coutera plus chère. Les études de nos enfants à l'étranger couteront plus chères. Nos couts de production couteront plus chers. Et je dois dire que je suis extrêmement sceptique quand je note que le taux d'inflation est prévu à seulement 4% dans les *Estimates*. Je fais moi-même mes courses et je peux vous dire que la corbeille ménagère a augmenté de bien plus de 4%, M. le président. Mais malheureusement la situation risque de s'empirer davantage. La roupie risque de se déprécier davantage car il y aura forcément moins de devise sur le marché. Nos usines n'ayant pas travaillé durant le confinement, il y aura moins de recette en devises. Avec les vols annulés d'*Air Mauritius*, avec moins de touristes, la situation s'aggravera davantage ; et si nos sociétés offshore, nos sociétés globales se délocalisent ou retirent leurs dépôts des banques mauriciens, là, la situation sera carrément catastrophique.

M. le président, si aujourd'hui on se retrouve dans une telle situation, on ne peut pas tout mettre sur le compte de COVID-19. Les indicateurs économiques étaient déjà au rouge

avant COVID-19. Notre dette publique en mars de cette année, avant COVID-19, était déjà à 65.3% du produit intérieur brut. Tous nos secteurs économiques traditionnels étaient déjà en difficulté. Nos exportations étaient en baisse. Il n'y avait pas suffisamment d'investissement privés et étrangers et nos taux de croissance avaient été révisés à la baisse à seulement 3.3% du PIB. Le gouvernement est en grande partie responsable de cette situation avec sa politique d'emprunter et de dépenser impunément au lieu de travailler et de créer la richesse. Et là, ça me fait penser à l'une des fables les plus connues de Jean de la Fontaine, La Cigale et La Fourmi. D'ailleurs, l'honorable ministre des Finances a aussi fait référence à cette fable. D'ailleurs, l'honorable ministre des Finances a aussi fait référence à cette fable en répondant à une *PNQ* le mois dernier.

Depuis décembre 2014, ce gouvernement s'est comporté comme la cigale, chantant au lieu de travailler, dilapidant les biens publics au lieu d'économiser, vivant au-dessus de ses moyens, endettant le pays jusqu'au cou et quand Covid-19 fut venu, il alla crier famine chez notre fourmi nationale, la Banque de Maurice. Mais au lieu de tirer des leçons de la fable de la Fontaine, au lieu de semer pour récolter, il fut quoi ? Certes, il ne dansa point, mais il dévalisa la fourmilière ; il dépouilla nos réserves. Pauvre fourmi ! Déjà notre banque avait fort à faire comme institution régulatrice, surtout avec les mauvaises pratiques bancaires de certaines banques, notamment la *Mauritius Commercial Bank* qui a été condamnée par la Cour Intermédiaire pour délit de blanchiment d'argent, la *State Bank* avec ses dettes douteuses de plusieurs milliards de roupies et plus récemment le *Banyan Bank Tree* avec la nomination d'un conservateur.

Maintenant, elle aura aussi à gérer R 80 milliards de la *Mauritius Investment Corporation*. Non, mais franchement, est-ce le rôle d'une banque centrale de faire de l'*Investment Banking* ? A-t-elle les compétences nécessaires ? A-t-elle le personnel nécessaire ? Au début, selon – en tout cas le gouverneur de la Banque Centrale, la Banque Centrale aurait à louer ces R 80 milliards seulement à des grosses entreprises du secteur touristique et manufacturier ayant un chiffre d'affaire de plus de R 100 millions. Mais dans le budget, le ministre des Finances en a décidé autrement. Ce qu'il dit non sur l'indépendance de la Banque Centrale est la mainmise de ce gouvernement sur elle. Il n'y a plus aucune restriction dans quoi NIT peut investir. Elle devra même aller investir en Afrique. Mais le problème c'est que le *Mauritius Investment Corporation* est une compagnie privée qui n'est responsable qu'envers son seuil d'administration et pas au parlement. Est-ce que le décaissement du *MIC* se fera dans la transparence ? Est-ce que les noms des bénéficiaires, le

montant investi, les conditions d'investissement seront rendus publics ? J'espère que les parlementaires nous-aussi nous pourrions poser des questions, des *PQs* sur *Mauritius Investment Corporation* et j'espère que le ministre ne refusera pas de les répondre. Déjà on nous empêche de questionner la Banque Centrale sur les scandales qui secouent la *State Bank*. En tout cas, nous exigeons que ce gouvernement prenne un engagement formel en ce sens car on parle de fonds publics et nous ne voulons certainement pas que ces fonds publics finissent dans des entreprises proches du pouvoir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with so much money at his disposal, the hon. Minister of Finance had all the necessary leeway, *marge de manoeuvre*, to stimulate the economy and save jobs, but, unfortunately, this Budget has not lived up to the expectations. Let's take the tourism sector which is probably the sector which will be worse hit by Covid-19. What is the rescue plan for this sector? What is being done to prevent hotels from sacking employees? The Governor of the Bank of Mauritius announced that MIC will be investing in hotels having a turnover of above Rs100 m. Under what condition will this investment be made? Why doesn't the hon. Minister of Finance reassure hotels' employees that hotels will only be eligible to receive funding if they maintain the jobs of all employees like he has done with the Wage Assistance Scheme? And what about smaller hotels and bungalows that are let out to tourists, will they now also get funding under MIC? What about those who do not work in hotels but whose livelihood depends on the tourism sector? I am thinking about travel agencies, tour operators, taxi drivers, beach hawkers, souvenir shops, restaurants, fishermen and other food suppliers. We don't know when the air flight will resume, we don't know when tourists will come back, what will happen to these people in the meantime, what will happen to those enterprises in the meantime? Will they have to close down? Will people have to be sacked? Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is nothing in this Budget answering legitimate questions which people in the tourism sector ask themselves today.

The cane industry, of course, we welcome the decision of the Government to ensure that small planters get Rs25,000 per ton of sugar as well as the suspension of cess payment and the waiving of insurance premium, but these are very short term one-off measures. What about the long-term? What is the long-term plan of the Government for the cane industry? Does the Government have any strategy at all for the cane industry? Apparently not!

Manufacturing, there is nothing to boost the manufacturing sector and export sector save for short-term measures like reducing Port dues, terminal charges and freight rebate scheme, the benefits of which in any event will largely be negated by the depreciation of the

rupee. Is that what you call a paradigm shift? Just reducing a few charges here and there! And then to add insult to injury, at paragraph 82 of the Budget, this is what the hon. Minister of Finance stated, and I quote –

“To foster the transformation of the textile industry, a reputable international firm will conduct a comprehensive review of our export model.”

You have been in power for five and a half years and it is now that you will retain the services of an expert to review our export model! Is this how a country is governed? Hopeless! What about the non-textile manufacturing sector? What has this Budget in store for them? Anything new? There is no mention of the oil refinery, storage facilities, bunkering facilities that we have been hearing for years. Nothing also, Government seems to have given up on the idea of producing bicycles and motorcycles. Nothing about the Gold City but the Pharmaceutical Village announced in the 2016 Budget and repeated in every budget is back on the agenda, but this time MIC will be providing the financial support. The big question remains: who will be the lucky beneficiary? And there is also the High Tech Park at Côte d’Or announced in last year’s Budget back on track but this time rebranded as Côte d’Or Data Technology Park. Let’s hope that this appellation will not suffer the same fate as its other various technopoles announced time and time again but never implemented. *Du déjà vu, du réchauffé!* And yet, at paragraph 35, the hon. Minister announces, and I quote –

“There are currently some 34 projects in the pipeline in the EDB worth some sixty-two billion rupees. A High-Level Committee chaired by the Prime Minister will be set up to expedite processing and approval of these projects.”

Seriously, I wonder if the Advisors who helped the hon. Minister prepare his Budget Speech were the very same advisors who prepared the speech which Sir Anerood Jugnauth delivered on 22 August 2015, five years ago, his famous vision 2030, his roadmap to achieving the second economic miracle, Hon. Members will recall that he stated, and I quote -

“There are right now some 40 private investment projects to the tune of Rs183 billion. They have the potential of creating 100,000 new direct and indirect jobs within the coming five years. We shall unlock issues that stand as stumbling blocks for investment. Unjustified delays will not be tolerated and sanction will be taken. This is the reason behind my decision to set up a High-Powered Committee under my chairmanship to closely monitor project facilitation and implementation.

Before concluding, if we need to burn the midnight oil to attain our objective, we are prepared to go that far.”

Five years later, the oil has dried, the light is off, and we are still waiting for the investors to come and create hundred thousand jobs *avec la bougie rouge*.

The SME sector, unfortunately, the hon. Minister who have just spoken before me is not at his seat. I wanted him to listen to what I have to say about the SME sector since he has been bragging about it. At paragraph 141 of the Budget Speech, we are informed that DBM bank has earmarked Rs10 billion to support distressed SMEs and they will provide funding at a concessionary rate of 0.5% per annum - laudable initiative, very laudable measure, but will this scheme be implemented? Because this Government, unfortunately, has a track record of promising the earth to SMEs but inevitably failing to deliver on their promises. In 2015, hon. Lutchmeenaraidoo, the Minister of Finance, also wanted to make SME sector the backbone of our economy. He also announced the setting up of a SME bank. He also mentioned there would be Rs10 billion provided as capital without guarantee over five years, it never happened. Then it was announced that, instead of SME bank, MauBank would be financing SMEs through a SME Development Scheme. Now, according to the annual report published by the Ministry of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives, as at 17 June 2019, MauBank had received 582 applications for loans for a total amount of Rs1.174 billion. 582 applications for loans of Rs1.174 billion - do you know how much was disbursed by MauBank out of this Rs1.174 billion? As at June 2019, these are the latest figures we have in the annual report, only 284 million not even 25% of the requested amount and now you're going to provide them Rs10 billion. Since MauBank funding was obviously a fiasco, Government this time mandated DBM to support micro-SMEs. The figures are even more shocking, Mr Speaker, Sir. According to the latest figures from annual report published by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, published last October 2019, between July 2018 and March 2019, DBM has disbursed only Rs93 m. to 245 micro-SMEs as a preferential rate of 3%. Only two startups receive funding. Worse, as at March 2019, only two women entrepreneurs obtained Rs250,000 under the Women Entrepreneur Scheme. Failure upon failure.

According to the 10-year Master Plan for SMEs, we have more than 124,000 small enterprises which contribute to around 40% of the country's GDP and represent 54.6% of total employment. For five years, this Government has not been able to provide funding to these 124 small enterprises and now they want us to believe that they are going to provide Rs10 billion to SMEs. Go and find out why the existing scheme does not work; why is

MauBank unable to disburse? Why is DBM unable to disburse? Because it is extremely difficult today for someone from the SME sector to get financing. First, there are only a number of sectors which are concerned by the financing. For example, if you are in the trading sector, you buy and sell goods; you are in import and export, you are not eligible for any funding. Then you need to provide a viable project which means that you have to show that you have the capacity to repay. And, finally, you need to provide guarantees. You need to mortgage your house. You need to mortgage your parents' house. So, it is very difficult to get funding. But what is Government proposing? Is it going to give now loans without guarantee? Is the Government going to take a chance on SMEs and micro-enterprises because if it does not it serves no purpose announcing Rs10 billion. Next year, this amount will still be unspent.

The Minister of Finance also announced some measures to encourage consumption of locally produced goods. This is most welcome. With all due respect, Mr Speaker, Sir, supermarkets already sell more than 10% of locally manufactured goods. Dairy products, vegetables, fizzy drinks, bakeries, detergents, paper products locally produced are already on the shelves. The problem is not with the 10%, the problem is that it is extremely difficult for SMEs to be able to market and sell their goods in supermarkets because they cannot afford the high price tag which the supermarkets impose to provide them the shelf space. So, what we really need - what the Government really needs to do is to enter into an agreement with all these supermarkets and pay for a dedicated space to be used by SMEs. The Government provides the funding and then this dedicated space 10% or 15% is used to sell only locally produced goods manufactured by SMEs.

The hon. Minister of Finance also announced at paragraph 144 that he is increasing the one-off grant towards certification under the 'Made in Moris' label from Rs5,000 to Rs50,000 and everybody applauded. But do we know who delivers this 'Made in Moris' label? Association of Manufacturers. Do you know that this association is open for membership to only companies whose turnover is above Rs5 m.? Do you know that the certificate fee depends on your turnover? So, if your turnover is less than Rs10 m., you pay Rs6720; but if your turnover, the highest band, is above Rs20 m., you pay Rs52,900. So, when the hon. Minister of Finance is announcing that he is going to pay Rs50,000 for this 'Made in Moris', he is going to pay not to SMEs but to large corporations with turnover above Rs200 m. - so no more tapping. What is needed, in fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to take away this label 'Made in Moris' from the Association of Manufacturers and for SME

Mauritius to come up with its own brand, locally produced, which it can then give to all SMEs irrespective of the amount of turnover.

Let us turn to Financial Services. Ever since this Government took office in December 2014, there have been only bad news for the financial services sector. Our double taxation avoidance treaty with India and South Africa had been renegotiated to our detriment. Senegal has terminated its double taxation avoidance treaty with us. We have been blamed and shamed in the international media because of the paradise links followed by the Mauritius links and more recently, the Angola links. I concede that many of those criticisms are unfounded and very unfair especially those levelled against us by the international consortium of investigative journalism and organisations such as Oxfam which probably has an agenda on its own. Yet, on 17 September last year, I asked the hon. Prime Minister if he was satisfied that this Government is doing whatever is necessary to change the bad image and reputation which Mauritius has in the international community and, in particular, among African countries. What was his answer? I quote the hon. Prime Minister -

“We are, in fact, doing whatever is required to reply to those frivolous and unwarranted and unjustified attacks. And I tell the hon. Member to wait and see, and he will see the results that this Government, that this team will be having in the very near future. Just wait and see!”

Everybody clapped. It is on YouTube, you can see it. Everybody clapped - just wait and see what this Government will do. We waited and now, we are on the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force. We waited. Now we are on the blacklist of the European Commission as a high-risk country with strategic deficiencies in its anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing framework. The effect of the sanction was immediate. Last month, the Reserve Bank of India rejected a dozen applications for direct investment from Mauritius because funding is from a jurisdiction that has been identified by the Financial Action Task Force as having weak measures to combat money laundering and terrorism. The situation is very serious and this Government should really stop playing the blame game. Our peer ESAAMLG is not wrong. The Financial Action Task Force cannot be wrong. The European Commission cannot be wrong.

Only the Deputy Prime Minister is right because he looked him into the eyes. Come on! The Government keeps insisting that the list is not yet final and needs to be submitted to the European Parliament and the European Council of Ministers for approval. I really hope,

Mr Speaker, Sir, that we are able to convince the UE Council Members not to include us in that list and there are reasons for us not to be included in that list. But what happens if we are in that list? What happens if we are not removed from that list by 01 October 2020? Does Government have a back-up plan for the Financial Services Sector? Unfortunately, we may be up for further bad news because of measures announced in this Budget. Last year, Mauritius came close to be included in the EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes. This is a different list. The first list was about money laundering and financing of terrorist activities. This list is about countries which, according to the European Union, encourage what the European Union considers to be abusive tax practices. But the consequences which are being included in the list are just as bad because European institutions and Member States must take the list into account in foreign policy, in Development Corporation and economic relations.

One of the criteria for being included on this blacklist is that a tax advantage must not be accorded to non-citizens only and that there should be no ring-fencing. In other words, our taxation system should not, in any way, be discriminatory. And this is why we had to abolish the Deemed Foreign Tax Credit and other tax benefits enjoyed only by global business companies. What is the hon. Minister of Finance doing today? He is introducing a corporate levy on annual gross income which will be applicable to domestic companies but not to global business companies. He is clarifying that the partial exemption tax regime on interest income while still applying to global business companies will not be for certain domestic companies, those companies that are insurance companies, leasing companies or non-banking deposit taking institutions. Aren't these taxation measures discriminatory? Aren't foreigners being treated differently from Mauritians? Aren't global business companies being treated more favourably from a tax perspective than domestic companies? Isn't that what precisely the European Union has been telling us amounts to abusive tax practices? I really hope that the Government has cleared these taxation measures with the code of conduct group which has been mandated by the European Councils to screen and assess Mauritius, otherwise, we are heading straight to disaster as far as the offshore sector is concerned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the measures announced in the budget, it is clear that there will be hardly any growth to be expected from the traditional sectors I have just mentioned. The hon. Minister of Finance, being a fine economist, is aware of that. This is why, at paragraph 26, he announces that construction industry will be the engine of our recovery. Again, there is nothing new, but an emulation of what Mr Lutchmeenaraidoo tried to do in

2015 when he announced *Maurice un vaste chantier de développement*. Five years down the road, we have to admit that this strategy failed to translate into any meaningful growth. It is always a risky bet to rely on construction as engine for growth. In fact, there is little practical evidence that public infrastructure projects are net positive to the economy or that they even boost net employment figures. There are numerous articles on the subject, freely available on the internet, where economists identify technical challenges known as infrastructure as stimulus theory. One of the reports even had this title: “De we have roads to prosperity or bridges to nowhere?”

In Mauritius, any massive investment in public infrastructure is likely to have limited impact on growth simply because we import most, if not all of our raw materials and equipment that we use in the construction sector. We have limited technical knowhow and expertise which forces our local entrepreneur to team up with foreign companies to carry out big projects. Some of the projects financed by overseas grants and funds are required to be constructed by foreign enterprises such as in the case of Metro Express and before that Airport of Mauritius. Finally, we simply do not have sufficient manpower locally to implement our project. According to Statistics Mauritius, as at December 2019, we already have more than 5,000 foreign workers in the construction sector. How much of those billions of rupees which Government will inject in public infrastructure projects will actually stimulate domestic consumption and how much of those billions of rupees worth of investment will eventually be remitted outside of Mauritius? This is the question. And how much of the infrastructure projects will actually be implemented? This is another issue.

The Government has announced the creation of social housing. This time, they will construct 12,000 houses over three years. Again, nothing new! The Government announced the creation of 10,000 social housing in its Government Programme 2014-2019. Every year, we are called to vote hundreds of millions of rupees, if not billions of rupees for social housing and we receive hundreds of millions of rupees from India, from China, from Saudi Arabia for social housing. The funds are there, but at the end of the day, the Government did not even deliver 20% of what they have promised. And yet, we have a big housing issue in this country, Mr Speaker, Sir. According to a Press report this morning, quoting the hon. Minister of Housing, there is a waiting list of 18,000 people.

M. le président, au moment où nous célébrions la fin du confinement et la fête des mères, les bulldozers ont écrasé les maisons de fortune des malheureux squatteurs de Pointe aux Sables, Riambel et ailleurs. M. le président, on ne devient pas squatteur par plaisir. Ce

n'est pas un plaisir d'aller habiter dans une maison en tôle qui devient une passoire à chaque averse. Ce n'est pas un plaisir de vivre sans l'électricité, sans eau courante, sans toilette, dans des conditions hygiéniques exécrables. Combien d'entre nous avons pris la peine de parler à ces gens, à comprendre leur douleur, leur détresse, leur désespoir ? Il y a des centaines de familles squatteurs dans ma circonscription. Depuis 10 ans que je suis député, je ne cesse d'attirer l'attention des autorités dans cette Chambre et en dehors de cette Chambre sur leur sort. Non, M. le président, on ne devient pas squatteur par plaisir, mais si on devient squatteur par nécessité, par désespoir, par contre on reste squatteur par la faute du gouvernement. Le droit à un logement décent est un droit humain fondamental et une aspiration légitime. Aujourd'hui, avec R 158 milliards de la banque centrale, on aurait pu résoudre le problème de logement une fois pour toute, mais ce budget ne prévoit la construction que de seulement 1800 logements sociaux en trois ans, soit 600 logements par année pour les plus démunis. Comment va-t-on résoudre le problème de squatteurs, ceux qui touchent moins de R 10,000 avec seulement 1800 logements sociaux en trois ans ? Et quelle garantie qu'une fois construits, ces logements ne seront finalement pas alloués aux gens proches du pouvoir comme c'est, malheureusement, le cas aujourd'hui ?

Mr Speaker, Sir, the greatest concern of workers today is whether they will have a job tomorrow. Ever since this Government amended the Workers' Rights Act to make it easier for enterprises to sack workers, applications for reduction of workforce have been piling up before the Redundancy Board. In answer to a PNQ on 14 May, last month, the hon. Minister of Finance stated -

« En termes de chômage, comme j'aurai l'occasion de le préciser, si rien n'est fait, Maurice pourrait voir son nombre de chômeurs grimper de 150% pour arriver à un total de 100,000 actifs non-employés. »

Now, the very least one would have expected from the hon. Minister of Finance in his Budget Speech is to tell us what would be the rate of unemployment. How many new jobs will be created? How many jobs will, thanks to the measures that he announced in the Budget, be saved? 10,000, 20,000, 50,000? But not a single word. First time I read a budget which forecast inflation, forecast growth rate, forecast deficits, forecast public sector debt, forecast everything, except unemployment. And yet, in the Budget Speech, he keeps saying that the aim/the priority of this Government is to save jobs and he has received Rs158 billion from the Central Bank to do precisely that. *Ce n'est pas sérieux, M. le président!* Who will create the job? Where will the job come from? In which sector?

The hon. Minister of Finance is betting on the construction industry. He can, at least, tell us how many jobs will be created for resident Mauritians in the construction industry. And what about all those from the non-construction industry who lose their job? Those in the financial sector, tourism sector, manufacturing sector, will they now have to go and work in the construction sector? And will the Government be providing training if they want this to be the case? Then, at least, provide training; but nothing is budgeted, nothing is mentioned.

At paragraph 365 of the Budget Speech, the hon. Minister of Finance announces that Rs15 billion have been earmarked to provide an exceptional minimum monthly support of Rs5,100 to each beneficiary over the next six months. If I were the Minister of Finance, that would have been my *mesure phare*, announcing that everybody who is going to lose their job, we put in Rs15 billion there to give them a minimum Rs5,100. per month. But instead, *on est laissé sur notre faim*. Who will benefit from this income support? Only those who have lost their job? What about self-employed? Those in the informal sector who are also affected by the economic crisis, will they also benefit from this income support? Many youngsters looking for a job for the first time will be unable to get a job because of the economic crisis. Will the income support be extended to these youngsters as well? Will the income support be extended to workers who receive Transition Unemployment Benefit under the Workfare Programme? I note from the Annex to the Budget Speech at page 48 that the amount of Transition Unemployment Benefit will be increased, but how much? Will the people on the Welfare Programme also get the income support? Rs5,100 is the minimum. What would be the maximum? What would be the criteria? How will these measures be implemented? The Budget mentions that it will be implemented by DBM, MIC, MRA, Ministry of Labour, Tourism Authority. Come on! This has to be one single place which monitors all this. All this unanswered question, Mr Speaker, Sir. And then, when I look at the Estimates, I can find nowhere where this Rs15 billion is budgeted, not in the Estimates of any Ministries, not in any Reserve Funds. So, all this leads me to believe that probably this is a last minute measure added without proper thought being given to. But, it is a very good decision to give support. but I would like the hon. Minister of Finance to come and elaborate more as to who will benefit from it and how much they would get out of this benefit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at a time when saving jobs should be the utmost priority of this Government, I really do not understand the timing for abolishing the National Pension Fund and replacing it with *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*. At a time when enterprises, especially SMEs, will be hard hit by the economic crisis, they will now have to pay 6% of the

basic salary of their workers without any ceiling. How will increasing contribution to social cost reduce unemployment? If anything, it will increase the Wage Bill. How will it save job? Because on top of the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, enterprise will still have to contribute National Savings Fund, 2.5%; Training Levy: 1.5%, and don't forget the Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund of 4.5%. So, when that adds up together, we are close to 15% charges. I have no doubt that there are many enterprises out there which would be able to absorb that charge and pass it on to customers. But there will also be many enterprises, especially SMEs which will not be able to do so. With the fall in revenue, enterprises will be forced to cut down their expenses. And what will they do? The first thing they will do, they will reduce employment, because it is so easy to hire and fire now, and now that you are making it more expensive to retain employees, of course, they will have an incentive to fire people. So, I really don't understand the logic of this Government. Some weeks ago, you introduced the Wage Assistance Scheme to help enterprise pay wages to avoid retrenchment. Very good measure! Now, instead of improving on this Wage Assistance Scheme, you are increasing the Wage Bill for enterprises?

According to the Estimates, the Government is expecting to get Rs4 billion contribution from this *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*. At the moment, the contribution under NPF is about Rs1 billion. So, you are going to get four times more, four times the revenue, Rs4 billion. Where does that come from? Of course, from the pocket of enterprises. And it is not just employers who are going to pay more, it is also the employees earning more than Rs37,000, they would pay more. Self-employed will also be required to pay more.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have all been taken by surprise with the decision to close down the National Pension Fund without any consultation. As hon. Members are aware, there are two pension schemes in Mauritius, one, general universal non-contributory, which we call *pension de vieillesse*; any Mauritian resident is eligible and you don't have to contribute to it. And then, there is a second pension called *fonds de pension nationale*, NPF, employees and employers contribute and when an employee reaches 60, he gets money out of it and when he passes away, his widow or widower gets money. This is open only to those who contribute. Now, the Government has announced that they are going to close down National Pension Fund. So, what will happen to the Fund that is already sitting in the account, in the NPF? Will that be transferred to pay universal pension or will that be reserved for employees who have contributed to that Fund? What about retirees who had already contributed to NPF and now

are benefitting from the additional pension from NPF? Will they still get that pension after NPF is abolished? So, there are very many questions still left unanswered, Mr Speaker, Sir.

And my plea to the Government is, please, postpone this measure. Hold consultation with all stakeholders, employers, trade unionists, actuaries. Maybe after consultation you will come back with an improved version of *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*. And really, there is no urgency; with all the money you received from the Central Bank, I am sure that the Government can defer for a few weeks, months, years, the implementation of *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*.

M. le président, bien que le Premier ministre ait soutenu ce budget, il n'en demeure non moins que ce budget représente une cassure avec le modèle économique du MSM tel que le prônait Sir Anerood Jugnauth. En effet, dans le passé, le MSM a toujours prôné une fiscalité légère. On se souvient des fameux *No Tax Budget* du ministre des Finances d'alors, Lutchmeenaraidoo, une fiscalité légère qui a attiré les investisseurs étrangers et qui a créé toute une génération d'entrepreneurs locaux. C'était le fondement même de notre miracle économique et de notre résilience, la résilience de notre économie dans la durée.

But, henceforth, Mr Speaker, Sir, the New Normal for this Government will be high taxation. And time will tell if this New Normal will have any impact on investment, on flight of capital, on brain drain, on our ability to attract and retain talents and our ability to convince our children to come back to Mauritius and serve their country.

M. le président, ce budget ne convainc pas. Pour preuve, vous avez reçu R 158 milliards. Et c'est quoi votre mesure phare ? Et c'est quoi votre mesure phare ? La réduction du gaz ménager par R 30. R 158 milliards et mesure phare, ce malheureux R 30 de réduction alors que le prix du gaz a dégringolé sur le marché mondial et que la STC fait des milliards de roupies de profit.

M. le président, je voudrais terminer en remerciant une nouvelle fois tous nos *front liners* pour leur dévouement et ajouter ma voix à ceux qui ont réclamé que le gouvernement étende la prime de R 15, 000 à tous ceux qui ont travaillé durant la période de confinement au péril de leur vie dans les secteurs essentiels, tant dans le secteur privé que dans le secteur public, sans oublier bien sûr les corps paraétatiques. Quant à ce budget, malgré les R 158 milliards de la Banque centrale, notre dette publique atteindra 86.7% du PIB l'année prochaine. Il n'y aura pas de relance de l'économie. Des centaines d'entreprises cesseront

d'opérer, des dizaines de milliers de travailleurs se retrouveront au chômage, la roupie va dégringoler, les prix prendront l'ascenseur. Quel gâchis.

Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman, wear your mask!

Hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo!

(4.01 p.m.)

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The year 2020 is an extremely difficult year for the whole world. The COVID-19 pandemic will remain engraved in our hearts and memories forever. The Budget 2020-2021 has been presented at this tough and difficult time. We still do not know how long COVID-19 pandemic will last or when a vaccine will be introduced. However, we do know that the impact of COVID-19 pandemic is very devastating and has caused havoc around the world.

Before I turn to the Budget itself, allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to say a few words on what has been happening around the world and in our country during the last few months. The world has witnessed an unprecedented sanitary crisis, the biggest we have known in more than a century. The COVID-19 pandemic has paralysed the entire world with more than 3 billion people having been locked down. The infection has spread at a stunning rate; we were almost defenceless in the face of such an unpredictable and highly contagious virus.

One of the major challenges was the detection of infected persons. Surprisingly, many were those who did not show any symptoms despite being infected. This has contributed towards a quick spread of the disease. The world, I must say, was brought to its knees within days. None of us were prepared for such an unprecedented crisis, not even the wealthiest and most powerful countries such as UK, France, Italy and America, amongst others. This pandemic has caused havoc, as I have said, around the world and Mauritius has, unfortunately, not been spared. I am deeply saddened by the loss of 10 of our fellow citizens due to this virus. I seize this opportunity to extend my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the first cases of COVID-19 were detected in Mauritius on 18 March 2020. Our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, lost no time to respond to this critical crisis. He immediately took drastic measures, I must say, to prevent the spread of the

disease. On 20 March, Mauritius was under a strict sanitary lockdown. On 23 March, a Curfew Order was issued, a difficult decision indeed. Our Prime Minister took charge in time of the crisis. Even, I must say, our Prime Minister has been swift in action, he has taken the right decision at the right time. We do recognise that these measures and actions have disrupted our daily life and the economy, but all these actions have to be taken to better protect our people.

To reply to what hon. Dr. Boolell said about the closure of our frontiers, I would like to mention that the first cases of COVID-19 were detected in Mauritius on 18 March and decision was taken by our Prime Minister to close our frontiers on the next day itself, that is, 19 March. And even before we detected cases in Mauritius, all flights from Shanghai were suspended as from 31 January itself. So, I cannot understand hon. Dr. Boolell when he said earlier that we have taken long to act. Is the closure of our frontiers on the next day of the first suspected cases not quick enough? So, I leave it to the House to appreciate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the top priorities of our Government has always been to provide assistance and support to the most vulnerable. Ever since we took office in 2014, we have come up with a series of measures to provide our citizens with a more decent living. Our Prime Minister has always been mindful of the needs of the most vulnerable. And in such a crisis, what have we done? A series of measures have been taken by different Ministries, our Government has adopted appropriate policies –

- in no time, a Wage Assistance Scheme was put in place to provide financial assistance to companies to ensure that employees are paid their salaries during the lockdown;
- a Self-Employed Assistance Scheme was designed to assist self-employed persons who have suffered a loss of revenue as a consequence of the said lockdown, and
- a COVID-19 Solidarity Fund was set up to collect funds to be used to help those affected by the said pandemic.

It would have been difficult for us to deal with the aftermath of the pandemic without a robust and legal framework. Therefore, prior to the lifting of the confinement, our Government has deemed it necessary to come up with the Covid-19 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 and the Quarantine Act. I must say that these two Acts will serve to chart the way forward post-pandemic.

My Ministry, with the support of other key Ministries, has had to change the way of doing things to protect our elderly, to keep them safe indoors, to help vulnerable families. We adopted immediate actions such as distribution of food packs to 7,900 families eligible under the Social Register of Mauritius and to 19,779 elderly persons and persons with disabilities benefitting from a Carer's Allowance. We paid pension at home to around 58,665 beneficiaries. We did this for two consecutive months with the collaboration of Mauritius Post Limited. Payment to around 500 beneficiaries of Social Aid was also carried out at their residence by officers of my Ministry. We have changed the mode of the vaccination exercise; instead of asking the elderly persons to come to our centres, vaccination has been carried out through mobile caravans across the island. 108,583 elderly persons were vaccinated through caravans and this exercise has been done in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, as you can see, throughout the crisis, our objective has been to shield and protect our elderly, to provide basic necessities to those in need. Well, if this is not proof of our goodwill, I wonder what else will be!

Having said that, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to comment on the present Budget 2020-2021, the first Budget of the Minister of Finance. I have no doubt this has been a challenging exercise in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. In spite of this difficult time, the present Budget, I must say, has struck the right balance between *la relance économique et l'aspect social*. This Budget provides a roadmap to stimulate our country's economy, to modernise our healthcare sector, to continue caring for our elderly and also to provide those who are at the bottom of the ladder with the means to come out of poverty.

It is hard not to acknowledge that a major part of the Budget 2020-2021 is focused on social upliftment. This Budget clearly addresses the needs of our most vulnerable citizens in a coherent and sustainable way. In fact, a major part of every Budget presented by our Government since 2014 has always been dedicated to social upliftment. The first things that come to my mind are measures such as –

- the introduction of minimum wage;
- negative income tax;
- subsistence allowance for families living under the poverty line, and
- of course, the increase in basic pension.

If our Government had not taken all these measures, if we had not injected huge sums to provide financial assistance to vulnerable people, they would still be struggling hard to make

both ends meet. Today, the minimum wage stands at Rs10,200 and the Basic Retirement Pension at Rs9,000 instead of Rs3,623, Mr Speaker, Sir.

From the time we took office in 2014 to date, the budget of the Ministry of Social Security has undergone massive increases from Rs13.9 billion in 2014 to Rs36.7 billion today.

Let me now say a few words on some of the measures that concern my Ministry, specifically the Social Security and National Solidarity Division. I have listened with great attention to hon. Dr. Boolell and hon. Uteem comments regarding the National Pension Fund. Hon. Dr. Boolell is not present. So, can hon. Dr. Boolell tell us where, in the Budget, it is said that we will end the non-contributory pension? Where in the Budget has it been mentioned that old age pension will be targeted?

Let me, Mr Speaker, Sir, at this stage, eliminate all confusion. Let me reassure the House that we are not ending Universal Basic Retirement Pension. There will be no targeting in terms of Universal Retirement Pension. This means that all those who turn 60 will continue to benefit from their Universal Retirement Pension of Rs9,000. We have said that old age pension will become Rs13,500 before the end of this Government's mandate and let me reassure the House and the population that we will honour our commitment.

One must not forget that it is our Government that has increased and aligned Basic Widow's Pension and the Basic Invalidity Pension from Rs3,267 to Rs5,000 in 2014 and, in December 2019, we took the decision to bring these basic pensions to Rs9,000. It was our Government, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have always delivered on our commitment. Our track record, I must say, speaks for itself.

Now, coming to the National Pension Fund and its assets, the National Pension Fund, as I understand, will continue to exist. All those who have contributed to the National Pension Fund so far will be paid their dues as and when they retire. As for existing beneficiaries, who have already retired, they will continue to receive their monthly pension.

The National Pension Fund will continue to invest its surplus fund, as has always been the case, with a view to maximise return. Let me stress that the assets of the NPF have always been the property of the workers and will always remain the property of the workers. Government will never claim ownership of the assets of the NPF, as some of the Members may think. In fact, what we are doing, Mr Speaker, Sir, is moving towards a more progressive contribution system. The National Pension Fund is being replaced by the *Contribution*

Sociale Généralisée, which will be effective as from 01 September 2020. Employees earning up to Rs50,000 will, therefore, contribute 1.5% and their employers will contribute 3% on their monthly salary. As for employees earning more than Rs50,000, their contribution will be 3% and that of their employers 6%.

However, contributions will, therefore, no longer be capped against a ceiling of Rs18,740, as is currently the case under the National Pension Act. This is an effort for a fairer, more equitable system for the future, Mr Speaker, Sir.

All other basic pensions have known considerable increases. At this point, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is pertinent for me to mention that prior to December 2014, the Basic Widow's Pension and the Basic Invalidity Pension were less than the Basic Retirement Pension, and necessary measures have been taken by Government to align the two pensions, same as the Basic Retirement Pension.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, at this stage, to move to another measure announced in the Budget; *Visite Médicale à Domicile* to persons between the age of 18 and 60 years. Initially, monthly domiciliary visits were provided only to children with disabilities below the age of 18 and to bedridden persons aged 75 and above. The House will recall that in the Budget 2019-2020, this service was extended to bedridden persons aged 60 and above. Provision is being made in the Budget 2020-2021 for the provision of *Visite Médicale à Domicile* to bedridden persons between the age of 18 and 60, and as we can see in the Budget Estimates, an amount of around Rs150 m. has been earmarked for the implementation of this particular Budget.

I am grateful to our Prime Minister as well as the Minister of Finance and his team for having acceded to this request, and now *Visite Médicale à Domicile* to bedridden persons will be allowed for all people. Age will no longer be an eligibility criterion to benefit from this service. I am sure this measure comes as a great relief to many vulnerable families.

Moving on, I would now wish to comment on the provisions made for the increase in the number of anti-influenza vaccines for the elderly and for children in Special Needs School from 75,000 to 150,000. Mr Speaker, Sir, the figure has doubled. An amount of Rs34 m. as compared to Rs10 m. for the last financial year has been allocated to my Ministry for the purchase of the vaccines. We have noted recently that there is an increasing demand for this vaccine and, therefore, there was a pressing need to respond to that need. I am glad the

Minister of Finance has agreed to our request. So, now, we will be in a position to extend this service to a larger number of elderly persons.

Coming to the Social Integration Division of my Ministry, Mr Speaker, Sir, the alleviation of poverty is a long process. We need to be realistic. Unfortunately, even if we would have wished, poverty cannot be eradicated overnight, but despite all the various challenges, our Government is determined to reduce poverty to the extent possible. This is the very reason why our Government initiated the Marshall Plan Against Poverty in 2016. Families living below the poverty threshold were then registered on the Social Register of Mauritius. As at now, around 8,000 eligible families in Mauritius and 2,000 eligible families in Rodrigues are on the SRM. They benefit from various schemes such as monthly Subsistence Allowance, Child Allowance Scheme, School Premium Scheme, Free Examination Fees Scheme, School Materials Scheme and Crèche Scheme.

I would like to mention that a total amount of Rs355 m. was disbursed for these schemes during the Financial Year 2019-2020. I believe that this is a clear indication of our Government's commitment to help and support those who are vulnerable and need help from the Government. I heard hon. Dr. Boolell mention the creation of the Ministry of Social Integration by the Labour Party. True it is, yes. But who came up with an Action Plan to help people out of absolute poverty, Mr Speaker, Sir? It is our Government which initiated the Marshall Plan Against Poverty in 2016. Families living below the poverty threshold were then registered on the Social Register of Mauritius. If it were not for us, there would have been no register of vulnerable families. There would have been no financial assistance provided to them. There would have been no tailor-made empowerment programmes for them. So, I think we are doing our level best to give support to those vulnerable families.

As for social housing, the Budget 2020-2021 makes provision for the construction of 1,800 housing units for families with an income of up to 10,000; 80% of the cost of these houses will be subsidised by our Government. This is an attempt to provide families with housing.

My Ministry has different housing schemes for eligible families on the SRM. The NEF has already acquired 47 housing units from the NHDC and procedures for the allocation of houses to beneficiaries are underway. In addition, 136 fully concrete housing units have already been completed as at 31 March. Due to the COVID-19 and lockdown situation in Mauritius, the construction of some additional 59 housing units has, unfortunately, been

delayed, but I do hope that, in the months to come, we will be able to complete these 59 housing units.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as you can see, there are a series of measures to accompany the vulnerable families. However, we need to acknowledge that there are other vulnerable families living in relative poverty. I personally believe that these families also deserve our support. To be able to do this, we need to identify the families living in relative poverty. Therefore, the Budget 2020-2021 makes provision for the setting up of a national database of vulnerable families.

Once the registration of these families is complete, Government will devise an Action Plan on how to assist these families in improving their living conditions. In the meantime, vulnerable families that are not eligible for the SRM are being taken care of by NGOs. The National Inclusion Foundation provides financial assistance to around 350 NGOs involved in specific areas. I have always believed that NGOs are privileged partners for the Government in addressing social issues and we will continue working together.

The Budget 2020-2021 makes provision for an amount of Rs700 m. to be allocated to the National Social Inclusion Foundation for further assistance to NGOs.

On another note, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to comment on a measure taken to support children for vulnerable families in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we all know, schools have had to be temporarily closed to protect our children, but this does not mean that their studies should be stopped, especially those hailing from families eligible under the SRM. These families are often deprived of the necessary facilities for their children to follow online classes dispensed by the Ministry of Education. Government has given due regard to the educational needs of these children. So, provision has, therefore, been made in the Budget 2020-2021 for tablets to be provided to around 2,570 students of Grades 10 to 13 who are eligible under the SRM. I am sure this measure will enable them to keep up with their studies so that they are in no way at a disadvantage, and needful is being done. Our Government's vision is to foster a socially inclusive society. We are doing our best to ensure that vulnerable families benefit from the technological facilities and innovation of today's era. In line with this vision, free access to broadband internet has been provided to around 4,900 SRM families as at March 2020. The present Budget makes provision for free broadband internet access to be provided to an additional 5,000 families falling under the

Social Register of Mauritius. This is a huge step in bridging the digital divide and is being implemented jointly by Government and the Mauritius Telecom.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the last few months have been very challenging for all of us. I am happy that, so far, we have been able to brave this situation as one united nation. The present Budget has been delivered, as I have said, in a very difficult moment and also in an attempt to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19.

On a concluding note, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to warmly congratulate the Minister of Finance for the presentation of his first Budget in the National Assembly. I am confident that this Budget will no doubt pave the way for our economic performance to recover from this unprecedented crisis brought about by the global pandemic COVID-19.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

(4.30 p.m.)

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Merci, M. le président. Avant d'aller dans la lecture de mon discours, permettez-moi d'ouvrir deux petites parenthèses. Je n'ai pu m'empêcher d'aller jeter un petit coup d'œil dans le dictionnaire *Le Petit Larousse* pour comprendre la définition de deux termes; d'abord la définition du terme 'pessimiste' parce que depuis que nous sommes là, à écouter les discours, eh bien c'est surtout ce sentiment qui se dégage dans la partie adverse et bien sûr on doit comprendre les raisons.

Alors, le terme 'pessimiste' est défini comme une doctrine qui soutient soit que tout est mal soit que la somme des maux l'emporte sur celle des biens. Le pessimiste est une personne qui a tendance à considérer et entrevoir une suite fâcheuse à tout événement, toute situation et qui en attend donc le pire. Et je poursuis avec cette petite définition du terme 'butin' que nous avons entendu aussi tout à l'heure surtout pour ceux qui nous écoutent. Alors le terme 'butin' c'est 'ce qu'on prend à l'ennemi, produit d'un vol qui est normalement dissimulé dans un coffre-fort'.

M. le président, merci de me permettre de prendre la parole aujourd'hui et de vous parler de mes sentiments sur le budget 2020-2021. Cela fait aujourd'hui sept mois, jour pour jour, que le peuple mauricien a confié son avenir entre les mains de *l'Alliance Morisien*. Le discours programme post-électoral annonçait effectivement une île Maurice en chantier des

projets de développement pour une Ile Maurice meilleure. Et personne, je dis bien personne, ne savait alors qu'une pandémie nous guettait. La COVID-19 a mis le monde à genoux en portant sur son passage les centaines de milliers de victimes et secouant de manière violente l'économie mondiale.

Nous sommes d'ailleurs toujours en état de guerre. Cette pandémie nous a fait prendre conscience de beaucoup de choses, de nouvelles habitudes ont été prises et des manques se sont fait ressentir. Il y a certainement des leçons à tirer pour les appliquer à l'avenir. Nous retenons parmi le fort ralentissement des échanges et l'arrêt de secteurs industriels et commerciaux qui ont eu des conséquences majeures sur le niveau de consommation des ménages. Le traumatisme social causé par le fait d'être enfermé chez soi. La peur de manquer d'argent pour nourrir nos enfants, nos cœurs ont été mis en attente alors que nous décidions de ce qui doit être fait maintenant et aujourd'hui.

Aussi mauvais que ce soit pour nous, maintenant, permettez-moi, M. le président, de vous ramener à sept décennies de cela où un juif dans un camp de concentration à Auschwitz en Pologne était entre la vie et la mort. Il était psychiatre, son nom, Viktor Frankl. En observant ceux qui étaient décédés, et ceux qui avaient survécu, il fit l'observation que ceux qui ont survécu, leur survie ne dépendait pas de leur force ou leur faiblesse physique mais sur la force de leur objectif de vie. Son livre, *Man's Search for Meaning*, nous décrit comment il a découvert cet aspect fondamental du caractère et de la condition humaine.

Lorsque nous nous concentrons sur le 'pourquoi' de la vie, nous pouvons déterminer le 'comment' de la vie. L'homme, selon lui, peut conserver un vestige de liberté mentale ou d'indépendance d'esprit même dans des conditions terribles de stress psychique et physique.

M. le président, je pense que nous sommes tous conscients des faits psychologiques subis par tout un chacun pendant cette période de confinement. Une période où nous nous retrouvions dans l'obligation de faire une pause, un arrêt obligatoire qui nous a laissé dans nos réflexions. Cette période nous a permis de faire une introspection et pour certains d'entre nous de se rendre compte de la vie que nous menions avant. Une prise de conscience qui nous permet de mieux comprendre qui nous sommes, qu'est-ce-que nous voulons ou ne voulons pas et surtout en quoi nous croyons. A quoi est-ce-que l'on s'accroche aujourd'hui pour voir un meilleur lendemain, une fois sortie de ce confinement ? C'est ça la nouvelle normalité.

M. le président, mon vécu me permet de comprendre cette rage de vouloir sortir de la misère, de pouvoir manger à sa faim, d'avoir un toit, de se sentir en sécurité. Je pense que

nous tous ici dans cette assemblée, nous rêvons d'une île Maurice où chaque famille aurait un toit, un salaire minimum, le droit à l'éducation, à la santé, une chance égale. Le ministre des Finances, l'honorable Dr. Renganaden Padayachy, a prononcé un discours budget dans un contexte exceptionnel, je dis bien dans un contexte exceptionnel.

La situation actuelle liée à la COVID-19 a eu un impact profond sur tous les types d'entreprises. Les conséquences de la pandémie sont encore pires pour l'économie mondiale que celles qui ont suivi la grande crise financière de 2007-2008. Le confinement drastique qui a provoqué la fermeture ou la réduction des activités d'un certain nombre de grandes entreprises manufacturières, de commerce, de détails et surtout du tourisme a terriblement ralenti l'économie de notre pays. Si cette crise n'était que sanitaire au début, elle nous dévoile aujourd'hui ses conséquences qui sont entre autres sociales, économiques, culturelles même politiques.

Il ne serait pas exagéré de considérer cette crise comme l'une des plus dramatiques pour l'économie mondiale suite aux décisions prises par la majorité, je dis bien la majorité des gouvernements de la planète. D'un point de vue général, on s'attendait tous à ceux que la vie soit plus dure après la COVID, un budget *serre ceinture*. Je remercie le ministre des Finances car l'essentiel a pu être préservé, l'écart social rétabli, l'économie reconstruite afin d'assurer ensemble un développement inclusif, robuste et durable. Le ministre des Finances revient à l'essentiel en investissant dans l'agriculture. Nous avons trop longtemps cru en une industrialisation mondiale et dans des produits venant de l'étranger. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes encouragés à produire et à consommer local. Grace à la mise en place du *National Agri-Food Development Programme* qui je cite assurera notre sécurité alimentaire et réduira notre dépendance vis-à-vis des importations.

Pour ce qui est des logements, R 12 milliards seront allouées pour la construction de 12 000 logements sociaux à travers le pays. Pour les foyers, dont le revenu mensuel ne dépasse pas R 10,000 le gouvernement construira 1800 appartements et subventionnera 80 % du coût de ces appartements. Allons dire, par exemple, qu'un appartement coûte 1 million de roupies, le gouvernement va contribuer 80 %, donc R 800,000 et le bénéficiaire va payer R 200,000 sur une période pouvant aller jusqu'à 35 ans. Pour ceux dont le revenu mensuel se trouve entre R 10,000 et R 30,000, 5200 appartements seront construits et subventionnés à la hauteur de 67% du coût de l'appartement. À savoir bien sûr que ces familles auront la possibilité de rembourser le montant restant sur une base mensuelle pendant une période pouvant aller jusqu'à 35 ans également.

Il est bon de souligner M. le président, que le ministre des finances a annoncé que tous ces logements seront construits en recourant au maximum aux énergies renouvelables, ceci dans le but de répondre aux besoins des familles les plus vulnérables, ainsi qu'à ceux des familles à faible et moyen revenus.

Pendant le confinement, la MRA a enregistré un nombre significatif d'artisans, de plombiers, de maçons entre autres, et dans le budget du ministre des Finances, il y a effectivement une volonté de promouvoir la main-d'œuvre mauricienne, notamment en stimulant la construction. Il va sans dire que ces projets immobiliers généreront de l'emploi.

En parlant d'emploi, M. le président, je constate que ce budget démontre une volonté d'encourager les petites et moyennes entreprises en prévoyant une somme de 10 milliards de roupies pour soutenir les PME et les coopératives en difficulté.

Ceci est un exemple parmi tant d'autres, et avec le centre de loisirs qui ouvrira ses portes du côté de Riambel, il est évident que certaines personnes de la région pourraient également y trouver du travail.

M. le président, je souhaiterais personnellement remercier le ministre des Finances d'avoir accédé à la demande du ministre des Collectivités locales pour tous les développements qui seront apportés dans ma circonscription, la circonscription numéro 14, tels que la construction de nouvelles foires à Chemin Grenier et Bambous, la construction d'un marché intégré, d'un gymnase et des équipements sportifs à Bassin, Quatre Bornes.

Et, M. le président, les habitants de la circonscription, nous le savons tous, souffrent depuis de nombreuses années de problème d'eau. Je tiens donc à dire merci au ministre des Finances pour la réhabilitation du réservoir de La Ferme qui soulagera bon nombre d'habitants faisant face au problème de fourniture d'eau au quotidien. À cette mesure s'ajoute le forage de puits supplémentaires à Valriche et St Martin, aussi bien que l'installation des stations d'épuration mobile à Beaux Songes. Aujourd'hui nous sommes contents de savoir que 12,500 ménages bénéficieront du *Water Tank Grant Scheme* à travers l'île et bien sûr les habitants de la circonscription 14 pourront également en profiter.

Pendant cette période de crise, M. le président, les ONG ont joué un rôle important et contribué énormément en assistant aussi, comme nous, les personnes les plus vulnérables, dans les différentes régions de l'île. Je voudrais profiter d'ailleurs de cette occasion pour leur dire un grand merci pour leur soutien. Ces organismes méritent une attention particulière car leur volonté de soutenir des causes notamment les problèmes de la communauté est

extrêmement louable. Je salue l'effort du ministre des Finances et du gouvernement pour l'enveloppe de 700 millions de roupies accordées pour soutenir les ONGs et à mettre en œuvre les projets et programmes approuvés par la *National Social Inclusion Foundation*.

Allons croire que ce n'est pas la fin, que l'histoire ne s'arrête pas là, que la vie ne s'arrête pas là. Le pouvoir de l'espoir en cette période de défis vient de notre peuple dont la vie a été protégée par les nombreuses mesures prises par ce gouvernement, notamment la fermeture de notre territoire, le couvre-feu sanitaire, les centres de quarantaine parmi les principales mesures et maintenant par les décisions audacieuses et les dispositions prises dans ce budget pour assurer notre subsistance. Lorsque nous sommes au centre de la tempête, il est difficile de savoir ce qui vient, d'où elle vient, et ce qui va suivre, mais l'espoir génère la confiance mutuelle entre le gouvernement et son peuple, aujourd'hui et demain. Les gens se tournent vers son gouvernement et c'est normal. Ils sont confus, ils ont peur, parfois désorientés quant à ce qu'ils devraient faire, mais surtout bouleversés, car ils ne peuvent pas voir plus loin qu'aujourd'hui.

Ce budget est le budget du peuple. Hormis la préservation de ce que nous avons acquis au fil des années, rien n'a été laissé au hasard. Le ministre des Finances a fait en sorte que tous les domaines essentiels à une bonne qualité de vie soient pris en compte. Quel que soit notre rôle ou notre vocation, ou, où nous en sommes dans la propagation de la pandémie, il y a un début et une fin pour chacun de nous, que ce soit le gouvernement, la famille, les ONG, la religion, les écoles, les usines et les entreprises. Après que la catastrophe sera épuisée ou que le monde aura développé une immunité contre le virus, il y aura une suite, une époque future dans laquelle la dévastation devra être résolue et traitée. Pour vous dire que la lutte contre la pauvreté est l'affaire de toute la société.

Je termine mon discours, M. le président, par cette esquisse de quatre étapes d'une crise: pause et pivot, préparer et planifier, engager et exécuter, récupérer et ré-émerger.

Dans le tourbillon de cette crise, alors que nous nous luttons avec ce qui doit être fait et comment nous pouvons le faire, l'espoir écrit ceci à nos portes : tout n'est pas perdu, la vie continue. Faire une pause signifie ouvrir les portes des opportunités, avoir le temps de repenser la nouvelle normalité après cette situation sans précédent. Pivoter, c'est passer d'un cœur de peur à un cœur d'espoir. La crise n'est pas comme une maladie dont on ne peut sortir, elle est comme une sorte de nouvelle naissance, comme le dit si bien, Paul Mauroy. Donc, au lieu d'être coincés, pris dans les phares, pivotons, pivotons dans ce que nous savons

être nécessaires. Écrit à travers ce budget un mot de quatre lettres - plan. Nous pourrions penser à l'espoir comme un sentiment flou ou des lunettes de soleil que nous utilisons pour filtrer nos problèmes et nous protéger de ce qui est. Mais ce n'est pas. Nous sommes appelés à aller de l'avant. C'est la préparation et la planification. Ce gouvernement fait cela en collaboration avec sa population, et les intervenants. L'espoir nous permet de voir plus que le problème. L'acte de volonté nous déplace de notre position actuelle vers un engagement à trouver des solutions, et la quatrième phase consiste à récupérer et à ré-émerger. Cette crise ne durera pas éternellement. Il reviendra un moment où d'autres questions appelleront notre attention. En tant que personnes, peu importe où nous sommes, nous voudrions sortir de cette période difficile et entrer dans notre nouvelle normalité et son avenir. Alors je dis oui, M. le président, ensemble nous le pouvons.

Merci pour votre attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

(4.49 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, the best memorial we can build for our fellow citizens who lost their lives to this COVID-19 pandemic, and the best tribute that we can pay to all front liners and the population at large in combating this invisible, yet so dangerous enemy, is for the Government to come up with new policies and new approaches to move the country towards a better, greener and fairer society. Yet, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget has unfairness at its very core.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have received representations during the weekend from several workers, from the Scavenging Unit of the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix. They were rightly so gutted and felt left out and they asked me to convey same to this august Assembly, that they have worked relentlessly and in very difficult conditions during the lockdown. They have been collecting all the household wastes, exposing themselves and their families to very high risks of contamination during those dark and uncertain days; keeping the localities clean, and after lockdown, they have been together with other employees cleaning and disinfecting all public places within the Constituencies of No. 15 and 16 respectively, and yet, together with all those brave men and women, who are working in supermarkets, in the fire services, at the port, at the airport, they have all been ignored and were not deemed fit to get the exemption allocation of Rs15,000, Mr Speaker, Sir. They all are equally eligible and

deserve, as are our police officers and hospitals staff to be provided with the exemption allocation of Rs15,000.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, and the Government, cannot discriminate and be divisive in their approach. So, I urge the hon. Minister to make amend and include all those people as well. Mr Speaker, Sir, the population at large is utterly disappointed with this Budget. There was a legitimate expectation when prior to the presentation of this Budget, the hon. Prime Minister addressed the nation and said that there will be *une relance agressive de l'économie*. But, unfortunately, the Budget that the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has delivered, is actually the culmination of five previous years of failures to address core pillars of our economy and the difficulties that we are facing are much prior to the advent of COVID-19, be it for the manufacturing sector, export-oriented sector, tourism, agriculture, financial services and our SMEs, amongst others. At this point in time, in our country's political history, it would have been historical and a new milestone if the hon. Minister could have been more innovative in its approach, and contents of his Budget Speech and establishing new norms to the 'new normal' that he is advocating. One would have expected a Budget that will breakaway with the standards stereotyped practice of announcing measures in a general manner and avoid being repetitive of what have already been uttered in previous Budget Speeches. Far from being *une relance agressive de l'économie*, this Budget fails lamentably to address serious concerns with regard to our balance of trade that has deteriorated sharply from Negative Rs77.3 billion in 2014 to Negative Rs120 billion in 2019, Mr Speaker, Sir. There has been a dramatic fall in exports from Rs95 billion in 2014 to Rs79 billion in 2019. We are still having a high rate of youth and employment up to 23%, Mr Speaker.

Corruption Perception Index! Our country has gone down, from 54 in 2014; we are now at 56 in 2019. The Global Innovation Index, we have gone down very badly, Mr Speaker, Sir. We were ranked 40th in 2014; we are ranked 82nd in 2019, Mr Speaker, Sir.

With regard to production of food crops, in 2014, we produced some 116,000 tonnes and, in 2019, only 93,000 tonnes. And the same decrease noted in the production of sugar, from 400,000 tonnes in 2014 to 331,000 tonnes in 2019. Those figures and statistics, Mr Speaker, Sir, speak volumes, and show how bad the situation is and how this Government that has been in power for nearly six years now, has not succeeded to gear up our country

towards economic stability and instead we are faced with an uncertain future with no major reforms to kick-start a new economic model.

More alarming, Mr Speaker, Sir, our Rupee is depreciating dangerously. One US Dollar is around Rs40.50 and one Euro is around Rs45, yet, not a single word in this Budget on how the hon. Minister will address this disquieting scenario. The population at large, the consumers are being seriously affected by this weakening of our Rupee. For example, Mr Speaker, Sir, retail price of basic commodities like milk has increased from Rs156 to Rs209. Rice has increased from Rs240 to Rs315. Medicines and other pharmaceutical products are day by day getting more expensive. Go and ask those old age pensioners how much are left in their monthly Rs9,000. It is incumbent on Government and the Budget ought to have at least analysed and come forward with a plan to stabilise our Rupee and also find solutions to the ever eroding purchasing power of our people. This is the role of the hon. Minister in a Budget; this is the role of the Government. The decrease in the price of LPG by Rs30 is just a mere sham, Mr Speaker, Sir. We all know that on the global market, for the last six months, the price of this commodity has gone down by more than 25% and the population should also be aware that it is from their pockets, through excessive tax imposed, when they are purchasing petrol that the price of LPG is being subsidised. They should thus be warned, what this Government gives with one hand, it takes away with the other. Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now elaborate on certain measures in this Budget that, at the same time, are mere repetitions of measures already announced in previous Budgets. For example, construction of 12,000 social housing units, at paragraph 250 of the previous Budget; it was announced that 6,000 units will be constructed over three years. So, which is which: 12,000 units now or 6,000 for the next three years? They have to come up with a realistic figure on this issue.

Construction of Rivière des Anguilles Dam! Mr Speaker, Sir, year in year out, we are hearing about the construction of the Rivière des Anguilles Dam. Construction of a Fishing Port! That was announced way back in 2015 by former Minister of Finance, Vishnu Lutchmeenaraidoo. And last year's Budget, at paragraph 170, Construction of the Cruise Terminal and a breakwater was already announced. There is nothing new in announcing it again. Côte d'Or Digital Park, last year, it was announced as Côte d'Or Industrial Park. It was at paragraph 74. So, you just change industrial park, you put it digital park, but not to forget the massive investment made in the Rose Belle Business Park. Another *éléphant blanc* that has swallowed huge sums of money and likewise we can go on and on in this Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir.

But there is one measure in this year's Budget that has been suavely introduced, Mr Speaker, Sir, and this is the new mandate being given to Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd. When Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd was set up, there was already a lot of criticism as to the way it will operate and the powers and mandates being given to it. We have all witnessed the tug of war between the Board and Management in recent times and how lands at Côte d'Or were being allocated to some lucky few promoters and now this Government will be giving a new mandate to Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd and a centralised digital land bank of state and private agricultural land will be set up under Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd. Why should we give a new mandate to Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd to manage a land bank when the system is already in place and available at the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning under the LAVIMS which has cost around Rs1 billion to be put in place. The Ministry already has a clear procedure for Mauritians to get access to State land and have the required trained and qualified personnel to use the system. Why this waste of money which will cost another colossal sum and why so much powers is being vested to Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd? I am sure hon. Steven Obeegadoo, the Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning together with the staff at his Ministry can surely manage the land bank together with the collaboration of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security and if Government is serious enough to boost our agro-industry sector, then DBM Ltd, Mr Speaker, Sir, should be used as a one-stop shop. DBM Ltd is already offering facilities to the agricultural sector with various loan schemes and here I am referring to page 19 of the Annex to the Budget Speech where a series of loan schemes have been provided by DBM Ltd.

Here, I wish to draw the attention of this august Assembly to the danger of giving a new mandate to Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd as if we are creating a super Ministry in the same vein as the Economic Development Board. Major roles played by the Executive through various Ministries and hon. Ministers have been taken over by these two organisations. Here, I am sure my good friend, hon. Callicurn, the Minister of Labour, Human Resources, Development and Training will agree with me with regard to the new powers being given to EDB to issue work permits and all sorts of permits.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at paragraph 52, page 7 of the Budget Speech, and I quote –

“Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd will have a new mandate to acquire more private agricultural lands with the support of the State Investment Corporation.”

This new mandate is very unbecoming, Mr Speaker, Sir. This reminds me of the SIFB scandal, when following a Private Notice Question last year from hon. Xavier Luc Duval, this scandal came to light and the public and small planters were shocked. Government was cornered and was obliged to set up a Committee of Inquiry and it was revealed that there were purchases of lands well above the market value and to add salt to injury, it was further revealed that evaluation as to the market value of those lands purchased were conducted after the purchase of those lands. I here pause to raise a note of caution and urge the Government to reconsider this move as we all very well know that while creating Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd, special care was taken for it not to fall within the purview of the Public Procurement Act. Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd is not listed as a public body under the Act and, Mr Speaker, Sir, recent work contracts to the tune of Rs400 m. were processed in-house at Landscape and this is the trend of this Government, creating bodies, corporations, agencies, Special Purpose Vehicles in such a way so as to avoid being governed by the Public Procurement Act.

This Budget also does not address the serious problem of governance. Good governance has been relegated to an inferior league, on its own by this Government. My able learned friend, hon. Reza Uteem dwelt on this matter, explaining how there are conflicts of interest with regard to nominations at the FSC and how people are being co-opted without any interview and are asked to work as CEOs in those very important organisations. And the sad fate of an institution like the Bank of Mauritius is a vivid example of the growing appetite of this Government to navigate through its mandate by twisting regulations, juggling dangerously with key institutions like BoM and establishing despotism as the new normal by placing political poodles at key positions.

The malicious amendments slipped into the Covid-19 Act allowing the Bank of Mauritius to depart from traditional policy not only undermines the independence of the Central Bank but also entails both governance as well as compliance issues. With whistle blowers growing attention to financial concerns, an incestuous political relationship between Government and Bank of Mauritius, the distribution of unrealised gains and its impact on accounting practices, audit standards and fiduciary duties of Board of Mauritius Directors are issues of extreme gravity, Mr Speaker, Sir. And we are adding on with the creation of the Mauritius Investment Corporation Ltd. I recently heard the Governor General of the Bank of Mauritius stating that this Corporation will operate in an independent manner and it will be up to the Committee presided by Lord Desai to take the decision where to invest the huge

sum of Rs80 billion. Let me express my serious concern thereon. Because when you read through this Budget, it is clear that the hon. Minister has already decided where and how to invest this money. For example, at page 17 of this Budget, paragraph 123, and I quote –

“To this end, the Mauritius Investment Corporation Ltd will invest in the production of pharmaceutical products, medical devices.”

Paragraph 130, page 18 –

“MIC will invest in joint ventures engaged in fishing activities and its value chain.”

Paragraph 138, page 19 –

“MIC has earmarked Rs10 billion to invest in African projects.”

With those changes brought into the role and function of the BoM, it is high time like it is the case in the United Kingdom that the Bank of Mauritius together with the Mauritius Investment Corporation Ltd should be made to answer before a committee to be set up by Parliament like it is the case for ICAC. Parliament should be able to exert adequate scrutiny on those two organisations in the aftermath of amendments brought to the Board of Mauritius Act and I am sure hon. Ganoo will agree with me because on Radio Plus he said that the MIC will be accountable to Parliament.

A few words on the Judiciary, Mr Speaker, Sir. In last year’s Budget, at paragraph 334, it was announced that there will be new legislations in place for the setting up of a separate Court of Appeal, a Land Division and a Children’s Court. We are still waiting, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, with the coming into operation of a state-of-the-art Supreme Court and the recruitment of more personnel, it is also high time in the spirit of our new normal to legislate and bring on also the creation of a constitutional court, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are a constitutional democracy. Our Constitution is supreme and yet we do not have a constitutional court; for our democracy to work we cannot have cases seeking constitutional relief going through the normal procedures. It is in the best interest of our country for this Government to confirm its legitimacy, if need be, for our democracy that those electoral petitions are heard and determined at the earliest. It is thus imperative for such an important instance to be created. This is the case in many constitutional democracies around the world, Mr Speaker, Sir. Last but not least, what this Government has managed to do is to make the youth of this country lose hope; nothing mentioned to tackle the high rate of youth unemployment. No Master Plan nor any programme for the creation of more green jobs, on the contrary, Mr Speaker, Sir, their scope of earning a decent job will diminish with

foreigners being given all facilities to bring on their entire families to come, live and work in Mauritius without any permits needed any more. I shall thus summarise this Budget Speech by mentioning this commercial partnership with Liverpool football club for the promotion of the Mauritian destination. What a sense of ingenuity to attract tourists to Mauritius. Let us place this decision in the same vein as the decision the hon. Minister and the Government took by inviting foreigners to travel to Mauritius and as incentives to attract them, they will be allowed to purchase more bottles of whiskies and wines when the world was facing a pandemic. This will cost our Liverpool fans and many more other fans of football and Mauritian taxpayers' money almost Rs375 m. that will be taken from our pocket. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. God bless our country!

At 5.13 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.49 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister Hurdoyal!

The Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms (Mr T. Hurdoyal): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me, at the very outset, congratulate my colleague the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, and Development, hon. Dr. Renganaden Padayachy, for presenting this very audacious Budget which contains bold measures for the recovery of the economy.

Moreover, I would like to thank our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, for his support and guidance in the preparation of this budget.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister of Finance has presented a very enterprising budget at a time when the impacts of Covid-19 have led to economic slowdown worldwide and in many sectors of our economy. It is, in fact, a responsible budget, that ushers in an era of hope, and ambitions for years ahead.

Le ministre des Finances a démontré que nous avons la capacité pour venir avec un budget équilibré et que nous ne dépensons pas plus que nous recevons.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is what we call *un budget de Relance de l'Investissement et de l'économie*. Yes, it calls for sacrifices! Sacrifices from all of us! Without the sacrifices, we will be unable to shape a vibrant future for tomorrow! Hearing the Members of the other side of the House, it seems that they have magical powers to bring things back to normal overnight! Let me reassure the population, that my colleague has produced the best that could

be produced in such a time. The Government team will continue to endeavour, to bring the best for everyone.

It is the best, because the 10 critical avenues that will propel our country to the path of sustained growth and development have been stated explicitly: the construction sector, agriculture, tourism, local manufacturing sector, financial services sector, the blue economy, and the pharmaceutical sector, among others. This is the strategy, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that will allow us, to revive the economy!

In spite of unfounded speculations, around the dismantling of our Welfare State, this budget provides, against all odds, for the preservation of our welfare state, and ensures that our citizens continue to benefit from free health care, free education, free transport for senior citizens and students and all other social benefits. Even the end-of-year bonus has also been preserved. The population is indeed relieved that the forecasts of the *prophète de malheur*, who indulge in showing a gloomy picture, have turned out to be wrong.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Covid-19 outbreak took us by storm. Not only us, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, but the whole world was and is still on its knees.

This reminds me of a famous quote from Pierre de Coubertin, and I quote –

“Chaque difficulté rencontrée doit être l’occasion d’un nouveau progrès.”

Nobody was prepared for such an unprecedented calamity, but the stewardship of our Prime Minister, coupled with his agility and dexterity to weather that storm, played a pivotal role to ride out that crisis.

On this side of the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we inspired by the words of Swami Vivekananda who said, and I quote -

“Arise, awake and stop not, until the goal is achieved.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are on the right track, in the journey to overcome the challenges arising out of the pandemic. This budget bears testimony to our unflinching commitment to relaunch our economy and ensure that our population, particularly those at the lower rung of the ladder, is cushioned from the ill effects, of such a calamity.

Despite the attempts of many, who were full of steam but unable to start the machine, they desperately tried, to *mett baton dan laroue, mais la population n’est pas dupe*.

While many advanced countries were desperately, struggling to contain the spread of the pandemic, Mauritius emerged as a role model which was praised by several International Media such as BBC News and others. Several researchers, both local and international, have commended, what has come to be known as, the Mauritian Approach! Here again, I would thank the hon. Prime Minister for taking bold measures at the right time. It is unfortunate that even during such a period, certain Members of this Assembly tried to lure people with their political tunes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the COVID-19 has put to test the resilience and the capability of our public sector to face such a unique event despite the fact that most public officers had to be confined at home. Our front liners in the Health Sector and the Police Department responded admirably and were on duty all throughout the crisis.

We need not forget employees in other sectors who were also performing their work diligently throughout the pandemic. Indeed, many public officers, not serving in essential services, stepped out of the comfort of their houses, risking their life and that of their families to be able to alleviate the hardship others were facing.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to seize this opportunity to pay tribute to all those who demonstrated patience and commitment in serving their country loyally. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have also a special place in my heart for our citizens, 10 in all, who have, unfortunately, left us and could not make it in the face of the vile and invisible enemy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on behalf of my colleagues and the elected Members of Constituency No. 10, I would wish to express my gratitude, towards our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, for his special support, to the people of Montagne Blanche/Grand River South East. In fact, I have a dream for the people of Montagne Blanche and that dream is being realised, thanks to our Prime Minister. The inhabitants were delighted to learn that this Government will construct a Multipurpose Complex in that village.

Additionally, I would fail in my duty if I do not mention the construction of a market fair, and a Mediclinic at Bel Air Rivière Sèche, which have been possible thanks to the support of our Prime Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the budget allocated for the construction of the East Coast Trunk Road, will play a pivotal role in the development and accessibility of the Eastern region. This road, also known as the M4, will be linking Forbach to the Airport via Bel Air. I am glad that the Phase 1 will be linking Bel Air to Pont Blanc on a 15km route to avoid

congestion at Flacq. This, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will minimise the time needed to reach the northern parts of the island whilst significantly reducing traffic.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am humbled to note that at paragraph 206 of the Budget Speech, my colleague, the Minister of Finance, has mentioned that we rely on our public sector to relaunch the economy. Let me thank all my brothers and sisters of the Public Service family who have worked wholeheartedly.

As Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms, I pledge my utmost commitment and my unflinching support in ensuring that the public service continues to play its role in supporting the recovery process.

In fact, an Implementation Plan of the main measures of the budget will be published and the hon. Prime Minister will personally chair a High-Level Committee to monitor the implementation of those measures.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, during the lockdown, Government focused its effort to alleviate difficulties faced by the most vulnerable families.

For our elders, it was imperative that they do not face any financial difficulties, and more particularly some 56,000 old age pensioners, who due to the confinement, could not collect their monthly basic retirement pension, from the Post offices around the island.

It is a major pride, for this Government, that all fifty-six thousand (56,000) old age pensioners were paid their benefits *in toto* and safely at their doorstep, over less than two weeks. Furthermore, this exercise was successfully done twice during the confinement.

The closing down of all shops, supermarkets and other retail shops during the confinement period meant an irregular supply of foodstuffs for many families. The challenge was to be able to provide food packs to not less than thirty-five thousand (35,000) vulnerable families who were on the Social Register of Mauritius, or beneficiaries of Carer's allowance, basic invalidity pension or residents of homes. This Government, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, was able to meet up this challenge!

The response of public officers was admirable. In a short time span, public officers, with the support of NGOs, were mobilised from diverse public organisations, even though they were not directly related to poverty alleviation. An efficient supply chain was built, from scratch, to ensure delivery of all food packs under appropriate safe sanitary conditions.

M. le président, je voudrais ici citer l'écrivain, Phyllis Bottome -

“Il y a deux façons de gérer les difficultés: les modifier ou s’adapter à elles.”

The more we progressed in our understanding of the pandemic and the outcomes of strategies put up in foreign countries, the more it became clear that the confinement period was going to be lengthy. This implied that many private companies and self-employed would be facing major difficulties to maintain a payroll due to lack of revenue.

To that end, among the key economic operators, to limit the human and economic impact, Government disbursed, under the Wage Assistance scheme, a sum of Rs6.8 billion for the months of March to May to some 263,000 employees, and, for the informal sector, this Government provided financial support to some 175,000 persons to a total funding of Rs2.3 billion Rupees, through the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme.

I would wish to lay emphasis not only on the sum disbursed, but on the methods deployed by public officers through technology and direct contact with applicants to ensure a rapid disbursement of funds.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, every year, Government ensures, that our elders are safeguarded against influenza and this year, it was primordial that this safeguard is maintained. We have witnessed, for the first time in the history of Mauritius, thanks to this Government, that some 130,000 citizens were vaccinated across the island at their very doorstep. This was not only for the good health of the beneficiary, but to ensure that there was no additional pressure put onto our health services.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government had in its last mandate, extended the facilities of a monthly visit of a doctor to those vulnerable persons, who are bed-ridden and disabled, by lowering the eligibility age from 75 years old to 60 years old.

With this Budget, Government has gone a step further to consolidate its support towards the most vulnerable in society; the monthly medical visit facility is being extended to those aged 18 and above. This will not only help alleviate the hardship, to access medical support faced by these beneficiaries, but also ensure better proximity of Government in terms of support to these families.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are major changes that are taking place in the international environment, and the public service is not shielded from the onslaught of such upheavals. Nevertheless, my colleague, hon. Dr. Padayachy, has further reinforced that caring attitude, which has been nurtured by the hon. Prime Minister. I would like to commend him

for maintaining the Basic Retirement pension, of an amount of Rs9,000, to all individuals as from the age of 60 and above, despite such adversity.

This 2020/2021 Budget, and the policy measures that have been enumerated by the Minister of Finance, have indeed, paved the way for us to not only embrace the future, but to shape it as well; to foster an inclusive society, without discrimination or distinction and to re-design the contours of our socio-economic development.

In the same line, those at the lower rung of the ladder have also been taken care of through the “*Contribution Sociale Generalisée*”.

In addition, employees of the informal sector will now have the opportunity to contribute to the new scheme through the Service Employment Cheque.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, consideration has also been given to provide assistance to our citizens through a housing scheme, which will not only be beneficial to the needy families but will also cover low and middle income families. I would like, to point out that 12,000 housing units will be constructed over the next three years.

Furthermore, the basic necessity, which is common in all households, has also been catered for in this budget. The price of a 12 kg cylinder which is currently Rs210 has been reduced to Rs180. Such a measure, will definitely, bring comfort to low-income families and the vulnerable ones.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a nation is judged by the way it treats its children with special education needs. As far as I know, no other government has ever increased the annual per capita grant for SEN students for teaching aids, utilities, furniture and equipment by fourfold! Only this Government can do it and has done it!

That’s not all, SEN students, at all levels including primary, secondary and tertiary education, will benefit from taxi fares. We don’t just say that we want an inclusive society; we are working hard to make the Republic of Mauritius an inclusive society and the proof is evident!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government is likewise committed to extend its support to SMEs which reflects its direction towards an inclusive economy and society. In this line, loans will be granted to SMEs at a nominal rate of 0.5 % per annum, which will apply to women entrepreneurs as well.

This measure will certainly bring relief to enterprises and motivate them to engage themselves in promoting their creativity and entrepreneurship as well as propel more women in the forefront as an active player in contributing to the country's economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I don't agree to what hon. Khushal Lobine said earlier in his speech stating that the youth of Mauritius is losing hope. I will say the future of our next generation will be brighter.

As a young Minister, I make an earnest appeal to the youth of this country to take advantage of all those schemes and incentives that are being provided in this Budget to start up their enterprise and to stand on their own feet. In addition, Government has not remained insensitive to the fact that our country is facing a precarious time, which is giving rise to doubts among employees, who have been affected by the down-turn and fear for not being able to fend for their families. In such circumstances, Government will make necessary arrangements to continue with the provision of monetary assistance of a monthly amount of Rs5,100 to redundant workers for this calendar year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government is fully aware of the negative impact that the pandemic has had on those who earn their livelihood at sea. In this context, I am pleased to note that the daily rate of the bad weather allowance to fishermen which was previously Rs365 will be Rs425.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the pandemic has made the country realise how crucial it is to ensure self-sufficiency and food security. In this respect, Government is coming up with an innovative plan to give a boost to the agricultural sector. The necessary financial resources are being provided in this Budget together with measures for the optimisation of agricultural land use, so that the country becomes more independent in the future in terms of food requirements for the population.

The National Agri-Food Development Programme will ensure our need for food security whilst reducing our dependency on imports. To meet that objective, the Government is conscious that more acres of land should be made available for exploitation for agricultural purposes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a Land Bank of State and Private Agricultural Land will therefore be set up under the aegis of Landscape Mauritius Limited and will be accessible to the public at large. Some 20,000 acres of abandoned land will be listed on the platform for immediate exploitation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Government will ensure that small planters are given additional technical support and other financial assistance so that they can participate fully to the National Agri-Food Development Programme.

We are confident, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the series of measures enumerated above and those mentioned in the budget will yield the desired result of boosting the agricultural sector and set the country right on target for achieving the objective of food security in the near future.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in order to ensure a sustainable environment, I am pleased to note that significant investments have been made in the budget to address environmental challenges so that the Republic of Mauritius becomes a cleaner, greener, sustainable, low emission and climate resilient country.

There is not an iota of doubt, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the people of the Republic of Mauritius will appreciate that these measures will have a deep impact on their standard and quality of life and contribute enormously to their physical and mental well-being.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, investing on innovative and high-tech industries as an engine of economic growth is a laudable ambition which will gear up our country towards a swift recovery by attracting foreign direct investment and creating jobs. I am, therefore, pleased to note at paragraph 117 of the Budget Speech, of the setting up of a Data Technology Park at Côte d'Or.

This bold strategy reminds me of the decision a previous Government led by Sir Anerood Jugnauth, the then Prime Minister, in the setting up of the Cyber City in Ebène.

This iconic place is now a bustling city, which has radically changed the economic landscape of our country, by contributing to make the ICT/ BPO Sector a major contributor of our Gross Domestic Product.

The contours of the Côte d'Or high-tech project is a testimony, to our collective resolve in our endeavour to bounce back from adversity, to offering high value-added ICT and BPO services, such as cloud services, Artificial Intelligence, blockchain to name a few, and thus sharpening the competitive advantage of our country.

Furthermore, positioning Mauritius as a preferred ICT BPO destination also resides, in our success to make our country a free Covid-19 zone by being capable to ride out the

spread of the pandemic. Mauritius already enjoys a reputation of a world class IT and telecommunications infrastructure.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, indeed, the public sector has been instrumental in ensuring that every sector of the economy could respond in a timely and effective manner to the needs of the population during the period of sanitary curfew.

By being at the forefront of innovative technologies such as video conferencing, data analytics and collaborative platforms, my Ministry was able to provide the necessary directives, guidance and support across the Public Service.

By building on the positive experience, gathered during the lockdown period, my Ministry has developed a comprehensive Work-from-Home scheme, which will become a game changer by contributing to improve efficiency, promote social distancing and improve on work-life balance.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to further promote the adoption of technology and innovation in the Public Service, I am pleased to note that budget provisions have been made for a consultancy project to develop a business continuity plan and by leveraging on innovative technologies.

Such initiative will create the right platform to embrace whole-of-Government digital platforms such as the Electronic Document Management System Project along with other whole-of-Government projects.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an eye-opener for revisiting the educational landscape by taking advantage of innovative pedagogical digital platform which focusses on a student-centric approach in the process of teaching and learning. In this context, this budget makes provision of no less than Rs100 m. for the establishment of online educational platform for the educational community.

With the emergence of a new model, the public service will be citizen- centric. I am confident that public institutions will become more resilient and better equipped to face similar situations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am also extremely pleased to note that Government is on the right path, towards reforming and reviewing institutions of the public sector, which have outlived their purpose. In this context, the Mauritius Digital Transformation Agency, which will operate under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office, will be a key institution in

accelerating the Business Transformation of the public sector, through the adoption of innovative technologies and smart processes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that without exploitation of digital transformation tools and innovative technologies, successfully conquering over the pandemic would not have been possible. My Ministry had introduced earlier this year a new SMS-based communication platform. This platform has enabled my Ministry to communicate with and sensitise the public officials, instantly, of any important matter and Government decisions. As such, on 11 occasions SMS have been sent to 45,000 recipients during the past three months.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, besides the mandatory adoption of the e-Procurement platform as highlighted in the Budget Speech will significantly contribute to reducing the procurement cycle, improve transparency and accountability, and provide more opportunities to our local firms and SMEs, to tap from the Government procurement opportunities.

These measures will undeniably contribute to catalyse socio-economic progress and improve our international ranking in the ease of doing business as classified by the World Bank.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with a view to ensuring that innovative technologies are at the centre of public service delivery, the Procurement Policy Office will issue directives to public bodies in regard to the procurement of innovative solution following its successful adoption through a sandbox framework.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have been able to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, it's time to control public expenditure to tide over the economic crisis.

Processes and procedures in the public service will have to be reviewed to cope with existing staff as all vacancies have been frozen. Regarding vacancies in the essential sectors, a high-level Committee chaired by the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service and comprising representatives of the Ministry of Finance and my Ministry, has been set up to examine requests for filling of positions on a case to case basis.

The minimum wage, coupled with the decision to maintain the PRB interim allowance of Rs1,000 will relieve workers in the short and medium terms. These measures will boost spending in the economy which will trigger growth.

Accumulation of sick leaves and passage benefits is being maintained. In the late 70s and early 80s, passage benefits were paid only for medical treatment overseas. The limitation

used of passage benefits for the local tourism and travelling abroad will help to boost the tourism sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the COVID-19 pandemic has to a large extent transform the way we function as a society.

Government is fully concerned about the safety, health and well-being of its citizens, including public officers and with a view to ensuring that all safety measures are put in place for the resumption of work.

Safety and Health Officers of Ministry have effected no less than 1,008 visits in all Ministries and Departments to ensure that measures such as cleanliness, disinfection of workplace, basic personal hygiene and provision of hand sanitizers have been catered for.

With a view for creating a conducive work environment to inspire and improve the morale of Public Officers, my Ministry has pursued with “Enhancement of Work Environment Programme”, commonly known as EWEP which has considerably contributed in upgrading and modernising the physical and structural layouts of several workplaces across the Public Service.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as a caring government, our top-most priority has always geared towards the continued protection of public health, and the Government has come forward with appropriate measures in this budget, to ensure availability of hygienic locally made goods, such as sanitizers, PPEs, masks, hand-wash, and medical devices for the protection, of each and every citizen of this country.

To this effect, Investment Support Programme Ltd. has been mandated through this Budget, to financially support local enterprises in the manufacture of these hygienic products, as well as to promote sustainable development.

Moreover, MIC will invest in the production of pharmaceutical products, medical devices and personal protective equipment, through the public-private enterprise.

This will, in no doubt, boost up the emergence of enterprises, thus creating more jobs, and supplying the local market with products, at a competitive and affordable price for our citizens and why not exporting same to the region.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the new normal is forcing a re-thinking on the way we conduct welfare activities. Over the past years, the Public Officers Welfare Council, which is under the purview of my Ministry, has diversified its welfare activities, such as the *Kermesse*,

Football tournament, Tours abroad, stay in hotels, *Zumba* classes, among others, which are very popular among public officers.

The POWC has already started revisiting its whole welfare strategy, which will have to be more respectful of, and responsible towards prevailing sanitary conditions. This will be an opportunity to step into a new era of online activities, and other such possibilities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as recommended by the Pay Research Bureau in its various reports, training is being dispensed to Public Officers at various levels by the Civil Service College, Mauritius. The college which became operational in November 2015 has, as at date, provided training to some 34,158 Public Officers.

Furthermore, during the confinement period, the Civil Service College Mauritius has been dispensing online training to public officers, one of the main topics being “Stress Management”. I am informed that 1,624 public officers have followed courses on the E-Learning System during the confinement. The college has planned to dispense online training, to an additional 8,000 public officers in the coming months.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Civil Service College is currently housed in a rented building and has limited physical facilities to respond to the training needs of all public officers. There is, therefore, a need for a more conducive and congenial environment, for dispensing training to our public officers.

During the State visit of our Prime Minister to India, in May 2017, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed, between the two Governments which provided that the Government of India would finance the construction of a Civil Service College for Mauritius in the form of a grant, to the tune of 4.74 m. US Dollar.

In this context, a plot of land of an extent of 09 Acres 13 perches has already been identified for the project at Le Réduit, and the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning is currently finalising the vesting of the land in my Ministry.

In February 2020, NBCC (India) Ltd was appointed, as Consultant for the project and as at to date, the consultant has already prepared the Master Plan, Inception and Preliminary design which have been approved by my Ministry.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the consultant is currently preparing the working drawings and bid document for the project. It is planned that the contract for the construction of the college be awarded in October and the project be completed within 15 months. An amount of

Rs60 m. has been provided in the 2020/2021 Budget for the Civil Service College project which will be used for payment to the contractor on signature of contract and also for work in progress.

M. le président, nous avons pu maîtriser la pandémie du COVID-19, grâce à la collaboration de la population et l'intervention des autorités sous le leadership éclairé du Premier ministre.

Ensemble, je suis certain que nous allons maintenant surmonter la crise économique qui en résulte. Avec la vision du Premier ministre, nous veillerons à ce que notre pays reste une île prospérée.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, citizens from all walks of life have been taken on board in this budget.

La philosophie du budget est *All lives matter*. Nous allons offrir à chaque Mauricien l'opportunité de s'épanouir et de contribuer aux développements du pays.

Pour conclure, je voudrais citer le grand écrivain, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry –

« Un pessimiste fait de ses occasions des difficultés, et un optimiste fait de ses difficultés des occasions »

Et M. le président, nous sommes des optimistes!

Merci pour votre attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(6.29 p.m.)

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to speak tonight.

Nous nouveau la vie. « Notre Nouvelle Normalité : L'Economie de la Vie » is this year's Budget title. When I hear hon. Hurdoyal talk about '*mett baton dan la roue*', I say this is not *nouveau*. No one is here to *mett baton dans la roue*. We are all here as patriots, elected to do our duty to safeguard the interest of the people of this country. The people of Mauritius have voted for us to represent them here in this august Assembly. It is in this spirit that I express my wish that life post-COVID-19 will not be as hard as the majority of the countries in the world expected to be. I have listened to the hon. Minister of Finance inside the House

and outside the House and I have a number of questions that people put to me - *les gens de ma circonscription, entre autres* - which I do not find answered in his lengthy discourse. This Coronavirus has taken a heavy toll not only on the lives of our people, and here, I wish to express my sincere sympathies and condolences to those who have fallen and to their families. The virus has affected the health of our people, our people's ability to stay into jobs and thus earn a living.

As we speak, 1,043 jobs in the tourism, textile, manufacturing, commerce are at stake. *946 employés de trop, 397 employés en congé sans solde. Ce n'est que la première vague de demande de licenciement auprès du Redundancy Board.* The people I meet outside have asked me many questions about their future and the future of their families, yet, I do not find many of these issues addressed in this Budget from a Minister not only responsible to balance the books today, but for planning, for reshaping the future of this country. As I speak, our borders are still closed, and here, I wish to once again mention how sorry I feel for all the Mauritians who are still stranded overseas. I have been in contact with many of them and I know how much they have suffered and many still are. I hope they will be back among us very soon.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is also a fact that many countries have started recording a daily increase in the number of Coronavirus cases, stocking fears of a second wave of outbreak. The global truth is that we may never escape this virus and there will be certainly more threats around the corner for which we need to plan great resilience. Sadly, this is not addressed in the Budget, which seems hardly to recognise there is a future corner to look around. Resilience demands that we open our borders to foreigners again, which has a definite bearing on our economy and on the Budget itself, but opening up will have to be accompanied with a new protocol which is well defined to protect our people until the time we have a vaccine and to provide protection against the next global health threat for which we must be better prepared. I, for one believe that for every disease, God eventually send us its cure, but he has also endowed us with the responsibility to seek those solutions ourselves. I don't quite see how this Budget will protect our health from a second wave of the Coronavirus if ever there is one, which I hope there isn't. What I see, there is a provision to cover exceptional expenditure in connection with COVID-19 pandemic as part of Rs2 billion of the National Environment Fund, the rational of which I don't quite fully understand as yet, but I look forward to the details in the forthcoming Supplementary Appropriation Bill on the National Environment Fund.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me know address more specifically some of the measures mentioned in the Budget discourse.

At paragraph 21 (c) of his Speech, the hon. Minister has mentioned Sustainable and Inclusive Development as the new normal of the economy of life. I wonder what is new here. ‘*Gouvernement Lepep*’, as it was called in 2015, decided, in January 2015, to dissolve *Maurice île Durable* Project on which I worked from 2009 to 2014 at the Prime Minister’s Office before entering politics, therefore in a past recent life.

The mandate of the *Maurice île Durable* Commission - to remind - was to coordinate the implementation of sustainable development across key sectors of the economy. The Commission was dissolved and it was integrated with the Ministry of Environment and this was deemed also a new normal at the material time, but when we see what is happening to our country, there don’t seem to have been any sustainable development at all for the last five years. Sustainable development is about the balance between the care for the environment, economic growth and social welfare.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me take some issues because there is time constraint. I will take one by one the three pillars of sustainable development and I will start with environment first. Over the last five years, between 2015 and 2019, the Ministry of Environment has become a sort of a garage to park Ministers, three Ministers, and the three have not been candidates at the last general election; we know who they are. And who are the greatest losers in all this: the people of Mauritius, their quality of life, the national economy and our hitherto fame, luxuriant, natural environment. This is a great concern to many people because the quality of our ecology affects both the quality of life and this deeply affects the Tourism Industry as well, which had already started to decline before COVID-19 became a priority. And this should not be allowed to mask the fundamental environmental crisis we face, the looming climate change, the increase risk of sea level rise, beach erosion and more frequent and intense national disasters, heat waves and droughts; all these are threats we are facing.

Sustainable development does not mean construction which is now presented as a pillar in this Budget from shore to shore. The new normal must be a new balance in which the environment is valued as a national asset and we invest to preserve and protect it in our own interest. So, let me remind, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, about the core issues for the pursuit of sustainable development which some seems to have forgotten or ignored over the last five

years. We all remember what the headlines have been, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir: « *De Maurice île durable à Maurice île poubelle, l'île Maurice est sale ; Maurice n'a plus le panache d'avant à cause de la dégradation environnementale. L'environnement physique de nos îles, plages et lagons a subi des dégradations importantes* ». Who does not remember what Mr Jocelyn Kwok, *directeur de l'AHRIM* has been warning us since May 2019, a year ago. And he said, I quote –

“Notre tourisme ne va pas très bien en ce moment.”

That was a year ago. So, it is not just a lack of airlines that are keeping people away. It is the lack of confidence in Mauritius as land where nature is protected and cherished. The global perception of trust in our over vaunted natural brand has been tarnished, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Therefore, it is not COVID-19 that has brought the decline to the Tourism Industry of Mauritius last year. Whilst at the same time, the Tourism Industry was doing so well in the Maldives and in the Seychelles, the downfall of the Tourism Industry is due to mismanagement and lack of vision. The question is: can people place their trust in the Government to protect and preserve our natural environment for the future?

Before I switch from Environment to Economic Pillar, I would like to have a word on renewable energy. It is high time that the 29 megawatts wind farm at Plaine Sophie be constructed. This project was originally supposed to be commissioned in May 2015. Several extensions later, five years later, I have set many questions on this in Parliament. And I am taking this project specifically because 29 Megawatts of Wind Farm at Plaine Sophie is a sizeable project, which is needed if the Government wants to achieve the 40% of renewable energy by 2030, as enunciated in the Budget Speech.

As regards economy pillar, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have an immediate question: where is fiscal sustainability in this Budget? It is a fact that the Bank of Mauritius, the regulator, the banker of bankers, certainly not the banker of Government has stepped in and has put at the disposal of Government a whooping first time, ever historical Rs158 billion to fund this budget and small amounts coming from grants and loans, and from windfall gains and so forth. But what about next year, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? There is money this year, but there is no foreseen sustainable development. The question again, is: can the people place their trust in the Government to protect their livelihoods for the future? Sustainable development after all is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on the other hand, there seems to be a disparity between the direction the Government wants to go with regard to taxation. The 25% solidarity levy will apply to all Mauritians – it has been said in the morning – and not to expats. Why is that so? What kind of message does the Government want to send to the diaspora and to their parents who have invested massively in the education of their children and the prospect of them coming back to motherland and to put their competencies at the disposal of the country? To me, this is the perfect recipe for brain drain at a time the country needs our brains the most. The question again, is: can the people place their trust in the Government to protect the interest of Mauritian families in the future? Again, the keyword here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is future. We are talking about sustainable development future generations. The hon. Minister of Finance has mentioned one of the key drivers of the *Plan de reliance et de l'économie* to be the construction sector. Much has been said about the troubles of Spain and Dubai with regard to their buildings and infrastructures. But what is the situation here in Mauritius? Let me take the private sector first. Foreign clients who have already signed up for real estate development under the Property Development Scheme (PDS) are asking for rebates, given that the value of their investments has already dropped after COVID-19. I was speaking to one real estate developer while writing my speech, and he said that clients are asking for huge reduction, even though firm contracts have already been signed. In one case, the reduction asked for a PDS was from Rs30 m. to Rs19.5 m., and the developer will have no choice than to accept otherwise the client will back out. The question again, is: can business people place their trust in the Government to protect their investments in the future? As regard to construction in the public sector, there are two points which I would like to raise tonight, Mr Deputy Speaker. The first one has to do with the proposition to release retention money, a sort of guarantee to protect the interest of the client, in this case Government, and the proposition is to release retention money after six months instead of 12 months, like the case is now for Government's projects of up to Rs300 m., which is about the contract size of the Decaen Flyover, where cracks have started to occur after six months after the handing over, if I am not mistaken. Hon. Bodha is here, he was then Minister of Public Infrastructure and he will correct me if I am wrong. About the six/seven months, the cracks have started to occur in the Decaen Flyover. For a flyover, road project and other civil works, any engineer would want the handed over project to fully pass the weather spectrum of winter, summer, cyclonic and splash flood windows before releasing the money, and that spectrum we can only have it over a year. Just imagine, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, had the retention money for the Decaen Flyover be released after six months, who would have had to foot the bill of the

repair of the cracks? Most definitely the taxpayers! With this proposition to release retention money for Government contracts within six months instead of twelve months, I put the question: in whose interest is the Government working?

My second point regarding construction is the proposed Côte d'Or Technology Park. I wonder why the Data park cannot be host in the unutilised building along the Motorway, which we all see when we travel there - in Rose Belle Business Park, so far, for more than a decade, a white elephant. But is there any thought to economise, as every Mauritian has to when money is scarce and debt has so mounted? Is this part of the so-called economy of life? It is high time that the country starts to do some real thinking and planning so as to optimise on resources and avoid wastages.

Le gaspillage et la dette publique ! M. le président, le directeur de l'audit est allé plus loin dans son dernier rapport en dénonçant le fait que pour les trois dernières années financières, le gouvernement a littéralement vécu à crédit. Alors, comment expliquer que, dans son discours, le ministre des Finances ne parle pas du gaspillage et du niveau de la dette publique ?

Is it because the level of public debt has soared so much because of the depreciation of the Mauritian Rupee vis-à-vis the US Dollar, when we know that quite a bit of our national debt is in dollar? The question again, is: can people place their trust in the Government to cut out waste and promote efficiency, when, at such a critical moment in financial planning, the Minister of Finance is totally silent on the Director of Audit's recent well-researched recommendation to correct gross waste and mismanagement?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I now move to the third pillar of sustainable development and the social pillar. Rs1 today is worth 79 cents of our Rupee in December 2014. This Government's ambition was to make of Mauritius a high-income country. In 2018, our GDP per capita was 11,238 US Dollars. I wonder what the GDP per capita is today with that kind of rapid depreciation of the Rupee. At best, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, GDP per capita has remained stagnant and at worst it has surely declined. And the consequence of this is that the people of this country are getting poorer and poorer when they were promised to be richer, not poorer. I fear that the middle class in Mauritius will shrink and we will be sadly left with two classes of people: *les riches et les pauvres*.

En parlant des pauvres, c'est navrant que l'honorable ministre des Finances n'a pas trouvé nécessaire, ne serait-ce qu'une seule fois de mentionner dans son discours le Plan

Marshall contre la pauvreté. On ne l'entend plus maintenant : le Plan Marshall contre la pauvreté. C'est navrant car c'est la brûlante question que mes mandants me posent.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in regard to needy families, I wish to mention one problem that spouses of Mauritians holding residence permits perpetually face when they seek for public service, an example being treatment at public hospital. Their problem is that they have to pay their full bills. The day before Eid this year, a young father, who is married to an Indian citizen, had all the trouble in the world to bring his wife and new born baby back home because he did not have the means to settle his bill of Rs31,000 incurred for his wife's delivery. This is because the wife has not yet obtained her citizenship and was thus not entitled to free healthcare although she had given birth to a Mauritian whose father is also a Mauritian. When the father, a constituent of mine, called me up on that Saturday afternoon, he was panicky. Fortunately, a payment schedule was agreed to on that day itself, otherwise the family would have found itself in a catch-22 situation because if they were not released from hospital, their bill would have kept on increasing with each passing day. I thought this Budget would have addressed this issue, but it sadly did not. The Budget exercise however makes provision for other facilities, lavish facilities, to foreigners wanting to work and invest in Mauritius as per paragraph 205 of the Budget Speech. My plea today is for the hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Minister of Health and the hon. Minister of Finance to make an effort so as to amend the pertinent regulations in order to be fairer to Mauritians whose spouses are holders of resident permits to benefit from the facilities as the Mauritians, including free medical healthcare at the public health institutions. This will go a long way in addressing a longstanding injustice.

A quick few points before I conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Recently, I raised the issue of garbage collectors, *les éboueurs*, not provided with the proper masks; they were given tetron masks, made of tetron. Now, they are provided with KN95 masks. So, I have become their good friends. Many of them have called me after the presentation of the Budget, asking me the same question that many MPs have raised before: why don't they benefit from the Rs15,000 bonuses, them, who have kept our country clean and tidy all along the COVID-19 pandemic. And the same question applies to other front liners as well.

Much has been said about the number and types of social housing. I wonder whether the threshold of Rs10,000, which came about before the introduction of the minimum wage is not outdated and that should not be raised. Should it be Rs10,000 or more because the cost of living has increased and in the prices in the shops have height as well.

So, as a matter of fact - we are talking about prices of commodities - the Rs30 reduction on the gas cylinder has been absorbed by the increase in the price of milk. The pack of one kilo of milk has gone up by more than Rs30 in the recent days. So, I do believe that this Rs10,000 threshold should be relooked at, otherwise a lot of people deserving social housing will be excluded from the first tranche of the facilities being offered.

Because of time constraint, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I shall have this much on the social pillar and I shall conclude by saying that as an officer, as a professional who has handled the sustainable development dossier, the more I look at the Budget statement, and it is claimed to be the foundation for sustainable development, the more I fear it is merely a house of cards. The big issue today is whether the questions I have raised about the interest of the people here, *le citoyen*, about safeguarding their future insofar as the environmental, economic and social landscapes ignored in this Budget, can be addressed by this Government which does not seem to have this as a priority.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister Ramano!

(6.55 p.m.)

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): Merci, M. le président, de me donner la possibilité d'intervenir dans le débat budgétaire de ce jour.

M. le président, à entendre l'honorable Osman Mahomed, on se croirait en pleine campagne électorale. L'honorable membre, c'est quelqu'un que j'apprécie bien. Il nous a toujours gratifiés de questions documentées mais là j'ai l'impression que c'est la politique politicienne qui semble avoir pris le dessus. Mais je dois quand même lui rappeler quelques points saillants lorsqu'il parle de Maurice Ile Durable, du *climate change*, du *sustainable development*. Permettez-moi de lui rappeler trois endroits chers aux Mauriciens : la plage de Trou Aux Biches, la Route Côtière a été déviée pour favoriser l'hôtel Tarisa. Permettez-moi de lui rappeler la plage de Trou Aux Biches, gracement donnée au Pandit Sungkur. Permettez-moi aussi de rappeler l'accaparement de l'Îlot Gabriel. Ces trois plages, ce sont trois symboles du PTR et du PMSD. L'accaparement de l'Îlot Gabriel pour nourrir des petits coqs.

M. le président, revenons aux choses sérieuses. M. le président, les élections générales sont bel et bien terminées. Les élections générales sont derrière nous. Le peuple a choisi une

équipe pour diriger le pays. Une fois les élections terminées, le temps n'est plus au rapport de force, le temps est à l'action, le temps est à la gouvernance, le temps est à la mise en action des mesures fortes pour gouverner le pays.

M. le président, gouverner le pays c'est prendre des mesures courageuses, gouverner un pays ce n'est surtout pas être populaire à n'importe quel prix, gouverner un pays, c'est avoir le courage et la conviction de prendre des mesures des fois impopulaires mais salutaires pour le pays. M. le président, c'est à ce prix-là qu'on reconnaît les hommes d'État, savoir trancher dans le vif, c'est cela l'ADN des hommes d'État et je suis fier de faire partie de cette équipe gouvernementale.

Ce n'est pas l'heure de se soucier de sa popularité, c'est l'heure de prendre des mesures fortes, courageuses pour le bien de la collectivité, pour le bien de l'ensemble du pays. M. le président, sachons distinguer une chose, sachons distinguer l'intérêt particulier de l'intérêt collectif. Jean Jacques Rousseau dans son contrat social définit les intérêts particuliers comme l'ensemble des buts qu'un acteur social se propose pour son bonheur personnel. L'intérêt général lui renvoie à la collectivité, ce qui contraint l'homme à renoncer à certains de ses propres intérêts au profit de la communauté. Quand chacun ne voyant que ses propres buts, le peuple est réduit à un agrégat d'individus. L'intérêt collectif n'est pas la somme des intérêts particuliers, l'intérêt collectif, M. le président, c'est la reconnaissance des valeurs universelles qui gouverne l'être humain. M. le président, c'est à ce prix-là qu'un pays, qu'une nation sortira d'une crise pour prospérer et garantir la paix sociale. Pour l'ensemble du pays, c'est cela la priorité. *Le roadmap* d'un gouvernement responsable.

M. le président, la récession qui nous guette, l'inflation, la perte du pouvoir d'achat, le chômage qui rôde, le virus Covid-19 ou sa forme mutante dans quelques mois, ne se soucie guère de votre appartenance politique, de votre couleur, de votre race, de votre sexe, de votre communauté. Ils frapperont indistinctement tous les Mauriciens. Il nous appartient en tant que gouvernement responsable de prendre des décisions pour l'ensemble de la collectivité, pour l'ensemble des mauriciens. L'heure n'est pas non plus à l'opportunisme politique. L'histoire se souviendra aussi qu'un groupe de députés d'un parti de l'opposition, par pure opportunisme politique, ont voulu faire pression sur le gouvernement dans une période de grave crise sanitaire pour l'ouverture des lieux de cultes spécifiques, avec le danger que cela représente pour leurs propres membres et pour le pays. Avec la fin du couvre-feu sanitaire, le gouvernement a tout lieu d'être fier et satisfait d'avoir œuvré pour l'intérêt général, l'intérêt de la collectivité. Aujourd'hui, tous les lieux de culte de toutes les religions sont ouverts en

toute sécurité. Le libre exercice des cultes, la liberté religieuse est plus que jamais garantie par ce gouvernement, M. le président.

M. le président, dans cette même ligne de pensée, il convient de condamner toute forme de populisme. La démagogie à son apogée. L'humanité, les plus grandes démocraties du monde, ont un ennemi commun; le populisme. C'est précisément pendant les périodes de crises que des individus profitent de la misère, profitent de la crise économique pour exacerber et manipuler les frustrations des uns et des autres, jouer sur la peur des gens, caresser la bête dans le sens du poil, même s'ils savent pertinemment bien qu'on va à l'encontre des procédures, à l'encontre de la collectivité, à l'encontre des intérêts du pays, à l'encontre de l'harmonie sociale du pays.

M. le président, ce gouvernement dirigé par Pravind Jugnauth, a à son actif des mesures fortes de protection sociale, la pension de vieillesse, le *minimum salary*, le contrôle de prix des produits de base, le *Wage Assistance Scheme*. Le présent budget dresse toute une panoplie de mesures en faveur des vulnérables de la société. La seule condition, M. le président, c'est le respect des procédures, le respect des hommes et des femmes qui s'arment de patience, de civisme, de respect de la règle et de la loi.

Je souhaite ici exprimer toute ma satisfaction et ma fierté de faire partie d'une équipe qui partage les mêmes valeurs envers les économiquement faibles et les mêmes valeurs pour le respect de la démocratie - une équipe composée d'hommes et de femmes qui ont un parcours politique fait sans compromis envers les valeurs de justice sociale, de la démocratie et de la consolidation du mauricianisme.

Je souhaite ici haut et fort exprimer tout mon soutien à notre camarade Steeve Obeegadoo, ministre du Logement et des Terres. De par son parcours politique, il n'a rien à prouver de sa soif de justice pour les personnes se trouvant au bas de l'échelle. Certaines personnes peuvent discuter du *timing* de certaines actions, mais le fait demeure que nous sommes dans un état de droit, qu'un vaste chantier de construction est annoncé pour les bas-salaires et la classe moyenne. Un accompagnement et une enquête sociale sont en cours, même pour ceux qui n'ont pas respecté les procédures.

M. le président, ce gouvernement n'a aucune leçon à recevoir, surtout de ceux de l'Opposition qui étaient au pouvoir pendant de nombreuses années sous plusieurs gouvernements. Ils étaient même à la tête de différents ministères où ils avaient la possibilité d'œuvrer pour les vulnérables de la société. Ils étaient même à la tête du *Select*

Committee suivant le rapport du *Truth and Justice Committee* - leur piètre bilan envers ceux touchés par la misère est indéniable, M. le président.

La pandémie nous interpelle. Le social, la politique, l'économie seront un non-sens, M. le président, sans considérer tous les facteurs présentés par le budget. Cette nouvelle normalité, M. le président, fait émerger un point central qui, à mon avis, est loin d'être un débat idéologique, mais bien un débat de survie politique et économique. Quel doit être le rôle du gouvernement et quel doit être le rôle du secteur privé? Jusqu'où peut aller l'interventionnisme du gouvernement sans que le privé puisse crier au loup dans cette économie de marché. L'île Maurice n'échappera pas à ce débat.

Mais, M. le président, dans ce débat, je tiens ici à citer et à rendre hommage à notre service hospitalier public qui a été à la hauteur dans cette lutte contre le Covid-19. L'interventionnisme étatique est plus que jamais reconnu dans nos services essentiels : un service de quarantaine gratuit, un service hospitalier, des *food packs*, la vaccination de masse. Le gouvernement est intervenu aussi pour stabiliser le marché financier, le gouvernement est aussi intervenu avec le *Wage Assistance Scheme* et là, le gouvernement accompagnera le privé surtout dans le secteur manufacturier et le tourisme.

Les banques centrales européennes et la banque fédérale américaine interviennent ces jours-ci massivement pour protéger les entreprises face à la récession et préserver l'emploi. Il n'y a rien de sorcier de ce que fait actuellement la Banque de Maurice.

La main invisible d'Adam Smith est insuffisante pour stabiliser l'économie. Le secteur privé mauricien doit sortir de son conservatisme légendaire. Il est un fait aujourd'hui que certains États à travers le monde pratiquent le protectionnisme et le repli économique, notamment dans le secteur alimentaire. Donc, le privé mauricien doit se réinventer.

Je souhaite ici saluer cette population mauricienne qui, au tout début de l'éclatement de la pandémie a su se montrer compréhensive et démontrer un sens de maturité. Cette population est reconnaissante de la façon dont le gouvernement a su gérer le Covid-19 à Maurice. Une leçon à tout homme et femme politique c'est de ne jamais sous-estimer l'intelligence de la population, M. le président.

Il n'y a pas lieu d'être un grand analyste des sondages pour savoir qu'il existe aujourd'hui un sentiment de satisfaction de la population après la présentation du budget dans un contexte très difficile.

M. le président, permettez-moi encore une fois de féliciter le Ministre des Finances pour le budget 2020-2021 fait dans un contexte de crise mondiale.

Il est un fait que le monde vit et se prépare à vivre une des plus grandes récessions. La contraction du PIB mondial selon le FMI serait de l'ordre de 3% en 2020. Le PIB de l'Europe chutera de 7,4% en 2020. Selon le journal Le Monde, l'Allemagne connaîtra une contraction de 6,5%, la France 8,2% alors qu'en Italie une contraction de 9,5% est annoncée. Aux Etats Unis, la puissance économique mondiale par excellence connaîtra une contraction d'au moins 5,9% alors que quelques mois seulement de cela, les Etats Unis comptaient sur une croissance de 2,3% en 2019 et prévoyait 3% de croissance chaque année suivante.

Le taux de chômage, M. le président, sera de plus de 10% en France, de plus de 12% en Italie, de plus de 10% aux Etats Unis, soit bien plus que la crise de 2008. Tous les analystes prévoient une morosité sans pareil à travers le monde. Toutefois, une lueur d'espoir en 2021 sera annonciatrice d'une reprise économique, à condition que la pandémie puisse être maîtrisée lors du deuxième semestre de 2020.

L'Ile Maurice n'est pas en reste, M. le président. Nous devons nous prémunir des décisions fortes, d'une part pour maîtriser la coronavirus, et d'autre part, créer les conditions nécessaires pour sortir de cette menace de récession et de perte d'emplois.

M. le président, j'attache une importance particulière à l'immobilier, car il est un fait que l'effet cascade de l'économie est plus présent au niveau de l'immobilier. La croissance a été de l'ordre de 3.5 % lors de la dernière année. Avec la récession mondiale, le risque que l'immobilier mauricien allait pâlir et pâtir était bien présent. Le Ministre des Finances a annoncé toute une batterie de mesures que je souhaite souligner rapidement: la construction de 12 000 maisons pour ceux aux bas de l'échelle sociale et la classe moyenne sur 3 ans. Le Ministre des Finances a annoncé l'extension du *Housing Estate Scheme* et du *Newly Built Dwellings Scheme* pour une période de 2 ans. Cela permettra aux promoteurs d'être exemptés du *Land Transfer Tax*, et aux acquéreurs d'être exemptés du *Registration Duty* pour une période additionnelle de 2 ans. Il est à souligner que la limite d'éligibilité de la valeur de l'unité du logement passe de R 6 millions à R 7 millions de roupies.

Autre mesure, M. le président, c'est de permettre à l'un des conjoints de bénéficier l'exemption de *First Time Buyer*, même si l'autre conjoint a déjà bénéficié ou est déjà propriétaire d'un bien immobilier.

M. le président, à chaque crise, émergent des opportunités ! Ceci me rappelle d'une citation d'Albert Einstein –

« Au centre de la difficulté, se trouve l'opportunité. »

Ainsi, la crise du coronavirus doit être vue comme un catalyseur de changement. La crise nous a fait prendre davantage conscience que nous devons consolider notre résilience et construire une société plus durable et écologique. Il est grand temps qu'on repense nos fondements économiques, sociaux et environnementaux afin d'atteindre nos objectifs de développement durable.

M. le président, l'année 2020 restera sans doute gravée dans nos mémoires. Nous savons tous que le ministre des Finances a eu une tâche très difficile mais il a su nous présenter un budget qui est à la hauteur des défis à venir notamment dans la relance économique. C'est aussi un budget qui démontre également notre prise de conscience et un changement concret de paradigme pour permettre une croissance économique verte, inclusive et soutenue.

Malgré que ce contexte est difficile, notre volonté de reconstruire ensemble, une économie plus durable est plus que jamais d'actualité. Les trois orientations de ce budget s'attèlent à reconstruire une île Maurice plus résiliente.

Même avec un champ de manœuvre très limité, ce budget ouvre la voie à une relance économique, en particulier dans les secteurs traditionnels tels que la construction, l'agriculture, la sécurité alimentaire, le secteur manufacturier, le tourisme et l'entrepreneuriat. En outre, une panoplie de mesures ont été annoncée afin de renforcer nos secteurs clés tels que, la santé, l'éducation, la technologie, l'économie bleue, la jeunesse, le social et le bien-être familial. La protection de l'environnement, le développement durable et les énergies renouvelables ont été aussi au centre de ce budget.

Durant le confinement global, nous avons pu observer des exemples où la nature a pu se régénérer en l'absence d'activités humaines. Ceci devrait nous interpeller dans nos actions futures de sorte à ne pas compromettre l'épanouissement de la nature. D'ailleurs, je voudrais rappeler que le slogan qui a été choisi par les Nations Unies pour la journée mondiale de l'environnement est le temps de la nature et elle invite à la protection de la biodiversité.

M. le président, permettez-moi de dire quelques mots sur le plan directeur en voie de finalisation au ministère de l'environnement. Les mesures que préconise ce budget pour la protection et la gestion de l'environnement. Et là, je me retrouve complètement dans ce

budget, M. le président, parce que ceci s'insère dans notre volonté d'accélérer la transition écologique, qui est une des principales recommandations des assises de l'environnement, tenues au mois de décembre 2019.

Les Assises et les consultations qui ont fait suite, ont mis en lumière un certain nombre de défis environnementaux et sociaux que Maurice doit relever pour répondre aux besoins du pays et aux obligations internationales telles que les objectifs de développement durable.

Mon ministère, avec la collaboration de tous les acteurs concernés, élabore un plan directeur sur l'environnement pour la République de Maurice. Le plan comprendra les orientations politiques et stratégiques sur l'environnement pour les dix années à venir (2020-2030), ainsi qu'un plan d'action pour les cinq prochaines années.

Ce plan nous permettra de répondre aux urgences et aussi d'avancer vers des résultats ambitieux pour une transition écologique. Je suis bien sûr très satisfait de noter que le budget prévoit R 2 milliards dans le *National Environment Fund*, pour financer, entre autres, la mise en œuvre des actions identifiées dans ce plan directeur.

Ceci démontre l'urgence de reconstruire sur des bases nouvelles et durables, tout en tenant compte de l'importance et la vulnérabilité de notre environnement.

Les mesures budgétaires pour l'environnement reposent essentiellement sur huit piliers à savoir -

- a) l'économie circulaire et la gestion des déchets solides ;
- b) le changement climatique ;
- c) la protection des zones côtières et de l'environnement marin ;
- d) le contrôle des déchets plastiques ;
- e) la pollution de l'air et de l'eau ;
- f) rendre vert le secteur public ;
- g) l'aménagement paysager de l'autoroute et d'autres espaces publics, et
- h) la culture environnementale.

M. le président, permettez-moi de prendre l'économie circulaire et la gestion des déchets solides. M. le président, pendant des années, nous avons traité la nature comme une ressource

à être exploitée sans limite. Nos besoins en termes d'énergie, de l'eau et de biens matériels entre autres n'ont cessé de croître, incitant de ce fait une consommation excédentaire. Cette tendance a du coup, engendré des effets néfastes et souvent irréversibles sur notre environnement.

Un défi de taille à relever pour réaliser une transition écologique est la bonne gestion de nos ressources et l'adoption d'un modèle économique circulaire qui représente un levier essentiel pour atteindre nos objectifs. Ce nouveau modèle d'économie circulaire nécessite de l'innovation et un changement d'attitude dans notre façon de faire.

Ainsi, les déchets doivent être considérés comme des ressources à être valorisées. C'est pourquoi, il faut mettre l'accent sur le recyclage et le compostage.

Avec une planification appropriée et des actions ciblées, il est possible de récupérer 50% à 60% de tonnes des déchets pour le recyclage et la production du compost d'ici 2025. Ce faisant, nous détournerons les déchets du site d'enfouissement et obtiendrons des avantages économiques, environnementaux et même sociaux. Cependant, cela ne se produira qu'avec des infrastructures adéquates, les législations, les instruments économiques et l'engagement actif des citoyens.

Le budget a alloué quelques R 148 m. pour la gestion des déchets dans son ensemble pour la mise en œuvre du tri de déchets à la source et pour promouvoir le compostage et le recyclage.

En ce qui concerne le tri de déchets, mon ministère travaille conjointement avec le ministère des Finances actuellement sur un plan pour fournir deux poubelles par ménage. Une poubelle sera utilisée pour le stockage des déchets organiques et l'autre pour les déchets secs tels que les matières recyclables comme le papier, le plastique, le verre et le métal.

Une étude de faisabilité sera faite pour la construction et l'exploitation d'unités de tri sur une base de *Public Private Partnership* dans la région du Nord et La Chaumière pour la séparation des matières recyclables.

Cinq déchetteries seront mises en place dans les 5 stations de transfert pour le stockage des déchets encombrants qui ne sont généralement pas collectés par le service régulier de la voirie que ce soit par les municipalités ou par le *District Council*. C'est ce qu'on appelle généralement le *bulky waste*, les déchets encombrants.

Dans un premier temps, des espaces seront prévus dans les cinq stations de transfert pour le stockage des déchets encombrants.

Le compostage est une priorité dans cette nouvelle approche d'économie circulaire. Les autorités locales seront aussi de la partie, par exemple, pour le compostage des déchets de marchés.

Dans le même temps, les pneus usagés sont des déchets encombrants et leur gestion a toujours été problématique et n'a jamais été clairement définie. Ils sont source de nombreux problèmes pour l'environnement, notamment la prolifération des moustiques, l'*illegal dumping* et source d'incendie. Ainsi, ce budget encourage le rechapage des pneus à travers une nouvelle mesure pour le remboursement de R 25 par pneu rechapé. Il est bon de noter que différents régimes fiscaux et autres mesures d'incitation vont être étendu aux activités de recyclage. Toutes ces mesures vont ainsi contribuer à notre transition écologique.

M. le président, dans la même démarche de passer d'une économie linéaire à une économie circulaire, plusieurs autres initiatives ont déjà été entamées par mon ministère.

Entre autres, le projet '*Switch Africa Green*' qui vise à encourager l'efficience à travers des modes de production et de consommation responsable. Ainsi, les pratiques telles que la valorisation des ressources, la confection des produits à base de fibres naturelles, la collecte et le recyclage des 'déchets' ont été mises en avant.

Plusieurs entreprises se sont engagées dans un réseau à travers lequel elles ont établi un système de récupération de 'déchets' pour ensuite les utiliser comme matière première.

Dans ce même contexte, le budget propose également un système d'information pour les consommateurs ('*Le Consumer Information System*') qui facilitera l'accès aux consommateurs à des informations fiables sur des produits verts.

Deuxième pilier, M. le président, le changement climatique.

Alors que l'attention du monde entier était focalisée sur la gestion de la pandémie du COVID-19, nous avons peut-être perdu de vue les autres problèmes majeurs environnementaux, notamment le changement climatique. Mais la réalité est que le changement climatique reste une urgence.

D'ailleurs, récemment nous avons pu observer plusieurs phénomènes météorologiques extrêmes dans plusieurs régions de la planète, notamment des ouragans de catégorie-5 tels que, Harold, qui a dévasté les Iles du Pacifique tels que Fiji, Salomon et

Vanuatu en avril, et plus récemment le cyclone Amphan qui a durement touché le Bangladesh et le sud de l'Inde.

La baisse des émissions de gaz à effet de serre qui a été observé à cause de la réduction des activités humaines à travers le monde, ces derniers mois, ne suffira pas pour endiguer le réchauffement planétaire qui est le résultat de 150 années d'émission intense et continue. Ainsi, cette problématique reste entière et elle demande toujours toute notre attention et doit être considérée en toute priorité.

M. le président, il y a beaucoup de similitudes entre la pandémie du coronavirus et le changement climatique. Les deux représentent des défis majeurs qui mettent à l'épreuve la résilience de tous les pays du monde, surtout les pays vulnérables. Les deux problématiques nécessitent également des investissements massifs immédiats afin d'éviter l'écroulement de nos systèmes économiques, dont les coûts financiers seront catastrophiques.

Ce budget est non seulement un budget qui ouvrira la voie vers une nouvelle normalité, mais il permet de renforcer notre résilience climatique et la transition vers une économie à basse émission. A cet effet, des investissements conséquents sont prévus :

- Près de R 1,2 milliards seront allouées à la construction des drains dans des zones à forts risques d'inondation à Maurice et à Rodrigues ;
- R 314 millions pour des développements infrastructurels afin de pallier aux glissements de terrains, et
- R 215 millions pour protéger nos plages et nos lagons.

En ce qui concerne l'atténuation du changement climatique, nous nous sommes donnés les moyens pour atteindre les objectifs annoncés d'accroître la part des énergies renouvelables dans notre bouquet énergétique à 40% d'ici 2030. Cela permettra une réduction conséquente de nos émissions de gaz à effet de serre.

Une série de projets seront mis en chantier, notamment la promotion de l'énergie solaire à grande échelle et aussi au niveau des foyers.

Notre politique énergétique concorde avec nos objectifs de transition écologique. A travers notre contribution nationale déterminée (CDN), qui sera revue cette année, nos objectifs d'énergies renouvelables seront réévalués. Nous allons aussi développer une feuille de route pour l'atténuation de nos émissions des gaz à effet de serre afin d'atteindre une neutralité sur le long terme.

Nous allons également mettre en place le projet '*Regional Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis Programme*' avec le soutien de la *SADC* pour soutenir l'évaluation des risques liés au changement climatique, notamment concernant les risques d'épidémie et pour promouvoir la sécurité alimentaire. Ce programme d'investissement prévoit la somme de R 1 million par an au cours des trois prochaines années pour l'évaluation de la vulnérabilité du secteur agricole aux aléas du changement climatique.

Une stratégie de résilience pour Maurice est aussi en voie d'élaboration. Elle vise à intégrer les impératifs du changement climatique dans le processus de planification du territoire. Elle met aussi l'accent sur une approche intégrée des problèmes tels que l'érosion côtière, inondation, dégradation des écosystèmes marins provenant des activités humaines.

Nos efforts pour mieux gérer le changement climatique sera également renforci grâce à la présentation d'un *Climate Change Bill* avant la fin de l'année. Il visera à améliorer la coordination, la gestion et l'intégration multisectorielle du changement climatique à tous les niveaux.

Ce budget ouvre aussi d'autres horizons en termes de mobilisation de ressources financières. Des sources de financement novatrices tels que les obligations vertes '*Green Bonds*' sont envisagés. D'ailleurs un comité interministériel travail déjà sur l'ébauche d'un mécanisme pour les obligations vertes pour Maurice. Ceci permettra le financement des projets d'atténuation et d'adaptation pour le changement climatique par le secteur privé.

M. le président, permettez-moi d'aborder un autre aspect qui est La Protection des Zones Côtières.

Nos plages et nos côtes sont des atouts majeurs pour notre économie, notre industrie du tourisme et pour le loisir de tous, mais sont affectées par l'érosion côtière. Nous avons constaté un rétrécissement de nos plages, dans certaines régions côtières, allant jusqu'à 20 mètres lors de ces derniers dix ans.

Depuis 2015 à ce jour, le ministère l'Environnement a réhabilité quelque 6,5 kilomètres du littoral au coût de R 330 millions. Ces derniers trois ans, des travaux de réhabilitation à grande échelle ont été réalisés sur plusieurs sites, notamment à Baie du Tombeau, Résidences La Chaux, Grand'Baie et Case Noyale.

Le budget 2020-2021 a alloué une somme additionnelle de R 134 millions, en addition de ce qui est prévu dans le *National Environment Fund*, afin de poursuivre des travaux sur 10 autres sites les plus affectés par le phénomène de l'érosion côtière, totalisant

environ 6,3 kilomètres du littoral, notamment à St Martin (Bel Ombre), Anse Jonchée, Providence (Grand Port), Bois des Amourettes, Pointe aux Feuilles, Petit Sable, Bambous Virieux, Rivière des Créoles, Grand’Baie et Grand Sable. Les travaux proposés amélioreront également le potentiel socio-économique et récréatif de la région, notamment avec la création de plages de sable perchées et d’une piste cyclable.

Pour la période 2020-2024, mon ministère a déjà identifié 16 autres sites affectés pour lesquels il est primordial d’apporter une solution urgente. Des études approfondies vont être menées et les travaux de réhabilitation commenceront dans un bref délai. Les sites sont comme suit : Flic en Flac, Deux Frères, Baie du Cap, Trou aux Biches, Blue Bay, Albion, Le Morne, Pointe des Lascars, Pointe des Régates à Mahebourg, Pointe d’Esny, St Felix, La Prairie, La Preneuse, Rivière des Galets, La Mivoie Rivière Noire, Bois des Amourettes et certaines autres régions encore, M. le président.

Dans cette même optique de lutte contre l’érosion côtière, mon ministère remplacera les arbres de filao qui se trouvent dans l’espace dynamique, par des espèces endémiques et indigènes. Le projet, au coût de R 10 millions, a déjà débuté à Flic-en-Flac et Le Morne, sur une étendue de 200 mètres par 30 mètres et se poursuivra sur la plage publique de Belle Mare.

Une étude sera aussi menée pour évaluer l’efficacité des travaux de réhabilitation du littoral effectués par mon ministère dans les années précédentes. L’étude nous permettra aussi de voir, dans quelle mesure, les objectifs fixés ont été atteints et, si nécessaire, d’apporter d’autres mesures supplémentaires ou correctives.

De plus, en vue des impacts imprévus et des effets dévastateurs du changement climatique sur nos plages, des travaux de réhabilitation doivent être exécutés rapidement. De ce fait, il a aussi été prévu d’amender le ‘*Public Procurement Act*’ à travers le prochain ‘*Finance Bill*’ afin de pouvoir expédier le recrutement des consultants et de pouvoir commencer les travaux d’urgences.

M. le président, le contrôle des déchets plastiques

Une des filières de déchet ciblé par le gouvernement est le plastique, qui représente 75,000 tonnes soit 14% des déchets solides à Maurice. Nous avons actuellement 7 recycleurs opérationnels à l’île Maurice qui traitent les déchets plastiques. Chaque année, environ 2,000 à 3,000 tonnes de déchets plastiques sont recyclés localement ou exportés pour être recyclés.

Sur une base annuelle, environ 100 millions de bouteilles en PET sont mises sur le marché mauricien, représentant 2,500 tonnes par an de plastiques. A ce jour, seulement environ 40% des bouteilles en PET sont collectées chaque année pour le recyclage, soit environ 1,000 à 1,125 tonnes par année.

Permettez-moi de souligner quelques mesures prises par mon ministère au cours de ces dernières années en ce qui concerne le contrôle des déchets plastiques –

- (a) la promulgation des règlements sur l'interdiction d'importer, de fabriquer, de vendre et de distribuer certains sacs en plastique à partir de janvier 2016;
- (b) l'augmentation du '*refund*' accordée aux fabricants locaux de R 5 à R 15 par kg de bouteilles PET usagées, comme préconisé dans le budget 2018-2019;
- (c) l'introduction d'un '*excise duty*' de R 2 pour les '*takeaways*', assiettes, bols, tasses et plateaux en plastique à usage unique non biodégradables à partir de février 2019, et
- (d) l'installation des '*eco-bins*' pour la collecte des bouteilles en PET dans 12 collectivités locales et dans les 57 '*Social Welfare Centres*' à travers le pays.

Avec toutes ces mesures, on reconnaît quand même un changement de mentalité des commerçants, des consommateurs et des fabricants. Par exemple, les sacs en plastique biodégradables et compostables sont aujourd'hui largement adoptés par le public, y compris l'utilisation de sacs en papier durables. Mais il existe quand même quelques brebis galeuses. Cela a conduit à la fabrication de plus de 52 millions de sacs biodégradables et compostables à Maurice et à l'importation de 7 million de ces sacs uniquement en 2019. Les '*takeaways*' biodégradables sont aussi de plus en plus présents sur le marché. Mais, il y reste encore beaucoup à faire.

Les nouvelles mesures budgétaires vont de pair avec notre vision pour une Ile Maurice zéro-déchet plastique. L'accent est encore une fois au retour vers la nature. Ainsi, ce gouvernement veut promouvoir la recherche et le développement des alternatives au plastique notamment l'utilisation des produits à base de plantes et des ressources locales.

Le cadre réglementaire et institutionnel va aussi être revu et renforcé contre la pollution plastique, notamment par rapport à l'interdiction d'utiliser des sacs en plastique au niveau même des consommateurs, l'interdiction des « *roll-on bags* » et « *pocket bags* » de moins de 300 cm², la mise en place d'un mécanisme pour la collecte des bouteilles en PET et l'interdiction d'au moins d'une dizaine de produits en plastique à usage unique. Des éco-bacs

seront installés dans des lieux stratégiques pour collecter les déchets plastiques pour le recyclage.

La pollution marine par le plastique est aussi une de nos priorités. Le financement international a été sollicité pour la mise en œuvre d'un ensemble de mesures pour lutter contre la pollution marine par le plastique, y compris l'installation des bacs écologiques à des emplacements stratégiques sur les plages et l'installation des filets près des embouchures des rivières pour faciliter la collecte des déchets plastiques pour être ensuite recyclés.

M. le président, une des priorités de ce budget c'est le contrôle de la pollution de l'air et de l'eau. La pollution de l'air et de l'eau a des effets significatifs sur la santé et l'environnement qui représente aujourd'hui l'un des sujets majeurs de préoccupation environnementale dans le monde.

Le Laboratoire National de l'Environnement, sous mon ministère, est chargé de surveiller la qualité de l'air ambiant afin de garantir la conformité aux normes environnementales prescrites. Il est important d'évaluer la qualité de l'air sur une base continue, car la pollution de l'air peut entraîner divers effets sur la santé.

Au cours de la récente pandémie du COVID-19, des études ont démontré que la transmission virale s'accélère aussi par les particules fines. En outre, ces études ont également démontré une prévalence élevée de décès lié au Covid-19 dans les zones touchées par la pollution atmosphérique.

Notre laboratoire dispose actuellement de trois stations fixes, situées à Port Louis, Vacoas et à Rose Hill, pour surveiller la qualité de l'air ambiant sur une base continue. Pour la région de Port Louis, la concentration moyenne de particules (PM-10) enregistrée pendant la période de couvre-feu, c'est-à-dire du 20 mars 2020 au 30 avril 2020, par rapport à la même période en 2019 était presque similaire. Mais par contre, à la station de Rose Hill, une diminution de 52% a été enregistrée pour la concentration moyenne de particules (PM-10).

Afin de maintenir une bonne réputation de notre pays au niveau international, notamment auprès des touristes et afin d'informer et de rassurer le public sur la qualité de l'air, il est nécessaire de développer un indice de la qualité de l'air. Le budget propose donc l'élaboration d'un indice de la qualité de l'air qui vise à informer quotidiennement le public sur la qualité de l'air à Maurice.

Les véhicules fumigènes, M. le président. Le rejet de fumée noire par des véhicules fumigènes, en particulier par des véhicules à moteur diesel, est l'une des principales sources

de pollution de l'air à Maurice. Pour contrer ce problème, des contrôles routiers sont effectués visuellement par des équipes de la NTA et de la Police de l'Environnement. Des infractions sont établies à l'encontre des conducteurs dont les véhicules émettent de la fumée noire pendant plus de dix secondes consécutives. Malgré les contrôles rigoureux effectués par ces unités, un problème perdure. A l'heure actuelle, il existe certaines provisions des lois mais celles-ci sont insuffisantes ou mal adaptées pour traiter le problème à la source et dans son intégralité, particulièrement due au fait qu'on ne possède pas des appareils appropriés qui permettent de mesurer l'opacité des fumées émanant des véhicules.

Dans cette optique, ce budget prévoit 10 millions de roupies pour l'acquisition de treize nouveaux opacimètres portatifs qui permettront de mesurer en temps réel l'opacité des fumées émanant des véhicules. Ces appareils sont légers et fournissent une lecture visuelle rapide de l'opacité. Les données peuvent être facilement téléchargées, archivées et imprimées. Ces équipements seront mis à la disposition aux centres d'exams des véhicules, à la *National Land Transport Authority*, au *Police Traffic Branch* et à la Police de l'Environnement à travers l'île et aussi à l'île Rodrigues.

M. le président, on connaît très bien que la santé de notre population est au cœur de notre priorité. L'usage excessif des pesticides représente un risque considérable pour notre santé ainsi qu'à l'environnement.

Aujourd'hui, nous sommes confrontés à des défis pour protéger les écosystèmes aquatiques et les eaux souterraines de la contamination causée par les pesticides en raison de manque de données.

À Maurice, la principale source d'approvisionnement en eau provient de la nappe souterraine (54%). Le reste (46%) provient de sources en surface. Il est donc impératif d'avoir une bonne surveillance de nos milieux sur de nombreux paramètres, notamment l'analyse de la contamination de nos ressources en eau par des pesticides.

Le budget permet donc la mise en place d'une unité d'analyse des résidus de pesticides au Laboratoire National de l'Environnement sous mon ministère afin d'assurer une protection adéquate de nos écosystèmes aquatiques et ainsi que notre santé.

M. le président, rendre le service public plus vert. M. le président, le sixième pilier dans notre démarche pour une transition écologique est l'engagement du secteur public pour se mettre au vert dans leurs activités et opérations quotidiennes. Nous travaillons avec le ministère de la Fonction Publique pour mettre en place les mécanismes nécessaires afin de

mettre en œuvre cette initiative. Nous allons revoir les règlements pour faciliter cette initiative; proposer une charte verte qui sera élaborée pour aider les institutions publiques à s'adhérer à des directives sur les divers aspects de consommation responsable, notamment sur l'utilisation du papier, la mobilité durable, la conservation de l'eau et de l'énergie, la gestion des déchets entre autres. L'objectif est de réduire l'empreinte écologique du secteur public et de servir d'exemple en matière de consommation et production responsable.

M. le président, l'aspect visuel des choses. L'aménagement paysager de l'autoroute et d'autres espaces publics. Dans ce même élan, une attention particulière sera accordée pour mettre le pays au vert. Quelques 207 millions de roupies seront allouées au *Cleaning and Embellishment Programme* pour les drains, les routes, les rivières et les lieux publics, incluant les lieux de culte.

Mon ministère va développer un schéma directeur pour l'aménagement paysager, en collaboration avec la *Road Development Authority*, pour l'embellissement de l'autoroute et les accès latéraux aux villes et villages seront élaborés prochainement, dans les jours à venir. Les abords de l'autoroute seront dotés de plantes endémiques, décoratives, d'arbustes, d'arbres fruitiers et de fleurs bien sûr. Ce vaste projet va impliquer plusieurs entités gouvernementales ainsi que le secteur privé, les ONG et d'autres acteurs. Le schéma directeur va prendre en compte le microclimat, le sol, l'aspect historique et culturel des régions du pays et, bien sûr, la sécurité des usagers et aussi l'entretien.

La culture environnementale, M. le président. Au final, la culture environnementale constitue un élément clé à l'égard d'une transition écologique. Les citoyens doivent comprendre la nécessité d'adopter des modes de vie plus durables, en faisant des choix plus respectueux de l'environnement. Nous devons nous engager à développer une conscience environnementale et sociale dès l'enfance. Faire participer les jeunes à la protection de l'environnement a non seulement un impact direct sur le changement des comportements et des attitudes des jeunes, mais influence également leurs parents, leurs proches, leurs familles et leurs communautés à changer leurs modes de vie. Il est donc très important que nous impliquons nos jeunes à réaliser des projets pro-environnementaux en collaboration avec la communauté.

A cet égard, le budget 2020-2021 prévoit 3 millions de roupies pour encourager les jeunes à entreprendre des projets environnementaux avec la communauté.

L'île Maurice s'est engagée dans une nouvelle voie de développement qui prône une transition écologique. Notre île est plus que jamais confrontée à de nombreux défis que ce soit au niveau économique, sanitaire et environnemental. Une transition écologique n'a jamais été aussi d'actualité et je pense que ce budget contient des mesures phares pour cette transition.

M. le président, le ministère de l'Environnement travaille en ce moment sur un projet qui est important, à plus d'un titre, c'est la création sous le ministère de l'environnement de notre observatoire de l'environnement qui aura la responsabilité *to develop a repository of environmental data, to disseminate environmental information, to provide sound knowledge for policies, development and rational decision making and to undertake research and development* en matière environnementale, qui était chose absente avant, M. le président. Cette observatoire de l'environnement aura la participation de tous les acteurs de l'environnement et aussi nous comptons sérieusement sur une collaboration avec l'Université de Maurice surtout en ce qui concerne l'aspect *Research and Development*. Une plateforme *Science to policy* va être mise en place pour permettre de définir les orientations politiques en matière de protection de l'environnement et du développement durable.

C'est sur une note très optimiste que je voudrais féliciter encore une fois le ministre des Finances et le Premier ministre pour l'excellent travail accompli en présentant un budget qui répond à la fois aux attentes de la population et à celles des secteurs économiques du pays.

Sur ce, M. le président, je vous remercie.

The Deputy Speaker: I suspend the sitting for one hour.

At 7.43 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 8.49 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Dr. the hon. Ramdhany!

Dr. A. Ramdhany (First Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre D'or): M. le président, merci de me donner la parole. Après avoir écouté et étudié le budget préparé par l'honorable ministre des Finances où il a fait mention de Kenneth Joseph Arrow, je cite –

«La confiance est une institution invisible qui régit le développement économique».

En parallèle, je voudrais ajouter que la confiance que les mauriciens ont placé sur nous est un des catalyses qui nous a aidés pour lutter contre cet ennemi invisible.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we were fighting two invisible enemies: first, Covid-19; second, misinformation through mass hysteria, fear-mongering and cheap political theatrics where I have learnt that fake news travel faster than the light of truth.

As a PPS, my vision goes same with the vision of the NDU (National Development Unit). The vision is simple; it is to inform society benefiting from efficient and continual upgraded infrastructure and governmental programmes. It means that the Government is massively putting effort in the construction site and I have the responsibility in my Constituency to bring this development and it is my duty to inform the good work of the Government through mass media.

The world was awoken with an unprecedented situation and despite being a small nation, we managed beyond expectations. Let me clarify to the hon. Members of the Opposition. This is not a self-shoulder patting moment. This was a learning curve that we all went through regardless which side of the fence we sit. The bottom line, we went through uncharted territories and we emerge with minimum casualties.

I would like to extend my thanks to the hon. Minister of Finance and the hon. Prime Minister for this humanistic Budget; because of the time constraint I will outline only a few main points.

This Budget has been tailored to the current situation we are, to accommodate the damages of the Covid-19. I don't have to remind you all, the world economy has been shot in the knees, and this has deeply affected us. This is a time where we have to put aside the pettiness and get on board with this program. Together we will get through this rough patch.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a doctor, I must congratulate this Government who always have its priorities right by investing massively into the health sector, namely –

- 1) the new Cancer Centre;
- 2) the new Eye Hospital;
- 3) the new Teaching Hospital at Flacq
- 4) Renal Transplant Unit, and
- 5) a new National Laboratory will be setup to upgrade testing capacities.

Let us not forget that the rate of diabetes has a high prevalence in Mauritius and by taxing sugar based products, this will deter Mauritian public from consuming excess of sugary

commodities. This will also extend the accountability factor of the damages that these bad habits cause to the public healthcare system. A diabetic with complications will cost taxpayers a lot of money in terms of on-going treatments. This Government is not sugar coating the Budget as many tend to believe. Like all good doctors, we will agree, the best medicine is not sweet and right now, after the damages left by the Covid-19, we need a remedy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are doctors and doctors. There are some doctors who are keen on doing only web conferences. A question comes to my mind. Do they know what is a stethoscope? Maybe it's still in the vault or somewhere else but there are many doctors in Mauritius who are working in the frontline. They are like soldiers. They are taking bullets for us. They are working night and day in hospitals, casualty settings, in dispensaries and I would salute them for the effort they are doing and the Government is very grateful to them, and the Mauritian public is very grateful to them. One of them is Dr. Bruno Cheong. I would like to take one minute of the minutes allocated to me just for the grievance of Dr. Bruno Cheong that left us and the other family that lost their life. I would like one minute of silence, if it is possible, Mr Speaker, Sir.

At this stage, one minute of silence was observed.

Thank you for your cooperation. I heard my friend hon. Lobine earlier. He said he happily contradicted the Leader of the Opposition. I will try to explain. When the Leader of the Opposition talk about pharmacopeia - British Pharmacopeia. There is one example I want to share to the House - for five years, I have been working as a private doctor and I have done many home visits. One of the visits was to an old lady, one of my patients. She is living in a devastated place like in creole we say *lakaz tole*. I pitied her, I consulted her for free and I myself went to buy the medicine for her and the price of the medicine was Rs1,000. How can a patient, every time a doctor visits her, have to pay so much money, in private? So, this is in private but if this situation is in clinic, it is double. So, if the Leader of the Opposition is saying that he want only British Pharmacopeia - British Certified Medicine to come in Mauritius, then he is advocating for the devil because all Mauritians must have a choice. All Mauritians must have a choice. They can choose from generic medicine also which is cheaper and there is Indian Pharmacopeia which this Government is bringing on.

If he wanted very good quality of medicine, why when he was in power, he did not bring on European Certified Medicine? So, the question is here. This Government is a

caring Government. This Government want everyone to be able to buy medicine of his choice. If you want to buy British Certified Medicine, you are free to buy but if some want to buy Indian Pharmacopeia Medicine, they should buy. I would urge the Mauritian public that the Government is doing a very good job and I am going to support this Budget.

The popular belief that our jobs are given to foreigners is inaccurate. This is not the case. No foreigners would want to pay and relocate with their family to a developing country, only to steal the everyday Mauritian jobs. I have to stress on this negative word ‘steal’ as some people out there have been very liberal with this phrase and is used to create fear purposely for their achievements and political agendas. These foreigners looking to move here will be people with expertise, experience, and never seen before sets of skills and resources. This will be the catalyst factor behind the growth and progress for the employers.

This domino effect will result into a prosperous economy for the country. When businesses thrive, additional jobs added to locals, more money will circulate and everyone will resume a normal socioeconomic life.

Again, I am not an economist or nor someone with financial background. I come from a middle-class set up and the barrier was not a hindrance in my dream of becoming a doctor and now a PPS. The point I would like to reiterate, there are an abundance of opportunities out there, and this Government will do whatever it can to assist our citizens.

This budget is facilitating Mauritius to be self-sustained in terms of in-house products. The one-off grant towards the certification under “*Made in Moris*” label will be increased from Rs5,000 to a maximum of Rs50,000. This, Mr Speaker, Sir, will open the door to many SMEs to get on board this programme.

The Provision in customs duty exemption on goods imported by post or courier services has been amended in order to encourage people to buy products locally manufactured and thus maintaining local businesses.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am grateful to the fact that the two constituencies, I represent as PPS, have been mentioned in the budget. Constituency no 6, which encompasses the unique beautiful coastal area, home to many hotels and fishermen.

This budget promotes blue economy, and I am truly grateful for the fact that this Government cares for the fishermen even during bad weather. They are increasing the daily rate of bad weather allowance for fishermen to Rs425, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Furthermore, for the operators in the Tourism Sector, the licenses of Tourism and Beach Authority will be exempted from any payment of license fee for a period of two years. Let us not disregard the fact that tourism is one of the central pillar supporting the Mauritian economy. But what I see from this budget, I see a vision of the hon. Prime Minister, I see a proactive change, I see a cultural tourism which is taking place and this will jump start the Tourism Industry.

We are looking forward to continuing the promised development to my constituencies

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1. Completion of market fairs at Bel Air and Goodlands. Here, the people of Goodlands and nearby village needed a well-structured Market Fair and thanks to this Government, this project is going on;
2. A new multipurpose complex which will be built at Montagne Blanche;
3. Major projects are being implemented at Grand Baie village to connect houses to the sewerage system;
4. Installation of mobile treatment plant in Poudre d'Or village and Goodlands;
5. The Cap Malheureux Relay Centre for Boys will be upgraded.

And I would thank the Minister of Health, hon. Dr. Jagutpal, for upgrading the local dispensary in Grand Baie. The situation is catastrophic over there in Grand Baie but the Minister is not insensible to these. He will do everything to protect the people in Grand Baie and I am very grateful to him.

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, hon. Koonjoo-Shah, is bringing new changes in my Constituency and this will help youngsters to promote sports. They are upgrading volley-ball pitches in social welfare centres.

The Ministry of Finance announced the setting up of land banks, many farmers in my village will benefit in this way.

The Ministry of Blue Economy is helping the fishermen in my Constituency by giving fishing nets. I thank him for this commitment.

This Government understands the cost of daily life and is not detached from the reality of things. It is for the same reason why we are still preserving the Basic Retirement Pension as from the age of 60. National Minimum Wage, Negative Income Tax for the low

income earners, end-of-year bonus will not be affected, access to quality education, subsidy on the examination fees for SC and HSC, free transport, and this popular measure will help many household, decreasing the price of gas cylinder by Rs30 and many more.

We have made an exception for the allocation Rs15,000 to our front liners in the context of this difficult moment we have been facing.

Like the hon. Minister of Finance said, this Government is not taking from the less privileged and giving it to the rich. In fact, they are taxing and encouraging the rich to contribute more by engaging in this beautiful equity system.

Mr Speaker and hon. Members present, we will rebuild this country with hard work, creativity, passion and courage. We are innovating to accommodate current changes and shifting dynamics to make this beautiful country of ours stronger than ever, and above all we will do it together.

There are still tough times ahead, but we have made it this far in fighting Covid-19. Fair but forthright, single minded, but united in action.

There is a little thought; Sir Anerood Jugnauth is, in my opinion and in many Mauritians' opinion, the father of our economics today. Today, we have a young Prime Minister who guided the hon. Minister of Finance to deliver a humanistic budget and I will 100% support this budget.

I thank you for your time and attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

(9.09 p.m.)

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I wish to join my colleagues from this side of the House to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for having presented such a promising and an ambitious budget to the nation in spite of a global economic situation which some analysts have branded as uncharted waters.

This Budget translates the view of the Government and the hon. Prime Minister for a better and more prosperous Mauritius and for ensuring our economic recovery for sustained growth and development. *Ce budget a aussi mis chaos l'opposition dans son ensemble, qui prévoyait, elle, un budget d'austérité. Tel n'a pas été le cas, M. le président, n'en déplaise à certains !*

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a developing country, highly dependent on external sources, there are lessons for us to learn from the crisis unleashed by the international pandemic COVID-19. As we all know, no country, big or small, developed or developing, has been shielded from the impact of the pandemic. That's why, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget is constructed on the philosophy of 'Our New Normal: The Economy of Life'.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this crisis is unique on its own and cannot, in any manner, be compared to the financial crisis of 2008-2009. The Minister of Finance deserves our respect for the initiatives he has taken to ease the life and quality of living of our population. In the same breath, he has also proved the doomsayers wrong. The more so as many of them were expecting this Budget to be a difficult one with measures that would otherwise have impacted on the population. But he has shown, *qu'il a plus d'un tour dans son sac*, because this Budget is being widely acclaimed in almost every segment of business and the population at large.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget presented to the nation on Thursday 04 June 2020, is also a testimony that this Government was not elected on false hopes, but a commitment to improve the plight of the people of this country. For this Budget, we have shown that we came here to work for the country and for the benefit of every cross section of our population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, *Notre Nouvelle Normalité : L'économie de la Vie*, Our New Normal: The Economy Of Life is meant to propel the development process of our country in such a manner that will bring a glimmer of hope in the aftermath of the global pandemic.

The House may be aware of the speculations that were reached before the presentation of this Budget. For example, it was stated in many quarters that there would be a price hike of basic necessities. The end-of-year bonus or the universal old age pension would be abolished, but nothing of that sort has happened. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a clear indication that Government means business and its philosophy is to strive for the good of the common man. The new normal that the world is advocating, demands that it cannot be business as usual and, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition is a great fan of the Prime Minister of New Zealand, she recently stated: "Business as usual would have everyone retrenched into our old patterns. Now is the chance for us to come together rather than argue about who gets to hold the umbrella."

Mr Speaker, Sir, a few months ago, no one in this august Assembly would have ever predicted that the whole world would be impacted by the global pandemic which would wreak havoc in economies over the world. Countries had to shut their borders in order to contain a virus that was literally invading the whole world, affecting the bottom lines of businesses and the routine of people. That's why I said in the beginning, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are lessons for us to learn from the global pandemic. The new normal, Mr Speaker, Sir, calls imperatively for a new way of life, a new culture and all together a different way of looking at things around us. This Budget has laid the foundations for us as a society to move along a new path, a path of recovery of our economy and society.

Of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, Members, on the other side of the House, will find every opportunity to lash out at the Government. That is their role in a democracy. However, we expect the Opposition to act more responsibly and to move away from the underlying principle, that the post COVID era will be business as usual. Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House would have noted that the new normal and economy of life that the Minister of Finance has advocated in his budget speech to the nation is built around 10 key pillars, ranging from the construction sector, agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, to entrepreneurship and SMEs.

Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, by the blessings of God, I happen to represent a constituency that is fundamentally rural. Although, a big chunk of the constituents also comes from urban areas, but, essentially, my constituency is agriculture in nature and scope. I will, therefore, take the time of the House to focus on three main pillars encapsulated in the Budget, namely agriculture, entrepreneurship and SMEs and gender.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to begin with one sector which is very close to my heart, agriculture, which is for a very long period of time, has been the backbone of the economy of our country. Indeed, it has been one of the key pillars of the socioeconomic development of Mauritius since independence. We know that it has also remained one of the biggest employer providing jobs to thousands of our population living in rural areas. Although we have diversified away from agriculture into sophisticated sectors, such as tourism, ICT, Financial Services and so on, historically and emotionally, agriculture, in view of this multi-functionality, will continue to constitute the main history of our economy for many more years to come.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Constituency, Port-Louis North/Long Mountain, comprises several regions, namely Notre Dame, Montagne Longue, Congomah, Crève Coeur, Vallée

des Prêtres, Les Mariannes, that are essentially agricultural. There are many people from these places who depend on agriculture for their livelihood and the livelihood of their families. Indeed, these regions comprise a large number of planters and vegetable growers. I feel deeply elated that this 2020-2021 Budget has laid so much emphasis on the need to boost agricultural development *et de redonner à l'agriculture ses lettres de noblesse en faisant de Maurice notre terre nourricière*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, even big countries, such as Germany, France, Australia, New Zealand are sparing no effort to give an added dimension to the development of their agricultural sector. Mr Speaker, Sir, the memory of our citizens having had to face an artificial shortage of vegetables and other basic food supplies, is still vivid. We are also not oblivious to the fact that many of our people have had to face a price hike of vegetables during the recent lockdown.

Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, food self-sufficiency is crucial for a net food importing country such as Mauritius. Food self-sufficiency also has direct implications for our country in order to enable us to respond in an effective manner to the dietary needs of our population, notwithstanding external factors, such as financial crisis or health pandemics.

Therefore, it is incumbent, Mr Speaker, Sir, upon us, as a Government, to ensure a regular flow of food supplies and, more importantly, to strive for food self-sufficiency. This Budget, indeed, encompasses a whole gamut of policy measures designed to strengthen and ensure food self-sufficiency. It is important, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we protect our citizens from the trauma of artificial shortage of food supplies, including such basic necessities like potatoes, onions, tomatoes, you name it. We have all witnessed it, Mr Speaker, Sir, and, honestly, I am not convinced that such a dim picture should be painted again.

In this regard, Mr Speaker, Sir, we welcome the announcement made by the Minister of Finance in his Budget Speech for the inception of a comprehensive National Agri-Food Development Programme as well as the promotion of the farm to fork concept, with the object of ensuring food security and reducing our high dependence on imports of the food supply, particularly, in difficult times. This is yet another lesson to be drawn from the COVID-19, because the pandemic has created negative consequences for countries across the world, in particular countries with low levels of food self-sufficiency. Mr Speaker, Sir, food self-sufficiency are no longer an option. They are irreversible processes in our agricultural development strategy. Food self-sufficiency should lie at the very heart of our vision and

mission as a Government. *Pas seulement le temps d'une pandémie, M. le président.* Governments across the world have started to realise the importance of food self-sufficiency and the need of the population to have access to sufficient amount of healthy foods. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to continually motivate our people and enjoin the coming generations to go back to basics, meaning, *retourner à notre terre nourricière*, because agriculture will continue to be the linchpin and the accelerator of our socio-economic development policies and strategies. Mr Speaker, Sir, we must all join forces in ensuring a food system that is better suited to grapple and handle any global crisis, whether financial, economic, or health pandemics. We must encourage our industries to move towards the development of agriculture and food supplies so that in the years to come, we become more resilient to external shocks.

In his Budget Speech, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister of Finance has laid emphasis on the need for us to bring more land under food cultivation. This is a very laudable initiative. Allow me here to open a parenthesis by recalling to the House, around the year 2007, the Labour Government had caused come 22 planters in the region of Riche Terre to be evicted in order to make way for the Tianli Project, which as we all know, has turned out to be the biggest joke ever in the history of our country, and it is this Government which has ensured that justice is done to those planters. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Budget Speech refers to some 20,000 acres of land that are currently abandoned, meaning unutilised, and which can be converted for agricultural use. There are also private lands, Mr Speaker, Sir, which are unutilised, and which can be put to better and more effective use in the context of the ongoing efforts of Government to achieve food self-sufficiency. Mr Speaker, Sir, our local planters and food growers must be encouraged; they must be given the necessary technical and financial support in their effort to step up food production. In his speech, the Minister of Finance has also announced a series of measures to support planters and food growers. Such measures include, Mr Speaker, Sir, an increase in subsidy for the purchase of potatoes and onion seeds, from Rs5,000 to Rs25,000 per tonne. Similarly, the payment of the annual premium of Crop Loss Compensation Scheme will be waived. A grant of 50% will be provided to all orchard owners for the purchase of permanent netting structures. Distressed companies affected by the COVID-19 will be granted loans at the concessional rate of 0.5% per annum by the Development Bank of Mauritius, that is, DBM. Mr Speaker, Sir, these are certainly very bold and ambitious measures which will go a long way in giving a new lease of life to our planters and food growers.

It would be remiss on my part if I did not refer during my intervention to another policy measure announced by the Minister of Finance regarding sugarcane planters in Mauritius. We know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the sugar planters' community has dwindled over the years. I know that at some point of time, there were like 35,000 planters in Mauritius, and now, I am told that the number today is a dismal of 11,000 planters. This does not augur well for the future of small sugar planters. But then, the question that we should ask ourselves, Mr Speaker, Sir, is why the size of small sugarcane planters has plummeted. Why? Who is responsible for such a situation? We should revert this trend in the interest of agriculture and the interest of the planters' community. Mr Speaker, Sir, we know that for a very long time, the sugar planters' community in Mauritius was left on its own, having had to face declining sugar prices, as well as the absence of necessary support and facilities from the authorities concerned, and this Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, has addressed a problem that no other Government has dared to do, up to now, that is, ensuring that our local planters are given a guaranteed price of Rs25,000 per tonne for the first 60 tonnes of sugar. Likewise, it is also provided in the Budget that the insurance payable to the Sugar Industry Fund Board by planters, who produce up to 60 tonnes of sugar, will be waived until the 2020 crop season. Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is provision for an increase of the rate of customs duty on imported sugar from 80% to 100%, which is yet another laudable fiscal policy measure to protect the local sugar planters in the context of National Agri-Food Development Programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the second dimension of my intervention. And here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to dwell upon the subject of entrepreneurship and SMEs, which is the tenth pillar of the economy recovery plan for this Government outlined in the 2021 Budget Speech by the Minister of Finance. Mr Speaker, Sir, it cannot be denied that every crisis brings in its wake a number of challenges and threats. But, at the same time, there are also opportunities that are generated and that can be captured for the benefit of humanity. Likewise, Mr Speaker, Sir, organisations are also impacted, and when I say organisations, I have in mind people such as employees and entrepreneurs, in other words, those who constitute the backbone of the business, the linchpin of the economy. It is only reasonable and legitimate that as a Government, we continue to provide all the necessary support they deserve, especially during these testing times of their existence. Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know that businesses have been badly dented, and their bottom line seriously impaired in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, and here, I have in mind, the Small and Medium Enterprises

(SMEs) operating in the informal sectors. As a Government, it is our duty, even our obligation to give support to our SMEs in these difficult times because they constitute an important segment of our economy. They make significant contribution to the GDP of this country. They are also major job providers. It goes without saying that SMEs are increasingly becoming key players in shaping national economic development and ensuring sustainable growth. It is a known fact that Governments over the world are sparing no effort to support SMEs in their vision to provide goods and services to the local community as well as for job creation. As rightly pointed out by the Minister of Finance in his speech, our economic recovery and future growth of Mauritius will depend on how we build a strong and inclusive economy and society. In this regard, it is highly commendable that the SMEs are at the forefront of the recovery agenda of this Government. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me therefore congratulate the Minister of Finance for the financial support he is giving to the SMEs and cooperative societies through the DBM. For too long, SMEs have suffered from lack of finance and access to capital. I would like to believe that such a shortcoming which was too prevalent in the past, has now been fully addressed by this Government. In the same manner, Mr Speaker, Sir, we thank the Minister of Finance for his excellent initiative of providing financial assistance up to the ceiling of Rs10 m. per enterprise at a concessional rate of 0.5% per annum. My own constituency has many local entrepreneurs and I am sure this will be a major boost that will enable them to expand their activities within the context of avowed policy of the Government to promote the 'Made in Moris' label.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the achievement of the 'Made in Moris' label, the Budget Speech provides some excellent proposals, such as the increase of the margin of preference from 30% to 40% in all public procurement initiatives. Furthermore, all SMEs and Cooperative Societies will benefit from a grant of 15% on cost of asset under the DPM Enterprise Modernisation Scheme. All these innovative measures will, no doubt, encourage our local entrepreneurs to take their business to the next level while bringing in value added in their quest to remain afloat in the aftermath of the global pandemic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in conclusion and while being mindful of the time allocated to me, I also wish to say a few words on gender and family welfare. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore one stark reality that most impacted segment of society has been women. Studies carried out by a well-known analyst confirmed that women have been the hardest hit by COVID-19. Indeed, women are facing untold challenges and will continue to be affected at the hands of the virus, driving them deeper into the poverty trap. There are also reports

that indicate that during lockdowns the rate of domestic violence and abuse against women has increased drastically, the more so as women were less able to seek help and assistance as a reason of being confined at home. For example, in Germany, the emergency number for domestic violence registered a rise of 18% more during the first two weeks of the lockdown. It has also been reported, Mr Speaker, Sir, that after the lockdown has been lifted in China, there has been a sharp rise in divorce. In our own context, there have been over 800 reported cases of violence against women during the confinement period.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the economic and financial vulnerability of women, meaning that women will continue to bear the financial fallout in the post-COVID era. That's why, Mr Speaker, Sir, the need to protect our women against all forms of discrimination, abuse and violence should continue to remain our major preoccupation. In this regard, as a woman, I welcome the initiative announced by the Minister of Finance to amend the Protection against Domestic Violence Act in order to enhance the protection of women. It is also encouraging to note that there is provision for concessional loans to be granted to women as part of Government's strategy to promote women entrepreneurship.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all these measures speak highly of the Government's vision to foster and build an inclusive economy and society. This Government will not remain on its pledge to build a better society for all Mauritians from all walks of life. This Budget is not about the loss of jobs; rather it is about saving as many jobs as we can for the various policy measures announced by the Ministry of Finance. It is about supporting the growth of our economy during the next four and a half years. It shows the determination and compassion of this Government, in particular the Prime Minister, to protect jobs and to improve the livelihoods of our people. This Budget also encapsulates a clear vision and sets out a clear plan to restore economic stability in uncharted waters. This Budget lays down the social and economic fundamentals to take Mauritius through the process of economic recovery and get the economy back on track and moving.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me quote the Prime Minister of New Zealand. She recently stated-

“Let's begin our recovery and let's rebuild together. The new normal, the economy of life has started, it's irreversible. We have chosen as a Government to act. As a

Government, we will succeed. We will reverse the situation for the common good of our country and our people. We will bounce back.”

Thank you so much for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Jagutpal!

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Mr K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, I move for the adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to tomorrow, Tuesday 09 June 2020, at 11.30 a.m.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

MATTERS RAISED

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

CITE MARTIAL - SUB-RESERVOIR - LEAKAGE

Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Mr Speaker, Sir, it concerns the Deputy Prime Minister and it is with regard to the leakage of a sub-reservoir situated at Cité Martial, near Military Street. It does not cause inconvenience to the residents, only that it concerns the Canal Anglais which is being damaged by the water from the sub-reservoir.

I have made complaints many times to the Central Water Authority Department, but, unfortunately, there is still leakage in the region. So, I will make an appeal to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, to his good office, to see that this problem be resolved.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will look into it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

(9.36 p.m.)

DR. JEETOO HOSPITAL – ANGIOPLASTY EQUIPMENT

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The issue which I would like to raise is addressed to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and it concerns equipment needed to carry out angioplasty procedures in Dr. Jeetoo Hospital. There is only one such equipment and it is down for ten days now and there is a list of patients who are waiting for the angioplasty machine to be operational again.

I understand from the doctors I have been talking to that there is a spare part that has to be ordered, and it has been ordered. So, my plea today to the hon. Minister is to consider buying a second equipment to carry out angioplasty procedure because Dr. Jeetoo Hospital is not only a big hospital, but also has to cater for patients from Nehru Hospital, Rose Belle, and having only one such equipment is not sufficient to cater for all these patients.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken note of the hon. Member's request. At the same time, I must say that such an equipment is very expensive. We have to see the feasibility of adding one more equipment over there. I will look into that.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

CAMP LE JUGE/LA BRASSERIE - DRAIN

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): M. le président, ce soir ma requête s'adresse à l'honorable Hurreeram, le ministre de l'infrastructure nationale et du développement communautaire. Cela concerne la rue principale de Camp Le Juge à La Brasserie où le drain principal qui sert aussi comme unique passage de piétons est obstrué par les mauvaises herbes. En cas de grosses pluies, le passage de piétons est inondé et cela cause des inconvénients aux habitants.

Je demanderai à l'honorable ministre s'il peut demander à la RDA de prendre les actions nécessaires pour remédier à la situation, car c'est une route classifiée.

Merci.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank my hon. colleague for having given me advance notice of this question. I will pass over this request to the RDA and will make sure that the needful is done.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Osman Mahomed!

DR. JEETOO HOSPITAL - CASUALTY DEPARTMENT - WAITING TIME

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. It concerns Dr. Jeetoo Hospital as well. I am not too sure whether there is something going on, but today I have received many photos - it is on my mobile phone, maybe I can show the hon. Minister later – of long queues in the Casualty Department. People don't have a clear explanation about this. Maybe, the number of doctors is not enough; I am not too sure what is the problem.

So, my simple request to the hon. Minister is to kindly have a look at this because people have to wait for long, long hours to have the chance to see a doctor in the Casualty Department these days at Dr. Jeetoo Hospital.

Thank you.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken note of the long queues, especially at a time when we have social distancing, queues will be longer. I will look into why there is so much crowding in that department...

Mr Osman Mahomed: It is not about social distancing; it is crowd, a big one. Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Well, I will look into that.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

(9.40 p.m.)

FLACQ – MARKET FAIR – STORM WATER DRAINAGE SYSTEM

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request tonight is addressed to the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management and it concerns the market fair of Flacq.

Despite the resistance of the inhabitants, the then Government in 2012 went ahead with the construction of a market in a marshy land and today there is a major storm water drainage problem. I will thus request the Minister if the drainage and also the ventilation system can be relooked as this is causing a major inconvenience to both the vegetable sellers and the inhabitants.

Thank you.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnood): I'll look into it, Mr Speaker, Sir. I'll talk to the local authorities at Flacq to see what can be done about it.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

(9.41 p.m.)

CHANCERY HOUSE – SEWERAGE SYSTEM

Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, I have an issue concerning the hon. Deputy Prime Minister. This morning whilst I was on my way to Parliament, I was approached by the Syndic of Chancery House, the building found along Lislet Geoffroy Street. In fact, what I have been told is that due to blockages in the sewerage system, during rainfall, this system gets overflowed and the waste gets accumulated, especially in the parking of Chancery House. In fact, requests have been made to the officers of the Wastewater, visits were carried out, the request dates back to 13 March but since now the request has remained unattended. May I request the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to kindly look into the matter.

Thank you.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr I. Collendavelloo): Of course, I will look into it, but from what I hear, I understand there is accumulation of water during rainfalls, which means that it would not necessarily be a wastewater issue but a rainfall matter, but I will look into it and see what is the issue.

Mr Ramful: Can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister...

The Deputy Prime Minister: This is not a debate.

Mr Ramful: I am not...

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sorry, this is not a debate. No, no, no.

Mr Speaker: The Deputy Prime Minister will look into the matter.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sorry.

(9.42 p.m.)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

MADAME AZOR, GOODLANDS – NHDC HOUSES – TITLE DEEDS

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning. I am referring to the NHDC houses situated at Madame Azor, Goodlands known as Ametrin C1 to C36. While most of the house owners have already received their title deeds, these 36 families have not received their legal documents so far. They have been waiting for the past 18 months. Please kindly look the matter and help these 36 families to have the said documents, the sooner the better.

Thank you.

The Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for drawing my attention to this issue of which I was not aware. I shall certainly look into it and would invite the hon. Member to provide me with any further information he may have.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

MAGON STREET, PLAINE VERTE – WASTE DUMPING

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The issue I am raising tonight relates to the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government. In fact, very often, there are wastes that are dumped on the corner of Nyon and Magon Streets at Plaine Verte. Apart from being an eyesore, it creates much inconvenience to people visiting the garden and inhabitants living in the area. And adding to that there are some abandoned cars that are left near this place. So, I will kindly ask the Minister to instruct the Municipality of Port Louis to do the needful as well as the Police.

Thank you.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware of the problem. This problem

has been there for a long time. We have been there. The Municipality of Port Louis has sent their people to sort it out, to clean it, but every time they clean it, the inhabitants just make it a mess again and this has been going on for years. They have been cleaning it and, unfortunately, we have to say it is the inhabitants who are making a mess, they just use it as a dumping ground and throw everything there all the time; but the Municipality of Port Louis is doing its job.

Mr Speaker: No further adjournment matter! So, we stop here. Thank you very much.

At 9.45 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 09 June 2020 at 11.30 a.m.