



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

THURSDAY 11 JUNE 2020

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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
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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

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 18 of 2020

Sitting of Thursday 11 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.

Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

The Audited Financial Statements of the Independent Broadcasting Authority for the year ended 30 June 2019.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

ST. LOUIS POWER GENERATION PROJECT - ALLEGED CORRUPT & FRAUDULENT PRACTICES

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the alleged corrupt and fraudulent practices unfolded by the African Development Bank concerning the tender for the redevelopment of the St. Louis Power Station, he will state –

- (a) if he was informed that an inquiry had been initiated therein, indicating if his Office was solicited to provide any assistance in connection therewith, and
- (b) if his Office has been communicated with the adverse integrity report, indicating if he has measured the expected impact thereof on the credibility of Mauritius vis-à-vis the international financial institutions and international community.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the afternoon of 08 June last, the Deputy Prime Minister informed me that the African Development Bank had announced the debarment of Burmeister & Wain Scandinavian Contractor (BWSC) for a period of 21 months for engaging in sanctionable practices in a power generation project financed by the AfDB in Mauritius.

He forwarded to me a copy, and I saw that the Press release was to the effect that Burmeister & Wain Scandinavian Company (BWSC) had been debarred for a period of 21 months pursuant to a settlement agreement between the Bank and that company. The reason advanced for that debarment was that the company had, according to the Bank, engaged in –

“sanctionable practices in a power generation project financed by the Bank in Mauritius”.

The Press Release states that in 2014 and 2015, BWSC participated in tenders for the redevelopment of the Saint Louis power plant in Mauritius, a project funded by the Bank. It further states that an investigation conducted by the Bank’s Office of Integrity and Anti-Corruption had concluded that it is more likely than not that the company engaged in fraudulent and corrupt practices in the context of this project.

The Press release further states that, and I quote –

“evidence supports a finding that Burmeister & Wain, on a balance of probabilities, financially rewarded members of the Mauritian administration and others, through the intermediary of third parties, for providing access to confidential tender-related information which allowed them to tailor the technical specifications of the tenders to its offering, thus gaining an undue competitive advantage over other tenderers”.

I am tabling a copy of that Press Release.

In regard to part (a) of the question, I was not informed that an inquiry had been initiated, nor was my Office solicited to provide assistance.

In regard to part (b) of the question, my Office has not been provided with the report of the Office of Integrity and Anti-Corruption of the African Development Bank. I am informed that the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, on 09 June 2020, requested a copy of the report on the investigation. On the following day, the Bank replied that in accordance with its guidelines and policies, investigation reports compiled by its Office of Integrity and Anti-corruption are confidential in nature and cannot be shared outside of a referral process to law enforcement authorities.

I am further informed that, on 09 June 2020, the CEB has referred the matter to ICAC for investigation in accordance with sections 44(1) and 46(1)(e) of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as soon as I became aware of the Press release, I caused my Office to start an assessment of the impact of this matter.

I have to point out that the Acting General Manager of the CEB has agreed to inform the Board of his intention to step aside from his current position pending further development.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to stress, in the strongest terms, that this Government, just as the previous Government, has adopted a zero tolerance policy against corruption. The House and the population may rest assured that our fight against fraud and corruption shall continue relentlessly and without fear or favour. Tough and stringent actions, as may be warranted by the ICAC inquiry, will be taken against any person who is found to have been involved in any of the alleged acts of corruption.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister is underestimating the gravity of what I would term the ‘Saint Louis Development Gate’. The gravity of which cannot be underestimated because there are people in the rank and file of his Government who are directly involved in this.

Can I ask the Prime Minister why is it that his Deputy Prime Minister didn’t bring it to his attention an exchange of correspondence between the CEO of BWSC and Mr Mukoon, highlighting the problem since a year ago in relation to fraudulent and corrupt practices, Mr Speaker, Sir? Since a year! And you are telling me that you are a Prime Minister whose ambition is to wage war on corruption and fraud, when sitting next to him is a gentleman who is involved in fraudulent practices, Mr Speaker, Sir?

I will table this paper.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is asking me whether the Deputy Prime Minister was aware of a correspondence. The question should have been addressed to him, for him to answer. I must say that I do not think that he was aware of such a correspondence; otherwise this matter would have been brought to the level of Government for any action to be taken.

Mr Speaker: Quiet! Order!

Dr. Boolell: I take it for granted that the Prime Minister is honest in his reply. Can I ask him whether the Ministry of Public Utilities does not have a representative sitting on the Board of CEB?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it has a representative.

Dr. Boolell: Did that member not report to the Senior Chief Executive who would in turn inform the Deputy Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not aware ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order here!

The Prime Minister: ...whether anything has been reported.

(Interruptions)

You asked your question! Let me answer! I am not aware what has been reported to the Board of the CEB, for members of the Board to be made aware, so that they can, in line with their responsibility, relay any information to the Ministry.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet here! Order! No crosstalking!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Prime Minister whether he is aware that the Chairman of the Central Electricity Board not only is a member of the political party of the Deputy Prime Minister, but he is also Chairman of the Central Electricity Board, and I would have taken it for granted that the matter was raised, discussed with him, and knowing that he has close relationship with the Deputy Prime Minister, am I to understand that the matter was not raised there and then with the Deputy Prime Minister? Can he fail ignorance on this?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying “I take it for granted”. Well, this is why I say we must find out whether anything has been, in fact, reported to the Board. I do not have this information. I cannot say whether it has been reported or it has not been reported. We shall find out.

Dr. Boolell: Is the Prime Minister aware, and I am sure the Prime Minister took cognizance of a question put in this very House by hon. Bashir Jahangeer, where the Deputy Prime Minister refused to table the Tender Analysis Report of this corrupt contract; not only that, instruction was given to give a certificate of urgency for the project to go ahead?

The Prime Minister: As far as I know, there was no certificate of urgency.

(Interruptions)

There was?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: I shall have to find out about the information that you are relaying to me. I do not have all this information.

Dr. Boolell: And is he aware that the difference between the company which was awarded the contract and the next is more than Rs700 m.? Is he aware of that?

The Prime Minister: Well, I shall have to find out.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan!

Dr. Boolell: Is the Prime Minister aware that this is what has been highlighted by the African Bank of Development? And not only that, the African Bank of Development has an observer status at the Financial Action Taskforce. Can I ask the Prime Minister whether he is aware of that?

The Prime Minister: From the information that I have up to now, I do not have anything to say as to whether the African Development Bank has highlighted the fact that there was a difference between the first tenderer and the others. I do not have any comment from the ADB on that issue. What I know, what I have been informed -because I just gathered the information from the different quarters concerned - is that there was an initial tender that was carried out in 2014 and that tender was annulled because the Central Procurement Board found that it was not appropriate to award the contract to the supposed successful tenderer and, thereafter, there was another process that was carried out in order to allocate the contract to the successful tenderer.

So, from what I gather, there were certain things, but I do not have all the information with regard to the first tender process. But from what I have been told, the African Development Bank was fully involved in drafting the specifications and in assisting the process throughout in order to enable this allocation to be made.

Dr. Boolell: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that the report concluded that the contractor has paid officials and others, through intermediaries, in order to have access to confidential information? Has he been made aware of this? Has there been an inquiry conducted in respect of who is the agent, who is the one who is distributing the money around?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I only have information in accordance with the Press release of 08 June of this year. I do not have any other report in my possession. So, if the hon. Leader of the Opposition has the report itself, I shall be very grateful to him if a copy of that report can be communicated to me.

Dr. Boolell: The truth is in the report. Can I invite the Prime Minister to address this matter very seriously. Because we know who is the intermediary, and the intermediary is well-known to the Deputy Prime Minister, and he is well-known. And if you want to, I can drop the name of the intermediary in respect of the amount of money that has been distributed.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as soon as I became aware of this Press Release, we have sent a communication to the African Development Bank so that we may be provided with details pertaining to the allegation that has been made. I have just answered that we had a reply that this information cannot be communicated unless there is an Authority which is carrying out an inquiry. Of course, again, I do not go into the process of how they are going to obtain the evidence, but...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: I am sure they will have to make a request for this report. The way the hon. Leader of the Opposition is asking questions indicating he has information. Please, give it to me, and if you...

(Interruptions)

...have names, you are aware of how much money has been given, and so on, please give it to me. We shall also hand it over to the ICAC.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, if there is honesty of purpose, and the Prime Minister is willing to have access to information, can I ask him to see to it that a proper inquiry is conducted and not leave it to ICAC to conduct the inquiry, which is not a respected law enforcement agency? Can I ask the Prime Minister, if there is honesty of purpose, to invite, first of all...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan!

Dr. Boolell: ...his Deputy Prime Minister to step down, the Chairman of CEB to step down, the lady who is member of the IRP, Miss Christelle Sohun, to step down and also the Acting Director of CEB and Board members of CEB. Can I ask him, if he is willing to put his best endeavour to wage war on fraud and corruption, to set up a Commission of Inquiry,

chaired by a sitting Judge to enlighten this country on this mega scandal called the ‘St Louis Gate’? Mr Prime Minister, it’s up to you to do that!

The Prime Minister: I do understand that the hon. Leader of the Opposition wants so many people to step down, but, as a matter of principle, I have...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet!

The Prime Minister: I have always acted on the basis of principle. Let us see what evidence we have, if there is any *prima facie* case, and then, whoever...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan! You don’t have the right to say this.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Dir mwa qui fer pas kapav don mwa la parole.*

Mr Speaker: Do you know your Standing Order?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am not sure you know your Standing Order! You are just kidding in Parliament.

(Interruptions)

You are kidding in Parliament! Obstructing the proceedings of Parliament!

(Interruptions)

Yes, you are obstructing the proceedings! On your own rule!

(Interruptions)

You behave yourself!

Mr Bhagwan: I am behaving myself!

Mr Speaker: You behave yourself!

(Interruptions)

You behave yourself! You behave yourself! You behave yourself!

Now, I want you to withdraw the word ‘*voleur*’!

(Interruptions)

I ask you to withdraw!

(Interruptions)

Sergeant-at-Arms!

(Interruptions)

Withdraw!

(Interruptions)

Sergeant-at-Arms! Withdraw!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Withdraw the word!

(Interruptions)

Sergeant-at-Arms!

(Interruptions)

Sergeant-at-Arms!

(Interruptions)

Withdraw from the Chamber!

(Interruptions)

Withdraw from the Chamber!

(Interruptions)

Withdraw from the Chamber!

(Interruptions)

Withdraw from the Chamber! Withdraw from the Chamber!

(Interruptions)

Withdraw from the Chamber!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Pas touss mwa!*

Mr Speaker: Withdraw from the Chamber!

Mr Bérenger: Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Leader of the Opposition, continue your work!

Dr. Boolell: Don't shout at me!

Mr Speaker: I am not shouting at you. I am guiding you.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is willing to address this issue very forcefully? I have asked for a Commission of Inquiry, and if there is honesty of purpose, and I am sure, I am not saying the Prime Minister is willing to cover up anybody, far from that. But can I...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am listening!

(Interruptions)

You don't address me like that!

Dr. Boolell: Can I reiterate what I said. I know the Prime Minister had a phone conversation with the President of the EU Council, and I also can say what the outcome has been. This PNQ is an opportunity to restore the image of this country, and if the Prime Minister is willing to restore the image of this country, I appeal to him yet again to set up this Commission of Inquiry and to see to it that this Minister steps down for fraudulent practices!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir,...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You need a reply?

(Interruptions)

Do you need a reply?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is confusing matters between my...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Do you need a reply? You listen to the reply?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: I did. When you were asking questions, I have not interrupted you. At least, listen to my reply. So, good for him if he knows my conversation between myself and hon. Michel...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You want me to suspend the sitting?

(Interruptions)

You don't have to make any comment, and I don't listen to your comment!

(Interruptions)

You are...

(Interruptions)

Order!

The Prime Minister: My conversation with Mr Michel pertains to the EU listing of Mauritius. It has nothing to do with this matter, because the EU listing concerns the anti-money laundering and the combatting of financing of terrorism, which is a totally different subject altogether. So, you should not...

(Interruptions)

No, you should not be mixing issues.

(Interruptions)

I agree that this communication from the ADB is, indeed, a very serious matter, and you can rest assured that, as soon as it was publicised, I, of course, started looking into the matter, and, in fact, I am already looking into this matter, and whatever decision will have to be taken ultimately will be taken.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I reiterate what I said. And I don't want any perception of cover-up from this Government. It's an opportunity for the Prime Minister to set up this Commission of Inquiry, and I invite him to do so. And let me remind him in relation to a Select Committee which was set up concerning the Gas Turbine Project. At least Sir Anerood Jugnauth had the decency to set up this Select Committee. Can I appeal to the Prime Minister, yet again, to set up this Commission of Inquiry and invite his Deputy Prime Minister and others to step down? Because the word 'Administration' is stated in this Press Communiqué and 'Administration' means CEB, the Ministry, the Minister and others who are guilty of impropriety.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can assure the hon. Leader of the Opposition that Government will take whatever decision it has to take in order to shed light on this matter.

Dr. Boolell: And in the meantime, I hope none of these essential documents disappear.

Mr Speaker: This is not a question, this is just a remark.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, in this august Assembly, on 01 April 2015, the hon. Leader of the Opposition asked a specific question: whether there is going to be a Police inquiry in respect to the award of the contract to BWSC. The then Minister - who is still Minister - said, no, he is looking forward. Then, on 28 November 2017, hon. Jahangeer, again, said that it is not possible that the same company is awarded the contract for the past 15 years, and again, the Deputy Prime Minister did not do anything. Last year, the CEB had a report from the African Development Bank that this company is involved in corrupt practice. Again, the Deputy Prime Minister does not do anything. So, he has been covering up for BWSC! So, is the Prime Minister, today, going to tell the nation that he is going to cover up his Deputy Prime Minister or he is going to sanction him?

The Prime Minister: Well, hon. Uteem, let me remind you what hon. Bérenger said with regard to the tender process that started under the Labour/ PMSD Government. Let me quote.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Let me quote.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: And I quote: “Now there is a Government that wants to have good governance all over the place. My information was that there was a change in the specifications after the tender had come out. Tailor-made! Not everybody, but some people in the Central Electricity Board, to suit the purposes of those people, and *favorisera* a given contractor”. This was the comment made by hon. Bérenger.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: So, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say again that inquiry has already started. We will see about the outcome, and there is going to be not only no cover-up, but also no perception of cover-up.

Mr Speaker: Hon Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Can I ask the Prime Minister to be faithful and not to give the impression that he is misleading the House. In respect of that particular contract, it was annulled; it was cancelled at the time we were in Government.

The Prime Minister: Yes, do you know why it was annulled?

(Interruptions)

Do you know? You seem to be so much informed!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You have to listen to the reply, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

The Prime Minister: The African Development Bank objected!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You are misbehaving, Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Let me answer! You have been saying so much...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You are misbehaving!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Why cannot you listen? You put a question, but you do not want to listen to my answer. You know why? Because the African Development Bank, on the eve of General Election, objected that this contract be awarded. And you know on what basis?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mohamed! Hon. Dr. Boolell, listen to the reply to your question! This is parliamentary manner!

Mr Mohamed: He is covering up!

The Prime Minister: What covering up? I am uncovering what has been done...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Second Leader of the Opposition!

The Prime Minister: ...under your Labour Government. And, Mr Speaker, Sir,...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: ...the truth has to be told...

Mr Speaker: Maybe the Member does not need a reply! Maybe he does not need a reply!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Dr. Boolell! You asked a question! Listen to the reply!

Dr. Boolell: And don't shout at me!

Mr Speaker: You, don't shout in this House!

(Interruptions)

You don't shout! Okay! You listen!

Dr. Boolell: Have manners! Don't shout at me!

Mr Speaker: You listen to the reply of the Prime Minister! You listen!

(Interruptions)

You listen to the reply!

(Interruptions)

I suspend the sitting!

At 12.03 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 12.09. p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: It's good to show some respect! Hon. Prime Minister, do you still have a reply?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I was ...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: I have another question.

Mr Speaker: Yes, I will give you.

The Prime Minister: No, I have not finished my reply.

Mr Speaker: I know, bear with me! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, can you listen to the reply? Okay, please!

The Prime Minister: I shall not be long. Suffice it for me to say that the first tender process was cancelled because CPB did not find it was in order and the African Development Bank had made certain remarks also, and they were agreeable that the tender had to be cancelled.

Dr. Boolell: I concur with the Prime Minister. Can I, again, reiterate what I said. Can I ask the Prime Minister whether he was made aware the circumstances under which the certificate of urgency was issued while there were other cases before the IRP? Who gave instruction and why was it that this certificate of urgency was issued allegedly in the name of public interest? Why then was that issued?

The Prime Minister: From what I am informed, I believe it was urgent for the project to materialise because eventually there could have been a shortage in terms of supply of electricity.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the light of information which I have imparted to the House and in the light of what has been stated in this Press Communiqué, can I ask the Prime Minister, in his heart of heart and to think wisely, and in the name of transparency and accountability, to ask the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chairman of the CEB and Board members of the CEB to step down and set up this Commission of Inquiry to send the right signal to financial institutions and to the international community, at a time when we are trying to revisit our jurisdiction to make it a better jurisdiction?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no need for asking about stepping down. What the hon. Leader of the Opposition has said - it seems; and I hope he is very serious about it. He seems to have a lot of information with regard to this.

(Interruptions)

Well, you provide me with this information, then we will see.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

Mr Lobine: Hon. Prime Minister, is it not a fit and proper case to at least set up a Select Committee into this whole saga?

The Prime Minister: As I say, Government will take whatever decision we consider necessary so that we can shed light on this issue.

Mr Speaker: Last question! Leader of the Opposition! You don't have any question?

Dr. Boolell: I have, but ...

Mr Speaker: I am giving you the last question. Time is over! I am giving you the last question!

Dr. Boolell: Can I ask the Prime Minister again, in the light of exchange of information, and those information have been circulated in the Press, whether his Office or the Ministry of Finance will liaise with the African Bank of Development and invite the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Unit to come and share information to ensure that we know who is the subcontractor, why is it that there has been a discrepancy in respect of the contract allocated to the Danish Company and the second best? And I would like to know, Mr Speaker, Sir, whether there has been sharing of this money. Allegedly, this is what we have been told, and if he wants, I can give him the name of the person who has distributed that money; that I can give him.

The Prime Minister: First of all, let me answer the first part of the question, and let me repeat again that the Ministry of Finance had already requested information from the African Development Bank. I have mentioned this communication. The reply is that this information is confidential, and from what I can gather from the reply, it seems it can only be disclosed to an institution which carries out an inquiry into the matter. So, I am sure that the institution will request the report so that it can carry out the inquiry.

Now, the second part of the question - you said, and I am very happy, that you will communicate to me the details and information that you have in your possession.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

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

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(12.14 p.m.)

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

MOTOR VEHICLES – PERSONALISED REGISTRATION MARKS – ONLINE RESERVATION & PAYMENT

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to make a statement on the online reservation and payment of personalised registration marks of motor vehicles.

Following the extension of registration marks from FN 1 to FN 1000 up to ZZ 1 to ZZ 1000, the new combination of Personalised Registration Marks, ranging from letters FN to ZZ, followed by four numeric figures, from 1 to 1000, was hosted on the Government Online Centre and was made available to the public as from Friday 07 June 2019 through the website of the National Land Transport Authority.

The allocation of these Registration Marks was strictly on a 'first come, first serve' basis. A Special NLTA Registration Unit was set up at its sub office located at Autocheck Ltd, Plaine Lauzun to attend to demands. However, the Unit was faced with a high influx of

customers. It was observed that the public, in general, was not respecting the control measures that were put in place, and verbal complaints about malpractices and illicit businesses were even reported.

In the circumstances, the NLTA temporarily suspended the online reservation facility as from 17 June 2019, and the public was informed accordingly through a Press communiqué. It was hence, decided, for a better control and effective service, that both reservation and payment of a Personalised Registration Mark be made online.

The NLTA has worked closely with the Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation on this project. The system has gone through 3 cycles of development, enhancement and testing. I wish to seize this opportunity to thank my colleague, hon. Minister Balgobin and his staff for their support.

The Road Traffic (Registration of Motor Vehicles and Trailers) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 which provides *inter alia* for the online application and electronic payment in respect of a Personalised Registration Mark, has been gazetted on Thursday 04 June 2020.

Arrangements have already been made by the NLTA for the online system to go live by Friday 12 June 2020 at midnight. The cost of a Personalised Registration Mark is being maintained at Rs25,000, and a Press communiqué will be issued by the NLTA to that effect.

Thank you.

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. Minister Sawmynaden!

The Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Mr Y. Sawmynaden): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first of all, congratulate the Minister of Finance for coming up with a budget *dans un contexte économique difficile sans oublier l'aspect social*. M. le président, au moment où nous débattons des mesures énoncées dans le

budget 2020-2021, notre pays n'est pas le seul à souffrir des conséquences néfastes de la pandémie COVID-19. Le monde entier, y compris les grandes puissances mondiales, se retrouve face aux mêmes défis. Dans de telles circonstances, beaucoup, surtout l'Opposition, s'attendaient à ce que le gouvernement présente un budget qui serait défavorable à la population, leur donnant ainsi l'occasion d'émettre des critiques. Or, il en a été tout le contraire. Malgré toutes les difficultés, ce gouvernement a tout mis en œuvre pour sauvegarder les intérêts du peuple tout en mettant en application les mesures nécessaires pour relancer l'économie. Le gouvernement n'a pas lésiné sur les moyens. Nous avons travaillé matin, midi et soir, et ce depuis plus de trois mois, pour éviter que le pays ne coure à une catastrophe.

M. le président, de par les temps qui courent, je suis triste pour l'humanité. Quand je vois la réaction des membres de l'Opposition ces temps-ci, pour eux, c'est du *'business as usual'*. Ils ne savent que critiquer. La question qui se pose est la suivante : Qu'auraient-ils dit s'ils étaient des membres de l'Opposition aux États-Unis, en Angleterre ou en Europe? Il est vrai que gouverner c'est prévoir. Mais qui dans ce monde aurait prévu que le ciel serait clair, sans avions et que des animaux pourraient se promener librement dans certaines villes qui grouillent habituellement de monde et de véhicules?

M. le président, je maintiens que la nature a repris ses droits et nous n'avons aucun contrôle.

Malgré tout ce que peut dire l'Opposition, je suis certain que personne de l'autre côté de cette Chambre n'aurait souhaité se retrouver à la place du ministre des Finances, du Premier ministre ou du gouvernement pour la présentation d'un budget dans un contexte aussi incertain et difficile.

M. le président, ce n'est pas le moment de critiquer. La situation actuelle et les critiques venant de l'Opposition me ramènent à une chose élémentaire que j'ai apprise quand je faisais mon *MBA*, et que je pratique toujours. Les théories peuvent être belles et intéressantes, mais si on ne peut les mettre en application elles ne servent à rien. L'Opposition met en avant de grandes thèses. Mais la question demeure : Nous parlent-ils de l'aspect pratique? Est-ce que leurs thèses peuvent être mises en application? La situation est toujours difficile. Il s'agit aujourd'hui de remettre le pays sur les rails pour assurer un avenir meilleur à toute la population.

C'est le moment de se serrer les coudes et de travailler tous ensemble pour le bien-être de notre peuple. A quoi serviront les critiques? A rien. Si ce n'est qu'à provoquer des débats qui ne déboucheront sur rien de solide. L'Opposition a son rôle à jouer, certes, mais ne serait-il pas plus judicieux si elle venait avec des idées et des propositions concrètes et réalisables? La critique est facile. Sans vouloir entrer dans une polémique, je voudrais juste revenir sur les propos de l'honorable Nagalingum, qui a soutenu que de nombreuses familles n'ont pu s'approvisionner à la fermeture des supermarchés. Je lui rappellerai tout simplement qu'il fallait épargner/sauver la population face au COVID-19 et éviter la mort de centaines, voire de milliers, de nos compatriotes. Je tiens à lui rappeler les prévisions et les statistiques concernant le nombre de morts qu'il y aurait eu si le gouvernement n'avait pas pris les mesures qui s'imposent. Comment éviter que le COVID-19 ne décime notre population? Est-ce en laissant les commerces, les centres commerciaux et les supermarchés ouverts? Non, M. le président. Si nous avions agi ainsi, nous aurions ouvert les vannes pour une hécatombe. On se souviendra tous de la ruée vers les supermarchés et des achats en excès dont nous avons été témoins avant l'instauration du couvre-feu sanitaire. Quelles auraient été les conséquences s'il y avait une personne infectée parmi les nombreuses personnes massées dans les différents commerces? Combien de familles auraient été affectées? Aurions-nous dû permettre que ce genre de situation ne perdure? Si nous n'avions pas agi, c'est le gouvernement qui aurait été blâmé. On nous aurait accusé, et l'Opposition en première ligne, d'avoir envoyé nos compatriotes à l'abattoir.

M. le président, bien que les supermarchés aient été fermés, le gouvernement s'est assuré que plus de 40,000 familles vulnérables soient alimentés en produits de premières nécessités. Nous avons mis en place d'autres mesures pour que le reste de la population puisse s'approvisionner. Et parallèlement, nous avons travaillé sur un plan de réouverture structuré, coordonné et sans risques. Et les résultats sont là. Je l'ai dit, et je le répète ici : Nous sommes un gouvernement qui est proche du peuple, un gouvernement qui est à l'écoute du peuple et un gouvernement qui protège le peuple.

M. le président, permettez-moi aussi de revenir sur les critiques émises contre le gouvernement par l'honorable Michael Yeung Sik Yuen lors de son intervention, hier soir. L'honorable membre a affirmé que le pouvoir d'achat est en chute libre et que de nombreuses familles peinent à s'approvisionner en produits de base. L'honorable membre a aussi soumis une liste à l'Assemblée de produits que lui-même s'est auto-déclaré enquêteur pour dire que

les prix ont grimpé. Il a pris le temps d'énumérer divers produits tout en comparant les prix pratiqués en 2014 et les prix pratiqués aujourd'hui.

M. le président, nous savons tous que l'honorable membre vient d'une famille qui possède une enseigne très connue à Curepipe. Pourquoi, donc, est-ce que ce supermarché n'a pas maintenu les prix pratiqués depuis 2014? Je suis certain que cela aurait fait plaisir aux consommateurs. Pourquoi n'avoir pas expliqué les raisons qui ont provoqué la hausse des prix depuis 2014? L'honorable Yeung Sik Yuen devrait éviter de faire des commentaires et des observations irrationnels. Il est vrai que les prix ont pu augmenter au fil des années, mais l'honorable membre doit être honnête en reconnaissant que, quand son parti ou le parti qu'il a récupéré après avoir été expulsé du PMSD, quand son parti a quitté le pouvoir en 2014, il y avait des citoyens de ce pays qui touchaient un salaire mensuel de R 1,500 par mois, la pension de vieillesse était de seulement R 3,623, la bombonne de gaz se vendait à R 330, des familles n'avaient pas droit à six mètres cube d'eau gratuit, les athlètes ne touchaient pas de pension après leur carrière, les enfants handicapés ne touchaient pas de pension, il n'y avait pas de visite médicale à domicile pour les personnes de 18 à 65 ans qui en ont vraiment besoin. Et c'est ce gouvernement qui a introduit le salaire minimum et qui a augmenté la pension à plus de R 9,000. De plus, M. le président, en tant que gouvernement responsable, nous avons pris les mesures qui s'imposent quand certains commerçants faisaient des abus. N'oublions pas que le prix du gaz était de R 250 en 2005, R 300 en 2008 et R 330 en 2012. Et c'est nous qui avons baissé le prix pour arriver aujourd'hui à R 180.

La structure des prix, M. le président, démontre que le contrôle et les '*mark-up*' imposés ont ramené les prix des commodités dans une fourchette raisonnable. Il est vrai que la hausse du Dollar a engendré une légère hausse des prix, mais la situation n'est pas aussi alarmante que veut le faire croire l'honorable Yeung Sik Yuen. D'ailleurs, mon ministère s'attèlera à revoir toute la stratégie de contrôle des prix.

Toujours au chapitre de la consommation, pendant le couvre-feu, l'honorable Yeung Sik Yuen et un ancien conseiller municipal de Curepipe ont, à travers leur plateforme Curepipe News, s'auto-déclarés producteurs et acteurs, tourné des vidéos dans lesquelles des commerçants de la Circonscription No. 17 faisaient état de pénuries de certains produits de base. Ils interrogeaient des personnes qui ne portaient même pas de masque en plein confinement, mettant à risque la vie de ces personnes. Or, lors des inspections effectuées par les inspecteurs de mon ministère dans ces mêmes boutiques et supermarchés, les commerçants ont tout bonnement avoué de n'avoir pas commandé des fournisseurs, d'où

l'absence de ces produits sur leurs rayons. Et comme par enchantement, peu de temps après, les produits avaient réapparus dans ces commerces. Je laisse le soin à la population et aux habitants de la Circonscription Curepipe/Midlands de tirer leurs propres conclusions.

Concernant la soi-disant pénurie d'oignons et de pommes de terre sur le marché pendant le confinement, je tiens à préciser qu'il s'agissait d'une pénurie artificielle, provoquée par des commerçants qui espéraient pouvoir pratiquer des prix élevés. Et tout de suite, le ministère de l'*Agro-Industry and Food Security* de mon collègue, l'honorable Gobin, et avec mon ministère, nous avons travaillé en étroite collaboration, et c'est là, qu'on a fixé le prix d'oignons et de pommes de terre à R 20 le demi kilo. Et là les commerçants n'ont eu d'autre choix que de remettre les produits en vente.

M. le président, venons maintenant au prix du masque. Hier, long exposé du ministre Sik Yuen avec des cotations remis sur la Table de l'Assemblée Nationale. L'honorable Sik Yuen affirme avoir payé des masques chirurgicaux à R 1.50 l'unité. M. le président, s'il a payé les masques aussi bon marché, en tant que patriote qui veut à tout prix défendre les intérêts des consommateurs, je suis certain qu'il aurait pu en faire profiter à la population. Nous sommes en période de pandémie; les masques s'achètent à des grandes quantités à travers le monde. L'honorable Yeung Sik Yuen, vous avez trouvé des masques à 70 sous à l'étranger. On ne connaît rien de la qualité de ces produits. Mettons cela de côté ! Vous êtes issu d'une famille qui est dans le commerce. Vous connaissez les rouages de l'importation. Patriote que vous êtes, vous auriez dû commander des milliers de ces masques et les mettre à la disposition des Mauriciens au lieu de faire un show à l'Assemblée nationale.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Yeung Sik Yuen is also advocating for a decrease in the price of Mogas and Gasoil putting forward the fact that the price of petroleum products has gone down on the international market.

L'ancien ministre responsable de la Protection des Consommateurs semble ignorer que les produits pétroliers ne s'achètent pas en temps réel comme on entre dans un supermarché pour acheter des 'macaronis'.

L'achat de l'essence au niveau international se fait selon une formule qui prend en considération la moyenne du prix pour six mois, soit trois mois avant l'achat et trois mois après. De plus, il n'y a pas de tuyaux qui relient directement les fournisseurs à nos cuves ici à Maurice. Le prix payé pour l'achat auprès du fournisseur se fait donc ressentir quelques mois

après. Evidemment, à Maurice le prix de vente à la pompe est déterminé par le *Petroleum Pricing Committee* qui est une instance indépendante.

M. le président, je sais qu'hier après que l'honorable Bablee a expliqué son cas, l'honorable Sik Yuen a fait un *walk-out*. Les députés de l'Opposition devraient aussi cesser avec leur terme fétiche 'éléphant blanc.' Auparavant, c'était pour la Cyber Cité, aujourd'hui c'est le complexe sportif de Côte d'Or.

Insinuent-ils que ce soit mal d'offrir des infrastructures de qualité à nos sportifs ? La rentabilité, pour nous, c'est quand nous voyons des sportifs en profiter et que des champions naissent.

L'honorable Ms Foo Kune devrait expliquer à son collègue, l'honorable Quirin, que les infrastructures que nous mettons à la disposition des sportifs aident ces derniers à devenir des champions. Elle en est elle-même un exemple. Le progrès est nécessaire. *Pa avek ene kachak charli ki nou pou gagne formula 1.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, even though the country is going through tough times, this Government has not deviated from its commitments. It has to the best of its abilities maintained its clearly defined pre-COVID-19 trajectory while ensuring that the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 are integrated in our strategy. As we take immediate measures to restore growth and protect employment, we still need to look at the long-term horizon.

Soon after the 2019 general elections, our programme had been presented and the next major step was obviously the presentation of our first budget, paving the way for the transformation of our vision into concrete actions. Unfortunately, unforeseen circumstances have slowed down our take-off and altered our plans, but our determination and long-term objectives remain. Today, many people talk about an unprecedented situation caused by the Novel Corona Virus. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, the COVID-19 is now a real precedent and we have to readapt all our strategies, actions and decisions by factoring in the lessons of the COVID-19 precedent.

Bien que les données aient changé au niveau international, avec évidemment un impact sur notre pays, ce gouvernement jette les bases pour la relance économique sans négliger les mesures sociales qui permettront aux familles mauriciennes, surtout celles qui sont au bas de l'échelle, de sortir la tête de l'eau.

M. le président, à ceux qui parlent de réchauffé, de déjà-vu, de déjà-entendu, de décevant, je ne poserai qu'une question : Est-ce que l'ombre du COVID-19 ou de quelque

chose de similaire a déjà plané sur la présentation d'un précédent budget ou encore sur la situation économique et sociale du pays ? Mais il est réconfortant, d'un autre côté, de constater que tous les commentaires ne sont pas négatifs.

N'en déplaise à nos détracteurs, de nombreuses associations qui veulent aider au développement du pays voient en ce budget des opportunités et une réelle volonté de sortir le pays du gouffre économique et des autres conséquences qui y sont associées.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the population will recall that earlier this year, we presented our Programme for the period 2020-2024, with the overarching message - Towards an Inclusive, High Income and Green Mauritius, Forging Ahead Together.

Today, even with the COVID-19 pandemic, the message is ever more pertinent. We can only succeed if, as a nation, we forge ahead together to face the upcoming challenges. The Programme of this Government had as main focus –

- to combat poverty and improve the standard of living of the population;
- to facilitate access for everyone to a decent and affordable housing;
- to ensure a fair access to high quality education and upgrading of skills for all, including students with disabilities;
- improving our health care services and protection of the population against infectious diseases;
- taking the country to greater heights of development through innovation, entrepreneurship, consolidating our key economic sectors, and improving our infrastructure, and
- adopting a reasonable and environmentally sustainable development policy.

With the Budget Speech 2020-2021, these fundamental objectives have been reinforced and concrete measures have been enunciated to make them happen. Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to put our economy back on track after the disastrous situation generated by the COVID-19. Government had various options, namely increase taxes, massive borrowing or drastic cutting down on spending. The first option would have been detrimental to the population whereas the second option would have condemned us to debt servicing which in the long run kills the economy. The third option of cutting down on spending has been explored and retained to the extent possible. However, in critical sectors like Health,

Environment or Education, limitations on spending have contrary effects. There was, therefore, need to look for another alternative.

A lot has been said in the recent days about the decision of the Government to have recourse to the Special Reserve Fund to repay part of the debt of the State held in foreign currency. Mr Speaker, Sir, most Central Banks around the world nowadays have a dual mandate of achieving sustainable growth and maintaining price stability within the economies they are overseeing.

The Government of Mauritius is the sole shareholder of the Bank of Mauritius and the BoM already transfers some 85% of its annual profitability to the Consolidated Fund of the central government.

Given the existing provision in the Bank of Mauritius Act allowing the State of Mauritius to issue debt to fund the Special Reserve Fund, should the balance of the Fund be insufficient to cover any net unrealised losses in any financial year, the debate about the impediment created by the use of the Special Reserve Fund appears futile.

The COVID-19 pandemic will impact negatively on the economy with a predicted fall in Gross Domestic Product by 3%, increased unemployment and a budget deficit amounting to Rs63.6 billion and 13.6% of GDP.

To safeguard the economy, the Bank of Mauritius will provide for an amount of Rs158 billion. Rs60 billion will serve as contribution to support economic stabilisation by the issue of instruments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a budget deficit leads to an increase in borrowing. Nonetheless, in order to ensure debt sustainability, Government should be able to meet its debt service without having resort to –

- a considerable adjustment of its income and expenditure balance;
- the accumulation of payment of arrears;
- the rescheduling or cancellation of its debt.

Hence, Rs80 billion from the Foreign Exchange Reserves will be channelled to set up the Mauritius Investment Corporation Ltd which is a fully owned subsidiary of the Bank of Mauritius. A sum of Rs18 billion has been earmarked as Special Reserve Fund to further assist Government in its fiscal measures. The Bank of Mauritius Act has been amended accordingly.

Let us not forget one important thing. Today, we are on our own. The whole world is going through tough times, and no one will come to help us out. We have to find ways and means to get ourselves out of this difficult situation and stand on our feet.

Mr Speaker, Sir, yet, some Members of the Opposition are trying to convince the population and make the people believe that there is nothing in this present Budget to put our economy back on track. Perhaps have they missed some important aspects mentioned by the hon. Minister of Finance on the 04 of June 2020.

Let me, therefore, remind them that Government has earmarked more than Rs100 billion for a *Plan de Relance de l'Investissement et de l'Economie* so as to give a boost to the construction sector, investment in smart agriculture, rebuilding our local manufacturing fabric, support our tourism industry, among others.

The construction sector is an important pillar of our economy and the development of our country. Its contribution to GDP was 4.9 per cent in 2019.

Contrary to tourism, manufacturing and financial services, construction is a non-tradable sector, which includes housing construction, construction of business structure and infrastructure-related construction.

Infrastructure investments have a powerful multiplier effect, namely –

- Stimulation of economic growth;
- Boosting of private investment;
- Enhanced trade facilitation, and
- Creation of jobs.

And the saying goes - “*Quand la construction va, tout va*”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are alive to the fact that job creation in the construction sector is a real opportunity for workers in the informal sector. When I see some Opposition Members trying to appear as neo-champions of the informal sector, I want to remind them that it is this Government that introduced minimum wage. It is this Government that extended the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme to employees of the informal sector during COVID-19 and it is this Government that will ensure protection of employment for that sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, major projects have been announced in the Budget 2020-2021.

The Rs12 billion earmarked for the construction of social housing units across the island will enable our citizens to become owners and, at the same time, solve the problem of

squatters all around the island. Several Members of the Opposition are criticising Government concerning the number of social housing units constructed until now.

Let me remind them that compared to some years ago, full concrete houses of 50 square metres are being built now instead of those 31.5 square metres *boite zalimette* that were built under their regime. Of course, if we were to construct those *boite zalimette* types of houses, more social houses would have been constructed. But we have adopted for the construction decent houses. These beneficiaries have their dignity, and we should respect that.

The Construction of Housing Estate Scheme and Acquisition of Newly Built Dwelling Scheme will be extended for another two years and the eligibility threshold from Rs6 m. to Rs7 m. Government aims at improving the wellbeing and quality of life of our citizens.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Economic Development Board has currently 34 projects worth Rs62 Billion and the Government has announced a high-level committee chaired by the hon. Prime Minister which will expedite processing and approve these projects.

These will indeed boost up our economy. Contractors will be paid within 28 days when working for Government projects worth Rs300 m. and the retention money will be paid fully within six months instead of one year. These measures will enable them to avoid liquidity problems and encourage them to undertake more projects thus increase their working capital.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we should be self-sufficient for our food supply and one of the lessons which we have derived from COVID-19 pandemic is the need to be self-subsistent in terms of consumption. Food security of the population is of prime importance. As such, measures are being taken to regenerate the agricultural sector.

Today, people are conscious of the importance of having their own backyard garden as our elders used to have in the past, to produce their own vegetables and fruits, thus being less dependent on imported ones.

Today, self-sufficiency allows the food markets to increase their reliance on domestic food production thus mitigating the risk of shortage of essential food items.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House and the population will appreciate that there was no shortage in the supply of essential items such as potatoes and onions during the confinement period in Mauritius.

Government is determined to go much further. To support food production, an array of measures is being taken by this Government. Some of these measures are –

- The establishment of a price guarantee mechanism for local producers. Presently, this is the case for onions and potatoes purchased by the AMB.
- Restaurants and hotels to source their ingredients from local farms. As a result, there might be an equilibrium in the market. Moreover, the Farm to Fork concept will be beneficial to the environment as products will not have to be transported, thus implying fewer greenhouse emissions.
- Agricultural Finance will empower farmers. Loan schemes formulated will help local producers to acquire machinery and equipment thereby leading to a subsequent fall in finance costs and costs of production and this will also create jobs for our young people. The Development Bank of Mauritius will provide loans at a concessional rate of 0.5 per cent per annum to companies affected by COVID-19.
- Storage facilities, quality seeds and processing will be provided by the AMB.
- The support to the sugarcane sector will be sustained through a guaranteed price of Rs25,000 per ton for the first 60 tons of sugar.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a major step forward that needs to be underlined is the support to the local producers. Under the National Agri-Food Development Programme, around 20,000 acres of land will be put under cultivation. New Standards and norms will be developed by the Food and Agricultural Research Extension Institute for production, storage, transformation and commercialisation of super foods. The demand and supply of agricultural land for food production will be operated by a centralised digital Land Bank of State and Private Agricultural Land set up under Landscape Mauritius Ltd. This will provide an opportunity to youngsters to venture in commercial agricultural production and become self-employed.

It is also a challenging task of fostering greater participation of educated youth in agricultural development and further encourages them in setting up self-employment activities particularly in the field of innovative agriculture and agro-processing. We must tap

fully on all the possibilities in order to survive in unpredictable circumstances, for instance, curfew and closed borders.

Government is also encouraging consumers to purchase local products. The Buy in Mauritius Brand fosters local entrepreneurship, job creation, continuous improvement, expansion of product lines, sustainability, and citizenship and unification of the nation.

The commendable initiative of a minimum of 10 per cent shelf space for locally manufactured goods in supermarkets will positively impact on the consumers' buying behaviour, therefore, boosting demand for locally manufactured goods. This will also reduce our dependency on imported products and make us more self-sufficient in the long run.

Moreover, for their purchase of goods, Ministries and Public bodies will be required to have a minimum domestic content of 30 per cent.

The margin of preference of 20 per cent on public purchases to all manufacturing companies and 30 per cent for manufacturing SMEs - these measures will thereby enable the Small and Medium Enterprises to breakeven and survive in the market.

Turning to the Commerce and Consumer Protection aspect, Mr Speaker, Sir, following the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in the world and the lockdown in Mauritius, it was noted that the prices of several essential goods increased drastically.

In order to curtail rising prices, I introduced regulations to control the prices of several products including but not limited to potatoes and onions, breakfast cereals, adult diapers, basmati rice, margarine, butter, processed cheese, pasta, pulses and sanitary items.

Ces mesures, M. le président, ont été un soulagement pour les consommateurs. Cependant, il est déplorable que nous continuions à recevoir des plaintes concernant la hausse des prix de produits alimentaires et d'autres produits de base. J'ai moi-même, reçu plusieurs plaintes. Néanmoins, après une enquête approfondie, cette hausse de prix est attribuée à la dépréciation de la roupie vis à vis du dollar américain.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the limited competitiveness of the Mauritian rupee *vis-à-vis* hard currencies has led to our imports becoming more and more expensive. Mauritius actually imports most of its products in American dollars and given our high dependence on imports, we are bound to pay higher prices. This situation is here to stay. The only solution for us is to become self-sufficient in the production of basic necessities. This implies that we need to become self-reliant in agricultural production, manufacturing of our own textile products as

well as other household necessities. This budget will help diversify our consumption patterns and will gear Mauritians towards consuming more '*Made in Moris*' products.

This present budget makes provision for measures and initiatives to better protect our citizens. A large section of the population estimated at about 150,000, are vegetarians in Mauritius. Moreover, during the period of fasting cutting across all religions, up to 600,000 people may go on a vegetarian diet. However, many such vegetarians were not always able to read or understand the ingredients listed on products. Government is therefore introducing a mandatory labelling on food products to indicate vegetarian products. This measure will facilitate the shopping experience of the consumers as they will no longer have to spend time to read ingredients. They will rather see a label which would clearly mention that a product is vegetarian.

It will, therefore, reduce shopping time and will also provide tremendous help to our elderly who may not otherwise be able to consume some products as they are unsure if the said product is vegetarian or not.

L'étiquetage, M. le président, permettra aux gens à choisir facilement et rapidement des aliments végétariens, mais d'un autre côté, cela aidera à éviter les regroupements devant les étagères contribuant, du coup, à limiter le temps passé dans les supermarchés et à garantir le respect de la distanciation sociale.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a new Consumer Protection Framework will be enacted. During the recent COVID-19 lockdown, a plethora of issues have been noted concerning the functioning of the Consumers Affairs Unit and it is imperative that changes be brought in the way the institution operates so as to better ensure consumer protection. One of the loopholes in the actual mode of operation of the Consumer Affairs Unit in the face of emerging challenges is e-Commerce which is gaining ground. For instance, in order to ensure supply of essential food and non-food items, several online platforms came into existence, all by themselves without any regulatory mechanism.

The current legislative framework is suited for traditional methods of trade for purchases made by individuals physically. It is also deplorable that abuses were noted from some online platforms, both existing and new. In some cases, the consumer was compelled to pay the full amount for the products before receiving the goods and was denied the possibility to check the products upon delivery or to effect returns thereafter. Some consumers received completely different products than what was ordered. In some cases,

delivery dates were not specified while in others, delivery was made extremely tardily. For perishable products the situation was even worse. In view of the practical issues encountered by consumers, the new legal framework will introduce strict parameters within which e-Commerce service providers should operate and provide timely remedies to consumers in case of abuse by traders.

Quite apart from the question of e-Commerce, the operation and management of the CAU requires upscaling. The main thrust of the work of the CAU is enforcement in nature. Basically, they visit trade premises and establish contraventions. In addition, they do some ancillary duties related to sampling and standards verification and clearance. The CAU will be called upon to transform itself in a more vibrant and efficient authority over time and will look at the following areas –

- (i) Market intelligence, statistics and the evolution of consumer behaviour and pattern;
- (ii) Consumer education and responsible buying;
- (iii) Consumer prevention strategic planning;
- (iv) Fair trading, and
- (v) Enforcement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I was just talking about consumer education, an aspect on which the CAU should devote some more efforts. The focus of consumer education will now be on two main factors namely, responsible buying as well as encouraging consumers to purchase more local products. This will consequently, in the medium and long term, encourage Mauritians not only to shift to local products but also to consume less imported products. This will undeniably have a positive impact on our Balance of Trade and help foster higher sustainable economic growth.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the world is changing and is more and more driven by innovation and new technologies. The CAU will therefore be expected to be more proactive in helping to regulate both the traditional commerce and the e-Commerce market. The current system is only reactive and thus does not adequately cater for the needs of consumers in a digital age. The new framework will help increase efficiency as well, since it will provide for different departments to operate within the CAU with specialised staff. After drafting the new Consumer Protection Framework, consultations will be held with relevant stakeholders

before its finalisation. But it is encouraging to note that this measure is being applauded by many, including consumer protection associations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all these measures elaborated in the 2020/2021 budget clearly demonstrate that Government is willing to take the country out of the difficult situation arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and go much further in the development of the country while ensuring our population's wellbeing. The MSM in power has always saved this country from difficult situations. And this time also we will honour our responsibilities. Over the years, starting with the 1983–1984 Budget, we have managed to strike the right balance so as to avoid penalising the most vulnerable people of this country.

Today, some are talking about 'Robin des Bois'. The COVID-19 has affected everybody in this country. Should we have added to that burden and imposed additional charges and taxes on the less fortunate? The Minister of Finance has made the right balance and time will prove that this Government has acted responsibly in its mission to save our economy while at the same time protecting our population.

Depuis 6 ans, M. le président, on entend parler des derniers jours de ce gouvernement. Mais nous sommes toujours là. Les Membres de l'Opposition devraient plutôt se demander pendant combien de temps encore ils resteront dans l'Opposition. La certitude c'est que ce gouvernement, pendant les quatre prochaines années, reconstruira l'île Maurice post-COVID 19. La discipline et le travail font partie de l'ADN du MSM. C'est grâce à cette équipe jeune, menée par un jeune Premier ministre que nous avons fait face au virus mortel qu'est le COVID-19. D'ailleurs, je tiens à saluer le Premier ministre pour son dévouement de même que mon collègue, le ministre de la Santé et son équipe, pour tout leur dévouement pour combattre ce virus invisible.

M. le président, avant de terminer, je tiens à remercier et saluer l'énorme travail abattu par le personnel de mon ministère, le Chef de Cabinet du ministère du Commerce et de la Protection des Consommateurs, le personnel de la *State Trading Corporation* et les officiers de la *Consumer Affairs Unit* pendant la période de couvre-feu. Les officiers de la CAU, on le sait, ont redoublé d'efforts et ont été sur le terrain tous les jours pour des visites dans des commerces à travers le pays, mettant à risque leur santé et celle de leurs familles.

Le travail d'équipe a porté ses fruits et a permis au ministère du Commerce d'apporter sa contribution dans la lutte contre le COVID-19.

M. le président, sur ces mots, je vous remercie.

At 12.57 a.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.06 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please, be seated! Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to start my remarks on the resumption of the Budget debate by pressing my concerns about –

Firstly, the impact of Coronavirus on businesses in our country;

Secondly, an increase debt of 83.5% of GDP, and

Thirdly, a debt of approximately Rs60 billion on our balance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the Budget of two halves, that is, the response both to Coronavirus and the longer term issues with regard to our national debt, support to small and medium enterprises, protecting jobs and helping those sectors, such as tourism, textile which was the most affected.

I am afraid, I cannot agree with the description of the Minister of Finance about our economy giving the impression that all was very cosy until Coronavirus hits us. Sadly, before the crisis began, our economy was flat lining with a sovereign debt of 67.3% of our national GDP when in December, a rescue package of Rs18 billion from the Bank of Mauritius was requested to pay debts. Our export had decreased, foreign investors were getting scarce and our growth rate was only 3.3%. Our debt is expected to be 83.5% of GDP and sadly, every child has his share of Rs350,000 debt.

Mr Speaker, our economy was already sick well before and arguably, so, it went into intensive care like many of the economics with a projected recession of 5.8% of our GDP. However, unlike other economics, for example, South Africa, European countries, their Government ensured that they take proper remedial actions to rekindle the economy and that their central bank would be their lender of the last resort

- through Government adjusted fiscal policies to create wealth;
- protect employment;
- stimulate business,
- controlling inflation rate, and
- stabilising their national.

Here, it was done largely through a generous generation by the Bank of Mauritius to mop the Budget deficit of nearly Rs60 billion. Our Government also had a major intravenous supply of serum from the central bank to balance the account of debt and expenses, now called 'balanced account' and using a very innovative treatment called 'The Mauritius Investment Corporation', to help with Rs80 billion, to help among those, project of national importance to the country. Hopefully, *pas d'autres éléphants!*

Mr Speaker, Sir, inequality in our country continues to grow, yet, we see no real intent from Government to close the gap and it is the people in areas such as mine, in my constituency, that would lose once again. There is no structural plan of housing for the low-income households in specific areas of my constituency, no plans how to bring the marginalised in employment and to tackle the issue of drugs, which is a major concern in many parts of the country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not feel that the Budget is fit to address the specific problems we face as a society, particularly a rising debt, increase unemployment, be it short-term, long-term or seasonal, risk of business closure, depreciation of our currency against the dollar and other foreign currencies, increase in the prices of basic commodities by greater than 25%, the price of milk and butter have gone up by nearly 35%. The loss of confidence of foreign investors due to our recent grey listing by the European Commission coupled with the recent Bank of African Development's disclosure of shady and unethical practices in our tender procedures, as evidenced by the PNQ of this morning and its debate, I knew it was very extremely painful as quoted yesterday for some to listen, particularly when an excess of Rs700 m. have apparently been squandered by some intermediaries. Is that sort of practice going to give confidence to the European Commission to reconsider our listing on the grey list? I am sure the Mauritian population has already given its verdict on that point. The one group we must be very mindful of today are the self-employed and those who run small businesses. They were already facing a tough situation in the last two and a half months, but the self-employed assessment scheme has brought some relief truly. Unfortunately, for those families, their income came entirely from self-employment and they are asking how they will pay their utility bills accumulated before and those to come in the weeks and months to come ahead with just an allowance of Rs5,100.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure many of us are confronted by our mandates for the payment of these three monthly bills. This is how desperate people are at the present. I echo those who say we must consider every possible way to provide support for those people, and

I propose that their payment for utility bills for last three months, be suspended and waived, as it will tremendous relief to these already difficult households. The spending measures, as advocated by the Minister of Finance, may keep us out of recession for the immediate future, but it is difficult to feel reassured that our economy is strong enough to cope with the unknown impact of Coronavirus. We need to think about the long-term. And if we were to adjust life under the Coronavirus, as mentioned in the 'New Normal', then we need to look at many different things, such as providing free internet for all people in this country who have to work from home; free internet to children who were expected to do their schoolwork at home, irrespective of the social strata. We need to look once again at feeding needy children now with full school meal programmes, particularly for those who need it like the ones supplied at ZEP schools.

M. le président, mes collègues, de ce côté de la Chambre, avaient fait un vibrant appel, pour que ces enfants reçoivent une allocation pendant le confinement, afin qu'ils puissent manger à leur faim, car ils dépendent de ces repas gratuits. Mais c'était en vain ! Qu'est-ce que cette modique somme aurait coûté dans la balance de paiement gouvernemental, quand on voit ce matin qu'il y a certains qui prennent R 700 millions et mettent dans leur poche?

We also need to look at giving mental health support to adults who have been isolated for three months, which have had an impact on domestic violence, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Budget must place at its core the small and medium enterprises that are the country's beating heart. It is only by providing financial support schemes can those wealth creating and job creating industries develop and flourish. The small and medium enterprises must be a priority of the new MIC in its criteria of distributing Rs80 billion that have been made available to Government by the Bank of Mauritius. What is critical is not how much is spent from the MIC, but how it is spent and who are going to be the beneficiaries and what are going to be the criteria to use/to hand out millions and billions of rupees to specific companies. Already, some are queuing for the Rs500 m., Rs1 billion reserve package from the MIC. The small and medium enterprises must have a fair share as promised. *Les SME ne doivent pas être l'enfant pauvre du MIC.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am now going to talk about the housing proposals. The provision of Rs12 billion for the construction of 12,000 social housing units across the whole island in another dream, simply because the same promise of 10,000 social housing units during their last mandate never materialised. Let alone, only 10% was achieved, without forgetting that

some of these houses, its construction had started prior to December 2015. And listening to the speech of the hon. Minister of Commerce this morning who he tried to defend the poor achievements of promise made in 2015, he based only on the sub-premise so that our people are going to have housing of a greater surface area compared at what was promised prior 2015.

M. le président, toujours au niveau du logement, en analysant la grille de paiement et le montant des subsides pour les différents catégories dépendant de leur salaire, je me demande comment ceux au bas de l'échelle vont pouvoir contribuer ce 20% pour avoir un décent logement, car ils n'ont même pas de suffisant pour se nourrir et se vêtir convenablement. Ces gens qui vivent dans les bidonvilles, leur finance mensuelle est parfois inférieure à R 5,100 qui leur est offert. Je parle de ce j'ai vu, ce que j'ai ressenti, et ils vivent dans des conditions extrêmement précaires, et leur survie est une bataille au quotidien. L'électricité et l'eau sont pour eux un luxe. Vous et moi, M. le président, nous nous couvrons avec des couettes pour nous protéger du froid ce soir. Eux, ils n'ont que de vieux molletons recouverts de plastique, car si jamais il pleut, leur toit est une passoire et c'est de cette façon qu'ils se protègent des aléas du temps. Je l'ai vu, je l'ai ressenti. Nous devons avoir de l'empathie pour ces gens.

M. le président, la loi doit être respectée, mais l'esprit de la loi demande que l'humaniste, pendant ce temps hivernal et à la veille de la fête des mères, aurait dû primer et trouver des solutions temporaires. Il ne fallait pas les mobiliser brutalement, surtout parmi il y avait des femmes et des enfants en bas d'âge.

I request the hon. Minister of Housing and Land Use, the National Empowerment Foundation and the National Housing Development Corporation to ensure proper diligence in assessment of the squatters in need of social housing, since many of them may need full subsidy together with social support and bring them in the mainstream of society, as these families struggle for daily survival, I am thinking following what I have witnessed and seen in specific areas of my constituency. I am of the opinion that if such capping of contributing only 20%, even at the lowest end of the grid, is a *sine qua non* criteria, many of them will never have a decent shelter and squatting will always be their sole alternative, even if that means *dormir au clair de lune*. Let us work together so that the fire disaster at Cité Longère in Baie du Tombeau serves as a lesson to us all and empowers these communities in having a decent shelter so that we do not have to witness such dramatic scenes on other State lands where squatters have erected whatever they had to have a roof over their head.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the agricultural sector, I note that 24,000 of abandoned land will be put on the platform for immediate use. Knowing quite well the history of the Landscape and its performance, I expect that the Ministry concerned will exercise due authority as to see that transparent prevails, particularly at its outset for bidding so that tailor-made criteria are not made to give unfair advantage to some and also to that large estate developers do not have easy access for conversion of these lands. The conversion of these lands from agriculture to commercial ends will thus make a big kill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our tourism industry is currently in intensive care and unless given the right remedies and support, it will have a very painful recovery. The on-going border closure here and abroad, unemployment and business closures looming ahead and a decrease in the number of bookings at hotels will not make matters easy.

As I mentioned in my opening statement, there is no clear Government vision or strategy on how to reform and revitalise the main foreign exchange sector such as tourism and the manufacturing sector. And surely, till borders are not opened again, the tourism industry will not kick start soon. The only response from Government is to exempt the tourist licence of Rs10,000. As rightly pointed out by some in the touristic sector, can Rs10,000 per operator save the touristic industry from an ongoing agony?

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government must pay particular attention to the thousands of employees in that sector ranging from hotel employees, taxi drivers whose base of operation are hotels only, beach hawkers, small touristic enterprises, *les plaisanciers*, fishermen, restaurant owners and those who earn a living in the entertainment world of hotels like the music industry. It looks like they have all simply been forgotten because the Government is more focused, through the MIC, to support the hotel owners while completely forgetting *le petit peuple*, whose household depends on a fully revamped integrated touristic sector amidst the fallout of COVID-19.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now, I am going to talk about a very important topic following the expenses that the MIC might support. The production of pharmaceutical products through the private-public enterprise is definitely a very enviable and highly profitable project for many in the pharmaceutical and medical world. Already, blue-eyed-boy names are cropping up of those who roam daily in the corridors of power to be among the few selected ones. Just remember the American AXIOM, there is no such thing as a free lunch and those who have offered their free services for Government, surely are eyeing these projects. The Minister of

Health has to ensure complete fairness and *transparence* so that it is not a tailor-made project for those who rub on the right side of the green of Government but rather an open transparent bidding process that will allow only firms having the right experience, expertise and know-how with proven track record on biosafety, efficacy and acceptable quality standards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very important that the products respect the internationally agreed European Pharmacopoeia, United States Pharmacopoeia and the British Pharmacopoeia standards which have been our acceptable specified standard in outsourcing our pharmaceutical products for public hospitals. The proposal to bring India Pharmacopoeia is a positive move and it will go in a long way to break monopolies and decreasing prices. However, the current proposed amendment to include India Pharmacopoeia which is a regional standard and not internationally accredited must be evaluated carefully and should not be an opportunity as a backdoor entry to allow one particular company to have access to procurement orders. Knowing very well that the Pharmacy Board had rejected many of its products during COVID-19 confinement period, but still that company managed to have its products, including hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin accepted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, buying India Pharmacopoeia will imply it is up to the buyer to ensure that the products meet the quality standards. We are a small country like Mauritius, with no inspection capacity. We will find it extremely difficult to ensure quality when procuring drugs from a country where there are more than 35,000 manufacturers and over 200,000 wholesalers. While it is true that, in terms of volume, our country buys the largest volume of drugs, excluding public hospitals from India, attention needs to be given as to the risk of counterfeit products, non-accredited intermediaries and, therefore, pharmaco-vigilance must be on a high alert. The health and safety of our population is sacred and Government has to be very careful.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the lesson of hydroxychloroquine use in the management of COVID-19 under the umbrella of the WHO Solidarity Trial or informed consent, and its then withdrawal of its use due to adverse side effects as reported by a study in The Lancet should have prompted the Minister of Health to come up with a regulatory framework to enable the use of certain medication on trial basis in exceptional circumstances and also trial of new medication in selected patients as it is done in developed countries which participate in phase 2 and phase 3 trials. That would have been innovative and benefit those whom their last chances of cure lie in a newer drug and bring some hope to them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Fisherman Allowance, as mentioned in the Budget, which says targeting the most vulnerable and those at the lower end of the economic ladder. Increasing Bad Weather Allowance by just Rs60 per day is, in my opinion, an insult to those seasonal self-employed persons.

M. le président, qu'est-ce que R 60 additionnelles par jour ajoute dans votre corbeille ménagère dans le contexte économique que nous vivons? Imaginez ce pêcheur avec sa famille qui doit remplir leur ventre le soir. Dis-moi, qu'est-ce que ce pauvre pêcheur peut se dire quand il voit des millions injectées dans de grosses compagnies pour leur donner un coup de pouce à leur économie en détresse, elles qui faisaient des profits en milliards ces derniers années, et lui qui n'a que R 60 en plus par jour et que pour quelques jours? *A descent daily rate of Rs500 or more considering the depreciation of the Rupee must, at least, be offered to them.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am now going to talk about the health issue. While the Budget does make some commendable propositions, the expansion and modernisation of our Health Care Infrastructure, yet such advanced state-of-the-art units can only be efficient with the right trained staff. Unfortunately, there is no Budget earmarked for advanced training of healthcare personnel regularly abroad to update themselves and familiarise with the new technology emerging in the world of medicine, particularly in sub speciality areas. The unfortunate loss of 10 lives due to coronavirus can only be a stark reminder of the limitation of such specialised medical services when it comes to intensive care.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the tremendous and highly applauded effort and commitment of our doctors, specialists, nurses, physiotherapists managing the incubated patients, the desperate need of trained intensivists is a must. *Et pour ceux de l'autre côté de la Chambre qui n'ont pas eu l'occasion, lisez l'interview du proche de cette jeune femme de 20 ans qui est décédée, et vous allez ressentir la douleur de ces parents et ces proches.*

And Government must, therefore, invest heavily in training healthcare personnel in infectious disease control, should we, unfortunately, be afflicted by a new epidemic in the future. The provision of satellite infectious disease unit in each regional hospital is a must due to the need and demand of multidisciplinary team at any time. And the proper setup of isolation units with negative pressure within each regional intensive care unit will complement the eventual forthcoming National Centre for Infectious Disease which I thank the Minister of Health for this project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is spending millions of Rupees on the treatment of patients abroad solely because either a lack of medical expertise or therapeutic treatment, particularly in cancer patients. It is high time noting the huge Budget allocated that consideration be given firstly to the local availability of these expensive therapeutic treatment. For example, Herceptin which is needed by cancer patients and should be given to them, irrespective of their social strata, status or political abeyance. Secondly, the facility of advanced diagnostic and screening equipment in each regional hospital is a must, like PET scan. These two recommendations will go a long way to save millions of rupees. The construction of a new laboratory was long overdue and I am pleased it is part of the budget proposals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on a final note regarding Health, the exams that the Medical Council has sent for recent proposal to be registered, I note that the Minister of Health, and I quote from his speech two days ago –

“As for the Medical Registration Examination, they will be conducted by an Independent Body of International Repute on behalf of the Medical Council.”

However, as a Senior Consultant and Specialist, myself and all Specialists in this country, we have all been sent a letter to participate as examiner and set questions, and I quote –

“The Council is intending to propose setting up of a Mauritian Medical Board of examiners for the Medical Registration.”

Which is which? I hope the Minister of Health will come up and clarify this very confusing situation because more confusion will deny the right of these young doctors to have a speedy registration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding consumer protection, slogan is one thing and the provision of it in real terms is different. Bringing down the 12 kilo of liquefied gas price from Rs210 to Rs180, surely my friends, on the other side of the House, not an excuse to be so upbeat and beating the table repeatedly when knowing quite well of the fall of the price of liquefied gas on the international market for some time.

M. le président, le ministre des Finances sait pertinemment bien que ces jours-ci la réalité est très différente. Une baisse de R 30 sur le gaz ménager contre une augmentation d'environ 22% sur la plupart de nos denrées alimentaires et la perte du pouvoir d'achat pour notre corbeille ménagère est très, très grave.

A écouter le ministre du Commerce ce matin, il m'apparaît que nos ménagères n'ont ressenti aucune hausse de nos denrées alimentaires et elles sont très, très, très satisfaites. Il vit sûrement dans un monde irréel. La réalité, je vous l'assure, est toute différente. Cette baisse de 30% sur le gaz ménager devient alors négligeable par rapport aux dépenses alimentaires nécessaires quand les pères de famille en déboursent plus pour ses enfants le matin parmi tant d'autres commodités. C'est très compréhensible de son agacement quand il apprend que des millions de roupies sont allouées à travers le MIC pour des projets peut-être non-essentiels, peut-être même des éléphants blancs que certains n'aiment pas entendre ce mot éléphant blanc. Projet que certains, avec des appétits gargantuesques, attendent avec impatience. Ce slogan 'valoriser l'importance du bien-être et la protection des consommateurs' ne tient pas la route avec comme unique commodité de gaz qui a baissé surtout dans ce contexte extrêmement difficile.

M. le président, je vais maintenant aborder un sujet qui a une très grande importance dans notre économie. Un sujet concernant la gestion de notre économie, c'est-à-dire le gaspillage des fonds publics ou, si on peut le dire diplomatiquement, la mauvaise gestion des fonds publics.

Dans son grand oral, le ministre des Finances, la semaine dernière, n'a pipé mot là-dessus, mais non plus sur des actions concrètes qui peuvent être prises pour remédier la situation et aussi prendre des sanctions à tout niveau.

Reprenant cette phrase de mon colistier pendant son discours –

« Est-ce que le peuple peut vous faire confiance. »

Premièrement, la saga de la State Bank de Maurice. Comment se fait-il qu'un soi-disant milliardaire et propriétaire du *MNH Holding* en termes d'éléments de santé, puisse avoir un prêt faramineux de plusieurs millions de dollars, équivalent à des milliards de roupies, sans être inquiété et sans être soumis à un *KYC*, c'est-à-dire connaître votre client détaillé et qui disparaît au vu et au su de tout le monde dans le monde financier en laissant un trou énorme dans les chiffres d'affaires de la *SBM Holdings*?

Le Mauricien lambda, quant à lui, devoir fournir toutes sortes de documents et subir un rigoureux *KYC*, et si jamais il y a un petit manquement surtout au niveau de la *MCIB*, il se voit refuser son prêt de la banque ou d'autres institutions financières. Il a toutes les raisons de ressentir qu'il y a une justice à deux vitesses.

N'oublions pas l'épisode *Gold Finger*. N'oublions pas cette déconcertante facilité quand un ex-ministre de ce gouvernement se permet d'avoir un *loan* de ce même *State Bank* pour acheter de l'or. Un filon qu'il a bien ressenti contre une garantie minimale, mais la disparité entre la demande et la garantie fait froisser. Alors, comment doivent réagir tous ses actionnaires de la *State Bank* de Maurice qui voient leurs profits chuter de R 2.5 milliards en 2017 pour se trouver à quelques R 15 millions en 2019.

N'oublions pas le fameux Angolais, qui lui aussi a un passé pas trop fameux, s'est servi de nos institutions financières pour avoir des licences bancaires et investi avec de l'argent douteux dans le nord du pays. Et lui étrangement, son *KYC* fut fait au regard des yeux. Le diagnostic était très mauvais. Heureusement, pour notre pseudo-ophtalmologue, il n'a pas eu à faire place à des plaintes de négligence.

M. le président, pour revenir à la petite leçon de notre ami de l'autre côté de la Chambre, l'honorable Sandra Mayotte, sur la définition du butin par le Petit Larousse. Et bien, ce qui s'est passé à la *State Bank*, c'est du très, très gros butin. Et j'ai pris le temps de consulter moi-même cette fois-ci le Petit Robert. Elle a consulté le Larousse et moi je consulte le Petit Robert et cela équivaut à un pillage des fonds.

La récente nomination du nouveau patron du *CCID* me réjouit car il avait le flair de ce fameux butin dont faisait référence l'honorable Mayotte. J'espère qu'il s'envolera rapidement pour nous ramener, comme il avait fait en février 2015, *manu militari*, ce fameux Monsieur S. dont le patron du *CCID* seul à l'expertise et j'espère retournera nos milliards.

M. le président, deuxièmement, au niveau des mauvaises gestions des fonds. Mettre du plomb dans les ailes d'*Air Mauritius*, la largesse des paiements à certains cadres d'*Air Mauritius* occupant deux portefeuilles, avoisinant des salaires mirobolants de R 1.2 à R 1.5 millions par mois ; l'achat irréfléchi d'avion en surplus dont nous n'avons pas les ressources financières et les demandes de vol ; la commercialisation des routes non profitables, la dépendance de leasing de deux des appareils à la South African Airways qui elle-même est dans de gros problèmes. La nomination des petits copains à des postes stratégiques avec des salaires incroyables; le recrutement de certains n'ayant aucune expérience, sauf leur affiliation politique; les démissions forcées des *Chief Executive Officers* qui essaient de mettre de l'ordre et redresser la chute vertigineuse de notre transporteur national. Tout ça nous fait réfléchir. Tout cela ne donne pas confiance aux lambdas mauriciens. J'espère que notre joyau national puisse retrouver ses couleurs d'antan et la tentation de la liquider soit

résistée à tous niveaux. Selon certaines langues récemment, on assiste même un de ces protégés politiques MS, négociant son butin avant qu'il puisse partir. On essaie toujours de plumer la poule déplumée.

M. le président, troisièmement, le coût de certains projets n'ont pas aidé notre économie car certains développements, dont je reconnais leur utilité, mais n'était pas une nécessité absolue surtout qu'on savait pertinemment bien l'état maladif de notre économie et on ne pouvait se faire de largesse. Je parle de cette largesse d'éléphant blanc de Côte d'Or à R 5 milliards; le *Safe City Project* qui nous a coûté R 16 milliards ; le *Metro Express* qui coûte initialement prévu à R 18 milliards et dans ce budget qui va injecter encore R 8 milliards.

Quatrièmement, le rapport de l'Audit 2019, qui démontre année après année, les manquements en termes de gestion et des dépenses financières dans différents ministères, je voudrais attirer l'attention du ministère de la Santé en particulier sur un appareil d'angiographie de l'hôpital Jeetoo acheté R 30 millions. Laisse-moi vous rappeler qu'un appareil d'angiographie ces jours-ci n'est plus un appareil de luxe. Vu le nombre élevé des maladies non transmissibles, dont il y a plus que 50% des maladies artérielles et cardiaques, la demande d'angiographie et l'appareil d'une angiographie est aujourd'hui une nécessité absolue. L'attente de quelques minutes de trop dans ces circonstances en attendant l'intervention chirurgicale par angiographie peut être fatale.

Imaginez ceux ou celles qui attendent des mois à cause des pannes techniques, cela pourrait être n'importe qui d'entre nous qui s'assoit ici cet après-midi. Cet appareil qui tombe en panne répétitivement parce que la compagnie qui a eu le contrat n'a pas d'ingénieur local spécialisé pour faire la réparation en temps réel et reste hors de service pendant des mois. En conséquence, la liste attente s'allonge et les plus grands perdants sont nos patients Mauriciens. Certains qui attendent ne sont même plus là.

I, therefore, request the Minister to set up very tight and stringent conditions when contracts are given to these companies as we are talking hundreds of millions of rupees and that it becomes mandatory for them to have local trained engineers before they are allocated the contract for the supply and commissioning of such high-tech equipment. Tax money is the people's money. It is their right to have proper functioning equipment at all times in hospitals with specialised maintenance backup. The Minister of Finance must ensure that exemplary sanctions are taken at all levels. Be it senior officials working at banks, Senior

Executives in the Government, Board of Directors of Companies, Directors of Procurement Unit or even the Central Tender Board as those responsible must be accountable and should not get away freely.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, the coronavirus has definitely brought its focus on our inter-dependence, we need each other, the Chief Executive Officer is not nothing without the factory worker, the driver, the nurse, the refuse collector, the utility workers, the supermarket staff among so many. An injury to one is an injury to all. I make an appeal that all our front liners irrespective of departments, public or private, must be rewarded as this is done for police and public health care personnel. We will never be able to thank them enough. May God spare us from a second wave of the epidemic.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Dr. the hon. Rawoo!

(2.40 p.m.)

Dr. I. Rawoo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac): Thank you.

Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Members of the House, it is a real honour and privilege for me to deliver my first budget debate speech in this House to address you on the National Budget presented by this Government for the period 2020-2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, undoubtedly, we are currently facing an unprecedented global crisis due to COVID-19 pandemic. Few months ago, who would have predicted that half of the global population would be in total confinement, a situation which has led to a global economic paralysis? The world has suddenly stopped to a halt. All major economies put to a stop leading to a major global economic crisis. In span of few weeks, tens of millions of people worldwide have lost their jobs, thousands of businesses have been forced to close down, leading to unprecedented global economic crisis. The IMF and the World Bank have predicted no return to normal before 2024. Not later than yesterday, a major global airline has dismissed more than 1,000 workers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are currently living in exceptional times where exceptional measures need to be taken to restore economic growth and investors' confidence. My first word must be a tribute both to our Prime Minister, the Rt. hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth and to the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, hon. Dr. Renganaden Padayachy and, last but not least, to the whole staff at different Ministries who have been

working very hard to come up with an exceptional Budget in these exceptional circumstances.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is so easy to become wise after the event, to sit and just criticise without coming up with constructive solutions for the nations and this is not a patriotic attitude.

Sadly, this is the unpatriotic attitude adopted by some of the Members of the other side of the House. This is not with these negative attitudes that we will be able to help our nation. It is a shame to see that some unpatriotic people from the other side of the House are asking publicly the population to go out on the street in mass gathering. These same people have forgotten that we are still fighting an invisible enemy which is COVID-19. Going out on the street for what, Mr Speaker? For free distribution of *macaroni*? Asking people to go out in mass gathering is an act of irresponsibility *de surcroît venant d'un médecin*.

Inviter ouvertement les gens pour se rassembler dans les rues pour mettre en danger la nation mauricienne, c'est un appel suicidaire. L'heure est grave, l'heure est d'être solidaire, ce n'est pas l'heure de mettre en péril des vies innocentes.

M. le président, dans le monde entier, nous sommes en train de vivre des moments très difficiles. De ce fait, il est important de consolider nos relations diplomatiques. Dans ce contexte, je trouve aberrant qu'un ex-ministre des Affaires étrangères vienne avec des propos diffamatoires et remplis de haine contre un pays ami qui nous aide sur plusieurs fronts. C'est une honte de voir un ex-ministre des Affaires étrangères venir dans cette auguste Assemblée pour mettre en péril les relations diplomatiques entre deux pays amis...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Rawoo: C'est un acte infect...

(Interruptions)

If you have the guts and sense of diplomacy and humility, I will humbly request you to write a letter of apology to the Consulate of Saudi Arabia. Our diplomatic relationships are at risk because of you, hon. Leader of the Opposition. Soyons responsables et rationnels dans nos propos. Pour une fois faisons de la politique dignement.

M. le président, la pandémie de COVID-19 est fondamentalement une crise de santé publique mais elle a dégénéré à travers des restrictions de distanciation...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mohamed, this is debate.

Dr. Rawoo: Listen to my speech. I did not give you way to talk...

Mr Speaker: No, you don't have the right.

(Interruptions)

You are a seasoned parliamentarian. Give lessons to the newcomers. Don't learn from the newcomers. Go ahead!

Dr. Rawoo: La pandémie de COVID-19 est fondamentalement une crise de santé publique mais elle a généré, à travers les restrictions de distanciation sociale nécessaire, un choc sans précédent pour l'économie mondiale. Il est important de comprendre l'ampleur, la nature et la trajectoire du choc économique pour aider le pays à concevoir un soutien fiscal de manière à réduire les dommages immédiats pour les ménages et les entreprises à court terme, à faciliter leur rétablissement à moyen terme et à garantir une sortie durable sur le long terme. Ce budget vise à stimuler l'économie et l'investissement.

Dans le monde entier, la pandémie a poussé les plus vulnérables dans un état plus précaire. C'est qu'en ce temps difficile une option évidente qui est d'adopter un régime fiscal progressif. Cela assurera une redistribution de la richesse du pays et conduira à plus d'équité dans notre système fiscal. Nous devons apporter plus de progressivité et de justice sociale dans notre système fiscal. Pour cela, nous appelons les personnes à hauts revenus à contribuer davantage à la reconstruction de notre économie et à la préservation de notre tissu social.

Pour plus de justice sociale, nous revoyons le *Solidarity Levy*, un prélèvement de 5% sur le montant excédentaire du revenu imposable et des dividendes perçus par un citoyen Mauricien résident sur le territoire sera désormais de 25% et applicable à partir du seuil de R 3 millions par an. Ce prélèvement de solidarité sera payable sur la base du *Pay As You Earn*.

M. le président, compte tenu du ralentissement mondial, on s'attendait à ce qu'il y ait peu de marge de manœuvre mais, fait intéressant, le gouvernement neutralisera le déficit budgétaire pour 2020-2021.

Le ministre des Finances, l'honorable Dr. Renganaden Padayachy a abordé la question de la justice sociale et de l'équité en remplaçant la Caisse nationale de retraite par un nouveau système de retraite participatif et collectif (supprimant en fait le plafond des pensions) et augmentant le prélèvement de solidarité de 5% à 25% pour les hauts revenus. En

outre, un nouveau prélèvement de 0,1% ou 0,3% (soumis à l'activité commerciale) est en cours d'introduction pour les grandes entreprises dont le revenu brut dépasse 500 millions de roupies. C'est l'appel patriotique que nous lançons à ceux qui gagnent le plus. Nous nous attendons à percevoir plus de 3,5 milliards de roupies de recettes supplémentaires grâce à ce prélèvement. En tant que représentants du peuple, nous sommes fiers d'y contribuer.

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

Mr Speaker Sir, unemployment is a key concern and the fairness of the distribution mechanism for government support matters most. In this context, the Government is coming with sensitive measures to tackle these concerns appropriately. DBM Ltd has earmarked Rs10 billion to support distressed SMEs and Cooperative Societies. The DBM will provide loans of up to Rs10 million per enterprise at a concessional rate of 0.5 per cent per annum. In the same vein, DBM will provide loan facilities to taxi operators based at hotels. To promote a culture of entrepreneurship among our university students, DBM Ltd will scale up its Campus Entrepreneur Challenge competition. The first 10 best projects will be financed at a concessional rate of 0.5 per cent per annum for an amount of up to Rs500,000.

Mr Speaker Sir, to facilitate cash flow of SMEs, MauBank will provide factoring facilities with the help of Investment Support Programme which will subsidise half of the factoring fees. This Government will provide a minimum monthly support of Rs5,100 to each beneficiary facing technical unemployment over the next 6 months. This whole support is expected to cost around Rs15 billion and will enable those individuals to meet their short-term financing needs. Around 30% of the total loan portfolio on our island is towards the household sector. Providing a monthly minimum support will, therefore, help these household loan holders.

M. le président, la dernière fois dans mon discours précédent, j'avais cité une citation du Président Ougandais, Kaguta Musévéní. Je cite –

« Le monde est actuellement en état de guerre. Une guerre sans armes ni balles. Une guerre sans soldats humains. Une guerre sans frontières. Une guerre sans cessez-le-feu. Une guerre sans balles. Une guerre sans salle de guerre. Nous combattons un ennemi invisible. »

Je répète encore une fois, Kaguta Musévéní. Je répète pour l'honorable Assirvaden parce qu'il a cru comparer la dernière fois, le Président Ougandais au Dictateur fasciste Italien Benito Mussélini. Je ne blâme pas l'honorable Assirvaden pour son ignorance sur l'histoire de Géographie. Je le comprends tout à fait, surtout quand on a un leader dictateur.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You made your the point.

Dr. Rawoo: Peut-être l'honorable Assirvaden a comparé son leader à Mussélini.

M. le président, alors que presque tous les pays du monde ont fermés leurs frontières, la pandémie a contraint à repenser la durabilité d'une économie tirée par les exportations. Dans ce Budget, le plan du gouvernement vise à encourager la production locale, à se diversifier dans des secteurs stratégiques et à promouvoir le développement durable. Avec peu de production nationale, l'effet multiplicateur dans l'économie locale est réduit, l'argent étant déboursé à l'étranger par le biais des importations. En promouvant l'achat local «*Made in Moris*», plus de transformation de valeur se produira localement, plus d'emplois créés et conduisant à une relance économique. De ce fait, l'augmentation de la subvention unique pour la certification sous le label "*Made in Moris*" passera de R 5,000 jusqu'à un maximum de R 50,000. De plus, les PME détenant le label "*Made in Moris*" bénéficieront d'un marge de préférence de 40% au lieu de 30% prévus dans le cadre des marchés publics.

M. le président, la pandémie de COVID-19 a enseigné aux dirigeants du monde entier de précieuses leçons sur l'importance d'être une économie autosuffisante. Le nouveau système d'aquaculture, par exemple, s'il est développé à grande échelle, contribuera de manière décisive à mieux contrôler notre chaîne d'approvisionnement alimentaire.

Mr Speaker Sir, furthermore, in this Budget, the Government drive is to promote technology, innovation and sustainability which will lead our country to be more competitive and productive in the longer-term. In this context, as announced in the Budget, there will be a

new Data Technology Park at Côte d'Or. This Park, based on knowledge and skills, will lay the foundation for a data driven economy and would create the right eco-system to accelerate the innovation process from idea to creation. The Park will encompass 12 highly skilled and specialised centres from additive manufacturing to deep artificial intelligence. This Park will endow Mauritius with a Carbon Neutral Green Certified Tier 4 Data Centre. The Deep Artificial Intelligence Centre will provide the necessary support for start-up, existing businesses and Government service to achieve a major digital transformation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as announced in this Budget, digital and electronic services provided through the internet by non-resident for consumption in Mauritius will be subject to VAT. This measure is aligned with the VAT principles under the OECD VAT Guidelines. I quote –

“Further, this will not only ensure a level playing field between non-resident suppliers and local suppliers, but also lead to an increase in VAT collection without a corresponding increase in VAT rate. Also, payment of VAT will now be made as from the date of the receipt instead of date of invoice. This will apply only to construction contracts with the Government and represents a good starting point to ease cash flow for businesses.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, due to the global effects of climate change, weather disruption have caused flash floods in several regions across the island. Thus, it is highly imperative to have a proper Drainage Infrastructure and Flood Management System in place. In this respect, Rs1.2 billion will be provided from the National Environment Fund to construct drainage infrastructure in high- risk prone areas across Mauritius and Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, no doubt, the construction industry will be one of the main engines of our recovery. The sector is one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy, positively contributing to the economy. The average growth rate of the industry over the last three years was 8.5% per annum. COVID-19 lockdown totally paralysed the construction sector for more than two months, including the supply chain side of the model with the closure of the borders. In this Budget, the Government is coming with many facilitative measures for the construction sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as my Constituency No. 13 is concerned, I am very pleased to see that the Rivière des Anguilles dam will be constructed finally - a project that has been kept in the drawer by the Labour Party Government since 2010. Rest assured, this time we

will put words into actions. We not sell dreams like others do. This project will definitely boost both local and national development for the benefits of all citizens.

Undoubtedly, the construction of the dam will create employment, both directly and indirectly. The construction of the Rivière des Anguilles Dam is a long awaited project for all inhabitants of the whole Southern region of the island. There will be a 2 km-long, rock-fill dam across the Rivière des Anguilles. The dam will have a capacity of 14 mm³, with an annual yield of 50 mm³. The maximum dam height will be around 55 metres. The construction of the dam will definitely ensure the meeting of the potable water of the Southern and Eastern region. Hopefully, this project will start soon and also end in this mandate itself.

Hence, Mare aux Vacoas will ensure the supply of the inhabitants of the Lower and Upper Plaine Wilhems more effectively, reducing drastically any water shortage. Moreover, there will be the construction of new water treatment plant at Rivière des Anguilles and the rehabilitation and upgrading of the water treatment plant in Rivière du Poste. Furthermore, there will be the installation of new mobile treatment plant in Tyack, Britannia, Rivière du Poste in an effort to reduce water losses.

Mr Speaker, Sir, unlike previous pro-capitalist budgets presented by previous Ministers of Finance of the now Opposition, which did not hesitate in the budget to '*ras dipain la bouche ban zenfan*', we, on the contrary, are proposing a socialist budget for the benefits of the whole nation. This Government has always shown that we are a caring Government who humanly cares for the welfare of all the citizens of this country. Despite these unprecedented difficult moments, we are giving an utmost priority attention to the lower end of the society. In this context, we are coming up in this budget, with several social welfare state measures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will, therefore, enumerate you the 10 most popular social measures which show that we are a caring Government.

First, we are reducing *le prix du gaz ménager* by Rs30. The new price of a 12 litre gas cylinder is considerably dropping from Rs210 to Rs180.

Second, this Government will be constructing in the next three years 12,000 Social Housing Units for the benefits of the underprivileged.

Third, an amount of Rs15 billion will be injected in the economy to sustain businesses and preserve employment. Moreover, part of this amount will be utilised to support employees who are in *chômage technique*.

Fourth, the DBM will provide financial support loans up to Rs10 m. to local businesses at a symbolic interest rate of 0.5% per annum.

Fifth, the Bad Weather Allowance for fishermen has been increased to Rs425 per day.

Sixth, this Government had always a special attention to the women of our country. In this context, Government will be providing women entrepreneurs through the DBM, Rs200 m. for loans at a concessional rate of only 0.5% per annum.

Seventh, this Government knows the difficulty facing the people of determination. In this respect, Government will be providing a one-off grant of Rs100,000 to all Special Education Needs Institutions.

Eighth, this Government is taking the commitment to guarantee the price of Rs25,000 per ton for the first 60 tons to sugar planters.

Ninth, small planters who own parcel of agricultural land of not more than 10 acres, will now be able to convert 10% of this land for residential or commercial purposes.

Last but not least, how can we forget our lockdown heroes. These brave people have worked day and night in the front line since the very beginning of the lockdown risking their own lives for ours. In this respect, Police Officers and healthcare officers will benefit a special allowance of Rs15,000.

Mr Speaker Sir, let me conclude with these few thoughts. Our nation needs to be united in these unprecedented difficult moments. We, Mauritians, need to stand as one and fight this war together. Our Government has confidence in its people and knows the capabilities of us, Mauritians, to reinvent ourselves and prove to the world even if we are a tiny drop in the ocean, we can show the world we are an example to follow despite having limited resources. Our main resource is us, we, people of Mauritius, fighting this challenge together in unity. No one will help us if we do not help ourselves. As I have mentioned before, there is no right solution to this global pandemic until we find a vaccine. This is the reason we need to stay vigilant and most importantly to act as responsible persons.

In spite of pessimistic predictions and apocalyptic narratives from some negative minds from some Opposition Members, rest assured history has proven that humanity always

has a way of striving for a better future. Let us all set aside our differences and work together. At the end, one day the future generations will always remember us for our united determination to save and rebuild our country despite all odds against us.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

(3.05 p.m.)

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. M le président, le budget est l'instrument politique le plus important d'un gouvernement. Et c'est par le budget qu'un gouvernement façonne le développement social et économique de pays, d'une nation. Cependant, les budgets ne sont pas toujours justes dans leurs effets; ils touchent les hommes et les femmes de différentes manières ; touchent différentes couches sociales de manières différentes.

La COVID-19 a présenté au monde une situation sans précédent avec des forts impacts sur les communautés, en particulier, les plus vulnérables. A Maurice, cette pandémie nous a permis de découvrir notre vulnérabilité et a mis en exergue, les inégalités ancrées dans nos systèmes sociaux et économiques. La COVID-19 est venue mettre en exergue les failles de nos institutions et nos mentalités vis à vis des femmes et des enfants, et vis à vis d'autres couches sociales vulnérables de notre société.

A partir de là, il nous importe de façonner de manière différente notre société pour les années à venir. Le moment est venu de poursuivre avec compassion la sécurité et la santé des uns et des autres, en particulier, les plus vulnérables de notre société pour un monde juste et égal. Il est important de gouverner dans l'humilité car l'arrogance ne mène pas bien loin.

Alors que la pandémie et ses conséquences menacent des vies et des moyens de subsistance, nous voyons à quel point nos destins sont étroitement liés. Comment chacun de nous est directement et indirectement responsable de ceux qui nous entourent. Une citation de Martin Luther King est plus que d'actualité. Je cite –

« Nous sommes pris dans un réseau incontournable de la réciprocité. Tout ce qui affecte l'un directement affecte tous indirectement. »

Première vérité de cette pandémie. Mon collègue, l'honorable Nagalingum l'a déclaré dans son intervention. Le lendemain même de l'annonce du couvre-feu sanitaire, il était difficile pour nombre de nos concitoyens de s'approvisionner en nourriture. Pendant plusieurs jours,

ils sont restés en détresse alimentaire. Beaucoup ont eu de la peine à trouver de quoi se nourrir, surtout ceux qui travaillent au jour le jour, ceux qui “*travay gramatin pou manz tanto*”.

N’était-ce l’aide des ONG et la solidarité de nos compatriotes ils n’auraient même pu survivre. Il est vrai que le gouvernement a distribué des pactes de provisions, mais cela est venu un peu tard. De plus, nombre de personnes ne bénéficient pas de cette aide, n’étant pas sur le registre, *SRM*.

Deuxième vérité, M. le président, la restriction des mouvements augmente les tensions au sein des ménages et entraîne une hausse de violences conjugales. Dans son rapport sur l’Egalité du genre, le Fonds des Nations Unies pour la Population observe que le foyer n’est pas toujours un lieu sûr pour les femmes et les filles, et met en garde contre l’affaiblissement des systèmes de protection, et préconise des mesures spécifiques, face aux changements imposés par le coronavirus.

Le secrétaire général préconise ainsi la mise en place de système d’alerte d’urgence dans les pharmacies et les magasins d’alimentation et à veiller à ce que les forces de l’ordre soient sensibilisées à la nécessité de réagir vite aux appels des victimes. A Maurice, le gouvernement a déclaré qu’il n’y a *one case is too many*. C’est un peu comme applaudir le ministre de la Santé quand il avait déclaré qu’il y a eu que 10 morts pendant la pandémie et ‘*tablebangers*’ ont applaudi. Mais, *one case is too many*.

Suite à une interpellation parlementaire que, moi-même et l’honorable Ms Anquetil, avons adressé à la ministre sur le nombre de cas de violence conjugale pendant le confinement, la ministre est intervenue à la *MBC* pour expliquer que la violence pendant le confinement est tout à fait normal. M. le président, c’est le contraire qui devrait être vrai. La violence dans les foyers pendant le confinement ne doit pas être la norme. Au contraire, le confinement ne doit pas être chose normale. Au contraire, le confinement devrait être une occasion pour la famille de mieux se connaître et de se consolider. Le ministère de l’Egalité du genre et du bien-être de la famille a raté une occasion de renforcer les liens entre les membres de la famille pendant le confinement. Le ministère aurait pu utiliser ce confinement pour un *parenting programme* participatif en collaboration avec les médias.

Qu’est-ce que le Budget 2020-2021 prévoit pour combattre les inégalités du genre? La ministre mise sur un *National Gender Policy*. Or, cela figure dans le dernier budget également, et je ne peux que souhaiter que cela ne subit le même sort que le *Children’s Bill*.

Autre vérité, M. le président, la destruction des maisons dans les banlieues urbaines, à Pointe aux Sables, à Curepipe et dans les zones côtières de Riambel, en plein confinement du COVID-19. Illustration parfaite qu'une partie de la population vit dans des conditions inacceptables, dans un pays qui est maintenant une économie à revenu intermédiaire supérieur. L'opération '*kraz lacaz*' alors que nous étions censés '*rest lakaz*', a révolté plus d'un. La pauvreté y est vraiment palpable. *Poverty stares at us in the face*, M. le président. Et surtout, la problématique de la féminisation de la pauvreté est criarde, mais nous avons pu témoigner de la débrouillardise des femmes, à l'instar de cette dame de Riambel, qui, visiblement a occupé ce terrain depuis plusieurs années, son potager faisant foi. Son courage et sa passion prouvent qu'elle est une battante avec une volonté de sortir du piège de la pauvreté.

Cette femme-pêcheur a adopté plusieurs enfants et s'occupe de son potager pour nourrir les siens. Avec la vente de ces légumes, elle pouvait acheter des matériels scolaires pour ses enfants, ces derniers ne bénéficiant pas de matériels scolaires gratuits.

De même, M. le président, je crois que tout le monde a été touché par la déclaration de ce jeune garçon de cite Tôle à Curepipe. Sa famille occupe un terrain de l'Etat. Il a pu avoir *six credits* aux examens de SC malgré le fait que la bicoque où il vit est dépourvue d'électricité. C'est un jeune qui veut sortir de la misère. Sa mère détient un compte Plan Epargne Logement (PEL) depuis 2003; elle s'est inscrite auprès de la NHDC et n'a toujours pas trouvé une maison. C'est cela le drame. M. le président. Et certains pense-petits veulent faire croire qu'une section de la population ne soit que des profiteurs, qui ne fait pas d'effort nécessaire pour sortir de la précarité. C'est ce genre de mentalité qui nous empêche de progresser comme une nation et fait que nous vivons sur une poudrière. La moindre étincelle pourrait exploser à la figure si le gouvernement continue dans son approche inhumaine et dénuée d'empathie. Le gouvernement a une grande responsabilité et devrait pouvoir donner l'exemple.

M. le président, un récent reportage de la MBC a insinué que c'est à l'Église catholique et les établissements sucriers - 'tablissement' - de procurer un logement aux squatteurs. M le président, c'est à l'Etat qu'incombe le devoir d'assurer un logement décent à ses citoyens. Ce n'est pas la responsabilité des institutions religieuses ni celle du secteur privé. Serait-ce le *new normal*, pendant qu'on y est? Cela est très grave et est plein de sous-entendus, à caractère communale, M. le président. Est-ce que nous avons deux ou plusieurs catégories de Mauriciens dans ce pays? Ceux qui sont '*catered for*' par l'Etat et d'autres par

des institutions religieuses ou le secteur privé? Beaucoup de ces squatteurs avaient été encouragés par des politiciens et politiciennes à occuper des terrains pendant la campagne électorale, est-ce que ces personnes existent seulement le temps d'une campagne électorale, M. le président?

Occuper illégalement le terrain de l'Etat est condamnable certes, mais il y a la manière de faire, d'autant plus que le pays était en état de couvre-feu sanitaire, en confinement, et que plusieurs de ces occupants, à l'instar de ceux habitant Riambel ont occupé ce terrain depuis années. L'Etat du potager, bien sûr, faisant foi, et d'autres encore, comme je l'ai dit plus haut, avaient été encouragés à le faire par des politiciens. Il est regrettable que certains choisissent de faire de la politique sur la misère des gens. Aujourd'hui, au moment où je vous parle, des femmes et des enfants dorment à la belle étoile, sans équipement protecteur, sans masque. Est-ce que l'on se soucie de ce qu'advient de ces enfants, de ces femmes en cette saison hivernale? Est-ce que l'on se soucie de ces enfants, traumatisés par la brutale destruction de leurs maisons! Est-ce que des psychologues ont été dépêchés sur place pour suivre ces enfants? Ce n'est qu'après avoir détruit ces logis que le ministère songe à faire une étude sur les occupants de ces différents terrains. Après la mort, la tisane! Est-ce cela faire de la politique autrement?

M. le président, quelques jours après les élections générales de 2000, l'honorable Béranger, alors Vice-Premier ministre, effectue une visite aux occupants des longères de Richelieu et des habitants de *Dockers' Flats*, et leur promet des habitations humaines après une étude de cas individuel. Les maisons sont construites à Flamboyant, Richelieu, de même que le Dockers Village, un bijou. Ce n'est qu'après avoir logé ces personnes que les habitations de fortune sont détruites. C'est alors le prélude d'une série de constructions de maisons et d'allocation de maisons basées sur mérite.

Ce n'est qu'après avoir logé ces personnes que les habitations de fortune sont détruites. C'est alors le prélude d'une série de constructions de maisons et l'allocation de maisons basée sur mérite. C'est cela faire de la politique autrement! La destruction des maisons en plein couvre-feu sanitaire est inhumaine et irréfléchie.

Que prévoit-on pour cette catégorie de personnes? En termes de logement d'abord et de subsistance ensuite? Le gouvernement propose la construction de 1,800 maisons sur trois ans, soit 600 par an. Parler de 12,000 *social houses* est une fumisterie. Le ministère

mentionne le chiffre de 18,000 inscrits auprès de la NHDC. A mon avis, ce chiffre est beaucoup plus élevé.

De ces 1,800 maisons, est-ce que les critères d'allocation des maisons seront revus pour permettre aux mères célibataires, divorcées avec des enfants à leur charge d'en bénéficier? Est-ce qu'un certain nombre de ces maisons seront réservées à cette catégorie de femmes?

M. le président, venons-en à la subsistance, le *livelihood*. Je parlais de cette dame de Riambel et de la débrouillardise féminine? Que fera l'État pour lui permettre de continuer à gagner sa vie? Le budget mentionne le *loan* de la DBM pour les femmes-entrepreneurs? Je suis sûre qu'elle ne sera pas éligible vu qu'elle n'a pas de *collateral*. Aucun bien immobilier à être proposé en garantie.

Le terrain qu'elle occupait lui a été arraché parce que selon le ministre il y aurait un projet de développement à la place ou tout à côté. Dans le *President's Address* on parle de *inclusive society*. Le développement devrait aller de pair avec la justice sociale. Or, cet exemple démontre le contraire. Le peuple en prend note. Gare au retour de la manivelle. Elle sera brutale.

Dans le budget, la sécurité alimentaire et la *land bank* ont été mentionnés. Peut-on s'attendre à ce que des portions de terrain soit allouées aux femmes et ne pas les cantonner aux *backyard gardens*? Les femmes méritent mieux.

M. le président, au premier trimestre 2019, le pourcentage de femmes sans emploi était estimé à 57%, contre 43% pour les hommes. Ce taux ne reflète pas toujours la réalité, car des femmes ne se font pas inscrire souvent sur le marché du travail. Elles sont découragées par les mauvaises conditions d'emplois, des postes mal rémunérés et très précaires.

L'année dernière, la population active féminine était à 39,49% selon la banque mondiale. Nous nous attendions à ce que ce budget s'attaque aux inégalités sur les marchés du travail; que des mesures soient prises pour s'assurer que les femmes qui sont très souvent des travailleurs peu qualifiés rattrapent leurs revenus avec leurs homologues masculins bien rémunérés?

En parallèle, nous avons besoin de politiques sociales plus favorables aux femmes. Des politiques qui favorisent la participation des femmes au marché du travail et réduisent l'écart salarial entre les sexes; des garderies, des soins abordables aux personnes âgées ainsi

que la flexibilité dans la réglementation sur le temps de travail, sans pour autant impacter négativement sur leurs salaires. Le *work from home* ne devrait pas être une occasion pour les employeurs de diminuer les salaires.

M. le président, élue pour la première fois aux élections du 11 juin 1982 -aujourd'hui c'est le 11 juin 2020, 38 ans de cela - il n'est pas dans mes habitudes de prendre en compte les propos des transfuges. Mais parfois certaines personnes ont tendance à avoir la mémoire courte. Je vais citer une personne, membre de cette Chambre depuis peu parce que à l'époque elle parlait du problème de chômage des femmes. Elle avait ceci à dire, et je cite –

“Saki nou remarqué et ki nou lir dan zurnal, se zis bann fami ki p gagne kitsoz; tifi, niece, mawsi, madame Bambara, Mamzel Biskwi. Al interview, pa meme conner ki pos li pou gagner. Pa trouver zot p fer comic.”

Et aujourd'hui cette personne siège au sein de l'Assemblée sous la bannière de l'*Alliance Morisien*.

M. le président, malheureusement, le budget n'a pas pris en compte de façon méthodique le chômage des femmes. Ce budget occulte les inégalités dont sont victimes les femmes et n'est donc pas *gender-sensitive*. Je propose un observatoire des inégalités. Ceci aura pour responsabilité de rassembler des données et des éléments d'analyse sur les inégalités à Maurice; inégalités entre genres, inégalités socio-économiques et autres inégalités.

M. le président, l'*Education Act* a été amendé dans le sillage de la COVID-19 pour inclure le e-learning. Le *e-learning* aura également permis de mettre en exergue l'inégalité entre les enfants. Certains ayant des tablettes, d'autres pas. Des parents n'ont pas la formation requise pour aider les enfants. La dotation budgétaire de R 100 millions à 155 collèges à Maurice et Rodrigues pour l'installation de facilités d'internet est louable. Mais, il y a quand même des foyers qui n'ont pas accès à l'internet. Pourquoi ne pas créer des spots destinés aux enfants dont les parents sont sur le registre SRM? Est-ce que les enfants qui sont dans nos *shelters* ont eu la possibilité et les moyens de suivre les cours en ligne pendant le confinement? Je n'en suis pas sûre.

Pour les éducateurs, il aurait fallu leur faciliter l'accès aux équipements modernes surtout que la technologie se développe très rapidement. Or, il n'y a pas suffisamment d'*incentives* pour les enseignants. Le budget aurait peut-être pu songer à ce que les éducateurs puissent bénéficier d'un *soft loan* pour acquérir ces équipements.

Ceci dit, M. le président, est-ce que le *online programme* devrait être le *new normal*? Il existe deux écoles de pensées. Certains pensent que oui alors que d'autres pensent que cela devrait être utilisé dans des cas d'extrême nécessité seulement. Philippe Nemo, ancien professeur de l'ESCP Europe et directeur de l'École professionnelle de Paris, déclare dans du 3 juin de cette année que, je cite –

« L'écran ne remplacera jamais la rencontre du professeur et des élèves en classe. »

Une étude dans ce sens nous aidera à évaluer l'efficacité ou non du e-learning. Mais cela ne peut se faire que dans le dialogue et le dialogue seulement. M. le président, il existe un décalage inquiétant entre les exigences en matière de compétences sur le marché du travail avec notre stratégie d'éducation et de formation. Au premier trimestre 2019, en ce qui concerne les demandeurs d'emploi, 11% n'avaient pas atteint le niveau ou l'équivalent du CPE et 38% n'avaient pas le *School Certificate* ou l'équivalent. Ce budget ne traite pas de l'inégalité des possibilités dans l'emploi, en ce sens que la question de la formation n'a pas été prise en compte.

Lors de mon intervention sur le *COVID Bill* et le *Quarantine Bill*, j'avais émis des interrogations qui sont toujours d'actualité. Je ne vais pas y revenir aujourd'hui encore. D'autres questions pertinentes étaient posées hier par l'honorable, membre du côté de cette Chambre, l'honorable Dr. Gungapersad.

Pour ce qui est des ONG des *Special Education Needs Schools*, plusieurs d'entre elles étaient au bord de la fermeture par manque de fonds. La dotation de R 100,000 va leur permettre de sortir la tête de l'eau. On ne peut occulter le fait qu'elles font un travail soutenu et difficile. Pourquoi ne pas avoir proposé un *Remuneration Order* pour ces personnes qui se donnent corps et âmes pour les personnes en situation d'handicap.

M. le président, j'aurais souhaité parler sur le *blue economy*, arts et culture, etc, mais je ne peux pas les aborder faute de temps. Je le ferais plus tard peut-être.

M. le président, les Chagos - trois lignes pour ne rien dire dans le budget à part le fait que les Chagos apparaissent sur la carte mondiale sous la souveraineté de Maurice. Cela le Premier ministre l'avait déjà annoncé lors du confinement. Mais qu'est-ce qui est prévu dans le budget concrètement? L'année dernière, provision a été faite de la somme de R 50 millions pour un *resettlement programme*. Combien de cette somme a été dépensé et à quel effet? Cette année encore, le ministre des Finances annonce au paragraphe 342 –

“*A programme of resettlement in the Chagos Archipelago*”.

Et au paragraphe 343 –

“The necessary funds are being provided to support these efforts”

Quel est le montant de ce *funds*?

Le gouvernement avait promis d’affréter un bateau pour une visite sur les Chagos depuis l’année dernière. Des personnalités internationales devaient faire partie du voyage. Les élections générales sont arrivées, et puis plus rien. Pendant combien de temps encore le gouvernement va faire miroiter ce voyage, M. le président? Est-ce un nouveau mirage? Quelqu’un avait dit, je cite –

‘You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all the time but you cannot fool all the people all the time’.

Pour conclure, M. le président, la COVID-19 a démontré les failles de nos institutions et les mentalités. J’aurais souhaité un budget *gender-sensitive*, un *pro-poor budget*, un budget humaniste.

Mais je souhaite également une approche *gender-sensitive* et *pro-poor* de la part de ceux qui nous gouvernent. L’exemple devrait pouvoir venir d’en haut. Gouverner de sa tour d’ivoire et dans l’arrogance ne mènent pas bien loin. Ceux au pouvoir devraient faire preuve d’empathie et donner l’exemple à nos jeunes.

Toutefois, malgré les inégalités criardes pendant le confinement, malgré certains propos incendiaires sur les réseaux sociaux vis-à-vis des moins chanceux de notre société, la majorité des Mauriciens ont fait preuve d’une solidarité exemplaire. Et cela me donne des raisons d’espérer.

Merci, M. le président.

(3.31 p.m.)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): M. le président, je voudrais, en premier lieu, féliciter mon collègue, le docteur Renganaden Padayachy pour être venu de manière réfléchie et responsable présenter à la nation mauricienne les mesures jugées essentielles au bien-être de tous et à la prospérité de notre république surtout dans un contexte très exceptionnel.

M. le président, le budget reste un évènement extrêmement important au parlement et un évènement crucial pour le ministre des Finances. Il s'agit aujourd'hui du tout premier budget pour le grand argentier et le premier budget de ce gouvernement depuis sa reconduite au pouvoir. Mais il a fallu au ministre des Finances tenir des consultations pré-budgétaires en plein confinement pour ensuite venir de l'avant avec un budget répondant au contexte du jour. Un défi de taille, un défi relevé! Notre nouvelle normalité l'économie de la vie. Ce budget quelque bien défini par le titre lui-même traduit le besoin d'un équilibre que le gouvernement doit maintenant maintenir afin de relever les défis que nous lègue la COVID-19.

M. le président, qui aurait cru qu'une pandémie d'une telle virulence viendra mettre à genoux l'économie mondiale aussi subitement. Le monde dans lequel nous évoluons est aujourd'hui complètement bouleversé. La COVID-19 est rapidement venu changer de manière drastique notre quotidien, notre mode de vie, nos habitudes et même nos reflexes. Rien n'est plus comme auparavant. Et j'insiste ici sur l'importance que chacun d'entre nous doit réaliser que nous vivons désormais dans un monde nouveau, volatile, incertain, complexe et ambigu et qu'il nous faut impérativement nous adapter à cette nouvelle normalité pour qu'ensemble nous puissions surmonter nos difficultés et continuer à agir dans l'intérêt de chaque citoyen Mauricien.

M. le président, vous conviendrez que l'heure est à la solidarité. Le budget que nous a présenté le ministre des Finances, de la Planification Economique et du Développement vient répondre avec cohérence à cette situation d'urgence. Les impacts de COVID-19 sont ressentis non seulement à Maurice mais dans le monde entier où différents secteurs économiques sont frappés de plein fouet.

A Maurice, nos différents secteurs dont le tourisme, l'aviation, le textile entre autres traversent par des jours difficiles. Les risques de perte d'emploi sont réels avec tout l'effet que cela comporte. Il nous faut absolument nous réinventer pour prévenir un tel scénario et, M. le président, le budget 2020-2021 vient justement nous donner les moyens avant-gardistes pour cette réinvention.

Pour commencer, la relance de l'économie assurée par une enveloppe de 100 milliards est vraiment opportune; le nouveau modèle pour la pension avec plus de justice tenant compte de la démographie, l'introduction de la contribution sociale généralisée et

encore l'introduction du chèque emploi service aux milliers de Mauriciens travaillant dans le secteur informel.

M. le président, le gouvernement est venu de l'avant et de manière courageuse avec un régime fiscal plus équitable pour une meilleure distribution de richesse. Quelques 55,000 ménages à revenu moyen verront soit une réduction ou même ne paieront pas d'impôt sur le revenu.

M. le président, l'honorable madame Navarre-Marie nous a dit qu'il fallait un budget humaniste. Ce budget vient non seulement donner les moyens à tout un chacun pour surmonter les difficultés entraînées par la COVID-19 mais s'aligne aussi à la continuité de la vision du gouvernement de répondre aux besoins des concitoyens et surtout l'aspect social.

M. le président, un montant de 12 milliards de roupies sera consacré à la construction de 12,000 logements sociaux à travers le pays. Je crois que le ministre du logement a clairement démontré quelle était l'action du gouvernement. Très posément, il a expliqué à l'Assemblée quelles ont été les mesures prises et comment les personnes qui se sont trouvées en difficulté, (ceux qu'on appelle les '*squatters*'). Comment il a essayé de les accompagner, de les encadrer avec les *educational social workers*, les psychologues, les officiers du ministère des genres et avec bien d'autres - la santé, etc, pour s'assurer qu'on leur donne les moyens, qu'on leur donne des facilités et qu'on assure qu'ils ne soient pas délaissés. Les actions prises par ce gouvernement ont toujours été motivées par un sentiment d'aide et d'entraide, de solidarité surtout pour les plus démunis.

M. le président, le projet de la construction de 12,000 logements s'étalera sur trois ans et ces logements seront destinés aux familles mauriciennes qui sont dans le besoin. Le budget fait également la part belle aux jeunes qui voudraient acheter une propriété, pas de *registration duty* à payer pour les projets d'appartements ou des maisons, même pour ceux qui comptent acheter un lopin de terre, ils bénéficieront aussi de l'exemption en tant que *first time buyer*. Beaucoup de mesures, M. le président.

Mais c'est bon de souligner aussi que la COVID-19 nous a révélé beaucoup de nos faiblesses. La question de sécurité alimentaire est devenue extrêmement pertinente non seulement pour la sécurité alimentaire mais aussi l'autonomie, l'autosuffisance. Et on note avec grande satisfaction les mesures incitatives annoncées par le grand Argentier dans les secteurs agricoles, telles que la mise en place du *National Agricultural Development*

Programme pour promouvoir le concept ‘de la ferme à la table’ dont l’un des objectifs est de réduire les importations.

M. le président, nous savons clairement que c’est très important à Maurice d’encourager les gens à produire et les produits agricoles aussi, on devrait être en mesure de les conserver. Alors la transformation des produits agricoles, la possibilité de donner aux planteurs les capacités de stockage, les capacités pour la transformation de leur produit. M. le président, c’est clair que les planteurs ont besoin de ce soutien et le ministère de l’Agro-Industrie pourra les apporter, ces soutiens. J’habite dans une région où on cultive la terre et bien des fois les planteurs sont poussés à laisser sur leur champs leur produit, tout simplement parce que les prix baissent et ils n’arrivent même pas à payer les frais. Là, si on leur donne les moyens de venir avec des possibilités de conserver les produits, cela pourrait nous aider. Pour accroître la production de pommes de terre et d’oignons, nous avons vu aussi une subvention dans l’achat des semences.

M. le président, il y a tellement de mesures dans ce budget qui sont là pour aider. La banque de développement prévoit un montant de R 200 millions à un taux préférentiel de 0.5% pour aider les femmes entrepreneurs. Et là, je voudrais souligner que c’est un pas supplémentaire que l’on franchit. La possibilité pour les femmes entrepreneurs d’emprunter auprès de la *DBM* sans aucune garantie est déjà là depuis le dernier budget.

M. le président, c’est ce gouvernement qui est venu avec un maximum de mesures pour aider les femmes à se lancer dans le business. Je crois que ma collègue, l’honorable Koonjoo-Shah, a bien fait ressortir que toutes les mesures prises sont là pour mieux encadrer les femmes entrepreneurs. Elle viendra aussi, si je ne me trompe, avec les assises pour les femmes entrepreneurs. M. le président, il y a tellement de choses qui se font et c’est primordial que nous arrivons à suivre ce qui se passe. J’ai l’impression que très souvent on ne se rend même pas compte les actions prises par le gouvernement.

M. le président, COVID-19, vous le conviendrez, a apporté une pression accrue sur presque tous les secteurs, et surtout la santé. Et là, j’ai une pensée spéciale aux *front liners* qui ont, d’une manière passionnée, contribué à contenir le virus sur notre territoire et un grand bravo pour cela. J’imagine qu’on doit aussi se féliciter pour la façon dans laquelle notre service de santé publique a opéré. Bravo au ministre et à tous les employés de ce secteur!

Avec les mesures du présent budget, les services de santé publique connaîtront encore une fois un dynamisme nouveau, après l’*ENT hospital* de Vacoas, nous allons avoir un

nouvel hôpital spécialisé pour les soins des yeux à Réduit. Il y aura aussi la rentrée en opération d'une unité de transplantation rénale à l'hôpital Jawaharlal Nehru, la construction de l'hôpital universitaire de Flacq, mais aussi l'hôpital pour les patients du cancer à Vacoas. Là, il y a aussi quelque chose d'intéressant, les visites médicales à domicile étendues à toutes personnes alitées ou en situation de handicap et cela peu importe l'âge.

M. le président, je voudrais faire ressortir qu'il est devenu impératif qu'on donne un coup d'accélérateur à certains secteurs et la pharmaceutique en est un et le budget prévoit déjà des investissements importants pour la production des produits pharmaceutiques.

M. le président, permettez-moi maintenant de me tourner vers le secteur de l'éducation. M. le président, *education is what will forge the Mauritius of tomorrow*. Ce sont là les mots exacts que l'honorable Dr. Renganaden Padayachy a utilisé et ces mots chapotent la partie du budget ayant trait à l'éducation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, education is and will remain central to all development. COVID-19, Mr Speaker, Sir, has resulted into an exercise in-card reshuffling and none of us should be surprised that it has turned out to be a game changer in its own right. COVID-19 has become the clincher indeed. This clinching act has been remarkable felt in education. Had schools not closed, we would not have grasped it. And successfully availed of the opportunity that have arisen.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I recall reading Minister of Water and Sanitation of Senegal, hon. Serigne Mbaye Thiam, who commenting on the impact of COVID-19 wrote, and I quote –

“It will be a question of reinventing ourselves of conceptualising new economic models”.

I believe the same must be said of education. In education precisely, this is the time for carrying out a balancing act. At a time when there is so much of uncertainty, we have to determine what we can be certain about. What we are certain about is that we have to balance the possibility of a health setback amongst our learners with the necessity for them not to be disconnected from their studies. I know our schools and our learners were hit hard, but we supported them as far as possible, despite the restrictive sanitary measures such as Stay at Home measures of extended lockdown. More specifically, Mr Speaker, Sir, the current situation demands a fine balancing act between adjusting to the new normal and not losing out on the gains achieved in our education reform endeavours so far.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we, in education, have decided to be on the right side of history. However charged and changed the Covid-instigated context, we are undeviating from the fundamental principle that are a bedrock of our education agenda.

Les maîtres mots ont toujours été et restent inclusiveness, equity and quality. COVID-19 has now added a new pillar, resilience. Rest assured that we are never going to renege on any of these four thrust areas. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, this budget gives us the means to live up to the expectation imposed.

Let us take first the booster being given in this budget to facilitate e-Learning as a factor for resilience. We know that globally COVID-19 has brought to the forefront a heavy reliance and digital platforms radio and TV educational programmes to make up for school closures and ensure the continuity of learning.

After all, more than 1.2 billion students had to bear the brunt of such closures. Suddenly, the message rang out loud and clear, learning today can no more be seen as just a same time, same place activity. This explains, Mr Speaker, Sir, the attraction for the blended or hybrid learning, a mix of face to face teaching with online learning. Should we be surprised, therefore, when the University of Mauritius has already announced its intention to deliver 50% of its programme through the blended mode as from academic year 2022 to 2021. E-learning, Mr Speaker, Sir, has now to be seeded in the furrows of the education system. And this, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the new normal in education.

Our reliance on TV and online programmes filled an important gap. When new things were not perfect, there were some teething problems. However, the fact that teachers came forward voluntarily and committed themselves to the provision and delivery of programmes is praiseworthy. They all realised, we all realised, Mr Speaker, Sir, the importance for learners to stay connected to their studies to ensure learning continuity.

On parle ici, M. le président, de la continuité pédagogique. Cette continuité est cruciale pour éviter que nos apprenants ne se sentent livrés à eux-mêmes, complètement délaissés; ce qui aurait eu un impact sur l'apprenant et qui, nous le croyons, aurait mené à un décrochage accéléré ou encore une rupture de la vie scolaire.

Mr Speaker, Sir, contrary to popular thinking, the digital era and education has also given rise to a redefinition of the role of teachers. During the confinement period, it was evident that teachers had to use pedagogical approaches, different from those used during the face-to-face teaching. It was certainly not easy an adaptation, but it was done successfully.

This also demanded further training and I am glad to state that with the help of webinars, we have managed to train some 5,000 educators and they were initiated how to conduct online programmes. I must say that both the teachers and the students, especially the students adapted very easily to the new approach. Here, it is true to say that our learners belong to the generation Z. Technology is part of their identity, of their DNA and they had no difficulty at all to hop on the mode of delivery.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we saw this coming from a distance. Hence, the provision of tablets in lower grades, in the primary subsector, to facilitate early exposure à *la chose numérique*, the early digital learning programme. Incidentally, allow me to confirm that the early digital learning programme is slated to continue for the remaining grades in the primary. We also had the foresight to set up the students support platform in 2018, a platform that has so well been supporting learners of Grades 7 to 9 during the confinement period. And now, it is time to seize the opportunity to make a leap forward for real integration and embedding of online learning in the system, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I am happy that the Budget has announced the development of a national e-learning platform to connect educators of secondary schools with their students. We recall, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in the Covid-19 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020, specific provisions were made for the continuity of learning through distance education and online teaching.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, here, to state clearly that by no means are we saying that online teaching will replace the face-to-face contact that we have at school. But we are saying that we are moving towards a new hybrid type of school, a blended mode, the hybrid mode where both will come to play.

Mr Speaker, Sir, accordingly, the national e-learning platform will be developed to support this continuity of education. This will further enhance our preparedness, should there be any resurgence of epidemics. A platform, Mr Speaker, Sir, which will equally allow learners and educators to interact, discuss their educational resources, either individually or in a group setting, and educators will be able to teach in a lecture or classroom format or even virtually using video conferencing tools. It will also allow for the monitoring of performance and even virtual evaluation.

M. le président, je voudrais, ici, faire mention de quelques petites choses. L'honorable Madame Navarre-Marie nous a dit que jamais le *online teaching* pourra remplacer le *face-to-face*. Je viens de souligner que le rôle du professeur, de l'enseignant va changer avec cette

nouvelle mode d’instruction. Ce ne sera plus the sage on the stage, *comme on dit*. Ce sera l’accompagnateur, celui qui va être là avec l’élève, le mentor, et le rôle du professeur deviendra encore plus important. L’honorable Madame Navarre-Marie avait aussi fait mention du fait que certains élèves n’avaient peut-être pas pu avoir accès au *online teaching*. Certes, nous sommes au courant. Mais c’est important aussi de noter que le budget fait provision pour assurer que ces jeunes reçoivent des tablettes à travers le ministère de l’Intégration sociale et aussi la Mauritius Telecom est en train de connecter les maisons, les *households* qui sont sur le SRM. Plus de 5,000 maisons ont déjà été connectées. Alors, il y a une mouvance. Nous sommes en train d’essayer de trouver les moyens pour combler le gap qui est là. Mais c’est aussi important de mentionner puisque je parle là du *online teaching*.

J’avais écouté avec attention les propos de l’honorable Dr. Gungapersad qui disait qu’il était offusqué de voir que les ministère de l’Education avait pris des mesures, avait rappelé à l’ordre un enseignant qui, derrière le bouclier de *trade unionist*, s’était permis d’empêcher les professeurs de faire le *online teaching*. Il s’est permis de passer un message sur les réseaux sociaux pour demander aux professeurs de ne pas le faire. Dans un moment aussi difficile où l’importance des élevés de rester connecter avec leurs études était primordiale. Dr Gungapersad qui a été, lui-même, un recteur de collège, se permet de venir dire qu’on devrait le laisser agir de cette manière en toute impunité!

M. le président, je trouve cela choquant, venant d’une personne qui vient dire qu’il a à cœur le secteur éducatif, d’une personne qui a été, lui-même, enseignant, d’une personne qui a été, lui-même, recteur de collège, il trouve normal qu’on se croise les bras et on laisse agir quelqu’un de cette façon irresponsable. M. le président, je l’ai dit au départ, le moment est un moment, où il nous faut être solidaire et responsable. Le monsieur en question, je ne voulais pas mentionner le nom, mais puisque l’honorable Dr. Gungpersad l’a dit, le cher M. Meetooa est loin d’être le Meetooa de ses élèves, parce qu’il a tout fait pour les déconnecter.

M. le président, il y a des choses que nous devons garder en tête. Quand on est honorable membre de l’Assemblée ou quand on est éducateur et, en plus, recteur de collège, nous avons certaines responsabilités, surtout vis-à-vis de nos élèves, vis-à-vis des apprenants.

M. le président, puisque je suis là, laissez-moi répondre à quelques autres points qu’il a fait ressortir. L’honorable Dr. Gungapersad nous a dit aussi qu’on n’a rien fait pour l’éducation à la sexualité, il doit revoir sa copie. Si on a à cœur le secteur éducatif, il faut suivre ce qui se passe dans ce secteur. Depuis 2016, nous avons formé les professeurs et

l'éducation à la sexualité a été introduite dans nos écoles. Nous avons travaillé avec l'Institut Cardinal Jean Margéot pour pouvoir venir avec ce programme et l'introduire dans nos écoles. Alors, vaud mieux ne pas venir nous raconter des histoires. Venir dire que *SEN (Special Education Needs)* n'a pas été considéré, mais ce n'est pas connaître le secteur. Nous avons déjà un budget de R 138 millions pour les ONG. En plus, nous sommes venus avec - comme l'a si bien mentionné l'honorable Madame Navarre-Marie - cette dotation de R 100,000 par écoles. Et bien sûr, nous sommes en train de travailler avec le ministère du *Labour, Human Resource Development and Training* de l'emploi, pour voir s'ils peuvent être considérés sur le prochain *NRB*.

M. le président, il faudrait que les gens réagissent d'une façon claire et nette et non pas venir dire n'importe quoi. L'honorable, Dr. Gungapersad a parlé de beaucoup de choses, des examens, comment est-ce qu'on va faire la distanciation sociale à l'école. Tout cela nous avons pris en compte. Le port du masque, c'est simplement pour la protection de nos enfants. Nous sommes tous conscients que les très petits ne pourront peut-être pas, au pré-primaire on ne pourra peut-être pas le faire. Mais, bien sûr, c'est une protection. Ce n'est pas de gaieté du cœur qu'on demande aux élèves de rester en classe, mais nous avons donné aussi l'autonomie aux écoles de voir comment si le professeur est là, qu'il puisse faire sortir les élèves pour quelques minutes, bien sûr pour se dégourdir les jambes. Tout cela, c'est compris, mais il nous fallait dans un moment critique, durant la crise, venir avec des mesures pour protéger nos enfants. Nous avons deux choses en tête, la protection des enfants et d'autre part, la continuité pédagogique. On a agi en tant que responsable, en tant que gens réfléchis.

Mais je dois aussi dire quelque chose, peut-être que les gens ne se rendent pas compte à Maurice; les problèmes dont nous avons fait face avec le *online teaching*, avec les programmes à la télévision et à la radio, sont des problèmes que des pays à travers le monde ont fait face. En France, par exemple, il y a eu des enfants qui ont dû marcher des kilomètres avant de pouvoir faire scannériser une feuille et ensuite envoyer aux professeurs ou aux élèves. Alors, nous avons des problèmes, certes, mais nous ne sommes pas les seuls au monde ayant ces problèmes. Il va falloir trouver des solutions. Nous ne disons pas que tout était parfait mais il fallait quand même venir avec des mesures rapidement afin d'aider nos enfants. Et c'est pour cela que j'aimerais aujourd'hui dire merci et bravo à tous ces enseignants qui, malgré le confinement, eux ont agi en tant que responsables, ont fait les *online courses*. Certains se sont déplacés pour aller à l'*Open University* malgré le

confinement pour enregistrer les programmes. Bien sûr il nous faut réaliser que toutes ces choses ne se font pas comme cela. Il faut réfléchir, il faut trouver les moyens, il faut agir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am, therefore, extremely happy to note that the Budget caters for those who, as mentioned by my hon. Colleague, may not have been able to follow the classes. So, the Budget caters for those who have been victims of such digital divide and, in this connection, I am glad to note that digital tablets will be provided to the needy students through the Ministry of Social Integration. Also, loans will be provided to households, this includes students and educators for the purchase of laptops and other IT equipment. On the other hand, even loans up to Rs1m. will be given to private colleges for upgrading their IT infrastructure. Mr Speaker, Sir, I hardly need to explain the appropriateness of these measures to scale up actions already afoot for the digitisation of classrooms. Another step towards the digital transformation we have embarked upon, Mr Speaker, Sir. Agreed, technology is not a magic bullet but these measures will do a lot of good to the system as a whole. For one thing, they will facilitate access and improve education delivery. We know this has been heralded during the confinement period as a major equity issue. For another, they will pave the way for personalised learning and act as a prompt for students to learn. And we all know that the skills that people need in today's world, namely how to search for information to evaluate sources and to work in teams at best generated with the aid of technology. Not to labour the point, such measures highlighted in the Budget will enable teachers to move out of the routine and to take over a new role as mentor, as guide and facilitator.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, these measures will also help to make us move to the next step of our development. The Budget refers to the creation of a Data Technology Park at Côte d'Or, one that will have 12 specialised centres along with Deep Artificial Intelligence Centre, acting as support for start-ups, existing businesses and Government services. The question we need to ask ourselves is simple: will this be possible if we do not have a tech-savvy human resource? This is the bottom line, Mr Speaker, Sir. Perhaps the best way to accelerate innovation and creativity is to bank on our young learners and youth who will be trained from an early age in the use and handling of technology and this incidentally explains and justifies our early digital learning project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now move to the next booster in this Budget. I believe the new context in which we are called upon to evolve gives us the opportunity to equilibrate two extremes. One extreme is that of concentrating on the here and the now, and we are doing this

by having advisories and tried and tested security protocols covering hygienic and social distancing norms, amongst others.

After all, Mr Speaker, Sir, schools also have a mission to guarantee that children learn to be healthy while also ensuring that they are healthy to learn. This is one extreme, the here and the now. But we should also see COVID-19 as an opportunity for a foresight exercise in the domain of education. Where do we want the country to be in the future? What kind of conditions do we wish to see prevailing for our human resources? How would we soldier on to ensure that teacher training and professional development include scenarios for coping with crises? Are we going to witness a continued self-centeredness or wait for a surge of international cooperation? The last is especially pertinent since while the world was in lockdown, the people were still connected virtually. We witnessed the international community mobilising itself to support countries, webinars for exchanges and not simply educational, became commonplace. *Donc, ce sont là des questions qui nous taraudent.*

Let me quickly respond to some of these issues. Mr Speaker, Sir, taking up one domain that heralds at upcoming change and transformation in our education system, I am here referring to the Higher Education, more specifically the Internalisation issue.

M. le président, j'ai entendu plusieurs personnes venir dire que la mobilité des étudiants sera sévèrement affectée, très vrai, par la pandémie.

It has been averred that few students would wish to travel internationally for study purposes. Already the Group of Eight, that is, the top eight universities of Australia have been talking about a loss of 50% of their revenue through non-mobility of foreign students, and it is true. People will travel less, we know, and, at least, in the immediate future. However, for Mauritius, it may be considered to be an exceptional case. We have received requests from foreign universities to implant branch campuses in Mauritius. Curtin University has already done it, Murdoch University along with University of Arizona's, Micro-Campus at the University of Mauritius, are there, and there are others having put in similar requests.

Collaborations, signed MOUs with various countries and institutions already exist. While we can today boast of hosting local campuses and universities, like of Nantes, SUPINFO, Middlesex University, African Leadership University, all of them of high repute. Less we forget the setting up of branch campus of top universities will help reduce the brain drain. True, branch campuses, as international tools, are associated with high investment but there are potentially huge benefits as well. So, let's get it right. Our strategic geographic

location plays in our favour as a high education destination, so does the security factor and let us then turn that into a major opportunity. According to the report of the business of education in Africa that was launched at the World Economic Forum Meeting in South Africa, by 2035, the number of Africans, joining the workforce, will exceed that of the rest of the world combined. This spells tremendous opportunity for Mauritius to play its role as a Knowledge Hub in the region.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the facilities announced in the Budget comes in timeously. These will intensify reputed universities to come over. Those renowned and reputed universities will secure a tax holiday for the first 8 years of operation and will be exempted from tax on IT and IT-related materials. Obviously, my Ministry, Mr Speaker, Sir, will be working closely with EDB and the High Education Commission in the implementation of the Internationalisation strategy. Obviously too, there will be conditions and safeguards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, top universities will be encouraged to offer programmes which are relevant and to address scarcity fields to support the socio-economic development of the country - AI, public health, blue economy, sustainable development programmes and agriculture, etc. We will have to collaborate with mutual benefits with our public universities to share their knowhow and capacity. Joint programmes will be considered; the set-up of research incentives programmes that will build capacity for both local and regional students' niche research fields that are relevant to our needs as a society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, universities will have to collaborate with industry to support innovation and set up programmes such as industry incentives where students can acquire practical experience in the industry. Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, therefore, before I close this chapter on education to stress our determination to encourage research at institutional and national levels.

Nous avons déjà investi massivement dans la recherche collaborative au niveau des universités à travers le *High Education Commission*. Tout dernièrement, nous avons signé un accord-cadre avec le partenariat Hubert Curien qui est un programme bilatéral de soutien de la mobilité des chercheurs. L'objectif du projet Hubert Curien Le Réduit est de développer les échanges scientifiques et technologiques d'excellence entre les laboratoires de recherche et les réseaux scientifiques en favorisant les nouvelles coopérations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to state what are the areas where research would be done. Le partenariat Hubert Curien Le Réduit vise à une recherche conjointe prioritairement dans

les domaines tels que l'énergétique, les énergies renouvelables, l'environnement et le changement climatique. Bien sûr ça comprend aussi la science de l'ingénierie, la modernisation, l'intelligence artificielle, les études des océans, entre autres.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me, a quick incursion into another domain that the hon. Minister of Finance has deemed fit and rightly so to focus on in the budget he has presented. I think we should all laud the hon. Minister of Finance for having heard the voice of those who care for the welfare of learners with special education needs. Education is a public and essential good, and as such it is a right of every citizen to stake a claim for quality education.

So, I have just mentioned the amount that has been allocated for the SEN sector, but I would like also here to mention that the SEN sector has, to date, indeed, witnessed a lot of positive measures being taken and implemented to ensure all inclusive schooling system. I would like here to mention the creation of an integrated unit in our primary schools, the SEN Resource and Development Centres, the availability of assistive devices. And to reply to hon. Anquetil who mentioned that we should now come up with scholarships for students with disabilities, I would like to add that since 2017, every year five scholarships for higher studies are offered to students having a disability, both in the academic and technical fields.

I believe, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in the domain of special education needs, we rely enormously on the support of NGOs and they all play a prominent role as major purveyors of this service. I am sure that they, just like me, will note with pleasure that the financial provisions, aims among other things, at a greater professionalization of the sector. In addition, this budget will also make provision for a one off-grant of Rs100,000 to each SEN institution run by an NGO.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is important for us to understand that the early childhood sector is also extremely important. We have come up with a new curriculum framework. We have come up with a new programme for the professional development of all those working in the early education sector. It remains the foundation of the education sector and we are going to give all the attention required to that sector, this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when all is said and done, it is a fact that COVID-19 poses serious threats to our traditions, customs and routines. It certainly poses new challenges, but it is my sincere conviction that we should all work towards transforming these challenges into opportunities. We, in the education sector certainly intend to do so. It is extremely interesting

to note that we are, for instance, trying to look at the technical education sector with new eyes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a reform within a reform. *Une refonte de l'éducation technique à tous les échelons et qui prône une conception novatrice de l'éducation technique de haute qualité. C'est ce que nous voulons faire. Et alors, M. le président, c'est extrêmement important aujourd'hui de se rendre compte que la technologie* in the form of artificial intelligence, robotics, internet of things, Fintech, blockchain, among others, is extremely important in our daily lives. Lately, COVID-19 clearly evidenced how the use of technology can solve our problems. E-Learning, e-Commerce, webinars developed at a faster rate than expected as some people use their high level skills to keep the economy and learning moving.

Going forward, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are now keyed up to review the technical education sector. We intend to develop new courses in artificial intelligence, robotics and the like. Green technology is already on. It goes without saying that success in this venture will be achieved through partnership and thus employers will be encouraged to participate in the provision of technical education in the design of the curriculum as well.

Ultimately, it is expected that the high percentage of students will join technical education which is in line with the vision of Government and the socio-economic needs of the country. The biggest opportunity that we are availing ourselves of and tapping is to make blended learning the new normality in the education sector.

As I said earlier, Mr Speaker, Sir, when we talk about technical education, we are talking about a new mode, a new way of addressing technical education. It is extremely important that when we look forward, it is extremely important to note that even the technical education side, Mauritius Polytechnics which was set up only in 2017, today has more than 1,700 students. They have got more than 12 MoUs and active MoUs, they have linked up with HTMi of Switzerland, Murdoch University and many others to ensure that our students get high quality technical education as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to state one thing more. We have been talking a lot about e-learning, about e-education. But we are planning, in the near future, to come up with a pilot project where a number of schools, selected schools where students will be given the opportunity to have a blended mode of teaching with e-learning, as well as face-to-face learning. So, all this is coming in the future. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have got so much to do in that sector.

M. le président, pour conclure, je voudrais inviter nos parlementaires, ceux de l'opposition comme ceux de chez nous, de démontrer la solidarité. Les parlementaires de l'opposition, je leur demanderai de se ressaisir. COVID-19 est venu nous démontrer que chaque brin de solidarité compte. Les propos irréfléchis de certains membres de l'opposition, malheureusement, démontrent une ignorance totale de la réalité dans laquelle nous vivons tous aujourd'hui. En tant qu'élu, il est du devoir sacré de chacun d'entre nous de servir le peuple de manière responsable et respectueuse et c'est absolument ce principe qui guide le gouvernement dirigé par le Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. Le respect doit être mutuel. Pourquoi le dis-je ? C'est tout simplement dû aux propos de certains qui ne réalisent pas le tort qu'ils font à notre tissu social en tenant un langage quelquefois indigne.

M. le président, le gouvernement reste déterminé à mener la république de Maurice vers une nouvelle phase de développement. Le COVID-19, certes, est venu nous freiner dans cet élan mais ce n'est pas pour autant qu'on renoncera à réaliser notre vision pour la république.

M. le président, vous savez ce que les gens disent *out there*? Ils disent qu'heureusement que c'est ce gouvernement, sous le leadership de Pravind Jugnauth, qui a eu à gérer les affaires de ce pays pendant les moments éprouvants dû de la crise COVID-19. Ils disent qu'on n'ose même pas imaginer ce qui serait passé si c'était un gouvernement rouge aux affaires. Sans les mesures prises ces cinq dernières années, le pays aurait été à genoux aujourd'hui avec ce que nous a légué le régime d'avant 2014. On se réjouit d'avoir pris les mesures avant-gardistes qui nous ont permis d'être plus résilient. Depuis 2015, le pays a connu des développements majeurs le *Metro Express*, on n'oublie pas notre combat pour la souveraineté sur les Chagos, le processus de décolonisation se poursuivra bel et bien.

Notre détermination pour préserver notre dignité et celle de tous les citoyens reste plus que jamais inébranlable. Le budget 2020 nous donne les ressources nécessaires afin d'entamer l'avenir de manière plus sereine et je suis certaine qu'on réussira bien là où d'autres ont échoué et on va continuer à travailler pour le bien de ce pays.

Ce gouvernement, M. le président, est déterminé d'amener l'Ile Maurice à un autre niveau beaucoup plus élevé où chaque Mauricien se sentira bien dans sa peau ou chaque Mauricien se sentira heureux.

Merci, M. le président, pour votre attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

(4.19 p.m.)

Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Merci, M. le président.

M. le président, ce budget a été conçu dans un contexte complètement différent. Pour commencer, les *front liners* ont été mis à l'oubliette. Je voudrais mentionner non seulement le médecin ou le personnel médical mais une large panoplie de la population, en particulier ceux qui ont mis leur vie en péril afin de sauver la vie des autres. J'ai une pensée spéciale pour les éboueurs, les transporteurs et beaucoup d'autres. Je faillirais à ma tâche, M. le président, si je ne rends pas hommage aux médecins et au corps médical pour le combat assidu qu'ils ont mené face à la pandémie. Je voudrais attirer l'attention sur les médecins attachés au ministère de la Sécurité sociale *seconded for duty* au ministère de la Santé pendant le confinement et qui rendaient des visites à domicile. Ils ont été complètement oubliés et n'ont même pas été rémunérés.

Par conséquent, je voudrais saisir cette occasion, M. le président, pour exprimer ma profonde tristesse aux 10 victimes du COVID-19 qui ont perdu leur vie ainsi que ma plus profonde sympathie à leurs familles au moment de leur perte.

M. le président, en ce moment, un grand scandale secoue atrocement notre pays concernant le CEB. L'Ile Maurice se trouve dans la liste noire de l'union européenne de plus la séquelle noire continue à nous frapper à fond en créant l'obscurité dans beaucoup de nos foyers Mauriciens avec la perte d'emploi de plusieurs centaines de personnes. C'est à noter que ce n'est qu'une mascarade que les orateurs gouvernementaux veulent la collaboration des députés de l'Opposition. Pourtant quand on leur a demandé de mettre sur pied un comité de travail pendant le confinement, ils ont fait la sourde oreille.

It is always with eagerness, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we wait for the presentation of the Budget, the 2020-2021 is, indeed, a special one, probably the most awaited with the pandemic. Nobody, not only in Mauritius but around the world, can deny that the impact of COVID-19 goes beyond the health sector. Indeed, we are well aware that, be it socially or economically, nothing has been spared by the effect of COVID-19. This is one of the reasons why not only the Parliamentarians but the population, as a whole, were expecting a lot from the Minister of Finance and his budgetary measures.

The second reason, Mr Speaker, Sir, which is not negligible at all, is that many sectors which our economy revolves around were already in great difficulty well before the pandemic.

The 2020-2021 Budget, if I may say, Mr Speaker, Sir, should have been the answer to all the questions revolving around the near future of our economy, our island and the population is asking for. Unfortunately, for many instead of providing answers and reassurance, the Budget Speech has led to confusion and lots of question marks.

Throughout my speech, Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall express how many times, how many measures announced provoked a series of questions among the population. Members of the Government have repeatedly reminded us as citizens of Mauritius that we are not spared from the effect of the COVID-19. I am not saying that they are wrong in doing so. We are all aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, of how badly the world has been impacted and, of course, Mauritius also has and will be penalised. Jobs are at risk.

Forget about the unemployment rate before COVID-19; let's focus on the problem related to the employment now. I am not saying the aftermath as the crisis is not totally over yet. Words are beautifully put as usual but, at the end, when we sit down and reflect on the measures, we are left to ask ourselves what actually has been done for the preservation of jobs, Mr Speaker, Sir? What has been done so that a person working as secretary, as driver, as receptionist, among others can feel safe of not losing their jobs? Yes, we are aware of the conditions of Wage Assistance and all but we also cannot forget the amendments in the COVID Bill.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe it is not hidden to anyone that, in the time we are now running, almost any type of business is all about risk and apprehension. I am forced to question myself. Though I want to believe in the human approach of the hon. Minister, I am forced to ask how the levy and I will quote –

“(...) the annual gross income at the rate of –

- (a) 0.3% for insurance companies, financial institutions, service providers and property holding companies; and
- (b) 0.1% for other companies”.

Section 230 - corporate tax will encourage to preserve jobs.

I am not even referring to creating new jobs, believe me, Mr Speaker, Sir, I sincerely want to believe in the human approach. When we sit and ponder on such measures, we fail to understand how it will work in real.

Coming to the measures dedicated to the tourism sector, the brief part of the speech I would say considering how reliable our economy is on tourism and how badly the latter has been affected. Let us not get into the debate on whether the measures are good or not for the time being but, with all the efforts that the Government are doing in favour of the hotels, the least we could expect is that, in return, we could have the assurance that jobs of employees from same will be safe. It could have been a *donnant-donnant*.

Tourism sector, Mr Speaker, Sir, also provide for many Mauritian families indirectly the hawkers working on the beach, the taxi drivers, the small tour operators to mention a few are and will continue to suffer from the consequences of the coronavirus resulting in absence of tourism.

I do not think I am mistaken here, but, in the Budget, nothing is clear about them along with all the people in the informal sector, their question remains unanswered. Do they form part of the people who will benefit from the Rs5,100? What will be their future, Mr Speaker, Sir? Questions are many. Moreover, Mr Speaker, Sir, in my humble opinion, the consideration given to the Tourism Sector in this Budget, is far from being sufficient or appropriate. As hon. Xavier-Luc Duval has mentioned in the Press, this time could have been taken for a proper rebranding of our products. And we all know, Mr Speaker, Sir, how over the years, hon. Xavier-Luc Duval has taken our Tourism Industry to new heights of excellence.

(Interruptions)

Ki to koner?

Mr Speaker: What is happening there?

(Interruptions)

Mr Abbas Mamode: *Mo kozer, ekouter! To capav vaut li?*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Continue, hon. Member!

(Interruptions)

Mr Abbas Mamode: *Dire li merci!*

We should not forget that even before the whole problem of COVID-19, the product, that is, Mauritius, has, to a large extent, stopped being appealing. This break due to Coronavirus should have been taken to form personnel working in the Tourism Sector. How to work otherwise? We are all waiting impatiently for a world post-COVID. The world, as a whole, is sinking and projecting life post-COVID. We know it will not be the same. We are very well aware that people will think differently, travel differently. In short, Mr Speaker, Sir, live differently. But we must also not forget that competition will be intense, so, we have to be prepared for such type of competition. Will the commercial partnership with the Liverpool Football Club for the promotion of the Mauritius destination be enough? Will this help us to *tenir tête*, M. le président, to other holiday destinations? I leave that question open for everyone to reflect on.

With this Government being in power for around six years - six years now, almost not to say, all the time - we have heard them affirming their belief in how technological development can drive Mauritius to a larger dimension. I am not saying that this is wrong. Indeed, they are right, then, Mr Speaker, Sir, why not coming up with a very simple idea of investing, planning time and some money in digital tourism? This would give Mauritius a better visibility on the internet, on different social platforms. Maybe using the help of influences and bloggers, *comme dirait le jeune, et justement* to attract more young people.

In my speech, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would have spoken about poverty, but as my friend, hon. Deven Nagalingum, *avec beaucoup d'humilité d'ailleurs*, has elaborated enough on this topic, I would not repeat. But in my endeavour to show the House how I believe that the Budget is more questionable rather than satisfying, I shall now come to the famous part on social housing. No matter how much the hon. Minister of Finance or any other hon. Member from the other side of the House tries to convince us that they are going to construct 12,000 houses in three years, we will not believe them, Mr Speaker, Sir. We will not. It is high time now we stop hoping. I remember that almost all Members of the Opposition side, including myself, we all expressed our disappointment on this matter during the last budgetary debates; 10,000, 6,800, 6,000, we heard so many figures, Mr Speaker, Sir. I remember many Parliamentarians stated that the Government should stop with exposing *intention de faire* and do it, but now, with 12,000 social housing, we cannot even talk about *intention de faire*. Maybe, it is only about luring the population. Even if we force ourselves to, at least, give them the benefit of doubt, how, Mr Speaker, Sir, will

4,000 houses be built in a year, considering the fact that they managed to build an average of only 400 houses in a year. Beside, amid the applaud, we also heard, among those 12,000 houses, only 1,800 houses are meant for the families whose monthly income is up to Rs10,000. Will that be enough, if ever the idea materialises? That will be rather a big change, I would say.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, suppose, I insist on the word ‘suppose’, suppose we all reconcile to the idea that we should turn all focus on construction and the latter will be the engine of our recovery, as the hon. Minister of Finance has affirmed. What catches my attention, Mr Speaker, Sir, in paragraph 41, which reads as follows –

“Henceforth, public projects with investments of less than Rs300 million and where pre-qualification is not required by Central Procurement Board, will be opened to Mauritian Companies only.”

I sincerely hope that this does not have double meaning and that Mauritian Companies will not only be considered for projects less than Rs300 m. Of course, it will be a question of feasibility and all, but I hope that there is no underlying meaning and Mauritians will have the equal opportunity.

The bottom line remains, Mr Speaker, Sir, that Mauritius gets to work. Talking about Mauritians getting to work, I would like to articulate my concern on section opening to the world. We all know that Mauritius needs international investors. The Government is making effort to be more open to the world. Ok, fair enough. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, dear colleagues of the House, Rs2 m.! By reducing the amount to invest for obtaining an occupation permit to USD50,000, that is, Rs2 m., are we not putting the Mauritians in direct competition with foreigners? We are well aware that foreigners investing in the country can be beneficial, but, once again, the bottom line remains that the citizens of the country are not penalised, that we secure the jobs of our people.

We must secure the jobs of our population first. The solidarity levy takes the same concern, Mr Speaker, Sir. Further, we are made to understand that the hon. Minister of Finance finds it fair to ask an effort only from the Mauritians. Is it really fair? Is it? Living in same country and earning same, but one has to contribute while the other does not. This does not seem to be an example of equality. This particular measure is dangerous, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the sense that it does not only discourage Mauritian diaspora to come back

to Mauritius, but also encourage brain drain. I am not inventing this, Mr Speaker, Sir, developed countries have faced the same situation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, like all my colleagues on the Opposition side who addressed the House before me, I would like to convey my thought on the abolition of the NPF. I will join my colleague, hon. Reza Uteem here, there are so many questions around the shutting down of the NPF as we all know till now. There is no urgency now, Mr Speaker, Sir. I believe, like many, not only Members of Parliament, but also the population, now it is not the time to bring a change in this dimension. This project can well wait, especially with the huge amount of help Government is getting from the Bank of Mauritius.

Besides, Mr Speaker, Sir, while everyone is concerned about how to provide a minimum for their family, to provide the basic necessities like food, how can we ask that self-employed informal worker to pay into *Contribution Sociale Généralisée (CSG)*? Rs150 may sound as a very small amount for many, but for some, it represents a lot, and we should not forget them, especially in the context that we are right now. Therefore, I humbly request to put this project on halt for the moment and to come with a better formula after consultation with related stakeholders.

Members of the Government applauded themselves on the reading of the decrease in the price of the *gaz ménager*. I do not think there is anything to be applauded here. There is no special effort as we note that the price has dropped on the global market by around 25%. The population is intelligent also. They understand that they are paying tax on petrol to compensate for gas, '*tir ici met laba!*' the population is aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, of this very technique of the Government by now.

In the same vein, while applauding the Rs30' decrease in price of the consumer gas, we should not forget that the list of items that has increased in price due to depreciation of rupee, is quite long: rice, milk, food items. The list is very long, Mr Speaker, Sir. Yet, after reading and listening to Members of the Government, showing their appreciation of the Budget, I fail to see how, what, is it being done, or will be done to compensate to that for real?

Adding to that is the fear of helicopter money. As we all know, the situation will only worsen if the Government opts or has already opted for helicopter money as a solution.

Coming to the measures for the SMEs, Mr Speaker, Sir, from what I have understood, Rs10 billion has been earmarked to help SMEs in distress. The 0.5% interest rate also is very

appealing at first thought, but the reality is completely different. With all the requirements, '*tous les casiers à cocher*,' only few of these SMEs benefit from the earmarked budget. What about the others, or should I say, the majority, those SMEs who are already in debt, and cannot even think about borrowing money? Forget about being eligible! Should they stop their businesses and worsen the problem of unemployment? *Des mesures d'accompagnement* should have been put in place to help them.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot refrain myself from questioning the very title of the budget, 'Our New Normal'. When we go through measures in the healthcare sector, *réchauffé, représenté*, I am sorry, if this term exasperate Members of the Government, but this is the case. In 2015 budget, paragraph 158 - setting up of a new cancer hospital; 2017, paragraph 234 – new cancer hospital; 2018, paragraph 166 – a new cancer hospital centre will be set up; 2019 - complete the new cancer hospital and in 2020, paragraph 287, again, about the cancer hospital. I know that setting up and completing such projects make take time. Ministers may not be magicians, but six years, six budgets, talking about the same thing, is it the same thing concerning the Renal Transplant Unit at the Nehru Hospital, and the construction of a modern warehouse for pharmaceutical products? Concerning the community health centres, to mention one, the one that falls in my constituency, the health centre at St François Xavier, has been announced ample of time in the budget, but it is now that the Minister of Finance is affirming that bidding exercise will be launched shortly. I wonder if we'll get to hear its completion in the next budget or not.

The E-health Project on the other hand has got a different treatment. After expressing the *intention de faire*, several times, they have given up as I cannot see any mention of it in the 2020-2021 Budget.

I cannot, and will not complete, Mr Speaker, Sir, my speech without expressing my views on the *développement* announced in my constituency. *L'état du jardin de Plaine Verte reste déplorable*. Insecurity still reigns. I have been repeating this again and again in this Assembly. The people of Plaine Verte, Cité Martial, Roche Bois and Camp Yoloff need more leisure. It is not hidden to anyone that youngsters are particularly affected by the problems of drugs. They need sane environment, adapted leisure so as to focus from illicit to healthy activities.

Paragraph 276(f) mentions construction of a new sport centre at Plaine Verte. I really hope that the location of the construction of the sport complex be reviewed. *Vous savez*

pourquoi, M. le président. On est en train de détruire un jardin d'enfants. Il y a autant de place à la Plaine Verte. The plan is to destroy the open green area to set up a building. This is one of very few green areas left. So, I request to maybe discuss with us, MPs of the constituency to find another place. We already have land available at Cité Martial.

On an ending note, Mr Speaker, Sir, betting fully on construction in the situation that we are as of now *pour relancer l'économie* seems a hazardous but as we are not convinced that will tackle the issue of protection of jobs and unemployment. In the construction field, we are relying on imported materials, investing in the metro or the centre de Côte d'Or is completely out of context. The solidarity levy on the other hand, passes the way, most probably to frustration, brain drain, and maybe, eventually, tax evasion. Questionable is where the colossal amount of money from the Bank of Mauritius will really go; Africa, pharmaceutical industry? We, as Members of the Opposition, Members of the Parliament, side demand transparency on how the money will be spent. It is our legitimate right as representative of more than 60% of the population to know and oppose wherever the need be.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nazurally!

(4.46 p.m.)

Mr Z. Nazurally (Second Member for Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. *L'État ne crée pas les citoyens, mais c'est nous les citoyens qui créent l'État.* At the outset, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to bring this statement. I am not someone technically versed in economics or in complex financial issues, but I propose to deal with my budget speech in the following way today.

I will firstly talk about democracy, the present condition, including income, expense, the proposition that I have heard from this House, the items under the Budget Estimates, projects in my Constituency, the real fear factors that exist as of today, the socialist approach, the trust we have in the nation, and finally, innovation and prospect as to our future and present.

Democracy, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a Greek word deriving from *demos* and *quietus*, people and rule. It is a Government of the people, for the people. I lay emphasis on the words 'for the people', 'by the people'. Why is it important that we look at the words 'for the people'? 'For the people' mean a Government which has a responsibility, a duty to look after its people, duty in terms of Health Sector, Education, Pension, the Welfare State and so much

more that we have in this country. That said, the duty is not only owed to a certain class or category of persons, the duty is owed to each and every one, irrespective of colour, race, nation, treat, religion, whether he be poor or rich. So, how does democracy work? It runs on the executive, legislative and judiciary. They are different components which are very important. These components protect our democracy. Now that we know there are components which are primordial to our democracy, how do those institutions work? There must be income on one side and expenditure on the other side. Income, for example, for our country would be tourism, textiles, services that we provide, sugarcane, sugar that we sell. Expenditures: we have very high expenditure on petroleum product, readymade garments, etc.. Who, as of today, can vouch that his house contains only locally made products? Nobody! And the various ministerial departments/institutions that exist in our democracy require money, require funding. So, to follow, it was very important, once again - while not being someone engaged in finance - to understand the concept of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), *comme on le dit, Produit Interieur Brut (PIB)*, which, in the Wikipedia, is a monetary measure of the market value of all the final goods and services produced in a specified period of time. That said, when we know what is a GDP of a country and what makes up the GDP of a country, it is very important as well to understand the word 'recession'. In macroeconomics, it is termed as a period of temporary economic decline during which trade and industrial activities are reduced, generally identified by a fall in GDP into successive quarters. Recession can be V-shaped recession, U-Shaped recession L-shaped recession. I don't intend to dwell into these factors, but surely what I can tell today is recession would appear to be a decline in line in terms of services. Let's face it: our income, as of today, with this pandemic has decreased. It is going to continue to decrease undeniably. Why? Let's face it, frontiers are closed, hotel sectors are not working, textile factories have to readjust, while our expenditures have remained the same. We are still used to foreign products. We are still used to Government services, free health care, free education, free transport for old people and so many more. That said, when we have our income on the decrease and expenditure is still the same, what do we do? What are we meant to do? We have to find a solution. What kind of solution? The solution, as of today, for any democratic country, is to come up with a Budget Estimates. A Budget Estimates that is brought in this august Assembly to be debated, to be studied in order to find the most practical viable solutions. Being a young Member, what have I not heard! I have been hearing critics, but I have to admit that some Members did come with some rather relatively constructive proposals, despite not going in-depth, which I would so much have loved, and everybody would have

enjoyed, because this country is not only for the Government side, it is for each and every one. Each and every one has to be accountable, take up his responsibility, not just criticise, but propose, at least show something concrete in terms of proposal.

Once again, I wish to reassure, credit must go to certain Members who have come up with positive criticisms and proposals. Amidst things that I have heard is *nous vivons depuis six ans à credit*. I was baffled. I am asking myself: *six ans à credit*? How is it possible? We still have free education, free health care, free transport, pension has risen to three-fold, how is it possible. Maybe it is a slip of the tongue of the hon. Member who said that, very likely it was a slip of the tongue, because this Government has been working.

(Interruptions)

I am happy to take criticisms. That's fine. But I talk of what I really believe, what I understand. Some others do understand better than me, I am very happy to see their proposals coming. So, coming back to these proposals and coming back to what I heard a long time ago, there are groups, parties which have *Commission d'Education, représentants de la Santé*, group leaders for Pension, for Blue Economy. Why, as of today, all these brilliant brains – I am not talking as a partisan, I am talking as a citizen of this country – have not brought anything in concrete in terms of paper to say, this is my proposal, this is where I say we can get money from, this is how we can spend it, etc. Why don't we have it today? All I hear are criticisms. I would have hoped, as a young Parliamentarian, to see draft proposals, constructive matters. Why don't I see it today? I am appalled. It saddened me, because I step in politics along with so many of my young colleagues to get in politics to better this country, because we care about the present, we care about the future. So, that being said, I would like to take two items under the Budget Estimates that has been brought forward. Firstly, being also the Deputy Speaker, and mindful as to my position, it is indeed a pleasure to see that the National Assembly, from a Budget of Rs261 m. have cut down expenses to go to Rs251,700,000.

Well done to all the staff! In fact, from what I see, it is as a result of decreasing expenditure. The first temple of democracy of this country is showing the way; it has cut down on expenditure in this dire time. Secondly, being also by profession a lawyer, I see the expenses of the Judiciary have gone down from Rs950 m. to Rs5,098,000 which is almost Rs300 m. downward cost. So, given our context, that whether you have decreased, these two institutions have brilliantly shown that they have cut down expenses and the best part of it is

the qualms that we had as to speedy justice in this country, is, I am sincerely hoping for, going to be bettered. Why? Because the Supreme Court will now host 24 Courtrooms and shall be inaugurated in August 2020! That will ensure speedy justice. These are the two temples of our democracy which are showing the way. That's it!

Coming to projects around my constituency, I am happy to say that a teaching hospital is going to come very shortly. Mediclinics, the market fair of Bel Air, the multi-complex at Montagne Blanche, more so I have to emphasise that the local authority, district council, my constituency is concerned with Flacq District Council and Moka District Council, both these local authorities have the budget to continue making projects and maintaining employment in the different District Councils.

And also I am happy to see there is going to be replacement of defective water pipes. More projects are upcoming in my Constituency, the Constituency of hon. Bholah and my friend, hon. Hurdoyal in terms of drains at Ecroignard, Caroline, Grand Rivière Sud Est, Sebastopol and Olivia. With regard to upgrading secondary roads, Camp de Masque Pavé, Grand Rivière Sud Est, Mon Ida and there is ongoing work at Montagne Blanche as of today. That's it!

When I look at the first item in the Budget Estimates, paragraphs 1.1 to 1.18, I have tried to make a computation of the total estimates of expenditure. I have a total expenditure for very important institutions - Office of the President, the Judiciary, Public Appeal Tribunal, National Audit, Human Rights Commission - run with a budget of Rs2.363 billion in 2019-2020. As of now, I see the Budget Estimate is Rs1.6778 billion, almost Rs685 m. cut down in terms of cost. So, can we assign bad faith. It shows good faith in these hard times. Already, we see this Government is working towards minimising its expenditure. Overall now, what is very important, what I hoped to see what I didn't see is this big book, 448 pages plus annexes, plus index, 28 chapters, 8 appendices subdivided in so many chapters. It talks of revenue, expenses, prediction, anticipates the future economy. It rather caters for it all, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I am happy, at least, there is a guideline. Obviously, there is fear in our heart. It is in the book. Will it work in practice? Obviously, there is fear. Obviously, it is human in this dire context to have those fears because there are millions still affected out there. Hundreds of thousands have passed away. I'll take this opportunity to share my condolences and share the pain of those who have lost their loved ones, share the pain of those who have been infected, not that our pain or my pain is greater than ours, but we share it and we understand it and we are going to try to do our best to alleviate future pain. The toll

of deaths is increasing. Bodies are restricted, the face of the present day is about to change or could change. It feels very likely with all these factors. What we are used to eat, drink, the luxuries that we have been accustomed to, our social life, travel, tourism, import, export, exchange rate, foreign currency, this might all change.

Of course, as a young Member of this Parliament, I have fear in my heart. What can happen, what will happen? No past has ever witnessed something as we are today. What do we do? I hail from the new generation of parliamentarians; the Minister of Finance, who is not here, hails from the new generation of parliamentarians, the Minister of Health hails from this generation. There are so many here today that hail from this new generation. This generation would believe in peace, we believe in unity, we believe in socialist approach. We believe in so much more good that this life has kept in store for us. We have fear but we have trust, we have faith, we have the knowhow, we are a believing educated nation. We can make it happen. As of now, why we can make it happen? Because I do not see any better proposal than this almost 500-page Budget Estimates. There is nothing better as of now, I say. We do not have any other option. I would have loved to see options. So many of us around here would have loved to see options, but please there is still time, come up with your options. We need to recover, as a nation, we need to recover sufficiently, we need to make it work as a nation, we need to rise to innovation, we need to remember our brothers, taxi drivers, hotel employees, NGOs, who are suffering in this moment of crisis, but altogether if we innovate, we bring our ideas forward, bring it! Being an elected Member of Constituency No. 10, I am available for my constituents and so many of my friends are available, bring us your ideas so that we can put our heads together, bring innovation, make this innovation work, adapt to this new face of economy.

Now, what I thought was very passive from this Government, in fact emphasis should have been laid, in fact, 10% quota imposed on supermarkets today given they face the reality of the situation. It is less, but I appreciate this government is not someone who is going to usurp the role of each and every one. We, as Mauritians, should understand the concept of 'Made in Mauritius' and protect it. It is our duty, it is our creation, it is what our State has brought to life to safeguard this nation. We should, as a nation, work towards using 100% Mauritian. Hopefully, I am convinced that the young generation on this side, the older generation on this side along with the young and older generations, the experienced generation on that side, we are going to rise up to the challenge and make it hundred per cent made in Mauritius because we know the real risk that we could face.

That said, overall, my analysis of this Budget would be. I, personally - I talk about myself and the Government - would not be at peace if I came to know a senior citizen who is having to choose between medicine or paying rent. Even if he is not my grandparent, it would pain me and it would pain this Government.

This is why this Welfare State has been preserved despite the hard circumstance. If a child has no education somewhere in Olivia or Trou d'Eau Douce or somewhere in Cap Malheureux, it is the business of this Government to ensure that he gets proper education and this Budget estimate caters for it.

But the greatest unfear, I see hope on this side; I see hope on that side. I see hope all over the country because we started as indentured labourers, we started as slaves, we started in huts, we started in iron corrugated houses and today, we are planning to go to the moon. We are setting satellites. We have reached for the sky and this pandemic is not going to put its back. So coming back to what I said initially, *c'est pas l'État qui nous crée, c'est nous qui créons l'État*, my valiant nation.

Je n'ai pas de doute. Je suis convaincu même si tout le monde n'écoute pas, la majorité écoute et c'est nous qui allons bâtir l'État qu'on veut, l'État que nous voudrions pour notre futur.

Sur ce, M. le président, j'espère du fond de mon cœur que tout un chacun va mettre son effort, va reconnaître le sacrifice de tous les *front liners* y compris les éboueurs, les docteurs, les policiers, tous les Mauriciens, tous les enfants qui se sont sacrifiés pour rester à la maison pour qu'on puisse aujourd'hui être dans cette auguste Assemblée.

Je le salue et je vous remercie.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I suspend the sitting for 30 minutes.

At 5.12 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.51 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Balgobin!

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): M. le président, merci de me donner l'opportunité de m'adresser à cette auguste Assemblée sur le premier budget de ce nouveau gouvernement.

Dans le contexte sans précédent, nous faisons face à une pandémie mondiale et, après cette crise sanitaire, le monde, y compris notre République de Maurice, ne sera plus jamais le même.

M. le président, je tiens à remercier et féliciter mon collègue, l'honorable docteur Renganaden Padayachy, le ministre des Finances, de la Planification et du Développement économique pour avoir présenté un budget juste, un budget équilibré, un budget responsable, en d'autres mots, un budget pour le peuple.

Notre peuple est un peuple éclairé. Nos frères et sœurs Mauriciens ont compris que ce gouvernement a à cœur l'intérêt de tous. Il est donc évident, M. le président, que ce peuple intelligent, ce même peuple, qui nous a fait confiance lors des dernières élections générales, a accepté et a adopté ce budget, de par son pragmatisme et sa justesse.

Depuis le début de la COVID-19, par la façon dont cette crise majeure a été gérée, les Mauriciens ont compris que ce Gouvernement a fait de sa priorité l'intérêt de tout un chacun, que ce soit sur le plan sanitaire, social et économique.

Je tiens à souligner, que notre pays a été félicité sur le plan international, par le Premier ministre de l'Inde, Narendra Modi et aussi par l'OMS, sur les mesures prises par ce gouvernement dans la gestion de la pandémie.

Hier, *Business Today*, qui est un des magazines phares en Inde, a publié un article, pour dire et je cite « *there are at least nine countries in the world that have successfully controlled Covid-19 so far. These include New Zealand, Iceland, Tanzania, Fiji, Montenegro, Vatican City, Seychelles, Mauritius and Papua New Guinea* »

Pour référence, M. le président, je dépose une copie de l'article sur la Table de l'Assemblée.

Mais, malgré toutes ces acclamations, certains Membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre se sont laissés aller à des trivialités. Je frémis quand je pense à ce qu'ils auraient fait à notre place durant cette crise sanitaire.

M. le président, en parlant de la COVID-19, la première chose qui me vient à l'esprit est bien sûr le port du masque. Hier, lors de son intervention sur le budget, mon cher ami l'honorable Sik Yuen, qui n'est pas présent en ce moment, a déposé sur la Table de l'Assemblée nationale, un masque qu'il a acheté à R 1.50. En entendant cela, j'ai voulu moi aussi acheter ce fameux masque à R 1.50. Et alors, ce matin, j'ai été à Curepipe, dans le

supermarché qui était affilié à mon cher collègue mais grande fut ma surprise de constater là-bas, que les masques se vendent à R 825 la boîte de 50 unités, c'est-à-dire R 16.50 l'unité, et cela représente 1,000% de profits. Et moi aussi, je dépose sur la Table de l'Assemblée nationale, une photo prise sur les rayons du supermarché à Curepipe ce matin. M. le président, je ne sais pas quoi dire de plus.

M. le président, je reviens sur le thème principal. Heureusement, pour nous, il y a à la tête de ce gouvernement un Premier ministre responsable, une équipe dévouée. Fort heureusement, nous avons aussi un peuple admirable, débrouillard, et qui s'est montré solidaire dans des moments difficiles.

C'est pourquoi, M. le président, nous avons confiance en notre peuple, nous avons confiance en notre pays, nous avons confiance en notre futur.

La population a compris que nous faisons désormais face à une nouvelle normalité.

Cependant il est dommage que, dans ce contexte difficile et inédit, les membres de l'opposition continuent à s'embourber dans des élucubrations sordides ayant pour seul but de semer la panique et la frayeur dans l'esprit de nos citoyens surtout pour faire croire, que le pays est à genoux, que la Banque de Maurice fera banqueroute que les institutions ne pourront plus fonctionner, que rien ne va plus dans ce pays.

Laissez-moi rappeler à certains qui sont assis de l'autre côté de la Chambre - c'était au début de 1982 que ce pays était vraiment à genoux avec l'héritage lourd du Parti travailliste et du PMSD. Tous les indicateurs étaient au rouge.

Le pays n'avait jamais connu un semblant de décollage après 14 ans d'indépendance. Le chômage battait son plein. Un travailleur sur cinq n'avait pas de travail. Le peuple était affamé. Ce n'était même pas *létan margo* parce que *margoze* était un luxe à cette époque.

Le 11 juin 1982, tout change. Et quelle coïncidence, M. le président, aujourd'hui cela fait exactement 38 ans. Je suis sûr que l'honorable Bérenger s'en souviendra. C'était un jour historique, à partir duquel notre pays s'est embarqué sur la voie du progrès avec à la barre Sir Anerood Jugnauth alors et qui continue aujourd'hui avec l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth et son équipe.

Ces personnes sont entrées dans l'histoire comme des artisans du miracle économique. C'est un fait indéniable! D'ailleurs, c'est pendant le mandat de Sir Anerood

Jugnauth comme Premier ministre que les bases de la Cyber Cité ont été jetées et aujourd'hui le secteur de la technologie est un des piliers majeurs de notre économie.

M. le président, comme il serait meilleur si nous pouvions tous nous comporter comme de vrais patriotes. Le leader de l'opposition, dans sa *PNQ* du 6 mars 2020, a déclaré et je cite –

« We are willing to partner and this is a national issue, it's a challenge and as a nation we have to live up to the challenge ».

Jusqu'ici tout va bien. Le Premier ministre lui répond, et je cite –

« It is always nice to hear what the hon. leader of the opposition is saying in this House, but one must, first of all, be serious and also genuine in the intention ».

M. le président, le Premier ministre avait parfaitement raison de dire que le leader de l'opposition devait être *«serious and genuine»*. En mars, l'honorable Dr. Boolell affirme *«we are willing to partner as one nation»*, et hier il écrit sur Facebook *«tous bane patriotes passe mot d'ordre. Nou pou desan lor larue»*. Voilà le soi-disant patriotisme du leader de l'opposition. Je laisse à la population le soin de juger.

M. le président, si on prend l'exemple des vingt dernières années, 2000 à 2020, c'est intéressant de noter que le leader du MMM n'a fait que critiquer tous les ministres des Finances, systématiquement, l'un après l'autre.

Pour lui, c'est à chaque fois la même rengaine : *« C'est un budget copier-coller, un budget galimatias, un budget fade, c'est un coup d'épée dans l'eau, beaucoup de bluff et de maquillage, et surtout élection derrière la porte. Il n'a jamais trouvé un budget qui mérite d'être félicité. Sauf, en 2004, lorsque l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth était Vice-Premier ministre et ministre des Finances, où l'honorable Paul Béranger avait trouvé que «c'était un coup d'essai, coup de maître ».*

Il faut que l'opposition réalise que semer le doute et faire craindre n'est que démagogue et futile! Pourquoi faire craindre, juste pour la politique ? C'est ça servir le peuple ? Nous sommes tous inspirés par les livres sacrés. Permettez-moi, M. le président, de citer une pensée fondamentale du Ramayana, je cite –

« Celui qui cherche à faire craindre, ne dure pas longtemps ».

A bon entendeur, salut! C'est toujours la même méthode, le même schéma, la même démarche. Si ce n'est pas *politique zet labou*, c'est *politique fer per*. Nous l'avons vu et vécu

avant, pendant et après la fin du couvre-feu sanitaire. Que n'ont-ils pas fait dans cette auguste Assemblée et ailleurs, pour instiller la peur dans la tête des gens, pour faire croire que le gouvernement était incapable de gérer cette crise. Permettez-moi, encore une fois, M. le président, de le dire haut et fort : En tant que jeune, en tant que ministre et en tant que parlementaire,

- Je suis fier de faire partie de ce gouvernement.
- Je suis fier de faire partie de cette équipe sous le leadership de l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth.
- Je suis fier d'être aux côtés d'un Premier ministre qui s'est donné corps et âme pour soutenir, protéger et encadrer nos frères et sœurs Mauriciens, sans distinction aucune.

Pour moi, pour nous, ce que ce gouvernement a accompli pour pouvoir faire face à cette crise sanitaire est tout à fait juste et légitime. C'était de notre devoir, notre responsabilité vis-à-vis de notre peuple. La démagogie et la langue de bois ; la pagaille et la zizanie n'ont donc pas leur place dans une telle crise, où personne, aucun pays n'est épargné.

M. le président, après 1918, avec la grippe espagnole, jamais au grand jamais, notre pays a dû faire face à une telle pandémie, ni pendant l'époque coloniale, ni après notre indépendance.

La décision du Premier ministre d'instaurer le confinement sanitaire était nécessaire et a montré toute son efficacité. Cela nous a permis de contrer le virus, de contrôler sa progression et de préserver la santé des Mauriciens. C'est donc avec la même philosophie, la même détermination, le même dévouement, que, comme un peuple uni et un gouvernement soudé, nous allons surmonter cette crise. Comme le dit très bien notre slogan, '*Ensam Tou Possib!*'

M. le président, il est également important de tirer des enseignements de nos aînés, de nous inspirer de leur vision et de leur sagesse pour continuer à avancer. Je pense ici tout naturellement à Sir Anerood Jugnauth, qui est une inspiration pour nous tous.

Mr Speaker Sir, I made it a must to find the first Parliamentary Budget Speech of Sir Anerood Jugnauth. Let me take you back to more than half a century ago in 1964. In his intervention, on 19 May 1964, Sir Anerood Jugnauth explained his philosophy of how to make Mauritius attain economic success.

The fundamental component of this philosophy is that economic success can only be attained through infrastructural developments, capacity building and an inclusive distribution of national wealth. At that time, one of his striking statements was, and I quote –

“We see that the villages are lagging far behind, when compared to the towns.”

Mr Speaker Sir, today, after 56 years, we are proud that the MSM, through the years, has ensured that this is no longer the case. Our villages are as developed as our towns and, in many ways, provide a more conducive environment *où il fait bon vivre*. The philosophy of Sir Anerood Jugnauth has been upheld. And, under the leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, will continue to be upheld for many years to come.

Mr Speaker, Sir, COVID-19 is teaching us to adapt to a new way of living. We are currently in a “new normal” but it seems to me that the Opposition is having some difficulty making sense of it.

Let me explain what the “new normal” is –

- The “new normal” for our students and teachers is “learning from home” where e-learning platforms are being used.
- The “new normal” for our adult population is “working from home” using the world-class Internet infrastructure.
- The “new normal” for our citizens is “shopping from home” where, during the confinement, people could order food and other items online.
- The “new normal” is also “entertainment at home” with platforms such as YouTube, MyT and Netflix.
- The “new normal” is about “networking from home” with social media platforms allowing all of us to interact with our friends and families.
- And, crucially, the “new normal” is also about “using Government e-services from home” to allow citizens to pay their bills online.

Mr Speaker Sir, in all cases, there is one major enabler, it is Technology! And it is reflected in the Budget Speech of the hon. Minister of Finance. A Budget Speech, historically, is about finances. As such, the words “Economy” and “Finance” have been used 33 times during this Budget Speech.

But, here is an interesting statistics –

The words “Technology”, “Innovation”, “Digital” and “Data” have been used 35 times, more than “Economy” and “Finance”. I congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for putting technology in such a prominent place in his Budget Speech. This is to reflect that progress now co-relates with the optimal use of technology.

Unfortunately, the other side of the House has failed to understand this “new normal”. Why is this so? What is the problem?

Maybe because of a connection problem, Mr Speaker, Sir. While we are cruising much faster, together with our population, and moving towards 5G connectivity, well, it seems that they are still stuck at 1G connection! *Pas gagne reseau!*

Mr Speaker, Sir, during the last two decades, there have been two occasions where a budget was presented in this august Assembly during extremely difficult times. One in 2008, where we had a major financial crisis and the second one is, of course, COVID-19 pandemic. Let us dig a deeper into this. In 2008-2009, the then Minister of Finance came up with two Stimulus Packages.

The Stimulus Packages were presumably introduced to help enterprises sustain their activities. At least, this was what was promised at that time. But what did we see, Mr Speaker, Sir? Shocking!

How can we forget, the Infinity BPO and RS Fashion Saga? How dare they talk about good governance and accountability today, when their track records “*laissent tellement à désirer*”? “RS Fashion” got Rs250 m. from the Stimulus Package. We all know who is behind RS Fashion! Mr Mardemootoo!

At that time, the hon. Leader of the Opposition was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, hon. Xavier-Luc Duval was the Minister of Tourism and hon. Shakeel Mohamed was the Deputy Chief Whip and *colistier* of MP Mardemootoo. They were all clapping at that time when RS Fashion was getting those Rs250 m. They were all clapping. But what is shocking, Mr Speaker, Sir, out of those Rs250 m., only a sum of Rs150,000 was reimbursed. Only! And then, they were sitting there and clapping!

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the “Infinity BPO” Saga. That famous call-centre was owned by a Mr Jeanne Suzanne who was...

Mr Mohamed: It is not appropriate to mention strangers who are not in Assembly by name. This is just one little suggestion and I say it in all humility.

Mr Speaker: Don't, hon. Minister!

Mr Balgobin: Noted, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, the famous Call Centre was owned by somebody who was the special adviser on technology matters, *s'il vous plaît*, to the then Prime Minister, Navin Ramgoolam. Infinity BPO obtained Rs135 m. from the Additional Stimulus Package in 2009. And they clapped again! What happened next is more interesting!

Instead of injecting that money in the company, he bought an Aston Martin, Vantage V8, of engine capacity of 4,300 cc. He bought a BMW X5, he bought a Mini Cooper, he bought a Ducati motorbike 600 cc, amongst others. And again, they clapped! But, what is revolting, Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, another point of order. Just *en passant*, because the hon. Minister is a good friend of mine. It is also not acceptable, not allowed by the Standing Orders to make accusations against anyone who is not in the House, unless he is going to provide documents to that effect. That is just *en passant*. You cannot make accusations, unless you substantiate the accusations.

Mr Speaker: Let me check. Are you making any accusation?

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is of public domain. I have not made any accusations.

Mr Speaker: Don't make any accusation! Okay?

(Interruptions)

Mr Ganoo: He cannot make against a Member of the House.

Mr Speaker: Who is speaking?

(Interruptions)

Mr Balgobin: No problem, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr Ganoo: This is why we have immunity.

Mr Balgobin: We move on!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo, I would not allow any accusation against any Member!

Mr Ganoo: Unless by substantive motion, but Mr Suzanne is not a Member of the House.

Mr Mohamed: Sorry, but you cannot say...

Mr Speaker: Okay, hon. Mohamed, everything is okay. Now, you continue, hon. Balgobin!

Mr Balgobin: Now, if we go into details, what is more revolting is that provisions were made in the Stimulus Package for only Rs350 m. as subsidy to lower the price of essential commodities for the Mauritian population. Those Rs350 m. only allowed for a decrease in the price of a loaf of bread by 15 cents only, the price of Flour by Rs1 and the price of a gas cylinder by Rs15.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on Monday, and these are not allegations but these are records available everywhere, the hon. Leader of the Opposition made a very long speech. He spoke for 109 minutes and 4 seconds. At one point in time, he said something very interesting, and I quote –

“In 2008, under the Labour/PMSD Government, 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 every Member of the House clapped again. But, and a big But, the hon. Leader of the Opposition deliberately did not mention that, after he voted the additional stimulus package to give, *inter alia*, Infinity BPO hundreds of millions of rupees, the latter did not pay his employees. In his speech, he deliberately chose to ignore the fact that more than 500 employees of Infinity BPO were left *sur le pavé*. They were simply laid off, even after receiving the grants. In fact, in February 2011, some of those employees went on strike, even on hunger strike, in order to receive their dues. Again you see they clapped. Where were you then at that time, the hon. Leader of the Opposition? Where were you then my good friend hon. Whip of the Opposition? Why did not you raise any questions? Did you really give those who were in need? This august Assembly still resonates with your claps on the 07 of April 2009 where you decided to give stimulus package to *copains, copines*. But when the hon. Minister of Finance announced Rs15,000 for our frontliners, then you did not have the decency to clap for them, but you clapped for *les copains, copines*. Maybe these frontliners are not important to you but they are for us. I would like here to sincerely thank them for their sense of sacrifice during the pandemic and risking their lives to protect ours. Mr Speaker, Sir, on the other hand, we have decided to invest soundly. Our investment in this

Budget amounts Rs163 billion. The scale of difference in investment is significant and demonstrates how this Government has *lepep* close its heart.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened yesterday very passionately to my colleague, hon. Gilbert Bablee, when he cornered hon. Khushal Lobine when the latter was Chairman of SICOM. I would like to continue a little bit on that trend. When the hon. Member Khushal Lobine was the Chairman of Wastewater Management Authority, he approved cost overrun of more than Rs1 billion to the contractor responsible for Plaines Wilhems sewerage project with heavy costs overruns and mismanagement.

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Once again, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister, as I underline again, is a good friend of mine. So, my humble request is that if he is going to make an accusation against someone here, that he substantiates it. Because he cannot say there is overrun and accuse him of that without dropping any document and tabling it.

Mr Speaker: Are you making an accusation? If you make an accusation, you have to substantiate.

Mr Balgobin: Okay, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: And that will be the rule for the rest of the debate for both sides of the House.

Mr Balgobin: This is in my next paragraph. Why I am saying so? Because I did not invent all these statements, all these figures. The Director of Audit severely blamed him.

(Interruptions)

Wait! But what is more troubling, Mr Speaker, Sir, that a leading Member of his party who was then the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, Mrs Aurore Perraud, severely blamed him for his mismanagement. And he had not even sought clearance of the Ministry of Finance...

Mr Mohamed: Once again, Mr Speaker, Sir, he cannot say such things. He has no right; that is against the Standing Orders. He cannot do that!

(Interruptions)

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I advise the hon. Member to consult the PAC Report!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker!

Mr Speaker: I cannot hear anything!

(Interruptions)

I will suspend the sitting for a few minutes!

At 6.25 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.31 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! The two hon. Members met and set records straight. So, carry on!

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I just said in my statement that has been taken from the Public Accounts Committee Report and I undertake to table a copy of the Report.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now, allow me to come to a series of measures in this Budget, pertaining to the ICT sector –

- Our transition towards a data-driven economy where the role of ICT companies will be central in the setup of a Data Technology Park at Côte d’Or. This project, Mr Speaker, Sir, will undoubtedly create exciting jobs for our youth in the coming years.
- I also need to mention the fact that a Technology and Innovation Fund will be created to invest up to Rs2 m. as equity in projects recommended by the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council.
- A Public Sector Transformation Scheme will also be introduced by the MRIC to encourage innovative companies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, one of the most transformative proposals contained in the budget is the requirement for all Ministries and departments to become paperless in the long run.

The Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) is a major step in that direction. Our vision is to allow civil servants to have all their usual paper documents in digital format.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a means to support this digital service makeover, a Government Digital Safe will be made available to each citizen and will be used to store digitally signed

documents in the Cloud. Of course, the objective is to give a Digital Safe (*coffre*) to all citizens, apart maybe from one citizen, who already has a safe which is currently in the custody of the Police.

Additionally, to further ease the life of our citizens, public departments will be equipped with an Electronic Queue Management System by not forcing them to queue up for long at offices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my colleagues in the House will recall that, in 2017, on the day of assumption to the office of hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth listed his priorities to the nation. One of the major priorities was the Digital Transformation of the country. To this end, Government is setting up the Mauritius Digital Transformation Agency to be responsible for all the major technology Government projects implementations in the nation. In the same vein, we will ensure that mobile payment technology is integrated in the various e-services provided by Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, you will also agree that the world of technology is in constant flux, and institutions which were created decades ago need to reinvent themselves. This is why I heartily welcome the bold decision to restructure the Central Informatics Bureau (CIB), the Central Information Systems Division (CISD), the IT Security Unit (ITSU), the National Computer Board (NCB), the State Informatics Limited (SIL) and the Government Online Centre (GOC) to better serve the population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to say a few words on internet connectivity. When the Labour Party lost power in 2014, according to Statistics Mauritius, and I can also table that particular paragraph in the Report, only 43% of the population had internet connections on their mobile. 43%! Today, most Mauritians enjoy high speed broadband internet at home, at work on their mobile devices throughout the island.

Now, I am asking some hon. Members on the other side who are so fond of making live videos to criticise our actions, would this have been possible without us providing you with the technology to do so?

Would my good friend, hon. Shakeel Mohamed, be able to leave this very Chamber, go live and come back to the Chamber to make the Show on Facebook? No, Mr Speaker, Sir! He wouldn't, he has to agree. We have brought them into this new era. They should be thankful!

(Interruptions)

Voilà!

Mr Speaker, Sir, we should acknowledge that it is when hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth was the Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation that this idea of providing fiber-optic cable to every household moved to a next level. I noticed that, even the leader of the Labour Party has become digitally savvy these days. He is '*ar nou kozer*' and so on. Very good! I hope he is making judicious use of internet connection at home. As we all know, sitting at home, being idle, an empty mind becomes a devil's workshop.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has provided technological support to the population during the pandemic. A lot of our citizens also used their mobile devices to stay up to date with the latest news. This is why, for example, the beSafeMoris mobile application developed by Mauritius Telecom established itself naturally when it was launched.

To make the use of existing e-services even easier, my Ministry launched the Fasil.mu website on 20 May during the confinement. This portal brings under one roof some fifty most important and popular e-services.

Pour conclure, M. le président, vu les circonstances, le budget, présenté jeudi par mon collègue, l'honorable ministre des Finances, est mûrement réfléchi et propose des mesures fortes, concrètes et réalisables pour faire avancer notre pays.

Ce budget, M. le président, est un symbole de continuité du travail que nous avons commencé et que nous terminerons avec la même détermination et le même courage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the seeds have been planted. Let us all work together. We will reap the fruits together.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Woochit!

(6.40 p.m.)

Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you for availing me with the opportunity to deliver my first speech to this National Assembly in the context of the 2020-2021 Budget.

My thanks also go to all those who have chosen to vote for the Labour Party and, in particular, those of my Constituency No. 5 Pamplemousses and Triolet who have placed their trust and confidence in me.

I hereby extend my respectful thanks and appreciation to all the front liners involved in the fight against coronavirus. The behaviour of the population throughout the current crisis is remarkable. I would also like to express my deepest sympathy to the bereaved families. For my first Budget Speech, I will mainly focus on the importance of local government as a means to improve the quality of life of our citizens and the contribution of the Local Authorities in the development of our country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic which represents a serious threat to the sustainability of our economy and the lives of our people, it is of utmost importance that this proposed Budget must aim at securing the lives of the people first. As rightly stated in the introductory line of this Budget, I quote –

“(...) at a time of unprecedented crisis (...) our daily life would be put on hold.”

Finally,

“A deep contraction, globally and locally, is unfolding before our eyes.”

According to these important observations, we can easily conclude that although the Bank of Mauritius has pumped in billions of rupees in this Budget, there is no room for extravaganza.

Every action, every rupee, must be justified for the good cause of the people and the country at large. Agree some investments and measures are very important such as in the sectors of agriculture, health and education. Still, the Budget must focus on essential sectors that will help and alleviate the worries and the pain of the people. What can be relegated, must be set aside. Projects like extension of metro, new roads, Pharmaceutical Park, investment in Africa, construction of dam and other similar projects must not be the priority now. We all agree that our country is experiencing a chaotic economic and social problem. Many people will not be able to meet both ends due to inflation. Life is bound to be miserable. We can foresee an upsurge of many problems which have already given signs of. No jobs means no income and no income leads to family and social unrest. This situation will further widen the gap between the rich and the poor, accentuate poverty and lead to some people to act against the public order by indulging into unlawful activities such as robbery, drug trafficking and others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am very much concerned about the future of our nation. I seize the opportunity in this august Assembly to propose that all mega and prestigious projects on which billions of rupees have been earmarked to spend to be put on hold. We do agree that

projects that will generate employment and revenue should be maintained, for example, ports, air cargo and local authorities.

In this economic crisis, every citizen of our nation has to make immense sacrifice and I believe it would be appropriate for this Government to send the right signal by curtailing expenses in those projects that are not essential in this period of austerity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the expectations of the public at large has remained unattended as at now as the Government Budget does not make any specific reference to the Ministry of Local Government which is as important as any other Ministries.

Service to the community is an essential factor to promote development at large. The local authorities, since their establishment, have played a prominent role in the social and economic development of the community. The local authorities met their commitments because their source of income was different from what it is today. We are all aware that each year, Government undertakes major infrastructural projects which are then vested to local authorities for maintenance. In addition, with the mushrooming of *morcellements*, markets, traffic centres, new roads, drains, sport facilities, incinerators, street lighting, additional responsibilities have now been entrusted to the local authorities which are already a heavy toll.

In spite of these, the hon. Minister of Finance has reduced the grant-in-aid of local authorities by 11%. In this context, how can we expect to improve the services offered by the Local Authorities to our citizens? In addition, for certain types of application, fees for building and land use permits will be waived, thus leading to further loss of revenue for local authorities.

In the same line, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have noted that several businesses are operating without a proper licence. Applicants register their business activities with the Registrar of Companies and start operating with their business cards, thus, flouting planning requirements inasmuch as the verification process by the local authorities is done at a later stage. This state of affairs amounts to putting the cart before the horse and often creates nuisance to the environment. Several such matters end up in Court, thus causing prejudice to aggrieved citizens who lose their time and money. This situation calls for an urgent attention to the Ministry of Local Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in this difficult moment where our organisations need to be more efficient, I am suggesting the following measures to be taken into consideration just to reduce

the operating costs of our local authorities: first, the road works system should be reviewed. Instead of contracting out all the road works, the Local Authorities should purchase their own equipment, such as tar sprayer, pavers, roller and asphalt cutter to enable tarring of all non-classified roads within their jurisdiction. This in-house measure will reduce operational costs and offer a better quality of work and at the same time will create jobs in our Local Authorities.

Second, street lightings. I also note that an amount of Rs12 m. has been earmarked for street lightings along motorways. In line with the policy of achieving energy security and sustainability, I refer to paragraph 256. I suggest that the Ministry of Local Government should procure LED lights to ensure quality, uniformity and to avoid delays in supply. Moreover, purchase in bulk will allow for economies of scale. In addition, we should consider the use of solar energy for street lightings on roads which fall under the jurisdictions of local authorities. This measure can bring about additional consequential savings in the street lightings bills. Moreover, in line with the Green Energy Policy, solar panels should be placed in all local authorities' headquarters, on all public buildings, in particular, markets, village council buildings and schools.

Third, it is high time for the local government to be a major partner of the private firm operating at Mare Chicose landfill, which is currently generating electricity from wastes. Part of its revenue gain, could then be offset against the street lighting bills which is a heavy financial burden to the local authorities.

Fourth, scavenging service. Referring to paragraph 247, local authorities will carry out composting of market waste and the Ministry of Environment will be responsible for segregation of waste at source. The concept of waste sorting between paper, plastic, metal and green waste is still long overdue.

Mauritius lags behind our neighbouring countries, such as Reunion Island with regard to sorting and recycling of waste. A few months ago, hon. Minister Ramano stated that his Ministry will seek the expertise of Reunion Island on the issue of waste recycling. I understand he has already been to Reunion Island in this context. Whilst I highly appreciate this initiative, still, the effective implementation of this project will require the collaboration of the local authorities, particularly for the collection of waste.

I propose the introduction of waste sorting and recycling to be undertaken by the local authorities so as to apply the three 'R' system, that is, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, as local

authorities are also responsible for both the collection and disposal of waste. We also note that sweeper lorries which were mentioned in the last Budget Speech are still not acquired. As at date, none of the 12 Local Authorities is equipped with sweeper lorries.

Fifth, local authorities should also be called upon to assist our local entrepreneurs by reserving a certain number of stalls in the existing and forthcoming market fairs which are scheduled to be completed during the next financial year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the NDU, it is high time for the Government to review the operation of this entity. Despite the availability of funds, the NDU is very often unable to undertake all projects in a timely manner because most of these projects are later given to the local authorities for maintenance purposes. I, therefore, suggest that part of the funding be directed to local authorities, particularly for community-based projects while the NDU could focus on the other major projects. Furthermore, to enable better coordination and follow-up of works, I am of the view that the NDU should be under the umbrella of the Ministry of Local Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Local Government Act of 2011 has been amended in view of postponing the Village Council Elections for the year 2020. I was, therefore, expecting that budgetary provision be made for the organisation of the Village Council Elections. However, it is noted with deep concern that there is no provision in the estimates for such elections which are long overdue. This suggests that the present Government gives little importance to such a democratic process. Should I understand that this omission is deliberate? That there will be no elections? Is this what we call democracy? These are questions that rest in the mind of the public.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is also our responsibility to draw the attention of the population regarding these shortcomings and propose measures to be taken to redress the actual situation. It is deplorable that the National Pension Fund will be abolished and the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée (CSG)* will be introduced without the consultation of all parties concerned, that is, employees, employers and the Unions. Employee's earnings above Rs50,000 will be fixed with an unfair rate of 3% CSG. This measure will impact heavily on the employee's monthly earnings. I propose a flat rate to be imposed on all employees without any discrimination between high income and low income group. These CSG should be paid at the age of 60 instead of 65.

Mr Speaker, Sir, under construction sector, paragraph 38, the hon. Minister of Finance mentioned that “any retention amount will be paid fully within 6 months instead of 12 months”. This issue has been addressed by my colleague, hon. Osman Mahomed. I would, however, stress on the fact that the usual practice is that all major works are covered by a warranty period of 12 months so that defects that occur within one year from the date of handing over of the projects, are remedied at the contractor’s expense.

Reducing retention period by 6 months will automatically reduce the defect liability period. I strongly condemn this measure which will undermine the quality of future construction works as it will lead to poor workmanship in the future delivery of projects.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to social housing, in this Budget 2020-2021, Government announced an exceptional effort to construct 12,000 residential units. Referring to the Budget 2018-19, Government committed itself to construct 6,800 residential units. However, as at date, it is unfortunate to notice that merely half of the proposed number has been completed. I, therefore, believe that this Government is incapable of accomplishing the said 12,000 residential units.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister of Finance has earmarked Rs8.4 billion under law and order to enhance security. These funds have been earmarked for acquisition of new Hi-Tech equipment, specialised vehicles for Mauritius Police Force, and expansion of safe city projects, full body scanners and other items so as to prevent illicit activities. The intention seems to be good, whether this can be translated into reality, is a different question. It is not a secret that drug is ravaging our society, especially, this young generation. But, unfortunately, no provision has been made for detox treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts. These victims must be involved in social activities, placed in rehabilitation centres and we should be able to empower them to reintegrate the society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the 2019-2020 Budget Speech, the then Minister of Finance and now Prime Minister, came forward with the setting up of the Financial Crime Commission (FCC), which would among other activities, take over the functions of the ICAC, the performance of which we all agree, are below expectation. One year later nothing has been done, and this year, we again find provision in the budget for the FCC. I would like to draw the House on the poor performance of the ICAC. Between 2002 and 2019, the success rate of prosecution of ICAC cases concerning the public sector has been only 37%, whereas, for the Hong Kong ICAC, the success rate is 81% for the same period. According to the latest

Afrobarometer Report 2019, the majority of Mauritians do not trust the ICAC. Hence, it is high time that appropriate measures be taken to redress this situation, with a view to fighting corruption efficiently.

Mr Speaker, Sir, referring to paragraph 356(e), an amount of Rs15,000 has been allocated to Police Officers and hospital staff. During this pandemic period, many other stakeholders were committed to fight against this deadly virus. I wonder why the hon. Minister of Finance did not consider it appropriate to compensate all people involved in the battle for their efforts. It is a general view that fire fighters, dock operators, freight and transit operators, drivers, helpers, scavengers, cashiers, security guards, and other related front liners who have been mobilised during the confinement period should also be allocated the same amount.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister of Finance failed to elaborate on COVID-19 Solidarity Fund, regarding *Plan de Soutien*. The price structure of fuel has been modified as from 04 April 2020, where Rs4 on each litre of petrol has been imposed. It is important for the nation to know up to when this price structure will prevail. This led me to conclude that several items and measures which were announced previously, have not been implemented. It is a real disappointment for the nation to witness the repetition of same projects in this Budget through different wordings and headings.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the following capital projects were mentioned in the previous Budget Speech, Rivière des Anguilles Dam, Ocean Economy, Blue Economy, Investment in Africa, Côte d'Or Industrial Park, Breakwater at Fort William, Corporative Seafood Processing Unit at Tamarin, upgrading of Pont Bruniquel at Baie du Tombeau, Triolet Sports Complex, six football fields at Pointe aux Sables, Tranquebar, Vallée Pitot, Pamplémousses, Plein Bois, Chamarel, new market at Pamplémousses, set up of new Renal Transplant Unit at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, modern training centre for MITD at Beau Vallon, recreation centre at Riambel, smart driving licence cards, new Police Station at Phoenix and Triolet, drainage works at Le Hochet, Terre Rouge, medical Hub, SMEs Bank, bicycle and motorcycle plant, gold refinery industry, fishing port, water supply 24/7, Highlands City projects, education Hub, green economy. Mr Speaker, Sir, the list is long.

Unfortunately, we fail to understand why so many projects mentioned in the previous budgets have not been realised, especially at a time where there were neither financial, nor sanitary problems. There can't be any excuse that can be justified on non-completion of these

projects. Do we have to understand now, that at this particular moment, when the country is going through a catastrophic situation, as rightly acknowledged in the introductory line of this budget that, the outfall on our economy is without comparison, that our daily life would be put on hold. I highly doubt whether these new projects that have been proposed in this budget can now be realised.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am highly disappointed. Sincerely speaking, this Budget does meet the aspiration and the expectations of this population that is still affected by this pandemic. Poverty, insecurity and social unrest are queuing up at our doorsill. We need to be more human and caring. Please, invest where necessary, and make a solemn plea to the hon. Minister of Finance to review and amend the Budget 2020-2021 accordingly.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I would request the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

(7.09 p.m.)

The Deputy Speaker: Prior to starting, yesterday there were a couple of incidents to which I said I shall review on video and Hansard. I have reviewed the video and I am waiting for the Hansard to be ready to give my ruling.

Next Orator, hon. Ramchurrun!

(7.10 p.m.)

Mr P. Ramchurrun (Third Member for Savanne & Black River): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is with a deep sense of humility and duty that I am addressing this august Assembly today. To start, let me thank the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, Dr. the hon. Renganaden Padayachy, for presenting his first exceptional Budget 2020-2021 during an unprecedented economic and social times across the world.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from the very outset, actually since Monday, we, Members in this House, have been hearing from the Opposition side, on this one-time exceptional Budget, for four consecutive days now, just criticisms and criticisms. We, Members and young Parliamentarians with respect to this august Assembly, expect to hear, if not positive, but, at least, some constructive analysis and also some facts and realities of this Budget. Not even one mention was made to thank, I say, at least God, given that we have no active local

cases in this country for more than a month now. Whereas the world has, unfortunately, almost seven million cases and death toll has reached 400,000 deaths, it is understood that, as politicians, and as hon. Members from different political parties, who have lost for two consecutive general elections, you have to defend your party at this stage. But, for the sake of sitting in this temple of democracy, you must be real. You cannot just criticise, but you need to at least come with some solutions instead. If you think you have a magic formula to solve the thousands jobs in this hospitality industry, please, come forward. Please, come forward, but we do not want the same magic formula which famously created a budgetary *‘trou de R 800 millions en 2006.’*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if it was business as usual on Budget day, in his speech, the Minister of Finance would have presented Government’s major place areas and plans for the next year. The Opposition would also have given their business as usual speeches to categorically oppose the Budget and, as usual, sing their *‘nanien pas bon’* song. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, looking at the Opposition so far, it is disappointing to note that for them, it is still business as usual. While the world had acknowledged that the new world will never be the same, it is puzzled to note that the Opposition is still stuck in time and have not awakened to the new reality yet. The new normal is, in fact, well here, and we urge the other side of the House to wake up from their slumber and acknowledge that these are exceptional times and the response should be equally exceptional. They should leave their comfort zone. Interestingly, we have not heard, and I do not expect to hear from many, the three following points from the Opposition.

First, how they would have managed the post-lockdown economic and social recovery.

Second, a comparison of how this Budget performs against the Labour Party’s Budgetary Stimulus Packages to respond to the 2008-2009 Global Economic Crisis.

Third, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget Speech has 387 paragraphs and the Opposition have spared no efforts to blindly criticise each phrase. Their attitude is so unconstructive that I wonder if they might even not agree to say the last phrase of the Budget Speech, which says ‘Thank you’. Beneath the 387 criticisms, on each line of the speech, we have not heard them mentioned even one budgetary measure which they honestly think will benefit their constituents.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget's package of exceptional responses is prepared with all humility and integrity to support the maximum number of Mauritians during these unprecedented times. At least, we expect from Members of the other side of the House to be intellectually honest with the population and not to be scared of their leaders to tell the sincere truth on and try to scope to the point with either of their leaders. I wonder, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, during the current unprecedented times, where we all have to unite and demonstrate solidarity, how many Members from the other side of the House will dare to uphold their oath to serve the best interest of the country and vote for this Budget. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would ask Members of the other side to mention the famous Stimulus and Additional Packages they so proudly presented in clap, so noisily, nearly a decade ago. I heard the younger Members to take to task of their respective leaders who have then the chance to help people of this country, but, instead chose to support the famous '*petits copains, petites copines*'. It is not too late to rise and take up the challenge.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir it is important sometimes to go back to history, as hon. Bablee stated last night. To go back to history is important. By going back to history, I will say, 2018 marked the 100th Anniversary of the 1918 flu pandemic, also known as the Spanish flu. In fact, the 1918 H1N1 flu pandemic saw nearly 50 million losing their lives globally. The anniversary was almost overlooked by the world, but two years later, a new storm in the form of Coronavirus emerged to haunt and scare the world on an unprecedented experience, unseen by previous generations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, nothing in our recent history has created such an imaginary scene of disruption as the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government acknowledges that Mauritians have made considerable sacrifices throughout the lockdown, sacrifices in terms of not being able to see their close ones, having to change their daily routines, to stop looking forward to happy events, even not being able to help each other during difficult moments.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, during such moments, people naturally turn towards spirituality and self-reflection. However, they also look for visibility and reassurance, but, more importantly, leadership. Mauritians, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, have indeed found the visibility and reassurance they needed through the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. His unflinching efforts to ensure that Mauritians are supported and safe during the trouble times were widely acclaimed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget is not only finances, but, more importantly, about generation defining decisions that will pave the direction of Mauritius for the next decade and beyond. This budget is also about unity, that is, the nation and its citizens uniting to work on the economic and social recovery. Mauritius has internationally acclaimed for having successfully contained the virus and prevented the loss of further lives. We mourn the lost ones and think about their families.

During the interventions, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Opposition cited the New Zealand and their brilliant leadership, but they omitted to say that Mauritius won the COVID-19 well before New Zealand. It is by working together like today we have become one of the safest countries in the world and are being praised worldwide. Some examples I will say of the Oxford University, the BBC, the World Health Organisation itself and *The Guardian*. Mauritians have self-isolated, self-distanced and sacrificed to ultimately help flatten the curve. We thank them and are grateful for their formidable efforts. In setting things right, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is essential that we have a clear vision of the future we want for our nation. We also need to be concerned with better sharing. If we believe we should, that as a nation we are one, then we should put the principle of sharing at the very heart of our policies. A proper policy of national sharing is also crucial for maintaining social peace, a sine qua non condition to sustain economic progress.

Today, more than ever, this Government seeks to support the population as we navigate the Mauritian economy through the crisis which has enveloped the whole world and spared none. Even the global economic growth has slowed; there is no reason for pessimism. I acknowledge that the Mauritian economy is challenged to its core, but I am absolutely confident that hands in hands, we will get out of the trouble and get back on the high growth path. Hence, our main objective is higher growth leading to inclusive and sustainable development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget is pro-business and pro-jobs as it leaves no stones unturned from the support and recovery of affected businesses and, more importantly attempts to protect the thousands of vulnerable jobs, the facilities at concessional rates being granted to thousands of businesses and need to come with check and balances. In fact, no such business will be able to lay off employees if they have benefited from these facilities. It is growth that will lead to inclusive development and without it there will be neither development nor inclusiveness and the development must be sustainable economically and ecologically.

I dare say that sufficient funds have been provided to each Ministry and departments consistent with their capacity. Now, it is for the Ministries to deliver the result for good governance, prudent funds management as well as close monitoring and timely implementation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget has supported moves to foster more cohesive and caring society that we can better care and for our elderly and the vulnerable ones. Our success will depend on our unity of purpose and collective spirit. It is by working together that today we are one of the safest countries in the world. Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is by working together and by this everyone knows *ensam tou posib*. It is by working together and pooling our resources that we have built up a strong fiscal foundation. Together we have built and are continuing to build a nation that we can be proud of.

The timely executed lockdown has helped in flattening of the COVID curve saving many lives which is indeed one of the priorities of any Government. As a caring Government, it is our responsibility to reconstruct our economy, secure social justice and provide Mauritius with a new beginning. This Government is bringing us into a new air, the New Normal of development and has embarked the country on a transformative journey.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have heard interestingly how hon. Members on the Opposition are so keen and care for people who have been working in difficult situations risking their lives. This Government under the leadership of the Prime Minister and primeministership of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth has rewarded those front liners who have been working 24/7 and dealing with people in difficult situations days and nights.

M. le président, l'opposition nous accuse d'avoir mal géré la crise, la crise sanitaire et économique qui nous guette sans proposer des solutions concrètes. Nous faisons face à un ennemi invisible. Les plus grandes puissances militaires de ce monde sont à genoux face à cet ennemi qui ne respecte aucune frontière.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please!

Mr Ramchurrin: Cette Opposition travailliste qui, en 2013, ne pouvait construire quelques drains et dont ce manquement grave avait coûté la vie à dix de nos compatriotes suite à des *flash floods*, cette Opposition qui n'avait pu maintenir la flotte d'autobus de la CNT, résultat, un accident coûtant la vie, encore une fois, à dix personnes. Contrairement à aujourd'hui, leur ennemi de l'époque était visible, leur attaque prévisible et pourtant, nous

savons ce que nous avons subi. Je n'ose pas imaginer ce que serait advenu de notre pays si les travaillistes étaient au pouvoir en ce moment que je vous parle. Aujourd'hui, il nous reproche d'avoir remercié que le personnel de la police et de la santé. Pourtant, en 1999, alors que le pays était en plein émeutes, en pleine flamme, comme à la coutume sous le règne travailliste, des policiers qui furent mobilisés pendant plusieurs jours, essayant de maintenir l'ordre et la paix dans le pays et pas une roupie avait été votée pour leur courage et bravoure. L'Opposition vit toujours dans le passé, un passé honteux et elle a le culot, dotée d'une hystérie inconcevable, de venir nous faire la leçon alors que nos résultats sont indéniables.

M. le président, l'opposition travailliste qui vit dans un confinement politique depuis 2014, et le MMM qui subit un *lockdown* semblable depuis 2005 sont à court d'argument. Pire, le PMSD qui semble avoir devenu des experts dans le domaine de la construction pour oser forfaitiser l'impossibilité de ce gouvernement à accomplir la construction de 12,000 logements sociaux au cours des trois prochaines années. L'argument politique se résume à limiter nos braves compatriotes constructeurs, de leur capacité à construire un nombre record de logements décents pour nos citoyens les plus vulnérables. Mais laissez-moi leur rappeler que ce gouvernement a toujours tenu ses promesses malgré les prophéties de malheur médiocres animés par la pertinence des membres de l'opposition de rester en dehors du pouvoir. Oui, c'est dur de rester confiner politiquement. Et cela risque de durer pour bien longtemps encore.

M. le président, les chiffres parlent d'eux-mêmes. Entre 2005 et 2014, le gouvernement travailliste en alliance avec le PMSD n'a pu construire que 2,400 maisons – 2,400 maisons en neuf ans. Quand je dis maison, c'est un mot faible. C'était des bicoques honteuses pour les gens qui leur avaient fait confiance. De 2015 à 2019, pendant quatre ans, ce gouvernement a fait 2,230 maisons. En quatre ans, 2,200 ; en 9 ans 2,400 qui dit mieux? Et là, M. le président, les travaillistes et les membres du PMSD se sont récemment convertis en travailleurs sociaux pour encourager le squatting illégal de nos terres alors que le gouvernement fait tout pour régler le problème des vrais squatters.

En disant cela, M. le président, je vais vous donner quelques chiffres ce qu'on a fait en 2005. En 2005, à Africa Town à Riambel, ce gouvernement - au fait, en 2005 c'était l'alliance MSM/MMM et il y avait mon collègue l'honorable Alan Ganoo dans la circonscription numéro 14 où il a régularisé 67 portions de terrain. Et là, encore en 2015 avec ce gouvernement MSM, il y avait 62 régularisés avec ce même gouvernement à Cité des Dieux à Riambel.

M. le président, les chiffres parlent d'eux-mêmes. Je viens de dire à propos de logement. D'ailleurs, il est important de comprendre pourquoi on est arrivé à cette situation. C'est parce que l'écart entre les riches et les pauvres dans ce pays a augmenté drastiquement pendant le règne de Navinchandra Ramgoolam comme Premier ministre. Jadis, fut un temps où il n'y avait pas de salaire minimum, pas de *negative income tax*, pas de R 9,000 comme pension de vieillesse, pas de manuel scolaire gratuit, pas de vraie politique fiscale et justice sociale pour les Mauriciens. L'écart injuste à faire croire la pauvreté est une des causes à été que des familles honnêtes se sont retrouvées sur la terre de l'État. Tout comme on est ferme contre les faux squatteurs, ce gouvernement combattrait la pauvreté et l'injustice.

Je reconnais que ce n'est pas la première fois qu'un gouvernement annonce la création de logements sociaux dans un budget, mais je salue l'intelligence dans laquelle cette mesure est détaillée car, pour une fois, on s'attaque à tous les composants de la classe moyenne en voulant construire pour ceux dont le revenu mensuel ne dépasse pas R10,000; d'autres entre R 10,000 et R 30,000, une autre catégorie entre R 30,000 et R 45,000 et enfin, pour le foyer dont le revenu mensuel est compris entre R 45,000 et R 60,000 aussi.

M. le président, personne dans notre passé, surtout ceux de la partie opposée de cette auguste Assemblée, n'a osé taxer les riches alors qu'on accuse ce gouvernement de suivre l'agenda du secteur privé. Nous avons eu le courage politique de venir de l'avant avec ce prélèvement de 5% sur le montant excédentaire du revenu imposable et des dividendes perçues d'un citoyen Mauricien résidant sur le territoire serait désormais de 25% applicable à partir du seuil de R 3 millions par an. De plus, il y aura un prélèvement sur les entreprises dont le revenu brut dépasse 500 millions de roupies au cours d'un exercice comptable ou qui font partie d'un groupe d'entreprises dont le revenu brut du groupe dépasse 500 millions de roupies.

Nous ne sommes pas contre les riches, M. le président, mais nous estimons que cette solidarité économique de la part de ceux qui ont le plus nous permet de déduire la charge fiscale qui pèse sur les ménages à revenu moyen. Personne dans le passé n'a eu le courage de venir avec une telle mesure fiscale.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Budget also makes provision for a series of social initiatives such as the extension of medical visits to disabled citizens in need aged both below 18 years and above 18 years.

Moreover, the financial support of the NGOs will be consolidated to ensure that our nation's social fabric is further enhanced. I also welcome the measure enumerated to promote the 'Made in Mauritius' brand.

Mr Deputy Speaker, it is clear indication that the Government firmly believes in the Mauritian spirit of entrepreneurship and *débrouillardise*. Furthermore, the tax incentives granted to the local manufacturers will be extended bringing them well-needed breathing space.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Budget also protects further our brave agricultural entrepreneurs by guaranteeing a price of Rs25,000 for the first 60 tonnes of sugar produced.

On the other hand, the Development Bank of Mauritius will become the development and gene of the Government by offering numerous facilities to distressed businesses: families, planters and manufacturers with concessional rates. I welcome the new impetus given to the DBM.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Minister of Finance for provisions of a modern market place at Bambous and Chemin Grenier as well as a multisport complex in Quatre Bornes.

As PPS of Constituencies Numbers 8 and 14, as soon as we started work the next day we were put into power by the population, hence a list of more than 100 priority projects has been drawn for both constituencies: from repairing roads - construction and new ones, upgrading of football pitches and the building of drains. We are not sparing any moment and opportunity to rebuild the infrastructure.

The NDU (National Development Unit), under the able ministership of hon. Bobby Hurreeram and the team of all the PPSs, is ready to take the challenge in this unprecedented situation and we are talking about development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I will highlight a line from hon. Woomat when he said the mushrooming of amenities, new roads and drains. When he said 'mushrooming', all these amenities mean that *travay la pe fer*. We are on the path of development. I thank hon. Woomat for that.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to place on record my appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister for his continued and unwavering support, trust and guidance in delivering

this remarkable Budget. I also thank the hon. Members of this House who have provided their invaluable contribution with tremendous insight and skills.

As I said from the start, this Budget is about our common future. Members have expressed support for measures to position our economy for the future so that Mauritians will have opportunities to pursue their aspirations regardless of where they started. We have supported most to foster more cohesive and caring society so that we can better care for our elderly and the vulnerable ones. That is, even if we are going through a crisis, our Welfare State such as the old age pension has been consolidated.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the future will not be less we do the hard work for it and make preparations. Let us start with being rigorous and working on options that matter rather than being ideological. Our success will depend on our unity or purpose and our collective spirit of enterprise and care. We can only make it through this journey and we work together. It is by working together and pooling our resources that we have built a strong fiscal foundation and reserves to protect and provide for us for the difficult times. It is by working together and deepening partnerships that we can build scale; create value and ride the tight growth for the region together. It is by working together and partnering with one another's community that we can best reach out and care for our fellow citizens' need.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have a country where our citizens can have a guarantee of protection from the vagaries of the world over the course of life through the financial provisions that we have made. This is the kind of commitment that I hope all of us, not only from this side of the House, but Mauritians everywhere, will come together to implement this budget. We now have rolled up our sleeves and get to work to implement this budget and weather storms ahead. Mauritius, we are in this together and we stand with you. Long live Mauritius.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

(7.39 p.m.)

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is really with a great pride that I am addressing this august Assembly tonight, as today, we are 11 June and it was on this same date, in 1982 that this country went to an election where Sir Anerood Jugnauth was brought

to the Prime Ministership of this country, and it is Sir Anerood Jugnauth who saved our country from a decline to which it was going in those days.

I would then like to thank the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for this budget. This budget has made the people of Mauritius forget all their anxieties and stress of confinement entailing from the coronavirus. This budget has fostered the trust and confidence they have in this Government and understand that this Government is on their side.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when a calamity of such a magnitude hits a country, it then becomes the responsibility of each and everyone to come together to fight against the invisible enemy. However, let me tell you that I was really shocked to see that the Opposition was only criticizing the measures that the Government was implementing. They had nothing to propose, but only to oppose. I am tempted to say that when our people and the whole world were suffering from corona, they had moral anemia. Fortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have a Government who is sincere, serious and pragmatic. This is what allowed the Minister of Finance to present a budget which what I call the 5 'Ps'. The 5 'Ps' were really important in such a situation. The 5 'Ps' Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are as thus: the first 'P' for being practical; second 'P' positive; third 'p' progressive; fourth 'P' pragmatic and fifth 'P' prudent.

When you go through the measures of the budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you can see that the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development and his team have been guided by these attributes. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in a healthy democracy like ours, the Opposition needs not agree with everything that this Government does, but they could at least listen to the World Bank which stated last week that this virus has brought a devastating blow for world economy. And I request our hon. friends on the other side of the House to realise that this Government, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, is not only taking measures for the benefit of our people and also is providing a roadmap to relaunch our economy.

When I talk of our Prime Minister, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, who is also the leader of the party to which I belong, that reminds me that even hon. Abbas Mamode praises his leader. Hon. Navarre-Marie also did the same, but I did not hear any of the hon. Members from the Labour party praising their leader. And we know why, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the virus originated in China and in China there is a famous proverb which says –

“The bitter the pill, the better it is.”

So, some measures may sound bitter, but we must not forget that all trees that bear sweet fruits have bitter roots. The combination of the pandemic itself and the shutdowns has met billions of people whose livelihood has been disrupted, and that is a matter of great concern. Both the direct consequences, meaning loss of income and also the health consequences, the social consequences are really harsh. The challenge in this time, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that we have to save lives, we have to save jobs and we have to ensure food security. Especially, we have to save lives and the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi Ji said, when he addressed his nation, and I quote –

“*Jaan hai to jahaan hai.*”

Which means the world only exists for you if you are alive. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, again, as time goes on, we realise how the hon. Members of the other side of the House have been irresponsible.

Yesterday, we heard hon. Yeung Sik Yuen saying that he did a survey of the prices of different commodities like *boite sardine*, *cotomili* and I don’t know what else. At that time, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, he should have been at home. He should be in confinement. This is not, of course, an example to follow. That is why maybe when he did his walkout yesterday, no one followed him. He just walked out like they say: the poor lonesome cowboy of Lucky Luke.

The hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has rightly pointed out in his Budget Speech that in these unknown unknowns, what remains constant is the commitment of this Government towards its people. We must also not forget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that unlike us, there are other countries which are still at the threat of this virus and we don’t know what awaits us ahead. If the virus has not been cleared everywhere, it may also mean that it has not been cleared anywhere. Whatever happens, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we must not lose faith. We must be positive and realistically optimistic. It is easier to feel positive when everything goes well, but real positive thinking is revealed when you can maintain it in difficult times. It is then that you did it most, in difficult times when there are problems and the economic condition is tough. It is so easy to get into negative

thinking and pity and be stuck into a vicious circle of worries, fears and expectation of more problems.

The difference between an obstacle and an opportunity, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is our attitude. This Government has cultivated an optimistic mind in our people and this budget sets the foundation for us to dare, to believe that we can make possible what others think is impossible. We did it during the pandemic and we are also going to do it after the pandemic. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when you project positivity all around you, you become a sun. *Vous devenez un soleil*, high in the sky and people want to be near you. *Ensemble avec vous, ensemble avec le soleil*. ‘In every difficulty lies an opportunity’, they say. And with the COVID-19, I witnessed it, for during the pandemic, the behaviour of the Opposition provided the opportunity to Mauritians to understand that they have a Government which is inspiring them and an Opposition which is draining them.

When the Government had to come with a Bill to manage the pandemic, our hon. Members from the other side of the House, did not hesitate a while to provide wrong and false information about the Bill. Some even said that the Bill will be voted here, but outside we will be voted out. But let me tell you. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that they have been out voted and we will continue to do that, because we are a Government which is working for all the people and not just for a few like it was in the past.

During his intervention, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, on Monday, mentioned and praised New Zealand. He mentioned ‘New Zealand’ 11 times, he even concluded with a statement of the New Zealand’s Prime Minister. He could see lots of good measures being taken in a country which is 10,625km away from us, but could not see all the good things happening here. And this is a really very good bad faith!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this reminds me of the defenders of Barcelona football team. They didn’t see Arnold Trent taking the corner kick and the result we know, they are KO. And that’s what the Opposition is, today, KO.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I now come to the Budget. I do not pretend to be an expert in finance matters, but I do understand that the theory of ‘demand and supply’ plays a distinct role in the economy and this Pandemic COVID-19 is having a huge impact on the global economy, because it shocked both the demand and supply sides of the world economy simultaneously.

I endorse the vision of the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development who has made the construction industry the engine of our recovery. Construction, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, is a sector which can boost the economy. This industry had been in contraction in the year 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. It is only as from 2015 that our construction industry has known a growth and which is still increasing even today and last year, the growth in the construction industry reached 8.5% and contributed 4.9% of the GDP.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when I listened to my friends, on the other side of the House, they tend to say that nothing had been done in the infrastructure field during the last five years. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can you please explain to me, how without infrastructure projects, can the construction industry know growth year and year and year? Since the last five years, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the construction industry has known growth. How can we achieve it without having infrastructure projects? At times, they say there have been no infrastructure projects. But when you show them the projects, when you show them the accomplishment of this Government, they say that's a white elephant. I understand the confusion they have in the mind. I let them to clear it out themselves.

Construction is significant to the national output, not essentially being a key driver of economic growth. However, investments in infrastructure can stimulate economic growth in the long run.

Decisions taken now will determine the future shape of the recovery and global growth prospects. We need to lay the foundation for a strong, sustained and socially inclusive recovery, and this is exactly what I would like to highlight here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. From the measures announced, we can see that the objectives of the Government is to build resilient infrastructure and foster innovation, with significant investments in infrastructure and that's how we help spark meaningful growth and end the scourge of poverty.

During the lockdown, the Construction Leadership Council of United Kingdom, which regroups professionals of the Construction Industry from various parts of the globe, came with a roadmap to recovery also goes in the same direction. The Council says so as to have a recovery of the national economy, it is important to have a recovery in the construction sector.

Now is the time to act, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and this Budget should be applauded for the projects announced and also the funds allocated to them. Absence of these measures would have made us miss an opportunity and risks the industry lapsing into a longer-term

recession, which erodes capability and skills, and leaves a smaller and weaker sector as a legacy.

The roadmap by the Construction Leadership Council I mentioned earlier, proposes three phases to the plan. However, the timeframe of the plan and the phases are left to the respective countries Government to decide.

Again, the three Phases are called the '3 Rs', that is, Restart, Reset and Reinvent. Reinvent, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that's what the budgetary measures are proposing. I was a bit shocked when I listened to my friend, hon. Woochit saying that releasing the retention money after six months is going to affect the quality. It is not that the case, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because retention money is not always directly linked to the defects notification period. Even if the retention is released, the contractor will still have the liability and obligation to attend to defects under the civil law and even the contracts can be amended accordingly so that the contractor is made liable to attend to any defects. There are other mechanisms, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, like the retention bond. So, I don't know what the problem they are seeing in this innovative measure for the construction industry. For the construction industry to survive, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is very important that construction firms have a very good cash flow. The release of retention six months earlier that will actually enhance their cash flow and the cash flow is the lifeblood of construction industry. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am sure the construction industry will appreciate this measure.

The projects announced are also tackling our social issues. When we were at school, we were taught that the human being has some basic needs and shelter is one of them. The hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development came with the construction of 12,000 new social houses across the island. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, not only that housing is one of the basic requirements of human beings, but it is also one of the largest employments generating sectors of the economy.

Now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, 12,000 houses to be constructed in three years. The hon. Members of the other side of the House have doubts on our construction industry's ability. Everyone knows when we have volumes this brings innovation. It is an opportunity for our industry to innovate to bring new technology like precasting. It is an opportunity for the industry to mechanise and this is the future of the construction industry as the precasting and mechanisation will bring less labour intensive programme and also we must not forget

that the construction industry is facing a labour shortage and also the industry has an ageing workforce. So, the innovation, mechanisation and precast system, the industry will be relieved.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Rs5.2 billion will be spent on the construction of new roads and bridges and yet, Sir, at no point of time, have we heard this Government talking of monetising these infrastructures. It is still vivid in everyone's mind how when the Verdun link road was under construction, the then Government was talking about tolls. Since this Government is in power, especially under the leadership of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, we have never heard of monetising any of our infrastructures.

Construction, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, does not only bring modernity, but if not carried out properly, can put you to shame, like it was the case of the ring road and the Verdun link road.

The Metro Project, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will have its second phase. The metro which is a landmark project, is projecting the image of a modern country together with this modernisation programme of our bus terminals which will be extended to other main agglomerations of the country starting with Flacq and where some Rs3.2 billion will be spent over the next three years, and this shows the vision of this Government for a modern island.

There will also be massive investment in construction of dams so that the population is not deprived of water. This Government had promised water supply on a 24-hour basis. Lots of regions are having ample water supply and this Budget has allowed for projects like the Rivière des Anguilles Dam at the amount Rs7.5 billion so that other regions can also get adequate potable water supply.

Cruise tourism, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, used to be a deluxe way of travelling for the rich. Nowadays, it is accessible, all inclusive way, to travel for many Europeans and the demand is increasing. The cruise industry is one of the largest growing sectors in the tourism industry. The cruise tourist worldwide has increased from 17.8 million to 30 million during the last decade and it is still growing and also expanding into new destination. This is an opportunity for us to grab and, of course, we need the required infrastructure. This Budget has allowed for the construction of a Cruise Terminal Building which I applaud as this will foster the arrival of tourists.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, stimulation of the private investment - the Budget mentions at Point 34 that the way forward will be to embrace the private investment in the

infrastructure sector. The private sector which has expertise and financial can help make vital infrastructure projects a reality.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are lots of success stories of private investment in public infrastructure. Yet, the private sector accounts for less than 15% of total infrastructure investment in emerging and developing economies globally. These are troubling figures but it would be wise to remember that, by tapping into the private sector, we can unlock the transformative power of infrastructure. Specially at this point of time, as mobilisation of fund is a major challenge for any Government, increase private sector participation and investment will be indispensable to meet the infrastructure financing gap. Of course, as a responsible Government, we need to ensure that the profit incentive of the private sector do not undermine Government's pro poor and other development objectives.

Finally Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will like to just add a few words on the drainage infrastructure and flood management. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I, myself, and my two colleagues of Constituency No. 9, are constantly on the field. We were on the field even this morning. We were on the field before the COVID and we are even now. And let me also remind our hon. friends on the other side of the House that we never ever have the necessity of any *gilet* or *casque intégral* to visit our mandates. Our people are aware that this Government is doing the upmost for the betterment. We are aware of the urgency to have adequate drainage infrastructure so that people do not suffer at times of flash floods. The Constituency No. 9 has several high risk flood prone areas like Résidence Argy, Résidence Hibiscus, Poste de Flacq, Riche Mare, Bonne Mère, etc. I welcome the decision to invest Rs1.2 billion in drains, which will without any doubt relieve our people.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, times ahead are challenging and we will have a new normal, when nothing will be as normal. The coronavirus was not only a health crisis, it is also an imminent restructuring of the global economic order opportunity. For some, near term survival is the only item of the agenda; others are peering through the fog of uncertainty thinking about how to position themselves in this new normal. We still do not know what will the normal look like.

Let us all roll our sleeves and start navigating in the new normal that will be, for sure, unlike any of the proceeding years. The pandemic has changed everything but let us not allow it to change our destiny and the destiny of our country. Let us not let the sacrifice of our front liners go in vain.

Let me cite here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Helen Keller, who said, I quote –

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming (...)”

Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms Foo Kune!

(8.04 p.m.)

Ms K. Foo Kune (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): M. le président, mon premier discours sur le budget a pour toile de fond le contexte très particulier de la COVID-19. La pandémie de la COVID-19 est une épouvantable tragédie humaine. Des gens ont perdu leurs êtres chers, leurs proches, leurs emplois et leurs entreprises. Nous émergeons tout juste de la vie au-delà du confinement et il y a un long chemin pour atteindre une vie au-delà du coronavirus.

Aujourd’hui, nous sommes à un moment décisif de l’histoire de Maurice. Désormais, il nous faut tirer des leçons de cette crise et nous reconstruire. Ce budget est d’une importance capitale car les mesures et décisions impacteront directement sur toute une population dont les vies ont été bouleversées par cette pandémie. Plus que jamais, ce peuple a besoin d’un budget à la hauteur de la situation, au-dessus de nos intérêts personnels ou politiques.

Je suis inquiète par rapport à l’avenir du pays. Une prévision du taux de chômage annoncé par le ministre des Finances à 17% se chiffre à 100,000 chômeurs d’une population active d’environ 500,000 personnes. Le taux de chômage en 2019 était de 6,7%, une hausse de presque 154% prévue.

Ce budget doit avoir pour mission principale de faire repartir l’économie, de générer et sauver les emplois, de sauvegarder les moyens de subsistances et sauvegarder la dignité de nos concitoyens affectés et leur donnant les moyens pour se relever de cette catastrophe. Bien entendu, aucun budget ne serait faire l’unanimité dans son intégralité et notre rôle comme parlementaires est d’évaluer ces points forts, ces faiblesses et son impact sur notre pays et sur la population. C’est donc avec un œil critique que je m’exprime pour mettre les failles en évidence avec l’espoir qu’avec des critiques constructives, arriver à notre but à tous, avant toute chose, pour que notre pays se relève plus fort et plus prospère.

M. le président, permettez-moi de remercier les *front liners* qui, pendant cette rude épreuve de crise sanitaire et d’un confinement de presque deux mois et demi, ont travaillé

sans relâche et de façon altruiste pour garder toute la population en sécurité et en bonne santé. Je salue la prime allouée aux policiers et aux personnels hospitaliers. Mais j'estime que tous les autres *front liners* des secteurs public et privé méritent aussi notre immense gratitude.

M. le président, en ce temps de crise économique, il est demandé au peuple mauricien de se serrer la ceinture. L'effort est requis de partout et de tout le monde et l'exemple doit impérativement venir d'en haut. Faire des économies ne veut pas seulement dire réduire les dépenses mais aussi avoir une gestion des fonds publics en toute transparence et responsabilité afin de donner confiance...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, silence please!

Ms Foo Kune: Afin de donner confiance à l'adhésion de la population à cette solidarité demandée d'elle.

M. le président, on demande aux Mauriciens d'être solidaires et patriotes. Est-ce solidaire et patriote de demander aux Mauriciens de contribuer plus que certains étrangers ? Est-ce solidaire et patriote de refuser l'accès au pays à des Mauriciens bloqués en mer ? Est-ce solidaire et patriote d'expulser les citoyens de leur chez eux en plein confinement ?

M. le président, mon intervention sur ce budget va aborder essentiellement deux sujets: la santé et le tourisme. Mes collègues du MMM ont déjà pris ou prendront le relais pour les autres aspects.

M. le président, je suis soucieuse de la santé de nos citoyens. Nous tous nous n'oublierons jamais cette angoisse d'être peut-être infectés ou d'infecter nos proches, et le choc et la tristesse d'apprendre le décès de 10 de nos compatriotes et je sympathise avec ces familles endeuillées. Je souhaite que nous ne revivions plus jamais ce cauchemar.

La crise de la COVID-19 montre clairement le besoin de renforcer notre résilience face aux pandémies et à d'autres situations d'urgence et dans l'immédiat de consolider notre système de santé publique.

Pendant la pandémie, des failles ont été mises au grand jour comme le manque d'équipements de protection pour nos *front liners*. Médecins, infirmiers et personnels d'hôpitaux et des centres de quarantaine ont dû côtoyer et soigner des patients atteints de la COVID-19 avec par moment peu de protection et la peur au ventre.

Nous savons que la particularité de ce virus est qu'il est hautement contagieux et donc nécessite une protection adéquate en permanence surtout lors des contacts avec les patients infectés.

Le rapport du directeur de l'Audit fait d'ailleurs état des lacunes du ministère de la Santé chaque année. Les ruptures de stock de médicaments sont choses fréquentes. Ce qui indique un réel besoin de revoir la gestion de la chaîne d'approvisionnement.

Aux paragraphes 209 et 210, ce budget décide enfin de donner suite aux recommandations du directeur de l'Audit et d'améliorer la gestion des fonds publics. Cela, malgré qu'année après année, ce rapport vient démontrer clairement l'énorme gaspillage des fonds publics sans que rien ne change.

Je note avec une lueur d'espoir que ce gouvernement décide enfin d'agir sur ses continuelles recommandations et encore en espérant qu'elles seront bien mises en application. Des milliards de roupies sont gaspillés à travers la mauvaise gestion des stocks de médicaments et d'équipements médicaux, méthode d'achat inadaptée, non-conformité aux règles d'achat et mauvaise planification d'achat font que les ruptures sont courantes.

Par conséquent, soit les produits achetés en urgence à un coût beaucoup plus élevé entraînent un gaspillage, soit les produits sont achetés au détriment de la qualité et peut affecter l'efficacité ou même mettre à risque la santé des patients.

Les appareils médicaux sont souvent achetés sans service après-vente adéquat et sont fréquemment hors d'usage et pendant de longues périodes. Mauvais usage, manque d'entretien et réparation retardée entraîne aussi défectuosité et défaillance de ces appareils. Ces délais ont pour conséquence une détection tardive des maladies ou des retards pour prodiguer des soins curatifs, pouvons entraîner des répercussions dramatiques et fatales sur la santé.

Il est grand temps de réparer convenablement et remplacer ces appareils dépassés et défectueux. Il est grand temps de réduire les grandes dépenses inutiles liées aux traitements médicaux à l'étranger et investir dans des appareils afin de pouvoir prodiguer localement certains soins et interventions chirurgicales.

Ce budget prévoit qu'un nouvel entrepôt, destiné à stocker les médicaments, soit construit. Une construction qui se faisait attendre car l'entrepôt actuel à des capacités insuffisantes, est dans un état non conforme.

En 2015, le *Public Accounts Committee* avait qualifié de choquant l'état de cet entrepôt et cette même année, les médicaments périmés ont entraîné un gaspillage de R 105 millions. De 2005 à 2015, le gaspillage en médicaments périmés s'évalue à R 1 milliard.

M. le président, le traitement des maladies non transmissibles représente un lourd fardeau sur le système de santé et l'économie du pays. Il est estimé que pour chaque hausse de 10% en taux de mortalité dû aux maladies non transmissibles, la croissance économique est réduite de 0,5%.

En 2012, les fatalités causées par les maladies non transmissibles ont réduit le subséquent PIB de plus d'un milliard de dollars selon la région africaine de l'OMS. En 2016, 88,7% des causes de mortalité étaient principalement dues aux maladies non transmissibles.

Chaque année, un budget est alloué sous l'item *prevention of non-communicable diseases and promotion of quality of life* et cette année elle est de R 101 millions.

Une étude du représentant de l'OMS à Maurice, publiée en mars cette année, analyse les faiblesses de notre système médical pour la prévention et le soin des maladies non transmissibles. Cette étude trouve de nombreuses lacunes et dénonce un manque de sensibilisation et de responsabilisation de la population envers les maladies non transmissibles et souligne un manque de volonté politique.

M. le président, nous avons constaté comment certaines personnes sont plus susceptibles à développer des complications liées à la COVID-19, surtout quand ces personnes souffrent de pathologies antérieures telles les maladies non transmissibles. La comorbidité est un facteur aggravant pour les patients de la COVID-19 et malheureusement, une association parfois même mortelle.

L'activité physique joue un rôle prépondérant dans la prévention et le soin des maladies non transmissibles et donc joue aussi un rôle important pour prévenir les conséquences graves de la COVID-19.

Le budget alloue R 18 millions pour l'*awareness and sensitisation campaign*. Malgré cela, l'étude menée par l'OMS à Maurice, a conclu que les actions requises pour promouvoir l'activité physique dans le cadre de la prévention des maladies non transmissibles sont limitées et restreintes. Les analyses de l'OMS parlent d'elles-mêmes.

L'étude démontre aussi que la sensibilisation à l'activité physique et les programmes d'éducation physique dans les écoles sont inadéquats. Une culture sportive et active devrait

débuter dès le plus jeune âge qui donnerait à ces enfants davantage de chances de devenir des adultes actifs.

Ce budget double la taxe actuelle sur le sucre pour but de réduire la prévalence du diabète à Maurice. Depuis le 05 juin déjà, les boissons sucrées telles que les jus et boissons gazeuses ont augmenté et à partir du 01 novembre, des rayons entiers des supermarchés vont à la hausse avec l'augmentation des prix des grands nombre de produits comme biscuits, chocolats, céréales, yaourts et j'en passe. Pour que cette mesure porte vraiment ses fruits, elle devra être couplée d'une plus performante stratégie de sensibilisation et d'une meilleure volonté politique.

M. le président, permettez-moi de faire une parenthèse sur le sport de haut niveau. Pendant le confinement, des athlètes de haut niveau étaient livrés à eux-mêmes dans le flou et sans direction nécessaire.

Le budget prévoit une enveloppe de R 5 millions pour la préparation aux jeux olympiques de Tokyo et R 10 millions pour celle de Paris. Permettez-moi de partager mon expérience en tant qu'athlète qualifiée des jeux olympiques de Pékin de 2008. Je prends l'exemple de mon sport, le badminton, dont les critères de qualification aux jeux olympiques se basent sur les 10 meilleurs résultats au cours d'une année des compétitions entérinées par la fédération internationale. En faisant un simple calcul, au badminton l'athlète doit donc participer à un minimum d'une compétition par mois au cours de la période de qualification de 12 mois. Et c'est le strict minimum car ce serait inhumain qu'un athlète fasse un sans-faute sur chacune des compétitions d'où la nécessité d'une participation à plus de 10 compétitions. Je vous laisse faire le calcul. Un minimum de 10 allers-retours sur une année de Maurice vers l'étranger. Ajoutez à cela, les frais de logement. Et c'est le compte uniquement pour un seul athlète.

Cet exemple démonte l'ampleur des exigences financières d'une qualification olympique. Avec la dotation maigre du budget, la plupart des athlètes devront donc se fier sur d'autres sources de financement pour espérer se qualifier pour les jeux olympiques.

L'Ile Maurice abrite de nombreux athlètes de grand potentiel. Il faudra juste avoir foi en eux et leur donner les moyens nécessaires pour qu'ils puissent réaliser leur plein potentiel.

M. le président, le virus de la COVID-19 n'attaque pas seulement notre santé physique, elle augmente également les souffrances psychologiques, un nombre croissant de personnes sont proies à l'angoisse à cet avenir incertain. Plus de 200,000 personnes souffrent

déjà de troubles mentaux à Maurice dont la majorité souffre de dépression. Ce budget néglige l'importance d'une bonne santé mentale malgré que la pandémie de la COVID-19 frappe désormais avec un stress mental supplémentaire. Et qui se soucie de la santé mentale de ces hommes, femmes et enfants qui, en addition, subissent le traumatisme et déchirement de témoigner leur chez-soi détruit par des bulldozers?

M. le président, le virus a aussi démontré la vulnérabilité des *seniors*. Il est démontré que la santé physique est étroitement liée à la santé mentale. Je plaide, donc, pour la mise sur pied d'un programme pour améliorer l'espace social des *seniors*. Un programme qui va plus loin que les clubs du troisième âge et qui vise à l'amélioration de l'estime de soi à travers une revalorisation de leur expérience de vie. Cela contribuera grandement pour les faire trouver une place digne dans la société d'où une amélioration de leur santé mentale.

M. le président, au paragraphe 252, une introduction d'un indice de la qualité de l'air sera utile pour surveiller et évaluer la qualité de celle-ci. Mais quelles sont les mesures prises pour contrôler la pollution de l'air et sanctionner si les indices sont trop élevés ? A moyen et long terme, améliorer la santé environnementale de notre pays signifiera réduire la vulnérabilité des habitants aux pandémies futures en améliorant leur état de santé. Prendre en compte et réglementer les facteurs environnementaux qui agissent sur des aspects de la santé et du bien-être humain, tels les agents physiques, chimiques et biologiques dangereux présents dans l'air, l'eau, les sols, les aliments et d'autres milieux. Développer de façon extensive l'agriculture locale est louable et nécessaire, mais par souci de protéger la santé de nos citoyens, le taux de pesticides dans les légumes produites et mises en vente localement doit être soumis à des contrôles plus stricts et les contrevenants doivent être sanctionnés plus sévèrement. Nombreux sont nos médecins qui n'hésitent pas à dire que le taux incontrôlé et excessif des pesticides dans les légumes que nous consommons est étroitement lié à l'augmentation des cas de cancer.

M. le président, la protection et le bien-être des consommateurs ne doivent pas être cantonnés qu'à un étiquetage obligatoire pour les produits végétariens mais devraient aussi rendre obligatoire les tickets nutritionnels sur tous les produits alimentaires.

M. le président, cette pandémie a mis en évidence par surcroît l'importance de l'accès à l'eau, pas juste à une eau propre à la consommation, mais à l'assainissement, ayant le pouvoir de freiner la transmission des maladies infectieuses. Budget après budget, ce gouvernement prône l'amélioration de la distribution d'eau. Une promesse de l'eau 24/7 qui

s'essouffle. Il est maintenant grand temps pour que ce gouvernement s'investisse pour répondre à ce besoin légitime de toute la population. L'eau n'est pas un luxe, mais une nécessité de base. Toute privation atteint la personne dans sa dignité de citoyen du 21^{ème} siècle.

M. le président, j'ai écouté attentivement au plan de soutien de notre secteur du tourisme. Tout comme les 130,000 personnes employés directement et indirectement dans ce secteur, non seulement je suis restée sur ma faim par le manque de substance et de contenu, mais aussi déconcertée d'entendre qu'il y a absolument aucune stratégie pour sauver les emplois. Tous ces employés sont dans le flou et dans l'angoisse, car ils constatent que non seulement les amendements au *Workers' Rights Act* facilitaient déjà leur licenciement, mais désormais que rien n'est fait pour empêcher les hôtels et autres opérateurs touristiques de mettre à la porte leurs employés. Ceux qui seront licenciés, se retrouveront-ils qu'avec une allocation mensuelle de chômage technique de R 5,100 et cela pour les six mois à venir? Qu'a deviendront-ils au-delà de ces six mois? Bénéficieront-ils aussi du *Transitional Unemployment Benefit*? Des questions qui restent sans réponse.

Dans ma circonscription, l'hôtel, Le Club Med emploie de nombreux habitants de cette région, notamment d'Albion, Canot, Gros Cailloux et Petite Rivière et ces mandants me partagent leur affliction et inquiétude par rapport à leur avenir. Ces pères et mères de famille trouvent que cette modique somme est nettement insuffisante pour payer les factures, loyer et de quoi nourrir leur famille. La préoccupation est aussi du côté des agences de voyages, restaurants, plaisanciers, chauffeurs de taxi d'hôtel, artisans, artistes, fournisseurs de légumes aux hôtels. Et qu'a deviendront-ils de ces *self-employed* qui dépendent du tourisme? Le tourisme mérite une attention particulière. Ce secteur sera sans nul doute le plus affecté par la crise économique, déjà de par l'incertitude du timing de la reprise de ses activités et de la durée de la pandémie. Non seulement une centaine de milliers d'emplois sont en jeu mais le tourisme représente 24% de notre PIB, source importante de devises étrangères, ayant un effet multiplicateur et vital à notre économie. Ce serait plus juste de venir avec une stratégie de sauvegarde d'emplois spécifiques aux secteurs touristiques.

Pourquoi ne pas avoir étendu le *Wage Assistance Scheme*? Par rapport à l'aide accordée à notre transporteur national *Air Mauritius*, il est nécessaire que des sommes soient allouées pour la sauvegarde des emplois. Je salue néanmoins les exemptions de paiement des licences et de locations de terrains de l'État, mais ces frais ne représentent qu'une infime partie des charges totales des entreprises. Est-ce que ce sont ces mesures qui les sauveront ?

Selon l'organisation *Tourism Economics*, la demande internationale pour les voyages ne retrouvera pas son rythme habituel avant 2023. En sus, les entreprises du tourisme se retrouvent avec des dépenses additionnelles, une plus grande contribution à travers la CSG. La dure réalité sera le nombre massif d'employés au chômage technique et une reprise à la normale pas prévue pour un avenir proche. Il faudra, donc, mettre en place des mesures d'encadrement et plan d'aide pour une réorientation et formation à d'autres métiers.

Au paragraphe 88, le budget parle de l'élaboration d'une nouvelle stratégie par la *MTPA* et l'*EDB*. Toute élaboration nécessitera certainement de temps et la sauvegarde de l'industrie du tourisme et de ses emplois est chose urgente. Déjà même avant la crise, les arrivées touristiques étaient en baisse, pendant que nos concurrents directs, eux, connaissaient de forte hausse d'arrivée, les revenus touristiques ont chuté d'environ R 1 milliard de 2018 à 2019. Cela démontre que la stratégie adoptée est inchangée depuis des années ne marche plus. C'est le moment et l'occasion de changer de modèle économique et stratégique.

Le paragraphe 92 dit que la *MTPA* invitera la presse internationale, tours opérateurs et agences de voyages pour faire découvrir notre offre touristique. Tels sont des initiatives prises maintes fois dans le passé. Cela n'est ni innovateur ni créatif, il serait judicieux d'investir dans le marketing numérique, sortir des sentiers battus et offrir un choix plus large et divers dans notre gamme de produits et services, par exemple, penser à l'écotourisme, aux touristes solidaires qui offriront une expérience plus authentique de la vie mauricienne tout en respectant l'environnement, proposer une destination zen et séjour bien-être, offrir la possibilité de se ressourcer, développer le tourisme culturel et patrimonial, mettre en valeur nos produits locaux et artisanaux, notre cuisine mauricienne, développer les loisirs sportifs de nature, promouvoir notre atout plein air. La pandémie veut que les activités en extérieur soient privilégiées.

Dans beaucoup de pays d'Europe, certaines activités en intérieur sont interdites soit restreintes et contrairement à ses pays, l'île Maurice bénéficie d'un temps favorable tout au long de l'année. Investir dans une meilleure formation du personnel afin d'offrir un service de qualité, créer des centres d'accueil touristique dans les villes et villages.

J'accueille favorablement un *Cleaning and Embellishment Programme*, car selon les récents sondages, au fil des années, de moins en moins de visiteurs jugent convenable la qualité de l'environnement.

Au fil des années, les visiteurs se sentent aussi de moins en moins en sécurité. Outre, le rabais sur la location de terrain publique dans le cadre de l'*Hotel Reconstruction and Renovation Scheme*, dans le cadre de la relance verte, proposer des *stimulus funds* additionnels pour des rénovations qui seront écologiques et durables, et même la formation du personnel en compétence écologique. Il faudra se fier sur une clientèle de qualité au dépend de la quantité, car avec la récession mondiale, nombreux sont-ils à ne plus pouvoir s'offrir le luxe de voyager et, ajouté à cela, il est prévu une hausse des prix de 50% sur les vols pour que les transporteurs atteignent la rentabilité.

Il nous faudra être rassurants et donner confiance aux voyageurs et promouvoir notre destination comme *COVID-free*. Avec le nombre réduit de voyageurs, la concurrence sera encore plus féroce, sans oublier que nos îles voisines sont aussi *COVID-free*. Selon l'Association internationale du transport aérien (IATA), l'impact sur le segment du voyage long courrier sera bien plus sévère et durera plus longtemps. Il faudra, donc, dans un premier temps, encourager un tourisme local et régional.

M. le président, le protocole mis en place et les précautions sanitaires prises seront primordiales, car notre appellation *COVID-free* est très fragile. L'efficacité de celui-ci déterminera grandement la pérennité de cette appellation, non seulement pour préserver ce label, mais aussi afin d'éviter une deuxième vague et protéger la santé des employés du secteur du tourisme et de toute la population. Un seul paragraphe dans le budget parle du protocole mis en place de l'arrivée jusqu'au départ. J'ai, moi-même, posé une question au Premier ministre le 5 mai dernier au Parlement à propos du protocole mais qui, à ce jour, est restée sans réponse.

Quelle est la stratégie pour prévenir et contrôler la propagation des maladies à travers le voyage? Aucun détail, le flou total ! Il nous faut investir dans des appareils modernes de dépistage à l'aéroport et au port, former plus d'officiers de santé afin d'augmenter notre capacité de dépistage au frontière et informer tous les passagers Mauriciens voyageant à l'étranger sur les maladies transmissibles et les précautions à prendre.

M. le président, à long terme, l'avenir du tourisme dépendra beaucoup d'une volonté réelle de changement et dépendra surtout sur les incitations offertes par le gouvernement à le faire.

M. le président, avant de conclure, je m'exprime quant à l'avenir de nos jeunes. Les jeunes sont des laissés-pour-compte dans ce budget. Avant même la COVID-19, 25% des

jeunes se retrouvaient sans travail. Désormais, avec cette crise, les jeunes sont particulièrement vulnérables aux dégâts sociaux et économiques. Ces jeunes débutent à peine leur carrière et sont à une étape cruciale dans le développement de leur vie, mais se trouvent au milieu d'une conjoncture difficile, où leurs perspectives d'embauche sont réduites. Un vrai plan de relance est nécessaire pour les jeunes. Investir dans nos jeunes, c'est investir dans l'avenir du pays.

M. le président, le bien-être familial et la protection des personnes vulnérables sont des aspects particulièrement importants en ce moment de crise, où les incertitudes face à l'avenir, les soucis associés aux pressions économiques et sociales peuvent créer une dynamique familiale difficile et exacerber les tensions au sein des ménages. Par conséquent, pendant le confinement, on a constaté l'augmentation en flèche de violence domestique, aux nombres exorbitants et choquants de 812 cas rapportés, dont 463 envers les enfants. Au début du confinement, qui n'oubliera pas l'horreur du meurtre d'une fille de 10 ans aux mains de sa mère et du concubin de celle-ci, et cela, malgré que ce couple était déjà connu des officiers de la *CDU*, car la fille était une enfant battue et victime d'abus sexuel. Il est grand temps d'offrir une meilleure protection à nos enfants et de venir avec le *Children's Bill*.

M. le président, avec les générations futures en tête, ce sera l'occasion pour nous de *build back better*. Avec l'impératif de la reprise économique, la tentation est grande pour oublier la durabilité de nos actions. Il faudra s'assurer que nos actions visent à ne pas nuire à l'environnement en déclenchant d'autres problèmes plus graves à l'avenir. L'enjeu sera aussi de ne pas perdre de vue le défi primordial que constitue le changement climatique, faute de quoi, les générations futures devront non seulement rembourser la dette massive qui s'accumule, une dette d'approximativement R 300,000 par habitant, mais aussi supporter le fardeau consistant à faire face aux crises futures liées au changement climatique.

M. le président, une société durable ne saurait être bâtie avec en son sein de grandes inégalités sociales. C'est un cancer qui ronge la société mauricienne, et qui demande une attention immédiate et toute particulière avec un budget adéquat. Nous sommes assis sur une poudrière et nous avons le devoir de les amorcer durablement.

M. le président, nous sommes conscients de la portée majeure de ce budget. L'heure est grave, et je formule le souhait pour que nous ayons un débat constructif, au-delà des penchants de partisanerie, de manière que quand la crise sera loin derrière nous, que nous

pourrons être fières de la collaboration et des décisions prises et de la manière que nous avons agi aujourd'hui.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, Mr Speaker will resume the Chair.

At this stage, Mr Speaker took the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Tour!

(8.36 p.m.)

Mrs M. J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): M. le président, il y a environ trois semaines de cela, plus précisément, le 14 mai, quand l'honorable Dr. Padayachy, le ministre des Finances a conclu son intervention lors des débats du *COVID-19 Bill* comme suit, et je cite –

« Les Mauriciens et Mauriciennes ont donné au Premier ministre et aux membres de sa majorité gouvernementale ce qu'ils ont de plus cher, leur confiance. Nous ne les décevront pas ».

M. le président, parole donnée parole sacrée. Alors que beaucoup craignait que cet exercice budgétaire allait être '*enn budget serre ceinture*', le peuple a finalement poussé un ouf de soulagement. Car ce budget présenté dans un contexte extrêmement difficile certes, vient néanmoins, soulager les Mauriciens. Face à un avenir bondé d'incertitude, le ministre des Finances a su, en annonçant des mesures non-seulement courageuses mais fortes, préserver l'essentiel et renouveler l'engagement de ce gouvernement envers son peuple, c'est-à-dire, le bien-être de ses citoyens avant tout.

M. le président, c'est la toute première fois que je commente un discours du budget dans cette auguste Assemblée. C'est aussi la première fois que l'honorable Dr. Renganaden Padayachy se prête à l'exercice budgétaire. C'est la première fois depuis l'indépendance que Maurice fait face à une situation économique et sanitaire terrible. Devant autant inédits, nous devons prendre la mesure de l'évènement face aux prévisions des contractions de l'économie, de fermeture d'entreprise et de perte d'emploi, là, où on aurait été tenté par une politique de facilité, d'austérité, le ministres des Finances, suivant la politique et la philosophie du Premier ministre, vient avec un budget qui consolide à la fois la justice sociale et prépare le pays à la relance de son économie. Le gouvernement reste ainsi fidèle au programme sur lequel il a été élu.

Pendant la période de confinement, on a été témoin d'un grand élan de solidarité sur tous les échelons sociaux du pays. Cet élan, dont le Premier ministre s'est fait le chantre, en réduisant son salaire et ceux des membres de la majorité, est aujourd'hui perpétué dans ce budget qui fait une large place au social. M. le président, pour son baptême de feu, le ministre des Finances aurait sans doute préféré de meilleures conditions afin de bien mettre en place le projet gouvernemental pour les prochains cinq ans.

La COVID-19 est venu placer devant lui, un obstacle conséquent, mais à vaincre sans péril, il n'y a pas de gloire, nous dit l'adage, et je suis convaincue que c'est cela qui a motivé l'honorable ministre pour venir de l'avant avec un budget à la mesure du défi imposé par les conséquences de la pandémie, mais aussi en adéquation avec les aspirations du peuple.

Doté d'une vision pragmatique, le ministre des Finances nous propose un plan constructif et nous le voyons clairement quand ce budget parle de reprise économique pour encourager l'investissement, de réformes structurelles dynamiques pour faire face aux défis de taille qu'engendre cette crise sanitaire, tout en faisant de l'inclusion sociale une philosophie de l'action. M. le président, le pays dispose désormais d'un plan efficace pour sortir de cette crise sanitaire, mais aussi pour nous préparer à la nouvelle normalité, l'économie de la vie. Un plan qui fait de la relance de l'économie, son cheval de bataille car sans la relance de celle-ci, il nous sera impossible de continuer à protéger les plus vulnérables de notre société. C'est notre devoir en tant que gouvernement responsable, n'en déplaise, aux sempiternels esprits chagrins, qui polluent actuellement les réseaux sociaux derrière leurs écrans, dans le confort de leur salon. Il nous fallait donc un budget pour assurer la reprise économique, encourager l'investissement, mettre en avant des réformes structurelles, un budget pour préparer les nouveaux défis technologiques, assurer la transparence en matière de services financiers, et réduire notre dépendance alimentaire.

Ce présent budget, M. le président, nous assure tout cela, avec en plus, la philosophie qui a toujours caractérisé l'action de ce gouvernement et de notre Premier ministre, *always cater for the needy*.

M. le président, j'aimerais m'appesantir sur ces mesures préconisées qui prônent la justice sociale et viennent apaiser les appréhensions de la population en général, mais surtout, de l'emploi menacé par l'impact de la pandémie. Ainsi, 15 milliards seront injectés afin de minimiser les licenciements et ceux qui se retrouveront au chômage technique bénéficieront d'une allocation de R 5,100 pendant six mois.

Placer le peuple au cœur de notre vision a toujours été l'ambition de ce gouvernement. Donner à chaque famille un toit décent est une politique qui distingue cette ambition. Ainsi, grâce à l'enveloppe de 12 milles, qui a été alloués pour la construction de logements sociaux à travers l'île, 12 milliards d'unités seront construites pour répondre aux besoins des plus vulnérables, mais aussi des familles à faible et moyen revenu.

M. le président, je me permets ici de dénoncer l'instrumentalisation de la pauvreté, et particulièrement celle des enfants, par certains qui tentent de troubler l'ordre de la république et de faire croire que ce gouvernement ne tient pas à cœur les moins fortunés. L'allocation de ces logements se fera de manière juste et ciblée, avec une attention spéciale pour ceux qui sont au plus bas de l'échelle. Les méritants recevront leur maison, et je suis sûre que mon collègue, le ministre des Terres et du Logement, s'assurera que cela se fasse dans le respect du droit et de la méritocratie. M. le président, il est impossible de prédire à ce jour si, et quand la vie reprendra son cours normal. Il est donc impératif d'entamer des étapes prioritaires pour faire face à la complexité de cette crise, et de s'ajuster à notre nouvelle normalité. L'île Maurice est aujourd'hui confrontée à des urgences sanitaires, économiques, et sociales, qui doivent être traitées conjointement pour endiguer la COVID-19. L'impact combiné de ces chocs représente un défi de taille. Il n'y a pas de formule magique. Si les moyens octroyés dans ce budget, vise à amortir l'impact dévastateur sur les gens et sur notre économie vulnérable, il nous faudra l'engagement de tout un chacun pour refaçonner l'avenir de la nation mauricienne. Néanmoins, derrière chaque crise émergent des opportunités. Cet ennemi invisible qu'est le Coronavirus, est venu mettre à jour l'urgence de se réinventer, et la relance qui s'amorce, nous offre une occasion de reconstruire en mieux autour de nouvelles réalités. Un retour à l'essentiel en optimisant nos ressources de base, une urgence climatique, qu'il est plus que nécessaire de confronter grâce à une protection de l'environnement axée sur un objectif durable et essentiel, un système éducatif qui doit s'adapter à la fois, aux nouvelles exigences de l'économie, et du sociale, mais aussi pour prendre davantage des apports de la technologie. Pour l'urgence de nos actions à mener, le champ d'action mise en exergue dans ce budget, est tout à fait pertinent, et cadre bien dans le concert de mesures à prendre pour répondre à cette crise sanitaire.

M. le président, les Mauriciens ont un rapport viscéral avec la terre. Nos ancêtres sont venus sur cette île pour la cultiver. Cette vocation agricole qui a assuré notre développement pendant plus de quatre siècles, a diminué au cours de ces dernières décennies. Mais le confinement sanitaire a fait ressortir de façon éclatante, l'importance de retourner à la terre,

afin d'assurer une autosuffisance alimentaire. Il a aussi confronté le gouvernement dans sa politique agricole déjà entamée et qui vise à agrandir les surfaces cultivables et encourager la population de produire ses propres fruits et légumes.

Le budget 2020-2021 prévoit différents plans de soutien aux planteurs à travers la DBM. Révétons ici le *New Agricultural Loan Scheme* d'une valeur de 5 millions, qui permettra de convertir des terrains abandonnés en culture vivrière et qui aidera les planteurs à utiliser de nouvelles techniques de culture. Le *Mechanisation Loan Scheme*, d'une valeur d'un million de roupies pour l'acquisition d'équipements permettant de réduire les coûts de production, 1 million sous le *Seed and Seedling Loan Scheme* encouragera les planteurs à investir dans les semis et jeunes plantes. Et toujours, dans l'optique de la sécurité alimentaire, un emprunt à hauteur de R 25,000 sera possible sous le *Backyard Gardening Scheme* afin d'encourager les ménagères à produire pour leur consommation.

Un pessimiste, M. le président, voit de la difficulté dans chaque opportunité. Alors, qu'un optimiste voit l'opportunité dans chaque difficulté. Je choisis, M. le président, de voir le *Backyard Gardening Scheme loan* avec un regard optimiste car il nous ouvre les portes de plusieurs possibilités. Cette mesure, qui non seulement, favorise l'autosuffisance alimentaire, nous envoie une image de vivre ensemble. Imaginons, par exemple, la création d'un jardin communautaire, animé collectivement par un groupe commun d'habitants, ayant pour objectif de tisser des liens sociaux, de proximité et de partage, et je compte bien promouvoir ce concept auprès des ménagères dans ma circonscription. En sus de produire pour leur propre consommation, les ménagères, en vendant le surplus, seront aussi plus à l'aise financièrement, donc plus autonomes. C'est une question de perception, le verre est à moitié vide ou il est à moitié plein.

M. le président, j'aimerais aussi souligner toujours au titre de l'autosuffisance, mais dans un cadre plus élargi, les mesures d'encouragement pour la production locale dans le secteur manufacturier à travers les *incentives* pour le label, '*Made in Moris*', le quota de 10% de produits locaux dans les rayons de nos supermarchés et l'engagement du gouvernement à acheter au moins 30% de produits locaux *speak volumes* sur le soutien de ce budget aux producteurs locaux.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne l'environnement, les efforts déployés démontrent la détermination de ce gouvernement de mettre le cap vers une transition durable, inclusive, et plus respectueuse de l'environnement. Si la pause pandémie a permis à dame nature de

reprendre son souffle et de se régénérer, elle nous a aussi permis de mieux saisir le lien fragile entre les équilibres qui existent entre la santé, l'éducation, le travail, l'économie et l'environnement. Et cela, nous pousse à renforcer notre conviction à œuvrer pour entamer les mesures correctives nécessaires sur un certain nombre de secteurs afin d'atténuer les effets néfastes du changement climatique et d'une meilleure protection de l'environnement. Il s'agit d'une alternance qui reposerait sur les trois fondements suivants: une gestion des déchets, la transition vers une île Maurice plus verte, le renforcement des mécanismes pour l'atténuation des risques dus au changement climatique et la protection de nos ressources marines.

Avec une enveloppe de R 100 milliards, le budget 2020-2021 nous donne les moyens de mettre en place les attentes des Assises de l'Environnement, qui se sont tenues en décembre 2019 dans foulée de la constitution du nouveau gouvernement. Cela va nous permettre d'opérer la transition vers une économie plus propre, plus verte, durable, à faible émission et à pouvoir avoir un pays plus résilient au changement climatique. Il est important de souligner l'investissement dans le recyclage qui va permettre une économie circulaire et créer des opportunités d'emploi, la mise à disposition d'*eco bags* dans les lieux stratégiques à travers toute l'île pour récolter les déchets plastiques et la construction dans ces stations de transferts seront des exemples. Mais, il est surtout réconfortant de voir que le ministre de l'Environnement encouragera le tri des déchets à la source et que les autorités locales procéderont au compostage des déchets de marché. Je me réjouis également que toutes les activités de recyclage seront classées comme activités de fabrication et bénéficieront ainsi des différents régimes fiscaux et autres mesures d'incitation.

M. le président, révélons aussi l'accent qui est mis sur la qualité de l'air. Nous avons encore la chance de respirer un air pur dans la plupart des régions de notre pays. Mais il faut aussi que cela soit le cas partout. La création d'un *Air Quality Index* est une initiative qui augmente nos atouts en tant que destination touristique.

M. le président, ce budget jette aussi les bases de notre future et surtout ceux de nos enfants. Dans le précédent mandat, le gouvernement avait apporté une révolution fondamentale dans le système éducatif, en introduisant *le 9-year schooling*, permettant ainsi une démocratisation du savoir et une éducation plus holistique. Ce présent budget veut aller plus loin en donnant la possibilité au système éducatif de s'adapter à la fois aux nouvelles exigences de l'économie et du social, mais de faire de l'équité le moteur de la reprise de notre système éducatif. La période de confinement a mis en lumière la nécessité d'emmener encore plus de technologie dans les programmes scolaires.

Je me réjouis de voir que le gouvernement investira quelques R 100 millions dans le déploiement d'un réseau local, sans fil, dans 155 écoles secondaires de Maurice et de Rodrigues, et qu'une plateforme nationale d'apprentissage en ligne sera mise au point pour connecter les éducateurs des écoles secondaires à leurs élèves. Mais plus encore, je suis heureuse encore de voir que le ministre des Finances a pensé aux ménages pauvres en leur donnant la possibilité de faire l'acquisition de matériel informatique à des fins éducatives à travers la DBM. Ce caractère inclusif du budget de l'Education se voit dans le montant de R 138 millions à titre de subvention aux ONG qui gèrent des écoles pour enfants ayant des besoins éducatifs spéciaux et la subvention unique de R 100,000 à chaque *Special Education Needs School* gérée par les ONG.

Aux dernières parties de mon allocution, M. le président, je tiens à remercier le ministre des Finances aux noms de tous les habitants de ma circonscription, Port Louis Nord/Montagne Longue, car ces projets innovants n'ont pas empêché l'honorable ministre a accordé un cachet pour les projets de drains essentiels pour endiguer les inondations inhérentes aux conditions climatiques actuelles, et surtout pour pallier aux problèmes d'inondations dans plusieurs endroits de ma circonscription. Ou encore, l'extension du réseau de tout à l'égout et le projet de traitement d'eau usée à Terre Rouge.

La circonscription No. 4 verra aussi l'achèvement du Complexe Polyvalent Abercrombie, la construction et la mise en place du *SME Park* dynamique à Vallée des Prêtres, et sans oublier le *Women Empowerment Centre* de Notre Dame qui sera converti en *Village Shelter* pour filles.

Des fois, à écouter certains membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre, M. le président, on croirait que tout va bien dans le meilleur des mondes. Mais comme l'a mentionné l'honorable Madame Sandra Mayotte dans son discours, nous sommes toujours en état de guerre, mais l'Opposition semble avoir oublié que cette ennemie invisible est bien réelle et que nous devons rester vigilants. Si nous pouvons nous réjouir aujourd'hui d'avoir pu maîtriser le Coronavirus à Maurice, nous avons gagné une bataille mais pas la guerre. Donc, au lieu de décortiquer le budget et de souligner uniquement les soi-disant lacunes de chacune de ces mesures et nous faire part de leurs analyses hors-contexte, je les appelle plutôt à discerner l'essentiel du superflue quand ce budget a été conçu, rappelons-le, dans un contexte exceptionnel, où l'économie mondiale est à l'arrêt.

M. le président, je pourrais continuer ainsi de commenter les vertus de ce budget 2020-2021, pour montrer combien elles répondent aux impératifs actuels, mais le temps qui m'est imparti ne suffirait pas.

Je conclurai, donc, en félicitant le ministre des Finances pour sa vision, son courage, son sens de l'abnégation et son humanisme. Effectivement, M. le président, ce budget a le mérite de placer l'humain au cœur de l'action. Cette nouvelle normalité qui est désormais sur les lèvres de tout un chacun est tout simplement un retour aux valeurs humaines, d'empathie, de solidarité, de sacrifice, de courage, d'innovation et de passion.

Merci à l'honorable Dr. Renganaden Padayachy d'en avoir fait les fondements mêmes de votre budget et de jeter ainsi les bases pour une île Maurice encore plus forte et confiante en l'avenir.

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

The Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training (Mr S. Callichurn): Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Mr Ganoo seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to tomorrow, Friday 12 June 2020, at 3.00 p.m.

Mr Lesjongard seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

Adjournment Matters! Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger!

MATTERS RAISED

(8.55 p.m.)

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - RODRIGUANS & MAURITIANS - CONFINEMENT

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président, j'aimerais interpeller l'honorable Premier ministre, responsable des Affaires intérieures - qui n'est malheureusement pas là - sur la situation des Mauriciens et Rodriguais, coincés entre l'île Maurice et Rodrigues depuis le début du confinement et qui ne peuvent donc pas retrouver leurs proches ou bénéficier de soins médicaux particuliers. Quelques vols ont été prévus, mais il semblerait que ce soit les autorités locales qui décident des passagers et que les vols ne sont pas accessibles à tous, alors qu'*Air Mauritius* avait initialement prévu la reprise des vols à partir du 1^{er} juin.

Je remercie par avance l'honorable Premier ministre de bien vouloir permettre à nos compatriotes de voyager entre les deux îles qui sont visiblement COVID-free, ou alors de bien vouloir émettre un communiqué pour éclaircir la situation.

Merci.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, I will pass on the message to the hon. Prime Minister.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

(8.56 p.m.)

ROYAL ROAD, PHOENIX – SPEED CAMERAS

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, hon. Ganoo.

It concerns the plea from the inhabitants of St. Paul, Clairfonds and Phoenix for the installation of speed cameras along Royal Road, Phoenix, more specifically near the Phoenix Police Station for the following reasons. There has been recently a lot of road accidents and many fatal road accidents over the last two years, until recently, a lady was victim of a hit and run case, and it is a densely populated residential area.

Hon. Minister, I would request you to use your good office to request TRMSU to do the needful for the installation of speed cameras.

Thank you.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member for having raised this matter, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I thank him also for having given me notice of the issue that he wanted to raise. The hon. Member is absolutely right; this is an area which is *à haut risque*. I have already contacted the officers of the TRMSU and confirmation has been given to me that this is an area where we need to explore the possibility of fixing a speed camera. I can assure the hon. Member that we will go through the record and will attend to the problem as soon as possible.

Thank you.

(8.58 p.m.)

MORCELLEMENT MANICK, TERRE ROUGE – AIR & NOISE POLLUTION

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My address goes to hon. Kavy Ramano, Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change. It is a request from the inhabitants of Morcellement Manick, Terre Rouge, whereby there is a laundry factory causing both air and noise pollution in the neighbourhood. So, I would humbly request the Minister to look into the matter urgently.

Thank you.

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): M. le président, les officiers du ministère de l'Environnement ont déjà reçu la doléance des habitants. Nous avons effectué quelques vérifications. Le promoteur en question a été soumis à des conditions additionnelles. Donc, les officiers sont en train de suivre la situation de très près.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nagalingum!

(8.59 p.m.)

ROYAL ROAD, ROSE HILL – OLD GOVT BUILDING & STATE LAND – HEALTH HAZARD

Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the Minister with regard to an abandoned State land and an old Government building situated at Royal Road, Rose Hill and Corner Decaen Street. It was used before as Government Headquarters for the Police. Now, it is in a very bad state, not maintained and represents a health hazard and has become a place for drug users and represents a real danger for the inhabitants in the vicinity. Being given that it is a Government property, especially in the centre of the town of Rose Hill, I appeal to the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change to initiate immediate action to clean and secure this site. I must also draw the attention of the Minister that this issue has been raised in the past by hon. Bhagwan but nothing has been done yet.

Thank you.

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie environnementale de la question, je prendrais le problème avec les officiers de mon ministère et nous ferons le nécessaire s'il y a lieu de procéder à des nettoyages et aussi la désinfection des lieux, mais pour que cela ne puisse causer d'inconvénients majeurs dans le futur, donc, je prendrais la question avec les autres autorités qui sont concernées pour pouvoir cerner les lieux et s'assurer que ce bâtiment ne cause plus d'inconvénients en ce qui concerne l'environnement.

Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(9.00 p.m.)

SENIOR CITIZENS – FREE TRAVEL

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to hon. Alan Ganoo, Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail.

With the partial deconfinement as from 15 May 2020 and social distancing measures, the NLTA has restrained the time interval for our elders who are holders of free travel bus pass between 10.00 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. only, but those who are attending work or hospital for treatment, there is no restriction. It has been brought to my attention that bus conductors of bad faith are forcing them to pay. These concern private bus owners. I would request my colleague, hon. Ganoo, if he can intervene at the NLTA for traffic warden to take necessary action against these bus conductors.

Thank you.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I thank the hon. Member for having raised this issue. In fact, this is an issue which has been canvassed in the media also. The regulations which we came up with due to the COVID-19 to enable us to keep social distancing in the public transport, in fact, prescribed that the senior citizens could travel only during off peak period and the exception to that were when they were travelling for medical reasons or going to work, that would have entitled them to travel during peak hours. What has happened, as the hon. Member has said, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that, in fact, some employees and bus conductors did effectively make senior citizens pay because they contested the fact that these senior citizens were travelling for genuine reasons, that is, they were going for medical treatment or to work. In fact, this is not in order. Either the bus conductor does not admit the senior citizens in the buses because he is not eligible, he does not qualify or if he allows him to travel, he should not make him pay as the hon. Member is informing the House. So, the Member is right. We have heard of some cases where bus conductors have been misbehaving and compelling old people to pay the bus fares which they were not entitled to do. The traffic wardens of the NLTA have been monitoring the situation as much as they can, Mr Speaker, Sir, because, unfortunately, due to the restricted number of traffic wardens at the NLTA, they cannot be present all the time, but we have, on a few occasions, issued communiqués to remind the bus operators the exact

nature of the regulations and that they are not allowed to charge senior citizens for travelling in public transport.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

(9.04 p.m.)

TRANQUEBAR – HOUSES – FIRE OUTBREAK

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): My request is addressed to the Minister of Social Security. Can I request the Minister of Social Security whether emergency shelter arrangements can be made for five families who have no shelter since tonight due to a fire that broke out this afternoon at their premises which has completely destroyed their premises at Jickell Street, Tranquebar. I have just visited them an hour ago and they are just sitting on the pavement having nowhere to go.

Thank you.

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, I wish to express my sympathy and that of Government to these families in this difficult time.

Evacuation centres are usually open in cases of cyclones and floods, but, however, we do make exceptions for victims of an outbreak of fire. In view of the fact that this sad incident has been raised by hon. Osman Mahomed and hon. Uteem earlier this evening, arrangement has been done. So, I have already spoken to the Vice-Prime Minister, hon. Dr. Husnoo and the hon. Minister, Mrs Koonjoo-Shah, for the opening of centres. So, needful has been done to open Centre de Box, Tranquebar and Tranquebar Community Centre to provide temporary accommodation to the victims as from tonight itself.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to also inform the House of the additional assistance provided by my Ministry to fire victims. Clothing allowance per member of household: Rs2,238; cooking utensil allowance per member of household: Rs2,238; furniture allowance per member of household: Rs2,238 and also settlement allowance to head of the household: Rs4,387. We also provide a rent allowance of a maximum of Rs5,000 monthly for a period of at least six months. So, I do hope that all these measures will be of great help to the victims.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

(9.07 p.m.)

TRANQUEBAR – HOUSES – FIRE OUTBREAK

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me, first of all, thank the hon. Minister for her answer.

Ma requête s'adresse au ministre des Terres et du Logement suite à l'incendie qui vient de ravager les maisons de cinq familles à Tranquebar. Je voudrais faire un appel à l'honorable ministre, si ces personnes qui se retrouvent sans toit, c'était des personnes très pauvres qui vivaient dans des maisons de fortune, pouvaient être sur la liste prioritaire de la *NHDC* ou de la *National Empowerment Foundation* éventuellement pour une maison.

The Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I will liaise with my colleague, the Minister of Social Integration to ascertain the precise identity and situation of the persons concerned so that we may crosscheck with the *NHDC* and alternatively the *NEF* if they are already registered and, of course, to the extent possible we will extend the hand of solidarity.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

(9.08 p.m.)

MAHEBOURG-PORT LOUIS – BUS SERVICE

Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Au fait, ma requête s'adresse au ministre du Transport et concerne un manque de bus sur le trajet Mahébourg/Port Louis route 198, plus particulièrement dans la matinée, comme cela m'a été rapporté par quelques passagers.

Serait-il possible de voir avec la *NTA*, Monsieur le Ministre, la possibilité de rajouter au moins deux autobus entre 7.00 et 8.00 heures du matin. C'est un long trajet parfois de 90 minutes et cela aiderait énormément les habitants de la région de Mahébourg d'être à l'heure au travail.

Merci.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Yes, Mr Speaker. I thank the hon. Member for the issue he has raised. I will certainly look into the matter and, tomorrow morning, talk to the officers of the NLTA to remedy the situation.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(9.09 p.m.)

TRANQUEBAR – HOUSES – FIRE OUTBREAK

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you.

Again, pertaining to the fire outbreak, I thank the hon. Minister of Social Security for paying heed to what I spoke to her earlier when I visited the family in the afternoon.

Just one additional request for one particular person who has lost everything, including his wheelchair, Mr Blanche, if expeditiously a wheelchair can be provided to him.

He is one of the victims and this person is a diabetic. All his medicines are gone. So, I would appeal to the Minister of Health if attention could be given to him and also the fire broke out allegedly because of CEB's electric pole nearby.

So, I am aware that the CEB engineer has already completed his report. I hope needful compensation - if ever the report is favourable in that sense - be paid expeditiously to those families who have lost movable and immovable properties.

Thank you.

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Yes, needful will be done provided that the claimant makes an application to the Ministry of Social Security early tomorrow morning.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Gungapersad!

(9.10 p.m.)

POINTE AUX CANONNIERS – TREES – LOPPING

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or): My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community

Development. A few families who live along the coastal road at Pointe aux Cannonniers, have contacted me regarding a few huge *pieds la fourche* found in a private yard whose branches are entangled with electric wires and are dangerously hanging over the main coastal road which is a classified road and falls under the Road Development Authority.

Given that the branches of these trees represent a serious danger to human lives, I request you to do the needful for their lopping.

I will submit a few pictures and the exact location of the said trees to you.

Thank you.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker, Sir, I will look into the matter.

Mr Speaker: Any other adjournment matter? Thank you very much. The House stands adjourned.

At 9.12 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 12 June 2020 at 3.00 p.m.