

No. 19 of 2020



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

FRIDAY 12 JUNE 2020

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 19 of 2020

Sitting of Friday 12 June 2020

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis, at 3.00 p.m.

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2020-2021 - PENSION REFORM

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell) (*by Private Notice*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the pension reform, as announced at pages 22 to 24 of his Budget Speech 2020-2021, he will state –

- (a) what consultations, if any, he has had in relation thereto and, if so, with whom and when, and
- (b) when the last actuarial valuation of the National Pension Fund was conducted, indicating the findings thereof and table copy of the Actuarial Valuation Report.

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): M. le président, en préambule, permettez-moi de remercier le leader de l'opposition d'avoir correctement formulé sa PNQ.

Cela me donne cette fois-ci l'opportunité, et j'aurais souhaité saisir avant, de revenir sur la philosophie de ce gouvernement et d'expliquer en détail les tenants et aboutissants de la Contribution Sociale Généralisée.

M. le président, la philosophie de ce gouvernement est de placer l'humain au cœur de notre développement socio-économique.

Le Budget 2020-21 vient ainsi consolider notre action en faveur d'une meilleure répartition de la richesse nationale. La volonté affichée par le gouvernement en matière d'inclusion sociale tranche singulièrement avec la politique prônée pendant de trop nombreuses années par le gouvernement travailliste.

Ces défenseurs de la théorie du ruissellement ont mené en bateau la population en lui faisant croire que la solution aux inégalités sociales résidait dans un mirage. Celui d'une création de richesse au sommet de la pyramide qui ruissellerait vers les couches inférieures.

Rien de tel n'a cependant été observé alors que l'opposition avait les commandes du pays. Bien au contraire, les inégalités se sont creusées et divers rapports l'ont commenté.

Pourtant, nous savons très bien qu'une hausse des inégalités entraîne un effet négatif sur la croissance économique - pas moi qui le dis. Les chiffres de l'OCDE et du FMI sont là

pour nous le rappeler. Une hausse du coefficient de Gini qui se traduit par la hausse des inégalités de 0,03 point, je le rappelle, entraîne une baisse de la croissance économique de 0,35 point de pourcentage.

Face à ce constat, il nous est inconcevable de faire abstraction de ces données et d'accroître encore plus, par manque de courage, les inégalités économiques et sociales.

M. le président, avec votre aval, je vais dans un premier temps répondre à la partie (b) de la question.

J'ai été informé par le ministère de l'Intégration sociale, de la Sécurité sociale et de la Solidarité nationale que le dernier rapport officiel d'évaluation actuarielle pour le *NPF* a été soumis en février 2016.

Il couvre la période allant de janvier 2011 jusqu'au 31 décembre 2013. Cette évaluation a été menée par Feber Associates en partenariat avec Deloitte. Je déposerai une copie de ce rapport à l'Assemblée.

A titre d'information, permettez-moi de souligner que le rapport démontre un déficit actuariel du Fonds en 2013, c'est-à-dire que la valeur actuelle des passifs existants et futurs surpassait la valeur actuelle des actifs existants et futurs.

De tout temps d'ailleurs, le même constat est ressorti, que ce soit pour le rapport de 2010 ou encore de 2005. A chaque fois, c'est avec des mesures correctives de court terme qu'on a pensé solutionner le problème en réajustant notre stratégie d'investissement.

Mais à chaque fois, cette stratégie palliative a conduit aux mêmes résultats ; l'insoutenabilité à long terme du *NPF*. Nous ne pouvons plus continuer comme cela.

A ce titre, j'ai également été informé par le ministère de l'Intégration sociale, de la Sécurité sociale et de la Solidarité nationale que le ministère a, en mai 2018 et faisant suite à un appel d'offre, nommé la société RisCura Solutions (Mauritius) Ltd pour procéder à l'évaluation actuarielle du *NPF* pour la période 2014-2017.

Cela étant dit, une analyse préliminaire a déjà été réalisée. En se référant au passé, tout indique que nous nous dirigeons vers le même scénario.

M. le président, nous prenons les devants et réformons le système actuel. En premier lieu, nous abolissons les contributions au *NPF* sans pour autant mettre fin au Fonds en lui-même. Ainsi, je tiens à rassurer la population sur le fait que toutes, toutes, je dis bien toutes, les contributions accumulées dans le *NPF* restent dans le Fonds.

A ce titre, chaque roupie cotisée au *NPF* par les employeurs et les employés restera. Ceux qui en sont bénéficiaires continueront de percevoir leurs bénéfices. Ceux qui ont cotisé continueront à recevoir leurs prestations de pension à l'âge de la retraite.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, la réforme de notre système de pension n'est pas un débat qui date d'hier. Cela fait plusieurs décennies que le sujet est sur la table. C'est alors d'autant plus surprenant que le leader de l'opposition semble découvrir cette problématique en juin 2020. C'est donc avec la plus grande pédagogie que j'aborde en toute transparence le sujet.

Depuis des années, les consultations s'enchainent tant au niveau local qu'international. De nombreux rapports ont été élaborés en ce sens. Je m'attarderai sur deux d'entre eux qui montrent clairement la différente prise en considération de ces informations selon le gouvernement aux commandes.

Le FMI avait dans son Rapport Article IV en date de 2012 insisté auprès des autorités mauriciennes à cette époque en charge de la conduite du pays sur le fait qu'une amélioration de notre système de protection sociale était impérative afin de s'assurer, M. le président, que les plus démunis puissent, eux aussi, bénéficier du développement économique et social. Malheureusement, fidèle à son habitude, le gouvernement d'alors a brillé par son inefficacité en préférant enterrer le rapport du FMI et mettre en toute discrétion le sujet sous le tapis. Quelques années après, le FMI revenait à la charge, avec cette fois un gouvernement à l'écoute. Ainsi, dans son *Working Paper* de 2015, le FMI a indiqué, je cite -

« The baseline scenario assumes that BRP benefits grow in line with wages, reflecting the anti-poverty objective of the program, and that eligibility remains universal for individuals aged 60 and older. Under this scenario, reflecting population aging, the current BRP spending of 3.6 per cent of GDP is projected to increase rapidly over the coming decades: by roughly 4½ percentage points over 2015-2050 and another 3 percentage points over 2050-2100. This rapid increase could threaten the overall long-term sustainability of public finances. These amounts would not be financeable with the current tax system. »

Ainsi, ce que le FMI a souhaité mettre en exergue est le fait que notre système de pension, en l'état, n'est pas soutenable.

M. le président, notre démarche a depuis été en phase avec la vision que nous avons toujours portée. Celle d'une société plus juste qui tend vers le progrès social sans pour autant

mettre à mal la durabilité du système. A cet égard, dès 2016, notre Premier ministre avait annoncé et actionné la mise en place d'un *High-Level Committee* sur la réforme de la pension. Ce comité, placé sous la présidence du ministre de la Sécurité sociale, de la Solidarité nationale et de la Réforme des institutions, était composé :

- de l'*Attorney General*,
- du ministre de l'Intégration sociale et de l'Autonomisation économique,
- du ministre de l'Egalité des genres, de l'Enfance, et du Bien-être de la famille,
- du ministre du Travail, des Relations industrielles et de l'emploi,
- du ministre des Services civils et des Réformes administratives ainsi que
- du ministre des Services financiers, de la Bonne gouvernance et des Réformes institutionnelles.

Le comité comprenait également des représentants du ministère des Finances et du Développement économique, du *National Pension Fund (NPF)*, de *Business Mauritius*, et des syndicats du secteur privé et public. Cette première phase de consultation nous avait déjà mis sur la voie de la réforme. Dans le cadre des consultations pré-budgétaires, malgré le confinement entré en vigueur au 20 mars 2020, le ministère des Finances a tenu à proposer une forme de dialogue avec l'ensemble des parties prenantes au sujet de la réforme de notre système de pension. A cet égard, nous avons proposé aux acteurs institutionnels et à la société civile de nous faire parvenir leurs propositions via une plateforme en ligne.

Nous avons mis en place le cadre approprié pour permettre la tenue de consultations pré-budgétaires, et cela, je le rappelle, en plein milieu d'une crise sanitaire et économique sans précédent. Je me saisis de cette occasion pour remercier l'ensemble des acteurs qui ont soumis leurs propositions concernant les améliorations à apporter à notre régime de protection sociale, et notamment vis-à-vis de notre système de pension. Je me permets de souligner que parmi les propositions reçues et au regard des recommandations, certains préconisaient la diminution de R 3,000 par mois du *BRP* et même d'amener, à terme, l'âge de perception des bénéfices du *BRP* à 65 ans. Il est vrai que dans une situation de forte contraction économique, la facilité aurait voulu que nous accédions à ces demandes. Mais, M. le président, cela aurait été une atteinte à notre philosophie et une trahison envers la population. Nous nous y sommes refusés. Car c'est cette même population qui nous a donné sa confiance pleine et entière lors de la plus grande consultation démocratique de notre pays, celle des élections générales de novembre 2019.

M. le président, contrairement à 2006, nous gardons l'essentiel. Alors même que nous sommes confrontés à une forte contraction économique, pouvant aller jusqu'à 11% du PIB, notre engagement envers ceux qui ont le moins est inébranlable. Pourtant, en 2006, dans un contexte économique plus que favorable, où la croissance mondiale affichait +4%, le gouvernement de cette époque n'avait pas hésité à faire des réformes très dures envers les plus vulnérables, et tout cela pour favoriser les plus aisés. Ils avaient ôté - je vais le rappeler, parce que je pense que certains l'ont oublié. Ils avaient ôté le pain de la bouche des écoliers ; ils avaient aboli les subsides sur le riz et sur la farine ; ils avaient aboli les subventions sur les frais d'examen du *SC* et *HSC* ; ils avaient introduit une taxe foncière résidentielle ; ils avaient aussi supprimé la consultation tripartite sur la compensation salariale, entre autres. Ils avaient fait tout cela, M. le président, et en même temps, avait réduit la taxe pour les plus favorisés.

M. le président, ils n'ont jamais consulté la population ; ils n'ont jamais conduit d'étude de l'impact ; ils ne l'ont même pas osé l'annoncer en amont. Bien conscients du contexte actuel incertain mais aussi des attentes de nos concitoyens, nous, nous maintenons le *BRP* à R 9,000 par mois, soit plus de 20% du seuil de pauvreté relative, car jamais nous ne laisserons sur le bas-côté ceux qui ont le plus besoin de notre support. Si aujourd'hui nous avons choisi la voie de la solidarité et de la réforme, vous, vous avez choisi l'égoïsme et l'attentisme.

Merci !

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, condense your reply!

Mr Mohamed: You love listening to your voice!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: C'est bon, merci!

Mr Speaker: Continue and condense your reply!

Dr. Padayachy: C'est tout.

Mr Speaker: You have finished.

Mr Padayachy: Oui, j'ai fini.

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, on such an important issue, I would have expected the hon. Minister to rise to the expectation of the people in this country. I don't intend to condescend to his level, I doubt it whether his own shadow will follow his body when he walks around. Let me ask the hon. Minister who headed the committee on the pension reform for the last five years.

Dr. Padayachy: Je crois, M. le président, qu'il n'a pas écouté la réponse. Je vais revenir dessus à ce moment-là. S'il veut m'entendre de nouveau, je vais le redire ! À cet égard, dès 2016, notre Premier ministre, alors ministre des Finances, avait annoncé et actionné la mise en place d'un *High-Level Committee* sur la réforme de la pension.

(Interruptions)

Ce comité était placé sous la présidence du ministre de la Sécurité sociale, de la Solidarité nationale et de la Réforme des institutions. Je l'ai dit, et ils n'ont pas écouté, M. le président. Je suis désolé, ils doivent écouter ; ils doivent écouter au lieu d'écrire, parce qu'ils ne peuvent pas le faire en même temps.

Dr. Boolell: I don't intend to condescend to your level; you are such a nincompoop anyway! Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he would file a copy of this report or documentary evidence in the light of the committee chaired by the former Minister?

Dr. Padayachy: Quel rapport? M. le président, il a demandé...

Dr. Boolell: On the pension. . .

Dr. Padayachy: Excusez-moi, je n'ai pas encore terminé ! M. le président, j'aimerais qu'il me laisse répondre quand il pose une question. Il n'a pas demandé dans sa *PNQ* ; il m'a demandé de *table* le rapport, si je le dis bien. Quel rapport il a demandé ? Le rapport de l'*Actuarial Valuation of the National Pension Fund*. Je l'ai *table*.

Mr Speaker: Are you talking about this report?

Dr. Boolell: No, when the hon. Minister has referred to the Pension Reform Committee, I am asking him to submit a copy of this report. Well, does the Minister have a copy of the report or documentary evidence of such consultation with regard to the proposed pension reform?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, excusez-moi, je vais répéter la réponse. Il faut écouter la réponse. Je redis, cette première phase de consultation nous a mis sur la voie de la réforme dans le cadre...

(Interruptions)

Je continue - dans le cadre de ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: *Toi ki pa p kompren!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mohamed!

Dr. Padayachy: ...dans le cadre...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mohamed! I am on my feet. This is not good conduct in Parliament. I am on my feet.

Mr Mohamed: Now you are on your feet!

Mr Speaker: Yes, I am on my feet.

Mr Mohamed: I am watching!

Mr Speaker: I am on my feet and you don't comment when the Minister is replying.

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: He gives his own reply so eloquently!

Mr Speaker: You can raise a point of order if you have one, but no comment!

Mr Mohamed: Okay, fair enough!

Mr Speaker: No comment! This is my ruling, no comment!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: Je le redis et je vais terminer là-dessus. J'ai dit, cette première phase de consultation, et j'ajoute « qui était *for internal use* » nous a mis sur la voie de la réforme, et qu'on a continué de notre côté à travailler parce que nous, comparés à ceux qui ont fait des réformes injustes en 2006, nous, nous avons continué à travailler, et c'est notre travail de faire des rapports, des études d'impact. Et dans le cadre

Mr Speaker: Okay...

Dr. Padayachy: Laissez-moi terminer, M. le président, avec votre permission. Dans le cadre des consultations pré-budgétaires - si vous voulez avoir, ça je peux vous le donner ce

rapport - malgré le confinement entré en vigueur au 20 mars 2020, le ministère des Finances...

Mr Speaker: Okay, you made your point!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, non, s'il vous plaît, j'aimerais pouvoir répondre à la question. Il m'a posé une question !

Mr Speaker: You have another question. Come on!

Dr. Boolell: I have many questions. Can I come back to this. Do you have a report, yes or no? And can you table that report?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, c'est incroyable ! Je vais simplement parler pour dire qu'on a plein de rapports qui sont au ministère des Finances depuis 20 ans. Depuis 20 ans, on a des rapports sur les différentes réformes. Nous, nous sommes arrivés avec une réforme que nous pensons qui est juste, parce que nous avons décidé de maintenir l'essentiel. Nous, nous n'avons pas choisi la solution de la facilité. Voilà, M. le président, merci !

Dr. Boolell: I will come back. Do you have the findings of the report in respect of the Committee chaired by hon. Sinatambou? Can we have the findings of this report?

Dr. Padayachy: Je viens de dire que ce rapport, cette première phase, j'ai bien dit, cette première phase de consultation nous a mis sur la voie de la réforme, et que tous les documents étaient « *for internal use* ». C'est tout, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Okay, you made your point!

Dr. Boolell: Now, we know that there is no report. Will the hon. Minister inform the House what is the expected payment under the Universal Non-Contributory Basic Pension Retirement, which a 62 or 63-year old pensioner will receive when the first payment of benefit is made under *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* in July 2020?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, parfois j'ai du mal parce que je pense que quand je parle, on n'écoute pas assez. Je viens de dire, je l'avais dit pendant le budget, c'est que nous maintenons l'essentiel, c'est-à-dire que l'âge...

(Interruptions)

M. le président, je peux répondre, sinon je laisse et j'écoute !

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, let him reply first. We don't know what he is replying. Let us hear, let us listen first!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: He is just bragging.

Mr Speaker: No, this is your own comment!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je reviens là-dessus. Même si on essaie d'intervenir, je vais répondre à cette question. Nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, nous, comme un gouvernement responsable, et surtout solidaire, nous savons que nous devons maintenir la pension, la *BRP*, cette allocation universelle à ceux qui ont 60 ans et plus à R 9,000, et nous le faisons. Et j'ai bien dit, lors de mon discours sur le budget, que les prochaines augmentations - on l'a dit et je le répète - au vu de la situation actuelle, où on est en train d'affronter une des pires crises économiques, nous, nous maintenons l'essentiel à R 9,000, et nous avons le courage de le dire, oui, c'est à partir de 2023 qu'il y aura des augmentations pour la pension pour ceux qui partent à l'âge de la retraite et que ce sera la CSG qui va payer cette augmentation. Donc, oui, on va maintenir la *BRP* à R 9,000 et qu'à partir de juin 2023, si la situation économique le permet, je dis bien si la situation économique le permet en fonction - là, c'est l'économiste qui parle, ce n'est plus le ministre des Finances, parce qu'un économiste sait très bien que dans n'importe quel scénario on peut se retrouver dans un scénario pire. Je ne vais pas dire quelque chose que je ne pourrais pas tenir. Nous, dans ce gouvernement, on a appris sous le leadership de Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, et nous, ce que nous promettons, nous le faisons, nous ne faisons pas le contraire.

(Interruptions)

Nous, M. le président, nous ne venons pas annoncer qu'on va changer la vie en 100 jours, mais qu'après on fait les réformes pour les plus aisés. Merci.

Dr. Boolell: Can I understand that there is no certainty in respect of the additional benefits to be given to those even who have reached the age of 65 or above? Am I to understand this and, if so, can I hear it from the Minister?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je vais répondre clairement. Encore une fois, je vais le redire. Ceux qui ont contribué pour le *NPF* vont recevoir leurs augmentations tous les ans, qu'ils prennent la retraite aujourd'hui ou demain, ils vont recevoir leurs allocations du *NPF* parce qu'ils ont contribué au *NPF*. A partir de juin 2023, c'est écrit noir sur blanc, la CSG rentre et va payer un minimum supplémentaire à tous ceux qui sont à la retraite et, donc, oui, il y aura un minimum, mais dès maintenant je ne peux pas affirmer le chiffre. On est en juin 2020. Je parle de juin 2023, parce qu'on est en pleine crise. Même le FMI l'a rappelé, que

peut-être ce n'est qu'à partir de 2024 que nous allons sortir de cette situation. Mais malheureusement, M. le président, certains veulent faire croire, veulent oublier dans quelle situation on se trouve. On est en train d'affronter la plus grave crise économique jamais eu au niveau mondial et au niveau local. Merci, M. le président.

Dr. Boolell: Can I remind the Minister that was not the pledge made by the Prime Minister at *Domaine Les Pailles*, in the presence of so many elderly persons. What was the pledge? That people as from 60 years of age would be entitled gradually to an increase to the non-contributory pension so that eventually they will reach Rs13,500. Now, what we see, there is a differential treatment in respect of those who will reach 60 and those who will reach 65. I will come to the National Pension Fund. Let me ask him; will he be able to tell the House what will happen to the billions of rupees contained in the NPF with closure of the Fund? What will happen to this sum?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je vais le rappeler encore une fois. J'ai dit, et je redis, et je vais redire encore, le *NPF* reste. J'ai simplement dit que les contributions obligatoires pour le *NPF* seront abolies. Je n'ai pas dit qu'on allait abolir le *NPF*. Je n'ai jamais dit ça. Il y a certains qui veulent faire de la démagogie et qui parlent de cela. On a dit que le *National Pension Fund* va demeurer et va continuer de payer, parce que c'est des comptes individuels dans le *NPF*. Donc, si vous avez contribué dedans, vous allez recevoir ce que vous avez contribué, parce que c'est individuel. Mais à partir de septembre 2020, ce sera une pension collective et solidaire. Oui, M. le président ! Oui, c'est ça, c'est là peut-être où ça fait mal ! C'est que certains, ceux qui sont au-dessus vont payer un petit peu plus pour contribuer pour la pension de ceux qui gagnent moins. Oui, nous, en tant que gouvernement responsable, nous, nous avons décidé de changer cette contribution qui était injuste. Nous, nous avons fait que ceux qui touchent moins de R 50,000 vont maintenant contribuer à hauteur de 1,5% et que ceux qui touchent un salaire supérieur à R 50,000 vont payer 3%. C'est vrai ! C'est vrai que ceux qui touchent plus de R 50,000 vont payer plus, parce qu'avant c'était limité. Mais comme j'avais rappelé, j'ai trouvé et je pense que beaucoup d'entre nous, de cette génération, trouvaient que c'était injuste que quelqu'un qui touchait R 1 million contribuait R 500, donc, un taux de 0,06%, quand celui qui est à R 10,000 contribue R 306, soit 3%. Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister should know that our social security system has been acclaimed worldwide, and what he is trying to do is mobilising a savings for long-term investment and this is preferred to an unfounded scheme operating on a pay-as-you-go basis. This is what he is trying to do, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I ask him to reply to this question?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président,...

Dr. Boolell: More than...

Mr Speaker: Are you replying?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président...

(Interruptions)

Tout simplement, M. le président, je pense qu'il a déjà la réponse et il s'est fait la réponse lui-même ; la question et la réponse. Moi, je réponds. Nous, en 2014...

Dr. Boolell: You are...

Mr Speaker: Are you replying then?

Dr. Padayachy: En 2014, je tiens à le rappeler ici, leur système qu'ils disent acclamé à travers le monde, ils n'arrivaient pas à assurer à la population un minimum de R 5,000. Il faut le rappeler ici, M. le président. A l'époque, ils étaient tous en train de dire que ce n'est pas possible d'augmenter, d'aller plus loin. Je rappelle cela !

(Interruptions)

Nous, nous avons mis la pension à R 9,000. Oui, nous, nous assurerons que la pension serait à R 13,500. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Xavier-Luc Duval!

Mr X.L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, given that the CSG is a straight tax of 9% on employment and being accounted for on page 19 of the revenue of Government in the Consolidated Fund, can I ask the hon. Minister whether this tax is to be applied to the whole working population, public sector and private sector, irrespective of who the employer is?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, la CSG remplace le *NPF* tout simplement. La CSG va remplacer le *NPF* et va payer...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You know the answer then! You know the reply! No need!

(Interruptions)

Next question, hon. Uteem!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je sais que l'ex-ministre des Finances, l'ex-leader de l'opposition, veut donner la réponse lui-même, mais je vais revenir sur cette question et je vais répondre. Le *NPF* rapportait R 3,6 milliards à l'Etat dans le Fonds. La CSG, selon les estimations qu'on a fait pendant la période budgétaire, va rapporter R 3 milliards, donc, moins qu'avant. Parce que nous, nous avons décidé de diminuer le taux par rapport à ceux qui sont plus faibles, ceux qui sont plus vulnérables. M. le président, nous, nous avons mis en place, et je le répète...

(Interruptions)

Laissez-moi terminer ! M. le président, je peux prendre mon temps pour répondre à une question ! Je vous laisse le temps de poser la question !

(Interruptions)

Je ne vous interromps pas, honorable Xavier-Luc Duval !

Mr Speaker: Okay, continue!

Dr. Padayachy: Donc, la CSG va remplacer le *NPF*, et je le dis ici, le *NPF* était payé par le secteur privé. Donc, la CSG sera payée par le secteur privé. Oui, voilà la réponse !

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have a last question?

Dr. Boollell: Mr Speaker, Sir, a specific question has been asked: who has to bear the cost, the whole population or a small minority?

Dr. Padayachy: Mais, M. le président, je ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! Order! The Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

You are a former Leader of the Opposition, not the actual one! The actual Leader of the Opposition is asking a question.

(Interruptions)

Put your question, Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker...

(Interruptions)

Mr X.L. Duval: I have not got a reply, Mr Speaker.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You were the former...

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker...

Mr Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition has the floor!

Dr. Boolell: Yes, alright. But can I ask him...

Mr Speaker: One Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Can I ask the hon. Minister, while the NPF - that's what he said - is regressing, does he agree that the ceiling on contribution was imposed to protect workers at the low-income level? That's why there was a ceiling. Can I ask him again, if something is not broken, why are you trying to fix it, you can reform, but not fix it?

Dr. Payadachy: M. le président, je suis désolé de dire cela, mais je n'arrive pas à comprendre la logique du leader de l'opposition.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Payadachy: En quoi le fait de faire payer 3% à ceux qui sont au bas et 0,06% à ceux qui sont en haut était de protéger ceux qui étaient en bas ? M. le président, je ne comprends pas trop la logique dedans, mais je tiens à souligner que celui qui est à R 1 million va payer plus que celui qui est à R 10,000, parce que celui qui est à R 10,000 va payer R 150, et celui à R 1 million, il va payer 3% sur le R 1 million. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

Dr. Boolell: And you have to face the reality! Has he interfaced...

Mr Speaker: Time is over! Are you putting a question?

Dr. Boolell: Come on!

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.

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.

(3.50 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training (Mr S. Callichurn): Mr Speaker, Sir, I will start by saying thank you to the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development “*pour avoir présenté un budget responsable*” at a time when, not only Mauritius but the whole world is still measuring the damage of COVID-19 pandemic brought to one's economy. As we debate in this House on the bold and innovative measures this budget contains, let us take stock of what we are going through.

Mr Speaker Sir, even in our wildest dreams, no Government on earth ever thought that an invisible virus, Coronavirus, would, so to say, put the whole world under lockdown, thus creating collateral socio economic havoc in every nook and corner of our planet.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No conversation in the House!

Mr Callichurn: Today, it has become the Number One Public Enemy of all humans on this planet.

COVID-19 has infected over 7 million people; took lives of nearly half a million; and it is at the origin of an unknown amount of human sufferings worldwide.

Across the globe, Governments are still battling hard to contain the spread of the pandemic, and science is struggling harder to understand the behaviour of this virus, its origin, how it jumped from elsewhere into human cells, and pharmaceutical labs, researchers and scientists are struggling likewise to find the best medical remedy to cure the disease COVID-19. I sincerely hope and pray, for a remedy the soonest.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our country has not been spared. I take time here to pay tribute to the ten local victims of COVID-19, and to their families who are still mourning the loss of their loved ones.

Nobody yet knows, with surgical precision, for how long the virus will stay with us, how many more people will be infected, how many more lives will be lost and how long the reconstruction works would take. However, we do have a general idea of the breadth and depth of the socio-economic catastrophe lying ahead.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the times of turmoil and great economic turbulences like now, people look at history to make a better understanding of the tasks ahead. During the financial crisis in 2008, well-known economists, among them Nobel Prize winners, looked back at the Great Depression of the 1930s to try to find clues to understand the crisis and, more importantly, to identify the best ways and means to successfully tackle its heavy collateral damages.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a known fact that this Government is praised by one and all to have taken the right decisions, making some hard choices and acting bravely to contain the pandemic. Like all Mauritians, we shall stay focus on this mission and we all shall pray and work harder to keep our country safe.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are two very important things that people also looked for in times of crisis of the magnitude of COVID-19. Worldwide, political scientists and observers spend time to understand the pertinence of political leadership in managing such crisis.

Second, they are interested to know and to understand how really the burden for reconstruction is being shared. On this issue, there is unanimity. Fairness should be the order

of the day in any respected society. And fairness demands that between the weak and the strong, the burden should be shared in such a way that the weak don't collapse while carrying their fair share of the weight.

Our Prime Minister himself mentioned that this Budget translates values of solidarity and sharing with measures concerning construction of social housing, maintaining subsidies on basic goods, lowering the price of domestic gas, comforting the welfare state, etc. This is the philosophy of this Budget.

Coming back to political leadership, Mr Speaker, Sir, what does the history of Mauritius tell us? What does the history of Singapore tell us? What does the history of India, China, Europe or USA tell us?

In successful countries, raised from the rubbles and ashes of wars, from colonisation or armed conflicts or potential border tensions, political scientists underline political leadership as the main ingredient that helped make the difference.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when sanitary catastrophe looming around our shores since the beginning of this year till the fatidic date of March 18, the country has witnessed and has taken good note of the visionary leadership of the hon. Prime Minister.

I don't say so because I here sit on this side of the House.

Between GDP and lives of the population, he had chosen to protect the lives of his fellow countrymen first and foremost. He had in mind the sufferings of the people in other countries. We saw on TV, social media, etc., that doctors in other countries had to make difficult choices. Our Prime Minister simply did not want our doctors here to choose whom to save and who not to.

He acted bravely.

Mr Speaker, Sir, because of lockdown and closure of our borders, many foreigners were stuck here and they have experienced something they would have anyway experienced in their home country also, had they been there.

What do these tourists say? I live in the north and I have met many of them. They say they are thankful to the Government and public authorities for the way the pandemic has been managed right from the beginning. And they say they would come back holidaying here again as they felt safe in difficult times.

This is the truth, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Sure it is, the Mauritian economy is badly impacted and so is the world economy. For us, the serious socio-economic challenges will be met and successfully so, with time. We will surely have other opportunities to debate on the bold measures which this Government took. And we shall see in the future who was right and who was wrong. No matter what, we are all together in this equation. Hard work, discipline, sharing of burden, a sense of patriotism, acting responsibly, sacrifices, all may seem to be old tools.

But they are the right tools we need now and in the future because these tools, when collectively in action, are the quiet force that help build prosperity and peace.

Let us remember the time when this country achieved marvels during the mid-eighties under the shrewd guidance of Sir Anerood Jugnauth...

Today, under the leadership of Pravind Jugnauth, Mauritius shall, and against all odds, recover to prosper again. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sad to say it. But I need to. I respect all Members sitting on the other side of the House. They were the first to voice out that they wish to extend support to face the dire situation we are in. The truth is that many among them are forebearers of a double language policy for the sake of political expediency. In the House, it's one. In public, it's another. In private, it's yet another. The Opposition has displayed lots of criticisms towards Government's decisions. However, they never ever came up with alternative proposals, alternative ideas to shore up today's challenges and difficulties and it's in their political gene not to do so. The truth is that they simply do not have any alternative ideas.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is undeniable that the world of work is being profoundly affected by the pandemic. Workers are facing multiple shocks from COVID-19 crisis and constitute its major victims. Such exceptional circumstances call for bold measures geared towards the preservation of employment and sustainability of enterprises.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the 2020-2021 Budget focuses on three main axes, which I quote -

- (a) rolling out *plan de relance de l'investissement et de l'économie*;
- (b) engaging in structural reforms, and
- (c) securing sustainable and inclusive development

Indeed, in these hard times, the Budget provides for Rs100 billion for the *plan de relance de l'investissement et de l'économie*. This plan shall have the building sector as spearhead, as rightly pointed out by Dr. Padayachy.

Other sectors will have to re-invent themselves in the post COVID-19 period. Our new normal requires, *inter alia*, that we go back to smart agriculture, rebuild our local manufacturing fabrics, support our tourism industry, diversify and deepen the blue economy value-chain.

The prime objective of this Government is to protect jobs which we have been doing since lockdown. We are not doing any favour to the private enterprises as being portrayed inside and outside this House. The assistance in the form of quasi equity and equity, debentures, loans or wage support loans being given to companies in difficulty is for their survival because if they don't survive in this difficult time, jobs also won't survive.

In the context of the *plan de relance* following COVID-19, a Support to Company Scheme has been set up through different organisations. The financial assistance provided to companies is aimed at sustaining operation expenses including wages.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government considered it more appropriate to come up with the above schemes rather than opting for technical unemployment or reduction of wages which would have rendered employment more precarious. To harness this measure, the Workers' Rights Act will be amended to make it a prerequisite for employers to avail themselves of these financial assistance schemes before laying off workers. Thus, no employer shall have the right to give notice of intended reduction of workforce to the Redundancy Board unless an application has been made for financial assistance and the application has been turned down. Subsequently, any termination of employment shall be deemed to be unjustified where and when this procedure has not been followed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened carefully to the critics of the Members of the Opposition and this leads me to the conclusion that either they have not understood what we are actually doing to protect jobs or simply they don't want to understand because they are in the Opposition and it's their motto is to criticise.

I would like here to reply to some comments made on preservation of employment and reduction of workforce.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the *sine qua non* conditions for enterprises to benefit from the above-mentioned financial support schemes is that they should not lay off workers. We are alive to the fact that, nevertheless, some companies will, undoubtedly, not be able to sustain the shock and will have to close down.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind hon. Members on the other side of the House that, as the law stands in the case where termination of employment is justified, a worker will be entitled to 30 days in lieu of notice, and will also benefit from the payment of End of Year Bonus computed on the basis of the number of months he has been working during the year. He or she will also be refunded the remaining balance of his annual leave. In addition to the above, the employer would have to fulfil - this is important - his obligations under the Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund, that is, he or she will be under the obligation to pay gratuity on retirement of 15 days per year of service to the laid-off worker or contribute same in the latter's individual account held by the MRA. Therefore, it is not true to say, as being mentioned in some quarters, that the worker will be entitled to payment of 30 days in lieu of notice.

Hon. Sik Yuen, in his speech, mentioned that laid-off workers will be entitled to 30 days' notice only, this is not true. I would advise him, as an entrepreneur, before making any frivolous statement to better check the law. He should not be under the mistaken belief that he has to pay only 30 days of notice when he sacks someone in his enterprise as he may end up paying severance allowance of three months per year of service. So, take my advice, check your facts, otherwise my Ministry will not hesitate to prosecute those who do not comply with the law.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in spite of all the accompanying measures crafted by this Government to mitigate to a maximum the impact of COVID-19 on our economy; we have been taunted relentlessly by Members of the Opposition, notably those from the Labour Party.

Allow me here to bring facts to this House. We do remember that, in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, the regime led by Dr. Navin Ramgoolam had come up with the famous stimulus package meant to keep companies afloat. In reality, it was not meant to save jobs. Hundreds of millions of taxpayers' money were handed out to friends of the former Prime Minister to maintain the lifestyle of directors of these companies.

Employees of Infinity Call Centre and workers of textile groups RS Fashion and RS Denim *étaient simplement laissés sur le pavé*. I can assure the hon. Members on both sides of the House, especially the Opposition that our Robin Hood local will never this situation happen again.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our caring Government is going an extra mile to save our local economy. There is timely response for each and every sector. It would have been presumptuous to put everyone in the same basket and provide standardised aid. This is simply not possible.

Each of the pillars of the economy has got its own specificities. Let me take time to talk about one sector in particular, the textile sector. An industry which we all know boomed in the mid-eighties with *plein emploi* being one of the facets of Sir Anerood Jugnauth's first economic miracle. What happened in this sector during the two mandates of the Labour Party from 2006 to 2014? There were closures of so many factories leading to massive job loss.

I have one question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Did we, at that time, hear the Members of the MSM or any other Opposition party trying to stir social unrest by inviting the population to get to the streets? No. We never resorted to such cheap canvassing because we do tend to understand that, during an economic crisis of such amplitude, the best way to recover is to stick together and overcome that episode.

I have listened to hon. Gilbert Bablee's intervention on Wednesday night; he got it absolutely right by requesting a political *trêve* during this pandemic. I hence make an appeal to Members from the other side of the House, there is no place for demagogy, our only saviour is solidarity.

Mr Speaker Sir, it is this Government that has corrected the injustice which was caused to the workers prior to the coming of the Workers' Rights Act (WRA). It is good for the population to know that before the Workers' Rights Act, when the Employment Rights Act enacted in 2008 by the Labour and PMSD Government was in force, it did not offer protection to the working class.

When the country had known its last economic crisis, many people had lost their jobs without compensation. When jobs were lost at that time, we did not hear the outcry of the so-called "*défenseurs des droits des travailleurs*". Many are still sitting on the other side of the House and I can easily identify the culprits. They are accomplices, partners in crime.

Aujourd'hui, ils prétendent avoir la virginité politique. Malheureusement, M. le président, à l'époque Facebook n'était pas trop utilisé par les Mauriciens, sinon ils seraient descendus dans la rue. Ça, je vous assure.

Nous étions dans l'opposition à l'époque, mais nous avons compris la situation qui prévalait et nous ne sommes pas tombés dans la démagogie comme ils le font maintenant, car nous avons l'intérêt du peuple à cœur. Nous voulions que l'économie redémarre.

Mr Speaker Sir, talking about protecting workers' rights, we know it better, as it is us who safeguarded the rights of our working brothers and sisters.

Let me inform the House that new amendments are being brought to the Workers' Rights Act to protect workers against abusive termination of employment by rendering reduction of workforce unjustified where an employer has availed himself of the scheme put in place to support companies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if the Opposition Members had shifted their focus on the Annex to the Budget at page 47, instead of criticising, they would have surely noticed that the Workers' Rights Act is being amended to provide that Protective Order under section 35 of the Workers' Rights Act is being extended to the Redundancy Board. That is to say that all necessary steps are being taken by this Government to further protect the rights of the workers of our Republic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also like to draw attention to Budget Annex at page 48. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Workers' Rights Act is also being amended to entitle laid-off workers reckoning more than 180 days, that is six months, to benefit a transitional unemployment assistance of 90% of the basic wage up to the NPF ceiling for a period of six months instead of three months, as it is the case presently, and 60% for the next six months instead of 30% for the last six months. For example, if someone is currently drawing a salary of Rs15,000, he or she will benefit from Rs13,500 for the first six months thereafter and he or she will benefit from Rs9,000 for another six months. Furthermore, we will provide necessary training if they want to be reskilled. Never before had this been done, Mr Speaker Sir.

J'invite de ce pas, cependant, l'honorable Foo Kune à aller voir cette employée dont elle a fait mention hier pour qu'elle sache que désormais les dispositions légales que nous avons prises vont, entre autres, lui garantir un revenu raisonnable le temps qu'elle retrouve un emploi, en sus de ce qu'elle va percevoir dans le cas j'ai fait mention tout à l'heure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, previously a worker reckoning less than 180 days in employment was not benefitting from any sort of allowance whatsoever, provision has now been made in this budget for a payment of a Transitional Unemployment Benefit of Rs5,100 as from 01 July for a period of six months. This is what we call a caring Government. Hence, all the

demagogy we have heard so far inside and outside the House inasmuch as the workers of the Republic will be left with no revenue after losing their jobs is, therefore, a complete nonsense.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to say a few words specifically to the attention of the workers in the tourism sector who are the first victims of this crisis. We wish to reassure these fellow Mauritians that Government is monitoring the situation closely. We have had wide consultations with stakeholders in this sector including representatives of the workers. Today, an announcement will be made by the hon. Prime Minister for a specific package for them, and I will invite them to listen to the hon. Prime Minister tonight.

I would also like to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I am given to understand, there are bookings already made that could fill our hotels up to 50% to 60% in the coming months. We are working for the opening of our *espaces aériens* and we shall communicate in due time the measures that we will take for the reopening of the industry. Government has lent an attentive ear to their plight and we are currently working on tailor-made measures for them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, I will ask the Opposition a question: 'Would you have done better?' Je ne crois pas. M. le président, j'ai étalé les incohérences de l'opposition quand ils étaient au pouvoir et avaient à faire face à une crise moins dévastatrice que cela - Je fais référence ici à la crise de 2008 - ils ont failli dans leur tâche en tant que gouvernant d'alors. Maintenant, ils veulent nous donner des leçons gratuites. Non merci, nous n'en voulons pas.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government has come up with policy responses and concrete actions to curb the pernicious effect of COVID-19 on the economy and the labour market. Given the potential for change in the structure of the economy, it is worth recalling that ILO (International Labour Organisation) advocates that Government support be channelled to sectors that are able to create decent and productive employment.

Based on the existing International Labour Standards, tackling the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and employment retention measures include -

- (a) supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes, which we are doing;
- (b) extending social protection, which we are doing;
- (c) strengthening occupational safety and health measures, which we are doing,
and
- (d) adapting work arrangements, example, teleworking, which we are working on.

As a caring Government, in difficult times of sanitary curfew, we spared no effort to alleviate the burden of our people. There was a social urgency to mitigate the effects of the deadly pandemic. Legislative measures were taken at the same time to protect the population, to ensure the preservation of jobs and create a conducive environment for businesses to recover.

Mr Speaker Sir, We have now reached the time to restart the economy. Appropriate measures are necessary for a safe return to work and a gradual restart of business activities. In this context, my Ministry is coming up with new regulations. These regulations will provide for employers to devise and update their policies on safety and health. They will also provide for suitable and sufficient risk assessment to identify the risks of infection and implement appropriate preventive and protective measures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Some Members of the Opposition are harping that the welfare state is being dismantled with this budget. We have heard the hon. Minister of Finance earlier and I am sure it is clear to everybody that we are not dismantling the welfare state, NPF. We are also maintaining the basic retirement pension at the age of 60. We are maintaining the national minimum wage and other social assets. Government's response, therefore, on these issues have been prompt and swift.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now that we have a new normal, the pandemic is an opportunity for introspection, re-invention and effective pro-active action. Our economy has for the last five years experienced a decreasing rate of unemployment. Prior to COVID-19, the unemployment rate for year 2019 was 6.7%.

With the blow hit by the pandemic on our economic activities, a rise in the unemployment rate is forecasted. The mismatch between the market demand and skilled labour and the existing one will be further accentuated. Hence, training and placement programmes for our youth, workers and women in particular, will be reinforced.

The main objective of my Ministry will be to offer training most compatible with employability. The MITD and HRDC are key institutions that will encompass this philosophy. In fact, we have a specific plan to revamp both institutions, including improving its structure and training programs.

The National Apprenticeship Program (NAP) will also be revisited to cater for unemployed youth and redundant workers.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet!

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, the imposition of a minimum shelf space of 10% for locally manufactured goods in supermarkets and the requirement for Ministries and Government bodies to have a minimum domestic content of 30% in their purchases are landmark initiatives for entrepreneurship and job creation.

More than ever, development of entrepreneurship skills will be a key component of the training program. My Ministry will work in close collaboration with other Ministries and Departments concerned to attain this objective. As minister, I will see to it that all changes are results-oriented.

Mr Speaker Sir, the benefits of work-from-home during the sanitary curfew have been multi-fold. In fact, apart from the advantages such as lesser commuting costs and reduced risks of contamination, such mode of work has improved the work-life balance and reduced stress.

In parallel to the Work-from-Home Scheme launched in the public service, my Ministry is presently working on a new legal framework to regulate work-from-home in the private sector. We need to have a competent local workforce that will enable us to depend lesser on foreign labour. To this end, the MITD will be called upon to mount specific training courses to bridge the skills mismatch in the labour market.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the wake of resumption of the economic activities, not only the Government but also all stakeholders, including employers, workers and trade union's representatives are facing enormous challenges in our fight against the spread of COVID-19 at the place of work and in sustaining progress in suppressing transmission.

My Ministry carried out several activities to ensure that safety and health of employees, who were working during the lockdown. Guest workers were not left behind. Officers of my Ministry carried out visits to lodging and accommodation housing guest workers to ensure that healthy and safe norms were being observed. The Migrant Unit of my Ministry also ensured that they were duly paid, and were adequately provided with food.

Mr Speaker, Sir, under the Decent Work Country Programme second generation, my Ministry is planning to prepare an updated National Occupational Safety and Health Profile to –

- (a) identify existing and emerging challenges in the occupational safety and health

in Mauritius, and

- (b) propose measures to mitigate the risks and overcome any obstacle through a National Occupational Safety and Health Programme.

Mauritius has so far not been spared from acts of terrorism. Mr Speaker, Sir, nonetheless, the country is not immune from the threats posed by terrorism and its financing. The emergence or rapid spread of extremist ideologies and propaganda, especially through social media has been a major preoccupation of many countries, and Mauritius is no exception.

While the activities of the vast majority of Non Profit Organisations (NPOs) are aimed at providing assistance to those in distress around the world, a small number of unscrupulous entities have taken advantage in this sector to raise and move funds for illicit activities.

To address this issue, the Registration of the Associations Act was further amended through the Anti-Money Laundering and Combatting the Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2019. Provisions relating to good governance and financial integrity were added to the Registration of Associations Act. General and targeted outreach programmes to associations are being conducted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, protection of workers' rights has always been high on the agenda of this Government. The enactment of the Workers' Rights Act in October 2019 bears testimony to this pledge. In fact, conditions of employment have, since then, been significantly improved.

The landmark introduction of a 'Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund' will guarantee workers the payment of a retirement gratuity for his length of service with the current employer.

Although we have postponed the date of contribution to the Fund till December 2021, employers will, however, be still under the obligation to pay 15 days' remuneration per year of service as gratuity on retirement and contribution equivalent to the just mentioned formula in case of termination of employment.

I wish to inform the House that regulations shall be made today to that effect and its effective date is as from 01 January 2020. I will go to the office and sign the regulations just after my intervention.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to highlight that Mauritius is the only country in Africa where we have an effective Workfare Programme to cater for laid-off employees. We are proposing to extend the programme, in the form of skills development component to be supported jointly by the HRDC and the MITD to re-skill and to improve the employability of intended beneficiaries.

As a country, we are fortunate to have been blessed with Mauritians and by way of character and upbringing, they all share greater, better ideals, than the Opposition's political discourse. Across the length and breadth of our country, we can hear their voice. They are real. They are sincere. They are honest. They are reasonable.

Mr Speaker Sir, prior to COVID-19, this country has experienced lots of uncomfortable situations, be it socio-economic or political. As a country, we have been through two waves of colonisation. We have experienced the tides of sufferings of all shades. We know about the pre or post-Independence socio-economic situations, when things were uncertain.

And every time we found ourselves on the ground, we collectively managed to stand up again, going back to work, to work harder, making more sacrifices and to journey along tough long road till success is met. We shall do it again

Mr Speaker, Sir, it simply means that this country has always chosen hope over fear. It means that a government, as this Government is doing, should work for the people not against them. Tough choices have to be made whenever required. COVID-19 should bring us together. As genuine Mauritians, we know that in this dire situation, our country needs us all as never before. I know that Mauritians will answer positively to this call of duty for the good of our friends, families, children and loved ones.

The COVID-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented episode in the world's history. Social distancing is affecting mankind, wearing masks has made us become anonymous to many, airplanes are grounded, economic activities have halted. In spite of all this, the sanitary curfew or lockdown acted as a pretext to reconsider our way of life.

As a matter of fact, due to the less frantic activities, pollution levels have gone down. So, yes, there are positives that can be sought from this episode.

The Budget presented by the hon. Dr. Renganaden Padayachy is rightly entitled "Our New Normal: The Economy of Life".

To conclude, I would like to congratulate my colleague the Minister of Finance for the great job he did and also thankful to the Prime minister for his visionary leadership, for his most uncommon braveness in the face of adversity and to successfully leading this Government on the right path to manage COVID-19 pandemic.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. X. L. Duval!

(4.30 p.m.)

Mr X. L. Duval (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget was indeed eagerly anticipated, and for good reason. We have had last year, 2019, the worst economic performance of this country in the last 15 years. Never, for 15 years, have we had an economic growth of merely 3%, and the last time that we had such a bad performance was when hon. Pravind Jugnauth was himself Minister of Finance. So, the Budget was eagerly anticipated because people wanted to know how the structural issues, how the structural defects of our economy were going to be addressed by the Minister of Finance. But there were other reasons too. The Financial Action Task Force Grey list, Mr Speaker, Sir, including Mauritius and now the EU Blacklist have cast a long shadow, a dark black shadow over not only our financial services but also on the whole of our economy, even the real economy as people say.

And, Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been huge governance issues, the Rs7 billion loss as bad debts of State Bank of Mauritius and the programmed death of Air Mauritius. Both point to huge governance issues in the public sector and Government owned companies. And, of course, to add to these, we have had the Coronavirus, the virtual shutdown of the economy and a complete closure of our borders.

So, there were real issues to be dealt with in this Budget. It can, therefore, only be highly regrettable that this Budget did not give hope but brought confusion.

Even today people are confused. I have listened to the hon. Minister of Labour; his speech was a bit muddled, Mr Speaker, Sir. I could not hear properly with his mask. So, I am not very much better off as far as what is being proposed by Government for unemployment, transitional unemployment benefit, technical unemployment. I am still confused.

And so, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget is precise on minor issues, of little importance to the nation, and explains, *en passant* only, what it proposes on major issues - I have been

Minister of Finance - as if these measures were not ready. They were announced but were not ready. And, therefore, when they were not ready, they were just, like that, announced *en passant*. And we know that even today, the Mauritius Investment Company, the details have not been finalised. And I wonder whether some of the other things have been finalised and were just announced. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, measures badly conceived and badly prepared.

I was looking for a term to describe this Budget and I have to say it in French, Mr Speaker, Sir – *c'est un budget préparé par des apprentis sorciers*. And I went to the dictionary to find the definition in case, as I did not want to say something stupid. Mr Speaker, Sir, what is the definition of *apprentis sorciers*? *Un apprenti sorcier est défini comme une personne qui déchaîne des évènements qu'elle est incapable de contrôler*. And, for me, all these announcements, the changes that the Minister of Finance has proposed, badly, without consultation, of his own volition, smacked, Mr Speaker, Sir, of *un apprenti sorcier*, first time Minister of Finance, not really knowing what the impact and the real impact of his measures are going to be.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, au lieu de relancer l'économie, *this Budget* fragilise la reprise et surtout détruit la confiance et l'esprit de partenariat. Un budget rejeté par tous, *the first time in so many years*, rejeté par tous: syndicats, employeurs, professionnels, et surtout des économistes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

And then, therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, a Budget that is not fit for a time when our livelihood is threatened and our reputation is being destroyed. So, I will deal with, first of all, *l'actualité de la semaine*. On Monday 08 June, a day to remember, Mr Speaker, Sir, because on that day - and I am happy that the Minister of Financial Services will speak after me because I have a number of questions for him - our presence on the Black list of the EU became final. On that day - the Government has always been saying 'it is provisional', 'it is provisional', 'it can be contested and rejected by the *Conseil européen* and by the *Parlement européen* - as far as I understand, on Monday 08 June, one month delay expired without any rejection of the Act *délegué*...

Mr Speaker: Hon. X. L. Duval, you do not wear your mask?

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay. I am doing my best, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Five times I have told you that!

Mr X. L. Duval: You have gestured, you have not told. Now you are telling. Now, on that day, Mr Speaker, Sir, our presence on the Black list became final. And in all fairness, the

population was allowed to be told that information by Government. They should have been told that information and should have also been told by the Government as to what was expected from now on; we are now on the Black list final, how do we get out of it. But I will come to that, Mr Speaker, in a moment. So, on that day, the Black list became final and the same type of issue, same problem relating to the same type of issue also happened. The World Bank issued its damning statement as to the sanctions that it will take against Burmeister & Wain Scandinavian Contractor (BWSC) in a contract involving the CEB, in a sale made to the CEB worth some Rs4.5 billion.

(Interruptions)

I am sorry?

(Interruptions)

What did I say?

(Interruptions)

Excuse me. African Development Bank; I got carried away. Quite right, thank you. African Development Bank issued that statement, Mr Speaker, Sir, for bribes paid to the Mauritian Administration and others. Now, these bribes, I think, occurred in 2015/2016, not sure when exactly. But the fact remains that Burmeister & Wain Scandinavian Contractor (BWSC) published, as far back as February 2019, on its website, and informed the CEB and presumably informed the African Development Bank that it had taken cognizance, it had been made aware of a bribing paid to Mauritian officials and this bribe, Mr Speaker, Sir, resulted in five employees of Burmeister being sacked. This fact was known more than a year ago. CEB was formerly apprised of this more than a year ago. CEB entered into correspondence with them more than a year ago. And, my information, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the Board of CEB was verbally informed of the situation. Now, can we imagine a Government that has zero tolerance for corruption has two Members, two Ministries represented on the Board of CEB...

Mr Speaker: Sorry, I suspend the sitting for a few minutes.

At 4.39 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 4.44 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much for those who are sitting!

Mr X. L. Duval: Please tell me if you don't hear me because I had a lot of problems, lot of issues hearing the previous speaker. He mumbled most of his speech and I will try and avoid this.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, what I was saying was that since early 2019, CEB officially knew of the allegations of corruption and that it related to Mauritius. ADB also officially knew of the allegations of corruption. But look at the difference in treatment of the two institutions. The Government of Mauritius, being informed through the CEB, did nothing for the one year. In fact, most best qualified as a cover-up although on the Board of the CEB, there is permanently a representative of the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities, Ministry of hon. Ivan Collendavelloo, and permanently a representative of the Ministry of Finance. So, these two people are always on the Board of the CEB. So, the CEB did nothing, except tried to cover it up.

Now, I will tell you this, this is going to be one of the easiest investigations of corruption that I have ever seen. Why? Burmeister has already said that he has accepted that bribes have been paid and it has fired its five employees.

ADB has already done its investigation and has suspended Burmeister for 21 months. So, at this point in time, the people who have paid the bribes have all been sanctioned and the people who have accepted up to Rs1 billion of bribes, we don't know where they are. Oh, really! As if the Government today is waking up to this fact. This is not, Mr Speaker, Sir, acceptable in normal times and specially now in the week that the EU has put us on the black list. In fact, what we are saying to the EU is that: "You were right, you were bloody right to put us on the black list because we knew of a substantial fraud and corruption in our country for the last year and we did nothing about it, Mr Speaker, Sir." That is what we are telling the EU. And that is a very serious matter because my deepest wish when I think of the 15,000 people working in our offshore who today are not sleeping because of the black list. And yesterday I was speaking to a major management company in the global business sector. It had sampled Mr Speaker, Sir, its clients and do you know what he told me? He told me that 70% of the clients are saying that they will consider leaving Mauritius if we remain on the black list, and we are on the black list. The sanctions would take effect in October.

So, I would like to ask the hon. Minister talking after me, firstly, why he made no statement to the House concerning the events of Monday and the finalisation of the black list? Secondly, what was the nature and the conclusion of the phone call between the Prime

Minister and Mr Michel, *Président* of the *Parlement européen*, whether any commitments have been made and whether there is any light at the end of the tunnel following that phone call? The third question: what are now going to be the objectives of Government, whether Government will seek to, first, come out of the FATF grey list before being taken off the EU black list or whether they have obtained some sort of comfort that we may address ourselves directly to the EU to be able perhaps, maybe our only chance to come out of the black list by October? And, finally, what are the measures that are being taken to address the five deficiencies? And the five deficiencies, Mr Speaker, Sir; let us see what were the five deficiencies. The five deficiencies relate directly to institutional failure in Mauritius.

The same failures that have brought SBM down, that have brought the Air Mauritius down and that is plaguing this Government and the CEB affair, I must say also, institutional failures. And what does the EU blame us for? And I quote now from the EU statement –

“Mauritius failure to demonstrate that law enforcement authorities have capacity to conduct money laundering investigations, including parallel financial instigations and complex cases”.

But that is a fact! The CEB shows that it is a fact! Was it not here a few years ago when I asked a PNQ to the Prime Minister about the Alvaro Sobrinho affair? Was it not the person who brought - I don't know if it was a true letter to ICAC or a fictitious letter to ICAC to say that the Sobrinho affair has been referred to ICAC and we never heard anything else. In fact, we never hear anything else ever whenever a Member of Government is referred to ICAC and this is the sort of thing, the sort of example that we are giving to the European Union. And I must say quite sincerely, Mr Speaker, if we do not deal properly, fast and aggressively regarding the CEB affair, we will never get off the black list, because we will be showing to the EU exactly what they do not want to see and they do not like in this country.

And I will say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that what is needed is an immediate Commission of Inquiry, as has been asked by ourselves, our party and the Leader of the Opposition. An immediate Commission of Inquiry chaired by a Judge sitting or retired - I don't mind, but, please spare us Mr Domah - by a sitting judge, by a judge, and pending the conclusion of that, hon. Collendavelloo, his sidekicks, Mr Seety Naidoo and the rest, that they all resign. Let us hope for them that they are cleared by the Commission of Inquiry, but the reputation of Mauritius dictates that we take appropriate action and vigorous action now. Why do I mention? And the Prime Minister was wrong, I was not in Government. PMSD was not in

Government in 2014 for the first tender, but we were in Government in 2015-2016 for the second tender, that was an MSM/PMSD Government, alliance whatever, I can't remember the name. But I remember, Mr Speaker, Sir, that hon. Collendavelloo personally brought this St Louis, Burmeister affair to Government and in numerous occasions, he came up with it. So he was personally involved, he personally gave the Certificate of Urgency. He must, therefore, not only as a Minister in charge of CEB, but as a person who dealt with the file himself. He said in a statement in the House, 'The first file that was on my table', he said, I quote by memory, 'The first file that was on my table when I joined Government was the famous St Louis Power Station Project'.

So, it is for that reason, not for any other reason, that I am saying that hon. Collendavelloo must resign now and his sidekicks must resign. Let the Commission of Inquiry happen and let, Mr Speaker, Sir, the conclusions come out, because we have no faith in ICAC or the other institutions of Mauritius, neither has the Financial Action Task Force any faith in them, neither has the European Union any faith in them. So, Mr Speaker, that is the issue.

So, our priority is to get off the black list and I hope we don't come into the blame game, but I took cognizance this morning of Press statements that the previous Minister made. It is interesting perhaps if I should read just a little bit of what he said. Previous Minister, hon. Sesungkur, I think he was not an angel himself, but this is what he said, Mr Speaker, Sir –

« (...) il blâme le gouvernement de ne pas avoir donné assez de moyens et de pouvoirs aux institutions comme l'Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC) et la police. »

Mr Speaker, Sir –

« Ce ne sont pas des mesures qui concernent directement le ministère des Services financiers. Elles avaient surtout trait à l'ICAC et à la police. »

That's the five measures which the hon. Minister has commented on so many occasions. So –

« Elles avaient surtout trait à l'ICAC et à la police. Et pour des raisons que vous devinez, (...) »

This is a Member, I presume, of the MSM still and ex-Minister of the MSM -

« *Et pour des raisons que vous devinez, on n'a jamais permis à certaines institutions d'évoluer en toute liberté (...)* »

Now, the European Union is that, my friend, we are cooked, and this is the Minister in charge of the file saying that he was in charge of the file for the last three years or so. So, there you go! This is the *soupe* in which this Government has put this country into, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Now, coming to other issues. So, before I finish, I will ask the Members of the Government to read a book which is called, 'Why Nations Fail', very interesting book, co-written by someone called James Robinson. And it tells you there, Mr Speaker, Sir, that nations succeed, not because of any mineral wealth that they may have. There are so many examples around Africa, but because of the manmade institutions that are created, and they fail, because in manmade institutions fail, and Mauritius does not deserve to be a failed nation, Mr Speaker, Sir.

As I go on, Mr Speaker Sir, again, I say that the time now is not for the blame game, the time now, I hope the Minister will take my request seriously and come up with a serious speech as to the events from Monday and how we see the future. 15,000 families will wait for your statement in a moment. And this leads me also to Senegal, Mr Speaker, Sir. Very quickly, it is our fault that Senegal has denounced AL treaty. The Prime Minister met the President of Senegal, Macky Sall, who I know and promised that we would meet in November. Isn't that right that we would meet in November? Not we - that the Ministries would meet in November to thrash out a new Double Taxation Agreement, but the November 2019 appointment was cancelled for reason of elections and no new appointment given. And under pressure in Senegal, Macky Sall denounced the treaty. And Mr Speaker, Sir, so, this is why here, it is opportune for me to ask for a rethink of the approach to Africa, rethink *un autre regard*, we need an emotional relationship, Mr Speaker, with Africa. We should declare ourselves as the African Financial Centre, the Indian issues are finished. Europe now has put us on a black list. We only have our friends in Africa. We should now restyle ourselves as the African Financial Centre. We have much to offer to Africa, not just like India, we have only tax concession, but Africa we have much more. We have our laws, our political and economic side ability, our Court system, our lawyers, our accountants, our file managers, our stock exchange.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, let us move away as far as Africa is concerned from fiscal advantages. Let us offer ourselves to renegotiate any harmful tax and clauses that may be left in the 13 DTAs (Double Taxation Agreements) that are left with Africa and, let us, Mr Speaker, Sir, expand in a number of IPPAs (Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements) that we have with Africa which are as important as DTAs, maybe more important than the Double Taxation Agreements. We should expand, we have only five in force, I signed a few, but were never ratified after I left by the African countries. We need, Mr Speaker, Sir, to expand the IPPAS and offer ourselves with a new vision of our relationship with Africa, not a relationship with six to syphon up their taxes, they need it as much as we do, maybe more. We should offer to renegotiate if there are harmful clauses in any of these treaties, not wait for them to denounce them. There are only 30 left out of 54 countries and, Mr Speaker, Sir, we should offer this new partnership to Africa.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if I may move now to Tourism. 24% of GDP, Tourism and its related sectors, 125,000 employees, by far the biggest sector in Mauritius, very, very badly affected by Coronavirus, through no fault of their own, I must say this. It is not something some companies here and there have gone bankrupt because of some mistakes; it is through no fault of their own. And these guys, the Tourism Industry, have never benefited from any safety net; none. All other sectors almost did, but they never benefited from any safety net, from any tax incentives and the State land rent is now - in part thanks to Rama Sithanen - extremely high. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, they are desperate. We were already on a downward trend last year with less tourists and these tourists that came spending less money than previously. So, the situation was dramatic even last year. I don't agree with the measures that are being proposed; I find them utterly ridiculous. Mr Speaker, Sir, if the Mauritius Investment Company does not act quickly, not only for the large companies, but also for the small and medium companies, we are going to look at massive unemployment in the Tourism Sector. Let's hope that the MIC - I understand now is getting its Act together - can come quickly into play.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I was one of the few Ministers of Tourism that gave importance to the product, not the marketing. I will take an example. If I have a car, say a very old car, I haven't cleaned it for six months, it is not starting, the wheel is flat, I put in on the Website, even on the Liverpool Website, "please buy my car." Who is going to buy my car at a decent price? No one! People are not stupid. You need to get the product right before you start marketing and especially before you start branding because the brand is only a reflection of

reality. Never try to have a brand that does not reflect your reality. And now, they are going to pay Rs50 m.! For years, I was criticised for paying Rs40 m. Still, never have a brand that does not reflect reality.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our hotels are empty. As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, let's look at the product. Our hotels are empty, our restaurants are empty, our pleasure crafts operators are lying on the beach with nothing to do, and same for tourism amenities; all are facing bankruptcy. No tourists, however, Mr Speaker, Sir, also represent a huge opportunity to renovate, refurbish. Let's give them the finance, cheap loans. Let's give them the money through MIC; let's give them that money so that we have a completely refurbished tourism accommodation sector over the next six months. Let's have a completely new product, revamped, fantastic, for which we are pleased to market.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to give support to the hotels, to the restaurants, to all the Tourism Operators so that they can maintain employment. And I would like to see clearly set out - I don't know what the Prime Minister would announce in a few minutes or now. But, I would like to see plainly, Mr Speaker, Sir, set out, that we are subsidising at least 50% of the monthly wages of the lower paid employees in the Tourism Sector because through no fault of their own, they cannot feed their families, and we need to ensure that there is no unemployment in that time period until recovery, Mr Speaker, Sir. But coupled with that, as we did in 2008, Mr Speaker, Sir, let us offer an enormous package of training, technical skills, language skills, service delivery, courtesy, etc., to this extremely capable workforce during this period. We take care of the hardware and the software, so that that, again, as I say, in six months' time, we have an unbeatable tourism product. I would like, Mr Speaker, Sir, VAT to be suspended on all hotels and restaurants bills. Restaurants pay a huge amount of VAT because they have no deductible input. And that, Mr Speaker, Sir, would ensure their survival, would ensure that Mauritians can better afford going to a restaurant and better afford to support our hotel industry in the times of need. Rs4 billion, Mr Speaker, Sir, are paid annually by the hotel sector and the restaurant sector as VAT. I would like that, Mr Speaker, Sir, to be suspended temporarily instead of wasting all this money on roads, etc., which nobody needs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, - I am happy the Deputy Prime Minister is here - reducing substantially the electricity bill for hotels, which is the biggest industry of Mauritius, 24%, as I mentioned. Yet, they pay commercial rates, not industrial rates, and commercial rates are nearly twice as much as industrial rates. In these times of need, when they are just

suffocating, this is a time, Mr Speaker, Sir, to give them the discount and ask them to pay the commercial rates. The CEB has been accumulating billions of rupees. The latest internal report of CEB shows that the CEB has Rs5 billion in cash. And do you trust CEB, Mr Speaker, Sir, after the Burmeister affair, with Rs5 billion of cash? Would any sane person do that? Yet, they do, because the Deputy Prime Minister and the CEB have always refused to reduce electricity rates, at least for big businesses, even though the cost of electricity has gone down substantially and CEB sits on Rs5 billion of cash which, no doubt, it will want to squander on things like CEB FiberNet, Rs500 m., and not one single client.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will go very quickly. We need a vast campaign to clean up waste. We need to protect our beaches; we need to embellish our countryside; we need to promote night life. People come here to enjoy themselves, let's not forget.

We need taximeters in taxis. There is no future for taxis in Mauritius if there are no taximeters, at least, in the Hotel Industry, because no foreigner will sit in a taxi and be at the whim and mercy of the taxi driver as far as what bill he will eventually pay. We need to promote better gastronomy and, therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, the whole idea is for, in six months' time, let's say December, when we start again, we have a far better tourism product than now, and then we put the money where our mouth is, we give MTPA twice the amount of funds if necessary for them to market this fantastic world beating product. It is at this price that we will be able to combat the decline of the Tourism Industry that we have seen under the previous Minister Gayan, which has led to negative growth in 2019.

Mr Speaker, Sir, other pillars are not faring much better. Agriculture! Minister Seeruttun will speak after me, he was the Minister of Agriculture, he will know that under his previous mandate, land under sugar cultivation has fallen by another 1,000 hectares, Mr Speaker, Sir; export of sugar has consistently fallen and, in 2019, we exported 70,000 tonnes of sugar less than we had done in 2014 - under his mandate. Mr Speaker, Sir, we were promised last year to have some reforms proposed by the World Bank. Nothing came out. This year, under this Budget, there is no mention of the World Bank. But worse, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think a lot of people are talking about food security and all that. Do you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that land under food crops cultivation in Mauritius has fallen, under his mandate, by 1,200 hectares from 2014 to 2019, 15%, and tonnage produced by 20,000 tonnes have fallen. From 100,000 tonnes - this is in Statistics Mauritius, you can go and check - to 94,000 tonnes. These are the figures that I have and I can back it up.

Now Mr Speaker, Sir, agricultural policy has been a disaster under this and the previous Government. Onions have fallen by half the production in Mauritius, and it's not any better in Rodrigues. Rodrigues is even worse.

(Interruptions)

I am told I have time, with your permission, of course.

Now, manufacturing, same thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, dramatic fall in the exports, Rs95 billion exports in 2014, Rs79 billion exports in 2019, and we are told this time again, we are going to have another report. The report for sugar has not come out yet. We are going to commission a report for manufacturing. And construction, I am not going to delve on it because people have said, it is misguided, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is only in MSM School of Economics that you give so much attention to construction because construction in Mauritius, the whole of it is imported, especially big, even the firms, the labour, the cement, everything is imported, except for the macadam.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is why concentration on construction has given us an old time record low, 15 years' record low of growth in 2019. Now, I am proposing, Mr Speaker, Sir, that all non-essential construction should be postponed and all construction, wherever possible that are being done by foreigners, should be similarly postponed, Mr Speaker, Sir, because, obviously, there will be some and we should give priority to Mauritian entrepreneurs all the way.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, we've seen high taxation, I'll come to that in a minute, dramatic depreciation in the rupee, 15% in one year and no mention at all in the Budget and people are asking, Mr Speaker, Sir, after the bad time that we had in 1970s, whether with this Government, we haven't gone from '*ringo to renga*'. This is what people are asking. High taxation, big depreciation, '*ringo to renga*'! And this is not what we want in this year, in the 2020s, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, nothing as I mention to allay the fears of other Mauritians concerning the dramatic depreciation of the rupee, and now I've come to this 40% top rate, Mr Speaker, Sir, no one is refusing to contribute to the COVID Fund, but Mauritius is not a high tax jurisdiction. I ask the Government not to make a mistake between high tax rates and high tax revenues. They are not the same. Often they are contradictory. The higher the tax rate often, the lower the tax revenue. And I'll give you an example, Mr Speaker, Sir, because all Ministers of Finance I thought knew this. I'll give you the example, Mr Speaker, Sir, of 06 June 2008. Mr Rama Sithanen announced a drop of the income tax rate, halving of these tax

rates from 30% to 15%. That was in June 2008, and you know what, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the following year, income tax receipts increased from Rs10.5 billion to Rs13.5 billion. This is history, Mauritian history, Mauritian financial history. Drop of half in the top tax rate, 13-15%, increase of Rs3 billion in income tax revenues because we get better compliance and higher economic activity.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have now this 40% tax which I and many others, will be happy to pay perhaps a less reasonable amount. If it went to a definite fund, and if that fund was administered during the COVID period and its aftermath in a transparent way with good governance, not the way that it's being proposed at the moment, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is dangerous; it may lead to a number of undesired consequences.

Hence, now, Mr Speaker, Sir, let's come to this 9% CSG. We were offered this, we were presented with a CSG, *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, as if it was a pension contribution but when you look at the Estimates, you see clearly that is treated like any other tax. It is Rs3 billion of tax that is being put in the Budget as from next year, taking social security contributions from Rs1 billion to Rs4 billion. That is what it is doing, and now, I asked a question this morning because this money, we understand now, is going to be used to top up the *pension universelle*. This is what we have been told this morning. Now, who is going to contribute? Firstly, who gets *pension universelle*? Everybody gets *pension universelle*. Hundred per cent of the population above 60 years old, everybody, whether you are a public servant or whether you work in the private sector, you get your *pension universelle*, Rs9,000, due to go up to Rs13,500. But why should it be that the CSG only will be paid by the private sector employees? This is all the brouhaha, this is what I understood. Can you imagine that only private sector employees will, together with their employer, pay 9% of their salary to any amount when this will not apply to the public sector, whereas that money will be used to pay both the public sector retirees and the private sector? There is something really dramatically wrong, it must be corrected, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, someone was telling me this morning that he was - obviously a professional guy - that he would work from January to July for the Government and from August to December, he will work for his family and himself, because in fact, when you add together all this, the taxes that this Government is imposing, will reach 60% or 58.5% of remuneration. When you take the 40% top rate, the 9% CSG, the National Saving Fund (NSF), 3.5%, trading levy, 1.5%, and the PGRF, 4.5%. So, again, Mr Speaker, Sir, let's look at the situation of Small Island States. Are the Seychellois stupid? Can I ask you a question?

Are the Seychellois stupid when the tax rate in Seychelles is 15%? Are the Maldivians stupid when the top tax rate in Maldives is also 15%? I don't want to mention Bahamas, 0%, Cayman Islands, 0%. Are these people out of their heads? Seychelles is the richest country in Africa, ahead of Mauritius. But you understand when you are small, you need to work, you need to attract, you need to be attractive, and so the taxes that were going to reach 58.5%, we need to tread carefully, Mr Speaker, Sir. It may have a negative impact. As I mentioned, lowering of tax rates in the past has brought higher tax revenues, and the Government needs not high tax rates, as if to punish certain people, but it needs high revenues to cater for its lavish expenditure. And lavish is the word for this Government. So, we need high tax revenues.

We need to encourage companies and, Mr Speaker, Sir, this situation will encourage our own companies for moving out of Mauritius, and headquartering elsewhere and that is also a danger that we will face with this situation. It will discourage investments and, of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is going to be discriminatory vis-à-vis non-citizens. Can you imagine a serious Minister of Finance in any country, let's say England - I can't remember his name, Mr Rishi Sunak or something - saying in Parliament, that from now on, he will tax English residents at 40% but foreigners, at 15% doing the same job, doing the same business. Is that fair? Can you be a hairdresser and pay 40% tax when Mauritian and your next door neighbour is a foreigner, also a hairdresser, and is paying 15%. That is unfair and intolerable, Mr Speaker, Sir. I won't go; I have a little bit of time left. I don't want to get carried away but the lowering of the limits for investment here to Rs2 million is going to endanger a lot of people.

When I was Minister of Tourism, I tried to do my best to encourage Mauritians to work in Mauritian hotels, because we accept it or not, foreigners have an added advantage on us. They speak better French, they speak better English, they have gone probably to better schools, better universities, and will come here and actually compete with Mauritians. They may wipe out all sectors, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, I am against, Mr Speaker, Sir, the lowering of the threshold for investment to Rs2 m. only. I brought foreign residents, first thing, in 1999. It was Rs500,000 when I brought it in in 1999 and 20 years later or whatever, it has been brought to Rs350,000.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not going to be long. Bank of Mauritius financing, I just have this thing to say. It has given Rs150 m., lent or given, to Government. It has a *Fonds propre* - if you look at its last Accounts in June 2019, Bank of Mauritius had a *Fonds propre* of Rs28

billion. Of these Rs28 billion, it gave Rs18 billion to the Government in December. So, it is left now with Rs10/Rs11 billion. Let's say, it made some profits on the depreciation of the Dollar, but lost also money on its investments; let's say, it is now Rs20 billion. A corporation which has Rs20 billion decides to give a gift to Government of Rs60 billion. Where is the sense in that, where is the logic in that? Where is the accounting in that, Mr Speaker, Sir? Unbelievable, that anyone would seek to give away three times their worth to somebody else and, therefore, the answer, of course, is in the ability of the Bank of Mauritius to print money. It has gifted three times what it has in its own Shareholders Fund, its own *Fonds propre*, and will print money, with all the dangers that come with it in terms of hyperinflation and in terms of depreciation of the Rupee.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will finish with this. We had expected a Budget that recognised that the greatest assets of Mauritius are not buildings, but its people; the people are the greatest asset. And we would have expected maximum effort, maximum funds to be put on stopping unemployment, which is just, *en passant*, preventing and helping for *chômage technique*, and I hope that now, after hearing the Minister, some light is being offered, Mr Speaker, Sir. We would have hoped for a Budget that prevented, as far as is humanly possible, the closures that are expected in Tourism and in related industries. We would have expected a Budget that gave the maximum helping hand to the weakest of this population, the people who will be out of work, who will be needing help, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, we would have expected a Budget that would have put maximum effort in a massive risk killing of our workforce, prepare them for the new normal, which will be digital more than previously, which will involve new challenges, and also help to solve the historical mismatch, this massive risk killing that has always existed. So, we would have expected, instead of a reduction in the Education budget, a large increase in the Education budget.

I finish, Mr Speaker, Sir, just to say this; I won't be able to finish completely, but I will ask the Government to extend all the current Youth Employment Programme, the Back to Work Programme, the Graduate Employment Scheme that are maybe ending up to December 2020, extend them for a further year, because you do not want any youth at the moment, which are 23% unemployed, you don't want them *sur le pavé*, because for sure, they will not get another job and they will be going into drugs, into alcoholism, etc. So, these programmes, which lasted one or two years would need - Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not have time to finish, it does not matter, because I need to give time to my colleagues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will finish on the Riambel issue. Government has no right – I may have a legal right in Riambel and in Pointe-aux-Sables. Although they did not have a legal right during the COVID-19, but may now have a legal right to evict these people, they do not have a moral right. Until and unless you develop and propose and put into action a decent housing policy, you have no right to evict people. And don't tell me that you will be doing 12,000 houses for Rs12 billion, Rs1 m. per house. Then, what will you get after the infrastructure and all that is taken out? Let the Minister come and explain on Monday, when he speaks, what he is proposing as a house that is going to cost, after withdrawing infrastructure, etc., something like Rs700,000 per house. What will the Minister propose? Is it high-rise, are we going to use Chinese again here, building high-rise? Are we going to see ghettos? Because what I fear most is that when constructing housing, we, in fact, end up constructing ghettos.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will finish on that to say that, today, my thoughts are with the 158 people living rough in Riambel, under these cold winds, and the 100 people in Pointe-aux-Sables who are doing the same. My thoughts and my prayers are with these poor families, hoping, Mr Speaker, Sir, that somehow, we will be able to help them and help them on the way to prosperity.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: We suspend for 30 minutes.

At 5.26 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.05 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Seeruttun!

The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr M. Seeruttun):

Merci, M. le président. Permettez-moi de me joindre aux autres membres de cette Assemblée et de donner mon appréciation du Budget 2020-21 présenté le 4 juin dernier par mon collègue, le ministre des Finances. Ce fut son premier grand oral et surtout un budget préparé dans un contexte difficile et sans précédent.

Beaucoup de personnes, M. le président, qui émettent des critiques aujourd'hui, auraient peut-être abandonné en clamant que *poilon-là chaud*. Donc, je le félicite d'avoir su présenté un budget qui, à la fois, préserve la philosophie de ce gouvernement visant à

soutenir les personnes les plus vulnérables et celles de la classe moyenne et, en même temps, permettre la relance de l'économie dans des conditions exceptionnelles.

M. le président, lors de mon intervention sur le programme gouvernemental 2020-24 le 18 mars dernier, j'ai évoqué la situation dans le monde alors qu'on était au début de cette pandémie qu'est la Covid-19. A cette date, il y avait 170,000 personnes infectées dans 150 pays et déjà 6,000 décès. Je disais que le monde était presque à l'arrêt. Notre pays n'était pas encore touché par le virus, mais j'avais aussi dit que le risque était bien réel malgré le fait que le gouvernement ait déjà mis en place un protocole sanitaire pour parer à toute éventualité.

J'avais aussi dit que pour s'en sortir, la solidarité de tous était de mise. M. le président, trois mois plus tard, le monde témoigne d'un moment jamais connu en ce temps moderne, à hier, jeudi 11 juin, d'après l'OMS, il y avait 421,158 décès dus à la COVID-19 avec plus de 7,7 millions de personnes infectées dans 196 pays dont les plus grands pays avec des décès par milliers comme, par exemple, aux Etats-Unis : 115,393 décès; au Royaume Uni : 41,279 ; au Brésil : 40,276 décès ; en Italie : 34,167 et en France : 29,139.

La Banque mondiale parle de la pire crise vécue depuis 150 ans plus vaste par le nombre de pays qui vont se retrouver en récession économique et ce depuis la grande dépression des années 1870. Une contraction de l'économie mondiale par 5,2%. Du jamais vu depuis la seconde guerre mondiale ! Et entre 70 millions et 100 millions de personnes peuvent basculer dans l'extrême pauvreté, souligne aussi la Banque mondiale.

M. le président, qu'a-t-on fait à Maurice pour gérer cette crise ? Depuis le tout début, le Premier ministre avait dit haut et fort que sa priorité était et reste la sécurité et la santé de la population et que dessus il n'y aura aucun compromis. Résultat, c'est qu'on a pu contenir la propagation du virus contrairement à ce que projetait l'OMS initialement et on a pu éviter le pire. Maurice est cité en exemple des pays qui ont réussi dans la gestion de cette pandémie et même si nos adversaires politiques et certains dans le media ne voient que le verre à moitié vide, il reste le fait que le verre était aussi, peut-être même, je dirai, bien rempli.

Un sondage indépendant a démontré que plus de 80% des Mauriciens sont satisfaits de la manière que la crise a été gérée. Malheureusement, il y a eu des décès et je profite de cette occasion pour présenter mes sympathies à tous ceux infligés par ces décès. Je connais personnellement, M. le président, la famille d'une des victimes et je peux dire que faire le deuil dans de telles circonstances est extrêmement pénible et douloureux.

Je voudrais aussi, M. le président, comme les autres qui l'ont fait avant moi, rendre un hommage à tous ceux qui font partie des services essentiels, qui ont répondu présents pendant toute la période du confinement et continuent à assumer leurs responsabilités avec dévouement. Je voudrais saluer chapeau bas les *front liners* qui étaient au front, exposés aux risques et qui ont dû rester loin de leurs familles pendant des jours durant pour assurer la protection de toute la population. Je salue aussi mes collègues, les membres du comité COVID et le Premier ministre pour leur rigueur dans la gestion de cette situation.

M. le président, la décision d'accorder une prime de R 15,000 à tous les *front liners* est symbolique car on sera toujours reconnaissant envers eux. Les membres de l'opposition demandent que cette prime soit payée à tous ceux qui ont travaillé pendant la période du confinement, *fair enough*. La question qu'il faut se poser est comment décider à qui payer car tous les services essentiels étaient en opération. Donc, vous pouvez imaginer, M. le président, combien de personnes tombent dans cette catégorie. Alors je demanderai aux membres de l'opposition d'être tous raisonnables dans leurs propos et, comme j'ai toujours dit, on dirait toujours merci à tous ceux qui ont contribué à gérer cette crise.

M. le président, plus de 195 pays sont touchés par la pandémie et parmi il y a tous les grands pays développés avec des facilités et des infrastructures modernes. Mais qu'a-t-on vu ? Ils ont tous eu beaucoup de difficulté à gérer cette crise. Sans nous vanter, M. le président, Maurice a été un exemple pour beaucoup. Une des raisons qui expliquent cette situation c'est qu'on a eu un leadership fort avec un Premier ministre qui a su galvaniser toutes ses troupes et qui a géré cette crise en démontrant son sens de responsabilité, de fermeté, d'écoute, de compassion et sa capacité de prendre des décisions qui s'imposaient.

M. le président, imaginez un seul moment qu'à la place de l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth comme Premier ministre, c'était un autre leader politique. J'ai posé cette question à beaucoup de Mauriciens de toutes les couches sociales, la réponse a été unanime : *ayo papa, nou pays ti pou mort*.

Le Premier ministre était physiquement présent, nuit et jour, à son bureau depuis le début de cette crise sauf pour quelques jours où il a dû s'isoler sur conseils des médecins; présents afin de coordonner la situation - pas de congé, pas de week-end, pas de *break*, il était au travail. Pendant ce temps, d'autres leaders étaient au chaud chez eux, confinement oblige bien sûr, à poster des messages sur les réseaux sociaux et ne rien trouver d'autre à faire que de critiquer les décisions du gouvernement.

M. le président, c'est dans des moments de crise, qu'un vrai leader émerge et la population, dans son ensemble, a pu faire la différence entre le vrai du faux. Certains politiciens, en plein couvre-feu sanitaire, ont voulu un soulèvement de la population contre les décisions du gouvernement et quand cette initiative n'a pas abouti, ils reviennent encore une fois avec un appel à la population de descendre dans la rue à un moment que le virus pourrait resurgir et la distanciation physique est toujours en vigueur. Cela démontré l'irresponsabilité de certains qui voudraient un jour diriger le pays. Dieu soit loué, M. le président.

Certains membres de l'opposition se plaisent à dire que, bien avant la crise, l'économie du pays était mal en point et qu'il ne fallait pas tout mettre sur le dos de la COVID-19. A l'instant, avant mon intervention, l'honorable Duval a parlé de l'avant COVID comme étant une période catastrophique de ce gouvernement et de l'ancien gouvernement qui était au pouvoir de 2014 à 2019.

Alors, M. le président, comment expliquer que, depuis 2015, le taux d'inflation est resté très bas tout le long. Le chômage était descendu au niveau le plus bas depuis vingt ans. Le pouvoir d'achat s'est amélioré sensiblement surtout pour ceux au bas de l'échelle. Le revenu per capita est passé à 11,500 dollars américains. Notre rang sur le *Ease of doing business*, on est passé à la treizième position sur le classement mondial, M. le président. Les infrastructures sont en nette amélioration. La réserve pour couvrir nos importations est arrivée à son taux le plus élevé, un record. Et si je me réfère à un des derniers rapports de la Banque mondiale, elle prévoit que Maurice est sur le point de devenir un pays à hauts revenus.

Voilà un peu cette Opposition qui ne voit rien de bien dans tout ce qu'on fait. Voilà cette opposition qui a passé son temps à dire, pendant qu'on était au pouvoir de 2014 à 2019, qu'on allait avoir une raclée aux élections générales alors qu'elle demandait, année après année, les élections. Qu'est-ce qu'on a vu en novembre dernier ? La population a refait confiance à l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth et l'a reconduit comme Premier ministre. Et aujourd'hui, encore une fois, il a su démontrer qu'il est là pour diriger le pays, dirigé pour le bien de la population. Et ce budget, encore une fois, démontre qu'on veut faire tout ce qu'il faut faire malgré cette situation sans précédent, malgré que l'économie mondiale est totalement anéantie, malgré qu'on a dû tout arrêter pendant plusieurs mois. Mais la détermination est là et vous allez voir, avec le soutien de la population, avec les efforts qu'on a fait et qu'on va faire, on va s'en sortir, M. le président.

Avant d'aborder le sujet qui me concerne, pour mon ministère, parce que l'honorable Xavier Luc Duval en a parlé et je vais, bien sûr, lui répondre, mais il a parlé aussi d'autres sujets qui ne concernent pas directement mon ministère, mais quand même je voudrais lui donner quelques éléments de réponse. Bien sûr j'étais ministre de l'Agro-Industrie pendant la période 2014-2019, il a fait mention que la production des légumes a chuté pendant mon mandat. Il a fait référence aux chiffres des *Statistics Mauritius*. Laissez-moi vous dire une chose, M. le président. Pendant toute la période 2014-2019, le gouvernement, avec le changement climatique, on a fait la promotion de ce qu'on appelle le *sheltered farming*, faire de sorte à ce qu'avec les *flash floods*, avec les conditions climatiques qui mettent beaucoup à risque les planteurs, donc, je les encourageais d'aller vers la production sous les infrastructures protégées. Malheureusement, *Statistics Mauritius*, dans son rapport, ne prend pas en compte la production provenant de tout ce qui est des infrastructures hydroponiques ou des *sheltered farming* parce qu'il s'adhère avec les guidelines établit par la SADC. Et c'est pour cela qu'on voit, dans les chiffres publiés par *Statistics Mauritius*, une baisse parce qu'on n'inclut pas la production de ce qu'on appelle les cultures vivrières provenant de tout ce qui est hydroponique.

(Interruptions)

Non, c'est une vérité. On peut vérifier, ça c'est le cas. Donc, si vous comparez, si vous mettez ensemble la production en plein champs et la production sous culture protégée, vous allez voir que la production n'a pas chuté. Donc, vous pouvez aller vérifier, c'est le cas et je vous le dit.

Bien sûr, au niveau de la production sucrière, il y a eu une baisse et nous savons tous qu'aujourd'hui, le prix n'est pas garanti, donc, le prix que perçoivent les producteurs est le prix qui est perçu sur le marché mondial. Quand le prix baisse, bien sûr, il y a toujours des producteurs qui sont plus intéressés à cultiver la canne. Alors, on a vu une baisse dans la production due au fait qu'il y a certains champs qui sont des champs marginaux, et donc ils préfèrent faire autres choses que de cultiver la canne quand le rendement est bas. Alors, il y a des explications pour démontrer les raisons pour lesquelles des gens ont préféré abandonner la culture sous cannes pour passer à autres choses. Et bien sûr il y a d'autres raisons, comme vous savez c'est une génération des planteurs vieillissants et il n'y a pas de relève. Donc, il y a plusieurs raisons qui expliquent pourquoi il y a une baisse. Néanmoins, il faut continuer à produire une certaines quantités parce que quand même on ne fait pas que le sucre, on produit aussi de l'énergie et on dépend beaucoup de la canne, de la bagasse pour faire cette énergie.

Il parlait aussi du rapport de la banque mondiale. Je sais que la banque mondiale devait venir avec son rapport. Mon collègue, le ministre Gobin, peut être, aura l'occasion d'en parler quand il va intervenir, mais probablement avec la situation de la COVID-19, les choses ont été repoussées.

Il a aussi parlé, M. le président, de l'affaire d'*African Development Bank*. Je ne sais pas comment lui, il a pu avoir des informations que nous, nous n'avons pas. Il parle de pas mal de choses dans son intervention pour dire qu'il y a Rs 1 milliard de bribe et il y a d'autres choses dont il a fait mention alors que tout ce qu'on a vu, un *Press Release* qui est sorti. Hier, le Premier ministre a répondu à une PNQ, je sais qu'une enquête est déjà en cours et, bien sûr, le *Deputy Prime Minister* aura l'occasion d'en dire plus dessus et on saura, bien sûr, de quoi il en est exactement. L'honorable Duval faisait mention de l'année 2015 à monter, mais ce n'est pas vrai. Ce qu'on a vu, nous, dans le *Press Release*, il parle de 2014 et 2015. Donc, allons dire les choses comme elles sont à ce stade, ce qu'on sait et ne pas dire que c'est 2015 quand le *Release* dit clairement 2014 et 2015.

(Interruptions)

Oui, vous étiez tous ensemble !

Donc, M. le président, le secteur financier est un secteur très important pour notre économie. Un secteur qui, aujourd'hui, a connu une croissance annuelle en moyenne de 5,2% pendant ces cinq dernières années ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No conversation, hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Seeruttun: ... er contribue environs 12% à notre PIB. Et le centre financier lui-même de Maurice emploie 3% de la population active et génère des revenus fiscaux qui représentent 6% du PIB. Je dois dire que c'est un secteur qui s'est développé rapidement. Et est devenu tellement grand aujourd'hui, qu'il joue sur la scène internationale. Et ceci dit, M. le président, il fallait s'y attendre qu'on soit sous la loupe des institutions internationales et qu'on soit aussi attaqué par nos concurrents.

Maurice se trouve aujourd'hui sur une liste du GAFI (Groupe d'action financière) depuis février 2020 et subséquemment, sur la liste de l'Union européenne.

M. le président, c'est un sujet pour moi qui est très technique, et des fois, il y a des gens qui ne sont pas exposés à ce secteur, qui font des commentaires. Et je me pose la question, s'ils comprennent vraiment de quoi il en est.

J'ai eu l'occasion, lors d'une *PNQ* adressée à moi, le 13 mai dernier, par l'honorable leader de l'opposition, et j'avais fait part de toute la chronologie pour arriver où on en est aujourd'hui. Et suite à cette *PNQ*, le leader du Parti travailliste m'a traité de menteur, a même dans une conférence de presse, datée du 15 mai, a dit que j'ai *misled* le Parlement. Lors de ma réponse je n'avais que donner les faits et comment les choses se sont passées depuis 2008. Dans cette même conférence de presse, il parle que Maurice était sur une liste grise en 2005 et quand il est redevenu Premier ministre en 2005, il a tout fait pour faire sortir Maurice de cette liste grise.

D'abord, il n'y a avait pas une liste grise du *GAFI* à l'époque, non plus de l'Union européenne. Il y avait une liste d'*OCDE* de l'époque, pas sur l'affaire de blanchiment des capitaux, mais plutôt sur le régime fiscale. Et peut-être, ce qu'il ne sait pas, c'est que Maurice était sous l'observation de l'*OCDE* depuis 1998, à l'époque où, lui-même, il était Premier ministre, et le ministre des Finances d'alors, à l'époque, l'honorable Dr. Vasant Bunwaree, avait dû envoyer une lettre, datant du 24 mai 2000, pour donner ce qu'on appelle un '*high-level political commitment*', pour faire tout ce qu'il faut faire pour, bien sûr, se mettre en conformité avec l'*OCDE*. Et c'est comme cela que, je dois dire, Maurice n'était pas sur une liste, mais c'est sous l'observation, et que cela a été *cleared* en 2009. Alors, voilà quelqu'un qui ne connaît pas un dossier pareil et se permet de faire des commentaires !

Ce que j'avais dit dans ma réponse à la *PNQ*, il y a eu une évaluation en 2008 par la branche régionale du *GAFI*, l'*ESAAMLG* (*Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group*) et, bien sûr, il y avait certaines déficiences qui ont été relevées, et Maurice devait se mettre en conformité avec les normes qui existaient à l'époque. Et entretemps, en 2011, le *GAFI* vient changer sa méthodologie, et c'est là que cela devient les 40 recommandations sur tout ce qu'on appelle le '*technical compliance*'. A l'époque, l'honorable Xavier-Luc Duval était ministre des Finances et il a aussi assumé à cette période-là la présidence d'*ESAAMLG*. Et *ESAAMLG*, Maurice devait périodiquement soumettre des rapports pour démontrer les progrès que Maurice était en train de faire pour se mettre en conformité avec les recommandations du *GAFI*.

Jusqu'en 2016, Maurice avait continué à soumettre des rapports, mais pas sur la dernière méthodologie, pas sur les 40 recommandations qui émanent de cette nouvelle méthodologie du *GAFI*, mais sur l'ancienne méthode du *GAFI*. Ce n'est qu'en 2016, quand *ESAAMLG* demande de faire une deuxième évaluation qu'il n'y a plus de rapport à soumettre, bien sûr, on vient évaluer la position de Maurice. Déjà, en 2008, on avait demandé de faire ce qu'on appelle un '*National Risk Assessment*', qui n'a pas été fait.

Donc, il y avait un '*desk review*' en 2016, '*a non-site inspection*' en 2017 et le rapport sort en 2018. Qu'est-ce que le rapport donne ? Sur les 40 recommandations, on était en conformité que sur 14. Si déjà, à cette époque, on avait passé le cap de plus de 20 conformités, on n'aurait pas été là aujourd'hui.

Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait depuis ? Même avant que le rapport sorte en 2018 - il est sorti en septembre 2018 - dans le budget 2018-2019 et dans le budget 2019-2020, on est venu avec des amendements sur 12 législations. On est venu avec trois nouvelles législations. On avait fait sortir les huit régulations pour pouvoir se mettre en conformité avec les recommandations du *GAFI*. Et c'est comme cela, en espace d'une année, on est sorti de 14 recommandations sur lesquelles on était en conformité pour passer à 35.

Entretemps, comme je disais, le centre Financier est devenu plus conséquent, parce que, une fois que vous dépassez le seuil de R 5 milliards de *asset value*, on passe sous la loupe du *GAFI* directement. Et c'est comme cela, en 2018, en même temps qu'on était sous l'observation d'*ESAAMLG*, le *GAFI* nous met sous ce qu'on appelle un '*observation period*', la période est d'une durée d'une année et la période prit fin en septembre 2019.

Ce rapport est soumis à un panel évaluateur, ce qu'on appelle un *joint group* de la région Afrique-Middle East, et lors de cette réunion qui a eu lieu en janvier de cette année ci au Maroc, le *Joint Group* trouve qu'au niveau de ce qu'on appelle le *technical compliance*, Maurice n'a aucun problème. On est en règle. Par contre, sur ce qu'ils appellent, sur l'efficacité des mesures, des législations qu'on a mis en place, sur les 58 recommandations, il reste 5 sur lesquelles il faut encore faire des progrès. Il faut continuer encore à démontrer du progrès. C'est la raison pour laquelle le *GAFI* nous met sur une liste, ce qu'ils appellent *jurisdiction under enhanced monitoring* sans demander à ce qu'un *enhanced due diligence* soit fait mais seulement dans son *statement*, c'est dit clairement que tout pays qui veut travailler avec Maurice, étant sur cette liste de *enhanced monitoring jurisdiction*, doit prendre

en compte qu'il y a quelques déficiences stratégiques. Et on nous donne un *action plan* avec un calendrier établi et bien sûr, ce calendrier étale jusqu'à septembre 2021.

Dès qu'on eut ce plan d'action, on avait pris un engagement politique, du moins, d'adresser toutes ces *deficiencies* et, M. le président, tout de suite, on s'est mis au travail et on s'est dit qu'on allait adresser tous ces problèmes d'ici la fin de cette année-ci, c'est-à-dire décembre 2020. Un comité, qui est présidé par le Premier ministre, est en train de suivre tout le travail qui doit être fait afin d'assurer que l'objectif fixé pour décembre 2020 soit atteint.

Malheureusement, le 05 mai 2020, on apprend sur Reuters qu'il y a une liste que l'Union européenne compte sortir et que Maurice allait être incluse sur cette liste. Tout de suite, on s'est réuni. Le 06, le Premier ministre envoie une lettre au président de la Commission européenne, d'abord pour demander - et aussi il y a les chefs d'États des Etats membres de l'Union européenne - si cet article est fondé et si c'est fondé, comment se fait-il qu'il n'y ait pas eu de consultations? Il n'y a pas eu d'évaluation automne par l'Union européenne et surtout qu'on était en plein confinement. Comment se fait-il qu'une décision pareille a été prise sans aucun dialogue? Moi-même, j'ai eu l'occasion le 6 mai de parler, de rencontrer l'ambassadeur de l'Union européenne à Maurice pour lui demander si cet article était fondé. Lui aussi, il apprenait cette nouvelle, comme moi, et il devait, n'est-ce pas, lui aussi chercher confirmation.

Donc, effectivement, le 7, la Commission publie sa liste et le jour même, où cette liste est publiée, la Commission sort sa nouvelle méthodologie sur laquelle elle s'est basée pour sortir sa liste des pays tiers à haut risque. Et sur cette nouvelle méthodologie que nous avons tous appris, quand c'est sorti, parle qu'il faut que l'Union européenne fasse ce qu'on appelle une évaluation indépendante, il faut qu'il y ait consultation et aussi prendre en compte les recommandations des autres institutions. Alors, à aucun moment, lors de cet exercice avant de sortir avec une liste, l'Union européenne a eu un dialogue, ne serait-ce nous informer qu'il travaillait sur une liste et qu'elle allait nous inclure sur cette liste-là, et il n'y a pas eu non plus d'évaluation.

Dès que la liste est sortie, on se rencontre vu pratiquement tous les jours : le Premier ministre, le *Deputy Prime Minister*, le ministre des Finances, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, moi-même, l'*Attorney General*. On s'est vu pratiquement tous les jours pour d'abord avoir toutes les informations afin qu'on puisse décider de la marche à suivre. On a aussi, à travers le groupe ACP, son Secrétaire Général, parce qu'en même, il n'y pas que

Maurice, il y a pas mal de pays membres de l'ACP qui se trouvent sur cette liste et le Secrétaire Général des pays ACP a aussi écrit une lettre à la commission pour déplorer la manière dont l'Union européenne, la Commission plutôt, est venue avec une liste sans consultation et qui est fait d'une manière unilatérale.

Nous avons sorti un communiqué le 9 mai et depuis, il y a un travail qui est fait ensemble avec l'industrie pour trouver une solution afin qu'on puisse sortir de cette liste. Durant la semaine 18 au 22 mai 2020, le ministère des Affaires étrangères a commencé à initier pas mal de discussions. D'abord il y a eu une session de travail entre les techniciens de la commission, le *FISMA* avec une équipe locale pour comprendre le pourquoi et le comment. Moi-même et le ministre des Affaires étrangères, on a parlé avec le directeur général de *FISMA*. Le ministre des Affaires étrangères a parlé avec la ministre des Affaires étrangères Espagnole, avec le ministre des Affaires étrangères de la France, M. Le Drian. On a parlé avec la ministre des Affaires étrangères d'Italie, avec le représentant de la région d'Afrique, le conseiller de Madame Merkel pour la région d'Afrique, et tout le long, on a expliqué que la procédure n'a pas été suivie, il n'y a pas eu des consultations, il n'y a pas eu d'évaluation faite par l'Union européenne et surtout dans une période où on est en train de subir les effets néfastes de la COVID-19, ce n'était vraiment pas le moment de sortir une liste pareille qui va impacter négativement sur notre économie.

Normalement, d'après la procédure établie par l'Union européenne, la Commission a le pouvoir, par un acte délégué, de sortir cette liste et la proposition peut être rejetée dans une période d'un mois, et s'il y a objection, donc, ce délai d'un mois peut être prolongé pour encore un mois.

Il y avait deux comités institués par le Parlement. Un comité qui s'appelle le comité ECON et le comité LIBE qui avaient cette autorité d'objecter à ce que cette liste soit rejetée, soit revue ou demander qu'il y ait un prolongement d'un mois additionnel, afin qu'il puisse rediscuter de la liste.

Donc, le Premier ministre a écrit plusieurs lettres, entre autres, au président de ces deux comités et aussi à plusieurs personnalités européennes. On a eu l'occasion de parler avec le Vice-président de la commission, M. Valdis Dombrovskis et, malheureusement, les deux comités n'ont pas objecté à cette proposition de la commission et, bien sûr, le délai d'un mois est passé maintenant.

Normalement, il faut que la liste soit publiée sur l'*official journal* du Parlement européen pour que ça devienne, bien sûr, formelle et officielle. Comme vous savez tous, cette liste prendra effet le 1^{er} octobre.

Il y a eu une conversation téléphonique entre le Premier ministre et M. Michel, président de la Commission et, bien sûr, on a fait un appel à ce que Maurice puisse être évaluée par l'Union européenne avant le 1^{er} octobre parce que nous nous sommes engagés à adresser toutes ces déficiences notées par le GAFI et, bien sûr, le président, M. Michel, a fait comprendre qu'il va en discuter avec la Commission.

Nous avons engagé aussi un cabinet juridique et un Cabinet de lobbyistes pour faire ce qu'il faut faire en Europe afin qu'on puisse engager avec les Européens pour qu'on puisse plaider notre cas. Bien sûr on est encore à explorer maintenant la marche à suivre pour qu'on fasse tout ce qui est possible pour faire sortir Maurice de cette liste qui allait être adoptée par le Parlement européen.

On n'est pas seul. Il y a aussi beaucoup de pays qui ont été inclus sur la liste noire de l'Union européenne et comme nous, eux aussi, ils sont en train d'avancer les mêmes arguments parce qu'il n'y a pas eu de consultation, il n'y a pas eu de *autonomous assessment*, il n'y a pas eu, au préalable, des discussions.

Sûrement, vous avez aussi eu l'occasion de prendre connaissance de pas mal l'articles dans des journaux en Europe pour contester ou pour plutôt démontrer comment cette liste a été faite au détriment des petits pays.

Donc, c'est un sujet, M. le président, qui est important. D'ailleurs, je dois saluer la position du Leader de l'opposition. Il a compris que c'est un sujet national. Il a compris qu'ensemble on va devoir se battre pour faire sortir Maurice de cette liste et ensemble il faut rétablir la réputation de Maurice comme un centre financier de réputation.

Alors, nous sommes en train, toujours d'engager avec l'Union européenne à travers l'ambassade, ici, à travers notre mission à Bruxelles et, bien sûr, avec tous les pays amis des États membres de l'Union européenne afin qu'on puisse bouger. Je dois aussi faire mention que la Hongrie, un des États membres de l'Union européenne, a exprimé sa réserve sur la manière que cette liste est sortie et la Hongrie aussi demande à ce que cette liste soit révisée et demande à ce que l'Union européenne vienne avec *an autonomous assessment* avant le 1^{er} octobre et de voir les progrès qui sont en train d'être faits par ces différents pays concernés avant de les mettre officiellement sur la liste le 01 octobre.

Donc, comme je fais mention, M. le président, il y a eu pas mal de choses qui se sont passées depuis, mais l'objectif reste que nous adressons les déficiences notées par le GAFI. Aujourd'hui, il y a 5 sous-comités qui travaillent pour assurer justement qu'on se met en conformité avec ces 5 items sur l'*Action Plan* et nous avons avancé la date au 31 août afin qu'on puisse démontrer au GAFI les progrès qu'on a fait.

Il devait y avoir une réunion en avril. On devait soumettre un Progress Report le 20 mars, qu'on a soumis malgré le confinement. Malheureusement, ça n'a pas pu avoir lieu pour cause de COVID-19 et en fin août, début septembre, il y aura une autre évaluation par le GAFI.

Et nous souhaitons aussi démontrer tout le progrès qu'on est en train de faire d'ici à septembre. Donc, voilà un peu la situation, M. le président, par rapport à ce dossier, un dossier qu'on n'aurait pas aimé avoir à gérer maintenant, surtout en cette période où l'économie est vraiment affectée par la COVID-19, c'est le cas. On est en train de faire ce qu'il faut faire et j'espère que d'ici fin septembre, on sera en mesure de démontrer à la fois à GAFI et aussi à l'Union européenne tout le progrès qu'on a fait pour pouvoir nous faire sortir de la liste à la fois du GAFI et de l'Union européenne.

On me signale que mon temps est passé. Donc, j'espère pouvoir avoir la collaboration de tous parce que c'est quelque chose pour moi d'importance nationale. Pareil comme les autres pays concernés sont en train de faire un effort collectif, alors j'espère qu'on va retrouver ce même effort collectif ici aussi, afin qu'on puisse s'en sortir.

Avec ces mots, M. le président, je vous remercie pour votre attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

(7.00 p.m.)

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):
Merci, M. le président.

Avant de passer aux commentaires sur le discours du budget, je voudrais rendre un vibrant hommage aux *front liners*, au nom de tous mes mandants et en mon nom personnel, et qui ont côtoyé les patients au prix de leur santé. Je voudrais exprimer mes remerciements les plus sincères à tous ceux et celles qui ont été aux avant-postes, les *front liners* pour leur travail remarquable durant la période du confinement et du couvre-feu sanitaire. J'ai en tête, évidemment, le personnel médical, les autorités policières, les employés du supermarché, les

éboueurs des collectivités locales, les sapeurs-pompiers, entre autres, qui ont redoublé d'efforts pour assurer notre bien-être et nous épargner d'être contaminés par la maladie COVID-19, nous permettant ainsi de faire face à ces moments difficiles et contraignants, de manière collective, comme une nation.

Pendant la période de confinement, notre population a su faire preuve de discipline et particulièrement, d'une solidarité exemplaire. M. le président, pendant ces cinq dernières années, des économistes ont tiré la sonnette d'alarme concernant l'état précaire de notre économie, eu égard aux dépenses excessives dont les sommes sont puisées des fonds du gouvernement. Le lancement des projets de prestige et un manque de vigilance concernant des fonds publics en général, notre situation économique se détériorait davantage. On a promulgué des lois pour faire sauter les verrous de la banque centrale pour se servir copieusement, sans le moindre retenu, afin d'arrondir les chiffres. Et on ose parler de budget équilibré !

Je voudrais attirer l'attention de la Chambre, avec une note de prudence, concernant nos réserves financières. On ne peut nier que notre dette publique augmente considérablement et de manière alarmante. Quel est notre plan de remboursement? Est-ce que le gouvernement compte rembourser tout cet argent qu'il a astucieusement et légalement dérobé de la Banque centrale ? Et comment il compte s'y prendre? A combien se chiffre la dette publique ? Est-ce que le ministre des Finances a une stratégie claire, comment il compte la réduire à un taux acceptable? Avec l'avènement de la COVID-19 et, donc, l'urgence d'utiliser encore des fonds publics pour sauver des vies, l'état de l'économie nationale ne pouvait qu'empirer.

Et là, je vais commenter les mesures annoncées dans le dernier budget du ministre des Finances. Avec la création de la *MIC (Mauritius Investment Corporation)*, le recours au *special purpose vehicle* qui échappe au *Parliament scrutiny*, comme on dit, n'est plus quelque chose d'exceptionnelle, mais devient une pratique courante. Il faut être vraiment dupe pour croire que les R 80 milliards de la *MIC* vont être utilisées de façon judicieuse.

Le ministre des Finances a déjà signifié les secteurs et les projets où investira la *MIC* sans même que le conseil d'administration soit constitué. Donc, la *MIC* va être dictée par le gouvernement. Puisque cet argent colossal appartient au peuple et l'État Mauriciens, est-ce que les prêts vont être effectués dans la transparence totale et la liste des bénéficiaires sera rendue publique ? Mention est aussi faite que la *MIC has earmarked Rs10 billion to invest in African projects*. Ceci dit, si je ne me trompe pas, M. le président, la Banque de Maurice va

être la seule au monde qui, à travers une subsidiaire, agira comme un investisseur, bien au contraire de sa fonction principale de régulateur.

Maintenant, M. le président, laissez-moi commenter les mesures fiscales annoncées dans le budget. Rarement a-t-on vu des réactions aussi soudaines et spontanées. Toutes les pontes de la haute finance et de l'économie ne se sont pas fait prier pour donner leur point de vue contradictoire, des anciens ministres des Finances, des économistes, des directeurs des entreprises et même des syndicalistes se sont fait bousculer pour se faire entendre. Et là, je vais commenter les taxes sur les chiffres d'affaires. L'État vient poser un prélèvement sur les chiffres d'affaires de certaines compagnies. Ce prélèvement est injuste dans la mesure où une compagnie, une entreprise va devoir payer cette taxe, peu importe si elle est profitable ou pas. Surtout, en ces moments difficiles, où nous traversons poste Covid, cette taxe est illogique quand, normalement, ce sont les profits qui sont taxés.

Le ministre des Finances fait le contraire, car il aurait dû venir avec des mesures pour aider les entrepreneurs après les moments difficiles du confinement. Or, il alourdit les charges des entrepreneurs et autres compagnies avec plus de taxes et des charges sociales fortes. Le moment est peut-être mal choisi. Il y a d'autres questions que nous attendons des réponses.

Les compagnies concernées sont celles dont les revenus bruts dépassant les R 500 millions, au cours d'une année financière, qui en font partie d'un groupe d'entreprises dont le revenu brut du groupe dépasse R 500 millions, l'État prélèvera un impôt de 0.1 à 0.3%. La question qui se pose est : est-ce que cette mesure s'appliquera pour les maisons-mères ou vice versa ? Les subsidiaires qui se trouvent à l'étranger ; il y en a beaucoup de nos compagnies, à l'île Maurice des compagnies cotées en bourse, même pas cotées en bourse, qui sont directement concernées. J'espère que le ministre des Finances va clarifier cette situation lors de son *summing-up* en attendant le Finance Bill.

L'augmentation du *Solidarity Levy*, qui augmente le pourcentage de taxation à 40%, classe l'île Maurice à un niveau de taxation de plus élevé que les pays développés, tels que les États-Unis, la Nouvelle-Zélande et le Singapour. Et comment ne pas décrier le manque d'équité entre les Mauriciens et étrangers, avec le risque de *brain drain*, comme le prédisent beaucoup d'experts en finance. Il y a une très grande risque d'évasion fiscale, comme cela a été le cas dans les années 70-80, quand la taxe était de l'ordre de 40 % ou même plus. C'est un retour en arrière. La réforme de notre système de taxation, je me souviens dans les années

2000 à monter, avec la création de la *MRA*, la taxe avait été réduite de façon graduelle de 30% à 15%.

Et vous savez ce qui s'est passé, M. le président, avec la réduction de la taxe - et ça peut être vérifié ce que je suis en train de dire - au lieu que les revenus fiscaux de la *MRA* soient diminués, les revenus fiscaux de la *MRA* ont augmenté. Ça, c'était une réforme qui a augmenté les revenus de l'Etat et je peux vous dire que, par rapport à notre taux d'imposition, ça a été un des grands avantages de l'Ile Maurice comparativement à d'autres pays. Il y a aussi, M. le président, le risque de l'utilisation des juridictions étrangères pour investir à Maurice.

M. le président, laissez-moi venir sur la Contribution Sociale Généralisée. J'avais espéré plus de clarté ce matin lors du *PNQ* du leader de l'opposition, mais malheureusement, rien n'a transpiré. L'introduction de la Contribution Sociale Généralisée vient remplacer le *National Pension Fund*. La réforme du système des pensions était nécessaire et aurait dû être lancée depuis longtemps, mais les acteurs économiques sont catégoriques, le CSG est une taxe additionnelle qui va impacter le coût salarial des entreprises, et cet impact financier sera immédiat. Pour l'employeur, l'impact sera de 3 à 6% dans un contexte post-COVID, où l'on parle de sauvegarde de l'emploi. Le coût salarial des entreprises vont augmenter automatiquement. Cela veut aussi dire moins de compétitivités. Donc, ça va sans dire que cette mesure va mettre la pression sur l'emploi, décourageant tout recrutement et accentuera le risque de licenciement.

Les entreprises qui ne pourront payer vont réduire leur masse salariale en supprimant des postes, voire même des licenciements. Encore une fois dans le contexte actuel, il y aura beaucoup de chamboulements et comme je l'ai dit précédemment, j'aurai cru avoir des éléments de réponse dans la *PNQ*, mais malheureusement pas. Comment est-ce que l'interaction entre la CSG et d'autres plans de contribution légalement constitués, tels que le *Portable Gratuity Retirement Fund*, et les employeurs qui ont déjà contribué au *Super Annuation Fund* ? Comment va se passer cette interaction ? M. le président, ce sera un méli-mélo et donc on aurait bien pu se passer, vu le contexte actuel. L'impact de la CSG aurait, pour les employés qui contribuent déjà à un plan de pension avec une somme prédéterminée selon les clauses du contrat. La CSG serait alors un décaissement additionnel des fonds. Certaines entreprises vont carrément arrêter leur contribution et ça va affecter beaucoup de personnes qui ont misé là-dessus pour leur retraite. Ce sera vraiment un beau gâchis, M. le président. Et puis, il y a aucune visibilité dans quoi on contribue car il n'y a pas de plafond de

contribution. Quelqu'un peut contribuer R 100 par mois et d'autres R 10,000 par mois. Arrivant l'âge de la retraite, un individu touchera-t-il le même montant que tout le monde ? C'est-à-dire, quelqu'un qui a contribué R 100 et quelqu'un qui a contribué R 10,000 est-ce qu'ils vont recevoir le même montant ? Donc, on peut contribuer plus, mais il faut qu'il y ait une meilleure pension. Donc, tout ça il faut que le ministre des Finances clarifie au plus vite, M. le président. Donc, si le bénéfice ultime n'est pas lié aux taux de contribution, la CSG serait alors un impôt. Il y a beaucoup de questions que le ministre des Finances doit clarifier durant son *summing-up*. La CSG concernera-t-elle les étrangers ? Concernera-t-elle aussi les ressortissants Mauriciens qui travaillent à l'étranger ? La contribution à la CSG serait-elle déductible pour les employeurs ? La contribution de l'employeur serait-elle déductible pour les employés ? Qui va gérer ce fonds de pension ? Quelle sont les garanties, en termes de compétence, de transparence sur les placements et les investissements qui seront faits ? M. le président, ce que je déplore, c'est le manque de consultation à ce sujet. Il y avait certainement d'autres solutions, mais il y avait pas de consultation, M. le président.

Maintenant, laissez-moi venir au *Work and Residence Occupation Permit*. Au paragraphe 205 du budget concernant le *Work Permit*, *Residence Permit*, et *Occupation Permit*, M. le président, ce serait les portes grandes ouvertes aux étrangers. Les mesures annoncées dans le budget prennent à contrepied les amendements faites l'année dernière au *Immigration Amendment Bill*. Le *Bill* avait été voté pour avoir plus de contrôle sur le statut des étrangers qui sont mariés à des Mauriciens et les *non-Citizens Exemption Regulations* avaient été amendés afin que les étrangers, même mariés à des Mauriciens, soient dans l'obligation d'avoir un permis de travail pour être en mesure de travailler à Maurice. Le but principal derrière cela était de limiter les abus. Ce qu'on constate avec le budget 2020-2021 vient maintenant éliminer les conditions d'un permis de résidence pour les étrangers. Le montant minimum d'investissement pour l'obtention d'un *Occupation Permit* passe de 100,000 à 50,000 dollars, c'est-à-dire, de R 4 millions à R 2 millions.

M. le président, que représente R 2 millions pour certains étrangers ? Donc, pour faciliter l'arrivée des familles, maintenant le conjoint n'aura pas besoin de permis pour travailler à Maurice et pourrait même faire venir leurs parents à Maurice pour se la couler douce. Tout le monde est invité à l'Ile Maurice, le papa, la maman, les enfants, les grands-mères, les grands-pères et, cerise sur le gâteau, M. le président, les résidents étrangers à Maurice seront taxés à 20%, alors que les Mauriciens seront taxés à 43%. 15% plus 25% plus 3% pour les Mauriciens, et étrangers 15%, parce qu'il n'y aura pas de *Solidarity Tax* là-

dessus. Donc, vous voyez cette disparité M. le président ? Donc, si on prend en compte la Contribution Générale, on doit encore ajouter. M le président, c'est la première fois dans l'histoire de Maurice qu'on traite nos concitoyens de deuxième grade au sein même de leur propre pays. Cela est hautement discriminatoire. L'île Maurice sera la nouvelle Eldorado pour les étrangers et tout cela est défini comme une nouvelle normalité.

M. le président, ceci dit, je lance un appel au ministre des Finances pour qu'il rectifie cette mesure qui pénalise les Mauriciens. Il faut que la taxe soit uniforme pour les deux catégories.

M. le président, j'aimerais rapidement dire quelques mots sur le *Corporate Social Responsibility* (CSR). Le CSR avait été créé à l'origine avec pour objectif de doter les moyens financiers aux ONG pour mener à bon port leurs projets de société et également pour encourager le volontariat et le bénévolat, mais que voyons-nous ? Il a été détourné de ces objectifs initiaux et '*hijack*' pour servir de propagande pour le pouvoir. C'est de la malhonnête envers le secteur privé et les ONG. Il faut à tout prix retourner le CSR à ses intentions initiales, avec plus de transparence dans les allocations des *grants*. Les ONG doivent être autonomes pour être dynamique et performante.

Maintenant, M. le président, beaucoup a été dit, et beaucoup entendu ces derniers jours, concernant la construction des logements sociaux et la problématique du *squatting*.

M. le président, je propose qu'il faut dépassionner ce débat et venons-en au fait. Je le ferai avec honnêteté et sans démagogie. On ne peut regarder ce problème à la surface. D'un gouvernement à l'autre, on a berné la population avec des projets de logements qui n'ont pas été concrétisés selon les attentes des gens vulnérables. Dix mille logements ont été promis durant la campagne électorale de décembre 2014 et c'est dans le manifeste électoral. Ce qui fait que dès lors, il y a eu un *crisis of expectation* dans ce secteur là et les pauvres ont eu l'impression qu'ils ont été menés en bateau.

Je voudrais mettre l'accent et attirer l'attention sur l'inadéquation entre ce qui est proposé dans le manifeste électoral en matière de construction de logements sociaux pour leurrer les gens à voter pour ce gouvernement et son implémentation. Là, je vais venir avec des chiffres officiels, fournis par l'ancien ministre des Terres et du Logement, *and I will refer to 2 PQs put by myself in 2018 and 2019; PQ B/374 and PQ B/236. I will quote from this PQ, je cite le ministre –*

"I am informed by the NHDC that since January 2015 to date (...)"

C'est-à-dire, en avril 2019 -

“(...) 1.979 housing units have been completed over 49 sites, out of which, 149 units have been delivered. I am further informed by the NHDC that construction of 2,420 housing units is ongoing, out of which 458 units are expected to be completed by June 2019, and 528 units will be completed by end of December 2019.”

Et dans le précédent PQ, c'est-à-dire PQ B/374, le même ministre nous disait que –

“Construction of 746 housing units started prior January 2015 were delivered in 2015.”

Donc, M. le président, *when I add all these figures, 1,976 plus 458, plus 528, we arrive at a total of 2,962 housing units, minus the 746 which were already constructed by the previous Government. So, this brings us to a grand total of 2,216 housing units built by this Government, out of 10,000 that was announced in the Electoral Manifesto.* Et dans la question B/374, mention a été aussi faite que –

“Under the grant and line of credit of USD20 m. and USD25 m. respectively from the Government of India.”

Et je dis bien là, il y a eu un *line of credit* de 20 million dollars et 25 million de dollars de *grant*. De *grant* veut dire de donations, de cadeaux.

Donc, M. le président, l'argent était là. 700 millions plus 875 millions de roupies, 1 575 000 000 de roupies. L'argent était là, les terres étaient là, la demande était là, mais la volonté et la compétence n'étaient pas là, M. le président. La volonté et la compétence pour les logements n'étaient pas au rendez-vous, M. le président. Donc, M. le président, après avoir fourni ces chiffres officiels, il n'est guère exagéré de dire que la politique de logement du gouvernement est une faillite totale à ce jour. Le gouvernement a failli lamentablement en ce qui concerne la construction des maisons pour les classes défavorisées de la société mauricienne. Mais ceci dit, j'ose espérer qu'on va changer la donne avec l'annonce d'un effort exceptionnel pour construire 12,000 unités au cours des trois prochaines années au bénéfice des familles mauriciennes, selon les dires du ministre des Finances. En tant que patriote, je souhaite bonne chance, mais quand même l'avenir nous le dira, et eu égard du passé, ce sera un gros challenge.

Aussi, M. le président, une autre promesse électorale de *l'Alliance Morisien* fut l'exemption de la taxe immobilière pour les personnes ne possédant qu'une seule maison en

ville. Annoncé en grande pompe durant la dernière campagne électorale, et faisant partie des 15 mesures phares annoncées dans le manifeste, le ministre des Finances n'a rien annoncé dans son budget 2021. Les propriétaires urbains qui pensaient être exemptés de la taxe sont très déçus car ils ont déjà reçus des formulaires pour régler la note auprès des municipalités.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say a few words on education. We all agree that during this unprecedented situation of COVID-19 pandemic, all stakeholders of the education sector went through difficult times, including the Ministry, the students, as well as the educators. But it is very unfortunate to observe that in such difficult times, instead of adopting a diplomatic approach in instilling online teaching, the Ministry chose otherwise by using intimidation. *Donc, ça arrive au bon moment parce que le ministre de l'Éducation fait son entrée.*

Here, I would like to highlight some issues faced and will be faced by both students and teachers. Firstly the primary sector, no online teaching has taken place, apart from the videos from the student support programme broadcasted by the MBC. Are we assuming that these students have completed the first term syllabus by themselves? For the secondary sector, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very saddening and disheartening to observe that the extended stream has been completely forgotten and no consideration given in terms of MBC program or online teaching contents, despite the fact that they were at the centre of the 9-year schooling, of the 9-year continuous basic education reform. Some parents of my constituency, be it in Plaine Verte and Roche Bois, have complained to me on this issue. The more so, they did not have access to internet and computer equipment. What will happen to students of Grades 10 and 13, who for some genuine reason have not had access to online teaching during confinement period, no provision for time allocation for catching up since the second term is already so overloaded? What measures the Ministry intends to take for catching of such category of students? The May and June exams 2021, in case the papers will be from May and June series, has there been any formal approval from the Cambridge International Examination regarding the setting of papers based on the SC, HSC syllabus of 2020, as syllabus incompatibilities have already been raised by my friend, Dr. the hon, Gungapersad, regarding prescribed texts for literature, while some subjects are not even included in May and June series. Is the Ministry concealing that the students will eventually lose one whole academic year? If this is the case, why no come forward and communicate it already? It seems to me that the Minister of Education has adopted an attitude of self-deafness. She seemed to have only heard that some educators were unwilling to do the online

teaching, but chose not to hear the plea of educators for proper training and provision of equipment from the Ministry, who, as their employer, has obligation to do so. To conclude on this issue, I would like to say what I find more unacceptable on the part of the Minister of Education, is that she dared to make fun of an educator's name in this august Assembly yesterday, namely Mr Meetowa, which I interpret as very humiliating for the educator vis-à-vis his students and a blatant lack of respect towards that noble profession. Is this the kind of education that the Minister is condoning or encouraging? If you do not treat people with the respect they deserve, do not expect any kind of commitment to set to your set goals and targets. It is very unfortunate that instead of seizing the opportunity to review and improve the whole education system in the new normal, the Minister has lamentably failed in her duty by not taking on board all stakeholders. Now that the Prime Minister has just announced that classes will resume on 01 July, it would be good if the Minister of Education clarifies many important issues, such as the calendar year, examinations and social distancing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am running out of time. Donc, laissez-moi rapidement dire quelques mots sur les prisons. Je voudrais maintenant dire, eu égard à la situation qui prévoit actuellement dans nos prisons, surtout concernant la mort prématurée des prisonniers qui sont censés être sous la surveillance des officiers du personnel carcéral en général. Le milieu carcéral sous la houlette de l'ancien Commissaire des Prisons laisse beaucoup à désirer et l'image de cette institution pénitentiaire a pris un sérieux coup. Il est inconcevable que des prisonniers soient tués entre les quatre murs de la prison. Nous savons que l'atmosphère qui y règne pèse sur le mental des condamnés, mais le devoir est de constater des assistanats organisés, ce qui est totalement inadmissible. Ces prisonniers sont sous étroite surveillance 24 heures sur 24. A cet effet, des caméras CCTV ont été mises en place, aussi comment se fait-il que lorsqu'on interroge les officiers de la prison sur la mort inattendue d'un prisonnier dans l'enceinte de la prison, personne n'est capable de donner une réponse plausible. Mieux encore, nous avons été choqués par la déclaration de l'ancien Commissaire des Prisons, après le récent assassinat à la prison, à l'effet qu'il ne croit pas dans le système de caméra. Il aura dû être viré sur le champ. Cette déclaration stupide est en totale contradiction de l'action gouvernementale et qui a investi des milliards dans les caméras du *Safe City*. Et pour couronner le tout, l'ancien Commissaire des Prisons a été promu en tant que Conseiller auprès du Premier ministre. Je me demande ce qu'il va conseiller au Premier ministre, peut-être qu'il va lui dire qu'il faut enlever les caméras du *Safe City*. Il y a une nécessité urgente de mettre fin aux règlements de compte et à la guerre des clans dans nos prisons. Les

prisonniers qui sont sous la charge et la responsabilité du Commissaire des Prisons doivent pouvoir terminer la durée de leur sentence, peu importe le nombre d'années ou la gravité de leur offense commise. L'opinion publique est en faveur d'une refonte en profondeur des prisons chez nous.

M. le président, laissez-moi conclure pour dire que la politique est une mission sacrée pour certains et un repère de fraude et de corruption, de magouille et de bassesse pour d'autres. L'histoire fera la différence entre le bon grain et l'ivraie. Nous sommes fiers au MMM d'être guidés par l'honnêteté, l'intégrité et le mauricianisme. Aux dernières élections, seuls, face à des alliances, nous ne nous sommes pas laissés tenter par la bassesse, par le *money politics*, pour prendre ce terme de notre leader, l'honorable Paul Bérenger. Nous avons fait une campagne dans la dignité, sans grande ressource financière. Nous n'avons pas eu recours aux populistes et à la démagogie. Tout cela ne constitue pas notre ADN. Dix ans en politique, je dois vous dire, M. le président, c'était mon élection la plus difficile. Je n'ai pas dû mener une campagne communale, infecte pour me faire élire. L'électorat de la circonscription No. 3, qui est composé de toutes les communautés, peut être rassurées que jamais, au grand jamais, je ne vais me servir du communalisme, de la religion et de *fake news* pour assurer mon élection. J'aime trop l'harmonie sacrée en toutes les communautés. Franchement, je préfère mordre la poussière que de mener une communauté dans les ghettos sectaires. C'est très dangereux d'empoisonner l'esprit d'une communauté avec le sectarisme et d'utiliser ce langage pour vaincre ses adversaires. Un Parlementaire ne peut pas être un pyromane. Certains doivent se rendre à l'évidence que nous ne sommes plus dans les années 60 et 70. Nous sommes en 2020 et il n'y a plus de place pour des politiciens qui se croient pouvoir s'octroyer du titre de leader d'une communauté. Il n'y a de la place qu'aux patriotes. Malgré les hauts et les bas, ce pays demeure un havre de paix pour l'ensemble des mauriciens. C'est sur ce fondement solide qu'on a pu prospérer.

M. le président, pour terminer, je souhaiterai voir une île Maurice émergente, prospère, juste et généreuse, une nation unifiée avec chaque individu jouissant des droits égaux.

M. le président, j'ai terminé. Vive la République de l'île Maurice !

Merci.

Mr Speaker: Dr. the hon. Husnoo!

(7.36 p.m.)

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, allow me to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for his bold and resolute Budget Speech in the context where the Coronavirus Pandemic has plunged the world into the worse and an unprecedented crisis of recent time, a situation that no one could have ever imagined only a few months ago.

As everybody in the House is aware, the previous months were testing time for our country, as it was for the rest of the world. The whole world is continuing to experience severe and, in some cases, catastrophic financial and social disruption. In fact, the full impact of the pandemic on economies, and societies at large, is yet to be assessed. Undoubtedly, many countries across the world are still going through tremendous amount of turmoil. As has just been mentioned by my colleague earlier, we have reached more than seven million cases of COVID and about nearly half a million deaths so far, and it is still increasing. The pandemic has affected the lives of billions across the globe. In fact, three billion people were in lockdown for weeks. Three billion! For millions of people across the world, their life has changed and will never be the same again.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this forced lockdown and restriction have also had dire consequence on Mauritius, a small nation with an open economy. Nevertheless, we are now seeing the result of prompt action and timely decision taken by the Government to control the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the population from this deadly disease. In this connection, I must also applaud the Prime Minister and the National Steering Committee for implementing measures which, in some cases, were drastic, but were nevertheless crucial and necessary to combat the COVID-19.

As a matter of fact, Mauritius is being commended on many fronts for the management of this pandemic here. I would like to say a special word of appreciation to our front liners, who have worked with unwavering determination to combat the various. And also to the Mauritian population who have cooperated with the Government during this difficult time.

As we enter the next phase of the confinement, vigilance is the keyword. At this juncture protective measures, that is, wearing masks, personal hygiene and social distancing are still of paramount importance. These will be the main ingredients in this new lifestyle. Maybe until a vaccine is developed. This is also part of the new normal. That is what is going to help us to prevent any further spread of COVID-19 if, God forbids, we get one new

local case in Mauritius. This new normal, Mr Speaker, Sir, takes the centre stage in the philosophy of the 2020-2021 Budget. Measures to address the socio economic impact of the Covid-19 have been matched with other measures to lay the foundation for stability and progress in the economic sector in the years to come.

The post recovery will be a long and difficult one, we must all agree, but I am sure with the help and understanding of the population, we shall prevail eventually. The Minister of Finance has, in this catastrophic economic situation, produced a balanced exercise to give the necessary boost to the economy while protecting the most vulnerable groups of the society. A number of measures have been taken to boost the different sectors namely, the construction industry, the agriculture, the SME sector, the tourism industry, the housing sector as well as job protection for thousands of workers and social measures to protect the most vulnerable members of our society. My colleagues have canvassed these issues, so, I am not going to delve on them.

Before I proceed to Local Government, I would like to make a few points on what has been discussed by previous Members. The previous Member just mentioned about *taxe immobilière*. Yes, it was part of our programme, but who could have predicted the financial catastrophe that is going to be caused by Covid. Nobody could have! This Government was genuine. We wanted to do it, but now with this present economic situation, that's why we have not applied it and I can assure the House that this Government still believes in that and as the situation improves, we are going to apply this measure.

One of the first insinuations that the Covid pandemic was not properly managed by this Government, that was made by a few speakers. At the very beginning of the epidemic in China, we had discussion about the approach we were going to take to manage the situation. Basically, Mr Speaker, Sir, there were two approaches. Firstly, we could have taken the approach that was done in some countries where they would allow the whole population to get infected, that is, to develop herd immunity. This would allow the economic life in the country to continue but would have a very high mortality in the population. That was the first approach.

The second approach is where we do everything to control the spread of the disease. This type of approach is going to be costly to the economy, but it would allow us to save each and every life as much as possible. And, very importantly, it would decrease the mortality to a minimum.

These are the two approaches. I can assure you, Mr Speaker, Sir, that from the beginning, the Prime Minister, in different meetings, insisted that we are going to do everything to save the lives of our citizens despite the fact that it is going to cost us a lot financially, the emphasis was to save lives and that was decided by the Prime Minister in the different meetings from the very beginning.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to mention a few dates to show you how this Government has been proactive in controlling the epidemic. On 31 December 2019, a dozen of cases of pneumonia of unknown causes were confirmed in Wuhan. Please note that the causes of the epidemic were not even known at that particular time. They were called pneumonia of unknown causes. Eventually, following the announcement of the COVID-19 epidemic in Wuhan on 22 January 2020, the Chinese nationals arriving from China were quarantined at Souillac. We started taking action almost immediately. On 02 February, 12 Mauritian nationals were evacuated from Wuhan to France.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Assirvaden!

Dr. Husnoo: On 27 February, Mauritius closed its border with some provinces in Italy. Two weeks later, that is, on 16 March, Mauritius closed its border to European countries. On 18 March, the Prime Minister had announced the first three cases of COVID in Mauritius and he announced a sanitary lockdown. On 19 March, the Ministry of Health takes possession of 1700 rooms for quarantine purposes and, on the same day, Mauritius closed its borders with the rest of the world. On 24 March, to prevent local spread of the disease, the Prime Minister announced the closure of supermarkets, shops and grocery stores. On 26 March, the Government set up the Solidarity Fund to help people who are in need.

During this time, the Souillac and ENT hospitals were open to treat Covid cases. These measures taken proved to be very successful and we managed to control the situation in Mauritius. All these measures were taken at a time when some of the most developed countries in the world were unsure – I repeat unsure on how to cope with this disease and their mortality rate was going up in thousands. As you are aware, Mauritius has been commended on many fronts, even by the World Health Organisation, on the way we managed the epidemic in Mauritius. So, to come and say that we did not manage the situation properly is to say the least, Mr Speaker, Sir, is very unfair and even very antipatriotic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we did this at a time when the world was facing this new virus, at a time when nobody knew how this pandemic was going to pan out. Even people like Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases of the United States and Sir Patrick Vallance, the Chief Scientific Officer of the British Government could not pronounce themselves about the disease. They were managing the situation on a day-to-day basis because it was a new virus and nobody knew exactly how to manage the situation at that time. But despite the way the Government controlled the situation in Mauritius, in this House, some people were criticising.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is easy to criticise and to be wise after the event, but we know, we managed to flatten the curve, as we say. We managed to decrease the mortality to make it less than what was predicted by the WHO for Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir, but so many people does not seem to understand all this and it is easy to criticise.

The second point I would like to raise is about the facilities given to the investors and professionals, which was mentioned by hon. Ameer Meea earlier to allow them to come and work in Mauritius. A lot of people are saying that it is going to prevent our people in Mauritius from getting jobs and would cause a brain drain. Mr Speaker, Sir, in Mauritius now we are facing a major demographic problem. As mentioned by the Minister of Finance at section 199 of the Budget Speech, last year our country's population declined for the first time in more than 50 years and if this trend continues, our population, which is now 1,225,000 people would come down to about 1,000,000 by the year 2050. In 30 years' time, we are going to have a population that is going to decrease by more than 200,000, that is, the population may contract by about 18%, Mr Speaker. That is in 30 years' time. In 10 years' time, at the rate we are going, the population is going to decrease by 20,000; in 20 years' time by more than 75,000. In 30 years' time, as mentioned before, by more than 200,000 at the rate we are going.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is: how are we going to develop this country in one-generation time if we are going to lose more than 200,000 people? How are we going to develop that country? You know the replacement fertility rate is 2.1, that is, a woman must have, statistically speaking, 2.1 children to keep the population at the same level as it is now. We call that a replacement value and it should be 2.1 to have a static population, but, in 2018, the fertility rate in Mauritius was 1.37, Mr Speaker.

Just to give you an idea in Europe, the fertility rate is 1.6; in Mauritius, it is 1.37. That is why it is going to be a mess; are we going to have enough population to replace the present population in the years to come? So, if we want to develop the country what choice do we have, Sir? Do we have any choice? No, Sir.

As the Minister of Finance said we have no choice but to open our country to talents, ideas and knowledge. We have to invite people especially professionals to come and live and work in Mauritius. That is how we are going to have the critical mass of talented people to develop the different sectors in Mauritius.

Apart from this, Mr Speaker, the Government is putting in place other measures to encourage women to have more children. For example, last year, the Government increased the paid maternity leave from 12 weeks to 14 weeks. Incentives are being given to open *crèches*. Flexi time and working from home are being encouraged.

In this Budget, Mr Speaker, for the first time, the income exemption threshold for all categories of taxpayers has been increased significantly. Previously, the increase was the same whether you have one, two, three or more dependents. But in this Budget, for a taxpayer with two dependents, the income threshold has been increased by 15,000; with three dependents the increase is Rs50,000 and for four or more dependents, the increase is Rs80,000. Okay, you may tell me it is not enough, but it is a step in the right direction. These measures are being implemented, Mr Speaker, to encourage the couple in some way to have more children, to alleviate the difficulty to have more children.

Even if we start putting those measures in practice now, we will not see the effect till after one generation time, that is, by the time the children are born, they grow up, they go to the secondary school, they go to university; they come back, that will be in 25 or 30 years.

Even with all the measures that are being given now, all the incentives, we are not going to see the effect now. The effect would be in 25 years' time. So what do we do in 10 years' time? What do we do in 20 years' time when the population would have decreased significantly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Singapore is one third the size of Mauritius and its population is four times the population of Mauritius, but still they are encouraging talented professionals from all over the world to come and work in Singapore.

So, Mr Speaker, is it wrong what we are doing? This Government is looking well ahead - 20 to 30 years ahead. This is why we have to implement these measures now. It is to

improve the economic prospect of this country in the years to come so that in 15 or 20 years' time, we will not be in a fix with a shortage of highly trained professionals.

Before I proceed, Mr Speaker, to Local Government, allow me to say a few words about some of the comments that were made yesterday. Hon. Aumeer mentioned yesterday about cancer treatment. It was not good; the new hospital is not coming and all that. I know the state of the cancer ward as I was the Minister of Health for the last three years; but improving the situation, it can't be improved overnight. Just to give an idea. I'll explain how it was previously. To treat cancer we need equipment what we call the linear accelerator. The last linear accelerator that was bought in Mauritius was 24 years ago and we should have changed that linear accelerator 12 years ago. Nothing was done, Mr Speaker. And a couple of years ago, when I came to the Ministry of Health, I started working on that. So, we are building the new hospital and we have got not one, but two linear accelerators coming so that we equip the hospital properly for the patients who really need this care. Just to give you one. That is number one.

(Interruptions)

The hon. Leader of the Opposition is right, I mentioned it the last time and I just said it again. I said it because Dr. Aumeer was not in the House. He did not hear what I said the last time so I am just repeating myself so that he can hear it now.

Now, talking about the COVID, about the loss of lives due to COVID, he was kind of insinuating about the substandard care provided. Look, I, as a doctor, know we need training. Everybody needs training whether it is a pre-registered doctor or a consultant, we all need training. But he should know, as a doctor, that there are complications. A lot of these patients who passed away from covid had severe lung damage and I am sure he knows about it.

In UK and US, there is the death rate in terms of thousands, Mr Speaker. Are you telling me that in UK and US, they are giving substandard treatment as well. No. It is just that sometimes one can make cheap comments, it is not fair because these people - these doctors, these nurses are working very hard at their expense. They are putting their lives in danger. They are working to provide the service and we can't come with this kind of comment. Then he was talking about Medical Council. The Medical Council does not know what it is doing, but it is mentioned here in the annex to the Budget Speech that the Government is going to have a reputable international organisation to do the MRE exam. It is mentioned in the Budget but he said he does not know about it. Since I am on the Medical Council I would like

to mention: before the election, I came myself with a Bill that was going to stop the pre-registration exam - the pre-exam we call it, that is, the exam you have to take before you start your pre-registration trainee. I came last time, but because of the General Election, it did not manage to go through, but now, it is coming it is in this Budget as well. In Europe, we are having deaths by thousands. Every night, people were going on their balcony to clap their hands to encourage the front liners. Are they clapping their hands because thousands of people have passed away there? No. They clapped their hands to encourage the front liners. That is what they did. As far as the Minister of Health is concerned, during the COVID-19, he was in the front line. He was at Souillac hospital, at ENT hospital, at all the different hospitals in Mauritius, in the quarantine centre, looking for PPEs and making sure that our patients get the best treatment. He was not sitting around in his living room. No. He was in the front line and looking after the care of our patients. But to say that, we cannot applaud him, well, I live it to you to judge.

Again, yesterday, hon. Abbas Mamode mentioned the Saint François dispensary in our Constituency. He has heard so many times about it, when is it going to come? Mr Speaker, Sir, this dispensary has been closed for the last 15 years. Nobody did anything about it. I started the project last year. We managed to get one contractor, but he had some problems with his bank guarantee and, unfortunately, we have to do another bidding exercise and we started the project again this year. It is coming, but he does not seem to know. He was complaining that there are not enough sports facilities for the young people in Constituency No. 3. When he was PPS between 2015 and 2017, for two years, he did not do one decent football pitch. He did not do it. I did it at Jean Lebrun and I am doing Mamade Elahee Football Ground now.

Mr Speaker: This is debate. Do you know the meaning of debate?

Dr. Husnoo: When he is in the Opposition, he keeps complaining about there is no sports facilities for the young people in Plaine Verte. When I started working on the Sports Centre, he said: "Well, it is not good, this is not the right place." He is *un éternel insatisfait*. Always complaining! *Éternel insatisfait*, Mr Speaker, Sir! That is the kind of people we are dealing with.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you allow me to come to the Local Government, the Local Government touches the lives of each and every individual of the Republic and lies as a core of any country activity and development strategy. Our local authorities have been active

through these challenging times, ranging from activities comprising scavenging, cleaning, distribution of foodstuff, consumer protection, disinfection of market fairs, traffic centres and bus centres. That is why I would like, here, together with the front liners, to congratulate them as well .

(Interruptions)

They will also have to play a very important role in the prevention of a new surge of COVID-19 cases as we enter the phase of post-confinement.

Furthermore, during the next phase of deconfinement, the local authorities will have to provide operators of public space, more specifically, market, market fairs with information and required guidelines to manage public space in order to help social distancing and observe sanitary measures in crowded places, which now form part and parcel of our daily activities.

Yesterday, hon. Wochit was worried about we are not going to have enough budget; it is going to affect the development, the infrastructure projects in the local authorities. But I can reassure him that in spite of the difficult financial situation, Government is allocating substantial funds to the local authorities for the implementation of new projects in the next financial year. The Budget 2020-2021 makes provision for completion and implementation of new infrastructural projects for which a sum of over Rs872 m. is being allocated. Some of the projects that have already started and nearing completion now -

- (i) market fairs at Bel Air and Goodlands;
- (ii) District Council Headquarters at Calebasses and Flacq;
- (iii) Multipurpose Complex NHDC at Camp Levieux and Route Militaire in Port Louis;
- (iv) 18 incinerators at coastal islands.

And other new projects which will start in 2021 are -

- (i) renovation of Plaza, phase III;
- (ii) market fairs at Mahebourg, Pamplemousses, Chemin Grenier and Bambous;
- (iii) District Council Headquarter at Souillac;
- (iv) Multipurpose complex at Plaine Verte - yes, at Plaine Verte again; Abercrombie and Rivière du Rempart;

(v) One stop-shop at Montagne Blanche and a Sports Centre at Plaine Verte again.

Mr Speaker, Sir, together with the Ministry of Environment, we are coming with new measures to tackle the problem of waste management; reduce, reuse, recycle and recover is now becoming a reality and this measure is key to the protection of the environment. Households would be called upon to start segregation of their wastes at individual level as mentioned by the Minister of Environment previously.

This measure, Mr Speaker, Sir, you would agree is long overdue. We should have done it a long time ago, but never mind, this has come. I have no doubt that this measure will greatly help in reducing the volume of wastes to be sent for disposal at the Mare Chicose landfill. Our local authorities, which are at the core of waste collection, will have an instrumental role to play in the effective implementation of this budgetary measure and will fully collaborate with the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change to this effect.

Additionally, the local authorities will carry out composting of green waste and you have lots of green waste from the market, which will be used as bio-fertilizers which we need, instead of using a lot of pesticides. Other projects, I just mentioned, again, that is coming, would be the computerization of the Local Government system with the help of the Ministry of Information and the Local Active Mauritius Partnership (LAMP) Project with the Ministry of Sports.

Now, as far as the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council is concerned, a protocol of heavy rain for the private sector - because we have one for the public sector - has been finalised in collaboration with business Mauritius and the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training and the Ministry of Public Service. This protocol has been ratified by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

The annex to the budget provides for the necessary amendments to the Workers' Rights Act to facilitate its implementation as regards the remuneration to be paid to workers of the private sector where work has been stopped as a result of climatic condition, including heavy rainfalls. Once this protocol is in place, there would be no perception of discrimination between facilities granted to the public and the private employees when the country would be under heavy rainfall situation.

Now, I will mention a few words about the Mauritius Meteorological services. The Mauritius Meteorological services have been transferred to my portfolio, Mr Speaker, Sir.

With climate change and global warming, the frequency of extreme weather and climate events are increasing, with more intense tropical cyclones and frequent short duration high intensity rainfalls, resulting in increased vulnerability of Mauritius. The fifth Assessment Report and the special report on global warming of the inter-Governmental panel on climate change confirm the observation. There is, therefore, an increased demand of timely and accurate weather forecast and warning serviced by Government for the private sector and the general public as well. The more so that the high quality weather and climate service can effectively contribute to economic growth and build community resilience to natural hazard. The operation of the Doppler weather radar at Trou aux Cerfs as from April 2019 is contributing in the provision of more accurate weather forecast, including tracking of tropical cyclone and other severe weather conditions.

The modernisation of the Mauritius Meteorological Services will be pursued over the next five years.

To strengthen socioeconomic resilience to climate variability and climate change, a national framework for climate service will be set up. The national framework for climate service will provide necessary infrastructure, namely statistical software which will downscale output from global climate model to island scale, while integrating the unique topography features of a small island and local climate data at specific site, thus enabling the Mauritius Meteorological Services to provide tailor-made climate service and on a 30-day climate forecast every month to farmers and planters to ensure more effective crop management and achieving food security.

Secondly, to the water sector, in providing advanced rainfall forecast which will be integrated in more efficient water resource management and, obviously, disaster managers in preparedness alerting and risk reduction of weather hazard.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service as well. The Government is deeply committed to building a resilient country to tackle disasters and manage risks in the best possible manner to protect citizens. In this connection, a synergy is being established and reinforced between the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, the Mauritius Meteorological Services and the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service, all of which are now under my portfolio at the Ministry of Local Government.

The Government is in the process of modernising and providing the necessary equipment and means to the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service to enable them to respond to emergencies promptly and in the best possible conditions, and for which an amount of Rs413 m. has been budgeted. I mean, these will be used for a lot of things, for new fire stations that are coming this year, we are going to buy a lot of equipment - I don't want to go into debate because I think I have taken most of my time allocated - we are going to procure a articulated hydraulic platform, 20 fire fighting rescue vehicles, hazardous material vehicles, one shift water vehicle, two vehicles fitted with ultra-high pressure system to fight fire in Agaléga Island as well. I am not going to go in further details.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before I stop. During the course of the debate, a lot of criticisms has been made by the Opposition. Some of them sensible and constructive, while some others rather cheap. As Government, we are not going to let ourselves being taken aback by these comments. We have to roll up our sleeves and get to work. We have gone through difficult times with the COVID-19 epidemic and a lot of work needs to be done.

The Budget has come up with a lot of incentives to help the different sectors, namely SMEs, tourism, construction, to name but a few. If the Opposition wants to join in the construction of this country after the COVID-19 epidemic, I am sure they are all welcome. But if they want to criticise, let it be known that the caravan will make its way ahead slowly but surely. We, on this side of the House, to paraphrase Roy Bennett, we believe that –

“What's done is done. (...) One of life's lessons is always moving on. It's okay to look back to see how far you've come but we have to keep moving forward.”

And this is what this Government is doing!

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I will suspend the sitting for one hour.

At 8.14 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.17 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

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

Mr F. David (First Member from GRNW & Port Louis West): M. le président, c'est mon tout premier discours sur le budget national de notre République de Maurice et très sincèrement, je souhaite de tout cœur que ce soit également le tout dernier dans un tel contexte.

Pendant presque 10 semaines, j’attendais tous les soirs, comme des milliers de mauriciens, la terreur des chiffres mis à jour de l’attaque menée par un ennemi invisible et imprévisible, le COVID-19 - je précise que l’usage faisant loi, je prends la liberté ce soir d’utiliser ce mot au masculin. Et derrière chacun de ces chiffres, chaque soir, se trouvait une vie, une vie en danger, une vie épargnée, une vie parfois perdue.

A l’issue de ces 10 semaines de confinement, 10 de nos compatriotes sont tombés sur le champ de bataille du COVID-19.

M. le président, avec votre autorisation et je n’ai rien vu dans les *Standing Orders* de notre Assemblée nationale qui m’en empêcherait, je demande à ce que soit comptabilisé dans mon temps de parole sur le budget, la minute de silence qui va suivre pour rendre hommage aux 10 victimes.

At this stage, the hon. Members observed a minute of silence.

Je remercie notre Assemblée nationale de s’être jointe à moi pour cet hommage.

La période que nous venons de traverser a mis en exergue plusieurs faiblesses de notre société, et je tiens à les mettre en perspective du Budget 2020-2021.

Tout d’abord, la pandémie du COVID-19 à Maurice a révélé, selon moi, l’obsolescence de notre Registre Social, notamment lors de la distribution de *packs* alimentaires pendant la fermeture des supermarchés. Beaucoup de pauvres n’étaient pas sur la liste initiale des 10,000 familles du Social Register of Mauritius. Je note d’ailleurs que Statistics of Mauritius, dans son dernier rapport de 2017, mentionne 36,500 familles. Je présume que la différence est entre autres liée aux cas de pauvreté absolue et de pauvreté relative. Dans tous les cas, je salue au paragraphe 307 du Budget la mise en place d’un *National Database for Vulnerable Groups* afin d’améliorer l’efficacité des politiques de lutte contre la pauvreté.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Sawmynaden! Excuse me! Hon. Sawmynaden, your mask please!

Mr David: Et précisément en parlant d’efficacité des politiques de cette lutte contre la pauvreté, je sollicite le Premier ministre en lui demandant de revoir le portefeuille du ministère concerné. Je rappelle que le ministère de l’Intégration Sociale a été créé en 2010 par le gouvernement dirigé par le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam qui avait alors confié ce ministère à l’honorable Xavier Duval. En 2014, Sir Anerood Jugnauth avait sagement (pour ne pas dire

« SAJ » ment) conservé ce ministère. Et en 2019, l'honorable Premier ministre a décidé de fusionner ce ministère avec celui de la Sécurité sociale qui a déjà tellement à faire. C'était, à mon sens, une mauvaise décision, et, aujourd'hui, dans un contexte de post-COVID-19, elle l'est encore plus. Je tiens à souligner que je ne remets pas en question la bonne volonté et les compétences de madame la Ministre, l'honorable Daureeawoo, mais soyons pragmatiques. Le ministère de l'Intégration sociale et de *l'Economic Empowerment*, de par son appellation initiale de 2010, est un gouvernement à lui seul car il a pour objectif de dynamiser et de coordonner les actions du gouvernement, à définir les priorités sociales et à donner une direction à la lutte contre la pauvreté. Je propose donc la re-cr  ation de ce minist  re, en   tant conscient que l'heure est    la r  duction budg  taire des d  penses publiques, mais croyez-moi, ce sera de l'argent bien investi et je suis certain, monsieur le Premier ministre, que les candidats ne manqueront pas pour occuper ce poste minist  riel.

Et justement en parlant de poste,    ma connaissance, la *National Empowerment Foundation* n'a toujours pas de nouveau *CEO* apr  s que l'ancien ait d  missionn   pour se pr  senter aux derni  res   lections g  n  rales dans ma circonscription num  ro 1 Grande Rivier   Nord-Ouest/Port-Louis Ouest. C'est donc l'occasion de faire d'une r  flexion deux nominations.

Et j'annonce d  j   au futur ou    la future ministre de l'Int  gration sociale, pour lui donner un peu d'avance, que ma premi  re question parlementaire que je lui adresserai concernera l'absence du Plan Marshall dans le Budget 2020-2021 alors qu'il figure au Programme Gouvernemental 2020-2024.

M. le pr  sident, aux squatteurs qui ont fait l'objet de plusieurs interventions d  j   avant moi dans cette Assembl  e, et je pense que certains nous regardent actuellement ce soir, s'agrippant    un espoir,    une parole,    une d  cision, je veux leur dire, et tout particuli  rement aux familles qui sont    Pointe-aux-Sables car ce sont celles dont je me suis rapproch   ces trois derni  res semaines, que le logement est un besoin vital    tout   tre humain et que je souhaite sinc  rement la r  ussite du gouvernement dans la construction des 12,000 logements sociaux au cours des trois prochaines ann  es. Cela repr  sente une moyenne de 4,000 logements par an tel qu'annonc   dans le pr  sent budget, soit 10 fois plus que r  alis   entre 2015 et 2019 avec une moyenne d'alors de 400 logements sociaux par an.

Je viendrai de l'avant prochainement avec une question parlementaire pour le ministre du Logement et de l'Am  nagement du Territoire, l'honorable Obeegadoo, qui est pr  sent ce

soir, pour qu'il vienne éclairer cette Assemblée sur les sites identifiés pour la construction des 12,000 maisons, le Cahier des Charges du projet, la décomposition du prix de R 1 million par maison, la date prévue pour le lancement de l'appel d'offres et le *planning* prévisionnel de livraison.

Par ailleurs, je tiens à préciser la chose suivante : lorsque je me suis rendu sur le terrain de l'État à Pointe-aux-Sables, la *State Land*, où se trouvaient les squatters, l'une des premières choses que j'ai dites aux familles sur place, et elles peuvent le confirmer, c'est qu'en tant que député, je suis membre du Parlement, qui est précisément l'endroit où l'on vote les lois du pays et qu'en aucun cas je n'étais là pour promouvoir ou encourager un acte qui va à l'encontre de la loi. Mais j'ai rajouté que nous étions dans des circonstances exceptionnelles de couvre-feu sanitaire, de confinement et que, par conséquent je demandais aux autorités d'agir de façon exceptionnelle face à cette situation. Et dans la même logique de respect de la loi, je demanderai au ministre du Logement et de l'Aménagement du Territoire de s'assurer qu'il n'y ait pas d'occupations illégales de terres de l'État ou de Pas Géométriques par certains puissants. Je n'ose imaginer mon pays en 2020 où il y aurait deux catégories de squatteurs ; certains qu'on évacue avec une armée de policiers et de bulldozers et d'autres squatteurs qu'on pourrait qualifier de haut de gamme qu'on protège. Je ne peux pas l'imaginer. La loi doit être la même pour tous.

M. le président, pendant le confinement, une autre communauté qui a souffert est celle des pêcheurs. J'ai écouté avec beaucoup d'attention le ministre de l'Economie bleue, des Ressources marines, de la Pêche et de la Marine, l'honorable Maudhoo, qui est également présent ce soir, et qui dans son discours sur le Budget avant-hier, a dit que le poste qu'il occupe lui a donné l'occasion de rencontrer la communauté des pêcheurs pour la première fois et d'être à l'écoute de ces personnes très humbles. Et je le cite –

« Ces moments resteront gravés à jamais dans ma mémoire, car ils m'ont poussé à me mettre dans la peau de ce petit pêcheur qui, tous les jours, risque sa vie pour s'aventurer en mer, afin de nourrir sa famille et, bien sûr, nous-aussi. »

Je regrette que l'honorable Maudhoo ne se soit pas mis dans la peau des pêcheurs artisanaux dès le vendredi 20 mars 2020, date du *lockdown* à Maurice, pour se demander ce qu'allaient devenir les centaines de casiers laissés brutalement en mer. Ce n'est que le 05 mai, soit plus de six semaines après, que les pêcheurs ont reçu l'autorisation d'aller en mer

pour récupérer leurs casiers. Evidemment, après aussi longtemps restés dans l'eau, la prise de leur pêche était entièrement perdue et leurs casiers souvent dans un état lamentable.

(Interruptions)

J'accueille ça avec grand plaisir pour les pêcheurs.

Les planteurs avaient été autorisés à reprendre leurs activités plus tôt, même traitement pour les éleveurs. Pourquoi donc les pêcheurs ont-ils été si injustement traités pendant le confinement alors qu'à 2 personnes sur un bateau de 23 pieds, soit 7 mètres environ, il était si facile de respecter le *social distancing* ?

M. le président, j'ai pris bonne note au paragraphe 132 du budget que le *Bad Weather Allowance* aux pêcheurs passera de R 365 à R 425. Pour autant, je lance une requête au ministre de la Pêche - il me semble l'avoir entendu le dire - pour voir dans quelle mesure une aide financière peut être accordée aux pêcheurs pour compenser leur perte d'exploitation et pour soulager leurs dépenses liées à la remise en état de leurs casiers et de leurs bateaux en raison du *lockdown*, évidemment.

Par ailleurs, j'ai également noté dans le discours du ministre de la Pêche que le gouvernement a pris l'engagement de réaménager et d'embellir les débarcadères à travers l'île, je le cite –

« dans les jours à venir ».

J'accueille favorablement cette annonce qui ne figurait pas au budget. Alors soyez assuré monsieur le ministre d'une question parlementaire de ma part, dans les jours à venir, sur les débarcadères de Bain des Dames et de Pointe-aux-Sables.

Pendant le confinement, j'ai également été en contact avec plusieurs artistes inquiets de leur sort, inquiets que leur musique soit moins diffusée avec la fermeture des hôtels et des avions, inquiets de ne pas pouvoir survivre avec l'interdiction logique des concerts, festivals et événements culturels en raison de la pandémie. J'en avais d'ailleurs fait une question parlementaire numéro A/18 le 5 mai 2020, adressée au ministre des Arts et de l'Héritage culturel, l'honorable Teeluck. Je suis soulagé d'avoir lu au paragraphe 104 du budget que R 19 millions sont mis à disposition pour financer le Plan d'Action COVID-19 2020 afin de soutenir la production de concerts virtuels ainsi que R 15 millions pour financer des événements dans le cadre d'un calendrier culturel.

Par ailleurs, j'ai envoyé mardi dernier, 9 juin 2020 une question parlementaire numéro B/175 au ministre des Arts et de l'Héritage culturel sur l'état d'avancement du *Status of Artist Bill*. Et en fait, dès le lendemain, le 10 juin 2020, lors de son discours sur le budget, l'honorable Teeluck annonçait que son ministère a obtenu l'accord du gouvernement pour transmettre des instructions au bureau de l'*Attorney General* pour la rédaction d'un projet de loi sur le statut de l'artiste. Je ne peux que m'en réjouir et vais faire le nécessaire auprès du *Clerk's Office* pour retirer ma question, en attendant de pouvoir débattre de ce projet de loi au Parlement dans les meilleurs délais.

M. le président, pendant le couvre-feu sanitaire, j'ai été bouleversé par la souffrance des familles touchées par l'autisme, en particulier celle des enfants qui, subitement devenus prisonniers chez eux, ont vu leur quotidien chavirer avec pour conséquence l'angoisse, l'agressivité, la dépression et dans certains cas l'autodestruction. J'avais donc dédié la toute première question de mon mandat à cette situation en demandant à l'honorable Premier ministre d'émettre un laissez-passer dérogatoire pour les familles concernées. C'était ma question B/10 du 5 mai 2020. A la dernière minute, l'attribution de cette question a été transférée à l'honorable ministre de la Santé et du Bien-être et s'est alors retrouvée à la fin d'une liste interminable de questions sans réponse. Mais je tiens à souligner que j'ai pris contact directement avec le bureau du ministre de la Santé qui a donné une suite favorable à ma requête et j'ai déjà eu l'occasion de le remercier.

Dans le budget 2020-2021, j'ai noté au paragraphe 300 l'affectation d'un montant de R 138 millions à titre de subvention aux ONG qui gèrent des écoles pour enfants ayant des besoins éducatifs spéciaux et au paragraphe 301 la subvention unique de R 100,000 à chaque *Special Education Needs School* gérée par des ONG afin de leur permettre d'améliorer leur environnement d'apprentissage.

Mais plus particulièrement pour accompagner l'autisme qui me semble-t-il est encore mal connu dans notre pays, je fais les 3 propositions suivantes –

- i) organiser une campagne de sensibilisation à l'échelle nationale sur l'autisme à Maurice ;
- ii) former le personnel de santé publique pour permettre la détection précoce de l'autisme notamment au niveau des hôpitaux publics, et
- iii) construire un centre résidentiel spécialisé et équipé avec un personnel formé pour les adolescents à partir de 16 ans et les jeunes adultes autistes, car on

oublie trop souvent que les enfants autistes grandissent alors que leurs parents vieillissent et deviennent fatalement un jour des adultes laissés à eux-mêmes quand leurs parents ne sont plus là.

M. le président, je regrette que ce budget ait oublié nos compatriotes en situation de handicap. Certes j'ai lu au paragraphe 303 que les visites médicales à domicile seront étendues à toutes les personnes alitées et gravement handicapées âgées de plus de 18 ans, mais c'est largement insuffisant dans le cadre de la reconstruction d'une société qui se veut inclusive. Je déplore plus particulièrement que le *Disability Bill* ait disparu de tous les radars gouvernementaux. Le gouvernement *Lepep* l'avait promis, allant même jusqu'à annoncer au paragraphe 25 de son programme 2015-2019, la proposition de modifier les sections 3 et 16 de la Constitution afin d'interdire la discrimination et fournir une protection supplémentaire aux personnes handicapées. Cinq ans après, aucun résultat concret et pas un seul mot sur ce projet de loi dans le Programme Gouvernemental 2020-2024 et encore moins dans le budget 2020-2021. J'exprime donc aujourd'hui devant cette Assemblée et avec force ma demande au gouvernement pour que ce projet de loi soit présenté au Parlement afin que nous puissions redonner de la dignité aux Mauriciennes et Mauriciens autrement capables.

M. le président, j'ai lu le discours du budget 2020-2021 dans son intégralité et je dois dire dans les deux versions française et anglaise, et je peux vous confirmer que les 387 paragraphes sont fidèles entre les deux langues. Mais il y a une différence entre les deux versions, et pas des moindres. La version française du budget a un avant-propos qui ne figure pas dans la traduction anglaise et cet avant-propos, c'est une citation - J'ai vu le regard inquiet de certains ministres - de Kenneth Arrow, économiste américain et je cite. À l'image on voit que je l'ai surlignée en jaune –

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

J'imagine que cette citation a été choisie par le ministre des Finances, de la Planification et du Développement économique lui-même et je veux dire à l'honorable Dr. Padayachy, s'il ne le sait pas déjà, que ce même Kenneth Arrow avait affirmé que selon lui, la crise économique de 2008 avait été en partie causée par l'asymétrie entre la distribution du risque et la distribution de l'information. M. le ministre, vous l'avez justement dit vous-même dans votre discours du 4 juin dernier et je vous cite –

« Dans cette période troublée par la pandémie du COVID-19, nous avons peu de certitudes. »

L'absence de certitudes augmente naturellement la part de risque et face à cette situation à haut risque, vous devez distribuer symétriquement l'information, l'information à la population, l'information aux institutions, l'information au Parlement. En mettant sur pied un prolongement de la Banque centrale qui va se comporter comme une banque commerciale tout en échappant à toute supervision du Parlement, vous créez un monstre qui va jongler avec nos milliards et dans l'opacité la plus totale, soit aux antipodes de la confiance que vous prônez vous-même dans l'avant-propos de votre discours.

Je demande, donc, au gouvernement de revoir sa copie, afin que la *Mauritius Investment Corporation*, sous une forme différente, soit redevable à un *Select Committee* du Parlement.

La pandémie du COVID-19 est une triste et historique occasion de remettre en question notre modèle d'existence et de repenser nos relations sociales, nos comportements, nos investissements, notre conscience collective, notre société mauricienne et ses valeurs.

Je termine mon discours avec une citation du sociologue Français Jean Viard, qui disait il y a encore quelques semaines, pendant le confinement en France, et je le cite –

« Ces situations d'urgence sont comme d'immenses moments d'innovation pour le futur. »

M. le président, chers collègues parlementaires, soyons donc, devant l'histoire de notre pays et pour celles et ceux qui comptent sur notre sens du devoir, les bienveillants innovateurs du futur.

Je vous remercie pour votre attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms Ramyad!

(9.40 p.m.)

Ms N. Ramyad (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Budget Speech is a long awaited exercise, even more this year, where the COVID-19 pandemic has swept the world exposing the frailties and inequalities of our societies. G7 countries have been hardly hit and the United States is still battling with the staggering number of fatalities along with arising social unrest. This pandemic has not only struck the crux of the global economy, but also showed that even countries, which are believed to possess the most advanced systems, have encountered much difficulty to flatten the curve. According to the IMF, this crisis pinned down as the great lockdown, global

growth will shrink by, at least, 3% by 2020, and Governments across the world are expected to use conventional measures to stimulate the economy. Economic and even often, politicians like to think that economics is a hard science when it is, in fact, a behavioural science which makes prediction of future, economic growth very difficult to forecast, especially when a black swan event occurs. In these times, where unknowns are the norm, Government needs to rely on heuristics, as there is no past data to rely on for policy measures.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we must not forget that whilst it is very easy to say that the Government should have closed the borders earlier, or that we should have been more proactive in our approach, or we should have forbidden the entry of the COVID-19 virus by taking more precautionary measures, let me remind all those who have been continuously doing this propaganda that in February, the virus virulency and mode of transmission was still under study. Even the WHO was struggling to identify the gnome and the different physical characteristics of the viral contamination as well as top scientists work were divided on the exact causes, the mode of transmission of the virus and the possible preventive measures.

The Government followed all the protocols of the WHO with strict compliance to the changing and altering rules and regulations as and when they were formulated. Anyone with a notion of biology would definitely agree that viruses are the most difficult organisms to identify and elucidate and hence, since it struck the whole world, getting to the crux of the infection was not only important, but was vital to preserve lives. That is why I commend the prompt decisions taken by the High Task Committee of the Government, as efficiency in this war had only one element in common and that is action, action and action.

The contact tracing as well as confinement have proved to be the best way to halt the propagation of the virus, and even medically it has shown that it was and it is the best way to protect an ailing population. Allow me here to pay tribute to all those directly or indirectly involved in keeping our country safe and healthy and who have strived with their heart and mind to curb the infection. Every objective person will definitely recognise that this virus has shaken the economy of the world and has called for drastic measures.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, economic crises are often distinguished by their source; they can be either demand or supply shock. The COVID-19 crisis is characterised by both a demand and supply shock. This has produced globally one of the fastest contractions in economic activity, in history exacerbating and already regrowth coupled with unpredictable

inflation rates. Before the crisis, wealth and income inequality gaps were already contributing to populism and rising political conflict despite an expanding economy and falling unemployment. Now, the downturn will hit the most vulnerable groups, the hardest, and while the speed and size of policy response, we have seen in the developed country so far, is promising, much more will be needed globally and differences in views on how to share the shrinking pie have the potential to make political conflict more bitter and acute. It is worth noting that, unfortunately, historical crises like this can act as catalyst for the rise of populist demagoguery.

M. le président...

The Deputy Speaker: Please hon. Ms Ramyad, your mask!

Ms Ramyad: Yes, it is very difficult to talk with the mask. Let me try.

The Deputy Speaker: If you want to take some time to breathe, you can!

Ms Ramyad: Yes. M. le président, de par le monde, depuis la crise de 2008, les banques centrales ont pour la plupart adopté les politiques dites d'assouplissement monétaire ou plus généralement...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister Ganoo, please, your mask! Please proceed!

Ms Ramyad: *Thank you.* Adopter les politiques dites d'assouplissement monétaire ou plus généralement appelées '*quantitative easing*'. Ces politiques ont eu pour effet de relancer la machine économique mais a aussi contribué à augmenter les inégalités entre les différentes classes sociales. Pour contrer les effets de la crise économique liés à la COVID-19, les banques centrales ont réamorcé des politiques monétaires d'assouplissement à grande échelle aux États-Unis, en Europe, mais aussi en Chine et en Inde. Ces mesures sont nécessaires dans le cadre du polysémique voulu par les Etats pour contrer le choc actuel d'offre et de la demande.

Maurice, étant la base une économie ouverte, il aurait été mal avisé de se passer de l'apport de la Banque de Maurice pour relancer la machine économique. Cependant, ce gouvernement et ses institutions assureront une conduite stricte de la création monétaire, mais aussi de tout financement émanant directement ou indirectement de la banque centrale. Tout ceci, uniquement dans le cadre de la loi et du mandat de la Banque centrale.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the benefit of hindsight, the Opposition will often beg to differ on various economic measures taken but, in such times of crisis, slow reaction can

prove to be structurally damaging for the economy and this Government has acted swiftly. However, the very nature of this crisis is that it cannot be solved by monetary policy alone, as central banks can't effectively direct money where it is needed to fill the gap in incomes. The shock from the virus has pulled forward the need for coordinated monetary and fiscal policy. Monetary policy, on its own, won't be able to address the income holes that the virus has opened up. For one thing, monetary policy is already at its limit. Fiscal policy has the ability to fill the income gap.

The philosophy of this Budget makes the right diagnosis by identifying the pillar sectors which will jumpstart the economy. In a nutshell, the economic recovery will oscillate around the construction sector, food security and local manufacturing, upscaling the financial sector and enacting a data driven economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before going through the different measures announced in the Budget, which I am sure will be the foundation of future economic growths, it is important to note that during these testing times, unconventional measures taken by both Government and the Central Bank, if not properly managed, could lead to increased income inequality. It is widely known that a significant income gap will produce various sorts of political, economic and social turmoil. Mauritius' past economic success is for a large part also attributed to the flat tax system. It has produced predictability of taxes, but also kept intact the "invisible hand" instilled in the population for greater work ethics. However, with the challenging months ahead of us, adding some dose of the progressiveness in our tax system will not only tame income inequality, but also allow a fairer redistribution. Higher taxes on income can keep inequality in check, or even make it fall. In the same spirit, Corporates are asked to participate in the nationwide effort to help the country fight the economic hardships ahead.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the world population will continue to grow and is expected to reach 9.74 billion by 2050. The total food production will have to be increased by 70-100%, if all these people are to be fed sufficiently. Increased food production to feed this ever-increasing world population in a sustainable way is a great challenge, more so, at a time of rapid environmental change with rising temperatures and extreme climate events threatening food production globally. Agriculture is inherently sensitive to climate variability and change, as a result of either natural causes or human activities. Climate changes caused by emissions of greenhouse gases is expected to directly influence crop production systems for food, feed and fodder; to affect livestock health; and to alter the pattern and balance of

trade of food and products. The COVID-19 crisis has shown, evermore, that food security is of utmost importance and the setting up of the National Agri Food Development Programme and making 20,000 acres of land available for agriculture are timely as it will lower our dependence on world food prices and constrained international supply chains. The Buy Mauritian Programme is also welcomed as it will encourage local manufacturing and enable greater self-sufficiency.

M. le président, avec les effets de la crise du COVID-19, les grandes puissances tels les Etats Unis, l'Europe, l'Inde et la Chine pensent déjà à se replier sur eux-mêmes, ce qui provoquera un enclage plus régional ou même local des activités économiques. Les secteurs stratégiques tels que l'Agriculture et la Santé seront amenés à jouer un rôle plus important. De ce fait, ce budget pose déjà les bases pour la création d'un secteur de la santé de pointe pour encourager la télémédecine et offre aussi des incitations fiscales pour encourager des jeunes pousses de ce secteur. Il est aussi à noter que ce budget aborde clairement les développements liés à la science de la donnée (*Data Science*) avec la création du *New Data Technological Park* à Côte d'Or.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Africa will be needing equity capital in the coming years and the setting up of venture capital market at the Stock Exchange of Mauritius (SEM) can make Mauritius become the African Venue to raise and allocate capital in the continent. These measures will bring more substance to our jurisdiction and coupling the right technological-driven regulatory framework with value added activities will help build a unique ecosystem.

Data is said to be the new oil. The economic growth of tomorrow will be data driven as technological advances will help public and private authorities to be more flexible and innovative. With the necessary firewalls and protections, data should be made available through Application Programming Interface (API) to trusted third parties so as to enable start-ups to come up with compelling business models and thus develop an eco-system which will be crucial in the coming years. Big data is becoming a ubiquitous practice in both the public and private worlds. It is not a standalone solution and depends on many layers like infrastructure, Internet of Things, broadband, networks and open source, amongst many others. Furthermore, the non-technical issues, including policy, skills, regulation, and business models will be critical. Big data has to be embedded in the Mauritian business agenda. Policymakers, that is, the Government, will act in a timely manner to promote an environment that is supportive to organisations seeking to benefit from this inevitable progression and the opportunities it presents. Failure to develop a comprehensive big data

ecosystem in the next few years carries the risk of losing further competitive advantage in comparison to other global regions. With the future enactment of 5G connection, Artificial Intelligence algorithms will be more easily executable. Thus, the Data Technological Park would be wise enough to encourage companies to setup Cloud Computing Data Centre in Mauritius. In the future, storing capacity will be essential and African countries will want to secure their data. Mauritius can play this role of being their data and computing hub. This Government is determined to do “whatever it takes” to become a regional and continental leader in technology.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now have a special address to the youth of the country. Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger had her own way of addressing the youth, I have another. I speak the language of hope, of hard work, of dedication, of concern, of pro-activeness and innovation. I ask the same youth to stand up to the expectation and the belief, we lay in them.

Here, I will quote measures 111 to 115 of this Budget -

- “111. Our economic recovery plan is also about propelling Mauritius into the era of innovation and technologies.
- 112. This is a sine-qua-non condition for putting our economy on a higher growth path.
- 113. The world is changing and we can no longer wait for others to drive innovation for us nor can we wait for them to react to global changes.
- 114. We are now taking the reins and leading our nation towards a new horizon that is prepared for any eventuality.
- 115. For this, we need a game changer.”

I will only take one of the budgetary measures to substantiate my point, due to time constraint.

Paragraph 147 states that –

“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 rate of 0.5 per cent per annum for an amount of up to Rs500,000.”

This measure takes up the youth on board to develop their talents and their expertise by instilling the will to be drivers in the progress. Here, I will make an appeal to all tertiary institutions - private and public - to be active stakeholders by clustering students and fresh graduates with different skills and knowledge to form micro enterprises and tap the opportunities in the blue economy, agricultural sector, manufacturing and even research and technology, high-tech engineering and financial sector opportunities. We cannot ask a youngster between 20 and 25 to be multi-skilled by default in this age range, but we may help them to cultivate the spirit of team building and engage in groups in the new pillars of development. Students from marketing, management and law fields can be clustered with science and engineering students to form enterprises with a clear business plan. Whilst some will give the administrative and management inputs, others will give the technical know-how to the micro enterprise and there is no way to fail, if you have the appropriate drives and follow-ups.

The blue economy and agriculture offer an enormous opportunity to build, create and innovate. Even the manufacturing sector gives plenty of opportunities as there is a call for new production lines, new processes, new research and development and new technologies.

All these opportunities are not presented in the void. Measures of accompaniment have been devised in the same Budget Speech of the Minister of Finance. Technical support, DBM loans at concessional rate of 0.5% per annum, investment in joint ventures are amongst the many other initiatives that the Government is presenting.

Remember that the budget fosters entrepreneurship, creativity and ideas. So, I will make a humble appeal to the youth to sit with the Budget Speech 2020-2021, scrutinize, and analyze it, then, roll up your sleeves and dare to venture as the Government is not only providing the means but it is also accompanying you through capacity building programs and information dissemination, through FAREI, National Cooperative College, SME Mauritius, amongst many others.

The COVID-19 has brought us to a threshold that either we sit back and wait for mashed food to swallow, or enjoy the venture of building a future and new pole of development. Our parents have showed that sowing the seed of hard work in faith brings economic success. This success as well as the creation of new economic pillars is a two-way traffic. The Government provides the tools, means and accompaniment but it's up to you to tap the opportunities, dare to jump in the unknown and to dream big.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I cannot omit to include the youth who are in employment in the private and public sectors as they are contributing fully to the economy of the country. To them, I will state the bitter but motivating truth stated in paragraph 155.

“The status quo is no longer an option.”

It depends on how you want to translate this statement, but, once again, I believe in the spirit and energy of our young era. We have to adapt to change. But I will add that we have to go further. We have to bring the change, a change in work culture where experimentation and dynamism become the norm. A change in our way of viewing the essence of “having a job”. A job brings dignity and is part and parcel of our identity. The confinement period has clearly shown how difficult it was to stay indoors and within four walls. It made many of the young workforce realise the importance to be dynamic partners of development. To those youngsters, I make an appeal that terms and conditions of work should not be primary over your will to perform your duties and responsibilities. We are active partners of growth. We thrive for the benefit of the country and together, hand in hand, we will stand to the expectations of the country. The Government laid the pillars and it is for you to jump on the wagon and bring your fair share.

Here, I will have a special word to the public servants who are approximately 80,000 in numbers. The Government relies on our public sector to re-launch the economy. Digital transformation is the way forward and the public sector transformation strategy lies in the minds and hands of our work force. And here I will quote Mahatma Gandhi -

“Be the change that you want to see in the world.”

M. le président, pour stimuler la croissance, il nous faut absolument anticiper les grands changements de l'économie mondiale, et c'est justement le but de ce Budget. Il est primordial d'imaginer le passage d'un modèle sectoriel à un modèle qui tire sa valeur d'un écosystème. Ce budget ouvre des pistes pour transformer l'économie mauricienne même si les fondamentaux restent fragiles et que les moments difficiles sont à prévoir. Nos principaux partenaires commerciaux se replient sur eux-mêmes et les grands pays croulent sous les dettes. Il est donc important que le pays ait une approche résiliente face aux aléas de l'économie. Dans cet environnement, Maurice a une vraie carte à jouer étant COVID-free et devra s'adapter, s'ouvrir vraiment aux compétences étrangères et avoir une gestion stricte des comptes publics. Elle doit aussi constamment adapter son appareil productif, réformer son secteur éducatif et l'apprentissage technique avec les technologies nouvelles. Cela demande

du courage politique, un courage que ce gouvernement en a démontré, aussi bien qu'un sens fort de la responsabilité personnelle à tous les niveaux.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to end my speech, I will quote Christine Lagarde, Chairwoman of the European Central Bank who once said –

"Given the nature of the crisis, all hands should be on deck, all available tools should be used".

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Juman!

(10.09 p.m.)

Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): I should, first of all congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for his first Budget. In fact, he has done what nobody else before him has dared to do, just like the Professor, in *Money Heist*, *Casa de Papel* series. *Mine de rien*, he has gone about doing what is perceived as being the perfect hold-up of the Bank of Mauritius, Rs60 billion were taken out from the coffers of the Central Bank to finance this present Budget, which we are debating today, which is supposedly a breakeven one, when, in fact, it is not. Otherwise, Rs60 billion of the Bank of Mauritius would not have been required.

And then, another Rs80 billion have been taken for the setting up of the Mauritius Investment Corporation. In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Government has chosen the easiest way out of this economic mess in which we found ourselves even before COVID-19 outbreak. So much could have been done to rethink, reinvent and reengineer our economic model. So many measures could have been taken to reduce waste of public funds, to improve tax collection efficiency. Alas, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if we look at the last Audit Report, it is clearly mentioned that arrears of Government's revenues have increased by 20% over the previous year to reach Rs13.2 billion on 30 June 2019; a total amount of Rs195 m. of bad debts were written off. God knows whose debts have been written off. What has, so far, been done to increase efficiency, Mr Deputy Speaker, as far as debt recovery is concerned, nothing. Tax Revenue Arrears have doubled during the previous mandate of this Government from Rs15 billion in 2014 to Rs30 billion in 2019. Let me give you some examples from the Audit Report, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Wastage of public funds! At the Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms, for a project amounted to Rs395 m., as at September 2019, for a project of Human Resource Management Information System - we are talking of Rs395 m. up to September 2019 - none of the modules have been able to be operationalised. Further, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for instance, at the Registrar General Department, there was a difference of some Rs600 m. between amounts reported to have been collected as per Treasury Accounting System and the Mauritius e-Registry System. *Un trou de R 600 millions! Voilà, M. le président, quelques exemples. En fait, les exemples abondent.*

M. le président, je n'y m'attarderai pas, mais si le gouvernement avait pris le taureau par les cornes pour redresser cette situation, today, they would not have needed to plunder the Reserves of the Central Bank to finance this Budget. On top of it, our economy could have greatly benefited from a new management model. *Une occasion ratée pour un nouveau départ!* With some will, determination and hard work, we could have emerged stronger from this crisis, but vision, competence, good management skills seems to be lacking on Government side. Maybe, that's why they have completely missed the target.

Coming to the Financial Services Sector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, reading the previous Budget 2019-2020, I came across paragraphs 117, 118 and 120. I quote –

"117. Our policies to be compliant with international standards are paying off.

119. We do not have any harmful feature in our tax regimes.

120. With respect to AML/CFT, our sustained commitments are showing results. In the ESSAMLG Follow Up report on Mauritius, published on 24 May 2019."

Now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the one million dollar question: What happened to all these sugar-coated reassurance? How come, if all these were true - mentioned by the then Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, External Communications and National Development Unit, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, and now actual Prime Minister - that our country has found itself in the blacklist of the European Commission at a high-risk jurisdiction?

This morning, I came across a Press article from the Africa Intelligence, dated 19 February 2020. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me quote –

"D'après la fuite des données « Luanda Leaks » publiée en janvier par le Consortium international des journalistes d'investigation (ICIJ), Sindika Dokolo a acquis les trois

sociétés en avril 2017. Elles sont enregistrées sous le statut de *Global Business Corporation*. »

Qui est Sindika Dokolo ? Sindika Dokolo est le mari d'Isabel Dos Santos, la fille de l'ex-Président Angolais. Et, M. le président, en 2017, qui était le *Chairman* de la *FSC* ? Nul autre que notre actuel ministre des Finances ! Qui était le *CEO* de la *FSC* ? *Our actual Governor of the Bank of Mauritius* ! *SBM*, les milliards qu'on a dû *write off*. Quel est le rôle de la Banque de Maurice ? Qui était le *Deputy Governor* de la Banque de Maurice ? *Our actual Minister of Finance*, Dr. the hon. Renganaden Padayachy!

If efforts were really made, then, we should not have been anywhere on any grey or blacklist, be it FATF or European Union. Now, I see in this current Budget 2020-2021 that they have come with FATF Action Plan – we just heard the Minister – which, I am afraid, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, does not look convincing at all. Now, can they catch up on lost time to implement these measures in two months? Allow me to doubt it, especially when we are now facing yet another mega-scandal regarding the CEB. Ironically, we are talking about Africa being our future. Rs10 billion have been earmarked by the MIC in this current Budget to invest in African project. Now, tell me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, who will trust us after accusing finger pointed at us by the African Development Bank? The seriousness of the allegation made will further jeopardise our financial integrity on the international front. I understand, ICAC has been asked to investigate. ICAC! But this is the surest way, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to let the enquiry die a slow death. The surest way!

If the hon. Prime Minister really means business, he should, without any further delay, set up a Commission of Enquiry, as rightly said by the hon. Leader of the Opposition to investigate therein. And the hon. Deputy Prime Minister should step down immediately along with the Chairman of the Board of the CEB. Unless he does this, Mr Speaker, Sir - I know he is alone. I know all the Ministers left him. He is alone. Even the PPSs, even the backbenchers left him, he is alone.

(Interruptions)

Retranché dans son coin.

(Interruptions)

Unless he does this, Mr Speaker, Sir,...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please! Order, please! Let the hon. Member continue. Continue hon. Member, Please continue!

(Interruptions)

Order, please! Hon. Members! Hon. Members!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Dir sa corrompu-là ferme so labous.*

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. DPM!

Mr Juman: Unless he does this, Mr Speaker, Sir, let alone...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please! First of all, I require order.

Mr Mohamed: On a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr Mohamed: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister is obviously feeling very hurt by what is going on.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, there is no point of order....

Mr Mohamed: He has pointed his finger at hon. Juman and treated him as *corrompu*. Could he please act honourably and without those words? He has done something which is totally dishonourable.

The Deputy Prime Minister: May I know whether he has been ever convicted for corruption?

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: He has to withdraw those words. Withdraw! Withdraw those words! He has no right to say that here.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed, I know my duty. So, let me do it. After you made your point of order, please let me do my duty or you want to give your ruling.

(Interruptions)

Hon. DPM, I heard ‘*corrompu*’, I don’t know to whom you addressed it. If you did address it to someone, to an hon. Member in this House, please withdraw the word.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Well, of course, I will abide by your ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Good! Hon. Juman, please continue with your speech!

Mr Juman: Unless the Prime Minister does this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let alone be Africa, no other country will dare take the risk in investing in Mauritius.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, please!

Mr Juman: *Zot, zot pe pran la banque mem zot, la banque central la mem zot pe pran.*

The Deputy Speaker: Address to me, please!

Mr Juman: Let us now look at the social aspect of the budget. At the very beginning of his speech, the hon. Minister of Finance mentioned at paragraph 17, I quote –

“In these unknown unknowns, what remains constant is the commitment of this Government towards its people.”

I wonder if this is a joke *de mauvais goût*. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what kind of commitment towards its people when the purchasing power is constantly declining because of the continuous depreciation of the rupee? In June 2019, USD1 was equivalent to Rs35.10. In June today USD1 amounts Rs40.75 which means our rupee in one year date to date has so far depreciated by 16.5% and the depreciation is ongoing. Those who are not imprisoned in their ivory tower will know how many people are struggling every day to make ends meet. It is shameful, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to make our elders believe that their old age pension will remain intact. In fact, 9,000 from which they are now benefiting is currently worth only 7,300 as compared to June 2019.

Le même panier ménager qui coutait R 5,000 en 2019 - mon ami, l’honorable Yeung Sik Yuen a largement commenté dessus - aujourd’hui, ça vous coûte R 6,400. Il faut déboursier R 1,400 plus pour avoir le même panier qu’en juin 2019. Peut-être le membre qui

était parti, l'honorable Balgobin était parti au supermarché, il peut nous confirmer ça, demain, il peut emmener un *invoice* comme il a fait pour les masques. C'est ça la réalité aujourd'hui.

What kind of commitment does the Government has towards these people when hundreds and hundreds of self-employed have been deprived of the Financial Assistance Scheme during the confinement because of their inability to fill in the electronic form correctly? Is this not a form of discrimination? We are talking about 60,000 people.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed!

Mr Juman: And all these are lesser fortunate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member is from your party, let him speak, please!

Mr Juman: And how with the new *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, all these self-employed will be compelled to contribute Rs150 so that they can get their retirement pension. The MRA have already their records. All those who applied for the Self-employed Assistance Scheme sent their records to the MRA, they are hairdressers, they are dressmakers, housemaids, you have got Rs5,100 three months, now, you have to repay. If you have 30 years today, you have to repay back to the MRA Rs54,000 by the end of the day after getting 60 years.

Tout comme le ministre des Finances avait fait une volte-face sur le *Wage Assistance Scheme* qui était censé être une aide financière de l'État avant qu'il ne décide d'obliger presque tout le monde, toutes les entreprises à rembourser. Sur le chapitre de la pension, c'est également pareil, il faut rembourser. Vous avez eu Rs15,100 trois mois, vous allez rembourser Rs54,000 à la fin du jour.

I also wonder, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what kind of commitment they say towards the people when front liners are being treated sur *une base de deux poids deux mesures*. I really don't know who advised the hon. Minister of Finance to do this, but I humbly request him to reconsider his decision. How can we believe in this supposed commitment towards people, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when this Government is bragging about building 12,000 social houses when the sea is rough when they could not build even...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Give me one second, please! Hon. Ameer Meea, please!

Mr Juman: 2,500 units in calmer waters. Where is your commitment quand des dizaines de familles ont été sauvagement jetées à la rue en plein confinement, ces familles incluant des enfants en bas âge sont contraintes de passer la nuit à la belle étoile autour des feux de camps dans des conditions extrêmement pénibles alors qu'on est tout censé de prendre des précautions sanitaires. Nous sommes en 2020. Nous sommes tous réunis ici pour débattre sur des milliards de roupies. On parle de plus en plus d'intelligence artificielle mais malheureusement, ces familles, nos familles, nos enfants sont sacrifiés en même temps que nos enfants ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister Ganoo, please, your mask!

Mr Juman: En même temps que nos enfants sont sacrifiés, je n'ai pas de problème. En même temps qu'on a des enfants qui dorment à la belle étoile, mon ami, l'honorable Rawoo, a eu du gouvernement deux arpents pieds dans l'eau valant R250 millions...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Silence, please!

(Interruptions)

Silence, please!

(Interruptions)

Silence, please!

Mr Juman: Mr Deputy Speaker, I have a contract of it.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr Juman: There is no problem, he has a right to get even 10 arpents. He can get even 10 arpents...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Juman, please listen to me. Hon. Rawoo, please.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Juman, don't you understand simple English, I am talking, wait. After you made your statement. Hon. Rawoo came up with a point of order. So, I'll hear it then you come with your document. I am very happy that probably, the matter will be cleared prior to his point of order. Your point of order, please, hon. Rawoo.

Dr. Rawoo: Point of order, he comes with substantiate proof and table it in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Juman, you have it. Please, have it tabled.

Mr Juman: I table a copy of the contract, but I'll say it again. I have no problem he gets worth R250 million; he gets R500 million, he can get Rs1 billion...

The Deputy Speaker: One second.

Mr Juman: He can get 10 arpents.

The Deputy Speaker: One second, hon. Juman.

(Interruptions)

One at a time. Let us do one thing at a time. I cannot multitask. First of all, can we just show a copy to hon. Rawoo and then pass it to me, then you continue please.

(Interruptions)

I have not given a ruling on the point of order yet. So, let me give you a ruling. Let me be fair. This is what everybody wants in this House, fairness.

(Interruptions)

We will take the time as much as it is needed. Hon. Rawoo, you may have a look at the document.

(Interruptions)

It is a point of order, point of clarification is different.

(Interruptions)

Let me have a look.

(Interruptions)

Let us have the copy hon. Dr. Rawoo please.

(Interruptions)

I have to give my ruling as well. This is the most important point.

(Interruptions)

So, let us wait. Let's not argue. Have you done?

(Interruptions)

I can understand there is Friday night fever in there. So, first of all, hon. Rawoo, as of now, after consulting the document, do you have any issue with it?

Dr. Rawoo: Yes, I have. It is under a company name so the hon. Member just cannot tell it is on a person's name. The hon. Member has to verify well.

The Deputy Speaker: You have done your point. One second!

(Interruptions)

Order please, hon. Boolell. I am trying my best.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Juman, I am sure you have consulted the document. May I have a look at it, please?

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Mwa aussi mo envi guetter.*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: You will have the chance if it is tabled. What I see hon. Juman is State of Mauritius and Smart Clinic. Do you have anything to say as to this?

Mr Juman: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: So! I am waiting for your reply.

Mr Juman: Who is the director who signed...

The Deputy Speaker: No, don't ask me questions.

Mr Juman: Sorry!

The Deputy Speaker: Just give an answer. Do you have anything to substantiate Smart...

(Interruptions)

Order, please!

(Interruptions)

You will have your chance in a little bit. As of now, do you have any document to substantiate or to link Smart Clinic Limited to hon. Rawoo, yes or no?

Mr Juman: The document in your hands is signed by hon. Dr. Ismaël Rawoo.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: One second, let me have a look.

(Interruptions)

One second, one second. What I see as of now is only initials of IR. Yes, hon. Rawoo.

Dr. Rawoo: Being presented or being an owner of the company, he has to verify who is the owner and director of the company and just don't come and make allegations like this.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: It is fine. As of now, I personally do not see anything that will relate this document to hon. Rawoo. I see the initials of IR. So, as of now, unless you have a reply, I want to hear it before giving my ruling.

Mr Juman: Mr Deputy Speaker, I prefer you take your time and read it; you will go through it. You will see it is represented and signed by Dr. hon. Ismaël Rawoo.

The Deputy Speaker: What I have asked hon. Eshan Juman as of now, I have briefly gone through it unless you can refer to the page number which I don't mind doing. If you need time to do that, I'll suspend the sitting for a few minutes - ten minutes. Thank you very much.

At 10.36 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 11.11 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, please be seated!

As of now, following the discussion, I am allowing the document in. Hon. Juman, the document is allowed to be tabled.

(Interruptions)

Do you give leave?

(Interruptions)

One second, please! Do you give leave?

(Interruptions)

Yes! Please, go ahead!

Dr. Rawoo: The point of explanation is, in this debate, we are in a budget debate, this is completely irrelevant and he has said ...

(Interruptions)

I am giving way!

The Deputy Speaker: Please!

Dr. Rawoo: He is stating the value of the land. How can he state the value of the land? It is totally unacceptable in this House because in this tabled document which you have, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a company that is having it and my shares in this company is 0.9% which has been declared in the Declaration of Assets and everything is completely legal. Now, if you want to just tell, how many of you in this House have land? We can say Shakeel Mohamed, we can say even hon. Duval. Everyone has.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Rawoo! Hon. Rawoo!

(Interruptions)

I require some order, please!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir,...

The Deputy Speaker: One second, I will give you a chance!

Hon. Rawoo, is that your explanation? Done!

Dr. Rawoo: I am done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Done!

Dr. Rawoo: Yes, my explanation is done.

The Deputy Speaker: If it is done, thank you very much.

Hon. Shakeel Mohamed, do you have a point of order?

Mr Mohamed: Just on a point of order, as I said ...

The Deputy Speaker: No! Hold on! If it is not a point of order, you know the Standing Order very well.

Mr Mohamed: Following what you say, I have nothing to say. Thank you.

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

Mr Juman: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please, let him complete! Are you helping for us to end on Saturday?

Please ! Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: M. le président, d'après ce qu'on a vu, ce qu'on a entendu, les ambitions de certains proches du pouvoir passent avant les droits des laissés-pour-compte.

This is the true face of this Government. This is the Government's version of commitment towards its people. It must be the very same commitment that is prompting the Government to impose a fee of 1,300 USD for the quarantine and health services for the Mauritians working on cruise around the world so that they can come back to their country. Returning to your own country is no longer a right, but a privilege for which you now have to pay.

Réalisez-vous, M. le président, qu'on a 5,000 mauriciens qui sont employés sur les bateaux de croisière. Ils obtiennent en moyenne un salaire de 1,200 dollars par mois, ce qui fait un total de 6 millions de dollars par mois. En un an, ça vous fait 72 millions de dollars équivalent à R 2.9 milliards. Ces mauriciens nous rapportent R 2.9 milliards par an. Est-ce qu'on va tourner le dos à ces revenus ? C'est ce qu'on est en train de faire. Admettons que les compagnies des bateaux de croisière acceptent de payer leur frais de quarantaine *for health care services*. Demain, est-ce que ces compagnies souhaiteraient embaucher des mauriciens ou elles se tourneront vers d'autres pays ? Are we creating employment or unemployment, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

J'ai été choqué d'entendre la réponse de l'honorable ministre Bodha lors d'un récent PNQ où il a déclaré qu'il pourrait y avoir des risques d'infection sur ce navire et c'est pourquoi le gouvernement ne les a pas laissé entrer dans le pays qui était à côté de notre côte. Si le ministre craint qu'il puisse y avoir le risque que des mauriciens soient infectés sur ce navire, c'est une raison de plus pour laquelle nous devrions immédiatement les ramener à terre, nous devrions les mettre en quarantaine et leur donner les traitements appropriés si nécessaire. Comment le gouvernement Mauricien peut-il ainsi abandonner nos concitoyens ? C'est ça ce qu'il appelle un *caring Government*.

Il y a eu une discordance, M. le président, entre les paroles et les actions du côté du gouvernement. Hier, j'ai entendu l'honorable Joanne Tour dire que le *backyard gardening* doit être promu. Où était-elle quand les terres cultivées par la brave Madame Mélodie étaient sauvagement reprises par ce gouvernement ? Où était-elle ? Où était passé le *backyard gardening* ?

Government is talking about promoting agriculture, but instead of regulating her situation, her means of livelihood has been forcefully taken away. Let us have a look at the SME sector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, please continue!

Mr Juman: Je vois que le taux d'intérêt sur le *loan* à la DBM passe à 0.5%. Très bien ! Ce n'est pas le taux d'intérêt qui pose problème, M. le président, c'est plutôt l'accès aux finances. Dans la plupart des cas, c'est quasiment impossible pour les PME de fournir des garantis. Or, le new normal exigeait à ce que le gouvernement garantisse les emprunts tout en faisant un *strict monitoring* des projets financés. Voyons maintenant les non-dits de ce budget. Les taxes sur *specific goods and services* pour l'année financière 2018-2019 c'était R 18.2 milliards. Pour l'année 2020-2021, cette présente année, ce sera R 21.1 milliards. Durant la présente année financière, soit R 2.9 milliards de plus. La taxe sur les produits pétroliers passait de R 4 milliards en 2019 pour arriver à R 6.1 milliards, soit R 2.1 milliards de plus en 2020-2021 ; R 1 milliard : *levy on corporates* ; R 3.9 milliards : CSG.

Peut-être, Monsieur l'honorable ministre des Finances ne réalise pas les charges sociales généralisées, M. le président. Ici, on n'est pas à Paris, on est à Port Louis. Les spécificités de Maurice n'est pas pareil comme en France. L'honorable Dr. Husnoo vient de nous dire, *we have an ageing population*. Ces R 11.5 milliards, M. le président, on les prend directement des poches des consommateurs. Pour la baisse de R 30 sur le gaz ménager, qui coûterait au gouvernement R 150 millions, on vous fait payer R 11.5 milliards de plus. Ça ce sont les non-dits de ce budget. Voilà ce que le gouvernement vous cache ! J'ai vu dans le budget un projet...

An hon. Member: Condamné corruption!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members!

Mr Juman: J'ai vu dans le budget un projet qui est prévu pour ma circonscription...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Juman, one second! Please, all hon. Members, it is 23.21 hrs, I need discipline in this House! And this is my last warning! Thank you very much. Please continue, hon. Juman! Stick to the Budget Speech!

Mr Juman: Up to now, I am sticking to the Budget! What is wrong?

The Deputy Speaker: Are you are arguing with me? Please, just make your point! Stick to the Budget!

Mr Juman: J'ai, M. le président, un projet qui est prévu pour ma circonscription, la construction d'un *new sports centre* à Plaine Verte. Permettez-moi, M. le président, de douter de sa concrétisation. Sous ce présent gouvernement, M. le président, pendant cinq ans, le Centre Idrice Goomany n'a pas été rénové. On parle de rénovation ! Cinq ans il n'a pas été rénové ! Maintenant on parle d'un *sports centre*. *It is like building a sand castle*.

Avant de conclure, M. le président, j'aimerais dire quelques mots sur le sport, mais *I am really out of time*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I heard hon. Members saying that I need to be shown a lesson for having made allusion to the land owned by a company in which hon. Dr. Rawoo has an interest. What can they say? They are planning to say I was found guilty in a Court of law, what he just said.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: I am...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Juman, you listen to me! First of all, this is a Budget Speech! Be relevant as you debate matters! So, stick to matters relevant to debate, please!

Mr Juman: *Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with this, when our kids*, nos enfants dorment à la belle étoile, ici, on parle pas de milliers, pas de centaines de milliers, on parle de millions, et surtout...

The Deputy Speaker: I beg your pardon! Can you repeat, please?

Mr Juman: In the Budget, we are talking of million, billion.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr Juman: What is wrong?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much!

Mr Juman: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what is the problem? We are talking about the Budget; we are talking about figures.

The Deputy Speaker: I didn't hear!

Mr Juman: Oh!

The Deputy Speaker: That's why I said, 'I beg your pardon!'

Mr Juman: Okay! So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank you for your attention. I thank the hon. Members for their attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. Juman! Hon. Minister Hurreeram!
(11.23 p.m.)

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. *C'était pénible!*

Allow me to start my speech by a saying from Winston Churchill –

"We will never reach our destination if we stop and throw stones at every dog that barks."

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, après ce procès d'intention au ministre des Finances, au Gouverneur de la Banque de Maurice, ce que l'orateur omet de nous dire, c'est que ces personnes-là n'ont jamais été condamnées par une Cour de justice pour corruption, même pas eux, même pas le Deputy Prime Minister, ils n'ont le sang des innocents sur la main.

I have, again, against my will listened to hon. Juman's hollow speech. Unfortunately, that was a golden opportunity to remain quiet.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they have been talking a lot about squatters. But they did not have a word for those planters who were kicked out of their plantation in Riche Terre, where their leader told to those poor planters who were on strike: "*To pas konne si to pas manze to pu crever*".

They did not tell us about Pandit Sungkur taking the Trou aux Biches beach for himself. They forgot to tell us about *Madame là*, the Taj Mahal of *l'aéroport*!

They...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member!

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they did it...

Mr Mohamed: Is it a speech on the Budget?

Mr Hurreeram: Yes, I have to rebut, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

I have to rebut. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they did not tell us about the kids...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member! I heard hon. Eshan Juman say: '*tone baiz par millions*'. Withdraw these words, please!

(Interruptions)

Yes, you withdraw that!

Mr Juman: Okay, I withdraw! Not million, many million.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr Juman: I withdraw, I withdraw!

The Deputy Speaker: Continue!

Mr Hurreeram: None of our Members in here are guilty of giving NHDC houses to kids.

M. le président, je pense que c'est le destin du MSM de sauver et bâtir ce pays, comme il y a 37 ans, quand le parti a été créé avec à sa tête Sir Anerood Jugnauth. A cette époque...

(Interruptions)

What is the problem of hon. Mohamed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? He is disturbing me.

The Deputy Speaker: I did not hear it! Please, continue!

(Interruptions)

Mr Hurreeram: *Malélevé!* A cette époque, le pays traversait...

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: ... he is disturbing...

Mr Hurreeram:...par une phase...

(Interruptions)

Allez do assassin!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed, please!

Mr Hurreeram:... une phase très difficile. L'économie était à plat.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you heard that one?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, I think he has to withdraw that word.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed, I was talking to you. Please, keep some order! One person speaks in the House at a time. I cannot hear different people talking! So, hon. Minister, please continue!

Mr Hurreeram: A l'époque, le pays...

Mr Mohamed: There is a point of order!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, one second! Let us hear the point of order.

Dr. Boolell: The word 'assassin' is unparliamentary, you know, against...

The Deputy Speaker: I get your pardon, the word?

Dr. Boolell: The word 'assassin', this is unparliamentary, and that was the word uttered by the hon. Minister. I think it would be wise for him to withdraw that.

The Deputy Speaker: One second! So, your point of order is that hon. Hurreeram said 'assassin' to you?

Dr. Boolell: No, the word 'assassin' was uttered by the hon. Minister...

The Deputy Speaker: Did you say it?

Dr. Boolell: ...and aimed towards hon. Mohamed.

The Deputy Speaker: One second!

Dr. Boolell: Decency calls that he withdraws the word.

The Deputy Speaker: Did the hon. Minister say it?

Mr Hurreeram: I said sentences *assassins*.

The Deputy Speaker: Pardon?

Mr Hurreeram: *Des phrases assassins*.

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since hon. Hurreeram is happy with allegation, I will give it to him. Take it!

(Interruptions)

Mr Hurreeram: You will sleep nicely tonight! I hope nothing comes and haunts you!

A cette époque, le pays traversait une phase très difficile. L'économie était à plat, l'héritage des décennies de gaspillage sous le régime travailliste. L'emploi était précaire et la roupie était très faible. Mais grâce à un leadership fort et une équipe soudée, il y a eu le miracle économique. Les jeunes n'étaient peut-être pas encore nées, mais les moins jeunes se souviennent très bien de cette époque et aujourd'hui, on se retrouve dans une situation similaire, résultat d'une pandémie mondiale que beaucoup, M. le président, vont qualifier comme presque une troisième guerre mondiale. Ce qui me ramène en 2014/ Personne ne donnait l'*Alliance Lepep* victorieuse. Paul Bérenger disait «*Mo pas arrogant mais nous pe alle vers ene 60-0*» et l'électorat leur infligea une claque magistrale. Je crois surtout qu'il y a eu intervention divine dans l'intérêt de ce pays car depuis 2014, le gouvernement MSM et ses alliés ont jeté les bases pour qu'aujourd'hui nous avons les réserves nécessaires pour survivre à cette pandémie. Imaginez un instant, M. le président, c'était Tonton Cigar qui avait été reconduit au pouvoir. Je n'ose pas imaginer le désastre. Je dis un grand merci à l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth, notre Premier ministre, ce fils du sol, qui a mené la bataille contre cet ennemi invisible et à dirigé le pays vers une grande victoire.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, countries around the world are in uncharted territory, right now, fighting an invisible enemy. The world heads into the unknown. The emergence and spread of COVID-19 have touched every facet of society and the scale of the humanitarian crisis has been matched by widespread economic disruptions. While, as a responsible and united Government, we are facing this deadly enemy, the hon. Members of the other side of this House, unfortunately, had other plans; scampering around...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed! This is the last time I see you talking while another Member is making his speech. Last time!

Mr Hurreeram: Cheapness has no limit, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Scampering around...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed! I give you a last warning, last time I hear you talking. I'll order you out. Please!

Mr Mohamed: Yes, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: I order you out!

Mr Mohamed: Me?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes!

Mr Hurreeram: *Alala! Ale do fatras!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Please! Please continue!

Mr Hurreeram: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. So, I will start the sentence again. Scampering around, awaiting for the slightest opportunity to vilify the Government and minimise our every effort to save the lives of our citizens. Is this the kind of Opposition that this country deserves? Is this the example they want to give to our youth? *Faire politique lor maler dimoune?* Across the world, in all countries affected by COVID-19, Opposition Members have put politics aside and worked hand in hand with their respective Government and put the people first.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Sik Yuen! Please!

Mr Hurreeram: Here...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, allow hon. Minister to continue with his speech! I can no more tolerate indiscipline in this House! Please hon. Minister!

Mr Hurreeram: Here, all we have been served are clumsy live sessions on social media and vain attempts to create havoc amidst this pandemic. I must here say thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for his role. Unlike his fellow associates, he was trying to be politically correct. However, I was disappointed to read recently that he has now stooped as low as his colleagues and he is inviting people to *dessane lor simin*.

M. le président, il y a ceux qui veulent mettre ce pays à feu et à sang pour satisfaire leur intérêts politiques. Au fait, je fus heureux d'entendre ce cri de cœur de mon honorable

collègue Aadil Ameer Meea, et je me joins à lui pour condamner ces pyromanes qui ont le sang sur la main et qui veulent enflammer ce pays.

Je vois l'honorable David partir, il nous a fait quand même un très beau discours mais quand il vient, M. le président, nous faire cette comparaison dangereuse entre les planteurs et les pêcheurs, il aurait bien pu nous épargner cette démagogie. Je suis bien tenté de dire, ce fut un cheveu dans ce qui aurait pu être une soupe parfaite.

Mes collègues, le ministre Ramano, le ministre Maudhoo, la PPS Dorine Chukowry ont déjà effectué des *site visits* à Pointe-aux-Sables et à Bain des Dames, et les mesures sont déjà enclenchées pour l'embellissement et les aménités pour les pêcheurs. *Dessane lor simin* c'est désormais ce que prône le leader de l'opposition.

But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to believe that this does not come from him, probably from his boss and maybe those who had him living, running *ce vieux bâtiment...*

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, please stick the Budget.

Mr Hurreeram: Yes, but I am replying to them, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: I know, strictly.

Mr Hurreeram: *I think it is important to understand that, in this trying time we need to be solidaires autour du pays. On ne peut pas demander aux gens de descendre dans la rue. Est-ce que ce sont ces tapeurs qui lui ont fait courir hors de ce bâtiment pourri au Guy Rozemont Square qui aujourd'hui lui font écrire des choses...*

The Deputy Speaker: And what does that have to do with your Budget Speech hon. Minister?

Mr Hurreeram: It is in an unprecedented context that this Budget has been presented and it is indeed my duty to thank the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for what I feel is an amazing work he has accomplished in such short time and in such a situation. Exceptional circumstances demand exceptional decisions.

These trying times will be remembered as a turning point in our history and will acclaim how this Government prioritises the wellbeing of the population over economic consideration by imposing an early and strict lockdown since March 2020 to limit the spread of the deadly virus and protect the people of our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is an undisputed fact that the construction sector has long been a driver of our economic growth. Before COVID-19 reaches our shores, the whole country was a construction site. Major infrastructural projects were underway in every corner of the island. However, road, bridges, buildings, drains, all projects worth billions have been suspended due to the lockdown. It is much more important for this Government to stop the deadly transmission of COVID-19 in the Mauritian population.

As a responsible Government, bold decisions were taken to flatten the curve of progression of this invisible, yet deadly foe. Our front-liners, the Ministerial Cabinet, the COVID-19 Committee and our loyal partners of the private sector have worked hand-in-hand since day 1 to set up parameters to ensure that each and every citizen of this country has access to essential goods and services. My good friend, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has done a tremendous effort in order to ensure that each and every person, be it from the formal or informal sector, receives a salary.

Meanwhile, our health team, led by hon. Dr. Jagutpal has done a fantastic job in treating and healing more than 95% of those infected and our Prime Minister has shown immense courage and true leadership in leading our efforts to control this pandemic. I must here have a special word for my officers at the Ministry of National Infrastructure, the Architect Section, the Engineering Section, the QS Section, my PS, My DPSs and all the officers for having put their efforts together to build - what the hon. Member earlier was referring to as *conteneur* in the process of mudslinging - COVID-19 Clinics which were built in 10 days to save our population. In 10 days, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! While China has been constructing hospitals in so many days, I don't know the figure, we have built 5 Flu Clinics around the island in only 10 days. And those Clinics, what they don't know in their *opération jette la boue*, 4 of the 5 Clinics were sponsored by WHO, UNDP and 2 by IBL. And I say thank you to these people.

Contrary to those anti-patriots...

(Interruptions)

Cocovid! Yes, this is it!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy, there is a speech, please allow him to continue his speech without interrupting. And I am not asking for anything except for some order from your side.

Mr Nuckcheddy: It's not me.

The Deputy Speaker: So, whoever it was, please!

Mr Hurreeram: So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, even the WHO was very pleased, one with the quality of the work and the price that it cost. This is why we have had 4 different entities sponsoring those Flu Clinics.

M. le président, il faut le reconnaître aucun gouvernement n'aurait pu assainir la situation comme nous l'avons fait, n'en déplaie aux Membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre. Une section de la Presse et quelques génies autoproclamés sur les réseaux sociaux. This Government has always created a business friendly environment and businesses have, up to now, been very optimistic about growth and opportunities for all with hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth at the helm of Mauritius. This is a stark contrast with the period when under the Labour Government and its leader Navin Ramgoolam were creating opportunities only for *Madame là*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the COVID-19 under control, it is now time to take care of our economy and we firmly believe that the construction sector has a major role to play in this endeavour. Our major ongoing projects which are being supervised by the Road Development Authority are numerous like the grade separated junction at Pont Fer-Jumbo-Dowlut roundabouts and flyover at Hillcrest and the A1-M1 link road, A1-A3 link road and the upgrading of road B28 from Deux Frères to Beau Champ and others estimated at Rs5.5 billion. To this, we are adding 18 new projects under the responsibility of the RDA. The procedures for the refurbishment of the Cavendish Bridge are already well underway and now, we have obtained the funds for a new road, right next to the existing structure so that the Cavendish Bridge becomes *une route piétonnière*.

Traffic jams from Quartier Militaire to Réduit are a headache for every road users in the region on a daily basis. The Verdun Bypass will solve this problem once for all. Same goes for the M4 project along the east coast with a sum of Rs1.6 billion allocated to link Bel Air to the A2 road. This project will largely contribute to alleviate traffic problems in the south and east of the country. In short, RDA will be implementing 27 projects for a period of 3 years. 9 ongoing projects, amounting to Rs5.5 billion and 18 new ones with overall project value of Rs5.2 billion.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the National Development Unit, under the aegis of my Ministry, is undergoing a series of upgrading, resurfacing and drain works all across the island and has helped to mobilise more than 500 workers. Rs1.2 billion additional funds have

been allocated to the NDU to construct major drain works in high risk flood-prone areas, identified by the Land Drainage Authority.

My Ministry includes also the Community Development Component. In this regard, we will construct and upgrade a series of structures such as market fairs, multipurpose complexes, incinerators and around 200 secondary roads and 27 amenities, all across the island.

We will also, among others, construct a new Sports Centre at Plaine Verte and a Leisure Park at Quartier Militaire for a total amount of Rs1.3 billion.

This is only for Government projects. We also have major private sector projects like the construction of Smart Cities and terminals like the Victoria Urban Terminal and the Barkly Urban Terminal. We will also extend the construction of modern terminals in rural areas, starting with 4 regions, including Mahébourg. These projects will necessitate considerable amount of investment as well as *main-d'œuvre*. Anyone in good faith will understand the positive impact of such development on our economy and this is why the previous orator failed to understand when he was pointing finger at, who now is a PPS, then was a professional, was a businessman who created a company to create jobs. And whatever he did was in his rightful right, investing in his country, believing in his fellow countrymen and creating jobs and we must applaud him for that.

But, unfortunately, some short minds won't be able to understand that because they wanted to attack the PPS who thanks to him is bringing a new sport centre together with hon. Dr. Husnoo in Plaine Verte, this is getting in their throat, it is not digesting. But I am sure my good friend, hon. Aadil Ameer Meea, will appreciate.

Thousands of workers will resume their jobs. Thousands more will have reconversion opportunities. With the opening of new sites and reopening of all these major construction sites already underway, the supply chain is revived involving thousand more of workers. The construction industry employs directly and indirectly some 120,000 workers in Mauritius representing around 22% of the total workforce. In the year 2019, it contributed some 9.7% to the GDP of Mauritius with a net investment amounting to 48.3 billion. The construction sector encompasses contractors, suppliers and the manufacturers of construction plant, equipment and materials, architectural firms, consulting engineers, quantity surveyors, the overseeing civil servants, financiers, insurers and all those in charge of building and infrastructure management. The Construction Industry Development Board has a key role as

regulatory body for the construction sector. The unprecedented level of construction activity in the country halted by the COVID-19 pandemic had generated specific challenges.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister Ganoo, please wear your mask! Please continue!

Mr Hurreeram: Such challenges relate to the existing legal framework governing the construction sector, plant and labour resources, supply of construction material as well as capability or technical expertise. It is now very important for us to ensure that we adapt our regulatory framework to nurture our objectives.

With the amendments to the CIDB Act proposed in the Budget, the grading of contractors will be reviewed and certain contracts will be open to joint venture contractor. This will allow our proven local contractors to be eligible for more projects. With Rs40 billion worth of project in the country, we are now taking the construction sector to another level. The construction sector will now more than ever be the driving force of our economy. Not only we are going to preserve thousands of jobs, we are going to double its workforce. I, therefore, have this message to our fellow Mauritians, especially the unemployed. We do not have gold mines or petrol reserves; our only resource is our workforce. What we need right now is a change in mindset; no one should be ashamed to work on construction site.

M. le président, nous allons redonner ses lettres de noblesse à ces métiers liés au secteur de la construction. Vous ne faites pas que construire un bâtiment, vous êtes en train de bâtir, de participer à bâtir cette Ile Maurice de demain. C'est vous qui allez relancer notre économie et donner un avenir meilleur à la future génération. Soyons des bâtisseurs de cette Ile Maurice moderne !

J'ai entendu sur *Radio Plus* un soi-disant observateur politique, de surcroît ancien ministre, qui se dit sceptique quant à l'investissement massif dans la construction et la création d'emplois durables. J'espère qu'il est en train d'écouter mon discours. N'écoutez pas les *has been* qui espèrent obtenir un poste à responsabilité au sein de ce gouvernement ! La construction est un secteur en plein essor et c'est le moment ou jamais de se lancer, car c'est vous-même qui allez en profiter dans les années à venir.

This global crisis, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has naturally created doubts and nervousness in the population, quite normal, I will say. Nervous about how they will ride the uncertain time ahead, but they also know that with this Government and its strong leadership, Mauritius will prevail. However, some saw this as an opportunity to undermine our resolve. They fed it with fear-mongering rhetoric, only fuelled by greed for political mileage.

Shameful! They could not stand to see a united Mauritius led by hon. Pravind Jugnauth, united in the face of adversity, fighting, winning. It is a shame! We now have to witness classless actions and hollow speeches from the other side of the House. I am sure most of them, including hon. Mohamed, privately breathed a sigh of relief that it's not their leader who is the Prime Minister in this time of crisis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the population knows that no other Government would have dealt with this crisis better than this Government. The population knows that in the wake of a viral outbreak of such dimension, we could not have been in better hands than in the hands of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. The population knows that we have done everything in our capacity to protect their lives, secure jobs and ensure distribution of essential, such as food and water. The population knows that this situation could have been much, much worse, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, especially if our country was in the wrong hands.

Since day one of the crisis, this Government has set up the necessary framework to ensure the survival of our businesses and industries. This Budget is the consolidation of that philosophy and is in line with the effort of Government to build a modern and stronger Mauritius. Many businesses are ready to throw out existing strategies and adapt to the new business outlook. This Budget and the measures taken by this Government enable just that. The intent of this Government is clear. It recognises the resilience of Mauritius and our strength to fight adversity and our ability to adapt to changing environments. True is also the fact that this COVID-19 pandemic provides us with an opportunity to identify weaknesses and threats, and to our system and processes. With strategic thinking, this Government has been proactive and made the right decision to adapt to the novel situation. We learn from our limitation and devise several protocols to strengthen our capability to turn threats into opportunities and the establishment of new priorities across the country during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Government understands that the pandemic should not be considered as a one-off challenge. The time has come for us to develop and implement an innovative, proactive, adaptive and sustainable risk and change management strategy to address challenges successfully. It is imperative for us to review policies and apply the principle of resilience in the formulation of all strategies. Digital transformation of organisations is now a must. This Government has a real desire for long-term sustainability and believes that deploying financial resources need only be done after thoughtful decision making; both will be critical if we are to succeed at resetting the course of our economy.

The Buy Mauritian Programme to favour local entrepreneurship will ensure that it gives the much needed impetus required to our local manufacturing industries. It will also give the motivation to our youngsters to embrace an entrepreneurial culture. We will also see startups burgeoning around the island. Technology, innovation, food security, renewable energy and protection of environment form part of the Government's vision and commitment. Foundation of these initiatives can be traced back to prior Budgets presented by the Prime Minister. Many people are criticising the funds allocated to fight off the consequences of COVID-19 on our economy. Allow me to shed some light on the situation and bring some perspective. The stimulus package proposed in this Budget ranked Mauritius 5th worldwide when compared to effort done by other countries. This Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, commits 9% of the country's GDP to the effort of getting the economy back on track. Just for comparison's sake, we are far ahead of South Africa which committed only 4%, and behind USA which committed 10% of its GDP. This goes a long way to show how much commitment and belief this Government has put to the economy recovery of the country. It is also an eloquent example to the kind of resilience that this Government has built over the last few years which now allow us to question the initiative which will help jumpstart our economy after the global crisis. It is because we have the reserve that we will be able to provide support, and this is simple economy that some just cannot understand.

The healthy position of the Central Bank and other Financial Instruments will help navigate through these difficult times. You will also hear voices and criticisms about the increase in solidarity tax. I would like to point out that this tax affects only the very high-income earners. Who are they defending then, those earning at least Rs3 m., a tax that will unlikely affect their lavish lifestyle, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. However, I do question again those who criticise this measure: what is your agenda, who do you serve, surely not the small taxpayers who have, thanks to this Budget, seen their tax burden alleviated. Thank you Dr. the hon. Renganaden Padayachy!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a difficult task lies ahead to get this country up and running again without the resurgence of the COVID-19 virus. It will be difficult, but not impossible, and there could have been only one Government which could have succeeded at this task, the MSM Government, hand in hand with its allies, a well-balanced team composed of young as well as seasoned politicians, technocrats, professionals, brilliant minds with the same vision – definitely, not *bann coco vide*.

M. le président, nous vivons un moment sans précédent, où il est difficile de prévoir ce qui va arriver à court, moyen et même à long terme. Je suis persuadé que le secteur de la construction jouera un rôle clé dans notre stratégie de relance économique. C'est peut-être l'épreuve la plus difficile que ce gouvernement aura à faire face lors de ce quinquennat, mais nous avons la capacité, la compétence, la détermination, la maîtrise et la sagesse pour la surmonter, et nous réussirons.

Resilience is about accepting a new reality. It will be different from what we are used to. We can fight it or we can do nothing. We can choose to try and hold on to what we have lost or we can choose to accept that our world has changed. We must try together to build something good out of something bad. After all, isn't that the definition of being a true Mauritian? Our soon-to-be partnership with Liverpool Football Club inspires me for the next few lines. We walk-on with hope in our heart and as long as this Government is here, the people of this country will never walk alone.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ramkaun!

(00.05 a.m.)

Mr S. Ramkaun (Second Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me first of all to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, for conducting such a brilliant analysis and delivering a well-balanced and positive national Budget for the year 2020-2021 in times of the current crisis. The strong positive impacts of the measures announced would rekindle business and consumer confidence while strengthening our economic fundamentals. My constituents have requested me also to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development for the reassurance and feel-good factor his Budget has achieved within the population.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the world is experiencing an unprecedented crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a devastating health, economic and social effects and decrease in development gains in many countries. This pandemic has, indeed, negatively impacted on the world economy, severely tightening financial conditions, destructing trade investments and supply chains. It is a worst economic fall-out unlike any faced in the past century and during these dire situations, multilateral corporations and massive actions are needed in order to contain this unparalleled pandemic and mitigate its health, social and

economic consequences and ensure recovery. The dashboard of the World Health Organisation shows that the Coronavirus has infected to date more than 7.2 million people and claimed over 430,000 lives, disrupted lives and livelihoods and closed borders worldwide.

Never before have we been in such a global lockdown of this scale. The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in the global supply chains, accelerated digitalisation and technological changes and fragmented global markets. There is huge uncertainty on both the health and economic fronts and, in fact, it has opened up other fronts. The trigger of this crisis, the Coronavirus, will continue to disrupt lives until a vaccine or suitable therapeutic is developed. The IMF projects the global economy to contract sharply by 3% points. This is much worse than the 0.7% contractions during the global financial crisis.

There are serious cascading effects in the employment and people all over the world. While the pandemic's effects are global, the crisis is likely to hit the small and vulnerable enterprises the hardest, and in view to alleviate the financial situations of the SMEs, this exceptional Budget has taken definitive measures that include loan facilities and services through the DBM.

Indeed, to alleviate the financial situation of the SMEs, this exceptional budget has taken definitive measures that include loan facilities and services through the DBM. Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, businesses are in a position where they have to find a way to deal with the financial and operational challenges of COVID-19 and at the same time, attending the needs of their customers as well as, suppliers. To help them alleviate the losses encountered, the DBM Ltd has been allocated a hefty, generous amount of Rs10 billion, out of which loans up to Rs10 million per company with a concessional rate of 0.5% per year, which is the lowest preferential rate available in the market, will be used to provide unparalleled support to SMEs, cooperative societies, hotel based taxi operators, etc.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the road to recovery will be long as we deal with persistent impact on workers, jobs, and business. Beyond economic cost, there will be immense human and social cost. The Minister of Finance has worked on the same line, thus, to secure the jobs of thousands of men and women, thereby securing the means of livelihood of thousands of small businesses.

Another highly laudable measure to help SMEs and cooperative societies through the DBM, is the Enterprise Modernisation Scheme, whereby the beneficiary will be granted 15%

on the cost of assets of up to Rs150,000. This measure will help the SMEs and cooperative societies to upgrade their businesses, ultimately providing better services and producing better products, which will not only increase their product value, but will also promote the purchase of local-made products over imported ones.

Moreover, to offer our youngsters opportunities to ultimately pave their successful career path in the entrepreneurship sector, DBM Ltd will develop its Campus Entrepreneur Challenge Competition, whereby the first 10 best projects will be financed for up to Rs500,000, at a concessional rate of 0.5% per year. This initiative will not only motivate our youngsters to consider entrepreneurship as a career path, but will also ensure that their best ideas are implemented for the economic progress of our country. The use of IT is of utmost importance in households, and especially, in businesses where it fosters innovation, making businesses run more efficiently, thus, increasing value, enhancing quality and boosting productivity.

To ensure that every household has the capacity to process IT equipment, the DBM Ltd will also be providing financial facilities to purchase the IT equipment for educational purposes. Following all the services and initiatives the DBM Ltd has undertaken, our citizens will most certainly reap from its benefits and alleviate from some of the negative economic impact due to COVID-19. Major sectors also requiring support are the hospitality, manufacturing and SMEs.

Knowing quite well the effect of the pandemic on the tourism industry, the whole industry should be given additional support and consolidation of financial sectors. The SME Equity Fund Ltd shall invest through crowd-lending mechanism to the tune of Rs200,000 per project. More so, public bodies have to procure specific goods and services from SMEs only and payment will be made within 14 days from the date of the invoice. The SMEs holding 'Made in Mauritius' label will benefit from a marginal preference of 40% instead of 30% under public procurement. DBM Ltd will acquire industrial buildings at Coromandel, Terre Rouge, Vallée des Prêtres and construct SME parks at Plaine Magnien and Vuillemin. These facilities will normally give a boost to the SME sector.

A new tourism branding strategy will be developed, rental payment for State lands for hotels will be waived for the upcoming year and the introduction of apart hotel schemes to enable existing hotels to convert part of their accommodation into service apartment that can be sold individually. Hotel reconstruction and renovation schemes will benefit from increase

of rebate on rental of State lands from 50% to 100% up to June 2022. No payment of licence fee for 2 years by the licensees of Tourism Authority, Beach Authority. These will, of course, relieve our beach hawkers.

Coming to the Agri-business and real estate sectors, the creation of a digital bank of agricultural land is a very laudable initiative. The repurposing of 20,000 hectares of abandoned land will surely improve our self-sufficiency in crops and vegetables. Again, DBM Ltd is providing loans at 0.5% interest to distressed companies. Promoting local contractors by developing local expertise for projects below Rs300 m. will surely impact positively on unemployment. The shorter retention period of 6 months instead of 12 months, with faster payment cycles, will furthermore boost the cash flow of contractors.

Payment of VAT will now be made as from the date of payment instead of the date of the invoice previously. This will apply to contracts with the Government and represents a good starting point to ease the cash flow of businesses. With COVID-19, most economies are on the verge of unprecedented recession and unless the Government provides continuous support, many businesses may not survive. While this Government has targeted measures to fiscally help some industries, the introduction of new levies will have a negative effect.

Another incentive to planters owning less than 10 acres of agricultural land is that they will be able to convert 10% of the land for residential and commercial purposes.

I would fail in my duty if I do not intervene on the health sector that has been the engine against COVID-19 pandemic...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Seeruttun, hon. Minister, your mask please!

Mr Ramkaun: ...for the past few months. We can say that if the lockdown has been raised early this month, this has been done due to the unflinching effort of the front liners of the medical sector. The health sector has been allocated a 12 billion budget over the next financial year as part of a new strategic plan 2020-2024 to ensure that our national health services can cope with new challenges. Plagues and epidemics are notoriously known to have ravaged humanity throughout their existence, often challenging the course of history, namely plagues, Spanish flu, polio, more recently H1N1, swine flu, West African Ebola, and now, COVID-19. This pandemic is undoubtedly, one of the greatest challenges we have faced since World War II.

In the wake of COVID-19, countries worldwide have been left kneeling by creating a crisis at all levels, socially, economically and politically. I must here congratulate the Prime

Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, and the Government, who has excelled in containing this pandemic by taking very bold and stringent measures as soon as we registered the first confirmed case of COVID-19. These bold and arduous measures have, undeniably, shaped the outcome into a more positive one.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, here I would like to quote Dr. Musangu, the World Health Organisation representative, who was meeting our President, and he said, I quote –

“The containment of the disease in the country and the decreasing of COVID-19 cases were due mainly to the commitment of the high authorities in Mauritius.”

He also added that Mauritius is among the very few countries in the world which has been able to stop the spread of the infection only two months after the first three confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been registered. Nonetheless, we have to acknowledge, appreciate, and be forever grateful to our front liners who have put in hard work, sweat, dedication and soul in fighting this pandemic relentlessly. Moreover, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we can proudly say that Mauritius is one of the rare countries which have been able to provide its hospital staff, and all front liners at large, with appropriate protective personal equipment and masks. The mainstay of the Budget is, firstly, to set a National Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. Secondly, to improve, modernise the public health infrastructure. In doing so, we will be armed to strategically and efficiently fight the forthcoming pandemics.

I would also congratulate the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr. the hon. Jagutpal, for the tremendous effort put to fight the pandemic and manage such a critical situation. Furthermore, it has been noted that cancers and diabetes are among the four most prevalent non-communicable diseases in Mauritius, and with them, unfortunately, come a whole lot of complications, chronic renal diseases, retinopathies and vascular problems, etc. Thus, opening up a new Cancer Hospital in December 2020 will provide our population with a timely and appropriate *prise en charge* of our needy patients.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a nation is judged by the way it treats its children, especially those requiring Special Education Needs (SENs). As far as I know, no other Government as ever increased the annual per capita grant for SENs students for teaching aids, utilities, furniture, equipment by fourfold as we did in our previous Budgets. I welcome the grant being offered to SENs schools of Rs100,000 being managed by NGO. Clearly, this Budget puts the Mauritian child at the centre of development. On this side of the House, we have always promoted the wellbeing of our students so that they are empowered and, in turn, help

to fashion a bright future for Mauritius. The message is clear and explicit. Unless we empower the children and youth today, unless we give them the right environment to progress, unless we ensure that they are acquiring the right set of skills, the future of the country of the country will be bleak. We, as a serious Government, will never let this happen. We are a service-oriented economy, and, therefore, we need to ensure that every pair of hands becomes thinking hands.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, provision has also been made in to further address the climatic change challenges in the various high-risk flood zones: Rs340 m. for continuing landslide stabilisation; Rs215 m. for protecting our beaches, lagoons and coral reefs; and Rs207 m. for continuing Clean-up Campaign by the Local Authorities. The Land Drainage Authority has already mapped some 260 high-risk flood prone zones in Mauritius, and just to name a few from Constituencies under my responsibility: Vallée des Prêtres, Terre Rouge, Le Hochet, Cité La Cure from Constituency No. 4; Baie du Tombeau, Pamplemousses, d'Epinay, Bois Rouge, Mount, Pointe aux Piments and Arsenal from Constituency No. 5. Much progress has been done in the conceptualisation of these projects and procurement of services for undertaking these projects are in progress.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the start of the speech I spoke on the great uncertainty ahead and fundamental shifts that are taking place at an accelerated pace. What does this changing world demand of us? There is no easy answer. We need to adapt and transform ourselves with agility, creativity and determination to survive and emerge stronger from the huge uncertainties ahead. We must get three things right. First, we must have good governance and strong adaptive leadership, a Government that works with you and for you, that is always honest with our people about the truth, steadfast in preparing and anticipating what lies ahead and committed to support our people and businesses to meet uncertainty, head on and emerge stronger.

Talking about leadership, all the Members of this House have spoken about their leaders, the Labour Party Members are as if hesitant to speak of their leader because...

(Interruptions)

I know...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ramkaun, stick to the Budget Speech, please!

Mr Ramkaun: *The hon. Dr. Gungapersad stated yesterday that il a été mis k.o. en 2014. Il n'a pas été mis k.o. par ce gouvernement ou l'ancien gouvernement, il a été mis k.o.*

par le peuple. Pareillement, le peuple n'a pas voulu le leader du Parti travailliste dans la Circonscription No. 5, Pamplémousses/Triolet en 2014. En 2019, Circonscription No. 10, Montagne Blanche, là-bas aussi le peuple n'a pas voulu de lui, et je pense que c'est pourquoi que les honorables membres du parti ne veulent pas parler de leur leader. Eh bien, nous, on a un leader qui travaille, et on doit dire, il y a le MMM aussi, le leader du MMM qui travaille, et ont fait leur preuve. Alors,...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode, I understand it is past midnight. But, let's get on with the business of the House.

(Interruptions)

Order! Please, continue!

Mr Ramkaun: We must have strong social reserves...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please!

(Interruptions)

Mr Ramkaun: ...not just in each of us as individuals or just in our different communities but across all levels and parts of our society working together and holding one another up with trust and in solidarity *la main dans la main*.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of our main objectives at the moment is to ensure that our country emerges successfully from these trying economic conditions and I am quite sure that through the measures from this unique budget the forecasted economic fundamentals will be achieved. It is the right time for the Government and the Opposition and our country's citizens to combine our efforts with the only objective of containing this unparalleled pandemic and mitigate its health, social and economic consequences and ensure recovery of our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once we have all debated at length and voted 2020-2021 Budget, my appeal to every Minister, PPS and backbencher is to be fearlessly committed, sincere and upright in supporting the implementation of the recovery roadmap.

I thank you for your kind attention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much hon. Ramkaun for your speech after midnight. Hon. Dhunoo, please!

Mr Dhunoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Mrs Luchmun Roy seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Monday 15 June 2020 at 11.30 a.m.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

MATTERS RAISED

(00.31 a.m.)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

DIEGO GARCIA & GORAH ISSAC STREETS - UPGRADING

Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my issue is addressed to my colleague, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management and it concerns the Diego Garcia and Gorah Issac Streets. Pictures speak louder than words.

Il y a une dégradation de l'environnement et la route. Donc, je vais table the pictures and I will ask humbly the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Local Government to talk to the City Council and to remedy the situation.

Thank you.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Government has set up a very good service, the Consumer Service Unit (CSU). I would ask the hon. Member to put it through the CSU and the work is going to be done.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Nagalingum!

(00.33 a.m.)

STANLEY, ROSE HILL- ROADS - RESURFACING

Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my request is addressed to both the Minister of Public Infrastructure and NDU and the Minister of Local Government. We are talking about the state of many roads in Stanley, Rose Hill which are more than a pitiful state. These roads have been excavated for the installation of water pipes. Most of these roads have been completed since more than a year and most of these roads have been reopened to traffic but have not been resurfaced. May I press upon the Minister to see to it that necessary action be taken at the level of the NDU, Municipality of Rose Hill to remedy this situation.

If you will allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would also like to thank the Minister of Land Transport for two issues that I raised at Adjournment Time regarding footpath at Vandermeersch near Queen Elizabeth College and the feeder buses at Vandermeersch. Both have been attended to and I thank the Minister for that.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I have just mentioned, the Government has set up an online service, the CSU and I will ask the Member to put his request through the CSU, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much hon. Deven Nagalingum, and we appreciate that you recognise the work done. Next one! Hon. Uteem!

(00.35 a.m.)

G.M.D. ATCHIA COLLEGE - GYMNASIUM

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): I would like to raise a matter concerning the hon. Minister of Education and that concerns the school G.M.D. Atchia.

It was announced today that colleges will open as from 01 July. There is a request from the inhabitants of the locality that the people be given access to the gymnasium of G.M.D. Atchia so that they can practise badminton and other sports and my request to the

hon. Minister is to see whether it is possible to close because when we talked to the Rector, he says we need to talk to the Ministry and two years ago when I asked the same question, the Ministry told me that it was PTA which has to deal with it.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, we have a system through the Zone Directorate where people can go and request for the use of the gymnasium but it has to be through a registered club, it is not done for individuals.

At 00.37 a.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Monday 15 June 2020 at 11.30 a.m.