



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

**SIXTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY****PARLIAMENTARY****DEBATES****(HANSARD)****FIRST SESSION****FRIDAY 14 JUNE 2019**

**CONTENTS****ANNOUNCEMENT****PAPERS LAID****MOTION****BILL (*Public*)****ADJOURNMENT**

## THE CABINET

### (Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, External Communications and National Development Unit, Minister of Finance and Economic Development
Hon. Ivan Leslie Collendavelloo, GCSK, SC	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities
Hon. Sir Anerood Jugnauth, GCSK, KCMG, QC	Minister Mentor, Minister of Defence, Minister for Rodrigues
Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands, Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare
Hon. Yogida Sawmynaden	Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Nandcoomar Bodha, GCSK	Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun	Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research
Hon. Anil Kumarsingh Gayan, SC	Minister of Tourism
Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo	Minister of Health and Quality of Life
Hon. Prithvirajsing Roopun	Minister of Arts and Culture
Hon. Marie Joseph Noël Etienne Ghislain Sinatambou	Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity, and Environment and Sustainable Development
Hon. Mahen Kumar Seeruttun	Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security
Hon. Ashit Kumar Gungah	Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection
Hon. Maneesh Gobin	Attorney General, Minister of Justice, Human Rights and Institutional Reforms
Hon. Jean Christophe Stephan Toussaint	Minister of Youth and Sports

Hon. Soomilduth Bholah	Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives
Hon. Marie Roland Alain Wong Yen Cheong, MSK	Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment
Hon. Premdut Koonjoo	Minister of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn	Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training
Hon. Purmanund Jhugroo	Minister of Housing and Lands
Hon. Marie Cyril Eddy Boissézon	Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms
Hon. Dharmendar Sesungkur	Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance

## **PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS**

Madam Speaker	Hanoomanjee, Hon. Mrs Santi Bai, GCSK
Deputy Speaker	Lesjongard, Georges Pierre
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Jahangeer, Hon. Ahmad Bashir
Clerk of the National Assembly	Lotun, Mrs Bibi Safeena
Adviser	Dowlutta, Mr Ram Ranjit
Deputy Clerk	Ramchurn, Ms Urmeelah Devi
Clerk Assistant	Gopall, Mr Navin
Clerk Assistant	Seetul, Ms Darshinee
Hansard Editor	Jankee, Mrs Chitra
Chief Reporter & Subeditor	Allet, Mrs Marie-Hélène Caroline
Parliamentary Librarian and Information Officer	Jeewoonarain, Ms Prittydevi
Serjeant-at-Arms	Pannoo, Mr Vinod

**MAURITIUS**

**Sixth National Assembly**

**FIRST SESSION**

**Debate No. 11 of 2019**

**Sitting of 14 June 2019**

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

**The National Anthem was played**

*(Madam Speaker in the Chair)*

## ANNOUNCEMENT

### SITTING OF 13 JUNE – POINTS OF ORDER

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have an announcement to make with regard to the two points of order raised by hon. Rutnah first and thereafter by the hon. Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity, and Environment and Sustainable Development, hon. Sinatambou at the sitting of yesterday.

I undertook to check the recording and come back to the House with the ruling. I have gone through the video recording and hon. Bérenger can be seen to be saying the word ‘*imbécile*’.

When hon. Sinatambou objected to the word ‘*imbécile*’ which according to him was addressed to his good self, hon. Bérenger stated the following words, and I quote –

“*Pas pou twa ki mo pe dire sa, pou Rutnah sa, kuyon.*”

Addressed to hon. Sinatambou.

In the circumstances, I invite hon. Bérenger to kindly withdraw the word ‘*imbécile*’ addressed to hon. Rutnah and the word ‘*kuyon*’ addressed to hon. Sinatambou.

**Mr Bérenger:** I withdraw.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you.

## PAPERS LAID

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Papers have been laid on the Table.

### **Prime Minister’s Office**

The Annual Report of the Lottery Committee for the year ended 30 June 2018.

## MOTION

### SUSPENSION OF S. O. 10(2)

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, I move that all the business on today’s Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

**Mr Sinatambou rose and seconded.**

*Question put and agreed to.*

**PUBLIC BILL***Second Reading***THE APPROPRIATION (2019-2020) BILL 2019****(NO. X OF 2019)**

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Appropriation (2019-2020) Bill 2019 (No. X of 2019).*

*Question again proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Dr. Joomaye!

(3.04 p.m.)

**Dr. Z. Joomaye (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac):** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would, at the very outset, congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for the presentation of this Budget for the year 2019-2020.

Even before its presentation, Madam Speaker, I must say that there have been a lot of speculations in the press and within the Opposition quarters, depicting a certain picture negative calling it *la bous dou, électoraliste*, even preempting, because we are almost at the end of the present mandate. Some said that the old age pension would have been aligned to the minimum wage. It is, in fact, a lesson for those who like to talk, to speculate or to write nonsense or spread unfounded and fake news, sometimes, even all the time, without thinking. They would think that we forget, but we don't, the population as well do not forget. For those who write, they should know that leadership should not be taken for granted.

Despite all this, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Minister of Finance and Economic Development served us at the eve of the next general elections, one of the most responsible budgets, well-balanced, reconciling social justice and the need to pursue equitable development as well as durable development. A Budget turned towards the future where no one has been left behind, be it in Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agaléga and the Chagos, the aim is obviously to reduce inequalities. The series of measures to achieve this objective speaks for itself. I will not repeat all that has been already enumerated yesterday; measures to alleviate poverty include the support given to elders, to planters, to fishermen, to taxi owners, to civil servants, amongst others.

Following the presentation of the Budget, the mood in the country has changed, but in some segments of the press, the mood has not changed. I have noticed this year, a notable number of freshly proclaimed Consultants, Analysts and Advisers in economic matters communicating everywhere in the papers on radio or on social media. Freedom of expression allows everyone to talk, but not to use the cap of a professional and to induce the population in error, instilling doubts in the minds of people, undermining the confidence of business actors, undermining the confidence of potential local and foreign investors in our country. Some on a weekly basis take a sadistic pleasure to tarnish our reputation internationally.

Yesterday, I listened carefully to the Leader of the Opposition; he quoted Charles Dickens and my friend hon. Sinatambou reminded him that Charles Dickens was a fiction author. We have to run a country, not in fiction but in reality. I would rather be realistic and quote someone else. The person I would quote answers to all the detractors of the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, hon. Pravind Jugnauth. Madam Speaker, I will quote the Executive Director representing the African region on the Board of Directors of the IMF. Concluding the IMF article IV consultation 2019 on 22 April this year, the Director of the IMF wrote to our Prime Minister, and I quote –

“Excellency,

Let me take this opportunity to join other Executive Directors in congratulating you and the Mauritian authorities for the solid macroeconomic performance over the years and also for your continued effort to address structural bottlenecks.”

Madam Speaker, this is what the IMF thinks of our Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. So, who would care about our local *apprentis sorciers*? After these consultations, the conclusions were very clear. The economy remains strong despite adverse international challenges. Growth is stable, targeted up to 3.9%. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development fiscal policy has been found in line with the previous year's Budget. There is stability in our financial sector; the banking sector is performing satisfactorily. Official forex reserves have increased. The IMF! They carried out a debt sustainability analysis, which concluded that Mauritius debt level remains sustainable. I am not saying this; the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance is not saying that. We are not blowing our own trumpet. It is the IMF commending the economic management of the country. But the IMF, Madam Speaker, is not the only international institution which has assessed our economy positively.

Recently, Moody's maintained a Baa1 stable notation for Mauritius, stressing on the resilience of our economy. I will quote from the report, Madam Speaker –

“Mauritius has outperformed Baa1 (...), something we expect to continue over the next two years.”

Further, it says –

“Mauritius has a steady record of growth. Improvement in the labour market continues with the unemployment rate falling to its lowest since 2001, that is, now at 6.9%, down from a peak of 8% in 2013.”

Madam Speaker, we have growth and, more importantly, it is not jobless growth. Moody's said that household debt service has continued to decline to 15.2% in 2018, compared to 18% in 2014. Again, Madam Speaker, I am not the one saying all this, neither is the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance who is saying it, Moody's is saying that. We also ranked Mauritius 20<sup>th</sup> in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business, and the Prime Minister just announced continued efforts to improve business climate. A new Business Facilitation Act is in preparation.

Locally, Madam Speaker, the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in its latest report, stipulated that the business confidence indicator has improved in our private sector. Our offshore financial sector is doing well. The policies of the Government in this respect have produced results. The Mauritian jurisdiction has been cleared by UE (*Union Européenne*), *l'OCDE*, and it has been found compliant.

About anti-money laundering, the ESAAMLG follow-up report has seen us obtaining an upgrade in 11 Financial Action Task Force Recommendations. More importantly is Recommendation 15, which concerns due diligence of new investors. That means that our financial sector is safe, transparent and reliable. This translates the seriousness and good job of the regulatory bodies. The new agreement with the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City qualifying Mauritian companies to operate there is a new avenue which will definitely be remembered.

Madam Speaker, the efforts of our Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to develop and stress on economic diplomacy has been fruitful. Mauritius has earned its place as an economic leader in Africa. We have seen the visits of several African Presidents recently: the latest one from Kenya, President Uhuru Kenyatta, and a couple of months earlier, the President of Mozambique and the President of Madagascar who was the Chief Guest for the

Independence celebration on 12 March. New trade agreements have been negotiated, but all this takes time, and time will tell. All this proves our economic position in an objective way. We accept constructive criticisms, but what we are hearing these days sometimes leaves us confused. A few weeks ago, the main critic against the Government was public sector debt, even just before the Budget presentation. When we bring measures to bring down debt levels, some do not find it good. The way debt is being repaid, is being challenged, but this issue has already been canvassed yesterday - Central Banks using reserves to repay debt, and public debt is internationally accepted by the IMF. I will only say one sentence: "*qui paie ses dettes s'enrichit*". So, I fail to understand some people with double personalities. Either they are dishonest or they are schizophrenic, or they just want free publicity in the Press, talking nonsense.

Same goes for the medical insurance given to civil servants. Some are saying that it is the beginning of the dismantling of the Welfare State, as if we are closing public hospitals, or we are preventing civil servants to go to the public health sector. This is pure demagogic and short-sightedness. These people forget that all the employees of the State-owned companies have a medical insurance, be it Air Mauritius, Mauritius Telecom, CEB, CWA, SICOM, Cargo Handling Corporation, MRA. All these bodies have their staff insured or contributing to a provident fund. So, if medical insurance is good for these people, why won't it be good for all the civil servants? We have to raise the level of the debate, the level of thought. What is good should be acknowledged as good, even by political opponents. Syndicate representatives should abandon archaic reflexes. We are no longer in the 70s, we are a caring Government, we are modernising.

I listened to hon. Mrs Selvon yesterday making a plea for the legalisation of cannabis for medical purpose. I must say that there is debate. Myself, as a practitioner treating cancer patients, I am thoughtful about this issue. But we have standards to respect. The international trend nowadays is to go along evidence-based medicine. Until I read properly conducted studies published in reference periodicals such as the Lancet or the New England Journal of Medicine, or equivalent, in favour of the medical virtues of cannabis, I cannot adhere to that theory. Of course, in the eventuality that this happens, I will review my own position and my friend, the hon. Minister of Health who is a practitioner as well, will certainly advise the Government appropriately. We cannot let ourselves be pressurised by different lobbies, be it from pharmaceutical industries or other consumer organisations.

Madam Speaker, let me say a few words about my Constituency, Rivière des Anguilles/Souillac. People out there will be eternally thankful to the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. In the name of all tea planters, I wish to extend the warmest thanks to the Prime Minister for doubling the winter allowance. I have been working in this constituency for 10 years now, never in the past there have been so many projects realised. Apart from drains and upgrading of roads, I will enumerate a few projects that have been done in the last three years. New Village Hall in Château Bénares, sub-hall in Batimaraïs, new village hall in Rivière des Anguilles, new village hall in Bois Chéri, new village hall in Grand Bois, new village hall in La Flora, all this had to be done, and it has been done, thank you Prime Minister.

I need to extend heartfelt thanks to the PPS of the Constituency, hon. Mrs Boygah for her good work and dedication, and I wish to thank the Prime Minister for providing funds to move forward with the Rivière des Anguilles Dam Project. This undoubtedly will solve the problem of water supply in the whole of the southern region.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am done.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Uteem!

(3.19 p.m.)

**Mr R. Uteem (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):** Madam Speaker, where is the second economic miracle? Where are the hundred thousand jobs that the Rt. hon. Minister Mentor, when he was Prime Minister in August 2015, announced? What happened to the 5.7 economic growth that you promised in your first Budget? Or was it because it was announced by a magician, Mr Gold, who is no longer here? What about the 5.5% growth promised by the Rt. hon. Minister Mentor in August 2015? The bar was too high? Okay, what about your growth rate of 4.1% which you announced last year and the preceding year?

Even this, even your own set objective, you have not been able to achieve and, today, you expect Members of this side of the House to applaud? You should do what hon. Vishnu Lutchmeenaraaidoo did. He was absolutely right when he said –

*« Depuis dix ans déjà, avec 3% de croissance, on s'en flatte. Moi, j'ai honte. »*

You should all be ashamed of yourselves. At least, he had the decency to resign because he said that you were going to have 5.7% growth, he underachieved, he *leve paker*,

he goes. Where are the 10,000 social housing units? Yesterday, the hon. Minister confessed that this Government, since 2015, has been able to only deliver less than 2,000 housing units! 995, and in this Budget, you will construct 6,000 more housing units. And you are not even making provisions, not even one single rupee in this Budget for the construction of these 6,000 housing units. At page 333 of your Budget Estimates, you only mention that 6,000 housing units will be constructed through private participation in public sector project.

Private participation! Where are the private participants? And you want us to take this Government seriously? The hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure is not here. I would have asked him where the ring road with the double tunnel is. He went to the Korean Experts, who told him that one tunnel will not be enough; he was going to construct a second tunnel. What happened to the A1-M1 Bridge linking Sorèze to Coromandel? He is so ashamed of the lack of progress; he is so ashamed that he lumped this item in the estimates together with Jumbo Phoenix Roundabout.

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Uteem:** And he will have the time to come and explain whether geothermal studies had been carried out properly, whether they can do the piling that they were supposed to do. This is the reason why this bridge has not yet been constructed. And I am not going to even mention Terre Rouge/Verdun.

Where is your Fishing Port? Where is the Port which was supposed to link GRNW to Baie du Tombeau? What happened to your pledge of delivering water supply 24/7? You imposed a Rs3 tax on each litre of petroleum product to finance replacement of pipes and, five years later, you are still unable to deliver water 24/7.

Hon. Dr. Joomaye mentioned Rivière des Anguilles Dam. Five years now, five years, and what are we doing? We are still at design stage. Five years, still at design stage. Where is the SME Bank? Where are the five techno poles? Where is the Highlands City Project? What happened to the Medical Hub? What happened to the Education Hub? What happened to the Pharmaceutical Park? What happened to the Bicycle and Motorcycle plants? What happened to the Gold City? Gone with the gold finger. What happened to green economy? What happened to blue economy?

For five years, *l'or, vert, bleu; pendant cinq ans, vous nous avez fait voir de toutes les couleurs, mais au final vous nous laissez dans une situation où presque tous les indicateurs*

économiques sont au rouge. C'est ça votre bilan! Un catalogue de promesses non tenues, et vous vous en réjouissez! You are proud of your legacy. All economic indicators, except for inflation, are in the red, and you are congratulating yourself. Saving rates below 10%, all-time low saving rates; investment rate stagnating below 20%, only 18.8%; current account deficit has worsened, and you are proposing absolutely nothing new to boost the economy. And you are surprised that the private sector is disappointed with this Budget? Reaction from Mr Patrice Robert and Ms Leelowantee Ramjan of MEXA in *Le Mauricien* of 11 June –

*« L'industrie manufacturière à l'exportation avait besoin de mesures phares pour sa transformation. Les opportunités sont là, mais malheureusement on n'a rien entendu. »*

Nothing! Nothing also for the Sugar Industry. We are only told that now, after five years, we are going to rush to the World Bank to save us, and I am not going to even comment on the Financial Services Sector. Apparently, you think that we don't have harmful tax practices when you, yourself, hon. Prime Minister you wrote to the European Union committing to eliminate harmful tax practices by the end of this year.

**Madam Speaker:** Don't address the Prime Minister, please.

**Mr Uteem:** Yet, in his Vision 2030 speech delivered in August 2015, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, then Prime Minister said, and I quote –

“Few countries in the world can progress without a sustainable manufacturing base. Manufacturing today accounts for about 18% of our economy and we aim to increase its share significantly to 25% within the next three years.”

Four years later, what is the situation? Answering to a PQ which I asked on 21 May, last month, the hon. Minister of Industry and Commerce informed the House that 34 manufacturing enterprises ceased operations since January 2015 – 34. This has resulted in 3,411 job losses. You announced 5,000 new jobs in the manufacturing sector. Four years later, 3,411 job losses and the situation is worsening.

Budget deficit is maintained as 3.2% of GDP. But who trust this figure, Madam Speaker? It does not include expenses paid out of the special funds; it does not include expenses incurred by your Special Purpose Vehicles. After all, the hallmark of this Government has been to create special purpose vehicles to stay away from budgetary control of this House. We have seen it for Metro Express, SPV by State Bank of Mauritius. We have

seen it with Safe City project, SPV by Mauritius Telecom. We have seen it with the underwater sea cable, SPV by Central Electricity Board.

Why do you hide behind these SPVs? Why can't you tell the nation how much you are actually spending? Why are we cooking the books? Why so much window dressing? Why underestimate budget deficit? To hide poor fiscal policy tools? And those advisors who are encouraging the Government to use these colourable devices are certainly not doing a favour to their country. The population has the right to know what this actual public debt figure is because, at the end of the day, it is not us, Madam Speaker, it is our children, our grandchildren who will have to foot the bill for these hidden debts.

And despite all these colourable devices and Special Purpose Vehicles, public debt, today, stands at a staggering Rs323 billion according to Budget Estimates, and the hon. Prime Minister did not even have the nerve to state, in his Budget Speech, what was the actual public debt figure. We had to dig it from the Budget Estimates - Rs323 billion; that represents 65% of GDP. 65% of GDP when last year, the very same Prime Minister told this House that he was going to bring down public debt to 63.1%. What happened? Why has public debt exploded? Have we constructed hospitals? Have we constructed roads? Have we constructed colleges?

*(Interruptions)*

No! You are wrong! I will tell you what happened.

**Madam Speaker:** Order! Order, please!

**Mr Uteem:** I will tell you what happened. In an interview...

*(Interruptions)*

No, I will tell you what happened. In an interview published in *Business Mag*, June 2019, this is what the hon. Prime Minister said, answering a question about public debt: '*Moi, je n'emprunte pas pour financer les dépenses courantes, mais pour apporter des solutions à des problèmes chroniques*'.

How accurate is this, Madam Speaker? We are not borrowing to finance current expenditure! We know in this House, every year, in the Budget, there is an amount announced under the heading Capital Expenditure, and we know, every year, that we underspend under this item Capital Expenditure, and yet our public debt is increasing. You don't have to be an economist. You don't have to be a mathematician to understand that. You

can't possibly be using public sector borrowing to finance capital expenditure when your capital expenditure is going down and your debt is going up!

Madam Speaker, the truth is that this Government has completely mishandled the BAI and Bramer Bank scandal. The truth is that a substantial portion of public debt is being incurred because of the mess created by this Government when it dismantled BAI. Assets of BAI were sold for peanuts and made an insignificant contribution towards the Rs17 billion. This is the figure which hon. Sesungkur said to the House, Rs17 billion used to repay the Super Cash Back Gold holders and investors in Bramer Asset Management. And who had forked out for this? Us! Us, taxpayers!

Government has already injected or guaranteed directly or indirectly Rs7 billion to MauBank, and they said that they were not going to use one cent of public fund for BAI. Rs7 billion to MauBank. And guess what, Madam Speaker! And this was not announced in the Budget Speech. When you look at page 382 of the 2019–2020 Estimates, under the item Equity Purchase, Rs2 billion. In what? MauBank Holding! This nightmare is not over. We are budgeting another Rs2 billion to inject into MauBank Holding for MauBank to clean up the mess created by this Government. Shocking but true!

And we have also not made provision in this Budget for the reimbursement of the Rs3.5 billion that we borrowed from the Bank of Mauritius to pay the Super Cash Back Gold and Bramer Asset Management. What a mess! And now, when we have so much public debt, when we are unable to generate economic growth to repay our debt, what are we doing? We are turning to the Bank of Mauritius.

At paragraph 429 of the Budget Speech, this is what the hon. Prime Minister says –

“We will make early repayment of public sector debt by using part of the accumulated undistributed surplus held at the Bank of Mauritius.”

Madam Speaker, when we heard this measure, hon. Paul Bérenger was the first to react against it. Later on, I used the term ‘it was the most indecent proposition in the Budget’ and, today, I stand by what I said. What the Government is today proposing to do is not only dangerous, but will also set a very bad precedent. I will try to explain myself, Madam Speaker, in very simple terms, because we are dealing with a very technical subject. We have a Central Bank, the Bank of Mauritius. The Bank of Mauritius is governed by the Bank of Mauritius Act. The Bank of Mauritius Act tells you what are the functions of the bank, what are the objects of the bank, what the bank can do or cannot do. So, the bank cannot do

anything that is outside the four corners of that Bank of Mauritius Act. Now, the Bank of Mauritius Act tells the bank that it has to maintain two reserves: one, General Reserve Fund, and a Special Reserve Fund. In the General Reserve Fund, you will put your profit. What is your profit? For example, the Bank of Mauritius, holds accounts in foreign currency. You have bank deposits in US dollars; you have bank deposits in Pound Sterling, in Euros. These deposits earn interest. So, you are getting income, or you are investing in instruments, you are getting income. So, this net profit of the Bank of Mauritius, the law requires that they keep 15% of this profit in the General Reserve Fund. And the balance, 85%, they can transfer to the Consolidated Fund. But they can only transfer to the Consolidated Fund subject to retaining a minimum equivalent to the stated capital, which is currently Rs2 billion.

So, effectively, what the law says today, whenever the Central Bank makes a profit, it has to keep 15% for itself and then, any amount in excess of Rs2 billion, it can distribute to the Central Bank. Now, the problem is that the Central Bank has not been making profit. Last year, the Central Bank made a loss of Rs587.2 m. and in its annual report, the Bank of Mauritius stated, and I quote - that was in the latest annual report –

“It must be noted that the Bank has, since Financial Year 2014/15, been making losses except in Financial Year 2016/17, where it exceptionally made a net profit of Rs561.1 million as a result of the disposal of some financial instruments.”

So, the Bank of Mauritius is not profit making, has not been making profit for the five past years, except in one year.

So, when the hon. Prime Minister is referring to accumulated undistributed profit, he could not possibly be referring to that General Reserve Fund. So, now we turn to the next Fund, which is the Special Reserve Fund. Now, what is this Special Reserve Fund? Whenever the Bank of Mauritius has assets in foreign currency - Let us say it holds bonds in US dollar. Let us suppose that, at the beginning of the year, the US dollar is worth Rs34 to one dollar. Let us say the rupee depreciates at the end of the year, the dollar is now worth Rs35 for one dollar. So, there has been an appreciation again in the instrument held by the Bank of Mauritius. So, that gain is transferred to a special account, which is called a Special Reserve Fund account, and in that Special Reserve Fund account, the Government cannot touch that. Section 47(5) of the Bank of Mauritius provides that you can use this Fund in only two circumstances –

- (a) for the purpose of increasing the capital, issue more shares to the Government, or
- (b) by the bank, in exceptional circumstances, and with the approval of the Board for monetary policy purposes - only for monetary purposes.

So, you cannot, as the law stands today, Madam Speaker, transfer funds from that Special Reserve Fund to repay the debt of the Government. You cannot transfer funds from that Special Reserve Fund account to the Consolidated Fund. This is the law as it is now, and I must say it is rightly so. Why? Because there is a reason why we have these Funds. These Funds are used by the Central Bank to intervene in the money market to mop up excess liquidity, to stabilise the rupee. If the rupee is going up or is going down, they use this Fund to stabilise the rupee.

Therefore, it is quite shocking, Madam Speaker, when I came across the communiqué issued by the Bank of Mauritius on 12 June 2019. This is what it read –

“Following media reports on the use of the reserve of the Bank of Mauritius in the context of the Budget Speech 2019/2020, the Bank of Mauritius wishes to inform members of the public that it is an acceptable international practice by Central Banks to hold official foreign exchange reserve in support of the wide range of objectives, including, *inter alia*, to assist Government in meeting their external debt obligation.”

I say it is shocking, Madam Speaker, because when you read this communiqué, you would think that the Bank of Mauritius has the ability, it is an acceptable international practice to assist governments in meeting their external debt obligation. But it is not the case in Mauritius! The Bank of Mauritius is governed by the Bank of Mauritius Act. So, this communiqué is not only misleading, but it is totally illegal because, as of today, the law has not been changed. So, as of today, the Bank of Mauritius cannot say that it is going to use special reserve to bail out this Government. They can't do it, and this is contempt of Parliament. Even before an Act of Parliament, a Bill has been presented to this House and debated; the Bank of Mauritius already tells you “We can do it”. And it is shocking because, Madam Speaker, under section 3(3) of the Bank of Mauritius Act, this is what the law says -

“Subject to this act, the bank shall, in the pursuit of its objects, perform its function independently.”

It is a statutory requirement; the Central Bank must perform its functions independently. You may have political nominees at the helm of the Bank of Mauritius. It has always been the

case. We have always had Governors appointed by the Government of the day, but they acted independently as required by law. If they are unable to act independently, if they act as rubber stamp for the masters of the day, they are acting illegally, they should resign. So, that is what happens when you have the kitchen Cabinet controlling institutions as important and guaranteed by law...

*(Interruptions)*

And then, you are surprised that there is an uproar, both by economists and the public in general.

Madam Speaker, I am not saying that Central Banks in other countries cannot advance money to help the Government, but they can do it only if the law allows them to do so. And I will give you three examples of incidents that happened this year. The first one is in India. In India, the former Minister, Mr Piyush Goyal said, and I quote –

“The Government is of the view that the capital reserves held by the Reserve Bank of India are among the highest in the world and is not being put in good use.”

And, therefore, he wanted the Reserve Bank of India to transfer the excess reserve to meet the expenses of the Central Government. And guess what happened. The Reserve Bank of India has up to now resisted the pressure because they need adequate reserve for monetary policy operation to meet currency fluctuation, sterilisation cost related to open market operation, credit risk and other risks from unexpected increase in the expenditure. This is how an independent bank should respond to pressure from Central Government. Go and take lessons from India. Not rubber stamp whatever the Minister of the day tells you, just because you want to get a ticket for the next election.

In Turkey, again, the Government tried to put pressure on the Central Bank. The Government needed to transfer 40 billion liras from the Central Bank legal reserve, and again the Central Bank of Turkey put up a resistance and the Government of Turkey, last month, had to abandon its plan to tap in the Central Bank’s reserve.

In Sri Lanka, the situation was different. The economy was in a dire state and the Central Bank had to assist the Government with its financial needs, and I quote –

“Due to the delay in receiving expected foreign currency financial arrangements in January.”

So, because the Government was not able to secure foreign money to repay its debt, the Central Bank had to intervene. But even then, in a communiqué issued on January 16, 2019, this is what the Central Bank of Sri Lanka said –

“The monetary board has acceded to the Treasury’s request in the national interest and under exceptional circumstances.”

And when they did that, they were criticised by the International Monetary Fund, which refused to disburse money, and the IMF made it clear, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka needed to make a concerted effort to repair its low reserve buffers before IMF will disburse funds.

So, Madam Speaker, even in countries where domestic law allows the Central Bank to transfer funds to Central Government, they would only do so in exceptional circumstances. I need to point out, Madam Speaker, because listening to some Members on the other side, I think there is a confusion. We are not talking here about a situation where the Government asks the Bank of Mauritius to provide lending facilities, advances to another bank or another entity. The bank has the power to do that, and recently it did it to finance the Super Cash Back Gold and Bramer Asset Management. This is done. The law also permits the Minister of Finance to ask the Bank of Mauritius to invest in specific projects for economic development. This is in section 6(1)(y) of the Act. The Bank of Mauritius, with the approval of the Minister of Finance, may subscribe for shares in any company set up for the purpose of facilitating economic development. So, the hon. Prime Minister, as Minister of Finance, could have asked the Bank of Mauritius to, for example, acquire shares in Metro Express or Safe City or another company. The Bank will then have to decide. The Board will decide independently whether it is in its interest to do so or not, but the power was there. Nowhere, Madam Speaker, does the Bank of Mauritius Act allow the Bank of Mauritius to use its special reserve to repay public debt.

Now, when I look at the Estimates, the hon. Prime Minister is budgeting Rs18 billion to be paid by the Bank of Mauritius to repay the Government debt. However, Madam Speaker, when we look at the current accounts of the Central Bank, that is, last year’s account, we will see that the balance on the General Fund is Rs2.68 billion, balance under Special Reserve Fund, Rs13.4 billion, which make a total of Rs16 Billion. Now, as I mentioned, you cannot use Rs2 billion out of it. So, essentially, under the General Reserve Fund, you have only Rs600 m. So, where does the bulk of the money come from? From the

Special Reserve. Now, how would the Special Reserve make a profit? There is only one way. It will depreciate the rupee. It will depreciate the rupee so that it can make a realised gain and show that it has a lot of money in its Special Reserve Fund. So, this is depreciation. We are back to the 80s; we are back to devaluation. This is what this Government is telling us. It is telling the Bank of Mauritius to depreciate the rupee so that you can make a realised gain in foreign currency, and use these Rs16 billion, Rs18 billion and pay me so that I can pay my debt. And they are applauding this measure!

Madam Speaker, each intervener on the other side made reference to the employment rate. They all congratulated themselves because of the decrease in the unemployment rate. I think I should set the record straight. According to official figures published by Statistics Mauritius, - I am not going to use my own figures - in 2017, the number of persons in employment was 545,100. In 2018, one year later, the number of persons in employment was 543,700. The hon. Rutnah can help me here, but what it essentially says is that there are 1,400 less in employment. 1,400 less! So, you are not creating jobs...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Uteem:** No, you are not creating Rome! This is what Statistics Mauritius says: In 2017, people in employment were 545,100. In 2018, people in employment were 543,700. So, there are 1,400 less people in employment. The reason why your rate of employment is going down is not because you are creating jobs, it is because there are more people retiring every year, that there are young people joining the workforce. This is how you calculate...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Uteem:** This is how you calculate....

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order! Order! Don't crosstalk!

**Mr Uteem:** This is how you calculate employment rate. You are not creating jobs. I can understand that you don't understand this, but it is the truth...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Uteem:** ...there are 1,400 people who lost their jobs last year. It is not me saying this; this is what Statistics Mauritius says. Now, we are very, very far from the 100,000 jobs that you promised in 2015. But more alarming, Madam Speaker, is the youth unemployment rate. Again, I will use the official statistics. Youth unemployment rate in 2018, 25.1%. I am not talking about 6.9%. 25.1% unemployment rate among people who are less than 25 years old. One young out of four is jobless in this country. One young person less of 25 years old is jobless. One out of four! And you are congratulating yourself! No wonder the youths want to migrate. No wonder those who study abroad don't want to come back. Madam Speaker, idleness is mother of all evils, and we should not be surprised if, in desperation, our youths are turning to drugs and other delinquencies, because this Government has lamentably failed in its duty to create employment for the youths of this country. We have a 25.1% rate of unemployment among the youths, and you are rejoicing at an unemployment rate of 6.9%! Very soon, there would be the election. Very soon, you are going to have to face parents who toil hard to get their children an education, who went through much sacrifice,...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please!

**Mr Uteem:** ... who took loans to have their children get an education so that their children may have a better future than them. What will you tell them?

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please!

**Mr Uteem:** Rejoice! Rejoice, our unemployment rate is 6.9%! Yes, your kids must be sitting at home without a job. But who cares? We have reduced unemployment rate to 6.9%, even if it is 25% in your house.

Madam Speaker, again, in his interview to *Business Magazine*, this is what the hon. Prime Minister said –

« *Le taux de chômage est à son plus bas depuis une décennie(...)* »

« *Je peux comprendre qu'on fasse de la politique, mais pas de la désinformation.* »

So, Statistics Mauritius, today, is doing ‘*de la désinformation*’. Because this is what Statistics Mauritius says in its report of May 2019, at page 12 –

“Trend in youth unemployment, 2008 to 2018(...)”

We are talking about the *décennie*. The hon. Prime Minister said it is at the lowest since one *décennie*. This is what Statistics Mauritius says –

“From a rate of around 19.3% in 2008, youth unemployment rate followed an increasing trend to peak at 26.3% in 2015 (under this Government). It declined to 23.9% in 2016, after which it increased gradually to 25.1% in 2018.”

It is on its increasing trend; it is not lowest. It was lowest in 2008 when it was 19.3%. It peaked at 26.3% in 2015, and now it is 25%. This is not *désinformation*. This is reality; you have not been able to create jobs for people who are less than 25 years old. This is the reality; you have increased unemployment among people who are aged less than 25 years old.

Madam Speaker, the other hon. Members on the other side of the House also bragged about reducing the price of petroleum products. *Désinformation*? Let me remind the House of what happened with petroleum products. When the Government took office, the last published price structure of petroleum products in December 2014, contribution to Build Mauritius Fund was Rs1 per litre; Excise duty was Rs10.80 for Mogas, and Rs3.30 for Gasoil. January 2015, days after coming to power, what did this Government do? They increased the contribution to Build Mauritius Fund from Re1 to Rs4. The additional Rs3 were supposed to be used for investment to upgrade and modernise water supply and distribution. Rs4, taxpayers’ money! And then, in Budget 2017-2018, the Build Mauritius Fund was wound up and these Rs4 were passed onto excise duty so that excise duty was no longer Rs10.80, it became Rs14.80 for Mogas and Rs7.30 for Gasoil. So, for five years, they have been taking money out of customers of petroleum products. For five years, they have been accumulating money. For five years, we, on this side of the House, we have been telling them, “Please, reduce tax”. And today, when they decide to reduce it, everybody is clapping their hands. And they are not even reducing it by Rs3; they are reducing it by only Rs2.60. Even then, they can’t, they have to keep hold of these 40 cents. You increased the tax, you increased the price, now you reduce it, and you want us to congratulate you. *Zotte mem mette tax, zotte mem tir tax*. And everybody is clapping: yes, yes, we have reduced the price of petroleum products.

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, please!

**Mr Uteem:** And what about the LPG cooking gas? Everybody also on the other side is bragging about: ‘We have reduced LPG cooking gas’. Let me remind the House again.

When they came to power in December 2014, the contribution to subsidies on LPG, flour and rice, there was Rs1.50 on each litre of mogas and gas oil. What did this Government do? They increased that tax, that levy from Rs1.50 to Rs2.70 on each litre. They increased the levy by 80%. They taxed consumers 80% and at the same time as they were taxing consumers, the price of LPG on the world market was crashing, but they did not reduce the price of cooking gas. Instead, what happened? The State Trading Corporation made a windfall gain and transferred billions of rupees to the Government coffers.

Last year, in a PNQ, the hon. Leader of the Opposition dealt extensively on this and in my speech on the Budget last year, I also dealt with it. But the bottom line, Madam Speaker, is, today, when they are telling you that they are reducing the price of cooking gas, they are not doing us a favour. Because we have already been paying taxes for that. There are already taxes for 2.70 on each litre to reduce cooking gas, which they haven't done, and in any event, they are not reducing the price of cooking gas because they are developing, growth, they have money. No! Because the price of LPG today on the world market is half the price it was when they took office in 2014.

Madam Speaker, with your permission, I would like now to make some comments on some of the interventions which we had to listen, unfortunately, yesterday, from Members on the other side. Whether you like it or not, *les élections sont derrière la porte*, and it is with a sense of pride that I can say that it is thanks to us, the MMM, that we have election every five years, because when the MMM/PSM won the election in 1982, we...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Uteem:** When the MMM/PSM won in 1982, we amended the Constitution ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please!

**Mr Uteem:** We amended the Constitution to make sure that General Elections cannot be postponed. Section 57 subsection (2) of the Constitution provides that –

“Parliament unless sooner dissolved shall continue for 5 years from the date of the first sitting of the Assembly (...)"

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Can we have some order, please? I won't allow anybody to ask questions.

**Mr Uteem:**

"Parliament unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for 5 years from the date of the first sitting of the Assembly after any general election and shall then stand dissolved."

The first sitting was Monday 22 December 2014. So, Parliament will stand dissolved 22 December 2019, whether you like it or not. The election will be coming, whether you like it or not, and you will not be able to postpone the General Elections like you did last year when you postponed the village elections. You will not be able to postpone. And this Government knows how unpopular they are. Ministers and MPs from the other side know how unpopular they are. They know...

(*Interruptions*)

They know how many of them ...

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Uteem:** ...will not get tickets in the next election.

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Uteem:** So, the boot licking operation has begun. Now, they are competing with each other as to who will be praising the hon. Prime Minister most. Only superlatives! Some will go as far as saying that he has divine protection, he is the chosen one, the Messiah, which reminds me what someone used to call our former Prime Minister, *ene tipe pli tipti ki bondie*. Mais sachez, Madame la présidente, que tout flatteur vit aux dépens de celui qui l'écoute et la population regarde ces flatteurs de bas étage avec dédain, *with contempt*.

Madam Speaker, yesterday, hon. Sawmynaden referred to Betamax, to MedPoint, to CT Power. I can understand that he feels very vulnerable. Reading the newspaper today, I hear that you are being replaced by kitchen cabinet.

(*Interruptions*)

I hope not!

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Uteem:** I could not understand why you would refer to MedPoint! Because let us say it loud and clear.

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Uteem:** MedPoint was, MedPoint is, MedPoint remains *le scandale du siècle*. The Government bought a derelict old building...

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please! Order!

(*Interruptions*)

If order is not restored, I will have to suspend.

(*Interruptions*)

Can we have some order, please?

(*Interruptions*)

Order! Order!

(*Interruptions*)

Please proceed!

**Mr Uteem:** I would not have said it! The hon. Minister raised it! So, I have to reply. He raised it. So, the population must be reminded what was the MedPoint deal. The Government bought an old building with its obsolete equipment for Rs144.7 m...

(*Interruptions*)

...when it was initially valued at Rs75 m.

(*Interruptions*)

The hon. Prime Minister was a shareholder of MedPoint. Your sister was a shareholder of MedPoint. Your brother-in-law was a shareholder of MedPoint.

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** I will have to suspend. I will suspend the sitting if you continue.

(*Interruptions*)

The hon. Member who has the floor should have a fair hearing. Please proceed!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Uteem:** Yes, you were a shareholder and there was a rush to complete the sale before the end of the financial year to avoid sellers paying capital gains tax. And today, what has become of MedPoint Clinic?

*(Interruptions)*

What happened to the Geriatric Hospital which was supposed to be built there? The building is in such a bad condition that it cannot even be used for the cancer hospital. You are having to build a new building for the cancer hospital.

*(Interruptions)*

Yes, hon. Prime Minister!

*(Interruptions)*

Yes, you were not trying to be a...

*(Interruptions)*

Good for you! I am happy for you!

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please! Sit down! I think that any Member who has the floor is entitled to have a fair hearing. However, you should respect the fact that if there has been a decision from the Privy Council, I think everybody has ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Uteem:** Madam Speaker, we are respecting the judgment of the Privy Council. I have just said that I am happy for the hon. Prime Minister that he has been cleared of the criminal guilt. I am happy for him. I am very happy for you hon. Prime Minister, but the facts remain that your sister, your brother-in-law have benefitted by selling a building which was worth Rs75 m. for Rs144 m., and this money came out of our pocket. This is what we are saying. Jackpot! *Zot meme aster, zotte mem vander.*

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please! Order! I suspend the sitting then. Hon. Bhagwan, please!

(*Interruptions*)

No, are you threatening me?

(*Interruptions*)

No, you can't threaten me.

(*Interruptions*)

If you threaten me, I will have to suspend. I will not allow anybody to threaten me.

**Mr Bhagwan:** I am not threatening you. I am asking you to look over there also.

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. If you are saying that you are not threatening me, I accept. But, please, I will not allow anybody, be it on this side or on this side, to threaten me.

**Mr Uteem:** So, okay, point made. So, let...

**Mr Hurreeram:** Madam Speaker, I have a point of order. From a sitting position, I have heard hon. Bérenger saying '*volère*' to the Prime Minister. May he withdraw?

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Bérenger, did you say that?

**Mr Bérenger:** I did not pinpoint anybody when I said that. It is general.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. I will have to check and then I will come back. Let's proceed with the debates. Later, I will come back.

**Mr Uteem:** Because it hurts. Let us move to Betamax raised by hon. Sawmynaden. How indecent! Should I remind the House how the MSM defended *bechs et ongles* the Betamax contract? What did hon. Soodhun, then Minister of Commerce & Industry, state to this House in answer to a PQ of 10 August 2010? I quote: 'the contract was awarded after STC was exempted from the Public Procurement Act and, I think, as a lawyer - he is giving lessons - the hon. Member should know.' The Minister defended the contract. He listed the advantages of such a contract, the saving that we will be making, the tax that we will be collecting, the job that we will be creating. What did the same hon. Soodhun state to this House in answer to the PQ I asked on 24 May 2011?

"The advice of the SLO was that the agreement is legally in order."

They, themselves, were with the Labour Party. MedPoint had just been concluded. So, you know, everything is fine. So, there is no issue with Betamax contract. And again, Madam

Speaker, I am very proud that MMM is the only major political party which raised concern about this when that happened. We did that not because...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please!

**Mr Uteem:** We did that not because of who owned Betamax. We did that not because of whether the owners had any proximity to any political parties. No. That was not the reason we raised the concern. We raised the concern because of lack of transparency. We were being told to sign a contract which would bind us for 15 years, and we wanted to make sure that all procedures had been followed before the contract was awarded. I wonder how many lawyers on the other side have read the judgment of the Supreme Court in the Betamax case. It is a very interesting judgment, which will go on appeal. This is what the learned Judge said at page 39 of the judgment –

“In short, the PPA reflects the public policy of Mauritius in prescribing and ensuring high standards of integrity, free and open competition, and protection from fraudulent and corrupt practices in the award of major public contracts with a view to securing the efficient use of the public funds of Mauritius.”

This is a slap in the face of this Government. The Supreme Court reminding everyone that the Public Procurement Act is there to ensure high standards of integrity, free and open competition, which is always what we, on this side of the House, stand for. What has this Government been doing since they took office? Exactly the opposite! They have amended the Public Procurement Act in 2015, in 2016, in 2017, in 2018, just to exclude contracts from the purview of Public Procurement Act, just to exclude a series of corporations from the purview of the Public Procurement Act. Did the Government go through the Public Procurement Act to award the Safe City project worth billions of rupees? No! Did the Government go through the Public Procurement Act to award the Metro Express contract worth billions of rupees? No! What about Heritage City? No! For the underwater cable? No! And whenever it wants to bypass the Act and the challenges, it reverts to emergency procurement.

Madam Speaker, elections are coming. Elections are coming and we, the MMM, today, take a solemn pledge to the nation that, tomorrow, in Government, we will do a thorough examination of all those contracts awarded by this Government that has bypassed the Public Procurement Act, and we will be merciless against those who have unduly enriched themselves at the expense of good governance.

Lastly, CT Power. Again, from day one, only the MMM objected to this project. Again, not because of the perceived proximity which the promoters had with political parties. No. Because it was an unsolicited bid, and the *bailleur de fonds* had made it clear that they would not be funding a project which was the result of an unsolicited bid. But, at that time, who were those who defended the project the most? Other than the Labour Party and the PMSD, who were in Government then? Who were those who defended the CT project most? Mr Koomaren Chetty, Mr Menon Murday, both candidates of the MSM at the 2014 elections. And the third one was Mr Dulthumun who was campaigning for them at this election. So, please, don't try to win political point with CT Power because the MMM is the only one who stood against it.

Madam Speaker, the other Minister who was so eager to impress his leader – he is not here today – was Mr Sinatambou, who will for ever be remembered for *biscuits Marie*. The whole population was outraged at how low a Minister of this Government can stoop, trying desperately to score political points. Everybody knows, Madam Speaker, that it is us, the MMM, who, as far back as 1976, rose the issue of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, and ever since that date, we have relentlessly fought to claim back our sovereignty, not only over Chagos Archipelago but also over Tromelin, which, for five years, they have not done anything about; our sovereignty over Tromelin, be it in national forums, be it in international forums. The MMM has always stood by the side of Chagossians. Our Deputy Leader, Madam Speaker, Mrs Arianne Navarre-Marie, former Minister, former Junior Minister, several times elected Member of Parliament is a daughter of a Chagossian. So, how can we not be by the side of Chagossians? We need to applaud today all those people who, in and out of Mauritius, have campaigned long and hard for us to get back our sovereignty over the Chagos, starting with the Chagossians themselves and their groups such as *Comité Social des Chagossiens et Groupe Réfugiés Chagos* – Mrs Nadège Velours, Mr Olivier Bancoult, but also Mr Fernand Mandarin and Ms Lisette Talate and other numerous Chagossians who are no longer with us today. We also thank, Madam Speaker, all those anonymous people who have been financing the Chagossians in their struggle – the lawyers, the lobbyists, the social workers, the journalists, the religious people. They all deserve to be applauded. Madam Speaker, the struggle to get back our Chagos Archipelago certainly did not start with the decision of this Government to refer the matter to the International Court of Justice. Unfortunately, it is far from being over despite the historical vote secured at the United Nations General Assembly. It is a matter of regret, Madam Speaker, that the Government has chosen not to call the Inter-

party Parliamentary Committee, which was set up a few years ago, to discuss strategy over Chagos. More than ever, we need a united front - sovereignty issues cut across political divide. Yet, Minister Sinatambou would like us to believe that only this Government has at heart the Chagossians and our sovereignty over Chagos Archipelago. How intellectually dishonest?

Let me refer him to the MBC – the propaganda machine of this Government – February 27, 2019. This is what we said: *un jugement formidable*.

*« C'est ainsi que Paul Bérenger qualifie le ruling de la Cour de la Haye. Le Leader des Mauves qui s'est exprimé, lors d'une conférence de presse ce matin, 27 février 2019, a appelé la Grande Bretagne d'entamer des discussions avec Maurice pour compléter le processus de décolonisation. Paul Bérenger a aussi salué Sir Anerood Jugnauth et les Chagossiens pour leur contribution dans cette affaire. »*

How intellectually dishonest, trying to say that we did not applaud, we are not happy of what this Government has done. That was when the decision of the International Court of Justice was out. We congratulated Sir Anerood Jugnauth, but we also congratulated all the other Chagossians who were omitted from the Budget Speech of the hon. Prime Minister. Yes, we need to congratulate what hon. Sir Anerood Jugnauth did, but we should also not forget what all the other people in Mauritius and outside of Mauritius did for us to get our sovereignty back. That was when the judgment came out.

When the vote of the United Nations Assembly came out, again, we rejoiced this victory. This is what was reported in *Le Mauricien* of 23 May 2019 –

*« Paul Bérenger : « Se enn vot formidab ». C'est un vote formidable malgré la campagne intense menée par les États-Unis et la Grande-Bretagne, malgré bann presion ki Angle ek Amerikin finn fer lor sa dosie-la. Pou lemomman, nou get li dan sa direksion-la. Me nou pou analiz bann rezulta-la, ek bann vote ki finn ena de bann pei ek nou fer plis komanter apre. »*

So, even after the vote, we reacted immediately and congratulated, and we were happy. Hon. Sinatambou would like the population to believe that we are not happy about what is happening for the Chagossians. Madam Speaker, the attitude of some Members on the other side reminds me of the saying: it is better to stay quiet and look stupid than open your mouth and confirm it.

Next is the visit of the Pope. Again, hon. Sinatambou did not stop. He then accused the Opposition of not being happy with the decision of the Government to decree the day the Pope will visit Mauritius a public holiday. Let me remind the House what hon. Bérenger stated in the MMM Press conference of Saturday 30 March 2019, on the very first public appearance he made after learning about the Pope's visit. The whole recording of the Press conference is on Facebook, the page of mmmtv and can be consulted. This is what he said, and I quote –

*« Nu saluer la visite du Pape à Maurice et aussi à Madagascar et au Mozambique, et nous joine nu a banne dimounes qui fine demander qui le 09 Septembre, le jour ki l'église catholique pu célébrer enn la messe à Marie Reine de la Paix, le 09 Septembre décréter enn jour de congé public. »*

This is what we said as far back as 30 March 2019. We joined, we did not take credit for it, we say we joined our voice to all the others who, before us, have requested that 09 September be made a public holiday. Now that you know the truth, would you apologise? Would hon. Sinatambou apologise for his unjustified comments, for the improper motive that he has put on us? Maybe, when he is apologising, he can also explain why we, in the Opposition, as far back as 30 March, we have requested that this be a public holiday. But the Government waited till Budget day to announce it. Why? Because they wanted to score political points? How cheap!

Madam Speaker, - I will end on this - at paragraph 273 of the Budget Speech, the hon. Prime Minister praised religious bodies for their priceless role that they play in shaping and preserving the social and moral fabric of society, and he is absolutely right. We pay tribute to all these social and religious organisations. But then, Madam Speaker, why is he silent about those who put national unity in jeopardy? Not a word about those arsonists who damaged places of worship, those who damaged temples, kovils, churches, tombs, mosques. The hon. Prime Minister has, on several occasions, made public statements, including in Vacoas, which was reported in the Press and on the radio, to the effect that he had information about those who are damaging places of worship. He has information. *Les fauteurs de trouble qui profanent les lieux de culte.* What has he done about it? Has those *fauteurs de trouble* been arrested? Why not? What is being done to protect those places of worship from vandalism? Will Government install cameras? In this Budget, we do not even have a tax rebate to allow administrators of places of worship to buy close circuit cameras to be installed in public

places. Should we be surprised, Madam Speaker? Should we be surprised by the reaction of hon. Prime Minister when he has up to now failed to sanction hon. Gayan who said –

*« Dans la communauté musulmane ena honour killing. Quand enn tifi marier quelqu'un ki so famille pas accepter, la famille alle touye sa tifi la. »*

He accused members of a specific community to carry out *acte de barbarie*. Is not that insulting? Is not that abusive? Is not that steering contempt? Is not that only creating hatred against a section of the population, telling us that we are *barbares*? That if we don't like our daughters marrying someone, we go, and we kill our daughter and say that this is in one specific community?

*(Interruptions)*

It is not shame. It is a criminal offence. It is an offence under section 282 of the Criminal Code. An offence punishable by Rs25,000 fine and imprisonment of up to 10 years.

*(Interruptions)*

They have already made declaration. The Police had not even deemed it fit to take ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Gayan, any interruption from a sitting position is not in order.

Please!

**Mr Uteem:** Up to now, nothing from the Police! No interview, no arrest, no reaction from the hon. Prime Minister. He has received members of the community who feel aggrieved. Should we take it that he condoned what his Cabinet Minister has said? And then, if he condones, why did he treat the Vice-Prime Minister, hon. Soodhun differently? Why did he ask hon. Soodhun to step down after meeting Cardinal Piat? Why such a double standard?

*(Interruptions)*

Soon, you will have to go back to the electorate. Soon, you will have to explain, not in this House, but door to door, you will have to explain.

Madame la présidente, pour nous, ce budget est décevant. Le gouvernement n'a pas pu atteindre les objectifs qu'il s'était lui-même fixés. Ce n'est pas un budget de relance, ce n'est pas un budget qui va créer de l'emploi, ce n'est pas un budget qui va résoudre les problèmes sectoriels que font face les opérateurs économiques, que ce soit dans le secteur

manufacturier, dans l'industrie sucrière, dans le domaine touristique, dans la pêche ou même dans les secteurs financiers. Ce n'est pas un budget qui va résoudre notre problème démographique lié à notre population vieillissante. Pourtant, Madame la présidente, les attentes étaient grandes, mais aujourd'hui les retraités sont déçus, les fonctionnaires sont déçus, la population est déçue. Seul point positif, c'est le dernier budget de ce gouvernement. Vivement une autre équipe économique, vivement un autre gouvernement après les prochaines élections !

Merci.

(4.26 p.m.)

**The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr D. Sesungkur):**

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am flabbergasted after listening to the previous orator, to borrow the words of my friend, hon. Sinatambou. I am also surprised because the previous orator is not only a Member, but also a deputy Leader of a party which calls itself a national party.

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Sesungkur:** After hearing the arguments, the petty politics of this Member, I am even more ashamed because this Member has been here for so long, and today he must be desperate to make such kinds of arguments in a National Assembly which is a supreme place of democracy in this country. He must be ashamed because we have rules in this country. It is not for a Member to take the law in his hands. Whatever criticism we have against Mr Gayan or whoever, the authority is there to act, but I am going to tackle him one by one.

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Sesungkur:** Hon. Uteem made a number of criticisms about the economic miracle which he has not seen, so far. It is an argument which is being repeated *ad nauseam* by the Members of the Opposition, as if the previous miracle was made in two days or in two months. Sir Anerood Jugnauth has repeated it on several occasions that the economic miracle took place over a period of time when the population associated with the Government to make it happen. And I am convinced that the measures that have been taken, so far, we are in the right direction.

Hon. Uteem also criticised my friend, hon. Sinatambou, on the two announcements that were made in the Budget concerning the Chagos Archipelago and the arrival of the pope. He said that they were also in favour of those, and they were not against the announcements. But what we have been saying in this House, on this side of the House, that the Opposition remained cold and silent because they did not want to be patriotic, because these are issues above party politics, and when the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance announced that we were giving a holiday, *un jour férié*, for 09 September, they remained cold and silent. When we said that Mauritius had a great win on the Chagos Archipelago case, again, none of the Members of the Opposition reacted. This is called unpatriotic.

On the other hand, Mr Olivier Bancoult applauded on the several measures which the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance announced in the Budget, including the Rs50 m. for the resettlement of the Chagossians.

Hon. Uteem also spoke about the economic indicators, which, according to him, does not reflect the true economic situation. Should I remind hon. Uteem that the indicators that we have been using are indicators which have been used in the past years for economic analysis. They are not figures cooked by the Ministry of Finance, cooked by the Minister of Finance himself. They are independent figures which are worked out by Statistics Mauritius. We are happy with it, or we are not happy, we have to use those figures as a reference point.

We know that IMF also conducts regular reviews of the economic situation of Mauritius. These figures are also independent figures and cannot be challenged because these figures are worked out by professionals, and we have to respect the work.

Coming to the points made on the Budget, I was going through the last Budget Speech of hon. Uteem, which he made last year, on the various economic indicators, namely the budget deficit. I am going to quote a paragraph which he said last year where he was not agreeable with the Budget deficit of 3.2% which was in the Budget, and he said, I quote –

*« Autre mensonge, le déficit budgétaire. Il n'est pas à 3.2% comme annoncé par le Premier ministre, mais selon nos estimations, - cela veut dire his estimation - et là, je me fie aux experts en la matière, le déficit budgétaire a dépassé les 4% pour l'année en cours et dépassera certainement la barre des 5% pour l'année 2018-2019. »*

He has worked out the figures, he has come up with a figure of 5% budget deficit, whereas the IMF figures confirmed that the Budget deficit is approximately 3.2%. So, what a bluff! Last year, he also made a prediction. While he was finishing his statement today, he again

said that this was the last Budget and the election is nearing. We are all agreeable that the election is nearing, but what is surprising is that he said this last year, and I quote –

*« (...) c'est peut-être le dernier budget de ce gouvernement, le pays étant suspendu au procès en appel devant le Conseil privé de la Reine dans l'affaire MedPoint, qui décidera de l'avenir politique de notre Premier ministre. »*

Et notre Premier ministre est toujours là. And he finished his speech on a note –

*« (...) on essaye d'anesthésier le peuple. »*

Who is anesthetizing the *peuple*? It is for the people to decide.

Madam Speaker, hon. Uteem also raised a number of cases, a number of scandals, which we were all shocked. He mentioned the case of Betamax, CT Power, BAI, etc. But we all know that despite being a clean party, the MMM broke up the remake in 2014 to join force with the Labour Party, which was the very party which actually *a dévalisé la caisse de l'Etat, qui a dévalisé ce pays*. They find all sorts of pretext. There was a strong chemistry at that time, and then they were proud of their association at that time.

I will also remind hon. Uteem of the Rs10 m. cheques of the Rawat which was in the press, which everybody has seen.

*(Interruptions)*

Cleanest party! Cleanest party associating with ‘Mr Coffre-fort’.

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Sesungkur:** I will not go as far as reminding a part of history of the MMM, which reminds us of how the MMM was being financed at that time, and who were collecting the Libyan money? Who were going to look for these kinds of funding? So, I will better stop here because I am really shocked by the arguments made.

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

*(Interruptions)*

Order! Hon. Baloomoody!

**Mr Sesungkur:** Madam Speaker, when we listened to the previous orator, there was little about Budget, there were little proposals. Every year they come up with the same kind of argument. Last year, he spoke about how the Government was hiding the debt by using special purpose vehicle, and I will quote –

« (...) d'utiliser d'autres *Special Purpose Vehicles* pour que cela ne passe pas comme une dette (...) Madame la présidente, c'est honteux; honteux de manipuler ainsi les chiffres. »

Every year, it is the same story, the same song, repeated song without any proposal, and it's not a surprise, Madam Speaker, that these people have been in Opposition for so many years.

*And hon. Uteem, il est aigri, parce que son leader a dit qu'il va aller seul aux élections, et il est aigri jusqu'à en devenir mauve. Donc, pour moi, il n'y a pas eu une seule proposition dans son argument; seulement des démagogies et des propagandes. MMM plus faible que jamais.*

Now, I am going to refer to the real indicators of the IMF to rebuke what he has said and to confirm that despite all the free criticism that the Opposition has been making about the real situation of our economy, we should be proud, Madam Speaker, that we took a country in a really grave situation where many economic sectors, many economic pillars were facing difficulties, and I will mention a few. Tourism, for instance, has zero growth in 2012.

In 2014, construction had a negative growth of 8.5%. Today, construction is booming with a growth of 9.5%. This is the truth, Madam Speaker. Despite, what the opposition would say, GDP per capita was \$7,562 in 2010. Today, it is \$11,281, and it is forecasted to increase more in 2019. These are IMF figures, they are not hon. Uteem's figures.

Madam Speaker, the unemployment rate is at its lowest. Yes, we can interpret the figures in whatever way we want, but we need to have a benchmark to analyse figures. We need to have a reference point and that reference point for me is official figures from the Statistics Mauritius, official figures from the IMF. They say that our unemployment rate is falling. Yes, of course there are improvements, there are other avenues to explore, we don't deny that, but the truth is the unemployment rate is at its lowest.

We are having positive growth in all the sectors, be it in Tourism 3.8%; ICT: 4.8%; Financial Services: 5.2%, Construction: 8.6%; Textile and Manufacturing: 1.3%. These are IMF figures forecasted for 2019. So, we cannot say that our measures, our policies have not worked.

Now, coming to the issue of the public sector debt, I know that most of the criticisms of the Opposition have concentrated on the public sector debt. But anyone, who understands the risk associated with public sector debt, will know that we are not so much exposed because our public sector debt, our national debt is mostly constituted of national debt...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order please! Hon. Baloomoody!

**Mr Sesungkur:** I will not quote Eric Ng, who is a potential candidate of the *Parti travailliste*, who is here with Mr Navin Ramgoolam and hon. Shakeel Mohamed. I am going to quote *un économiste de renom*, Mr Pierre Dinan, and I quote: « *Concernant la dette publique, l'économiste trouve qu'en ce qui concerne Maurice, la situation n'est pas trop alarmante, car, dit-il, une grosse partie de la dette a été contractée localement.* »

So, we are not going to waste our time with political agents who claim to be independent professionals, who claim to be independent experts. In fact they are begging for a ticket for the next election, and they are there to praise their leader, to praise whoever so that they are in the good books.

Now, concerning the use of the natural reserves, there have been a number of explanations given yesterday by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, who is an Accountant, like me. Hon. Uteem and most of them do not seem to understand, because they have been talking about realised gain, unrealised gain, reserves, general reserves, special reverses. These are very simple things, Madam Speaker. If you are a shareholder in a company, whatever profit is made goes into the reserves and those reserves belong to the shareholder. You can distribute it according to your leisure, according to your needs, whenever you want.

But, we are not talking about distribution of reserves, and as rightly stated by hon. Uteem, the figures do not tally if we talk about distribution of reserves, but what we are talking about is on page 46 of the Appendix, the Minister of Finance made mentioned that the Bank of Mauritius Act will be amended. There have been provisions made in the budget for a transfer of a certain sum of money, it hasn't been transferred yet. It is a provision, which means that the law will have to be amended. And why are we amending the laws? It's precisely because, as mentioned in the Appendix, it says –

“(...) to provide greater clarity on the governance, process of reserve management, investment objectives and actual investment of the foreign exchange reserves; (...)”

This is the main point.

We have seen over the years, I will take two figures. In 2013, our reserve was around Rs100 billion. Last year, in 2018, it came to around Rs230 billion. There is a trend that the reserves will continue to grow, and those reserves are lying idle with very meagre interest rate, meagre return, whereas, on the other hand, we have been borrowing in the past in Forex for a much higher interest rate. So, this is precisely what we want to do, is manage the excess reserve. The main word is 'excess reserve'.

So, this is what we are trying to do. And I believe that it is sound management practice to manage your money, to manage your reserve in the best way. The objectives of the amendment goes on, and it reads as follows –

"provide for the BoM to determine the investment policy regarding the management of the official foreign exchange reserve of Mauritius".

So, the Bank of Mauritius will have to provide their plan, how they are going to manage those reserve, instead of leaving it idle, reaping very small return, how they intend to manage those reserves. So, it is not like yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition explained that those reserves belong to the creditors. Having looked at the balance sheet of the Bank of Mauritius, the only creditors which lie on the balance sheet are those liquidiser instruments which have been issued by the Central Bank. The bondholders, the treasury bills holders, those are the creditors. So, it is my understanding - it is yet to be confirmed - that the reserves, we are talking about the excess reserves which will have to be redeployed, which will have to be reinvested in the best way so that it meets the requirement, it meets the objectives of Government to maximise its return, to maximise its profit.

Madam Speaker, overall we have to be proud of the achievements made so far because, to my mind, we have made a long way since we took office in 2014 to address a number of issues, not only economic issues, but social, environmental, and it goes on as far as the deepening of the democracy. Madam Speaker, at this stage, it is opportune for me to congratulate the Minister of Finance for the excellent equilibrium in addressing economic, social issues and other environmental issues which are dear to the public, to the people. We have worked hard and there were daunting challenges which required tough and courageous choices. After four years of filling the tax and criticisms from various quarters, it is with much conviction and confidence that the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance delivered his speech. It is with renewed conviction that he delivered a far-reaching Budget

Speech, outlining his plans to continue building and consolidating the reform and modernisation process for an all-inclusive Mauritius. Here, I would like to add on this management of the excess reserve, this is yet another reform which this Government is bringing; a yet another innovation that we are proposing.

Madam Speaker, development is not about single events. It is a holistic process which entails successive implementation of good policies and programmes over the years. And this is what we are doing. It is from this position of strength that the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance delivered his address last Monday. He continued to chart the roadmap on a journey anchored on the cardinal principles of care, compassion and respect. His Budget demonstrates not a mere budgetary exercise, but a human one with careful, considered choices. Choices that carefully examine where we are and where we need to go, choices that prepare us for still arduous journey ahead. The Budget opens doors to a whole range of new opportunities aimed at a wide cross-section of the population, from planters, public servants, workers to pensioners, taxi drivers. All of them have been taken on board. Amidst a wide plethora of measures, no one has been left behind or forsaken. Madam Speaker, as I said, we have to be proud of our achievements.

Sur le plan politique, Madame la présidente, il y a actuellement un vent nouveau qui souffle, un vent annonciateur de bonnes nouvelles. Après l'issue positive dans le cas de MedPoint, où la justice a primé, où la vérité a repris ses droits, il y a eu le développement dans les cas de Betamax, de CT Power. Il y a eu aussi eu la récente réélection de Shri Narendra Modi en Inde, un pays ami qui nous a soutenus pendant ces quatre dernières années. Ce sont des signes qui, selon nous, il ne faudrait pas ignorer. Ce budget, Madame la présidente, est un gage, s'il en fallait, un des engagements de ce gouvernement de maintenir la confiance, la justice sociale et de protéger les groupes vulnérables.

Ce budget, Madame la présidente, au risque de me répéter, consolide les jalons jetés pour le progrès économique et social des Mauriciens. Il se positionne en faveur de la promotion de chaque citoyen mauricien, quel que soit son groupe d'âge ou son genre. Il propose aussi de nouvelles avenues de développement tout en mettant en chantier des projets réalistes et réalisables.

C'est un budget qui va certainement, comme l'a si bien souligné le Premier ministre et ministre des Finances et du développement économique dans son discours, aider à combler

le fossé entre les riches et les pauvres, qui va promouvoir davantage le progrès et l'automatisation de tous les citoyens.

Madame la présidente, ce budget est un budget visionnaire sur tous les plans. Un budget socialiste à tous les niveaux. Devrait-on encore s'étonner de la rhétorique *ad nauseam* par les membres de l'opposition parlementaire ? Je conçois que, de ce côté de la Chambre, nous comprenons tous que le travail de l'opposition est justement de critiquer, de s'opposer, de faire des critiques stériles, sans propositions concrètes. Mais quand il s'agit de l'intérêt supérieur du pays, d'une nation, il y a un niveau de bassesse qu'il ne faut pas dépasser. Tout cela pour vous dire, Madame la présidente, que l'opposition, dans sa majorité, s'adonne d'une manière quasi enfantine à un exercice de critiques généralisées de toutes les mesures préconisées, et souvent, c'est juste *for the sake of criticism*.

Aujourd'hui, en 2019, nous en sommes donc à notre quatrième budget et n'en déplaît aux honorables membres en face de nous, ce gouvernement qui est allé au-delà de ses engagements, promet encore d'autres budgets de ce genre qui va faire la part belle à la justice sociale en faveur des groupes vulnérables parce que nous croyons avoir la confiance du peuple, Madame la présidente. Et cette confiance se voit lorsque nous les rencontrons au jour le jour, lorsque nous sommes à leurs côtés pour des activités ou lorsqu'on est invité.

Madame la présidente, le gouvernement a mis en avant dix points stratégiques pour relancer et consolider l'économie du pays. Ces axes de stratégie économique sont –

- Consolider les piliers de l'économie - ce que nous sommes en train de faire ;
- Consolider les secteurs de l'économie ;
- Étendre l'espace économique ;
- Mettre en place les infrastructures qui cadrent avec la vision gouvernementale ;
- Approfondir les projets de réforme ;
- Améliorer la qualité de vie des citoyens ;
- Promouvoir un environnement local où il fait bon vivre et où il y a plus de sécurité ;
- faire face aux défis du changement climatique ;
- mettre en place des bases solides pour des projets d'infrastructures à Rodrigues, Agaléga et dans les îles éparses ;

- Soutenir la dette publique.

Madame la présidente, on s'accorde tous à reconnaître que loin d'être un simple exercice comptable, tout budget national reste avant tout un instrument de distribution de richesse. Et cette richesse, nous sommes en train de la créer. L'objectif étant de réussir cette distribution d'une manière aussi équitable que possible. Et c'est justement ce que le Premier ministre, qui est aussi le ministre des Finances, a réussi avec brio.

Madame la présidente, les promesses faites quatre ans et demi de cela sont aujourd'hui des réalités. Je vais vous mentionner quelques-unes. Pour ne citer que quelques-unes, la réforme électorale, qu'il y ait eu consensus ou pas, on ne peut oblitérer le fait que c'est ce gouvernement, le gouvernement de Pravind Jugnauth qui a eu le mérite d'être le premier à avoir présenté un projet de loi en ce sens à l'Assemblée nationale. Si plusieurs propositions du gouvernement ont fait l'objet de vives contestations, celles visant à assurer une meilleure représentativité féminine au Parlement ainsi que l'élimination de la déclaration de l'appartenance ethnique pour les candidats prenans part aux élections générales ont tout de même été bien accueillies. C'est dommage ici que l'opposition a préféré faire volte-face.

Madame la présidente, les débats parlementaires en direct, ceux qui sont en train de regarder en ce moment, encore une fois, après la libéralisation des radios privées, c'est également le travail du MSM, une réalité depuis 2017, une mesure que je considère être une révolution démocratique. Longtemps réclamée par l'opposition, c'est ce gouvernement qui a eu le courage de la réaliser, permettant à la population de se faire une meilleure idée de la qualité de leurs représentants au Parlement et nous savons tous, l'opposition qui fait des *walk-out* à tout instant, à chaque fois qu'ils ont la moindre occasion. On les appelle l'opposition *take-away*. Sans mentionner –

- le *declaration of assets*, qui vient d'être promulgué quelques semaines de cela ;
- le financement des partis politiques ; et
- d'autres projets prometteurs dont le Métro Express.

Madame la présidente, le pays est un chantier, de Port-Louis à Curepipe en passant par Rose-Hill, les chantiers ne passent pas inaperçus et je ne vais pas mentionner New York.

*(Interruptions)*

Électricité, comment, Madame la présidente, ne pas mentionner le combat inlassable, interminable et *ruthless* comme dirait l'anglais contre le fléau de la drogue, commission et

Task Force, saisies record, acquisitions et mesures audacieuses pour mieux combattre ce fléau.

Madame la présidente, je voudrais ici rendre hommage spécial à un homme d'exception, un patriote hors pair, un mauricien unique, le ministre Mentor, l'honorable Sir Anerood Jugnauth pour la volonté et la ténacité avec lesquelles il a défendu le dossier Chagos. Malgré son âge, il a réuni le courage, il a été infatigable, un infatigable guerrier dans cette grande lutte. Nous avons de la chance de l'avoir. Il nous a permis de vivre un grand moment de notre histoire. Grâce à lui, aujourd'hui, une page de l'histoire de Maurice, de la décolonisation de l'Afrique et du monde a été tournée.

Quand le Premier ministre a annoncé à cette Chambre cette bonne nouvelle, on a été surpris de constater le manque de réaction de la part des membres de l'opposition. On se demande pourquoi. Est-ce que c'était l'arrêt de mort de l'opposition ou est-ce que c'est pour des raisons obscures ? Parce qu'il y a certains qui n'hésitent pas même aujourd'hui à soutenir les étrangers qui nous ont arraché cette partie de notre territoire. Pourtant, l'île Maurice a été soutenue par pas moins de 116 pays, pour la plupart, certains ne connaissent même pas notre position géographique. Mais ici, en face de nous, les membres de l'opposition sont restés insensibles.

Madame la présidente, ce n'était pas une mince affaire. La cause n'était pas gagnée. On s'accorde tous à le dire. Sir Anerood Jugnauth a fait et accompli ce qu'aucun autre politicien n'a pu le faire. Il est le Messie du peuple des Chagos. Il a su rallier la majorité de la communauté internationale à cette noble cause. D'aucuns disaient que c'était perdu d'avance, que c'était la bataille de David contre Goliath, le pot de terre contre le pot de fer. Et pourtant, David a gagné. Le pot de terre a pris le dessus. Encore une mission accomplie avec brio. Nous n'avons pas de doute que l'actuel Premier ministre amènera la conclusion finale et attendue.

Madame la présidente, je vais passer maintenant à ces nombreuses réalisations dans le secteur des services financiers que j'ai moi-même accomplies pendant les deux dernières années. N'en déplaise à certains membres de l'opposition qui voient tout le temps des choses négatives, et en fait, ce sont ces membres de l'opposition qui contribuent largement à affaiblir notre centre financier.

Il est indéniable que l'élément confiance, Madame la présidente, est vital pour un centre financier. Depuis décembre 2014, le secteur des services financiers de Maurice s'est

embarqué dans un processus de réforme. Cette réforme vise à solidifier l'écosystème du secteur financier tout en consolidant la réputation de Maurice à l'international.

Le secteur des services financiers ne peut se contenter de la croissance enregistrée au fil des années. L'heure est venue de rechercher et créer de nouvelles opportunités dans ce domaine, tout en préservant la réputation de Maurice en tant que centre financier qui n'a rien à voir avec des paradis fiscaux, comme mentionné plusieurs fois par l'honorable Uteem dans ces déclarations de presse qui nous font beaucoup de tort.

Madame la présidente, le budget propose cinq pistes dont le secteur devrait exploiter le potentiel –

- mise en place d'un vaste programme pour faire connaître les produits spécifiques du secteur financier local partout dans le monde ;
- diversification de la base de produits que le centre financier a développée jusqu'ici ;
- installation d'un système de guichet unique à la *Financial Services Commission*, l'organisme régulateur, pour faciliter la gestion et la conduite des affaires en réceptionnant tous les documents et demandes des investisseurs du *global business* ;
- poursuite des initiatives pour faire de Maurice le centre régional de technologie financière ; et
- renforcement du cadre d'opération de l'organisme régulateur pour qu'il puisse combattre la fraude, la corruption et d'autres délits financiers.

Madame la présidente, il y a plusieurs mesures clés qui ont été annoncées par le ministre des Finances et je peux mentionner quelques-unes de ces mesures –

- La *Financial Services Commission* devra mettre en place des services de conseils en matière de robotique et de l'intelligence artificielle ;
- De nouveaux permis seront proposés aux fournisseurs des services de la FinTech. Le financement participatif sera soumis à la réglementation et la FinTech sera aussi introduite en tant que nouvelle activité ;
- L'introduction de l'*e-signature* sur une base pilote, sans oublier le *Crown Funding*.

- Ce sont là des mesures fortes qui ont été annoncées dans le budget. Les autres mesures, nouvelles lois et régime fiscal attractif pour promouvoir l'investissement dans le secteur immobilier sous le *Real Estate Investment Trusts*, plan pour encourager des activités de l'e-commerce, un cadre pour le développement de la *Green finance* en ligne avec le *Marrakech Pledge*, une nouvelle plate-forme de commerce à la bourse de Maurice pour permettre aux moyennes entreprises qui ne sont pas éligibles d'être cotées sur la bourse pour recueillir des capitaux, mise en place d'un *single-window system* que je viens de mentionner ; et bien sûr, l'accord avec le Gujarat International Financial Centre pour que les fonds enregistrés dans les *Gift City* soient reconnus à Maurice et vice-versa.
- Madame la présidente, il ne faut pas oublier aussi que récemment, nous avons passé une loi qui s'appelle le *National Regulatory Sandbox Licence* qui a comme objectif de promouvoir les activités de la FinTech, de la blockchain et également le *blueprint*, qui a préconisé un certain nombre de pistes pour que nous puissions remonter en gamme les services proposés par le centre financier de l'Île Maurice.
- Madame la présidente, lors de mon intervention sur les amendements qu'on avait proposés récemment au Parlement concernant le blanchiment d'argent et les financements du terrorisme, j'avais bien fait ressortir que la réputation d'un pays n'a pas de prix. Et quand il s'agit de l'image de la république, on ne peut, comme le font certains membres de l'opposition, agir d'une manière antipatriotique. Souvent les honorables membres de l'autre côté de cette Chambre ne réalisent pas le tort immense qu'ils font à l'image et à la réputation du pays en faisant des déclarations irréfléchies. Je laisse le soin à ceux qui s'amusent à tronquer l'histoire et à accuser ce gouvernement d'avoir mal géré le dossier de FATF et ESAAMLG d'aller réviser leurs notes sur ce dossier parce que le leader de l'opposition était président de ESAAMLG en 2012 et rien n'a été fait pendant toutes ces années, ce n'est que l'année dernière, j'ai pris le taureau par les cornes et on a mis de l'ordre dans ce dossier et nous avons fait honneur à notre pays en obtenant de nombreuses reclassifications par le FATF.
- Madame la présidente, ce gouvernement a un plan global très ambitieux pour le secteur financier. L'environnement global a changé drastiquement. Notre secteur financier s'est beaucoup développé grâce aux multiples accords qu'on avait avec plusieurs juridictions financières. Il est de notre devoir en tant que gouvernement responsable de protéger nos acquis et de porter plus de ce secteur. Il y a un processus

de réforme enclenchée dans le secteur. Celle-ci a été enclenchée depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir de ce gouvernement. Ces réformes visent à solidifier l'écosystème du secteur des services financiers tout en consolidant la réputation internationale.

- Madame la présidente, il faut bien comprendre que si les investisseurs internationaux se tournent vers nous, c'est parce qu'ils ont confiance dans le système et que nous leur inspirons une certaine garantie. En votant des lois, en installant des gardes fous, en nous exposant sur le plan local, régional et international, nous envoyons un signal très fort aux investisseurs. Ils savent que leur business ne peut se développer dans un environnement instable qui a été une caractéristique récurrente depuis 2010. C'est ce gouvernement qui a le courage de renégocier le *double taxation agreement* avec l'Inde et combien de prédictions de mauvais augure n'avaient pas été faites à l'époque comme quoi ce secteur allait mourir. Même, il y a quelques semaines de cela, l'honorable Uteem, avait dit : il faut attendre la fin d'avril, on va voir que ce secteur va mourir. D'après les informations que j'ai, Madame la présidente, les statistiques que j'ai, nous avons connu une croissance soutenue d'à peu près 19-20% en Afrique et les activités en Inde continuent d'accélérer et nous sommes confiants que dans les semaines à venir avec les décisions qu'on est en train de prendre avec le nouveau gouvernement en place, nous allons continuer notre négociation pour que nous ayons une place de choix en Inde.
- D'ailleurs, en termes de facilitation des affaires, Maurice se classe première en Afrique. Si la Banque mondiale nous donne un si bon classement, c'est parce que nous offrons une grande garantie aux investisseurs. N'oubliez pas non plus que le pays figure en première place du classement Mo Ibrahim sur la bonne gouvernance.
- Mais tous ces indicateurs, Madame la présidente, Mo Ibrahim, le *World Bank Ease of Doing Business*, Moody's, l'*IMF* qui sont venus il y a quelques mois de cela pour leur revue sous le *consultation IV*. Toutes ces grandes organisations sont en train de dire la même chose, que Maurice est dans la bonne direction, sauf que les membres de l'opposition qui ne trouvent pas que nous sommes en train de faire des progrès. Toutes ces institutions internationales, ces institutions où il y a de grands experts qui travaillent nuit et jour sur les projections économiques du monde, sur les projections économiques de chaque pays - ils sont en train de faire fausse route sauf les membres de l'opposition sauf le leader de l'opposition ; sauf l'honorable Uteem. Les autres, ce sont des idiots ; ils ne connaissent pas grand-chose.

- Donc, malheureusement, Madame la présidente, nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, nous ne sommes pas dupes, nous ne sommes pas disposés à gober ce genre d'argument et je suis sûr que le peuple va juger. Année après année, les membres de l'opposition tiennent les mêmes langages, agissent comme des prophètes de malheurs et ils sont en train d'attendre que ce gouvernement va faillir et c'est là où ils vont tirer des capitaux politiques. Ils sont désespérés, mais nous, nous sommes sincères. Nous sommes confiants. Avec la direction qu'a prise le Premier ministre et le ministre des Finances, nous sommes confiants que nous allons dans la bonne direction et certainement, nous accomplirons de très bonnes choses pour notre pays.

Madam Speaker, to conclude I now wish to end my address with these few words: where this well considered and product, yet strong Budget, the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance is allowing us to look more confidently ahead and set our course for where our country will go next. This Budget is for the people of Mauritius. The Mauritian population put their faith in this Government four years ago and today, we repay that trust with a Budget that guarantees a better future for the people of Mauritius and the future generation. It is the birth right of every Mauritian, Madam Speaker, to have a decent family life and hold some living. It is the birth right of every Mauritian, Madam Speaker, to have access to high quality and free education, to high standard medical care and access to decent jobs, livelihoods and square meals every day. *Chance égale pour tous* shall eminently prevail in all our endeavours. We seize the provision of good, free health care and quality education for the underprivileged, not as assistance but as an investment. True to his nature, the hon. Prime Minister has driven a budgetary process in a gentle and compassionate way, driven not by personal ambition but by vision.

Before this House, the hon. Prime Minister has tabled a fit for purpose Budget, a Budget close to the people, a Budget that talks to the people, a Budget that the people can trust and be hopeful, a Budget that will surely leave nobody behind, inclusive and fair in its approach, a Budget that will certainly leave a much better Mauritius than what we inherited in December 2014.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** I suspend the sitting for half an hour.

*At 5.18 p.m., the sitting was suspended.*

*On resuming at 5.55 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.*

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Dr. Boolell!

(5.55 p.m.)

**Dr. A. Boolell (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Though I did not listen to the full speech delivered by the hon. Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance, let me remind him and all our friends that the Opposition needs to have its say and Government, of course, will have its way. And it is not in the interest of neither the Opposition nor anyone, irrespective from which quarter he comes from, to harm our economic jurisdiction, but we have a responsibility to draw the attention of Government to shortcomings, to certain failures and what are the measures needed to be taken to redress a situation. The Financial Services Sector, Madam Speaker, is a sector where there has been democratisation of the economy, which recruits the best brain, and it is a joy to see the number of young people working in the sector. It is not in the interest of anyone to undermine this sector. And if you want to have a taste of what Mauritian culture is, it is a pleasure to interact and to interface with those young people working in the Financial Services. But let me remind our friends of what EU officially stated in a communiqué which was issued on 26 March 2019. The following jurisdictions are committed to amend or abolish harmful tax regime by end 2019: Antigua, Barbuda, Australia, Nicaragua, Mauritius, Morocco, etc., and Seychelles. Now, what is it that we want to do? We want to put our best endeavour to make sure that we are not on the EU Grey list of tax haven. So, we have to bring the necessary legislation, which we have done, make sure that the jurisdiction is neat and clean, that we know who we are inviting to come and invest in Mauritius. So, on this issue, I hope I have made our point clear, and I am sure my friend does realise that we all have the interest of our country at heart.

Madam Speaker, let me come to the fine prints of this Budget. Now, this is the last Budget before the fall of this Government, and I don't want to be nasty, but I am sure the fall of this Government will not be as eventful as the fall of the Berlin Wall. And this Budget, not only in my humble opinion, but in the opinion of shapers and movers of policies, is a non-event. *Un budget de sans vision et sans dimension*, according to a young promising political analyst whose views are much sought after.

*(Interruptions)*

No! I am sure you read the Readers' column of *Le Mauricien* - a young man by the name of Avinash Manohar. Now, what is it that we want to do? We don't want to make Mauritius

small; we want to make Mauritius great. This Budget is neither provocative nor challenging. If anything, it has created uncertainty. It is not because the regime has escaped the purview of the IMF this time that all is well, *Madame la marquise*. And tell us how we are going to ward off threats, grasp opportunities in a world where there is no free lunch.

None of us wants to be a citizen of a Republic which will be at the beck and call of any global power. Certainly, none of us wants our country ever to be a basket case. We all love our country, and we should not make our country the Oliver Twist of this world, asking for more and more grants and concessionary loans. The hon. Leader of the Opposition did not miss the opportunity to inform us that a loan can be a poisoned chalice.

Fundamentals, Madam Speaker, have to be addressed, and the Budget fails to do so. There is chaos in our Budget. Debt contracting is escaping the purview of Parliament, and this regime is bequeathing a legacy of debt to our kids. Interests on the total public debt represent Rs3 billion annually. I am sure we do realise the number of projects which could be implemented if we had saved on interests payment. And with the litany of projects, whose viabilities have not been tested and are off budget, there is no effective Consolidated Fund - as the tramway project or safe city project have not been under tight scrutiny of Parliament. Several questions have been put on this side of the House to obtain as much information as possible in the spirit of transparency and accountability. We are, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, in a fix and are receding as a middle-income country and, from the middle income trap, we will fall into the debt trap diplomacy. Sri Lanka and Kenya indeed have stories to tell.

Our economy is indeed in a state of emergency. I am not the one who is saying it. I am sure many of our friends read comments made by a young Director of Pricewaterhouse. What he stated is the obvious to the investors, and in our zeal to attract investment, much needs to be done to restore confidence. Confidence, Madam Speaker, is the very pinnacle, the backbone to attract investment. Should I remind what Mr Pierre Dinan said, that we need reserves to mop up liquidity. And these people, whether he is Mr Manohar, Mr Pierre Dinan or Mr Leung Shing, they are not members of the Labour Party. They have spoken their mind, and they are mainly like-minded economists and accountants, trade unionists, traders, entrepreneurs, members of the civil society who have expressed serious doubt over the debt issue and its impact upon the effective value of the rupee, that is, our purchasing power. Will our rupee depreciate vis-à-vis a basket of currencies? If so, by how much? It has become the subject of conversation throughout the country, and they are worried. People are worried over

the legacy that will be bequeathed to the next generation, and there are clouds looming over the sustainability of pension. Nothing is mentioned on aging workforce. We are talking of our way of life and the fear that lifetime savings will lose its value. It is the independence of an institution or quango which is at stake. The Minister of Finance calls his shot, monetary policy has surrendered to fiscal policy, and it goes against the best practice. And what are we told? Today, we read in the paper that Mr Padayachy is now the new guru and potential candidate in Constituency No. 8 ...

*(Interruptions)*

He is not worried about saving his deposit, because we are informed that he juggles billions in Forex and rupees. And he is under the spell of a master illusionist, my good friend, Dev Manraj. At a time when serious thought should be given to Fiscal Responsibility Act and Freedom of Information Act, the hon. Prime Minister has opted for *mainmise*.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon Member, I will ask you to refrain from mentioning people who are not in the Assembly and who cannot defend themselves. Please!

**Dr. Boolell:** I have simply quoted what the Press stated, although it is allowed to quote from...

*(Interruptions)*

Madam Speaker, I bow to your ruling, and I hope the murmur will stop.

The country is going downhill and our friends are toxic with praises. I seem to have the impression that many do not understand the gravity of the situation. And I am not surprised of the lavish praise being heaped upon the Prime Minister by Ministers and backbenchers. Even in the Democratic Republic of Korea, they are more moderate. By all means, let us all show some restraint. Perhaps the race to be fielded as candidate for election is on, so I can understand everyone vying to attract the good attention of the hon. Prime Minister. But in vying for tickets, some of them are elbowing out their friends and many of them are dagger drawn. The charade of unity which they display is grotesque.

Madam Speaker, on Monday, a writ will be issued for by-election in Constituency No. 7. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is feeling the pulse of the electorate and the consensus in the country at this very moment is dissolution of Parliament. I invite him to muster the courage and face the electorate. What is legal, Madam Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister knows is not legitimate. The legitimacy of the office and the power of Prime Minister is not

transferred, but gained through the ballot box. What the electorate gives, the electorate can take away. The electorate does not confer a permanent status upon anyone of us. I invite the hon. Prime Minister to bow to the wish of the electorate. This time, there is no running away. *L'Alliance Lepep* ran away from the election in Constituency No. 18. The Government chose to postpone the Local Government election by way of a controversial amendment to the Local Government Act. There is a political and economic urgency and, in the name of democracy, the hon. Prime Minister should go for dissolution. Enough is enough! Only a new Government can redress the economy. There is an urgency to think globally and act locally to consolidate existing sectors and to look at emerging sectors.

Madam Speaker, the proceeds from our export have been decreasing since the last four years and only petty cash in an ocean of debt has been left for distribution across the board. What is needed is a reversal of policy to come up with a new economic model. In many quarters, the Budget was greeted with derision and disbelief. The Budget, I am sorry to say, is divisive. I am sorry to say, it goes against nation building. More than 400,000 workers in the private sector have been left out. I am sure many of us have heard Jane Ragoo crying her heart out for the workers in the textile and garment factories. It was the Prime Minister, unfortunately, who, like fiddler on the roof year in, year out, raises expectations beyond wild streams. The people know that the Government is fake. Facts and figures of the Annual Report, for example, of MCB Focus, and findings of analysis of the Budget today are revealing. The writings are on the wall, and there is no need to look for devils in the details.

Economy, Madam Speaker, has been mismanaged and when there is no fiscal space due to massive public debt, there is no miracle solution, nor we need a dream team to honour debt obligation. Either one cuts down expenses, borrows excessively or like Oliver Twist asks for more grants and concessions. Of course, from whom, from global powers! When all the avenues have been exhausted, I, for one, did not expect any bank robbery. This Government will go down in history as the only Government that has decided to raid the vote of a bank because it is cash track, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, before I come to ground reality, let me make a brief comment on the ruling by the ICJ on Chagos and the massive support obtained on 25 May 2019 at the UN General Assembly. This is a non-partisan issue, and successive Governments deserve to be congratulated. Referring the case to the International Court of Justice was the inevitable outcome of the favourable ruling given by the international arbitration under United Nations

Convention on the Law of the sea. All Prime Ministers since independence deserve our congratulation.

I hope the Prime Minister reconvenes the Joint Opposition Government Committee. We are all in it together. I had a meeting with the shadow Foreign Secretary, Emily Thornberry in London at her office in March 2018. But let me tell you one thing. The agenda is not decided by the UK Ministers or Government of the day but by the Foreign Commonwealth Office, and I would say no more except to issue a note of caution over the divide and rule agenda. We have to keep our brothers and sisters of the Chagossian community close to us. We indeed are one. I must say the landscape has changed, and it is different, and the odds are very much against the British.

There is however an opportunity to grasp. It is precisely the reason I will make a proposal, and I hope it will be food for thought. As an ocean citizen, I ride with the tidal waves to impress upon the regime the potential of our ocean. The Prime Minister should not miss any opportunity before the representatives of the international community and the nation to make an announcement for the good of humanity. He should invite the international committee to join hands with the Ocean State of the Republic of Mauritius. The Republic of Mauritius should announce the setting up of the biggest marine protected area in the world, a potential world heritage like Aapravasi Ghat and Le Morne. It would be a game changer not only putting ecological values high on our economic agenda, but building more pressures for our UK friends to unconditionally withdraw - I quote - its 'colonial administration from the area' from our territory within the six months. If the decision is taken, there would be sustainable support from all citizens of the world. We can showcase the Republic of Mauritius as the ecological ocean. It would facilitate the resettlement of our Chagossian brothers and sisters of Mauritian origin.

The marine protected area would be a great carbon sink and revenue generated. We could learn from the experience of Seychelles, with whom we co-manage an extended continental shelf. This is visionary. We could make Mauritius the world meeting place for blue economy. Yes, we can make Mauritius great.

Let me now, Madam Speaker, come to ground realities which have been highlighted over and over again. But it is never enough to repeat and to reinforce what is relevant. All macroeconomic indicators, except for inflation, reflect the precariousness of our economy. Inflation is low because the price of oil has been stable at an average price of 60 dollars per

barrel since 2014. Yet, the Government, at its mandate, promised to cut the price of petroleum products by Rs10 a litre, but instead the contribution to the Build Mauritius Fund was raised from Re1 to more than Rs4 per litre for affordable potable water on a 24-hour basis. Water, water, but not many drops to clean and wash and drink, unless there is fury and fire from the people. All our friends from the Government bench, when the constituents wanted to put legitimate questions to them, I am sure no one was hiding in the water closet. In politics, we need to have rhino skin and face the music.

And I'll come back to the petroleum price, Madam Speaker, and the comments made by Professor Swaley Kasenally are very pertinent and striking. I quote –

*« Depuis 2015, le gouvernement a récolté des milliards sur le prix des carburants et ne retourne que quelques sous aujourd’hui. Je suis déçu. Même le prix du gaz connaît une baisse mondiale et cette mesure budgétaire n'a rien d'extraordinaire. »*

This is the naked truth, and the dream team promised sound fiscal and monetary policy and growth rate of 5.5% of GDP, creation of 20,000 jobs annually and massive investment from both public and private sectors, hardly any quality investment with gainful employment. Instead, the country was left with a total public debt of 70% of our GDP and the budget deficit is forecast to reach in the financial year 2019/2020 6.6% of our GDP.

Unemployment amongst our youth is 25.5%. Thanks, God, the regime didn't have to face the triple crisis which we did in 2007/2010, otherwise there would have been *pertes d'emploi à une vitesse vertigineuse*.

Madam Speaker, no one is going to be mistaken on what is obvious because Government has already opted to allow the rupee to depreciate in a staggered manner on a massive scale, and this is not the way to turbocharge the economy. It is the consequence of poor debt servicing capacity. When there is a basket of projects, Madam Speaker, there should be a balance in public expenditure and not narrow the fiscal space. We cannot swallow more than what we can chew. As PS, together with the Ministry of Economic Planning, I am sure you assess the varying economic viability of projects and their implementation was staggered to meet debt obligations. First, we have to do away with archaic, out-dated, line-by-line budget. An effective programme based budgeting has to be introduced. Everything has to be assessed, measured and tightly scrutinized. Thorough analysis with key performance indicators is mandatory.

Madam Speaker, it is not that I want to call the bluff of Prime Ministers, but many questions put in this very House have remained unanswered, and I want the Prime Minister to disclose the hidden cost in respect of the tramway project that has been conveniently parked in other budgetary and non-budgetary lines. People are thirsty for information. This is a country where, without any legislation, people want information because they need to be appropriately informed. They don't want hearsay, and we invited the Minister of Infrastructure, Land Transport to have an interface meeting with the residents of Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes. Promises were made, but promises are yet to be honoured, Madam Speaker. People want to have facts. People want to know whether the ultimate cost of a project would not have extensive costs overrun. But one thing is certain. What is financially feasible because of grants and concessionary loans will not always be economically viable.

The latest figure on public debt as at March 2019 is a staggering Rs318 billion and accounts for 65% of our GDP. This is unprecedented. The figure is frightening and despite adjustment items from non-financial public enterprises and the withdrawal of 1% of our GDP, the debt remains very high. When we talk of total public debt being as high as 70% there is concern and the concern is deep-seated, Madam Speaker. We know the reason as to why the debt is so huge and there is no fiscal space, Madam Speaker. I don't want to make any comparison, but one thing is certain - of all indicators with respect to financial management, the Labour Party Government did far better and outpaced this Government by miles, Madam Speaker.

*(Interruptions)*

If you want, I can quote too. You want me to highlight all the figures, I will spare you the pain of listening to what I have to say.

*(Interruptions)*

Madam Speaker, as of now, each citizen has a massive debt of Rs300,000 - a nation saddled with an increasing debt because an irresponsible Government has gone on a spending spree like there is no tomorrow.

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Please, please order!

**Dr. Boolell:** I know it hurts.

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order! No remark from a sitting position.

**Dr. Boolell:** I know it hurts, take it easy. Easy does it Minister Mentor. Do we have the capacity to repay the loan that has been extended to us? Who will pay for the dismantling of BAI, the unwarranted brokers fee, the loan extended to a company for investment in Kenya with an alleged guarantee from the Kenyan Government? Nobody cared to ask the President of Kenya on his State Visit if there was a fat chance of a single dime being refunded, Madam Speaker? The consequences are far-reaching, and there has been a flight of foreign direct investment from the State Bank of Mauritius. Many shareholders have sold their shares and the value has dropped by more than 50%. As far as MauBank is concerned, not even the smallest audit firm wants to assess the financial viability of MauBank. Please don't mention actuarial review. The bank is insolvent, simply hanging onto taxpayers' money for its day-to-day running. Impressing upon non-financial public sector entities like the National Pension Fund, CEB or financial public companies like SBM to invest in Government securities for consolidation of the Budget to narrow the Budget deficit is intellectually dishonest. But we cannot talk simply of assets. What about the liabilities of these companies? Postponing the day of reckoning, sweeping them under the carpet for the bookkeeping of Government does not help, Madam Speaker. The non-financial public sector enterprises preferred not to invest in Government security, despite pressure being borne upon them for good measure. Why should they tie their hands if they can obtain a better rate of interest elsewhere?

Madam Speaker, I know the Rs8 billion reserve of CEB. It is there for the day, and I hope it does not happen. I hope the staff association will be consulted. I hope all the relevant information will be disseminated. Please, by all means, don't have a dig at money which does not belong to you.

Madam Speaker, let me come to one issue where I want to make the comparison. With respect to investment in capital project – and if there is no investment in capital project and when the rate is not adequate, we know what happens. A responsible Government does not cut on capital spending, but strikes a right balance between social and capital expenditure, like we did when we introduced free transport for the elderly, free transport for the students; when we doubled old age pensions in our first mandate. We did it because revenue was increased. We created buoyancy in the economy. There were no sunset sectors, Madam Speaker. This regime will go down as a regime which has engineered an economic crisis. It has made history as the best Government that money can buy. Could they have faced a

financial, a food, a fuel crisis and brought structural reform of the engine of growth of our economy without loss of jobs? Under this regime, the aim of reaching a high-income status has receded. Ministers and cronies of this regime think they are the bastion of wisdom and can mismanage the economy, and without an effortless sense of superiority, issue a certificate of morality to the bosom pal, Mr Alvaro Sobrinho. Throughout its mandate, this Government has been confrontational on political and economic front, vendetta and mismanagement of the economy has become its hallmark. *L'Alliance Lepèp* is turning this country into a gambling den because of the debt it owes to whom. In its manifesto, it promised quality of life and an end to gambling, then suddenly gambling figures prominently in the agenda of this Government. Was there honesty of purpose or simply an arm twisting exercise, to swell their war chest? Compulsory gambling, Madam Speaker, is a one-way to poverty and misery. It turns good people into liabilities. This regime is a spinner of liabilities.

Madam Speaker, where will money come from - we have talked of liabilities - if there is no effective revenue, if revenue from export is not forthcoming? Our export of goods and services are stagnating at Rs200 billion, what is Government doing to increase receipt from export? What is the Government doing to reengineer sectors which are existing sectors, and what is being done to look at emerging sectors? Nothing, Madam Speaker! Figures show that net export of goods and services, that is, the balance between import and export of goods and services, which is a measure of the current account deficit, is increasing dramatically and is expected to reach Rs115 billion in 2019 compared to Rs69 billion in 2014. It represents 15% of GDP in 2019 compared to 11% in 2014. The deficit of 15% of goods and services is explained by a deficit of 23% on goods and services and a surplus of 8% of GDP on services from Tourism and factor service. There is a major crisis in exportation. The trend in our exportation of goods and services, as I said, is stagnating since the last three years, whereas under the Labour Government, it was on the increase.

In real terms, the effective rate has been negative over the last three years. Mauritius depends on exportation. We depend on investment that we need to attract. We depend on our services sector, and we have moved from an agrarian economy to a service-oriented economy. But where is our level of preparedness? What is done to see to it that we move from generic to field of specialization? What is being done to reboot the export sector?

Madam Speaker, if it were not for offshore sector, the deficit of Rs115 billion would have been reflected in the deficit in the balance of payment. However, Mauritius benefits from huge capital inflow which leads to a favourable balance of payment with the

intensification of international pressures which I highlighted earlier on our financial sector and the revision of the double taxation avoidance convention with India. There is a substantial risk that these capital inflows will decline in the future, and if it happens, we will have a major balance of payment deficit which will lead to a slide in the rupee and a financial crisis. Already there are signs of weakening capital inflow, Madam Speaker.

After several years, the balance of payment witnessed a deficit in both the third and the fourth quarter of 2018. These are dire warning signs. It is imperative that we reboot our export sectors so that we are no longer vulnerable to capital flows. Another way of reducing these risks of financial crisis is to boost saving rates in order to reduce deficits on goods and services. Our saving rates, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, are abysmally low. It has fallen to less than 10% of GDP. In 2018, it was a record low of 9%. As I have stated, the Prime Minister has given some micro goodies across the board, but has failed lamentably on macroeconomics and a financial crisis is looming.

Madam Speaker, on 08 January, I wrote an article which appeared in the readers' column of a Daily, and it was entitled "Don't touch our reserves". I was inspired to write the article following the resignation of the Governor of the Bank of India, Mr Raghuram Rajan. In India, following the resignation of the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Urjit Patel, the deputy, warned that Governments which make inroads into Central Banking apparatus and decision could incur the raft of the market.

Now, if somebody wants to tell me that the accounting system of the Central Bank is different from a Commercial Bank, please tell us so, but I don't think that the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India nor his deputy was wrong to talk of the raft of the market that could be incurred by undermining the independence of institutions. Mr Raghuram Rajan, a top brass economist, stated that the Reserve Bank of India's Governor's resignation should be seen as a note of protest. He made it clear that the extreme change through which the reserve bank of India board was given more operational authority, violates the principle of how the reserve bank of India used to operate and should operate. In other words, the Government should not interfere.

The Economic Intelligence Unit has forewarned us that we cannot forever live on borrowed time and borrowed money. And I put the question then as far back as January 2029, is the Prime Minister contemplating part of the Reserve Bank of Mauritius to rig the electoral process? Be it in India, Mauritius or New Zealand or any part of the world, very

few people give a damn, unfortunately, about technical issues of the Central Bank Reserves and capital adequacy ratio of Commercial Bank.

It is not because we live only once that we should leave it to the next generation to bail out this country. We are not India, which has a vast internal market. Even India cannot give up on global economic integration. India, on the threshold of a general election, can temporarily afford to give up on global economic integration, but for a small island developing State like Mauritius, only fools can ride the wave of populism politics at the expense of our credibility. The Governor of the Bank of Mauritius, unfortunately, bends to the whims of this Government, unlike the former Governor of India, Mr Raghuram Rajan.

Madam Speaker, the issue in India is about the level of capital and reserve of the Reserve Bank of India which is high around 20% of total asset. I don't have the information as to the percentage of assets of the Bank of Mauritius, but the provisions governing the Bank of Mauritius Act are clear. Under no circumstances should the special reserve fund of the Bank of Mauritius be used to finance a broad catching Scheme or debt incurred by the Government. Under section 47 of the Bank of Mauritius Act, there are provisions to use the special reserve fund for two purposes –

- (a) to recapitalise the Bank of Mauritius, and
- (b) for the conduct of monetary operation.

The proposed amendment in part (c) (1) is a retrograde step in Central Bank legislation. We had, over the years, the benefit of IMF expert to model our Central Banking legislation. Now, by the stroke of this retrograde amendment, the Minister of Finance can use the special reserve for fiscal purposes. What the Government is doing, it is laying its hands over a sum of nearly Rs14 billion to finance Government expenditure.

Madam Speaker, there is a vast difference between foreign exchange reserve and special reserve fund. To me and to the nation at large, what this Government is attempting to do is tantamount to broad light robbery by night raiders, Madam Speaker. This amendment is a licence to robbers to raid the Bank of Mauritius. It shows an utter failure of the regime to look for other sources of revenue, unfortunately, to please the political masters even if they have to bend backwards. There is a heavy price to pay when errand boys are appointed to head institutions which should be fiercely independent. The Bank of Mauritius cannot dance to the tune of any piper, however heavy-handed the latter is. Many economic policies have to be sound, and it is the responsibility of the Monetary Policy Committee to fulfil its mandate.

There is an absolute necessity for clarity and certainty on inflation, on interest rate and of the impact on GDP. These macroeconomic factors will be measured and quantified. The consumers, the buyers, the sellers, the investors or the tourists want predictability and reliability on exchange rate, parity on exchange rate and a targeted inflation.

Madam Speaker, the IMF is traditionally a strong proponent of independence of institutions, a strong proponent of a strongly independent Central Bank, and it would appear now that the IMF has doubts as regards the independence of the Bank of Mauritius and possibly the Financial Services Commission. I suspect the private sector or even the Governor or another Deputy Governor must have spoken in private to the IMF about the political role and closeness of people working at the Bank of Mauritius, closeness to the Government.

Madam Speaker, as I say, this Government is making history. No Minister of Finance since colonial days has used the Bank of Mauritius special reserves fund to meet debt obligations, and the amount targeted for Bank of Mauritius financing is Rs18.4 billion. I don't know what the outcome would be. Much has been written in the press. I know some people are saying that it's not an unknown habit, it's not something that it is not done. Australia has done it or India did it. But Madam Speaker, as I have said, we are a small island developing State. We cannot amend the legislation for fiscal policy to override monetary policy to enable the Government through the Ministry of Finance to have an upper hand and because the Government has failed utterly and abysmally to manage the financial sector and the economy of this country, it cannot certainly have its hands upon money that belongs to the nation, Madam Speaker. There should be no complicity either from the Governor and the Board.

Madam Speaker, the Bank of Mauritius, the Financial Services Commission, the non-financial assets enterprises are being assailed. Reserves are being depleted - and there is a reserve surplus from FSC, from the special funds which amounts to Rs2.7 billion over two years, the Special Reserve Fund. There is talk of sale of non-financial asset enterprise to raise 11 billion, which National Financial Asset?

Frantically, Madam Speaker, it reminds me of a gambler who has lost massively and is looking for money under the mattress, and he is even willing to break the safe box of his kids. What else remains for this Government to do, Madam Speaker? What else remains for the Government? They are selling the silverware of the nation. They have their hands in all

the pies where reserves are, and when they cannot settle debt incurred, what else remains for them to do, Madam Speaker? This is what I call ‘a jackass policy’.

This Government is game for a laugh, a comedy rooted in the tragic realities of its downfall. Their concern is not the country, but the swelling of the war chest. And when the country is in financial straits, what does the regime talk of? Concessions for implementation of projects, build-operate-transfer, public-private partnership. And I was shocked when I read that the regime is abandoning social housing projects to the private sector. This is the state of affairs largely due to mismanagement of our economy. This is where we are. Now, we have to talk of concessions, when we run out of cash, it is public-private partnership, BOT project.

As I stated earlier, from the middle income trap, we are falling into the debt trap diplomacy. And as a special consolation, what are we being told? 1,050 housing units will be constructed by the Saudi Fund. When? You can guess in 2021-2022. And I hope by the time the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman will authoritatively tell the world who was behind the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, Madam Speaker. As for the financing of 6,800 units by Exim Bank of China, it is a dream shattered, Madam Speaker. Let me quote an excerpt from an article written by Fine Economist: “Projects contracted loosely to public or private entities carry heavy risks of improper evaluation as for Heritage City, a multi-sport complex of Côte d’Or, Safe City, and they are associated with sizeable wastage and potential cost overrun and offer greater scope for corruption.”

Madam Speaker, much has been said about job creation, I will leave it to my good friends to take up this issue. But the fact remains that in year 2018, there were job loss of 1,004 and in 2016, hardly 300 jobs were created.

Madam Speaker, since time is running short, let me come to the sugar cane industry. Now, I know there has been much debate in the House over the reform and restructuration of the sugar industry. The Government has decided to disburse certain sums of money and come with a package of incentives. But, in my humble opinion, the Government has to spell out clearly whether it wants to have a sugar cane industry and if it wants to have a sugar cane industry, we have to put in all efforts to save the sector and to turn it into a viable sugar cane industry. Sugar cane is the best carbon dioxide. It has a multi-functional dimension, it makes our environment pristine. As I have said in the past, there is an organic link between millers, planters and the community at large. Small planters produce around 54,541 tonnes of sugar, that is, 17% of total production. But, the time has come to bring all the partners together.

What we need is dialogue, consultation, allow people to exchange information, to share views, but to reach ultimately a consensus. The whole nation wants this sector to stay, to be viable, and as Government, we have a responsibility. It is time to do away with the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act and come with a Sugar Cane Industry Efficiency Act. What we are saying, we are talking of equitable distribution, of proceeds obtained from the sale of sugar and its by-products.

And this sector has thrived, Madam Speaker, on a remunerative price and on market access. These days are gone. But, what beats me and what I can't understand, we have a remunerative market for the small planters in Mauritius. I see no reason why there should be dumping of raw sugar from the region. This commodity should be on the list of sensitive products, and the sugar price on the local market is as high as Rs36,000 per tonne.

Since the market is there for the take, why should this market not go to the small planters, Madam Speaker? There are several partners in this sector and, rightly so, have used the proceeds to widen the economic base and to create employment, but they have had, and rightly so, under successive Governments fiscal incentives. They have managed to diversify their proceeds from the sales of sugar cane. But the planters, we need to help them, and I am not going to apportion responsibility whether one Government has done better than the other, but the time has come for us to come together.

First, to say loud and clear that we need to reverse, what we call, the formula with respect to proceeds obtained from the sale of sugar and its by-products. Why is it that the proceeds from the sale of sugar should represent 80% of the whole revenue obtained from sugar and its by-products.

I make an appeal to the Minister, asking the World Bank to conduct studies is not good enough. I think the reports are there, the findings have been submitted. We have people who know the sector inside out. We have people who, as a result of experienced acquired overseas, can be of tremendous help. They are people irrespective whether they are from the corporate sector or they are from the trade unionist or from the planters' community, they are willing to come together as one people, as one nation to turn this sector into a viable sector.

There is no room for demagogic in the sector, but for God's sake, let us be fair to the planters. Let us be fair to the workers of the sugar industry, and it is this sector which has subsidised the other productive sectors of the economy for years and years. I hope, and the Minister has given his solemn word to the trade unionist that workers who opt to retire, from

the workers of the sugar cane industry, those who work in the factory will be entitled to the blueprint and those who work in the fields would be entitled to the provisions of the VRS II.

If the package can be improved or if there is an alternative, fair enough, but we should not undermine their rights, and we should not undermine what we consider to be their rights. This is a sector which has enabled this country to take off, this is a sector which is becoming a service oriented sector, and as a result of experience acquired in this sector today, we are a maverick on the Continent of Africa. This is a classical and a good example of cross border initiative.

Madam Speaker, the time has come not to waste time. The time has come to convene all partners to make sure that we give a fair hearing and the proceeds from a standing cane are equitably distributed, Madam Speaker. There is no need to obtain funding, be it from CEB or elsewhere, and then the cost to be borne by consumers. This is not fair, and we need to invest in research and development. When the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Bill was debated, I made several proposals and I hope they have been taken on board.

Madam Speaker, there is another issue which I consider to be a cross-cutting issue, the drug issue. I don't think that is fair for anyone of us to hit at each other, because if we want to play politics on a scourge which is afflicting many of our young people, it's time wasted, we can harness our resources to wage war on this scourge. There are the findings submitted by United Nations Drugs on Crime. But what I can't understand on this cross-cutting issue like the issue of Chagos, why is it that there is no representation of Members of the Opposition on the Committee? Why are we debarred from attending these meetings? I can't understand.

This goes against parliamentary democracy, and I can't understand why the Government flouts parliamentary democracy. Let me tell our friends, some of them have made unwarranted remarks, because some of them want to be vicious, I don't intend to be vicious. If I want to be vicious, I can wear my boogies and start hitting around, I don't want to do that. But let me impress upon them, that I am not going to talk about what happened in the past, which political parties have obtained funding from whom. But if there is honesty of purpose, let us mobilise our strength, act in unison, in the spirit of patriotism, let us wage war on drugs. I don't know why there is murmur on the other side.

But, let me tell the Prime Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition was right, if there is a missing link, there are many missing links, but what one missing link that should

not have been missed in the budget is in respect of the findings of the report submitted by Lam Shang Leen. There are two reports, the Lam Shang Leen Report and the Master Plan of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. So, we want to know where we stand. I agree much is being done, but this problem is a national scourge, and it's on the rise.

We don't know where we stand in respect of rehabilitation, reinsertion of our youth. And the other day, I raised the case of a young victim who had consumed a synthetic drug. What is the purpose of throwing this young man into jail? What we have said at party level that we want the demarcation line between a consumer and a trafficker to be wide. When a young consumer, what we need to do if we are humane and our approach is based on the feelings of being a human being is to rehabilitate, is to make sure that we save this child, Madam Speaker, or this teenager. So, the politics of rehabilitation, reinsertion is of vital importance, nothing is said.

Let me, Madam Speaker, by way of conclusion, say loud and clear that the end is nigh for this Government, and it's time for them if they can muster the courage to go for dissolution of Parliament, this is the wish of the electorate. What the people want, the people want new elections. We are ready and willing; we have the team, not a dream team, but people who are pragmatic and relevant, Madam Speaker, and who will fight for a cause which is just, who can reconcile social and economic factors, who will put people first, Madam Speaker, and I can tell them, we are a party which we are...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. Boolell:** We are a party, Madam Speaker...

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. Boolell:** We are a party which values the importance of being humane. And unlike this Government, there was no broad daylight robbery which has ever or will ever raid the vault of a bank. They are going to do it, they will have to assume the responsibility, and they will have to bear the brunt of the electorate. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Minister Seeruttun!

(6.58 p.m.)

**The Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Seeruttun):** Merci, Madame la présidente. Permettez-moi d'abord, Madame la présidente, de remercier le

Premier ministre et aussi ministre des Finances et du Développement économique au nom de toute la population de la République de l'île Maurice, d'avoir présenté un budget qui répond aux attentes de la population. Encore une fois, le Premier ministre a démontré son humanisme et, comme d'habitude, il a mis l'humain au centre de ce budget, toute la population de l'île Maurice, de Rodrigues, d'Agaléga et des Chagos. Ce qu'on a vu dans ce Budget n'est pas nouveau parce qu'à chaque fois qu'il a présenté un budget pour le pays, sa préoccupation principale est d'assurer que l'écart entre les riches et les pauvres s'amenuise et que ceux qui sont au plus bas de l'échelle, ceux qui méritent le plus soient considérés en priorité. Il reste toujours fidèle à cette philosophie, mais en même temps, comme un ministre des Finances et aussi un Premier ministre aujourd'hui, responsable, il assure quand même que le pays progresse sur le volet économique. Il a montré, encore une fois, sa responsabilité vis-à-vis de la population et aussi les secteurs productifs. Malgré un contexte international difficile, on parle aujourd'hui de la guerre commerciale qui existe entre deux superpuissances, les États-Unis et la Chine. Le Brexit est toujours là ; on ne sait toujours pas quel va être l'issue de ce problème du Brexit. Le problème avec l'Iran reste toujours un problème au niveau géopolitique et l'impact du changement climatique affecte aussi le monde.

Donc, dans un contexte aussi difficile et complexe, voilà un gouvernement qui est là depuis quatre ans et demi, qui, année après année, est en train de répondre à l'attente de cette population. Une de nos priorités était d'assurer qu'on puisse améliorer le pouvoir d'achat de la population, et à voir toutes les mesures prises depuis les quatre dernières années. On voit que la situation s'améliore, surtout pour ceux qui sont au bas de l'échelle. Aujourd'hui, j'entends l'honorable Uteem et aussi le dernier intervenant parler de la croissance - oui, l'honorable Dr. Arvin Boolell. Il parle de la croissance, il parle de la dette, comme si étant le plus gros problème qu'il faut débattre aujourd'hui. Or, pour moi, et je crois aussi pour toute la population, l'objectif d'un gouvernement, c'est de pouvoir partager la richesse avec sa population. Il faut que cela *trickle down* au petit peuple. Et ce qu'on a fait depuis 2015, c'est justement de pouvoir enlever ce poids qui était sur la population. Plus tôt, l'honorable Uteem parlait justement du taux de la croissance qu'on avait prédite, une croissance supérieure à 5% ; c'était notre vision 2030. On parlait du taux qu'on avait estimé dans le dernier budget. Mais ce sont des estimations. Au moment de préparer un budget, par rapport aux mesures qu'on compte implémenter, on estime que, voilà, ce que cela va donner comme taux de croissance, c'est un objectif qu'on veut atteindre. Mais en cours de route, il y a tellement de choses qui se passent, ce qui fait qu'on n'arrive pas à atteindre le taux de croissance qu'on

s'est fixé. Et ce n'est pas seulement maintenant que cela se passe, et je veux citer le cas, quand son leader, l'honorable Bérenger, était ministre des Finances, lui aussi, il faisait des estimations, des prévisions du taux de croissance.

Je vais prendre l'exemple de 2002/2003 ; il prévoyait un taux de croissance de 4.8%, mais au final, 2.1%. Même chose, en 2003/2004, il prévoyait un taux de croissance de 6% et, au final, 2%. Et je peux citer la même chose pour le leader de l'opposition, il était ministre des Finances lui aussi ; en 2012, 4%, selon son estimation, 3.2% au final. Pour l'année 2013, 3.4% et 3.2% au final. Et en 2014, pour ne pas être trop, comme on dit, rater le coche, il a fait/prédit un '*range*' entre 3.8 et 4% et même là, c'était en dehors, 3.6%. Ce que j'ai envie de dire, c'est que justement lorsqu'on prépare un budget par rapport à ce qu'on prévoit comme mesure qu'on veut implémenter, donc, on estime voilà, en prenant en compte le contexte international, on estime que la croissance va être de tel taux et comme j'ai dit, il y a des imprévus et des fois, on n'arrive pas à atteindre l'objectif fixé.

L'année dernière, on avait prévu 4.1%/4%, on va finir à 3.9%. Alors de faire tout un cinéma avec, quoi que c'est pour la première fois avec ce gouvernement qu'on n'arrive pas à atteindre le taux de croissance estimée. Alors, je crois que c'est du mauvais goût.

*(Interruptions)*

Alors, on ne peut pas parler de la même chose à chaque fois. Ce n'est pas du tout du sérieux ! Depuis la présentation du Budget, on parle sur la question de la dette. Avant la présentation, nos adversaires parlaient que la dette publique est tellement conséquente, tellement forte qu'il faut qu'on la réduise. Maintenant qu'on fait des efforts pour la réduire, ils disent qu'il ne fallait pas faire cela. Et je demanderai à l'honorable Uteem et à l'honorable Dr. Boolell d'aller à la page 80 du discours du Budget, au paragraphe 429 lorsqu'on parle de puiser de la Banque de Maurice pour réduire la dette publique. On parle d'*accumulated undistributed surplus*. Je suis sûr qu'il comprend très bien ce que cela veut dire. *Accumulated undistributed surplus*, c'est-à-dire le surplus que la banque a réalisé, qui a été accumulé pendant un certain nombre d'années et qui n'a pas été distribué et vous savez tous, que de temps en temps, le surplus que la banque réalise est distribué dans la caisse de l'État comme dividende ou *what not*, mais c'est distribué.

*(Interruptions)*

Aujourd'hui, on décide de faire cela et ce n'est pas bon. De l'autre côté, qu'est-ce qu'on veut faire ? On veut réduire le risque associé aux dettes étrangères qu'on a. Les dettes

qui ont été contractées dans le passé - et Dr. Boolell le sait très bien à quelle époque - les dettes à des taux vraiment élevés et on sait très bien le risque associé avec la dette étrangère en devise, le *Forex Risk*. Et on veut réduire ce genre de risque et on peut payer et rembourser cette dette. Et si on réduit notre dette, qu'est-ce que cela veut dire ? Notre dette *servicing* va diminuer et on pourra utiliser l'argent qu'on aurait à payer comme intérêt pour faire des investissements.

Eux, ils trouvent que ce n'est pas correct, aujourd'hui, alors qu'eux-mêmes, ils disaient que la dette publique était trop forte. Il fallait réduire. On s'était fixé pour ramener la dette publique à 60% d'ici à 2021 et aujourd'hui, le Premier ministre annonce qu'il va pouvoir le faire bien avant. Est-ce une mauvaise chose maintenant ?

Alors, j'ai écouté un ancien gouverneur de la Banque de Maurice, M. Dan Maraye. Il a expliqué d'une manière la plus simple possible comment cela peut se faire et qu'il n'y a rien d'anormal. Et il va même dire que voilà une situation où on a des réserves qui vont nous permettre de couvrir notre importation pour une période de 11.2 mois, un record, je dois dire. Et aujourd'hui, on a cet espace. Alors pourquoi ne pas utiliser cet argent excédent qu'on a pour rembourser la dette alors que la norme comme réserve pour pouvoir assurer nos importations est de l'ordre de six mois.

Pourquoi payer cher une dette et garder l'argent pour ne recevoir pratiquement rien en termes d'intérêt. Si ce n'est pas le bon sens économique, je ne sais pas c'est quoi alors. Alors, ce débat sur la croissance et aussi sur la dette publique, c'est parce qu'ils n'ont rien à dire. Voilà un gouvernement qui a mis au centre de ses préoccupations la population et on a vu depuis 2015 comment on est en train de traiter toutes les catégories de Mauriciens, à commencer par les vieilles personnes.

Je suis sûr, Madame la présidente, vous vous rappelez au moment qu'on avait annoncé qu'on allait augmenter la pension pour les vieilles personnes en 2014 à R 5,000, le Premier ministre d'alors disait que ce n'était pas possible. C'était du bluff. Il n'y a pas d'argent. Et voilà une des premières décisions prises par ce gouvernement, c'était justement d'offrir cette augmentation à nos aînés. Et on a continué à augmenter la pension, année après année. Et on a dit qu'on allait faire encore plus pour eux, parce qu'ils méritent d'avoir une retraite décente.

Et là, avant le Budget, il y avait tout un bruit qui ne venait pas de nous.

(*Interruptions*)

Dans les médias, on parlait qu'on allait aligner la pension de vieillesse au taux de salaire minimum et que cela allait être un désastre ce qu'ils avaient dit. Ne faites pas ça parce que ça va être un désastre ! Alors, lorsque nous annonçons une augmentation de R 500, maintenant c'est tout le contraire. On aurait dû augmenter à R 9,000, la pension. Je vais vous expliquer une chose, Madame la présidente. La plupart des employés, des salariés ont droit à une pension à la retraite et d'habitude, la norme c'est quoi ? Parce que vous partez à la retraite, vous recevez autour de deux tiers de votre salaire, parfois trois quarts, mais deux tiers c'est un peu la norme. Et si vous prenez deux tiers de R 9,000, quand vous travaillez, vous recevez R 9,000 et quand vous ne travaillez plus, vous recevez une pension, cela représente deux tiers de votre salaire et deux tiers, cela représente R 6,000. Et si on met cela à trois quarts, 75% de votre salaire, cela arrive à R 6,700. Alors, encore une fois, cela démontre qu'on fait les choses d'une manière responsable et qu'on s'assure que nos aînés reçoivent une pension décente. Je peux donner la garantie qu'avec ce gouvernement, il y aura encore plus pour eux dans l'avenir.

*(Interruptions)*

On parle justement de Sithanen. Ce gouvernement, et le MSM, à chaque fois qu'il est au gouvernement comme locomotive, a toujours été de bâtir le pays, contrairement au Parti travailliste qui a toujours détruit ce qu'on a construit. Et vous parlez justement de l'ancien ministre des Finances du Parti travailliste, de l'ancien gouvernement travailliste - PMSD, M. Sithanen, au lieu de réduire l'écart entre les riches et les pauvres, il a fait tout le contraire et ça c'est vérifiable ! Qui a oublié les subsides sur les *fees* d'examen du *SC/HSC*? Qui avait aboli cela ?

*(Interruptions)*

Justement la taxe sur les intérêts, sur l'épargne. À l'école, les enfants reçoivent du pain gratuitement. Il avait enlevé cela. Le *NRPT* ! Donc, toutes les décisions, toutes les mesures prises par l'ancien ministre des Finances du Parti travailliste étaient pour mettre la main dans la poche des pauvres pour donner aux riches. Pour donner à qui ? Betamax...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please!

**Mr Seeruttun:** Betamax, un dossier, un contrat en béton. 2009...

*(Interruptions)*

Ne racontez pas! Il n'y a personne qui va...

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Seeruttun:** Il n'y a personne qui va croire à ce genre d'allégations. En 2009 ! Qui va croire qu'en 2009, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth était au gouvernement ? Qui va croire à cela ? Et vous là, un contrat donné à un proche du ministre d'alors !

(*Interruptions*)

Au beau-frère, oui. Au beau-frère de M. Jeetah qui était ministre du Commerce à l'époque. À ce moment-là, il n'y avait pas de conflit d'intérêt. Oui, en plus, l'épouse est actionnaire. On était contre, le MMM aussi, je crois, était contre et un contrat sur 15 ans qui allait rapporter des milliards. R 4,5 milliards et une des premières décisions aussi de ce gouvernement, c'était de résilier ce contrat entre le *STC* et *Betamax*. En ce faisant, Madame la présidente, le pays, la population a économisé R 1,4 milliards. R 1,4 milliards d'économies en résiliant ce contrat. Ils ont voulu contester cela. Ils ont trouvé tous les moyens de faire croire qu'on avait tort de résilier le contrat, mais qu'est-ce que la Cour suprême de notre pays a donné comme jugement ? Comme on dit, un *full bench* a donné son jugement et quelques jours avant ce jugement, il y avait la Cour de l'Inde qui avait demandé une garantie bancaire de R 4.7 milliards. Et qu'est-ce qu'on n'a pas entendu de l'autre côté de la Chambre ? Les commentaires qu'ils ont faits. Et même le leader de l'opposition est venu dire : 'Moi, je n'étais pas d'accord qu'on arrête ce contrat et que maintenant le pays aura à payer.'

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Rutnay, I don't think the hon. Minister needs any assistance from anybody.

(*Interruptions*)

**Mr Seeruttun:** Madame la présidente, voilà un peu ce que je dis. Il met la main dans la poche des pauvres pour donner aux riches. On ne connaît pas l'histoire de...

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** You see how you distract the Minister?

**Mr Seeruttun:** ...Ram Mardemootoo, n'est-ce pas ! *Stimulus package!* Combien de millions de la poche des contribuables ! Combien sont partis dans la poche de M. Mardemootoo? M. Jean Suzanne, un autre ami, proche de l'ancien Premier ministre.

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Seeruttun:** Avec sa Rolex ! C'est ça la politique du Parti travailliste et PMSD !

Madame la présidente, j'ai écouté attentivement l'honorable Dr. A. Boolell pendant qu'il intervenait. C'est mon tour...

(*Interruptions*)

C'est mon tour...

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Do you have a point of personal explanation ?

**Dr. Boolell:** That's right. On a point of personal explanation, I ask the hon. Minister to give way, and I am glad that he did.

Now, you recall when I intervened, I was stopped and asked not to drop the name of any individual who is not in the House. It is good for me; it should be equally good for him.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Dr. Boolell, I think he is not dropping the name of anybody. We know that that person was a Member of Parliament, and it was against policy that he was given the Stimulus Package. I think it is fair.

(*Interruptions*)

I think it is fair. Rely on me, I will stop him wherever he is out of bounds.

**Mr Seeruttun:** Merci, Madame la présidente. On connaît tous le propriétaire de R.S. Denim, et on sait comment il a empoché de l'argent - et en ce moment, un château, au détriment des petits travailleurs qui n'ont pas reçu leur salaire...

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Seeruttun:** Donc, Madame la présidente, si on a à demander à la population ce qui lui revient en tête lorsqu'on parle de cette période 2005-2006 jusqu'à 2014, pendant la

période où le Parti travailliste et le PMSD étaient au pouvoir, à part Betamax, à part CT-Power, à part le *hedging*, STC, Air Mauritius – à part MedPoint justement, parce que maintenant, encore une fois, 2009, qui était le ministre de la Santé, qui a rencontré dans son bureau le propriétaire de MedPoint? Qui a commencé à préparer les spécifications ? Qui a été sur le site de la Clinique MedPoint? Et après, mettre cela sur le dos de notre Premier ministre, c'était une honte...

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Seeruttun:** Le jugement du *Privy Council* donne raison à notre Premier ministre; la Cour suprême aussi. Et le *Privy Council* donne raison et a blanchi...

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Dr. Boolell! Please! I said that all interruptions from a sitting position are not allowed.

**Mr Seeruttun:** On a voulu le détruire, Madame la présidente. Qui ne se souvient pas de l'épisode, la veille de son anniversaire, et aussi de l'enquête, pendant des heures et des heures jusqu'à fort tard, aux petites heures du matin...

(*Interruptions*)

**Madame Speaker:** Hon. Soodhun! Please!

**Mr Seeruttun:** ....aller le chercher, et en faisant cela devant sa famille. C'était quelque chose, et pour moi, dans un pays respecté, c'est inadmissible. Mais voilà, ça c'est le Parti travailliste ! Encore une fois, si on demande aux gens, qu'est-ce que cela vous dit lorsqu'on se réfère à la période 2005-2014 ? Ils vont vous dire, l'université 'marron'. Encore une fois...

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please! Order!

**Mr Seeruttun:** Encore une fois, c'est le ministre Jeetah, université 'marron'. Nous sommes venus avec une réforme dans le secteur éducatif, avec le *PSAC*. Regardez la différence, Madame la présidente, nous sommes venus avec une réforme, et à l'époque, c'était...

(*Interruptions*)

Madame la présidente, combien d'élèves qui ont cru dans cette université, qui ont payé des *fees* pour avoir à la fin un diplôme qui n'avait aucune reconnaissance ! Imaginez la souffrance de ces parents d'avoir sacrifié autant pour permettre à leurs enfants d'avoir un diplôme, en croyant que c'était une université reconnue ! Après trois ans ou quatre ans d'études, ils se retrouvaient avec un bout de papier qui n'avait aucune valeur. Cela fait penser aussi au D.Y. Patil, n'est-ce pas ! Enfin, Madame la présidente, il y avait d'autres projets, comme le métro léger, de l'époque de l'ancien gouvernement, et qui allait coûter, avec les intérêts, autour de R 38,8 milliards. R 38,8 milliards ! Et avec raison, nous n'étions pas d'accord avec ce projet-là, à ce coût-là. C'était impossible de pouvoir avoir le retour sur un projet pareil à ce coût-là. Mais lorsqu'on est revenu au pouvoir en 2015, on a demandé aux Singapouriens qui travaillaient sur ce projet de nous dire combien exactement et réellement cela allait coûter. Alors, on était tous choqués d'apprendre que cela allait coûter seulement R 18,8 milliards. Posez-vous la question, Madame la présidente, entre R 18,8 milliards et R 38,8 milliards, où allait partir cet argent-là ?

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Seeruttun:** Et en plus, Madame la présidente, on a eu un *grant* de R10 milliards de notre pays ami, qui est toujours avec nous, notre grand frère, pour soutenir ce projet. Je sais que l'honorable Dr. Boolell n'est pas trop d'accord avec ce que l'Inde fait pour le pays, mais ça, c'est sa position, tout comme – je ne sais pas s'il est toujours avec le parti – celui qui a traité le Premier ministre indien de monstre, de Hitler. Et le Parti travailliste n'a pas trouvé bon de condamner ce membre influent de son parti de traiter un pays ami, un pays avec qui on a une relation qu'on ne peut pas décrire vraiment, pour le traiter comme un monstre, un Hitler. Je laisse à la population de juger un peu comment on traite les amis au niveau du Parti travailliste.

Alors voilà, avec un projet qui sort de R 38,8 milliards pour descendre à - en prenant compte le *grant* reçu, ça va coûter à peine R 12,8 milliards. Et c'est comme cela que ce projet devient un projet viable et c'est comme cela qu'on décide de relancer le projet. Et ce projet va devenir une réalité dans quelques semaines. Malgré toute cette campagne pas seulement de nos adversaires politiques, mais tous ceux en dehors qui sont censés être des personnes objectives, mais qui nuit et jour mènent une campagne pour dire qu'il y a trop de poussière, trop de déviations, trop de bruit, ça dérange, trop de lumière, on n'arrive pas à dormir, mais

ce gouvernement, Madame la présidente, est en train de préparer ce pays pour les prochains 50 ans à venir.

(*Interruptions*)

Quand j'entends certaines personnes dire que ce Budget n'a aucune vision, mais, moi, je dis : ne le regardez pas uniquement en isolation, regardez ce qu'on fait depuis quatre ans, année après année, on est en train de préparer ce pays pour être légué aux jeunes générations pour les 50 ans à venir. On modernise ce pays, on est en train de transformer ce pays afin qu'ils puissent vivre mieux dans une Ile Maurice comparable aux grands pays de ce monde. Voilà la vision du Premier ministre ! Voilà la vision de ce gouvernement, Madame la présidente!

Donc, lorsqu'on parle de cette période de 2005 à 2014, on ne peut que retenir des choses qui n'ont rien apporter à la population. On parle de la route Terre Rouge/Verdun, j'espère que mon collègue, le ministre Bodha va dire un peu plus dessus, mais on connaît comment elle s'est effondrée la première fois qu'il y a eu une grosse pluie.

Le *Ring Road* va nulle part, le *dream bridge* qu'ils avaient annoncé, un cauchemar finalement. Mais on peut comprendre, lorsqu'il y avait un Premier ministre qui était en permanence en lune de miel, ...

(*Interruptions*)

...qu'est-ce qu'on peut attendre ?

(*Interruptions*)

Qu'est-ce qu'on peut attendre, Madame la présidente ? Qu'est-ce qu'on peut attendre ? Mais, Madame la présidente, voyons un peu ce qu'on a fait en quatre ans et demi. Madame la présidente, on a donné à nos aînés, comme j'ai dit un peu plus tôt, une pension adéquate, une pension décente. On a introduit le salaire minimum, un engagement de ce gouvernement. Combien d'années, on a parlé de l'introduction de ce salaire minimum. Personne n'a eu le courage ! On l'a fait. C'est une réalité aujourd'hui. 73,800 travailleurs ont bénéficié de ce salaire minimum et, en plus de cela, la *Negative Income Tax*, 70,000 travailleurs en ont bénéficié. Et vous dites que ce gouvernement n'a rien fait ! Et c'est prévu qu'en 2020 que le seuil va être revu parce qu'il y a toujours le coût de la vie qui augmente et donc, on va avoir une révision de ce seuil, bien sûr, par rapport au coût de la vie qui augmente.

Le combat contre la drogue, Madame la présidente ! Tout à l'heure justement, Dr. Boolell parlait de *a war*, il faut qu'il y ait un travail collectif, entièrement d'accord, mais

lorsqu'on lui avait demandé quand ils étaient au pouvoir et qu'il fallait combattre ce problème-là qui faisait déjà rage dans ce pays, le Premier ministre d'alors disait qu'il n'y avait pas de problème de drogue à Maurice. C'est sous contrôle. Il n'y avait aucune raison de mettre sur pied une commission d'enquête, aucune raison. Nous avons pris l'engagement, la commission d'enquête a été mise sur pied, le rapport est arrivé. Et regardez 750 kg de drogues saisies en quatre ans et demi. R 5,7 milliards de valeur...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Baloomoody!

**Mr Seeruttun:** R 5,7 milliards de valeur de drogues saisies, Madame la présidente! Imaginez pour une seule seconde, Madame la présidente, cette drogue est rentrée sur le marché à Maurice. Imaginez quel dégât cela aurait fait à notre jeunesse!

Aujourd'hui, on est en train de combattre ce fléau. Les résultats sont là. Ce n'est pas terminé bien sûr. Il reste encore à faire. Et on va aller jusqu'au bout et quand le Premier ministre s'est engagé personnellement et il a dit qu'il sera sans pitié, on peut compter sur lui parce qu'il est là pour défendre la population et il va nous défendre, Madame la présidente. Au moment où on parle justement de ce combat, le leader du Parti travailliste, qu'est-ce qu'il dit lui ? Il faut légaliser le cannabis, vrai, il faut légaliser.

*(Interruptions)*

Et je me souviens, il y a deux semaines de cela, on était parti à une prière pour la coupe 2019 et mon collègue, l'honorable Sawmynaden, me posait la question, à écouter l'ancien Premier ministre Navin Ramgoolam : est-ce qu'on devrait un jour au lieu de prier pour une coupe de la canne, faut-il qu'on prie pour la coupe de cannabis ? Faire une prière pour démarrer la coupe de cannabis à Maurice ? Est-ce que c'est cela qu'on veut, Madame la présidente?

*(Interruptions)*

Mais nous sommes là pour protéger la population.

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Seeruttun:** Nous sommes là pour protéger la population, Madame la présidente et on va la protéger coûte que coûte. On va assurer que dans ce pays, on va vivre sans ces fléaux. Pour la première fois dans l'espace de quatre ans, quatre ans et demi, on a connu une

baisse dans le prix du gaz ménager pour sortir de R 330 la bonbonne pour passer à R 210 – R 120 d'économie. On fait cela, ils ne sont pas contents, c'est décevant.

(*Interruptions*)

Un Budget qui ne répond pas à l'attente de la population. Mais nous, nous savons tous qu'elle a été la réaction de la population, quelle a été la réaction des *ti dimounes* de ce pays, quelle a été la réaction des ménagères. Alors, ce sont des mesures pour moi qui répondent à l'aspiration de tout un peuple. Je peux continuer encore, Madame la présidente, mais je voudrais quand même...

(*Interruptions*)

Laissez-moi parler justement sur le secteur sucre. Ce qui me choque moi, c'est que le Parti travailliste et le PMSD étaient au pouvoir...

(*Interruptions*)

ils n'ont jamais donné l'attention aux planteurs, et aux petits planteurs principalement, Madame la présidente.

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Seeruttun:** Je ne sais pas si vous vous rappelez, Madame la présidente, Sir Anerood Jugnauth comme Premier ministre avait offert aux petits planteurs le *duty free* sur les *double cab*. Et cela a soulagé beaucoup de petits planteurs à l'époque. Et qu'est-ce que Monsieur Rama Sithanen est venu faire pendant que le Parti travailliste et le PMSD étaient au pouvoir ? Enlever d'un coup - vous n'avez pas droit à cette facilité, vous, les petits planteurs. L'honorable Boolell était ministre. S'il avait un peu de sentiment, un peu de cœur pour ces petits planteurs...

(*Interruptions*)

...au moins, il aurait dû quand même dire : 'Non, ce n'est pas bon, c'est méchant, c'est mesquin de pouvoir faire quelque chose pareil aux petits planteurs.' Mais non, mais non...

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

(*Interruptions*)

**Mr Seeruttun:** Mais non, Madame la présidente, il a dit oui : ‘enlever ça, ils ne méritent pas cette facilité.’ Pravind Jugnauth est revenu, il a réintroduit cette facilité aux petits planteurs. Et ce n’est pas fini. Pour pouvoir aider les petits planteurs à faire la coupe où ils doivent préparer leurs champs pour l’année suivante toujours, l’ancien Premier ministre, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, avait introduit cette avance de 80% aux planteurs. Encore une fois, le gouvernement Parti travailliste/PMSD : ‘Non, ils n’ont pas droit à ça, il ne faut pas leur donner ça. Pourquoi il faut leur donner ça ?’ Et encore une fois, Pravind Jugnauth, il est revenu, il a réintroduit cette avance...

(*Interruptions*)

**Madam Speaker:** Please, hon. Dr. Boolell!

**Mr Seeruttun:** Et on est allé plus loin ces derniers temps avec la baisse sur les revenus du sucre. On l'a dit, on va étendre ces 80%, pas seulement sur le revenu du sucre, mais sur tous les revenus générés pour la canne qu'ils envoient à l'usine. Encore une fois, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Premier ministre, les petits planteurs qui produisent jusqu'à 60 tonnes de sucre sont exemptés, pas de taxe. Rama Sithanen, qu'est-ce qu'il a fait ? Il faut taxer ces planteurs ; ils gagnent trop.

(*Interruptions*)

Et encore une fois, Pravind Jugnauth revient et corrige cette injustice. C'est cela ce gouvernement qui a à cœur les petits planteurs. C'est vrai qu'ils passent par des moments difficiles et c'est vrai que depuis 2015 sans cesse ce gouvernement est en train de soutenir l'industrie. C'est difficile. On est un petit pays, des petits producteurs, plus de 90% de notre sucre qu'on produit est exporté sur un marché sur lequel on n'a plus de contrôle, malheureusement, plus de prix garanti, plus de marché garanti. On veut soutenir l'industrie et c'est pour cela que vous allez voir, Madame la présidente, 2015, alors que le prix pour la coupe 2014 était en baisse, ce gouvernement est venu avec une aide directe, une aide financière – R 2,000 par tonne de sucre à tous les planteurs, mais aux petits planteurs R 3,400.

On a aussi payé la prime d’assurance pour les petits planteurs. On a suspendu le *cess*. L’année suivante, soit en 2016, Madame la présidente, on a continué à soutenir l’industrie et, en particulier, les petits planteurs. On est venu avec ce qu’on appelle le *Cane Sustainability Fund*. Depuis des décennies, ils recevaient R 100 à R 125 pour la bagasse. On a augmenté cela à R 1225 - 1000% d’augmentation pour les petits planteurs et les autres ont eu R 300. -

encore une fois, une attention spéciale pour les petits planteurs. Madame la présidente, on l'a fait en 2015, 2016 et 2017 aussi. On a continué à soutenir l'industrie et comme je l'ai dit, le petit planteur en particulier.

Et à part cela, Madame la présidente, on les assiste pour la préparation de leurs champs, la replantation. Et l'année dernière, on a aussi offert des fertilisants aux planteurs. Mais comme la situation est toujours difficile et on n'est jamais resté insensible à leur demande, encore une fois dans ce budget, on voit une série de mesures qu'on a annoncé pour pouvoir soutenir les planteurs. Déjà, on est en train de *write off* ceux qui avaient bénéficié sous le projet FORIP, un montant de R 400 millions, et qui touche 9,000 planteurs. Aujourd'hui, ils n'auront plus besoin de rembourser cette somme, Madame la présidente.

L'avance qu'on avait effectué l'année dernière pour les fertilisants qui tourne autour de R 13,000 par hectare, 50% de cette avance ont été rayés. Encore une fois, la prime d'assurance pour les petits planteurs va être prise en charge par le gouvernement. Le *cess*, encore une fois, est suspendu et on a mis encore de l'argent pour continuer notre programme de replantation et un plan d'aide pour faire l'acquisition des équipements parce qu'aujourd'hui, il y a un problème de main-d'œuvre et on pense qu'on doit leur aider en leur offrant cette facilité de machines qu'on va mettre à leur disposition pour pouvoir faire la récolte.

On a aussi, Madame la présidente, pensé qu'il faut faire un effort spécial et le Premier ministre, qui a été lui-même un ancien ministre de l'Agriculture, qui lui-même était à la base de la réforme de l'industrie au début de l'année 2000, n'est pas resté insensible à cette requête et pour la première fois, Madame la présidente, on va pouvoir accorder aux petits planteurs qui produisent jusqu'à 60 tonnes de sucre pour la coupe 2019, un revenu total de R 25,000 la tonne, Madame la présidente - c'est la première fois – en prenant en compte le sucre, mais aussi tous les revenus des autres produits de la canne.

Cela démontre, encore une fois, Madame la présidente, que ce gouvernement est toujours là-derrière cette industrie et aussi derrière les petits planteurs et on va continuer à leur soutenir. Mais entretemps, il faut savoir, Madame la présidente, - parce que là aussi, j'entends quelques critiques là-dessus : qu'est-ce qu'on fait pour assurer sa survie ? - qu'on est en train de diversifier notre marché. Il y avait une dépendance totale sur le marché européen. Aujourd'hui, avec l'intervention du Premier ministre, lui-même personnellement,

avec le président de la République populaire de Chine, on va pouvoir exporter nos sucre spéciaux sur le marché chinois.

Il y a des discussions aussi sur comment pouvoir écouter le sucre sur le marché indien. Là, on a appris, dans la région, il y a des discussions qui sont en cours et on va explorer d'autres marchés pour pouvoir avoir des meilleurs prix que ceux qu'on reçoit aujourd'hui sur le marché traditionnel, c'est-à-dire, le marché européen. On a fait appel à l'expertise de la Banque mondiale pour pouvoir voir comment restructurer l'industrie afin qu'elle reste toujours une industrie viable. Et avec raison, cette industrie reste et comme on dit, joue un rôle multifonctionnel, pas seulement pour la production du sucre, mais aussi pour l'énergie renouvelable et aussi pour préserver notre environnement, pour empêcher l'érosion et protéger nos lagons. Et on sait combien de personnes sont directement ou indirectement attachées à cette industrie. Donc, ce gouvernement va tout faire pour pouvoir assurer sa survie.

Madame la présidente, je voulais quand même dire quelques mots sur un autre secteur qui était voué à une mort lente, le secteur de thé. Encore une fois, je ne vais pas être méchant avec l'honorable Dr. Boolell, mais les faits sont là. Pourtant, il était député dans la circonscription où il y a beaucoup de planteurs de thé. S'il avait vraiment un peu de sentiment pour ces gens-là, il n'aurait jamais lâché ces gens-là. Il y avait un forum où ils pouvaient se rencontrer, présenter leur problème, discuter et trouver des solutions. C'était le *Tea Board*. Il a démantelé cela, Madame la présidente. Ces gens-là étaient restés seuls, ils ne savaient plus où aller. On les a négligés complètement, aucun support, aucune considération. On les a encouragés à enlever le thé pour planter la canne dans des endroits où la canne ne pousse pas. Et ils ont tout abandonné. Je suis arrivé en fin 2014, début 2015, on a fait un constat de cette industrie, une industrie qui est en train de connaître une croissance annuelle de 7% globalement. Il y a des investisseurs étrangers qui sont là, qui veulent investir dans notre thé parce que notre thé est un thé apprécié, un thé sans pesticides, un thé propre et j'ose dire unique. C'est pour cela qu'aujourd'hui, il y a autant de demande pour notre thé local.

Donc, j'ai commencé par aider, soutenir les planteurs existants en leur donnant des facilités parce qu'il y a un problème de main-d'œuvre. On leur a offert des cisailles gratuitement, on leur a offert des fertilisants deux fois l'an gratuitement pour pouvoir *boost up* leur production et en même temps, c'était une catégorie des planteurs qui n'avaient pas droit à de *double cab duty free*, ça aussi, on leur a donné. La *Road Tax* payée au prix réduit. On ne s'est pas arrêté là, Madame la présidente. On a identifié toute cette terre qui était sous

thé auparavant. Il y a 600 arpents et on a commencé un programme de replantation de ces champs, Madame la présidente.

On a commencé à mettre en place une pépinière. Et l'année dernière, on a mis en terre dans des pots pour commencer, parce qu'il faut commencer par faire pousser la plante - 250,000 plantules. Et cette année-ci, à ce jour, on est déjà arrivé à 60,000 plantules. On a déjà planté 40 arpents de terre qui était abandonnée, et d'ici, la fin de l'année, il y aura 100 arpents plantés. Et déjà, on voit des résultats, Madame la présidente.

La production a augmenté par 4,7% déjà, et cela va continuer à augmenter avec le programme qu'on a. On a introduit la *Winter Allowance* qui n'a jamais existé dans le passé, et qu'ils ont demandé tout le temps, parce que, arrivé en hiver, la production baisse et ceux qui dépendent entièrement sur cette activité n'arrivaient pas à joindre les deux bouts. L'appel a été fait à moi-même, je l'ai transmis au Premier ministre et ministre des Finances, et l'année dernière, pour la première fois, ils ont eu droit à une *Winter Allowance*. On vient d'entendre dans le discours du budget, cette *Winter Allowance* a été doublée. Au nom de tous les planteurs de thé, merci au Premier ministre d'avoir prêté l'oreille à leur demande.

Je dis notre thé est unique. J'ai personnellement fait une demande auprès de la *FAO* de nous donner un consultant pour pouvoir travailler, pour pouvoir mettre le thé mauricien sur le plan international et que cela devienne un *brand international tea*. Voilà, un tel objectif que nous avons pour notre thé local, Madame la présidente. Alors, je crois que j'ai puisé le temps qui m'est alloué.

On avait parlé de macadamia il y a quelque temps de cela, et j'avais dit que sur des terres marginales où, aujourd'hui, avec la baisse dans le prix du sucre, il faut pouvoir offrir d'autres alternatives aux planteurs, et on avait proposé de planter le macadamia à Maurice. Je peux dire aujourd'hui, on a créé une pépinière à Réduit. On a 6,000 plantes déjà disponibles pour couvrir 20 hectares. On a aussi eu des intérêts démontrés par le *corporate*, du secteur coopératif, et aussi, eux, ils ont réservé 200 hectares pour la production de cette nouvelle plante. Donc, voilà un peu d'autres cultures qu'on veut entreprendre pour pouvoir apporter une diversification du secteur agricole, Madame la présidente. Alors, tout cela, ce sont des projets qu'on a réalisés et qu'on va réaliser encore dans des prochaines années, Madame la présidente.

Au niveau de la culture de miel, Madame la présidente, l'apiculture. En 2014, la production était à 15 tonnes annuellement, et à Maurice il y a un marché pour 200 tonnes. Il y

a un marché, mais on n'est pas en train de le capter comme il faut. Donc, encore une fois, on a commencé un travail, à former des apiculteurs, à leur donner de nouveaux équipements, et aussi, à créer ce qu'on appelle 'des zones d'abeilles'.

Aujourd'hui, la production est sortie de 15 tonnes pour atteindre 25 tonnes. Et, avec l'engouement qu'il y a, il y aura encore plus de production dans les années qui viennent. Je suis ravi que le Premier ministre, dans le Budget, ait annoncé que les apiculteurs aussi auront droit à des 4x4 exemptés de *duty*. Donc, encore une fois, voilà comment, Madame la présidente, ce gouvernement est en train d'accorder le support qu'il faut pour qu'ils puissent faire leur travail d'une manière beaucoup plus efficace.

*(Interruptions)*

Oui. Et on ose dire c'est un budget décevant !

Alors, je peux aller comme ça, pour le *sheltered farm*, aujourd'hui, pour contrecarrer le problème du changement climatique, on a augmenté le *grant*, la subvention qu'on offre aux agriculteurs, de R 250,000 à R 400,000. Et aujourd'hui, je peux dire il y a 120 bénéficiaires qui ont déjà pris l'avantage de ce *grant*. Et on voit comment la production sous serre est en train d'augmenter pour pouvoir rehausser notre niveau de sécurité alimentaire à Maurice. Comme annoncé dans le Budget, il y aura 100 fermes encore qu'on va construire dans les années qui viennent. Tout ça, ce sont des projets pour pouvoir renforcer le secteur agricole à Maurice, Madame la présidente.

Alors, j'avais aussi, au début de l'année 2015, annoncé un projet de planter 500,000 arbres sur cinq ans, 100,000 par an. Je peux dire que déjà cette année-ci, on va atteindre les 400,000 arbres qu'on aura plantés autour de l'île. Je suis content aussi d'apprendre que le Conseil des religions, eux aussi, ils vont planter 100,000 arbres. Donc, cela montre qu'il y a cet engouement-là. Donc, tout cela c'est pour, encore une fois, comme on dit, venir en aide pour contrecarrer le problème du changement climatique.

Donc, Madame la présidente, je crois qu'au niveau, du moins du côté de cette Chambre, on est fier d'avoir honoré nos engagements, vis-à-vis de la population, on est fier de pouvoir travailler pour améliorer le sort de la population, on est fier de pouvoir...

*(Interruptions)*

Vous me faites rappeler le *wholesale market*. Oui, il y a tellement de choses à dire. Le temps fait défaut.

Le *wholesale market* va être opérationnel à la fin de décembre, cette année-ci, Madame la présidente. Ça va être encore une fois. Lorsqu'on parle de modernisation de ce pays, ce n'est pas seulement pour un secteur en particulier, mais pour tous les secteurs et aussi le secteur agricole, et là, le secteur agricole aura un nouveau marché central moderne avec des infrastructures qui répondent aux attentes du jour.

Donc, tout cela c'est possible parce qu'aujourd'hui, on a un Premier ministre aussi ministre des Finances qui donne les moyens de pouvoir réaliser autant des projets. C'est quelqu'un qui est là pour *deliver*, c'est quelqu'un qui est là pour assurer que le travail est fait, c'est quelqu'un qui veut que le pays prospère et que tout le monde en tire bénéfice de cette prospérité.

Donc, la population est beaucoup mieux aujourd'hui qu'elle n'était avant décembre 2014 et qui va être encore mieux lotie dans les années qui viennent avec un Premier ministre qui est toujours là pour répondre à leurs attentes.

Madame la présidente, merci beaucoup.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Baboo, can I know for how long you will be speaking? 30 minutes, okay, thank you.

(8.19 p.m.)

**Mr S. Baboo (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal):** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, a Budget is an exercise in macroeconomic game and social justice and in the case of Mauritius, it should aim at creating a highly international competitive economy which will ensure a high and continuously rising standard of living for its citizens.

Madam Speaker, was it not a declared vision of this Government to make Mauritius a high income economy. If we look at this Budget 2019-2020 again, we find a few palliative and Panadol measures to attempt, to create an elusive feel good factor. When we look at the major measures announced by the Government, which I will elaborate on, it clearly shows that this Government has been capitalising on *effets d'annonce*. Many of which are just *des mort-nés*, Madam Speaker.

Let me now, Madam Speaker, enlighten this august Assembly on some of the *effets d'annonce* which have remained only on paper following the four previous Budgets; one will

judge for oneself to what extent the promises made in this current Budget 2019-2020 can be trusted.

The first Budget 2015-2016 of this Government boldly propounded that it will be a budget of *rupture* with the past, the second miracle, *Maurice vaste chantier de développements*. With great fanfare, it was announced that several Smart Cities would be constructed. Now, reaching at the end of this Government mandate, where are we with a five promise technopoles, but instead the Metro Express has taken the lead.

SME Bank, which was to assist entrepreneurs, with a promise of Rs10 billion to be put at its disposal over a period of five years. The bank has still not being inaugurated by the Prime Minister, Madam Speaker.

To decongest Port Louis, it was proposed that a ferry service would be made operational between Pointe aux Sables and Port Louis, no ferry to be found *à l'horizon* after four and a half years.

The much touted about Marshall Plan for the fight against poverty has only seen the preparation of a draft report. There have been PNQs in 2017 by the Leader of the Opposition and several PQs; still, we do not understand why major recommendations to assist persons from the pocket of poverty to emerge never materialised, Madam Speaker.

The previous Budget declared a complete ban on advertisement on gambling. Why many new licences have been issued for gambling houses and rendered us as a *nation zougadère*, and the measures and framework by the Gambling Regulatory Authority are still on waiting list showing the lack of consideration for the *ti-dimounes* who can continue ruining themselves in debts for their addiction in gambling. The privatisation of Casino de Maurice was also announced in the 2016-2017 Budget, but still it remains an *effet d'annonce*.

Madam Speaker, the Budget 2016-2017 was a plethora of some more empty promises. The setting up of several industrial parks, including an Agri-Business Park on an area of 100 hectares and two SME industrial parks; where are they, Madam Speaker? A new Skill Development Authority was to be set to more effectively guide the needs of the country in terms of skills requirement.

The Budget 2019-2020 is again repeating the same measure. This shows, Madam Speaker, a Government lacking new strategies. Mauritius was to be opened to the trade of gold as a new industry for Mauritius. The project has since been sent to *calendrier grec*, Madam Speaker. A lot of hope was given that abandoned agricultural lands would be brought

under the purview of an Agricultural Land Management System to bring small planters back to cultivate their abandoned lands. Four years later, the same promises are being rehearsed in different languages and terms.

The Phase I of the Metro Express which was not on the agenda is said to be completed to the tune of 90%. The men on the street have very good reasons to take with a pinch of salt the words of the Government. By the way, the works with regard to the construction of the Victoria Terminal are yet to start, and now hope is being given to villagers that the Metro Express will be extended. Luckily, there are no taxes on selling fake dreams, Madam Speaker. The proposed re-structuring of the State Investment Corporation of the Development Bank of Mauritius, the fusion between the Mauritius Housing Company and the National Housing Development Corporation, the fusion between the National Art Gallery and the Mauritius Museum Council - no fusion, Madam Speaker, they have been diffused.

Coming to the Budget 2017-2018, Madam Speaker, I will fail in my duty if I do not draw attention as to how again the population has been taken for a ride with unrealistic objectives year in year out. It was proposed that draws would be used to better manage cane plantations. The ambition was to cultivate at 500 hectares of abandoned lands during the Fiscal Year 2017/2018.

With regard to the tourism sector, Madam Speaker, it is now being announced that the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority will now develop a new tourism brand to reposition Mauritius as a premium destination. Madam Speaker, should we feel relieved for this measure and say ‘better late than never’? Madam Speaker, the figures speak for themselves, as elaborately analysed by the Leader of the Opposition. And I must say, the finest tourism Minister we have had so far, he left no stone unturned to boost *l'image de destination de marque* for Mauritius...

*(Interruptions)*

...for Mauritius culminating in a record in the growth of tourism arrivals, in enhancing our regulations to boost and improve our business climate and tourism sector. But, Madam Speaker, for how long can we sit without new strategies and keep on cultivating the fruits sown by the predecessor? Without nurturing the trees at some point, they will surely stop bearing the fruit, Madam Speaker. And this is our current situation, and our tourism sector has never been so bad, and our surrounding competitors are avidly capitalising on our latitude of *lâcher prise* Madam Speaker.

It was proposed to build a world-class sports complex prior to the *Jeux des Iles de l'océan Indien*. It is my wish and that of every one, on this side of the House, that it is completed prior to the games, Madam Speaker, because it goes for the pride of Mauritius. Unfortunately, the two administrative towers to house Government offices and proposed to be built for a Budget of Rs3.6 billion have not had the will of the Government to be materialised, which would have saved the Government hundreds of millions of rupees in rent. Announced in the Budget 2017/2018, Madam Speaker, was the Broadcasting and Communications Authority Bill to merge the Independent Broadcasting Authority and the Information and Communication Technology Authority. It would clearly see that the project would have since been abandoned, Madam Speaker. As we are on it, Madam Speaker, has the post of the Executive Director of the ICTA been filled? Total opacity, Madam Speaker, and as other several bodies still without heads, while the Government's mandate is coming to an end. The institution reform for the establishment of the Mauritius National Investment Authority to invest locally and globally the surplus funds of the NPF and NSF, the amendment of the Public Procurement Act to allow to exclude bidders whose performance has shown deficiencies in previous public contracts, but nothing seen, Madam Speaker. What can we say about the *pétards mouillés* of the sale of the Mauritian passport, the major discovery and strategy to boost our economy and open our doors? Just to mention only a few of the measures which have again, Madam Speaker, *effets d'annonce*.

Madam Speaker, if we look at the Budget 2018/2019, we should be fair that there are some social measures which have been implemented; fine for speeding over 25km/h, overprescribed limits increase from Rs2,000 to Rs10,000, income tax brought down for those drawing less than Rs50,000, maternity leave for those with less than a year of service, some 1,500 people aged 75 and above could benefit from an allowance of Rs450. However, Madam Speaker, there were many more measures, apart from social measures, to put Mauritius on the track to become a high income economy and which had remained only on paper. Where is the second economic miracle, as pompously declared, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, if we look at the announced measure for maximising opportunities from the ocean economy. So, to say, the next avenue for our import substitution strategy and for export growth in the medium and long-term lies in our ocean economy. According to Vision 2030, the Government was to give our fishing sector its due and importance. Then, where is the National Ocean Council, the promised transformation of Mauritius into a major regional fishing sector? The concerned Minister has been the few lucky ones who have stayed

in the same chair, the same Ministry since 2014. Unfortunately, the development in the sector, the slackness to tap the economic possibilities of our ocean is too obvious.

The Budget 2018/2019 stipulated that the Government would be setting up of an Ocean Economy Unit with the responsibility of preparing a National Ocean Policy Paper, where are we with the paper after nearly five years, Madam Speaker? It is unfortunate and sad that the Ministry of Ocean Economy is going for the sharks. Madam Speaker, an ocean observatory e-platform was also to be developed to support the marine special planning initiative of Mauritius; a geotechnical study was to be conducted in the extended continental shelf management area of Mascarene region to explore its potentials. Madam Speaker, nothing concrete has been done so far by the concerned Ministry and the Economic Development Board in developing what should be a new and probably the biggest economic pillar that Mauritius could develop to make it a high income economy, and this especially at a time when our traditional sectors have reached maturity and possibly are in declined stages of their life cycles.

Madam Speaker, the port expansion is still being announced or re-announced in the Budget 2019/2020, Budget since the Government Programme 2015/2019 was declared. Madam Speaker, the same applies to the ICT infrastructure of the country. The Government has devoted its energy and resources to violating the right to privacy of Mauritian citizens; so the Safe City project, at a cost of more than Rs15 billion, but nothing concrete has been done to the wealth creating infrastructure of the nation. As per 2018/2019 Budget, Government was to set up a Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Council. The council would, so to say, spearhead and drive artificial intelligence, related activities and advise Government on the way forward. Till to date, nothing, Madam Speaker. Government was also to set up a steering committee...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please!

**Mr Baboo:** Government was also to set up a steering committee under the Prime Minister's Office, comprising representatives of relevant Ministries, to ensure greater coherence in the digitisation of public sector services and the monitoring of its implementation in a timely manner. Madam Speaker, even today, members of the public have to take leave from work to go for registration or re-registration of their vehicles. One has to spend several hours to get a new driving licence in case of loss.

Electronic signature recognition is still a farfetched reality. Staying within the ambit of technology, the Government was to set up a new scholarship scheme for 50 students annually, who wish to specialise in digital technologies, including artificial intelligence and blockchain to build capacity for the sector. Has it been done, Madam Speaker? At the proposed rate of 50 students annually, Mauritius is all set for more brain drain and to miss the artificial intelligence age for the business opportunities, artificial intelligence could have represented for Mauritius, and so essential for Mauritius to become a high-income economy.

Madam Speaker, to secure sustainable development, the government was to make significant investment to protect and enhance our environment. What we still see in 2019-2020 Budget is peanut allocation to counter the effects of climate change and to say that this is one of the biggest challenges facing a small island economy, like Mauritius. And when we hear my good friend, the Minister of Environment's speech, yesterday - well, he is absent. Madam Speaker, it made us say that those who live in glasshouses should not throw stones. Since nothing was moving at the Ministry of Environment, the projects have been grouped and managed under the National Environment Fund under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office. Please carry out a survey with the officers of the Ministry of Social Security, National Security and Environment and Sustainable Development, and you will find the level of frustration, as most of the departments are in *rodage*; be it the Beach Authority, Solid Waste, the different sections and divisions of the department of environment. Well, he has talked a lot about the Leader of the Opposition, or like he has not performed when he was the Minister of Finance, let me remind my good friend, the Minister of Environment is a good orator, Madam Speaker, but when it comes to action, zero. The National Audit Office has clearly flagged that so much rent is being paid to DBM to store compost bins, but no policy has been put in place to distribute yet. The compost bins are being composted, Madam Speaker.

Furthermore, what a Minister, Madam Speaker, we should congratulate him because due to his inactions, there has been so many savings and this has given plenty of *manœuvre* to the hon. Minister of Finance! Madam Speaker, the Government has shown a lot of concern with respect to expenditure management. It was claimed that when things go wrong in public Finance, we must get things right. The Finance and the Audit Act was to be amended for Ministries and Departments to include an implementation plan in their annual report for preventing recurrence of shortcomings reported by the Director of Audit.

Madam Speaker, the recent criticism by the Director of Audit bears testimony of the fake promises. Madam Speaker, this Government has, again, been over-promising and under-

delivering when it comes to public sector debt which was supports to be brought to around 63% of GDP by the end of June 2019. Clearly, if we continue in this trend and, if we may say so, Mauritius can be said to be Greece in the making. Now, having recourse to the reserves of the Bank of Mauritius and going to the extent of amending the law to tap on the saving of several generations of Mauritians, Madam Speaker, as many on this side of the House, and the players of the economic society, we question ourselves of how the Government has come up with these so easy and indecent measures and gone away with over-expenditure and debt. If we look at the 2019-2020 Budget, *per se*, Madam Speaker, I am of the opinion that there are some respectable measures proposed in the Budget. Some of the measures which may be appreciated, are dealt along with caution, that have to be exercised in being overexcited about them. The proposed recruitment of 528 employees in the health sector is a welcome idea, but with by-elections, to be declared by 18 June 2019 and general election looming ahead, this measure may simply not be implemented without being caught in the controversy of bribe electoral. Government should come clear to the population on the issue, Madam Speaker.

Six new MUGA will be built. What will be the criteria for choosing the locations to ensure an equitable sharing of the cake, Madam Speaker? A new renal transplant unit to be set up at the Nehru hospital of Rose Belle is a welcome idea, Madam Speaker.

An increase of pensions by Rs500, payable in January 2020 is appreciated. It has not been a good idea for the spin doctors of the Government to have created over expectations in the psychology of our elders that pensions would have been aligned to a minimum wage level and to have been taken by surprise that ultimately they will be paid only Rs500m and that also as from January 2020.

An increase in monthly carers' allowance, from Rs3,000 to Rs3,500 for some 23,000 bedridden pensioners and the extension of domiciliary visits of doctors from persons aged 25 years or older to persons aged 60 years and above, will go a long way to alleviate the suffering of our elders.

To further advance gender equality, public companies and statutory bodies will be required to have at least one woman on their Board of Directors. Although welcome, I fail to understand this disparity. Why not 30%? Or still, why not 50% women sitting on the Boards, Madam Speaker? While it is appreciated that more is being done to combat drug trafficking, nothing seems to be on the agenda to deal with the *fléau social* that drug consumption is. Madam Speaker, drug consumption is a sickness rather than a crime. There is nothing or not

much in this Budget on the measures that can be adapted to get these victims back to normal life and what can be done to reduce hard drug consumption. We also appreciate that a move is being done to put in place a Land Research and Monitoring Unit to give a ray of light for those cases of dispossession of land, highlighted by the Truth and Justice Commission.

It is only hoped that this will not remain only an electoral announcement, Madam Speaker. Although worthy of appreciation are measures to mitigate floods in flood prone areas, I hope it is just not too much announcement, too late, at the end of this Government's mandate. The question is: why the Government is only now coming out of its lethargy to address such a pressing issue? The Government proposes to reduce provisions from ministerial missions to foreign countries from Rs160 m. to Rs120 m. Unfortunately, not only Ministers but high public officers and their surroundings have abused, depleted our taxpayers' money, Madam Speaker. This august Assembly and the next Government should see to it that it is not only about creating an illusion that this Government has suddenly decided to tackle wastages after the cow has been milked dry.

Madam Speaker, I am sure fishermen will benefit from a bad weather allowance increase from Rs310 to Rs340, but are fishermen *les enfants mal nés* of the Mauritian society? I wonder why only Rs30 increase is found *justifiable* by the Government. If an increase was to be given, it should make sense with the reality on the ground, the climate change effects and not to create a feeling of an abandoned section of the population of Mauritius, for this not easy and very risky task of our fishermen. Madam Speaker, it is true that for gas cylinder, the price has been brought down to Rs210 from Rs240. It is true also that there has been a decrease in the price of petrol from Rs47 to Rs42 and that of diesel from Rs38 to Rs35, but why was this announcement made only in the budget? Had the price monitoring mechanism committee not found that the price of petrol has gone down in the world's market earlier? Or is it just adding up on the list of some *semblant* of feel good factor, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, we also note that in this budget the detailed design for the Rivière des Anguilles Dam will be completed by the end of January 2020 when the National Audit Report 2016/2017 raised the issue about the dam being a priority project which was being initiated to me the problem and the increasing demand of water supply for domestic and irrigation purposes and the tourism sector in the southern and part of western region of Mauritius. The Audit Report further mentioned that at the end of June 2017, an amount of

Rs174.8 m. had already been spent. Now, at the end of this Government's mandate, we are still at the dam design stage.

Madam Speaker, well, one of the main priority and promises on which the Government was elected was to provide water 24/7. It is not 24/7, it is 'sec'. People have to come out on the street to get their voice heard. Clearly, five years later, we are far from the objectives spelt out in the Government programme. Unfortunately, this is what we can expect when they are taking almost five years to repair 300 m of Terre Rouge - Verdun Road while in other countries kilometres of roads have been built on the ocean.

Madam Speaker, *l'enfant très pauvre du budget*, I will say, is by far investment in arts and culture. Since PMSD left...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Baboo:** Since PMSD left the Government, nothing has been achieved at the Ministry of arts and culture...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order! Hon. Baboo, please proceed!

**Mr Baboo:** We opened the access to Le Morne Mountain, both *séga typique* and *geet gawai* were registered by the United Nations as *patrimoine mondial*. We had the safeguard of our national heritage at heart. At this surpass, our religious or culture beliefs showed that PMSD *pas guet figure et religion* by declaring *la case créole*, Al Aqsa Mosque, Pandoram Keswa Mandir just to name a few, as national heritage. While here, no second thoughts were given or the plights of the people heard before the destruction of the historical building. Here, even the slavery museum has remained in the speeches made for the abolition of slavery. All that is mentioned in the budget is that funds are being earmarked to undertake preliminary works for the setting up of the intercontinental slavery Museum, when no budget amount seems to have been earmarked. The only concrete measure is a budget of Rs30 m. which has been earmarked for phase 2 of the renovation of the Port Louis theatre.

On a final note, Madam Speaker, I have to conclude that the budget estimates for 2019/2020 are quite worrying. While total expenditure is estimated at Rs138.6 billion, only Rs17 billion is earmarked for capital expenditure. I am afraid that we may be creating a nation of consumers with too little on investment for the future. Sound macroeconomics

would be in favour of capital expenditure to a minimum of 25% of the total budget. We are far from the minimum that should have gone into capital expenditure, which will generate sustainable wealth in the future. The overall budget deficit for 2019/2020 will be Rs16.9 billion, which will add to the already unsustainably high debt of the country. This Government is creating a country that lives beyond its means.

Madam Speaker, this budget is packaged as embracing our brighter future together. Should the Government not make an introspection and tell the truth to the population? Madam Speaker, with all the unrealised measures of the past budget, can this Government be trusted? We are a nation which likes to stand on its own feet to face the future. What we have witnessed in this budget, is we are being taken for a ride through a series of palliative solutions to our pains. A budget snatched off our will to dream for a sustainable and prosperous future for our future generations. When hearing some of the Members on the other side since yesterday, I am sure many in this House and the public have got a feeling of hearing a kind of farewell speeches or an overtly appeal to flattery towards the Prime Minister, maybe in the lure or illusion for a ministerial chair. Luckily for Mauritius, the men on the street are not so duped.

Madam Speaker, I cannot end, my intervention today without saying a few words on the petty politics against the PMSD we heard yesterday from hon. Leopold.

*(Interruptions)*

Maybe, he should be reminded that development in Rodrigues has been possible due to Sir Gaëtan Duval...

*(Interruptions)*

I was not born, he was not born too. He was the one to give Rodriguans voting rights in August 1967, to give Rodrigues its port, its airport, roads, schools, electricity, administrative facility, hotels, and the Crève Coeur Hospital.

Merci Gaëtan, Monsieur Léopold!

He had nearly 10 *cités*/housing units built in Rodrigues and which are still known as “*cités* Gaëtan” by the grateful people of Rodrigues.

*(Interruptions)*

Wait! Wait, there are more, the best one is now. Madam Speaker, even the “*cité*” where hon. Leopold is residing, which is ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please!

*(Interruptions)*

Hon. François!

*(Interruptions)*

Hon. François! I am addressing myself to you, you will have the opportunity to intervene, then you rebuke what he said.

**Mr Baboo:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, he will have his turn. I repeat it again, even the *Cité* where hon. Leopold is residing, which is “*Cité Cascade Jean Louis*” was built by Sir Gaëtan Duval. To tell you what a shameful act and lack of gratitude by the hon. Second Member of Rodrigues towards Sir Gaëtan Duval’s contribution, by coming to this august Assembly and criticizing, ignorantly and wickedly, Sir Gaëtan Duval and the PMSD!

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** I suspend the sitting for one hour!

*At 9.01 p.m., the sitting was suspended.*

*On resuming at 10.08 p.m. with Mr Deputy Speaker in the Chair.*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Gungah!

(10.08 p.m.)

**The Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection (Mr A. Gungah):**

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Let me first of all, associate myself with Members of this side of the House, and coincidentally, I see only Members on this side of the House for the time being - my good friend hon. Ezra Jhuboo is here. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to associate myself with all Members of this side of the House to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development for the measures announced in the Appropriation Bill 2019/2020, entitled ‘Embracing a Brighter Future Together as a Nation’.

This document, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is not only a budget document, but it also defines the contours of a more equitable and prosperous country, built on the sustained work which we have started four years ago. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, each time he has assumed

office as Minister of Finance, hon. Pravind Jugnauth has always come up with bold measures to spearhead unparalleled socio-economic development for the well-being of the population.

M. le président, ce budget porte l'empreinte d'un homme qui a une vision, qui est à l'écoute et qui donne l'importance voulue à nos citoyens de toutes les couches sociales, particulièrement ceux vivant dans les conditions les plus difficiles, et c'est une grande marque de différence entre le Premier ministre actuel et celui de l'ancien régime qui s'occupait de son Rolex et de sa Rolls-Royce. L'honorable Pravind Jugnauth démontre tout son humanisme dans sa gestion du pays sans mettre en péril l'économie. Il a présenté, encore une fois, un budget très responsable qui vient cloquer au pilori l'opposition. Certains membres de l'opposition parlementaire aussi bien qu'extra-parlementaire ont même des migraines après la présentation du budget. Là, je pense particulièrement à quelqu'un qui n'est pas dans le Parlement, qui est le leader d'un parti politique et qui a décrit le budget comme un 'budget panadol'. Je pense qu'il devrait prendre lui-même une forte dose de panadol.

Madam Speaker, with this Budget speech, the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance also marks continuity in his philosophy of striking the right balance between social and economic development. Ce budget est en ligne avec la vision de faire de l'île Maurice un *High Income Economy* et va redonner définitivement un nouveau dynamisme au secteur clé de l'économie, notamment l'agriculture, le tourisme et le secteur manufacturier.

Ce budget, M. le président, ne peut être pris en isolation des autres budgets présentés par l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth. Les quatre derniers exercices budgétaires ont grandement corrigé les gaffes économiques de l'ancien régime.

M. le président, nous avons abattu un travail colossal pour remettre l'économie sur les rails et redonner la confiance à la population. Cela a été rendu possible par un *leadership* fort avec une discipline et un engagement ferme de faire avancer le pays. Toutefois, nous devons nous rappeler que sous l'ère Ramgoolam, la majorité de la population devenait plus pauvre. La pauvreté absolue était une triste réalité, alors que certains remplissaient leur coffre à ras bord.

M. le président, the House will surely recall how before December 2014, some people have ruled our country with the following motto, and that motto is: "Let us serve ourselves first, the rest we will see later". Such an approach in governing is poles apart from our style of governing. Unlike the previous regime, we govern for the people in transparency and by making judicious use of our financial resources.

M. le président, il y avait une politique sous l'ancien régime où tout était permis, il y avait une politique de ‘dominère’. Par exemple, l'imposition de la taxe sur les intérêts, le fameux *NRPT* qu'on avait nommé ‘Navin Ramgoolam Property Tax’, la décision de *rass manzer dans la bouss nou zenfan*, de ne plus donner le pain dans les écoles, l'abolition des subventions sur les frais des examens du *SC* et du *HSC*, et d'autres. Aussi, la population n'est pas prête à oublier les nombreux scandales de l'ancien régime. Je citerai volontiers quelques-uns au cas où certains membres de l'opposition parlementaire ont peut-être oublié. La route Verdun/Terre Rouge, le *hedging* à la *STC* qui a coûté l'État R 5 milliards, le *hedging* à *Air Mauritius* qui nous a coûté presque R 10 milliards. Le Bagatelle Dam, un trou sans fond, les fameux coffres-forts, des universités ‘marron’, dont mon ami a expliqué quel que juste avant moi. La fameuse *Airway Coffee*, ainsi de suite.

(*Interruptions*)

Le code du coffre n'était pas disponible à tout le monde.

M. le président, nous savons tous dans quel contexte les élections de 2014 ont eu lieu. L'équation 40 plus 40 est égale à 80, annoncée avec arrogance, a été rejetée par notre peuple intelligent. Il y a eu un vote massif, une adhésion pour l'Alliance Lepep et un rejet d'une certaine culture politique, typique du parti travailliste, où les actes de la politique «*fer peur* » étaient souvent à l'agenda.

Il ne faut pas oublier de cette fin d'année de 2012 quand l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth avait été interpellé, suite à ces dénonciations d'un cas d'attouchement sur une adolescente. Hélas, sous l'ancien régime, certains hauts gradés étaient au service d'un soi-disant roi lion.

Et on se rappelle aussi du traitement infligé aux planteurs de Riche Terre en février 2010, quand l'ancien Premier ministre avait alors déclaré aux grévistes qui luttaient pour leurs droits : “*to pa coné si to pa manzé to pou crevé*”. C'était ainsi qu'on traitait le peuple, M. le président. Et c'est surprenant. Ces mêmes personnes viennent faire notre bilan économique et social et demandent un autre mandat au peuple.

De 2005 à 2014, notre pays a connu les pires moments au niveau de la justice sociale. On a beaucoup entendu parler de «*démocratisation de l'économie*» de 2005 à 2010, un slogan qui n'a été utilisé que pour faire croire. A la fin, cette démocratisation n'a été utilisée que pour enrichir un clan travailliste. Et ces derniers temps, ils parlent de rupture. Je pense qu'il est temps, M. le président, que ces gens-là fassent une rupture avec la politique. Ce sera mieux pour le pays.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that during my intervention on the Budget speech last year, I highlighted how the measures introduced by the Minister of Finance such as the minimum wage, the negative income tax, the increase in social aid and the decrease in the price of basic commodities contributed significantly to improve the living conditions of our citizens.

M. le président, la classe moyenne aussi n'avait pas été oubliée. On se rappellera de la réduction de l'*income tax* de 15% à 10% pour les personnes ayant des revenus ne dépassant pas Rs650,000 annuellement. Avec cette mesure, ces personnes ont pu économiser environ Rs18,000 par an. Quel soulagement!

In every Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has increased the income tax threshold in order to allow more middle-income families to benefit from a higher purchasing power. And this year he has gone further with measures announced for land acquisition and housing facilities for the middle-income groups.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when we came to power in December 2014, some people said that we were some sort of a Government by default and that we would end up with another general election sooner or later. And I still remember someone saying "*Elections derrière la porte*".

*(Interruptions)*

*Tous les mois! Quatre bananés ine fini pe encore atane memo. Mais pe continuer dire.*

But time has proved that they were wrong. This is simply because we are not just a chapter in political history. On the contrary, make no mistake, we are here to govern the country for years to come. People voted for us in 2014 on the basis of our Programme to make their lives better. They had full confidence in us and we have not let them down. It is a fact that the population is on our side.

Et je peux témoigner, M. le président. J'ai eu l'occasion de rencontrer beaucoup de personnes, même dans ma circonscription, et je peux dire que tout le monde que j'ai rencontré m'ont demandé de féliciter le Premier ministre et Vice-Premier ministre pour ce budget.

And this budget has again proved that the Government is a *fédérateur*. Feedback from the civil society is positive and it is a clear indication that the population is fully satisfied with the Government.

What I can say is that we are the right Government at the right time. In less than 60 months, we have accomplished things that no one would have ever thought of.

*(Interruptions)*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, I can see that you are all in a good mood, but do not disturb the orator.

**Mr Gungah:** It is good that you listen because it is all your doings, in the past, what I just explained.

*(Interruptions)*

Par exemple, la pension de vieillesse. Nous avions pris un engagement avec le peuple pendant les élections. Et nous avons respecté notre engagement.

Je ne vais pas répéter ce que mon bon ami, l'honorable Mahen Seeruttun, a dit concernant la pension de vieillesse quand on l'avait annoncé en 2014. Comment le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam était venu pour dire - même il avait le culot de dire que Sir Anerood mentait, quelqu'un comme Sir Anerood! Mais aujourd'hui c'est une réalité et nous faisons cela parce que nous reconnaissons la contribution de nos ainés dans le développement de notre pays. Nous savons aussi que nombreux vivaient dans des situations précaires il y a quelques années.

And that's why we came up with the proposal of Rs5,000 for old age pension. And since 2014, this Government has constantly increased the allocation. And in January 2020, that is in some six months' time, that sum will be increased to Rs6,700. I won't go in the calculation of my good friend, hon. Mahen Seeruttun, but I think he has been very logical in his explanation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister's objective is to give a decent living to the most vulnerable groups of our society. I can say something, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that when the old age pension was increased to Rs5,000, I had the opportunity to meet many senior citizens and many of them told me that it is the first time after their retirement that they would be able to buy a gift for their grandson or granddaughter. You imagine, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, how these people had been living before that!

A second example is the measures taken for employees at the bottom of the ladder. This Government made a first step towards a better standard of living for employees with the introduction of the negative income tax and the national minimum wage.

And we are going further in consolidating and improving workers' rights and conditions.

Encore une fois, M. le président, nous respectons notre engagement pris pendant la campagne électorale.

All these measures are indications of the trademark of this Government. We work for the people, compared to the previous regime, which worked for a selected few among themselves.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I shall fail in my duty if before commenting on the measures announced in the Budget 2019/2020, I do not say a few words on the famous or infamous Betamax saga.

Un des plus gros scandales de notre histoire. Un contrat de R 10 milliards.

M. le président, la saga Betamax restera dans les mémoires politiques, judiciaires aussi bien que populaires. Cette allocation de contrat a été décrite par la Cour Suprême comme suit et je cite –

*“The enforcement of an illegal contract of such magnitude, in flagrant and concrete breach of public procurement legislation enacted to secure the protection of good governance of public funds, would violate the fundamental legal order of Mauritius. Such a violation breaks through the ceiling of the high threshold which may be imposed by any restrictive notion of public policy.”*

Effrayant, M. le président. L'allocation du contrat à la firme Betamax Ltd a été le symbole honteux et typique de cette culture politique où tout est permis quand le Parti Travailliste et Navin Ramgoolam sont au pouvoir. R 10 milliards pour un contrat illégal comme cela a été cité dans le récent jugement de la Cour Suprême de Maurice.

Let me now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, give some facts and figures on that contract.

D'abord, la STC devait payer Betamax une somme de 17,6 millions de dollars annuellement. En plus, le contrat contenait aussi un « *Escalation Rate* ». Un *escalation rate*, c'est-à-dire, un taux qui augmentait par 1% annuellement pendant les cinq premières années; ensuite, de 1.5% annuellement pour les prochains cinq années et de 2% annuellement pour les cinq dernières années. De ce fait, M. le président, même si le prix du fret baissait sur le cours mondial, la STC était dans l'obligation de payer le cout du fret comme défini dans le contrat en béton.

(*Interruptions*)

Oui, c'est ça, *day light robbery*. Notre très cher ami Arvin parlait de *day light robbery*.

M. le président, je dois dire que certaines clauses du contrat liant la STC à Betamax sont des plus surprenantes et les faits restent les faits. Vous imaginez, la STC a dû payer R 220 millions - R 220 millions ça nous fait rappeler quelque chose, mais en tous cas la STC a dû payer R 220 millions à Betamax comme *dead freight*. C'est quoi le *dead freight* c'est-à-dire, l'espace vide. Donc, STC a payé ce montant, R 220 millions, pour un volume de produits qui n'a jamais été transporté.

(*Interruptions*)

Produit fantôme. R 220 millions. Il faut se poser la question.

Permettez-moi, M. le président, de citer un autre extrait du jugement de la Cour Suprême concernant l'*escalation rate* et le *dead freight*. Ce n'est pas moi qui dis cela, c'est le jugement, et je cite –

*“As a result of that contract, Betamax was expected to receive USD17.6 million for the first year. Betamax was also guaranteed payment at the above-mentioned fixed freight rate –*

- (a) for 100% of the freight capacity of its vessel, regardless of whether the vessel carried a full load;*
- (b) for an uninterrupted period of 15 years as from September 2010; and*
- (c) together with the pre-set escalating rates which meant that Betamax would be shielded from any downward fluctuations in freight rates.”*

*Betamax would be shielded...*

(*Interruptions*)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Rutnah, please do not interrupt the speaker.

**Mr Gungah:** Et M. le président, pour la période de mai 2011, date de l'entrée en opération du navire Red Eagle, à janvier 2015, la STC a payé 125,244,128 dollars, soit environ R 4,3 milliards à Betamax, beaucoup de zéros. Le peuple se pose la question : si le contrat est jugé comme étant illégal, qui va nous rembourser les R 4,3 milliards ?

M. le président, les chiffres parlent d'eux-mêmes. De mai 2011, comme j'ai dit, date de l'entrée en opération de Red Eagle, à janvier 2015, le pétrolier a transporté 4,067,703 métriques tonnes de produits pétroliers pour un montant de 125,244,128 dollars, et un simple calcul nous donne un coût moyen de 30.79 dollars la métrique tonne.

Depuis que nous avons cessé d'avoir recours à Red Eagle, soit de février 2015 à mai 2019, la STC a importé 4,607,893 métriques tonnes de produits pétroliers et payé 101,056,647 dollars. Ce qui fait un prix moyen de 21.93 dollars la métrique tonne pour le transport des carburants.

Une différence moyenne de 8.86 dollar la métrique tonne. Donc, si nous avions continué à avoir recours à Betamax, nous aurions dépensé R 1,4 milliard en plus. Heureusement, M. le président, que le jugement, comme je l'ai décrit, a été un *coulou ki fine perce beton*.

This is how public funds were being dilapidated Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Ils ont le culot de défendre bec et ongles Betamax après le jugement de la Cour Suprême, et je me posais la question : est-ce que Navin Ramgoolam était devenu l'agent de Betamax? *La honte lor zot...*

Par contre, cela démontre toute la sagesse de ce gouvernement pour avoir pris la décision de mettre un terme au contrat entre la STC et Betamax.

And by so doing, the country has immensely benefitted financially.

M. le président, permettez-moi maintenant d'aborder le sujet du prix des produits pétroliers.

Les conflits géopolitiques sont hors de notre contrôle. Le prix et la production du pétrole connaissent plus d'instabilité, surtout après l'imposition de l'embargo total par les Américains sur les exportations de l'Iran au début de mai. De plus, l'OPEP, c'est-à-dire l'Organisation des pays exportateurs de pétrole, a maintenu une limite sur leur production. Fin juin, une décision sera prise pour réviser ou maintenir cette limite de production. D'autre part, le Venezuela, l'un des plus gros producteurs de pétrole, est affecté par une crise politique et humanitaire depuis quelques mois.

Maurice est directement affecté par cette situation conflictuelle mondiale. Une baisse de production ou une hausse de prix dans le monde a un effet domino sur le prix à la pompe.

Toutefois, en tant que gouvernement responsable, nous essayons de minimiser l'impact sur la population et l'économie. Un grand pas a été fait en ce sens lors du budget 2018/19. On se souvient l'année dernière, le gouvernement avait réduit le montant collecté sur le litre d'essence et du diesel, précisément de l'item des subventions pour le riz, le gaz et la farine, une décision qui avait été très bien accueillie par la population sauf par certains membres de l'opposition.

Le prix d'un litre de l'essence avait connu une baisse de R 2.35 et celui du diesel de R 1.90. Et pendant l'année financière 2018-2019, M. le président, le prix du pétrole sur le cours mondial a connu plusieurs hausses. En 2018, la *STC* a injecté une somme de R 350 millions dans le *Price Stabilisation Account* pour éviter une hausse de prix à la pompe. Je dois souligner qu'à Maurice, le prix de l'essence et du diesel n'a connu aucune hausse depuis mai 2018. Et on sait ce qui se passe dans le monde avec l'augmentation du prix des produits pétroliers sur le marché mondial.

Au contraire, M. le président, en janvier 2019, suite aux circonstances favorables sur le marché mondial, le prix à la pompe a été revu à la baisse. Je peux dire que nous nous sommes assurés que le fond du *PSA* (*Price Stabilisation Account*) soit utilisé judicieusement afin de maintenir le prix. Cette année, nous allons encore plus loin. La décision de baisser *l'excise duty* sur le carburant démontre que le Premier ministre et ministre des Finances agit dans l'intérêt des consommateurs. Cette mesure se traduit par une baisse de R 3 sur le litre de l'essence et de R 3 également sur le litre de diesel. Bravo et merci à l'honorable Premier ministre, au nom de la population.

M. le président, je dois faire ressortir que la décision de revoir à la baisse *l'excise duty* sur le carburant dans ce budget se traduira par un manque à gagner d'au moins R 1,3 milliard annuellement à l'État. C'est-à-dire l'État a donné à la population, R 1,3 milliard avec cette mesure.

M. le président, le leader d'un parti politique, qui n'a même pas été élu, à la mémoire courte. Il s'est permis de critiquer cette baisse en affirmant qu'elle n'est pas suffisante. Il a été au pouvoir pendant neuf ans, mais il n'a jamais pris une telle décision courageuse. On connaît l'épisode où le prix des produits pétroliers flambait sur le marché mondial. Mais il y a toujours des solutions pour pouvoir soulager le peuple, mais il n'a rien fait quand il était au pouvoir. En tout cas, comme je l'ai dit, la population reconnaît que le Premier ministre et ministre des Finances, fait tout pour le soulager.

M. le président, je parlerai maintenant d'une autre mesure phare du budget, le gaz ménager. Le gaz ménager est une commodité essentielle, utilisée par la quasi-totalité de la population. Depuis que nous sommes au gouvernement, à trois reprises, nous avons revu à la baisse le prix du gaz ménager. Après une baisse significative de R 60 pour une bobonne de 12 kg en 2016, suivie d'une autre baisse de R 30 en 2018, voilà que cette année, on a une troisième baisse de R 30. Ce qui fait une baisse totale de R 120 en 3 ans. J'ai entendu les membres de l'opposition, leur commentaire sur cette baisse et je vais leur répondre. Et pour les répondre, permettez-moi, M. le Président, de faire un petit historique du prix du gaz à usage domestique et ma réplique serait dans l'historique que je vais faire.

En effet, M. le président, c'est en 2003 que la *STC* a commencé à importer du gaz ménager. À ce moment, le prix de la bobonne de 12 kg était fixé à R 224. En février 2004, et on connaît tous, le *MSM* était au pouvoir, le prix a connu une baisse de R10, sortant de R 224 à R 214.

Maintenant, laissez-moi vous dire comment le prix a évolué sous le règne du Parti travailliste. En novembre 2005, c'est-à-dire cinq mois après que l'Alliance dite sociale fut au pouvoir, le prix du gaz connaissait une hausse de R 36 et passe de R 214 à R 250 et cela était suivi par une deuxième hausse de R 25 en janvier 2006 et d'une troisième en juillet 2006 quand le prix passe de R 275 à R 300. Et d'une quatrième trois mois plus tard, de R 300 à R 315. Ce qui nous fait une hausse de R 101 de novembre 2005 à décembre 2008. Ce qui est plus intéressant arrive parce qu'il y a eu une baisse de R 15, le 22 décembre 2008, mais je dois dire que c'était reculer pour mieux sauter, car le grand coup de massue arriva en mars 2012 quand le prix d'une bobonne du gaz de 12 kg passa de R 300 à R 330. Et c'est ça que nous avons hérité en 2014.

En résumé, durant le régime travailliste de juillet 2005 à décembre 2014, le prix du gaz a connu cinq hausses. Il y avait le leader de l'Opposition qui était à un certain moment...

*(Interruptions)*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order Please!

**Mr Gungah:** Cinq hausses passant de R 214 à R 330. Une hausse totale de R 116 ! Et c'était cela leur politique de *putting people first*.

*(Interruptions)*

**The Deputy Speaker:** No crosstalk, please!

**Mr Gungah:** Alors que depuis que nous sommes au gouvernement, en quatre ans et demi, le prix du gaz ménager a connu une baisse de R 120.

(*Interruptions*)

De R 330, ce que nous avions hérité à R 210, même inférieur à celui de 2002, il y a 17 ans.

(*Interruptions*)

Tout cela a été rendu possible, on doit dire, grâce au *leadership* éclairé du Premier ministre. Ce que vous auriez pu faire, mais vous n'avez pas fait. Désormais, il n'y a plus de TVA sur le prix du gaz ménager. Encore une fois, au nom de la population, je remercie le Premier ministre.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the purchasing power. *Nous avions pris un engagement pour améliorer le pouvoir d'achat de nos concitoyens lors de notre campagne électorale en 2014.* And I must say that we have been walking the talk. We all know that VAT has the effect of increasing the prices of goods and services, which has a direct incidence on the purchasing power of consumers.

Let me briefly state a few of the measures that we have taken concerning VAT removal and how we have increased the purchasing power of the population –

First, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, removal of VAT on breakfast cereals;

Second, reduction of the annual percentage rate from 19% to 12% in respect of goods purchase on credit under the Hire Purchase and Credit Sale Act;

Third, removal of penalty due to late payment on hire purchase and credit sales;

Fourth, *baisse de prix de la farine*;

Fifth, reclassification of bread from exempt to zero rated for VAT purposes in order to maintain the price of bread;

Sixth, *contrôle des prix sur le* blood glucose strips qui a amené une baisse de R 40 à R 130 par boîte;

Seventh, removal of VAT on sanitary pads in June 2017;

Eighth, removal of customs duties and clothing items such as suits, jackets, trousers, dresses, shirts, T-shirts, baby diapers and wipes, etc.

The list goes on, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. And this year, we have removed VAT on vermicelli, tukmaria, linseed, sagou, appalam, mustard seed and sesame seed.

Ces mesures, M. le président, démontrent clairement la volonté du gouvernement pour améliorer la qualité de la vie de la population.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to an important project that has been realised in the petroleum sector, that is, the Mer Rouge Oil Storage Terminal project, also known as the 'MOST Project'.

In line with the vision of the Government to ensure continuity in the supply of essential products, we have through the State Trading Corporation and the Oil Majors embarked on a project for the construction of a storage tank for Mogas and Gas Oil. The Mer Rouge Oil Storage Terminal was completed in mid-2018 and with the additional storage tanks, the stock level for Mogas has increased from around 3 to 30 days and that of Gas Oil from 10 to 27 days until the arrival of an ex-consignment. The additional stock of petroleum product would now act as a buffer stock, and this will give us a comfort in case of unpredictable delay in the arrival of consignments, just like we had on 01 December 2017, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when an embargo was put on one of our tankers at the Mangalore Port.

*(Interruptions)*

It was an anti-patriotic act, especially at this period of the year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the bunkering sector as well is witnessing an unprecedented growth under this Government.

The total volume of bunker fuel sales has more than doubled from 284,282 metric tonnes in 2015 to reach 582,000 metric tonnes in 2018. What is interesting is that this Budget provides for several more measures which would allow us to move closer to our objective of one million metric tonnes of bunker fuel by the year 2023-2024.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to business facilitation. Over the last four years, this Government has introduced bold and innovative measures to boost economic buoyancy for sustainable growth. In this regard, the Business Facilitation Act has been constantly reviewed to further improve the ease of doing business. It is not by chance that today we are ranked first by the World Bank in Africa and 20<sup>th</sup> worldwide as a centre of excellence for business. We are not resting on our laurels. We have the ambition to move

higher on the ladder, and this is why we are coming up with a new Business Facilitation Bill to transform Mauritius as a hassle free business destination.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since coming to power, this Government has embarked on a journey to reshape the landscape of this country.

Le pays est devenu un vaste chantier de développement avec de multiples projets d'infrastructures. Nous sommes en train de bâtir l'Île Maurice de demain. Des investissements massifs ont déjà été engagés dans la construction du Metro Express, des nouvelles routes, des complexes sportifs, des centres de loisirs, des centres de santé, d'autoponts, entre autres. Mais nous n'allons pas nous arrêter là. Ainsi, une somme colossale de R 20 milliards ont été alloués dans ce budget pour d'autres projets d'infrastructures, au port, à l'aéroport et à l'avancement des travaux liés au Metro Express.

Il est intéressant de souligner que depuis 2015, plus de 2,500 *community-based projects* ont été réalisés par les collectivités locales et la *NDU*. Je dois dire que dans ma circonscription, plusieurs projets ont été complétés, entre autres, le *multi-purpose hall* à Petit Raffray, les terrains de foot synthétique à Fond du Sac, l'asphaltage des routes et la construction des drains à Camp Carol, Grand'Baie, Péreybère. D'autres projets sont en cours. Je citerai, par exemple, la construction d'un nouveau terrain de foot à Poudre d'Or Village, la construction des drains à Fond du Sac.

*(Interruptions)*

Morcellement Swan également, de l'eau. La rénovation du *Fish Landing Station* à Grand Gaube. Ce budget fait provision de R 1.2 milliard pour continuer ce type de développement qui consiste, entre autres, l'aménagement de gymnase, de terrain de foot, terrain de jeu, *multi-purpose hall* à travers l'île, y compris un centre de santé à Vale, à Grand'Baie, à Cap Malheureux, un centre communautaire à Réunion Maurel, Petit Raffray...

*(Interruptions)*

Merci, Madame la vice-première ministre.

...aussi bien qu'un marché à Fond du Sac. Concernant le Gooldands Market Fair and Traffic Centre, suite à l'appel d'offres, l'exercice d'évaluation est en cours, et je suis confiant que les travaux pourront commencer incessamment. Ce qui est le plus intéressant, dans quelques mois le village de Gooldands sera doté d'un Multi User Games Area (MUGA).

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the manufacturing sector, a sector which continues to be one of the main pillars of our economic development. The sector is of vital importance providing employment to 97,000 people and this represents around 25% of the active workforce.

This Government is committed to maintaining social stability in the country by ensuring that the interests of all workers are safeguarded. In this Budget, Government has gone in the extra mile by proposing the establishment of a Wage Guarantee Fund under a new Workers' Rights Bill to guarantee compensation of up to 52,000 for job losses in case of insolvency. And henceforth, workers will not have to go to the streets to obtain their due for years of hard work.

Moreover, as promised, this Government will soon be coming forward with another landmark achievement in the interests of workers with the establishment of a Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund. This Fund will ensure that the worker will benefit from all the contribution made by his different employers until his retirement.

Here, I wish to especially thank the Deputy Prime Minister because he has chaired many meetings as regards to the Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund and finally, we came to the conclusion that we need to come forward with this fund because we don't want workers in the private sector to be treated unequally compared to those in the public sector. We need that all the workers in this country feel secure when they retire, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Furthermore, to ensure that workers are not unduly penalised in case of sudden closures of enterprises, a Technical Committee has been set up to examine the priority of claims in case of insolvency.

Much has been said in this House regarding the closures of Palmar Ltd and Future Textiles Ltd and the reasons for their failures. My good friend hon. Mahen Seeruttun mentioned how somebody had *profité du Stimulus Package à deux reprises. La première fois il avait remboursé. Oui, mais la deuxième fois on a vu des véhicules flambants neufs dans la cour de l'entreprise.*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, yesterday the Leader of the Opposition stated that 5000 workers lost their jobs since we are in Government. I would like, first of all, to point out that in a reply that I made to a PQ on 21 May this year, I informed the House that, since January 2015, there have been 3411 job losses, not 5000, and out of that 1534 were from Palmar Ltd and Future Textile Ltd and we know the reasons why these two factories closed down.

This Government cannot be held responsible when we know very well that such a situation has resulted from poor management. I must say that we will not tolerate any type of business malpractices which put at stake the livelihood of families. Enquiries are being carried out in case of Future Textiles Ltd and this will undoubtedly show us the way forward on this matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to seize this opportunity to assure all operators in the textile and clothing sector that this Government stands firmly by their side, and let me reiterate that the textile and clothing sector is not in a bad situation or not facing any crisis. It is true that the sector remains vulnerable due to external factors beyond our control, but what is important is that we have always withstood the test of time thanks to the determination and perseverance of our operators who have developed a great sense of resilience. In this Budget, we have come up with new measures that will further enhance the competitiveness of the sector. I will dwell on them later.

Let me also emphasise that the textile and clothing sector has not witnessed any major setback during the past few years as said by some Members of the Opposition. Export of textile and clothing has witnessed a positive growth of 0.6% in 2018 compared to 2017, and for the year 2019, we are forecasting a growth rate of 1%.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on the whole, the manufacturing sector has performed relatively well during the past four years with an average annual growth rate of 0.8 %, despite the hostile global trade environment.

As regards the export-oriented sector, there are good signs as domestic exports grew by 1.9 % in 2018 as compared to 2017 representing a net gain of around Rs1 billion.

At sectoral level, fish and fish preparations, medical devices, watches and clocks and optical goods have witnessed positive export growth rate. In particular, export of fish and fish preparations which posted an increase of 11% in 2018 as compared to 2015, whilst medical devices recorded an impressive surge of 35 % in exports for the same period.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government has pursued a systematic policy of export market consolidation, diversification and expansion. The EDB, as our national export promotion agency, has elaborated a well-defined strategy to boost exports of locally manufactured goods. Besides having a strong foothold in the United Kingdom, France and the USA, we are now making significant progress in other markets such as Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Netherlands, amongst others.

Government fully recognises the need to rebalance exports in our drive for greater market resilience. In this perspective, the African continent is poised to becoming the “promising land” for our exporters and, already, we have made in-depth market penetration with exports totalling Rs8.7 billion in 2018 representing 20% of overall exports. I sincerely believe that we are moving in the right direction, and our objective is to double exports to Africa by the year 2030.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on the investment front, we have successfully attracted a large number of foreign investors in manufacturing activities in the field of automobile spare parts, pharmaceutical products, optical fibre, assembly of TV sets, optical glasses, flexible packaging and metal recycling. I must say that FDI in the sector grew considerably to reach Rs4.2 billion over the last four years. Similarly, total investment in the manufacturing sector in terms of industrial space, plant and machinery climbed to Rs4.5 billion in 2018 as compared to Rs3.7 billion in 2015.

All these achievements testify that we have brilliantly realigned ourselves on new premises geared towards reinforcement of our manufacturing sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me again emphasise that Government will leave no stone unturned to assist our manufacturing enterprises. In this Budget, we have introduced new support measures and revamped existing ones. The main areas of intervention are –

First, the creation of ISP Ltd with a view to supporting enterprises to modernise the production processes. This will be a game changer for the enterprises, as it will help them to adopt latest technologies to enhance their competitiveness.

Second, the extension of the ‘Speed to market scheme’, which now will be known as ‘Support for Trade Promotion and Marketing Scheme’, will give a new impetus to our exports to the European market. The possibility of extending the scheme to the US market will also be explored.

Third, the creation of a Mid-Market Enterprise Financing Scheme to cater for the needs of enterprises with an annual turnover between Rs50 m. and Rs250 m. This category of enterprises will now benefit from concessionary interest rate on new loans from commercial banks, export factoring services in USD and Euro, LEMS facilities at 4.25% and access to the SME Equity Fund.

And fourth, the extension of the Innovation Box Regime to existing companies which will enable them to benefit from an 8-year income tax holiday on innovation-driven activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with all these measures, Government has gone the extra mile by putting in place a well-crafted architectural framework to sustain development of the manufacturing sector and we are confident that the sector will overcome the challenges and become more resilient.

At the same time, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are many institutions operating under the aegis of my Ministry which are providing support to the manufacturing sector. I would like here to highlight a landmark achievement in the field of accreditation with the international recognition obtained by MAURITAS.

This milestone accomplishment has put Mauritius on the global map of accreditation. Manufacturing enterprises, amongst others, are the ultimate beneficiaries since conformity and test certificates delivered by MAURITAS accredited laboratories and certification bodies are now internationally acceptable.

M. le président, en tant que ministre de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de la Protection des Consommateurs, je voudrais ici remercier le Premier ministre pour son soutien, son encouragement et ses conseils pour donner un nouveau dynamisme au secteur manufacturier, pour les mesures prises afin de mieux protéger les consommateurs, et pour gérer les dossiers complexes comme celui du secteur pétrolier.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, today from the man-made challenges, like economic war, Brexit, etc, we have to cope also with unprecedented and unpredictable environmental challenges. This calls for a radical change in mindset. It is laudable that our Prime Minister has also included measures in the forthcoming Budget to mitigate climate change effects. For some years now, we have been witnessing flash floods in various parts of the island. Earlier this year, our brothers and sisters in Rodrigues had to face two severe cyclones. Our neighbours, across the Mozambique Channel, were hit by two consecutive cyclones. Cyclone Idai tore through Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe this March, destroying roads, houses, schools, bridges and farmland. Just five weeks later, on 25 April, Mozambique was also hit by cyclone Kenneth. This is a brutal wake-up call, more particularly, for Island States. The dangers arising out of climate change are omnipresent.

M. le président, le Premier ministre a fait un grand pas en avant dans notre politique pour la protection de l'environnement. Le programme des trois 'R', *the 3 'Rs'*: *Reduction, Re-Use and Recycling of generated wastes*, pose des piliers solides afin que tout un chacun puisse prendre conscience et participer dans la protection de l'environnement.

M. le président, Nous avons le devoir de léguer une meilleure Ile Maurice à nos enfants et à nos petits-enfants. Les mesures annoncées pour le nettoyage et le recyclage des déchets donneront un nouveau dynamisme dans notre programme à mieux protéger notre île.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are actively preparing for the Indian Ocean Island Games which will be held in July.

Cet évènement va consolider notre vivre-ensemble et l'unité nationale. Et la coïncidence a voulu que les Jeux des Iles se tiennent pour la troisième fois à Maurice alors que le MSM est au pouvoir. Les deux derniers Jeux des Iles de l'Océan Indien ont été un franc succès pour la nation mauricienne et je suis sûr qu'une fois de plus, nos athlètes et toute la nation mauricienne feront honneur au quadricolore.

Momentum is also gathering, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to welcome His Holiness Pope François in September. And further, the countdown has started for the operation of the first Metro Express as from September this year. All these milestones will definitely be impregnated in our History and remembered by the future generations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the outset, we had the mission to give our country a brighter future together. To our people, we promised more happiness and prosperity. We are achieving our goals and there is no time to pause or stop.

M. le président, le gouvernement est actuellement à sa cinquième année. Nous avons relevé d'importants défis. Nous étions appelés à gérer un héritage lourd et catastrophique. Outre la situation économique difficile à notre prise de pouvoir, nous avions aussi à faire face à un autre défi, la prolifération de la drogue. Le combat sans relâche que mène le Premier ministre et Sir Anerood Jugnauth contre le trafic de drogue est salutaire. Le nombre de saisies et le démantèlement des réseaux et des trafiquants de stupéfiants démontrent tout le travail assidu du gouvernement dans ce combat.

M. le président, le mandat de ce gouvernement restera gravé dans l'histoire de notre pays. Outre notre bilan économique et social qui est éloquent, nous avons eu aussi plusieurs jugements favorables des Cours de Justice au niveau national et international cette année.

Après le jugement de la Cour suprême de Maurice dans le cas de *Betamax v STC*, le *Privy Council* a donné gain de cause à l'État dans l'affaire *CT Power* cette semaine. Cela a démontré, une nouvelle fois que le gouvernement a pris des décisions très sages dans l'intérêt du pays.

Dans notre combat pour la décolonisation complète de notre territoire, le 25 février dernier, la Cour de Justice Internationale à la Haye a émis un avis consultatif en notre faveur. Et il y a environ un mois, les pays membres des Nations-Unies ont voté majoritairement pour une complète décolonisation de notre territoire.

Une victoire historique, M. le président.

Et je salue très bas le ministre Mentor et le Premier ministre qui contre vents et marées, n'ont jamais abdiqué.

Et ce 25 février 2019, M. le président, restera aussi gravé dans l'histoire politique de notre pays. Le *Privy Council* avait rejeté l'appel du DPP dans l'affaire MedPoint. C'était le point final à une affaire qui a secoué notre histoire politique.

Nombreux adversaires voulaient voir tomber politiquement Pravind Jugnauth, car on savait tous qu'il était l'adversaire direct de Navin Ramgoolam. C'était de la tyrannie de leur part.

Je me rappelle aussi des humiliations et des commentaires désobligeants de certains qui voulaient saper son moral. L'histoire retiendra que c'est une des raisons de la cassure du *Remake*. Et conséquemment, il y a eu l'alliance contre-nature qui était supposément imbattable mathématiquement...

*(Interruptions)*

*Zot ti pe dire naturel mais li contre nature!*

Et ensuite, on a assisté à la chute politique, oh, combien ironique, de Navin Ramgoolam.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Pravind Jugnauth never gave up and he will never walk alone. We will always stand united by him.

On savait qu'un jour la vérité triompherait et la vérité a triomphé ce 25 février 2019. On se souvient, ici même, dans le Parlement, quand le leader du MSM était dans l'Opposition, quand il se mettait debout pour parler, il y avait des gens qui montraient les mains croisées *mett menote dan lamain*. Mais n'en déplaise à nos adversaires politiques, M. le président, la vérité c'est que Pravind Jaugnauth a été prouvé innocent par la plus grande Cour de justice et l'autre vérité, c'est que nous formerons le prochain gouvernement avec Pravind Jugnauth comme Premier ministre.

Merci, M. le président.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Soodhun!

(11.08 pm)

**Mr S. Soodhun (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix):** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like to thank God Almighty for, once again, giving me the opportunity to address this Assembly.

I have listened to all my friends here and the other side. Sometime, we forget that we are human beings. We don't have enemy in our life. It's true. *Ce sont des adversaires, mais ce n'est pas nos ennemis.* When we are going to realise, when we are going to leave this world, then the people will realise. In fact, it is our duty to help the country and I am the good example, in the life of a Member of Parliament. I can say that now, I am at my sixth mandate, representing my constituency, my people. I had a good experience. I started in 1976. First time, I got the chance with a party of Marxist Leninist, it was something else.

So, I would like just to mention, we have talked a lot, phase in and out of the Government and Opposition. But we have the tendency to forget that all the hon. Members have the responsibility towards our country, and we should not as if forget that we are Mauritians and we have the responsibility of tomorrow.

I can tell you this mandate has been full of various kind of experiences. I can tell you when I was asked to step down, I decided with my family to leave the country. Finally, I have to thank the Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. He is a man - maybe people in the House, will take time to understand, but outside, I know him very well. He is someone very sincere, believes in God - this is very important - and believes in human beings, and also believe in hard working people. If today, I am here, I can tell you because of Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, the Prime Minister. He deserves all our support. I will give you one - in 2017, I went for the pilgrimage. I was in Mecca. When I finished my pilgrimage, the Prime Minister called me and he said: 'Showkut, where are you?' I said: 'I'm in Mecca and I've just performed my Umrah'.

Once again, we had the problem of the Betamax and really we were going to have a catastrophic situation. There was a stopping order against Betamax with all the vessels, with all the products in India. Then, the hon. Prime Minister talked to me and he said: 'Showkut, do what you can'. My good friend, hon. Dr. Boolell just mentioned about Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. From Mecca, I gave him a call. I said; 'I need your help. Please, help my

country'. And he told me immediately: 'Come immediately to Riyadh'. I took the flight, I went to Riyadh. I met the Highness, Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, Minister of Petroleum, Minister of Finance and I said: 'This is the problem that we have'. And I explained that how difficulties we would get, in 10 days, we were not going to have neither electricity nor any petroleum product; no car, no hospital, nothing. In 10 days it would have been a catastrophic situation. Can you imagine?

But, sincerely, I can say, even I got a phone call from one – I am not going to go into details – 'Forget. Don't do anything. *Pousse to vengeance.*' I said: 'Never'. He never deserved it. People say: 'Okay, you are a slave'; not a slave, because he deserved all our support. He is sincere. From my granddaughter, my grandchildren, they are Mauritians. Maybe, we don't know, tomorrow we are here or not, but we have a generation and he is the only one for the future of this country. He is Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. He is the only one. And I immediately said: Yes, don't worry'. I negotiated and I got two vessels. I don't know if today, it would have been paid or not. I don't know. So, it shows that when I listened to all these people, because we have some responsibility and this is what we have to work for the country, not for yourself. Don't think always for yourself. Think about your country. It is our responsibility when we go in front of electorate and we just ask them to vote us. Why vote for us? For what purpose? To help the country. Don't forget one day, you will be going to be judged by a God, what we have done, what we are doing. This is very important.

So, it was mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition that we have 5,000 unemployed workers. It's completely rubbish. We employ more than 46,000 foreigners. Can you imagine, 46,000 foreigners working in this country and 5,000 Mauritians are unemployed? Who will accept it? Who will believe it? So, we have to react, we have to think what we are doing. What the Government is doing? So, this is very important and I can tell you if we are working hard because the Prime Minister works 7/7 days. From Monday to Saturday, he is in his office, working hard. He is supported. Due to his contact, it may be his morality, what I am saying is something moral, but it is the truth. If we don't have contact, we don't have good relation with neighbouring countries - India, China, why not Middle East? In a difficult situation, Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Dubai are helping us and in return, they don't ask anything. They have never asked anything. They have never claimed anything because due to his support. I always say I'm not going to blame the former Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Beebejaun or Dr. Kasenally, because they have never received the support of the Prime Minister. He has always supported me. What I have done for this country, I am

proud myself as a MP. Not many people have been able to do it and if I did it, I have been successful due to his support. If he did not give his support, I would have done nothing. Nothing! So, this is very important to know, my dear hon. Members. I have been a trade unionist; I have been in prison even when Sir Anerood Jugnauth was the Prime Minister.

*(Interruptions)*

Maybe we forget what he has done as Prime Minister. When we are talking about the portable retirement...

*(Interruptions)*

Maybe people do not realise. There are people who are working for 30 years; they changed a lot of employers and once they reach the age of 60, they may have worked with one employer for one year, and today with the law which exists, they are going to get the retirement on the one-year. I myself came forward with this in 2003 when I was Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations. Unfortunately, they did not accept. The Deputy Prime Minister, if I am not mistaken, was the Chairman of the National Remuneration Board; he knows very well. At that time, he was the Chairman – a very dynamic one. The Minister of Industry and Commerce, hon. Gungah has presided a lot of meetings due to his experience. And today, do you know how many workers are concerned? More than 400,000 workers in this country! This is very important. We should know exactly, we are working for whom? For the poor people! This is very important to know and this is why the Prime Minister, the Government, has taken the bold decision. Every Member here, when they receive their mandate, what do they hear, *fer moi gagn enn travail dan government, balier balier*.

Today, it is completely different. There is now an equivalence when on working in the public sector, in local government and private sector. People have a minimum wage. Maybe you have not realised the minimum wage. I, as a trade unionist in my time, I can tell you that. People were drawing a salary of Rs1,500 in this country. From Rs1,500, today it is nearly Rs9,000. They have got a minimum wage. Is this not helping the poor people? Believe me, *il ne faut pas faire de la demagogie, il faut être réaliste*. You should not only criticise, you should encourage also; forget who you are. We have to encourage the Government to do its job so as to help the people.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I feel sad when I listened to people, and I said, okay, I want to contribute some of my experience. And as all my friends, I would like to thank the hon. Prime Minister. We don't have in many countries a Prime Minister who is also the Minister

of Finance. Only in very few countries and it is not an easy task, believe me. So, we have to congratulate the Prime Minister. He has drafted a budget aimed at easing, improving overall positively, influencing the lives of the fellow citizens. This is very important.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a lot have been said about the drop in the price of cooking gas. May be, some don't realise, one cylinder I think was Rs240, and now it is Rs210. One packet of cigarettes, Dunhill, I think, is Rs240. Yes, a packet is Rs240.

*(Interruptions)*

*On a soulagé beaucoup de gens pauvres.* Today, people use gas while in the past some were using *charbon, di bois, la paille cane*. People were also saying, Rs500 for the pensioners! They forget that the Labour Government - Rama Sithanen, even they did not manage that compensation, they gave less than the compensation, one time. *Et zott ena le culot* just now to say that Rs500 is nothing. You have to just think about 2014, how much was it? Rs3,600! Today it is Rs6,710. More than 160,000 people today are concerned. This is very important for the senior citizens, those who have reached their sixtieth. There are some children who are waiting for the end of the month to get this money to take care of their father and mother. One important thing which you have not realised, the lowering of the eligibility from 75 years to 60 years! Who has done it in the past? We claim to be socialist; we claim to be in the Parti travailliste d'être plus socialiste, but did you have the courage to do that? You were in power, what have you done? I will always say that the Prime Minister deserves our congratulations and God will bless him definitely because he is always working for the poor, the vulnerable people; this is very important.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the interim allocation of Rs1,000! I don't know why people react like this on hearing about the Rs1,000 to be given as from 01 January 2020, pending the release of the Pay Research Bureau Report. Do you know how many workers are involved? More than 100,000 workers! *Ce sont des électeurs*, they know what to do when the time will come.

*(Interruptions)*

*B zott pou fou dehor l'opposition, l'opposition pu ale batt lamok* if you are going to react like this. Let me tell you something, Rs1.5 billion will be invested over the next three years to replace defective pipes. I have to thank the Deputy Prime Minister. What have not been said in this House? But who had the guts and the courage to come and change the pipes dating back decades? You can go and see in my constituency. Today, there is no problem of water in my

constituency. Thank you, Mr Deputy Prime Minister! Believe me, I am very sincere. This budget is catering for the various health needs of all Mauritians and I have insisted, and I have done my best to have the support of the Prime Minister to go to Abu Dhabi to find out the fund for an eye hospital. Do you know why? Let me give you the secret today, even the Prime Minister was not aware. I did my best because this country needs a new eye hospital...

*(Interruptions)*

The Opposition *pas truv pas assez kler, bizin met zott laba! Premier pu zott.* You will be the first patients to go in this hospital...

*(Interruptions)*

This is very important. Thank you, Prime Minister, you have a good idea just to bring all this opposition, and open their eyes with all the new equipment you are going to bring so that they can see exactly the progress on this.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will not be too long. The measures that have been proposed through the strong belief of this Government in the value of cooperation and creating opportunities while developing a strong foundation for a sustainable development; that will make an impact. Despite what my good friend from the Opposition have been describing as failure, it is an undeniable fact that an overall feel good factor is witnessed within the Mauritian population. Go and have meetings - *pu bizin sover sa.* Go in my constituency and see how Messrs Patrick Assirvaden and Said Hossen had to run away. Ask my brothers Eddy and Benydin, they will tell you. What are they going to tell the people? What are they proposing to this population? Nothing ! *Que des mensonges!* Unfortunately, it's amazing and most surprising how some people have become wise after the event, and yet, despite having had so many opportunities, time and again, to do things in the past. You were in the Government, Labour Party! How long they were in Government? They got this opportunity, the chance to do that. Why did they not do it? Only working for the *coffre*, only working for the *valise de comprimés?* Only for that? Only working for *cotomili?* I would tell you facts. There was one guy from Camp Diable who came to see me; his name is Said, he is a planter of *cotomili.* Do you know what the guy has done? He knows that we are working for Hajj, he came to see me and said that he wanted to contribute. As I said, he is a planter of *cotomili*, he is going to contribute more than Rs1 m. to pay the tickets for the poor for Hajj. He did it, believe me!

*(Interruptions)*

*B cotomili reporter!* You know, with *cotomili*, they have opened five shops in Italy! This is the *cotomili* story of Nandanee Soornack...

(*Interruptions*)

Sorry, the former Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, for the *satini cotomili*. It is very unfortunate for the Opposition that no amount of mockery and distortion of facts, be it here, or in media, because today media always show the camouflage, the reality that people are actually satisfied, if not more. You go outside, you ask the people. We don't need to go through the media or whatever. They are rubbish! Some, not all!

(*Interruptions*)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Let's have some silence in the House!

**Mr Soodhun:** It is sad that for some Members of the Opposition, these measures are seen like confetti, panadol. I am really very shocked when hon. Baboo said panadol. I don't know what he meant by panadol. Maybe he used panadol too much. But for a lot of people, it makes a significant impact on their lives. I can say more than 600,000 people are very happy with this measure.

(*Interruptions*)

More than that! *Et to sir nou p gagn pouvoir!* I can assure you, the next Prime Minister is Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. He is the next Prime Minister. I can challenge anybody. *Mo pas aster lottery moi*, I can challenge anybody, come forward. Ramgoolam is already inside the *coffre*. No problem! But there is always between the two. Let me now say how it will impact on the day life of our fellowmen. Here, I would like to thank the hon. Prime Minister for the measures announced for my Constituency No. 15, Vacoas-Phoenix, namely, a new Police station, which it deserves, a new health centre in Phoenix and sewage water. Once again, thank you. You know, there is a mess in Highlands, we have New York there. So, I have to thank the Deputy Prime Minister. It is due to his support that today we can say that nearly 80% of our sewage problems are solved in our constituency. Thank you, Deputy Prime Minister.

Let me tell you something very important. Since the last budget, we work as a team - my colleagues the PPS, hon. Boissézon, even hon. Dr. Sorefan. I am here for a sixth mandate. All hon. Members must be in their Constituencies like *un poisson dans l'eau*. This is how you must be. I give you some examples now. Since the last budget, the construction of

new road within the township of Vacoas and Phoenix has been to the tune of approximately Rs60 m. An amount of Rs9 m. has been spent for the resurfacing of road within the township; a mini soccer pitch has been set up at Promenade Père Laval. Everybody can go and see. There is also a child playground and an outdoor gym project financed by the NDU. Other mini soccer pitches have been set up at Parisot, Mesnil, Quinze Cantons, La Caverne. Works will soon start at Carreau Laliane and Morcellement Pinewood for additional ones. 600 new street lanterns have been fixed within one year.

This is very important. I thank the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for this. The NDU has provided Rs113 m. for the construction of drains as well as for upgrading of bridges and retaining walls at Mesnil, St Paul, Valentina, Cinq Arpents,...

*(Interruptions)*

I will give you the examples because you will say that I am bluffing. Camp Fouquereaux, Hermitage, Highlands and Clairfonds. We can say now that we are also taking care of not only those who are alive, but also those who leave this world. Incinerators are currently being set up at St. Paul, Highlands and Solferino to the tune of Rs24 m. and works are expected to be completed by September 2020. Here, it is very important for me to put on record the efforts of the NDU, my Colleague, Minister Eddy Boissézon, also the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix and all Ministries and officers who have collaborated to bring the development. I'll just mention that it is through a concerted team effort that we may achieve success. It is a teamwork, which is very important and we work in the interest of our constituency first and for the country.

There is one very serious matter that I wish to say a few words on. It is that of the problem of drugs. The Prime Minister and the Rt. hon. Minister Mentor have been relentless in their fight against this problem. I wish here to commend the excellent work done by various departments of the Police, the Customs and the other agencies which are doing their utmost best to address this matter. We all know that drug abuse is, in most cases, destroying lives of those using them. Recently, I, myself, witnessed the bodyguard of hon. Dayal, the incident happened due to the drugs problem. It was really very, very tough that a young boy killed his father because of drugs. The Prime Minister and Government are doing their utmost best to see how they can solve the problem, especially among the youth.

I most welcome the decision to extend the Drug Abuse Prevention Programme to all secondary schools, which is very important. The future of Mauritius is in the hands of our

youth and we need to protect them, listen to their aspirations and address their needs, support them and create an environment where the youth can innovate and contribute to the welfare of the community.

I am pleased to note, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that this Budget is not only building for now but also for the future and beyond. This Budget is aiming to build the youth capacity, improve their skills and unlock their talents. This will establish the need within the youth to aspire progress for our nation while empowering them to address challenges and issues of their generation and beyond.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, after the Rt. hon. Sir Anerood Jugnauth, we have a young and dynamic Prime Minister who is sincere, loyal to the country, who is doing all that is necessary to build a bright sustainable future for Mauritius and, more importantly, to ease the lives of Mauritians. We can see every day that the population will, as I say *Insha Allah*, support the Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Jugnauth. There is no doubt that the population will support him.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is an undeniable fact that, since a while, there is a slowdown in the global economy, coupled with the increase in trade dispute and geopolitical tensions. Despite the challenges in the global economy, the Government has guided Mauritius towards a growth rate as mentioned, 3.8% in 2018, and the Prime Minister has mentioned in the Budget that it is estimated to rise further to 3.9% in 2019. My good friend, the hon. Minister of Agro-Industry has explained that it will be 4.1% in 2020. I congratulate him.

I am not an expert in economy. I believe that it is a strong signal that Mauritius is on the right path of revenue diversification and the resilience of the Mauritian economy. This confidence is also recognised beyond our shores as new investors have shown their keen interest to develop projects in Mauritius. People say that there is development only in the public sector, in infrastructure, and so on. I can tell you not to worry. We are working hard and we have people even from the Middle East. The people want to come and invest in Mauritius. It is not a secret. I can say my good friend, hon. Anil Gayan, went to Saudi Arabia twice. Today, we can say that there is more than 400 per cent increase in tourists from Saudi Arabia to Mauritius. So, we have the possibility and we are going to have people coming and investing. We are going to give all the facilities. Don't worry! We are working. The Prime Minister is working very hard.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, I am not going to be too long because it is nearly midnight. Before concluding, I would like to bring certain clarifications. First, concerning Betamax, I would like to really clear that. I was the Minister of Industry and Commerce. On 24 May 2011, hon. Uteem put a Parliamentary Question. I have to thank him very much. The Betamax contract was not one in which I had participated as Minister. It is very clear. It was in 2009 that the contract was negotiated and concluded. I am not in the circumstances bound by the principles of Cabinet responsibility. I was not a Minister at that time and I find this attempt to blame me, dishonest and disgusting, I have always been faithful and acted with utmost integrity in the interest of my country.

Let me quote from Hansard. My good friend, hon. Uteem, asked me the question on 24.05.2011. He asked the Minister of Industry and Commerce whether, in regard to the contract with Betamax Ltd. for the transport of petroleum products, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to if the Corporation has –

- “(a) received any technical advice concerning the suitability of the vessel proposed by Betamax Ltd., and
- (b) sought and obtained legal advice from the State Law Office before the signature of the contract.”

So, I answered they received a report from Bent Nielsen –

“(...) Bent Nielsen, a Director of ST Shipping, which was at that time the supplier of freight services to STC for Black Oils.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some of the weaknesses identified by ST Shipping in that opinion concerned, *inter alia* –

- (1) the capacity of the vessel;
- (2) the number of grades that could be segregated on the vessel;
- (3) the high risk of contamination of products, (...)"

I did mention.

- “(4) the risk of loading some products at high temperature in tanks adjacent to those containing Mogas, Jet and Gasoil.”

*(Interruptions)*

Listen to me.

“(...) despite all the care taken so far, I feel it is my duty to inform the House that the risk of contamination of products, as mentioned by Bent Nielsen, remains a matter of concern.”

I also go further. I said –

“It does present a number of risks.”

You asked further if there was any advice from the State Law Office. I replied –

“In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the advice of the SLO was that the agreement is legally in order.”

We should not forget that, at that time, I was the Minister. I initiated the forensic report. Do you remember? I got problems with the then Prime Minister and this is the time where *la cassure a commencé. C'est cela.* I got problems - I am not going to say what did happen in the Cabinet. Members were aware about it, but we have to know the truth.

*(Interruptions)*

Hon. Boolell was a mere messenger there.

*(Interruptions)*

This is the reality and this is the fact. This is why I thank my Friend Uteem who had asked the question and I enlightened the House. Now, let us pray for this country, for its stability, for the progress, for the unity and I am hundred per cent sure next election, you will not be here, we will be here...

*(Interruptions)*

I am very sad to say. They are parties...

*(Interruptions)*

We don't know what to do. We have a clean record. *Vraiment, nous avons travaillé dur pendant cinq ans*, a clean record and we have a clean *bilan* and I thank the Deputy Prime Minister, Leader of the ML and the ML. We have walked together and the result today is ML/MSM and this will be the history of Mauritius.

Not for the five years, but the next 25 years, he will be the Minister of this country and MSM will go far.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo!

**The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands, Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo):** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

**Mr Roopun rose and seconded.**

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Debate adjourned accordingly.*

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Monday 17 June 2019 at 11.30 a.m.

**Mr Roopun rose and seconded.**

*Question put and agreed to.*

**The Deputy Speaker:** The House stands adjourned. Hon. Uteem!

#### **MATTERS RAISED**

(00.02 a.m.)

#### **VOLCY POUNGET STREET, PORT LOUIS – DOUBLE-YELLOW LINE**

**Mr R. Uteem (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I would like to raise an issue addressed to the hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure, and it concerns the lane along Volcy Pougnet Street, which is la rue Madame, which is next to the Jeetoo hospital.

There is a lane just next to the bridge and there are houses next to the lane. On this lane, there was a double-yellow line and people were not allowed to park their cars, but with time, the double yellow line has faded away and now, especially people going to the hospital tend to park that lane and this is causing considerable inconvenience for inhabitants who are finding it not only difficult to travel along the lane, but even to go into or come out of their house.

So, I'll make an appeal to the hon. Minister to see to it that double yellow lines are repainted and, if possible, one or more 'No Parking' sign posts be affixed along the lane in Volcy Pougnet street.

Thank you.

**The Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr N. Bodha):** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will certainly look into the matter.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Baloomoody!

- (a) **BRABANT STREET – OVERHEAD FOOTBRIDGE – PEDESTRIANS**
- (b) **ALLÉE BRILLANT STREET – RED & BLUE FLASHING LIGHTS**

**Mr V. Baloomoody (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I will raise two issues to the hon. Minister which I raised more than a year ago and his reply last time when I told him that he will look into the matter.

A year after, he is still looking into the matter. There has been no change.

First, with regard to the overhead footbridge crossing at Brabant street near Bike World. When you go towards Grand River North West, on this side, you have Odette Ernest Street. There is that overhead footbridge which is covered, very dirty and this is a danger more than a health assistance to pedestrians.

Women are being attacked, drug users are using it because it is so all covered and I maintain very dirty. One cannot see through. So, women are being attacked and they are not using it. It is a danger to the pedestrians at Brabant Street.

The cover was supposed to be removed. They want it to be open so that there will not be any incident.

I hope that the hon. Minister will look into the matter.

The second one which I am going to raise is even more serious. It is in his constituency. On the way to Allée Brillant, after River Walk, there is a house on the left which has two lights red and blue flashing. They keep flashing, and I understand that the owner is very close to the Government. Anyway, close to the Government or not, public interest is more important. Recently, ten days ago, there has been an accident because if the hon. Minister drives there tonight, he will see that the Police have put some yellow; these

lights are very confusing. They keep flashing red and blue, there are two poles, and we do not know what is their purpose.

I am asking again the hon. Minister to look into the matter.

These are two serious issues. We don't want a woman to be raped or to be attacked on that overhead foot bridge, and we don't want another accident to occur again on Allée Brilliant Street.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**The Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr N. Bodha):** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as a long time has gone and no action has been taken, I will see to it.

I have talked to the CP as regards to security on the footbridge but, removing the roof, that is another danger. There is rain and whatever.

*(Interruptions)*

So, we will have to consider this.

*(Interruptions)*

As regards to the lights there, I again talked to the Police. The question is: who should take action? Now, it is not on the road.

*(Interruptions)*

I know, but it is not on the road. So, the lights are on the premises.

*(Interruptions)*

The hon. Member has to understand that the roads fall under the authority of the RDA, but I have made a request. So, we will have to see now who should take action because the lights are on the premises.

*(Interruptions)*

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member cannot argue with the hon. Minister, let him take his action. Hon. Quirin!

(00.07 a.m.)

#### **MR A.S. – MBC – TV LICENCE FEE**

**Mr F. Quirin (Fourth Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière):** Merci M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au Premier ministre et concerne la MBC. Donc, j'ai été contacté récemment par un résident de l'Impasse Bougainville à Beau-Bassin par rapport à sa requête faite à la *MBC* depuis mai 2018, afin qu'il soit exempté de la redevance TV de R 150 payable, comme nous le savons tous, à la *CEB* en même temps que la consommation d'électricité. Dans une lettre adressée au directeur de la MBC en date du 23 mai 2018, Monsieur A.S. précise qu'il ne possède pas de téléviseur, et cela, depuis plus de deux ans, et que malgré tout, il continue à payer la redevance de R 150 qui lui est facturée chaque mois et donc en novembre 2018...

*(Interruptions)*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Continue with what you are saying, hon. Member!

**Mr Quirin:** En novembre 2018, il a reçu la visite des préposés de la MBC. J'ai une copie de la lettre que le monsieur en question a adressée à la MBC et effectivement les préposés de la MBC sont venus à sa résidence pour un constat, mais depuis aucune nouvelle et la réclamation de la licence TV de R 150 figure toujours sur sa dernière facture qu'il a reçue récemment en date du 13 juin de cette année, bien sûr quelques jours de cela. Donc, je pense qu'il y a très probablement d'autres personnes qui sont dans le même cas que Monsieur A.S. et je demande au Premier ministre de bien vouloir s'enquérir de la question, que ce soit pour Monsieur A.S. ou d'autres personnes qui sont dans le même cas. Je dépose une copie de cette lettre à l'attention du Premier ministre.

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will look into the matter and certainly see. Normally, there should be a process in order for people in such situation to seek, at least, the stand of the MBC whether to charge them or not. It is through a system whereby they pay it through their CEB Bill. So, I will look into that.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Abbas Mamode!

(00.09 a.m.)

#### **ROUTE DES PAMPLEMOUSSES, ROUTE MILITAIRE & BERNARDIN DE SAINT PIERRE STREET – CROSSROADS**

**Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):** Merci, M. le président. Je m'adresse à l'honorable Ministre Bodha et ça concerne deux *crossroads*, un à la Route Militaire et Route des Pamplemousses et l'autre Route des Pamplemousses et Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. *Many times more than one or two MPs have raised this matter in this House, and you know* c'est un calvaire, un cauchemar pour les automobilistes le matin et l'après-midi. Essayez de voir une solution ou un autre accès. Je compte sur votre indulgence.

**The Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr N. Bodha):** M. le président, on a évoqué la question avec la police, on a essayé de mettre la police pendant les heures de pointe. Je veux revenir, essayer de trouver une solution, parce que l'installation des robots n'est pas une solution. Donc, je veux revenir avec le commissaire de police pour voir si on peut avoir la présence des policiers durant les heures de pointe.

*At 00.11 a.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Monday 17 June 2019 at 11.30 a.m.*