



EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE 2025

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GCSK, FRCP

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Hon. Ashok Kumar Subron

Minister of Social Integration, Social
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Economic Planning

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MAURITIUS

Eighth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 17 of 2025

Sitting of Wednesday 18 June 2025

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

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

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

- A. **Prime Minister's Office**
Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications
Ministry of Finance
Ministry for Rodrigues and Outer Islands

The Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Lotto Fund for the year ended 30 June 2024.

- B. **Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science and Research**

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the University of Technology, Mauritius for the year ended 30 June 2021.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2025-2026 – BASIC RETIREMENT PENSION – AGE ELIGIBILITY – CONSULTATION & SOCIAL IMPACT STUDY

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the increase in the age eligibility to benefit from the Basic Retirement Pension as announced in the Budget Speech 2025-2026, he will state if –

- (a) he was consulted in relation thereto, and
- (b) any study has been carried out to assess the social impact thereof.

Mr Subron: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thanks to all Members of the National Assembly.

I stand today as a minister, Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity. I am part of the Cabinet of Ministers and I am part of the *Alliance du Changement* which was constituted to get rid of the previous government and to bring change in this country.

The question today of the PNQ relates to very important issues, very important social and historical issues. I wish to inform the House that the Retirement Pension in Mauritius has always meant more than just a monthly income. It is a cornerstone of our social contract and reflects our society's recognition of lifelong work and promises dignity to our elders in their final years.

To understand the depth of the issue, we must begin by looking back at the history of pension in Mauritius, starting from the pre-independence era and the evolution of times. During the colonial period, especially in times of slavery, I need...

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, may I?

Madam Speaker: One moment! Yes!

Mr Lesjongard: My question is very straightforward.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Don't imitate your friend!

Mr Lesjongard: My question is very straightforward. We don't need to go back to the colonial era to reply to this question.

Madam Speaker: But that's the way he feels that he must put a context. I can't stop him.

Mr Lesjongard: Then I take it if he is too long, you will give me enough time to put my questions, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: We will give you time. I will give you time.

An hon. Member: Ça commence!

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, when you go back in history, don't stretch too much!

Mr Subron: Yes. Because I noticed that when I was talking on the slavery and indentured period that I was interrupted.

During these times there were no such pensions, the only form of support available was a few years afterward after the abolition of indentured labour was the Comarmond Fund, a rudimentary form of assistance, not a right.

The idea of pensions – it must be remembered – first entered public discourse following the social unrest of sugar estate workers in 1930s.

In 1979, the Hooper Report formally titled 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Unrest on Sugar Estates in Mauritius' recommended the introduction of old age pension, sickness insurance and support for widows and orphans. Importantly, it stated that these protections must apply to all citizens.

The first steps were taken in the 1940s when the colonial governor appointed a committee to study the feasibility of old age pension. In 1941, the committee recommended a contributory scheme, however, it wasn't until 1950 that the government introduced non-contributory pensions as a temporary measure. Payment began in September of that year and were backdated to July. The age to qualify for this pension was 65 years at that time.

Progressively, the scheme evolved in 1953; the qualifying age was lowered to 60 for women and the pension increased by Rs20.

By 1957, the means test was abolished and the pension rose to Rs22.

In 1948, – this is the most important date – the government introduced the universal pension for people aged 60 and above. At that time, there were 25,783 pensioners.

Madam Speaker, the system continued to be matured. In 1965, the pension age was fixed at 60 for both men and women.

The journey towards a structured social security system had gained momentum in 1958, as I mentioned, when a ministerial committee, chaired by the late hon. Guy Rozemont, produced the first report proposing a modern system.

A key turning point came in 1976: the National Pension Bill, was presented by the then Minister of Social Security, hon. Mr K. Teeroovengadum. He credited the vision of Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, the trade unions of the time and the MMM of the time, who had spoken about the necessity of a pension system.

After 1976, major improvement followed. In 1977, coverage reached 98% of the elderly population. In 1978, a contributory system for private sector employees was launched alongside the continued non-contributory scheme. In 1983, a tiered system of pensions' amount was introduced for people aged 90 and over; an increase for different layers of our senior citizens. In 1995, a new tier was created for those over 100 years, our centenaries.

From 1996, pensions' amount was revised. By 2000, concerns emerged as the number of registered pensioners surpassed the estimated number of elderly citizens, raising questions of potential fraud. In 2001, an actuarial reform analysis confirmed that the system was financially sustainable up to 2040, assuming continuous growth.

Madam Speaker, I recall 2008, a pivotal year in my personal journey. As a trade unionist, I participated in difficult negotiations which led to two major changes at the time – raising the legal retirement age at 65 while retaining the old age pension at 60. It was hard; a hard battle; one that I fought with esteemed trade unionists like Rashid Imrith and the Trade Union Movement for this battle.

I wish to highlight that 2020 – and I speak to all hon. Members of the Assembly and all the people and workers of Mauritius – was a critical year for the current debate that we are having now.

In 2020, the former Minister of Finance, decided to stop the payment of contribution to the National Pension Fund via the National Pension Scheme. And, this decision was based on

erroneous findings, and the fact I enquired – before this PNQ, which I knew would come – with the officials of my Ministry. They were then informed that they were called by the then Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance asked officers of my Ministry to pay Rs4,500 – the electoral promises of the then government in 2019. They wanted to pay the Rs4,500 from a contributory pension system. My officials refused to pay the contribution of Rs4,500.

Madam Speaker: The pension!

Mr Subron: Yes, the pension, because pensions are payable based on pensions points of contributors. This is when my officials were nearly kicked out of the meeting and the Minister decided to eliminate the National Pension Scheme. This is the treason! This is the rupture with history! This is what happened. And as a matter of fact, the contribution accrued to the fund was stopped in September 2020. The fund value of NPF was at the time Rs138 billion. Every year, the fund pays around Rs4.5 billion in form of contributory pension. After almost five years, the total amount payable was around Rs20 billion.

It is to be noted that as at date, the fund value of the National Pension Fund is Rs160 billion. Imagine, what the size would have been if they did not stop the contribution at the time! This was a crime against the working people.

Instead, after dismantling the National Pension Scheme, they set up the CSG Benefits. The CSG was a contribution paid by employees, less than Rs50,000, 1.5 % of their salaries and above Rs50,000, it was 3 %. The CSG was introduced while dismantling the National Pension Scheme for the government to honour their electoral promise because since that time, our elderly had been weaponised as an electoral tool and electoral weapon.

Today, I am a policymaker. The current government is proposing to raise the pension eligibility to 65. This is a serious and challenging decision, not taken lightly. It is driven by the reality of fiscal constraints and demographic changes. I am a leftist; I will die a leftist, but objective facts have to be taken into consideration.

We are now living in a country where life expectancy is increasing. On average, men and women live around 74 years of expectancy. The extended longevity means longer retirement periods and heavier burdens on the pension system.

I must stress when in 1958, the universal pension system, now called BRP, was introduced, the life expectancy was in-between 55-58 at the time. One can reason and reflect maybe of a cynical aspect of these figures. Unfortunately, the debate around the pension has

become distorted by those with vested interest. These groups seek to manipulate public narratives.

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker....

Madam Speaker: I will give you time.

Mr Subron: Let us return to the facts.

Madam Speaker: Minister, one moment.

Mr Subron: Yes please, Madam.

Madam Speaker: If need be, I will give you more time, but perhaps at one point, you can come to the reply and some of what you are saying is probably already in your reply, but please reply – you know little (a) and little (b).

You have almost finished what you had to say?

Mr Subron: I will come to today's paragraph now.

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Mr Subron: I think it is very important to understand the social transfers in Mauritius because pensions are part of the social transfers. Social transfers are very important and have represented, were it not the existence of social transfers, poverty would have risen to 36.4 % in Mauritius.

I think the important point is that we cannot ignore the dramatic shift in 2020 when the NPS was abolished and the CSG was introduced. At the same time when the NPF was abolished, there were two other important issues which were brought in economic policies.

First, the richest people have benefitted from exogenous contributions. Lack of a contributions, I would say! Rs21 billion of Wage Assistance Scheme paid by the money of the people had been written off by the ex-Minister of Finance. This is in parallel to the dismantlement of the National Pension Scheme.

Secondly, as stated by many of my colleagues, there was the introduction of the MIC to the rate of Rs80 billion which was meant to support big corporates and directed to cronies living around the previous regime.

By repealing the NPF, the link between work contribution and benefit was severed. Pension became a politically vulnerable benefit rather than a guaranteed right. Our government acknowledged the fragility of the current system. Despite intense pressure and criticisms, we are looking to build a system that is equitable, sustainable and rooted in shared responsibility between employers and workers. We believe that benefits must be predictable and fair. We have listened. We also know how deeply Mauritians value their pensions, not only as a financial support, but as a symbol to their contribution to the nation. It is a promise that no one will be left behind.

In this context, we acknowledge the valuable input of my Party, which submitted a detailed proposal after the budget, and participated, almost on a daily basis, in the sub-committee chaired by the Ag. Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker: Yourself, because the question is about you. Were you consulted?

Mr Subron: Yes, let me come to whether I was consulted or not.

Mr Lesjongard: He must reply whether he was consulted or not.

Mr Subron: Yes, I am replying! I wish to highlight to the House...

Mr Jhummun: *Enn ti pasians!*

Mr Subron: I wish to highlight to the House that the manifesto of the present alliance made mention of the necessary restructuring of the pension system.

Secondly, as a minister in charge of social security, my ministry submitted proposals for the budget. But I do recognise and I was consulted as a Minister of the Cabinet before the budget was presented here. I will not go into the details of Cabinet decisions.

Madam Speaker: You are a member of the Cabinet!

Mr Subron: That is it!

When we analysed the budget, my Party submitted proposals to partners of the alliance. This is how alliances work. We submitted our views. This is what I was just saying. After submitting the views, the issues about the new pension system and what could be done to incorporate the concerns and consideration of the people were discussed for one week.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, I am so sorry.

Mr Lesjongard: We have 30 minutes.

Madam Speaker: Let me do my job, please!

Mr A. Duval: Table his reply!

Mr Lesjongard: He has taken almost 25 minutes!

Madam Speaker: Will you allow me to speak?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, of course, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay! Hon. Minister, we have 30 minutes for this item.

Mr Subron: Yes, good.

Madam Speaker: I have no choice, but to extend that time because he has not been able to ask any supplementary question. You are not replying to the question; you are actually making your speech!

At the same time, hon. Leader of the Opposition, you chose this particular subject which is, of course, of the utmost importance. But we have a budget debate going on.

You chose that! So, you cannot expect him to say in five minutes what...

Mr Lesjongard: But it is past 25 minutes!

Madam Speaker: I will give you time.

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: ... past 25 minutes!

Madam Speaker: I will give you time!

(Interruptions)

I will give time exceptionally because the issue is so important. If everybody agrees, we will do that. I am not going to penalise you, hon. Leader of the Opposition. I do not normally penalise you!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Dieu merci pa pe gagn zafer ar Phokeer la !*

An hon. Member: Dieu merci !

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Try and round up. Try and round up, hon. Minister, please!

Mr Subron: Yes, Madam Speaker.

(Interruptions)

I need to bring to the attention of the House that the high-level...

(Interruptions)

It is important to bring to the attention of the House...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Let us listen to the hon. Minister!

Mr Subron: ...and to the people of Mauritius that there was a high-level committee on pension reforms when the hon. Leader of the Opposition was in government. I will not go into the details of the report because of time constraint. But I need to bring to the attention of the House that the terms of reference of the report were exactly on pension system and the BRP. There were several options; I will not go into the details. Among these options were drastic changes to the BRP system.

Madam Speaker: Okay!

Mr Subron: This was under the MSM regime. It is important to note that when the budget was presented, people raised serious concerns.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, please! Hon. Minister, you have to answer the question! This is a PNQ!

(Interruptions)

Mr Subron: Yes. I was consulted as a Cabinet minister. My Party made representations and this issue was discussed lengthily. I wish to state that after discussions between Ministers and officials of the Government, the Cabinet took a decision on Monday 16 June 2025.

As regards part (b) of the question – this is where I am coming – the Cabinet has agreed to set up two interministerial committees. One under the chair of the hon. Prime Minister to look into possible support to the persons...

Madam Speaker: We know what these two committees are about!

Mr Subron: Okay. The second one: an interministerial committee under my chairmanship to look at all health-related inability workers. These committees have been lengthily detailed yesterday by the hon. Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker: Exactly!

Mr Subron: The two committees will analyse all the impacts, including the social impact, the financial impact and the future generations' interest – our children, grandchildren and children of our grandchildren.

This would be my answer.

I wish to conclude to say that my involvement in this government does not differ from the objective I had when I was a trade unionist. I wish to state that we, as a Government, recognise the rights of the workers.

Mr Lesjongard: This is question time, Madam Speaker!

Mr Subron: I am concluding.

Madam Speaker: You are not making a speech!

Mr Subron: Yes, I am just saying that...

Madam Speaker: No need to conclude!

Mr Subron: We recognise the rights of the workers, and we will do whatever we need to do to protect their interests.

Madam Speaker: You will be up on your feet again in a minute.

Mr Subron: Yes, Madam Speaker, thank you.

Madam Speaker: Go ahead! Your first supplementary question!

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, this is the first time that I have seen a minister taking so much time to reply to a PNQ.

(Interruptions)

And in his reply he has stated something with regard to part (b) of my question. So, the Minister is confirming that no study was carried out to assess the impact of such a measure on the population. Can he confirm that again?

Madam Speaker: Question please! Can you confirm? No studies were carried out prior. Right?

Mr Subron: I must say, Madam Speaker, that presently, there are 287,679 beneficiaries of the BRP. Out of these beneficiaries, we have studied that in the first year, that is, 60 years, 39% of the beneficiaries are working either in the private or the public sector. The number of working beneficiaries decreased up to 15% when they attain 55 years. So, we have studied this.

Secondly, I also want to emphasise that the government has decided to maintain the Basic Invalid Pension payment to all people with disability up to 65 years. Also, we have decided to maintain payment to all widows up to 65. That is for the first part of the answer.

The second is that the committee under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister will also assess the impact of the changes we are proposing to bring to workers. Already the law provides for derogation in many sectors, at least five sectors for the knowledge of the House. These are workers of the sugar industry, the workers of the transport industry, the workers of the construction industry, the workers of the salt pan.

Mr Lesjongard: He is taking the time of the House again!

Mr Subron: I am replying to your question. I have said yes, we have considered and we are still considering while you repealed the National Pension Scheme. I have your manifesto here, okay?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, let us keep to this question.

Mr Subron: You participated in the dismantlement of the National Pension Scheme and this was a treason to the people of Mauritius.

Madam Speaker: One moment, hon. Minister, he will probably be putting a few more questions. Please reply to the question, because we have the debate after that. I do not know at what time you will be speaking on the debate, but I am sure you will be speaking again on the debate. So, keep some of it for the debate, please.

Second question, please!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With regard to the Cabinet decision taken on 16 June for the setting up of two interministerial committees to examine matters related to the Basic Retirement Pension. I understand that one of the committees will be

chaired by the hon. Minister himself. Will he provide details of the terms of reference of that committee and the timeframe?

Madam Speaker: Very short and to the point!

Mr Subron: Our aim is to finalise everything before the implementation of the transition from BRP 60 to 65, so that is 01 September. Secondly, the terms of reference are quite explicit in the Cabinet decision, but I will give further details on the one that I am presiding. The Committee on the Health-Related Inability to Work will not only include in a reform of the whole medical board and assessment that we have known since independence, it would also include the reviewing and the reform of the whole assessment and whatever will be applied to people from the age of 60 years to 65 years, will also be applied to any citizen with disability in Mauritius. This will be a historical reform that the committee will be studying, and I count and rely on the support of all the ministers.

This will be a major reform. Do not worry, you will see it when it will come.

Madam Speaker: Third question!

Mr Lesjongard: Will the hon. Minister inform the House, this is a straight question, whether he is agreeable for a *ciblage* system for the allocation of basic retirement pension?

Mr Subron: *Ciblage* has been part of our history in the 1950s. It has been part of the decision of the previous government. All options will be studied and looked at by the committee. I need to read this. I wish to draw the attention of the Leader of the Opposition. The first committee – to look into the possible support to those persons aged 60 years and 65 years employed in sectors with difficult working conditions and eventual means tested eligible housewife mothers.

So, it is not blanket application of means tested. One of the means tested, kind of reviewed means tested might be derogation of some of the sectors that are already in law and maybe enlarging it to other sectors.

Madam Speaker: Fourth question!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Since the hon. Minister mentioned his friends from the trade unions and also in the communiqué issued by his Party and I quote –

“Le parti estime qu’il est primordial que les Mauriciens se mobilisent et se fassent entendre sur les questions qui touchent fondamentalement leurs acquis”.

May I ask the hon. Minister whether he will participate in the rally organised by trade unions this Saturday at Champ de Mars? His Party or he himself.

Madam Speaker: Do not answer that! There is no need to answer.

Mr Subron: I can answer.

Mr Lesjongard: I think if he wants to answer, he can...

Mr Subron: I have never seen you in any of the demonstrations in this country, if you want this kind of reply. Second, it is because we have heard the trade unions, because we have heard the people of Mauritius that we worked night and day during the past week to bring up these two important ministerial committees and the ministerial committees will study and will invite the people of this country to bring their input to what might be changed or not. And I will conclude, Madam Speaker, that worry not the treason of 2020, we wouldn't be there.

Mr Lesjongard: I have got two more questions, Madam Speaker. Will the hon. Minister inform the House whether there will be an increase in the Basic Retirement Pension for the next financial year, that is, 2025-2026 as promised by the government?

Madam Speaker: You have already answered.

Mr Subron: Yes, I have already answered and it is in the budget. You can study the budget if you have time.

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: It is not in the budget, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: He has another question.

Mr Lesjongard: But he has not replied...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: He cannot reply better than this.

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval!

The Leader of the Opposition has announced two questions.

(Interruptions)

But later on! Wait! You have a last question you said.

Mr Lesjongard: He has not replied...

Madam Speaker: You cannot do better. I cannot...

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: There won't be any increase then if this is the case.

Now, in view of the public outright, Madam Speaker, since the announcement of this measure, will Government consider cancelling this decision?

Madam Speaker: Is it for you to reply to that? Is it for you?

(Interruptions)

One minute!

Mr Lesjongard: You cannot decide for him, Madam Speaker!

Madam Speaker: Okay. I am asking...

(Interruptions)

Mr Subron: The Cabinet has taken a decision. The decision has been communicated to the public. The House knows the decision and any consideration will be looked by the two ministerial committees, and with this Government which has never betrayed the people.

Madam Speaker: Mr A. Duval, yes!

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: *Madam Speaker, firstly, the Government n'a jamais plébiscite le peuple pour une réforme de repousser l'âge de la pension. Aujourd'hui, le...*

(Interruptions)

... public reproche le manque de consultation. Le gouvernement a pris la décision de mettre en place...

Madam Speaker: I want a question...

(Interruptions)

Question!

Mr A. Duval: Est-ce que la communauté mauricienne dans son ensemble aura l'opportunité de participer aux consultations et comment compte-t-il mettre en place, justement, un comité large de consultations au-delà du comité ministériel ?

Madam Speaker: I am going to stop the whole thing in two minutes. Okay?

Mr Subron: The two interministerial committees will decide on the framework for consultations.

Madam Speaker: Okay, last one.

Mr Lesjongard: One last question...

An hon. Member: *Ale do ta!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: Now, with regard to promises made by the government during the electoral campaign, does government still intend to implement the decision to pay double pension to widows as canvassed before the elections?

Mr Subron: Our mandate is for five years. It is a five-year mandate. Whatever we have to do, we will do it during the next years within our mandate. Okay? And we do not have any lesson to take from the MSM.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Thank you very much. Time is up now. Thank you, hon. Leader of the Opposition. Thank you, hon. Minister.

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

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

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2025-2026) BILL

(No. XIV of 2025)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Appropriation (2025-2026) Bill (No. XIV of 2025).

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reforms. The floor is yours!

(12.12 p.m.)

The Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reforms (Mr L. Pentiah): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Keep an eye on the time!

Mr Pentiah: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: You have time but do keep an eye.

Mr Pentiah: Madam Speaker, I stand before this Assembly with neither the intention to defend the Leader of this House nor the Leader of the Labour Party because I fundamentally believe that this person who is the Prime Minister of our country, is fully capable of defending himself.

Madam Speaker, I stand before this House as a patriot to defend my nation, our people and the future of our country. Demagogs are all over *koumadir en kreol; ti serpan, serpan moyen, gro serpan pe sorti dan tou trou.*

An hon. Member: *Tang sa! Tang!*

Mr Pentiah: *Pe vinn sem division. Pe kre division ant nou.*

Madam Speaker: Not more in *kreol* please.

Mr Pentiah: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, some unscrupulous people tend to forget that beyond cheap politics, lie the fate of our country. Instead, they want to stop our country to move forward in a structured, responsible and accountable manner.

Madam Speaker, just to think that this country and the financial responsibility of a government is all about giving allowances is nothing else but a patronising, irresponsible, shortsighted view of certain individuals who apparently give the impression that our people and our nation only crave for arms and are not capable of standing up responsibly, with a clear mind, with all its might against adversity to build a sustainable economy to ensure that tomorrow is a legacy to be handed over to our children with pride and satisfaction.

Madam Speaker, with a clear word of caution to demagogues with their demagogues; beware. It has always been the case, the truth and sincerity will prevail in the face of minds full of darkness, spreading lies and insanity for political gains.

L'ironie du sort, Madame la présidente, il se déclare comme le prince héritier du symbole soleil, mais de par sa malhonnêteté et ses mensonges, il traine les ténèbres dans ses pattes. *Li dir kan li vinn o pouvwar aret...*

Madam Speaker: Minister! Minister!

Mr Pentiah: Il dit qu'il sera au pouvoir...

Madam Speaker: I can see what you are trying to do. I am reminding everybody that we are dealing with the issue of *kreol* and please, do not push me too much. We are dealing with this and hopefully, we are coming with something soon. So, please respect the Standing Orders.

Mr Pentiah: Yes, Madam Speaker. *Il dit qu'il va être au pouvoir.*

Madam Speaker: Voilà !

Mr Pentiah: Il doit s'arrêter de rêver.

(Interruptions)

Kouraz to pa ti ena. To finn fer sa pei la vinn Lakwizinn !

Madam Speaker: Minister!

Mr Pentiah: Tu as détruit l'économie de notre pays.

Madam Speaker: Voilà !

Mr Pentiah: Tu as pris le peuple...

Madam Speaker: Excuse me for a moment. Do not think that I am in love with French or English. It is just that you must respect what we have decided in this House! You must respect!

Mr Pentiah: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: And, you must respect me!

Mr Pentiah: Yes, Madam Speaker, and I do.

Tu as détruit l'économie de notre pays. Tu as pris l'argent du peuple que t'as donné à ta famille, dans le Maradiva par milliards. Tu as pris l'argent du peuple, à coût de milliards pour les judas renommés. Pravind, tu as pris l'argent du peuple pour faire des cadeaux par milliards à Abdoolah, Sonah, Chetty, Beekarry, Gopee. *Ayo mo fatigue!*

Madam Speaker: I am going to suspend...

Mr Pentiah: Tu as pris...

Madam Speaker: I am going to suspend the Sitting!

Mr Pentiah: I am sorry. I am sorry.

Madam Speaker: I am going to suspend the Sitting the next time that...

Mr Pentiah: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: You have just promised me. So, what is your promise worth?

Mr Pentiah: Yes, Madam Speaker. I will.

Madam Speaker: This is the last time. Otherwise, I am suspending the Sitting! *Je ne suis pas une maitresse d'école, ni une mère fouettarde !*

Mr Pentiah: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Mais, il va falloir qu'on travaille d'après les règles !

Mr Pentiah: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Tu as créé le MIC pour dévaliser la Banque de Maurice. Toi et ton 'savat Dodo', vous avez détruit et dévalisé les fonds du NPF. Tu as fini par détruire l'image même d'Air Mauritius.

Missie Lesjongard...

Madam Speaker: No, don't!

Mr Pentiah: Hon. Fourth...

Madam Speaker: No!

Mr Pentiah: Mr Lesjongard...

Madam Speaker: No!

Mr Pentiah: Hon. Fourth...

Madam Speaker: No! No!

Mr Pentiah: Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker: That is better!

Mr Pentiah: Votre leader et vous, avez défoncé la caisse de la CWA. Hier vous n'étiez pas là à l'écouter. Je le répète. Au coût de R 700 millions, Monsieur Lesjongard, Leader de l'opposition, vous avez faillit à assumer vos responsabilités ; même au CEB, donnant lieu à des risques de blackout. Et je prends vos mots, M. le leader de l'opposition. *Paisa naiba ! Pani naiba ! Kouran naiba !*

Madam Speaker: Non ! Ça suffit ! Ça suffit ! Ça suffit ! Si ça continue, je vais lever la séance !

Mr Pentiah: Vous avez volé ce peuple !

Madam Speaker: D'abord, M. le ministre...

Mr Pentiah: Au vu...

Madam Speaker: M. le ministre, asseyez-vous. M. le ministre, d'abord vous vous adressez à la présidente de l'Assemblée. Deuxièmement, ne faites pas ce petit jeu-là, entre les langues, parce que je sais très bien qu'est-ce qu'il se passe. Moi je parle plusieurs langues. Vous le savez. J'adore l'anglais, j'adore le français et j'adore le créole. Je ne parle malheureusement pas bhojpuri. Nous n'allons pas faire ce petit jeu. On peut le faire comme ça une fois, symboliquement.

Deuxièmement, vous vous adressez à moi. Vous ne vous adressez pas directement au leader de l'opposition. Vous vous adressez *to the Speaker!* *Otherwise, honestly, I will have to suspend the Sitting !*

Mr Pentiah: Respectfully, I duly take note, Madam Speaker. *Il y avait un autre mot en bhojpuri, mais je vais m'en passer.*

Madam Speaker, when the figures did not add up, then, budgets were tampered with, not to say forged by irresponsibly inflating the GDP and decreasing the budget deficit, leading to fictitious fund allocations to mislead the people of a whole nation. *Et ensuite, pour boucher leur trou – prenons les mots d'un beau et bon parleur –, ils sont partis imprimer des billets.*

Madam Speaker, we heard the hon. Leader of the Opposition saying that there is money. Then, it is legitimate to ask Pravind Jugnauth and Padayachy: If you had money, then why did you fail to duly pay over one thousand workers for the work done during the COVID period, which amounts to almost Rs2 billion? Still owing! *Des milliers de travailleurs, et majoritairement, Madame la présidente, des low income earners.*

If you had money, Sir, why did you not clear the mess you left with Pack & Blister? If you had money then, why did you leave, amongst other things, the STC, CEB, CWA, SBM, Air Mauritius with billions of debts? Moody's graded our country to Baa1. If you had money, then tell us why when you took over in 2014 and during the time you were in government, our country was downgraded to the verge where investors, offshore business and the financial sector are seriously jeopardised, as you left us at the doorstep of a junk state? Worst of all, Pravind Jugnauth, you taxed us on petrol for COVID vaccines. Dishonest that you are, we still owe the company that provided us with vaccines by millions.

Madam Speaker, the reckless acts and doings of Pravind Jugnauth and his Ministers, such as the Leader of the Opposition, jeopardised the safe Hajj pilgrimage this year when the supplying company of vaccines refused to supply vaccines unless millions of rupees of outstanding debt were settled first. Madam Speaker, we are thankful to the personal interventions of hon. Minister Bachoo and hon. Minister Mohamed, needful was done in time. These people have the audacity to pretend to be high and almighty and give lessons of good governance. *Monsieur Pravind Jugnauth, vous n'avez aucun droit moral ou quoi que ce soit de nous donner des leçons !*

Madam Speaker, undeniably, it is human nature. Who does not like to be popular, appreciated, loved and sometimes even flattered? Especially, politicians! Madam Speaker, do we have to be geniuses to know that the measures announced in the Budget 2025-2026 by the

Minister of Finance were going to be difficult? We do not have to be geniuses neither to realise that for someone to stand up and present such measures, that person must have courage in his veins for him to stand fiercely in the face of adversity and to decide in the interest of better tomorrow for our country and our nation.

What are the complaints, Madam Speaker? To our youth, whom I relate to as my sons and daughters, the future generation of our country, I have this to say to you: What do you wish? A country of beggars? A nation without pride? A country with its investors fleeing away as it crumbles to bankruptcy?

This Government is concerned in investing in the youth of our country. From the very early age, Government is providing all the necessary support to the youth in developing their potential in all aspects of life. It is the Labour Government that brought free education, free transport and invested massively in the construction of educational establishments, from the time of the Father of our Nation *jusqu'à present, avec le Premier ministre, digne fils de Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam et de notre nation mauricienne.*

Madam Speaker, education is free at all levels from pre-primary to tertiary. Government is providing Rs11 m. for youth development programmes and Rs20 m. for smart youth programmes.

Additionally, the Government is setting up seven sports academies with a solid conviction to professionalise the sports sector and promote the well-being of our young people. Rs1.1 billion has been allocated to the Ministry of Youth and Sports. We trust and have confidence in hon. Minister Darmarajen Nagalingum to successfully realise the vision of the Government as well as the aspirations of our youth. I must underline that the hon. Minister, for the first time, organised and personally attended a one-day recreational event in Amaury, a small village found in Constituency Piton-Rivière du Rempart. Recently, it was highly appreciated to see him in Karo Kalyptus. Another remote area where the attention of one and all is required.

Better employment opportunities for our youth will be provided through in-depth structural reforms in the economic landscape for them to contribute to the progress of our nation. This Budget lays the focus on creating well-paid jobs and fostering an innovative economy designed for the young generation.

The Government is introducing new fiscal incentives under the Innovative Mauritius Scheme. The 2025-2026 Budget introduces transformative income tax reforms designed to empower the youth –

- by reducing financial burdens and stimulating economic participation;
- by simplifying the tax bands, exempting annual income tax up to Rs500,000;
- taxing the next Rs500,000 at only 10%, and
- capping the highest rate at 20%.

The policy removes 44,000 individuals from the tax net entirely, as I said before, with 81% of employees paying no income tax. This directly benefits young professionals and entrepreneurs, allowing them to retain more earnings for a scaled development, innovation or savings. This, coupled with incentives like over Rs150,000 AI tax deduction for start-ups and equity funds for young entrepreneurs, these reforms foster a conducive environment for youth-led economic growth aligning with the vision of tomorrow.

Furthermore, the proposed new tax regime in itself will, as hon. Uteem said, provide more money directly from the earnings to the pocket of the workers. They will not be asking for arms or allowances. They will have money at hand.

Madam Speaker, I shall touch briefly on the welfare state.

Madam Speaker: Keep an eye on the time, please!

Mr Pentiah: Yes, Madam Speaker. Certain individuals stand to erroneously spread the idea that the welfare state is being dismantled. Madam Speaker, it is to be noted that our welfare state has been established under the hallmark of the labour government, under the hands of the father of the nation, and therefore, casting such aspersions, can only be attributed to sheer and utter bad faith. It is to be pointed out that government has shown its commitment to preserve the national wellbeing of its citizens by reinforcing social protection measures such as this government having maintained the minimum income of Rs20,000.

Over and above Rs70 billion have been provided for the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity after which Rs53 billion have been earmarked for payment of Basic Retirement Pensions. Widow's and invalid's benefits have been maintained by this Government in its 2025-2026 Budget.

Madam Speaker, I turn now to my own Ministry. Madam Speaker, digital transformation and new technologies, especially AI are vital for public sector reform, changing how citizens engage with government and governmental services. The Budget of 2025-2026 highlights AI's importance and due allocations to the public sector AI Programme. This will provide all Ministries with AI tools, boosting policy making and service delivery and signalling a commitment to a future ready public service. Aligned with the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, digital transformation blue print, my Ministry piloted the Electronic Document Management System (EDMS). This system automates document management, cutting delays and cost while increasing transparency.

The Budget of 2025-2026, allocations have been made to expand the EDMS across the public service. My Ministry also successfully piloted the Electronic Scheme of Public Service: the ESOS. This dramatically speed up scheme management from months to real time. The budget has allocated funds to roll out the ESOS across the Public Service as well. This enhanced ESOS system will use AI to empower HR Staff, enabling efficient development and update of schemes of service to attract top talent for citizen centric public service.

Moreover, Madam Speaker, good governance is the cornerstone of a striving nation, fostering transparency, accountability and the efficient use of resources for the betterment of all our citizens. However, for the past decades, Mauritius has witnessed a grim reality, a decline in our international rankings, notably in the Corruption Perceptions Index and the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance. In the Corruption Perceptions Index, Mauritius has regressed in the last ten years. Similarly, in the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance while Mauritius ranked first in overall governance in 2014. In the last ten years, it has shown warning signs and I quote –

“An increasing deterioration in several categories.”

Our people have endured corrupt practices, spiralling out of control as never before where greed had advanced to state of limitless rapacity. The previous administration unfortunately stifled good governance, demonstrating a blatant disregard to establish rules and regulations. This in turn, crippled the system, bringing progress and trust to a grounding stall.

My Ministry intends to work closely with the Financial Crimes Commission and other similar bodies to not just enforce good governance but to embed it as an unwavering standard

across the entire public service. Moreover, I am pleased to note the Public Service Commission and the other Commissions dealing with recruitment in the Public Service have regained their *lettre de noblesse*. Recruitment will now be conducted in a transparent, fair and impartial manner where meritocracy remains the sole criterion for serving in the Public Service.

Madam Speaker, no more letters issued at the desk of Ministries, no more police officers appointed, joining training directly at the Casernes. No more issuing letters of appointment at Bureau CAB. Everything is transparent. Everything is based upon meritocracy.

My Ministry is actively elaborating a new Public Sector Reforms Strategy 2025-2029 which is meticulously aligned with the Government Programme presented earlier. Our nation's blue print for Mauritius 'A Bridge to the Future' Digital Transformation 2025-2029 as well. Our public sector reforms strategy puts a significant focus on strengthening governance, ensuring a future where accountability, integrity and transparency prevail, are always high on the agenda.

Madam Speaker, in order to fast-track reforms initiatives, my Ministry is also introducing the Public Reforms Scheme with an initial provision, already earmarked in the Budget 2025-2026. This scheme is a strategic and transformative initiative designed to enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of our institutions. It is focused on improving process, strengthening institutional structures, promote the adoption of innovative technologies through the send box framework and empowering of public officers with the skills and mindsets required to lead change.

Madam Speaker, to ensure that reforms are not only well conceived but also effectively implemented, paragraph 210 of Budget Speech 2025-2026 highlights the setting up of reforms and innovation units in all Ministries and Departments. These units will be led by designated directors of reforms, will drive the reform agenda from within, working closely with the respective accounting officers and my Ministry to ensure coherence and accountability.

Madam Speaker, one of the foundation pillars of this strategy is the introduction of a Public Sector Reforms Bill as a key measure announced by the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in his Budget Speech.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that my Ministry has finalised the terms of reference for the recruitment of a consultant to revamp and digitalise the Performance Management System in an objective manner. Since the time it was put in place to the present time, it is dysfunctional. We are revamping it to make it objective, proper and a source of motivation for our public officers.

Madam Speaker, a short note on the training and capacity building. It is common knowledge to one and every one of the functioning of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of public service renovation, but we are adding to that place a new section which will be concerned with a public sector innovation research lab. Such a lab exists in countries like Singapore, UAE and India. This lab will function as a national hub for experimentation, cocreation and problem solving where public officers, academics, technologists and citizens can work together to redesign public services and delivery models, prototype new administrative processes, streamline workflows and apply human-centred design thinking to governance challenges.

Its goal is clear, that is to improve operational efficiency, reduce bureaucracy and foster smart, agile public service that is responsive to the need of citizens.

Madam Speaker, the budget has put emphasis on research and development backed by a sum of Rs200 million for policy driven research. This, in itself, is a game-changer. In the past, public service decisions were often made based on inertia or intuition. Now, we are institutionalising knowledge-based governance. Ministries and departments will work with the research centre at the institute to generate insights that improve programme-designed service, research and impact. We are laying the ground work for a citizen-centric tech enabled research, informed public service, one that listens, learns, adapts and above all, delivers.

This budget has taken into consideration the wellbeing and welfare of public officers. Allocations have been made to ensure that the Public Officers Welfare Council operates and has as its operational *modus* sports, keep-fit programmes to well-being as well as cultural initiatives.

Madam Speaker, ...

Madam Speaker: Are you concluding?

Mr Pentiah: Yes!

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I had a few words in *Kreol* but I will avoid that.

Madam Speaker: Of course!

Mr Pentiah: As rightly advised by yourself, Madam Speaker.

In conclusion, this budget is bold. This budget is courageous. This budget is a vision. To be able to govern, as the Prime Minister always says, we need to have clear vision.

Madam Speaker, I come to the end of my contribution towards this budget.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

I think there is consensus that we can now break for one and a half hour.

At 12.45 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.15 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Yes, you may be seated.

Hon. A. Duval!

Mr A. Duval (Fourth Member for Port-Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you. Madame la présidente, je me limiterai avant tout, aux points essentiels du budget, faute de temps, qui m'est accordé. J'ai 20 minutes et beaucoup de commentaires.

C'est un budget, Madame la présidente, maladroit qui demande au peuple de faire les grands efforts et de nombreux sacrifices tandis que le gouvernement lui, n'en fait aucun. Un budget amateur qui impose l'austérité au détriment de la croissance, fragilise les secteurs vitaux de notre économie et qui fera grimper le coût de la vie d'une manière significative.

Qui a donc préparé un tel budget, Madame la présidente ? Est-ce le Premier ministre ; qui n'est finalement qu'un ministre des Finances *very, very part-time*, cumulant pas moins des six autres portefeuilles importants en plus de celui du chef du gouvernement et qui dispose donc très peu de temps à consacrer aux finances du pays ?

Est-ce le *Junior Minister* des Finances qui a été propulsé sans avoir jamais auparavant occupé la moindre fonction officielle au sein d'un gouvernement ? Cela semble peu probable, lui-même n'était pas au courant des augmentations rétroactifs, des allocations que lui-même et ses collègues, *Junior Ministers*, touchaient sous les budgets.

S'agit-il plutôt d'autres personnes cachées derrière le rideau ? On n'y reconnaît l'influence de certains qui hantent toujours les couloirs du ministère des Finances et dont l'ombre plane encore sur celui-ci. La question se pose donc aujourd'hui, Madame.

Une réforme maladroite, celle de pension, qui s'est faite dans le dos des Mauriciens, alors même que l'alliance du changement avait, au contraire, promis monts et merveilles à ce sujet.

Qui ne se souvient pas des promesses faites durant la campagne il y a quelques mois ? D'augmenter la pension à R 21500, de supprimer toutes les taxes sur les pensions, de verser la double pension aux veuves, aux invalides dès l'âge de 60 ans, d'offrir des voyages gratuits à la Réunion et puis à Rodrigues aux retraités.

Et que diront-ils pour justifier un tel revirement, un retournement de veste qui d'ailleurs restera dans les livres d'histoire ?

Premièrement, comme le gouvernement l'allègue, dans son *State of the Economy Report*, que les statistiques officielles auraient été délibérément falsifiées afin de présenter un état de santé de notre économie, différent de la réalité ; afin de dissimuler un niveau d'endettement qui selon lui est plus élevé. Il s'agit d'une accusation extrêmement grave, passible d'ailleurs, d'une peine de prison en vertu de l'article 107 du code pénal mauricien.

Qui aurait, selon le Premier ministre, contraint l'Alliance du Changement à modifier radicalement son programme alors même que celui-ci avait été plébiscité par la population avec un score retentissant de 60-0 et un taux d'adhésion record.

Pourtant, Madame la présidente, à notre surprise, depuis huit mois, rien n'a été entrepris à ce sujet. Une priorité absolue aurait été de prendre des mesures décisives contre les éventuels responsables, quels qu'ils soient, et de remédier sans délai aux failles relevées. Or, aucune action, Madame la présidente, n'a été engagée, même pas l'ouverture d'une enquête. Cela jette désormais, Madame la présidente, un sérieux doute sur la crédibilité de ce papier qui semble aujourd'hui n'être qu'un prétexte.

La deuxième excuse portée par l'honorable Premier ministre hier au Parlement est de prétendre d'avoir découvert seulement maintenant les problèmes liés au coût et la viabilité économique des pensions, aux problèmes du vieillissement de la population, de la baisse du taux de natalité, de la diminution du ratio travailleurs-retraités, et de l'allongement de l'espérance de vie des Mauriciens, alors que ces données existaient déjà en abondance et

étaient accessibles à tous bien avant qu'ils ne rédigent leur programme, qui effacent leurs promesses.

Il était lui-même au courant. Le Premier ministre a cité hier le rapport du FMI qui date de 10 ans, Madame la présidente, et qui prévoyait alors 10 ans de cela que la pension deviendrait insoutenable en 2050.

Il a également repris une citation d'un actuaire réputé, sans toutefois en citer le nom qui qualifiait la pension de bombe à retardement. Ces propos, Madame la présidente, ont effectivement été tenus par Monsieur Bernard Yen, comme publié dans l'*Investor's Mag* en 2022. Un détail qu'il a sans doute omis de préciser, c'est-à-dire bien avant la campagne de 2024.

Pourquoi donc, le gouvernement n'a-t-il pas sollicité un mandat populaire lors des deux élections qui se sont passées depuis l'élection ? Un mandat populaire de repousser à 65 ans l'âge d'éligibilité de la pension de vieillesse au lieu de formuler, au contraire, de si vastes promesses pour ensuite faire exactement le contraire. N'est-ce pas une trahison ?

Pourquoi donc, Madame la présidente, être venu avec une réforme aussi maladroite ? Parce qu'on demande au peuple de se sacrifier, de porter le poids du fardeau de l'austérité sans que les élus, eux, n'en fassent aucun. Le gouvernement aurait dû, Madame la présidente, premièrement réduire les voyages et réduire le montant des per diem des ministres qui touchent....

(Interruptions)

Ms Anquetil: Qui le dit ! Et toi ?

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: ...plus en un jour à l'étranger...

(Interruptions)

...qu'un retraité pendant un mois, Madame la présidente. Il aurait dû allonger l'allocation des *duty free*.

(Interruptions)

Mr Jhummun: *Enn zour kom Speaker ek to gagn pansion!*

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: La période d'éligibilité pour l'allocation des *duty free* des députés à cinq ans au lieu de trois ans comme c'est actuellement. Cela aurait aidé à économiser sur les devises étrangères qui ont été utilisées comme justification pour demander au peuple maintenant de payer une augmentation brutale sur l'*Excise Duty* des véhicules hybrides et électriques. Le gouvernement aurait dû supprimer, comme promis, le poste de Vice-président qui économiserait aux contribuables plus d'une centaine de millions de roupies sur la durée d'un mandat, surtout si on tient compte des frais de sécurité, de voyages qui ne figurent pas dans les *Estimates*.

Ils auraient dû fermer les ambassades dont l'utilité est limitée aujourd'hui, par exemple, l'Allemagne, la Russie, la Malaisie, le Mozambique. La mission en Allemagne aurait pu être couverte par notre ambassadeur à Paris. Pour les autres, on aurait pu avoir adopté le modèle singapourien de *Resident Ambassador*, c'est-à-dire des ambassadeurs qui sont basés à Maurice, qui résident à Maurice et qui voyagent dans leur pays d'accréditation seulement quelques mois sur l'année, selon un calendrier préétabli.

Réduire le nombre d'institutions paraétatiques et le nombre de nominations au seuil des conseils d'administration en ce budget ne crée pas moins, Madame la présidente, de 12 nouveaux organismes pour les copains. Diminuer l'étreinte ministérielle qui augmente. Si on épluche dans les *Estimates*, on le voit. Si on prend, par exemple, le *Prime Minister's Office*, ça révèle une hausse de 33 % des dépenses liées pour les conseillers, 62 % pour les cérémonies et fêtes et 29 % pour les augmentations de célébration de l'Indépendance. La question donc : où sont les sacrifices ?

Voyez-vous ici, Madame la présidente, le moindre sacrifice ? Bien au contraire, la moto de ce gouvernement est : austérité pour vous, prospérité pour nous ! Suite à la PNQ de ce matin, plusieurs questions essentielles restent aujourd'hui. Premièrement, les comités ministériels, ont-ils, oui ou non, prévu de soumettre leurs conclusions avant l'entrée en vigueur au 1 septembre des nouvelles mesures ? La société civile sera-t-elle, oui ou non, invitée à faire partie autour de la table de négociation. Et si oui, quand ?

Qu'en est-il précisément de la réforme des pensions ? Entra-t-elle en vigueur sans interruptions ? Si on se fie à la réponse du ministre de tutelle, il nous a référé aux mesures budgétaires qui stipulent clairement qu'au 1 septembre 2025, le nouveau régime entrera en vigueur.

Est-ce que les amendements seront présents dans la *Finance Bill* qui suivra cet exercice ? J'insiste pour que les prochains orateurs viennent répondre clairement à ces questions. C'est important !

(Interruptions)

Cette démarche qui démontre le summum de l'amateurisme s'est révélée aujourd'hui clairement....

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Ah bon? Ki tonn konpran?*

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: ... dans les réponses du ministre de la Sécurité sociale qui n'a ni su répondre, ni su convaincre et ni su maîtriser un sujet aussi important. Comprenez bien...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Nou koup so pension!*

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: *Koupe! Koup pou tou!*

Comprenez bien que vous n'avez pas le mandat d'adopter cette réforme !

An hon. Member: *Pena manda?*

Mr A. Duval: Les Mauriciens de l'accepteront pas, Madame la présidente. Vous allez être obligés de *back pedal* tôt ou tard. C'est inévitable ! Plus tôt que vous réalisez cela, mieux ce sera pour le gouvernement et mieux ce sera pour la population et pour la paix sociale de ce pays parce que le peuple gronde avec raison.

Les autres mesures, Madame la présidente, des mesures amateurs qui choisissent la valeur austérité au détriment de la croissance. Le seuil de la TVA qu'on réduit l'éligibilité à R 3 millions est un coup terrible, Madame la présidente. Pour les *micro enterprises*, it adds an unnecessary burden on them. Many of whom do not have the required skills to comply with the strict requirements of the VAT Act.

(Interruptions)

This creates an additional administrative load forcing them to subscribe...

(Interruptions)

Bizin innove, non? Bizin inove! Omoïn mwa mo innove dan mo diskour !

...forcing them to subscribe to professional services which will heavily impact on their cash-flow and expenses.

Est-ce que les membres du gouvernement réalisent-ils aujourd'hui avec cette mesure, qui est un non-sens, que le marchand de *roti* de l'autre côté de la rue qui vend 400 *roti* à R 20 est aujourd'hui sous l'obligation avec cette nouvelle mesure d'aller s'enregistrer sous la VAT ?

Est-ce que les membres du gouvernement réalisent-ils que ce *roti* à R 20 dont la matière première n'est pas imposée de VAT, dont le gaz, l'huile, la farine, le salaire de ses employés, ne sera pas déductible, et donc passera obligatoirement la totalité de cette imposition aux consommateurs ? Attendez-vous, les Mauriciens, à ce que le *roti* vous coûte R 23 au minimum, sans compter les frais de comptables qu'ils devront payer.

Réalisez-vous donc le fardeau qu'on impose sur ces petits entrepreneurs qui pour la plupart n'ont pas la connaissance. Attendez-vous à votre achat de rôti et de dholl pouri d'être remis un *VAT receipt*. Pareil pour votre tailleur, pareil pour votre plombier. Heureusement, que les coiffeurs ont été exemptés.

Mr Jhummun: Happy hour *pay tax laba?*

Mr A. Duval : Madame la présidente, la logique aurait voulu qu'au contraire avec la dépréciation de la roupie, la hausse du coût de la vie, que le seuil soit augmenté et le gouvernement compte récolter R 5 milliards, 7 % de recettes, que sur cette augmentation, sur la baisse d'éligibilité et les nouvelles mesures de la TVA. Mais ce qu'il faut aussi retenir et ce qu'on ne nous dit pas c'est que les infractions et les amendes ont explosé sous le VAT Act, aujourd'hui.

Mr Assirvaden : ...*aksidan loto.*

Mr A. Duval : Au cas où un entrepreneur commet une erreur de calcul dans ses VAT *returns*, il sera aujourd'hui passible d'une nouvelle amende allant jusqu'à R 500 000 en plus de l'imposition d'une amende pouvant aller jusqu'à le double du montant de TVA due comme c'était le cas avant, s'il est trouvé coupable. Pire encore, dans le cas où l'entrepreneur ne s'enregistre pas à la TVA dans les délais requis de 15 jours ou s'il oublie de soumettre ses *returns*, alors qu'il était autrefois passible d'une amende allant jusqu'à trois fois le montant de TVA due, aujourd'hui, c'est jusqu'à R 1 million de pénalités et payer l'imposition de deux

fois le montant de TVA due – voilà ce qu'on ne nous dit pas. Et on va demander maintenant aux micros entreprises, aux plaisanciers qu'importe leurs revenus tous les plaisanciers ayant licence commerciale devront se souscrire à la TVA. On demande à ces personnes aujourd'hui d'aller en conformité avec le *VAT Act* qui apporte une véritable épée de Damoclès sur la tête de toutes ces personnes.

Madam Speaker, let us talk about the property sector. The measures in this budget are impacting the property sector which has been hit with significant tax increases. With the introduction of capital gains on property to an astounding level of 30% which will have a devastating impact of course on the sector, on the FDI that it brings and it will erode the growth in a sector that was doing so well.

The fact, Madam Speaker, that billions of rupees worth of property have been blocked since the government coming into office. They were waiting for clearances; clearances that have not been given because, of course, these amendments were being prepared. These people now are shocked; they feel that they can no longer trust Mauritius and the result is already being seen with cancellation following.

Does the Government realise that the new tax regime and registration duty which has doubled for foreign investors is now among the highest in the world on par with the UK? Does Government realise that capital gains tax introduced at a shocking level of 30% is now nearly as twice as the effective maximum capital gains rate in South Africa which is 18%? South Africa being one of our most prominent FDI market for property acquisition. Therefore, Madam Speaker, has this measure been really for thought through? Who now will come and invest in Mauritius from South Africa, for example, who will be interested if you are made to pay double registration duty, stamp duty, transfer taxes and capital gains, who? The more so, Madam Speaker, that security, law and order and the combat of drug is no longer a selling argument for Mauritius since a long time.

Does government realise the disaster this can mean for our economy. An economy, a sector that has been flourishing which brings Rs18 billions in Mauritius just in terms of property acquisition not in terms of related investment. We all know that foreign citizens come here and spend in the millions on their lifestyle, hospitality, etc. Has a proper study been done? A proper assessment in how this will impact.

Two words about Rodrigues, l'abolition des subsides sur les billets de la taxe aéroportuaire va tuer l'économie de Rodrigues, Madame la présidente, qui dépend

essentiellement du tourisme, dont la majeure partie, 90 % des mauriciens de la classe moyenne, et le billet qui passera bientôt de R 6350 à R11 000, 53 % d'augmentation risque de tuer l'économie Rodriguaise. Et c'est un long sens parce que ce Maurice qui va devoir après subventionner l'économie. Donc, quelle est la raison de mettre l'économie en péril pour quelques millions de roupies ? On se le demande en termes de *law and order*, Madame la présidente, c'est le véritable éléphant blanc du budget et j'y reviendrai plus tard. Le tourisme aussi, malheureusement, le temps ne me le permettra pas. Je vais conclure.

Madame la présidente, il n'est pas trop tard pour revenir sur ces mesures. Regardez ce qui se passe en Angleterre actuellement. Allez voir Rachel Reeves qui est actuellement en train de revenir sur ses mesures budgétaires car les investisseurs ont fui suite à certaines de ces mesures. Il n'est pas trop tard, ne répétez pas l'erreur du passé. Ne reproduisez pas la politique de l'austérité de l'épisode patate-manioc. Ne reproduisez pas un patate-manioc 2.0 des années 80 qui fut totalement renversé par la suite par Monsieur Lutchmeenaraidoo qui avait au contraire promu l'ouverture, l'expansion et l'histoire lui donne aujourd'hui raison.

Donc, c'est un appel au Premier ministre, revenez sur la pension. Si cette pension sera faite, elle doit être faite suite à une consultation large. Le ministre de tutelle, ne nous a pas convaincu. En fait, suite à son allocution aujourd'hui, plus de questions se posent, plus d'incertitudes ont été créées dans la population.

Madame la présidente, je vous remercie pour m'avoir laissé parler sans interruption. Merci beaucoup.

Madam Speaker : Je vous ai donné une minute de plus. Je vous ai fait cadeau d'une minute.

Hon. Beehook! You also keep an eye on the time, please.

(2.38 p.m.)

Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Madame la présidente, je vous remercie pour cette opportunité qui m'est donnée afin que je puisse m'adresser à sa Chambre sur l'audacieux et prévoyant budget présenté par l'honorable le Premier ministre et ministre des Finances de notre république. Mais avant, Madame la présidente, j'aimerais bien, puisqu'il l'a sollicité, répondre à hon. A. Duval qui parle de budget maladroit et d'amateurisme. Je laisse la population juger : qu'est-ce qui est maladroit ? 642 milliards de roupies de dette ou le rétablissement de la discipline fiscale ?

Je laisse la population juger qui a été maladroit : celui qui a imprimé R180 milliards occasionnant l'inflation, plombant le pouvoir d'achat des mauriciens et il ose parler et se poser en défenseur des consommateurs ? Totalement absurde. Il parle d'austérité, moi je parlerais de responsabilité fiscale. Mais comment ose-t-il, lui qui occupe un poste de best loser de s'attaquer aux junior ministre des Finances lui élu tombé de l'ancien Premier ministre ?

Oui, il tire sa légitimité du peuple, il tire sa légitimité des urnes, c'est pour cela qu'il est là pour travailler même en tant que *Junior Minister*, il doit s'attaquer aux responsabilités déléguées par le ministre des Finances. Il n'a que fait son travail et c'est honteux de l'attaquer je son travail et ses prérogatives.

(Interruptions)

Parlons de pensions à R 21 500. J'ai l'impression, que ce soit le leader de l'opposition ou son acolyte à côté, ils n'ont pas compris que nous avons un mandat de cinq ans. La pension à R 21 500 a été promise, mais échelonnée sur une base annuelle, soit une augmentation annuelle de R 1000. S'il sait toujours faire les calculs, il saura que d'ici la fin de notre mandat, la pension aura atteint le chiffre promis. Mais, ce que je trouve encore très regrettable, puisqu'ils n'ont pas d'arguments propres, tangibles pour venir contester les chiffres révisés dans ce document, ils se contentent, Madame la présidente, de discréditer ce document et ils essayent de savoir d'où ce document tire sa légitimité.

J'attire son attention et votre attention que c'est un document qui émane du Government of Mauritius, qui porte le sceau de la République de Maurice. Et, on ne peut pas; ce document qui est désormais considéré comme la référence par toutes les instances internationales, aujourd'hui je trouve tout à fait inapproprié qu'on vienne discréditer ces documents. Et c'est sur ce document, hier l'honorable ministre Reza Uteem l'a précisé, que c'est à partir des chiffres révisés de ce document que les *estimates* de ce budget ont été calculés.

Bon, revenons maintenant aux critiques faites aux voitures *duty free* et les voyages. Il a certainement la mémoire courte, puisque c'est moi-même qui avait posé cette question dans cette Assemblée. Figurez-vous, lorsque l'honorable Adrien Duval est devenu *Speaker*, par l'imposte, combien ses voyages de 78 jours ont coûté ?

(Interruptions)

78 days! Je vous donne le montant, R 748 112 !

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

Mr Beechook: And this is how he cares for public money!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Honteux !

Mr Beechook: Et ce que je trouve honteux...

(Interruptions)

Oui, nous avons augmenté le budget pour les célébrations du 12 mars parce que c'est sans doute le jour le plus important du calendrier de tous les Mauriciens !

An hon. Member: Exactement, bravo !

(Interruptions)

Mr Beechook: On va rompre avec la médiocrité des célébrations sous le régime MSM !

An hon. Member: Anti l'indépendance !

(Interruptions)

Mr Beechook: On va rompre...

An hon. Member: Anti l'indépendance !

Mr Beechook: On va rompre avec la médiocrité des célébrations du 12 mars, parce que c'est le seul moment. C'est le moment de la communion, c'est le moment du rassemblement des Mauriciens, et je vous dis, si on le fait de manière plus exubérante cette année, on en est fiers et moi en tant que député, je l'assume !

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Et noun fer lapli tonbe !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Beechook: Il ose parler et même questionner, est-ce que ce gouvernement, cette majorité a le mandat de réformer le système de pensions, mais je lui poserai la question : est-ce qu'il avait le mandat pour devenir *Speaker* de l'Assemblée nationale ?

An hon. Member: *Par linposs!*

Mr Beechook: L'honorable Premier ministre a l'habitude de citer cette expression 'what is sauce for the goose, is sauce for the gander'.

(Interruptions)

J'accueille l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed. Finalement, je ne comprends pas trop. Il se range du côté de qui ? Des consommateurs ? Des petites et moyennes entreprises ou les promoteurs immobiliers ? Quand il défend les acquéreurs étrangers, Sud-Africains, il en a cité ; mais ce ne sont pas les acquéreurs qu'il défend ; c'est les vendeurs, les *smart cities*. Posez-vous la question dans les rues, pourquoi ça se fait que maintenant si vous n'avez pas R 200 000, R 250 000, R 300 000, vous ne pouvez pas acheter combien ? Une perche. *One pole of land in Mauritius*. Cette hyperinflation a été créée d'abord par l'inflation, mais aussi par la demande des étrangers. A qui ? Notamment aux promoteurs des *smart cities*. On a sans doute – le MSM l'a fait – accordé le plus grand cadeau fiscal de l'histoire de l'île Maurice. Plus de R 6 milliards d'exonération fiscale. Il faut qu'ils répondent à tout cela. Nous nous rangeons du côté du peuple.

Voilà, Madame la présidente, ce budget n'est pas seulement une liste de chiffres, c'est une boussole qui trace la voie vers un avenir plus serein, plus prospère et plus équitable. Chaque mesure annoncée est graine plantée pour l'avenir, et nous en récolterons les fruits bientôt ; une croissance responsable, tirée par la production et non pas la consommation, une croissance portée par un développement durable. Ce budget est une fusée, propulsant notre nation vers de nouveaux horizons, l'économie de la terre qui nourrit et soutient nos concitoyens, l'économie des océans qui valorisent notre potentiel maritime, l'économie des énergies vertes, qui fait de la durabilité notre moteur, et l'économie de l'espace. Pas seulement l'espace sidéral, mais l'espace numérique, l'espace digital où se joue l'avenir technologique de notre pays. Nous avons un retard numérique à rattraper et ce budget corrige cette erreur.

Dix ans d'immobilisme sous le MSM, dix ans de stagnation où rien n'a été fait pour moderniser notre économie numérique. Et pourtant, l'avenir, il est numérique. C'est ce gouvernement de l'Alliance du Changement, sous l'impulsion de l'honorable Dr. Avinash Ramtohul, qui a produit un *blueprint* ambitieux pour la transformation digitale de notre économie. Comme le disait Victor Hugo, ouvrir une école c'est fermer une prison. Aujourd'hui, investir dans l'intelligence artificielle c'est ouvrir une voie vers l'emploi, vers l'innovation, vers la prospérité et un nouveau pôle de croissance.

Il faut refuser, rompre avec la médiocrité numérique. Mais, voilà les prophètes de malheur, atteints de l'IA, non pas de l'intelligence artificielle, mais de l'intelligence

anachronique. Prétendre qu'investir R 25 millions pour équiper et épauler nos fonctionnaires avec l'outil de IA serait une erreur. Non, M. le leader de l'opposition, l'IA n'est pas un monstre, comme vous le décriviez hier. Ce n'est pas un spectre qui menace, mais un levier qui libère l'innovation et la créativité. Que peut-on s'attendre du gouvernement MSM qui n'a rien fait de l'économie digitale ? Souvenons-nous, le ministre des TIC d'alors n'avait rien fait pour moderniser notre infrastructure numérique. Le peuple s'en souvient, son laptop avait éclaté. Voilà le symbole du naufrage numérique du MSM. C'est à s'arracher les cheveux. J'avais une expression en bhojpuri, mais je me retiens pour cette séance.

Madam Speaker: Merci !

Mr Beechook: Madame la présidente, quelle pitié, quelle ignorance de la part de ceux qui s'agrippent aux vieilles méthodes alors que le monde avance. Nous, nous regardons vers l'avenir. Ce budget regarde vers l'avenir. Nous créons, nous partageons et nous innovons. L'avenir appartient à ceux qui se lèvent tôt, disait Léon Trotsky. Aujourd'hui, l'avenir appartient à ceux qui investissent dans la transformation digitale, et ce budget, Madame la présidente, trace le chemin de cette révolution technologique.

L'opposition joue les cassandres, prédisant l'effondrement numérique, mais oublie que c'est l'audace et la prévoyance qui font avancer un pays.

Le ministre des Finances a bâti ce budget comme on construit un pont, celui de l'avenir, avec rigueur, vision et volonté, afin de relier les citoyens à de nouvelles opportunités. Moi, *zanfan planter*, enfant d'un planteur, je me réjouis des mesures budgétaires pour relancer l'agriculture.

Madam Speaker, the centralisation of State lands from the SIT, Landscape, the Ministry of Agriculture and the MIC into a consolidated bank, dedicated to agriculture, is a bold and commendable step forward. It is not just policy, but it is a vision. A vision that reclaims our roots, revitalises our fields and redefines our future.

Allow me, Madam Speaker, to pass through you, based on the facts of this Budget, a message to the youth of this country. It is not a statement; I am still within the parameters of this budget. The next great wave of social mobility is not in offices, not in air-conditioned skyscrapers, it is in the land. Your next BMW, your next Mercedes, your next Ford Raptor, and your dream home might not come from mere salaries, but from cultivation and from bold entrepreneurship and from the soil beneath our feet. Let us wake up! Let us rediscover what

our grandfathers knew, what they fought for, what they built. Let us work the land because it is in the land there lies the gold.

Let me share an example. One and a half years ago, I managed to grab some land from a friend, which allowed me to cultivate some bananas in one and a half arpents. Today, this single initiative earns me an average of Rs40,000 monthly. Selling directly to customers would have earned me Rs55,000. It is much more than an entry-level or a job in an office. Here is the real transformation: if I leverage on Government's grant schemes through the Ministry of Agriculture and SME Mauritius, I can invest in equipment, process the bananas into banana chips, package them, and my revenue jumps to Rs300,000. This is the power of agriculture and innovation combined. This is what this Budget makes possible. Bananas, Hass avocados, Victoria pineapples, fruit à pain, jackfruits – these five agricultural products hold immense potential.

This Budget, Madam Speaker, does not just promise. It delivers. Through this Budget, the Government is giving land, resources and opportunities to the youth of this country. Rs800 m. has been earmarked under the Food Resilience Scheme to support our farmers - *le petit peuple qu'il a oublié* - our planters and our breeders to make sure that agriculture is not just a survival, but a success. This is more than just a policy. It is an open door, a call to action. A chance to shape the destiny of our country. So, today, the naysayers will tell us *nanye pa bon. Madame, la présidente, le chien aboie, mais la caravane de la prospérité agricole et économique passera quand même !*

Madame la présidente, j'ai lu, comme vous et comme nous tous, d'ailleurs, ici, dans cette auguste Assemblée, l'interview accordée par l'ancien ministre des Finances, Renganaden Padayachy, à un quotidien. Sans le moindre scrupule, il qualifie ce budget de barbare. Quel culot ! Quel culot, Madame la présidente, de la part d'un ancien ministre des Finances qui fut lui-même l'artisan du naufrage économique.

Oser parler de barbarie alors qu'il a, lui-même, joué le rôle du boucher. Le boucher qui a décapité notre économie. Le boucher qui a égorgé l'avenir de nos jeunes. Le boucher qui a saigné à blanc les finances de ce pays : STC, CEB, CWA, Casino, fonds de pensions, NPF, CSG. Que reste-t-il ? Il a éventré toutes les caisses de l'État. À la veille des élections, il vient dire, sans le moindre gêne, et avouer aux Mauriciens : *lakess vid. Paisa nay ba*, ce qu'il avait dit hier.

Madame la présidente, le leader de l'opposition m'écoute.

(Interruptions)

Ah ! Il est parti ! Il est parti ! Il ne m'écoute pas !

Madam Speaker: Il vous écoute peut-être quand même !

Mr Beechook: Sans doute ! Il m'écouterà.

Ce n'est pas ce gouvernement qui a vidé les caisses de l'État. Ce n'est pas ce gouvernement ! En revanche, c'est ce gouvernement, c'est ce budget, ce ministre des Finances qui, aujourd'hui, reconstruit, répare et redonne espoir.

Madame la présidente, hier, on a assisté à un exercice de stand-up du leader de l'opposition où il disait : '*monte ho gal ba ; monte ho gal ba !* J'ai quand même essayé de terminer sans trop aller dans l'excès, mais qu'est-ce qui a baissé dans ce budget pour alléger les consommateurs ?' Il semble avoir oublié *that we have removed 15% VAT on essential goods, canned products, baby milk, frozen vegetables. These represent up to 20-25% of a household monthly food expense.*

Hier, c'était '*monte ho gal ba.*' Lorsque je ferai comme ça, vous saurez, *bese ho gal ba. Today, in our supermarché, bwat Glenryck ?*

An hon. Member: *Bese ho gal ba!*

Mr Beechook: Sardines?

An hon. Member: *Bese ho gal ba!*

Mr Beechook: *Corn mouton, purée de tomate, sachet de Watties, dile ti baba Aptamil, Blédilait, sab?*

Hon. Members: *Bese ho gal ba!*

Madam Speaker: You have two minutes left!

Mr Beechook: This is not just relief. It is an impact.

Income tax – the biggest tax relief in years. Let us make it clear: up to Rs500,000 of chargeable income, zero income tax. Let me repeat it loud and clear: zero income tax for chargeable income up to Rs500,000. This measure will directly benefit 80% of workers in Mauritius. For the middle class, between Rs500,000 and Rs1 m. chargeable income, only 10% will be taxable. This is not just relief, it is fairness. *Et j'en passe! Le dollar aussi.*

Je vais terminer, Madame la présidente. Je prendrai qu'une minute.

Madam Speaker: Vous n'avez qu'une minute !

Mr Beechook: Je vais essayer de démentir quelques mensonges, quelques calomnies colportés par le leader de l'opposition vite fait. Non, cette année fiscale, le bureau du Premier ministre n'achètera pas de limousine ! Non, le ministère n'achète pas de nouvelles berlines ! Non, le tarif préférentiel de l'eau et celui de l'électricité n'augmenteront pas ! Non, ce gouvernement n'a pas augmenté la dette de R 80 milliards. C'est l'héritage du MSM !

Et je termine avec cette anecdote. Tout le monde parle de la pension. Je ferai une petite analogie en trente secondes. Souvenez-vous ? Nous sommes en 1975. Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam va négocier le prix du sucre avec les Européens. On va le conspuer et le critiquer pour avoir accepté un prix inférieur au marché, mais SSR avait vu loin. Il avait la vision. À peine quelques années, le prix du sucre va chuter et le prix garanti par l'Union européenne va contribuer à la prospérité de notre société et de l'industrie sucrière de l'époque.

Pourquoi je cite cet exemple ? Parce que, Madame la présidente, ce sont les sacrifices d'aujourd'hui qui vont faire prospérer les enfants, les petits enfants de la République de demain.

Voilà, j'ai presque terminé. Il ne me reste pas beaucoup de temps, ou peut-être tout est écoulé. Mais, je dois dire, en tant que député, j'entends la rue. Je les écoute. J'entends. Je comprends pourquoi ce peuple dit : 'pourquoi nous sommes ceux les plus vulnérables à payer les pots cassés alors que les élus, eux, voyagent en berline et bénéficient des salaires ? Mais je poserai la question : est-ce que le leader de l'opposition qui passe une heure par séance dans l'hémicycle, mérite-t-il l'intégralité de son salaire ? C'est à lui de poser la question et finalement je dirais, et cela n'engage que moi.

Mr Etwareea : *Lot la si pareil non !*

Mr Beechook : Cela n’engage que moi s’il faut se sacrifier et sacrifier son salaire pour souffrir avec ce peuple, je le ferai de gaieté de cœur. Mais cela n’engage que moi, d’accord. Et pour terminer, c’est ma dernière ligne, aux prophètes de malheur ; hier, j’ai entendu le leader de l’opposition dire qu’il voit beaucoup parmi nous ne pas terminer son mandat ou en prophète de malheur, il prophétise que c’est peut-être notre dernier mandat. Je terminerai avec ce poème du célèbre poète indien Rahat Indori Saab, je vais le traduire en anglais –

“We are not mere leaves on branches, tell the storm to stay within its limits”

“*Shaakhon ke patte nahin hain hum, Toufaan se kehdo aukaat mein rahe*”

Madame la présidente, j’ai dit. Merci.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I will ask the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair. Thank you.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated!

Hon. Ms Collet!

(3.01 p.m.)

Ms M. R. Collet (First Member for Rodrigues): Merci beaucoup, M. le président.

Alors nous avons chacun notre idéologie, nos manières, nos parcours politique mais ici nous sommes un seul gouvernement porteur d’un unique programme gouvernemental pour notre république. Aujourd’hui, je me tiens devant vous non pas pour aligner des chiffres mais pour faire entendre une voix : Rodrigues n’est pas un territoire lointain. Elle est un membre à part entière de cette nation mauricienne. Elle en partage les droits. Elle en partage les devoirs, les rêves mais aussi les épreuves.

Il y a des instants où un budget dépasse les chiffres. Il devient une déclaration d’intention, une parole donnée, un engagement envers ceux qui souvent dans l’ombre bâtissent cette nation pierre par pierre. Un acte de responsabilité envers un peuple qui malgré les tempêtes, pandémies, inondations, crises sanitaires restent debout construit, cultive, soigne et protège.

Aujourd’hui nous devons nous poser une question essentielle : quelles sont les vraies richesses de nos îles de la république ? Est-ce seulement nos paysages, nos statistiques, notre

mer, nos terres ? Non ! Nos vraies richesses sont nos femmes, nos hommes, notre jeunesse, nos liens sociaux, notre résilience, notre dignité silencieuse, nos langues, nos traditions, notre attachement au sol et surtout notre incroyable capacité à espérer même dans la difficulté. Ce budget doit être au service de cette richesse humaine pour la libérer et surtout pour l'élever.

C'est pourquoi, M. le président, j'appelle à une attention particulière pour nos jeunes, pour nos femmes et nos citoyens autrement capables. Nos jeunes demandent plus que des discours, ils veulent une éducation forte, connectée au monde aujourd'hui et des espaces pour créer, pour entreprendre et pour innover.

Nos femmes veulent leur place pleine et entière, c'est une question de justice. Il est temps de leur garantir non seulement l'accès à l'emploi mais aussi la reconnaissance, la sécurité, la formation et des conditions leur permettant de s'épanouir pleinement. Et pour celles et ceux que l'on appelle autrement capable, notre devoir est d'adapter l'environnement, pas de les écarter. Ecole, lieu public, outils numériques, accès à la formation, tout doit être pensé avec elle et pour elle.

Aujourd'hui, je parle surtout pour Rodrigues, une île fière, vivante, résiliente, une île qui fait pleinement partie de la république. Rodrigues aussi a connu les épidémies, les ruptures d'approvisionnement, la flambée des prix. Elle a subi les tempêtes, enduré les silences, traversé les épreuves mais Rodrigues est resté debout. Et malgré ses crises successives, les Rodriguais n'ont pas cédé aux découragements. Ils ont aussi semé et soigné et soutenu, éduqué, pas avec des slogans mais avec du courage et de la dignité et ils ont continué à se lever chaque matin à cultiver leur terre, à élever leurs enfants souvent avec peu mais toujours avec fierté. Rodrigues ne capitule pas.

Alors aujourd'hui, ce budget, M. le président, doit être une promesse de reconnaissance et d'avenir aux rodriguais. Rodrigues ne veut pas de privilèges. Elle demande justice et je porte aujourd'hui quelques demandes légitimes formulées avec clarté par nos citoyens parce que notre parole compte. Les Rodriguais demandent des promotions dans des délais raisonnables pour les fonctionnaires, des transferts humains et équitables pour ces Rodriguais en poste à Maurice et qui souhaitent servir l'île Rodrigues, au cas par cas, s'il faut le traiter. Une réforme foncière, claire, rapide et juste. Un calendrier fiable pour le navire. Une politique tarifaire équitable sur les vols inter-îles, ces vols domestiques dans la république et la création d'au moins une école sportive professionnelle pour que la jeunesse rodriguaise

puisse rêver grand à Rodrigues, chez elle, chez nous. Ce sont des demandes de justice, pas de privilèges.

Mais au-delà de ces demandes, M. le président, il y a des inquiétudes et l'une d'elle a traversé notre territoire avec force : la question de l'âge de la retraite. Le peuple a parlé : il a dit son inquiétude, son incompréhension, sa peur. Et cette inquiétude est légitime parce que cette réforme ne touche pas seulement les chiffres, elle touche à la dignité, à la reconnaissance, au respect des parcours de vie. Je salue la décision du Premier ministre et de son Conseil des ministres d'instaurer deux comités d'experts indépendants chargés d'étudier la réforme de la pension en profondeur mais au nom de mon peuple, je le dis clairement : Rodrigues doit être pleinement associé à cette réflexion parce que nos réalités sont différentes ; parce que nos conditions de vie ne sont pas les mêmes ; parce que l'unité de la république n'est pas l'uniformité ; parce que nos réalités rodriguaises doivent être prises en compte dans la réforme ; parce que ce budget doit également entendre les voix et les esprits éclairés bien informés du peuple car une réforme juste ne peut se construire sans ceux qu'elle concerne. Ce n'est pas un simple débat technique, c'est une question de dignité, de reconnaissance, d'équité. Nous demandons donc que Rodrigues participe activement à cette réflexion.

M. le président, nous ne devons pas oublier une autre forme d'urgence, celle du lien social. Dans un monde saturé de fausses informations, de solitude, de violence silencieuse, nous avons besoin d'une action forte en prévention et en éducation. Alors oui, gouverner, c'est éclairer. Nous vivons dans un monde où la peur circule plus vite que la vérité. Comme l'écrivait le philosophe, Spinoza –

« L'ignorance n'est pas un manque de savoir. C'est une illusion de liberté. »

Quand on ne comprend pas, quand on ne sait pas, on croit choisir mais on subit. Quand les faits manquent, la peur gagne. Notre tâche de parlementaires est de protéger notre peuple. Protéger c'est aussi éclairer. Alors notre devoir ici, M. le président, c'est d'informer, prévenir, expliquer, éduquer pas pour convaincre mais pour libérer notre peuple. C'est pourquoi je pense que le rôle de ce gouvernement est de dire la vérité, de transmettre le savoir, de redonner du pouvoir par la connaissance et c'est pourquoi, au nom de mon peuple, je réclame des campagnes d'informations claires quitte à ce que le gouvernement central accorde ce rôle à l'Assemblée régionale, de sensibiliser contre les fléaux sociaux, contre la désinformation incluant sur les réseaux, contre la criminalité, contre la corruption.

Une attention est un appui accru à la santé mentale de nos femmes, de nos hommes, de notre jeunesse et un renforcement de moyens pour la lutte contre la criminalité et faire justice parce que sans justice, M. le président, il n'y a pas de confiance et sans confiance, il n'y a pas de progrès durable.

En parallèle, M. le président, la population exprime d'autres attentes concrètes. D'autres urgences remontent du terrain, d'autres choses doivent bouger. Les collègues avant moi l'on fait ressortir, le coût de la vie est trop élevé. Les factures d'eau, les factures d'électricité explosent. Les billets d'avion Rodrigues-Maurice, Rodrigues-Réunion, Maurice-Rodrigues sont hors de prix. Le navire Trochetia devient imprévisible. L'accès à la terre doit être plus simple. Les jeunes veulent des vraies perspectives – ici, pas ailleurs.

La justice, nous semble trop lente. La santé mentale insuffisamment soutenue et la lutte contre la corruption semble nous manquer encore des moyens. Ces ne sont ni des plaintes, ni des caprices, M. le président. Ces sont des appels et les appels il faut les entendre.

Ce budget ne doit pas seulement refléter des chiffres, il doit être une réponse aux espoirs, aux défis et aux urgences. Ce budget doit être au service de l'humain parce que les vraies richesses de Rodrigues sont celles qui ne figurent pas dans les tables comptables – son peuple, sa dignité et son courage et son avenir.

Rodrigues demande donc l'écoute et la parité. Ce budget doit répondre à une réalité car Rodrigues ne veut pas être assisté ; elle veut être actrice. Elle ne veut pas qu'on décide à sa place ; elle veut participer à la décision. Et surtout, Rodrigues veut que ses enfants puissent réussir chez eux sans devoir partir.

Nous devons bien sûr respecter les valeurs de notre drapeau national, le symbolisme des couleurs. Rouge pour notre force collective dans les moments difficiles. Bleu pour la profondeur de notre histoire et de nos racines. Jaune pour la lumière de nos rêves et notre espoir, même dans l'adversité. Et, vert pour notre attachement à cette terre que nous aimons, que nous chérissons et à l'avenir que nous construisons ensemble.

Respecter ce drapeau, c'est respecter le peuple dans les décisions, respecter le peuple dans la gouvernance, respecter le peuple dans la manière de considérer chaque citoyen. Un budget pour bâtir l'avenir.

Ce budget ne cherche pas à colmater mais à construire. Il anticipe les défis de notre époque, le climat qui change, la technologie qui évolue, les métiers qui se transforment, la sécurité alimentaire et surtout la promesse faite à notre jeunesse car un jeune Rodriguais ne

doit plus quitter son île pour réussir. Je le répète, il doit pouvoir grandir, s'épanouir et construire chez lui. Ce budget doit ouvrir des chemins car il rappelle que la république est une et entière.

M. le président, le budget 2025-2026, prévoit pour Rodrigues, R 5 milliards pour faire fonctionner les services publics – hôpitaux, écoles, administrations, transports et R 785 millions pour financer des projets d'avenir, des investissements utiles qui changeront le quotidien de chaque Rodriguais. Ce budget ne doit pas se limiter à un montant et moi, je vois qu'il marque une nouvelle façon de faire. Désormais, chaque roupie dépensée doit produire un impact mesurable.

La république entre dans l'ère du *programme-based budgeting*, un budget structuré par un programme où chaque dépense doit être justifiée par des résultats concrets. Cela signifie, M. le président, un objectif clair pour chaque investissement, un suivi des progrès et des ajustements rapides, une transparence totale où chaque institution doit rendre des comptes, incluant l'Assemblée nationale de Rodrigues.

Le gouvernement engage une transformation majeure, finit les pilotages à vue, place à la transparence et à l'efficacité. Dans ce modèle, Rodrigues doit être un acteur à part entière. L'Assemblée régionale ne doit pas seulement demander mais aussi planifier, exécuter et rendre des comptes. L'autonomie, ce n'est pas exigé plus, c'est de faire mieux.

Et bien merci. Clarifier les rôles pour avancer. Aujourd'hui, les responsabilités entre le gouvernement central et l'Assemblée régionale de Rodrigues reste floue. Il y a des compétences croisées, chevauchement entre ministère et instances régionales, des blocages qui ralentissent l'action publique. Or, quand la responsabilité est floue, l'efficacité disparaît.

Au nom du peuple de Rodrigues, je demande une réforme des lois sur la décentralisation de pouvoir pour clarifier qui fait quoi, quand et comment. Pour une gouvernance lisible, des rôles précis, une action rapide et efficace pour les citoyens.

M. le président, ce budget national nous engage tous sur des enjeux cruciaux –

- mieux produire et mieux nourrir pour garantir notre autonomie alimentaire ;
- investir dans la santé mentale et moderniser les soins à distance avec la télé médecine ;
- rénover nos infrastructures scolaires avec R 438 millions allouées pour une éducation plus forte de la petite enfance à l'université ;

- soutenir l'innovation avec R 200 millions pour la recherche appliquée et R 25 millions pour intégrer l'intelligence artificielle dans les services publics ;
- faciliter l'accès des femmes au marché du travail avec une nouvelle législation et pour la formation et la reconversion professionnelle ;
- digitaliser les services publics en partenariat avec le FMI pour développer l'accès aux données ouvertes ;
- mettre à disposition des terres publiques pour produire plus localement et nourrir nos familles ;
- créer des écoles sportives professionnels afin que nous jeunes puissions rêver, se dépasser et réussir dans notre république.

Ce budget ne répare pas que le passé ; il prépare l'avenir – l'avenir du climat, l'avenir du travail, l'avenir de la justice sociale, l'avenir de notre jeunesse. Et, ce budget doit ouvrir des horizons. Si nous doutons, regardons notre drapeau national.

M. le président, ce budget est une promesse. Une déclaration d'avenir. Je vous dis au nom de Rodrigues et au nom de mon peuple, Rodrigues est prêt. Rodrigues est en marche. Merci beaucoup.

The Deputy Speaker: Merci.

Hon. Baboolall!

(3.20 p.m.)

Mr C. Baboolall (First Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me begin by quoting Nelson Mandela –

“It always seems impossible until it's done.”

This reminds us that even the toughest challenges can be overcome with determination and courage. I thank Dr. the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for the presentation of the first Budget 2025-2026 of this new Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I concur with what my hon. colleagues has said before me, and I will not repeat myself. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, hon. Uteem who rightly explained the situation we are in today and if proper actions are not taken promptly, Mauritius may be a ‘junk state.’ Thus, leading to the downfall of Mauritius.

Hon. Assirvaden gave a detailed *exposée* of how funds were dilapidated by the previous government. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us not forget what the previous regime did. Mr

Deputy Speaker, Sir, the previous government was a fake government who has destroyed Mauritius. They were controlling all the institutions. We were in a dictatorship state. If you spoke against the previous government, the Striking Team could hit you any time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the liberty of the people was at stake. How can we forget that? The people have seen what happened when we borrow beyond our means leading to inflation, and huge public sector debt leading to higher prices where the whole country suffers. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, how can we forget that they cut off the internet connection? We have seen the memo that it was to be restored on 11 November 2024. The people were suffocating. We had a fake Speaker as well.

No independent press conference was being held and everyone were scared of talking against the previous government. There were even murders. The people voted for a change. The people voted to breathe again. The people voted for a second independence. The people voted for freedom.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I quote Bob Marley –

“Better to die fighting for freedom than be a prisoner all days of your life.”

The Alliance du Changement was elected to bring change to our country to provide security, liberty and prosperity. The document on the State of the Economy was published and gave us an indication that the situation we have inherited is unsustainable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the major issue today is the Basic Retirement Pension, as stated in the Budget Speech, needs a major reform. In a statement by Dr. the hon. Prime Minister on 17 June 2025, he made it clear that the old age pension system in Mauritius has become fiscally unsustainable and financially unbearable by the reckless policies of the previous government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, therefore, there is no choice, but to confront the urgent need for pension reform ahead on as a responsible Government. We remain deeply mindful of the challenges the most vulnerable may face under the proposed changes and commitment to addressing the concerns with compassion and empathy, as stated by him.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as a democratic Government, the hon. Prime Minister stated that two interministerial committees will be established to examine the matters related to the Basic Retirement Pension as this Government is here to consult as well.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as point out by the hon. Prime Minister, the BRP is a time bomb which has already exploded, and pension reform is absolutely critical as it aims at enhancing fiscal sustainability and to protect future generations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, quoting George Orwell –

“If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people things they do not want to hear.”

“Liberty begins to take route; it is a plant of rapid growth.”

This is what this Government is doing which will lead to a more sustainable Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if we care for the future generation, we need to act now, as rightly pointed out by Barack Obama –

“In the face of impossible odds, people who love this country can change it.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, no politicians like to make unpopular decisions, but we have to admire the courage of the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the hon. Deputy Prime Minister who, without doubt, mean business for the betterment of this country. The work began with this responsible Government in November 2024. In seven months, a lot has been done.

All Ministers are doing their best to clear the mess of the previous regime by restoring public responsibility in public finances, by giving the Bank of Mauritius back its independence and by rebuilding our public services. Now, our task is to secure Mauritius’ future.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget sets out comprehensive plans of action and policies resting on three pillars –

1. economic renewal;
2. a social order,
3. and fiscal consolidation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in shaping innovative Mauritius, education is a crucial building block for a brighter future. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a brighter future relies on how people across generations purposely engage in AI. Together we must imagine the impossible to achieve the unthinkable.

It is upon us all to build our future. This Government has provided Rs200 m. to various ministries to finance research that result in policy innovation. Ultimately, we will need intent fully redesign our education system, our economic system, our labour system to more broadly benefit from the power of generative AI.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is true, we, the people, invest in our future and that necessity is the mother of innovation. Without significant resource, investment ideas remain just that. This is why this Government believes in innovating all the ministries. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the upcoming future of the even lower cost of access to other broad types of expertise, we should aim for no human left behind. We should fund massive AI literacy training for our current generations XYZ.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us start making sizable forward, looking investment on the people, part of people + AI equation to make it balance. Only then, we will get on the path to the exponentially brighter future for humanity and Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, another pillar that Mauritius will develop is the Blue Economy. As rightly pointed out by hon. Dr. Boolell, the work has already started. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the high level 2025 United Nations Conference to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 has seen Mauritius being represented by the hon. Prime Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this conference aims to support further an urgent action to conserve the sustainability use of ocean seas, marine resources for sustainable development and identify ways and means to support the implementation of SDG 14. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there will be an *Assises de l'Océan* which will come up with a blueprint.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in relation to the Judiciary, the hon. Attorney General is doing his best for the long-awaited reforms. Also, the renovation of the Flacq District Court is most welcomed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget also brings changes in my Constituency, that is, No.10 where the implementation of motorway M4 project is under way from Forbach to Bel Air. Furthermore, there will be upgrading of the B28 from Beau Champ to Bel Air, extension of Bramsthan Area Health Centre, construction of Community Health Centre at Trou d'Eau Douce, Camp de Masque and Ecroignard. There will be also the construction jetties at Trou d'Eau Douce. These have been long due.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this first budget lays the foundation for building this bridge to the future. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this will be built together with the people of this country on solid foundation, with solid railings to protect the more vulnerable, with a solid platform to withstand the storm with a clear pathway to a brighter future for the common good of this and future generations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the population put their trust in us and we as a responsible government honour this trust to get us to the right destination. We must share the burden now so that we can share the proceeds of growth as stated by the hon. Prime Minister. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in replying to the speech of the Leader of the Opposition and hon. A. Duval. I would just summarise it in two quotes one from Plato that –

“We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light”.

And another one from Pierre Corneille: *Le Menteur* (1644) –

« Il faut bonne mémoire après qu'on a menti ».

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the two leaders here, are true patriots and like Martin Luther King Jr. said –

“There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because his conscience tells him it is right.”

Before concluding, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me thank Dr. the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Deputy Prime Minister and all ministers who courageously participated in the preparation of this budget. In conclusion, I will once again thank all the people in Constituency No.10 to have put their faith in us. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget lays the foundation for rebuilding the bridge to the future *et nous allons construire ce pont même avec un mauvais temps*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I commend the Appropriation Bill to the House. Long live Mauritius. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Dr. the hon. F. Aumeer.

(3.33 p.m.)

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I have participated in a few debates over the past few years but

this particular one bears a great importance not to the present alone, but to the future generation. I am however glad to see today among our invitees, a young generation of people sitting there watching how this Government has at heart their future and is securing a better life for them in the future.

This budget implements a vision to redress an economy completely devastated. As seen on one hand, as per the State of the Economy, this document will become a term of reference in the future or in the future decades. Nobody will be able to deny it and this is evidence of the catastrophic, reckless management of our finance by the previous government and it showed the depth of our debts. On the other hand, there have been many a times in this House, PQs and PMQs have shown how the coffers of the State have been squandered, ransacked and including the reckless and illegal recruitments by a manipulated Local Government Service Commission. We all heard yesterday the Prime Minister mentioned how Nundun Gopee benefited Rs 3.2 billion from the Government of Mauritius. The Minister of Foreign Affairs gave us in details how there was an abuse about using Mauritian money, our taxpayer's money only to have a lifestyle so that they can enjoy. But they never had concerns for the suffering of the people of this country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the budget brings a lot of expectations, anticipation, fears of taxes, criticisms but this budget was based on fiscal responsibility and concern of the status of our country particularly in relation to international agencies like Moody's whom we have had to consider their opinion and their probable actions if we do not act conservatively, appropriately and with due diligence. This Government has truly inherited a very catastrophic inheritance. The figures in the State of the Economy, I have heard so many times the Leader of Opposition and his colleague Adrien Duval saying the figures, they do not lie. They do not lie; public debt is expected to reach Rs 642 billion more than the Rs 574 billion expected. This will be 90% of our GDP. A budget deficit of Rs 70 billion, a depreciation of our rupee over last 10 years and we have also seen how there has been a loss of power in the buying capacity of our people including inflation rate that have increased.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with all the wide-ranging measures that have been announced in the budget, what is the Government's aim in producing such a budget? The aim was clear, we expect that a budget surplus in five years, a public sector debt to 75% within the next three years eventually to 60% as when the Labour Party left government in 2014. A fiscal responsibility regulation that would ensure that we cannot have levels of public sector debt overcoming more than 60%.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, *les budgets précédents ont jeté la poudre aux yeux avec des allocations à certaines couches de la société* but one must cut once coat according to one's growth *et ceci n'a été fait*. How did they do it? How could they give so much allocation? How could they pretend that they had enough money in the coffers of the bank? It is because our Reserves' figures were inflated, downplayed expenditures, overstated GDP, basically a combination of manipulation of figures, printing money, increasing debts and contempt, they showed utter contempt to warnings from the international monetary agencies like Moody's who has been downgrading us sequentially over the last few years.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, *the previous government* nous a laissé un cadeau empoisonné que ce soit en termes de finances ou de bonne gouvernance. Les finances quand on regarde les dettes accumulées des corps para étatiques tels que le CEB, le CWA, le State Trading Corporation, Air Mauritius, National Property Fund, Metro Express, NSLD, Multi Sport, on n'en finit pas. La bonne gouvernance ? À en voir la queue au triangle de Réduit comme s'il y aurait un trafic jam. Je travaille à côté, je vois tous les jours les queues. Le Local Government Service, les présidents et ses membres sous investigation, le Eco Deer Park saga, le MIC, l'achat de l'hôtel d'Ambre, le STC : l'achat du pétrole par le Mercantile Maritime Group. Le MIC s'est fait parler de lui plusieurs fois, le Menlo Park, Pulse Analytics et le loan à Maradiva. Nundun Gopee a bénéficié aussi bien que le Silver Bank.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to say a word on drugs. The drug fight is everybody's fight and this Government under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister has already shown the willpower to *vreman kas lerin trafikan ladrog* not only by the various seizures. Only two days ago approximately 12kg of cocaine was seized. Raids from drug lords, on their residences, on their drug den and also on their distribution network but more importantly by the tangible evidence that it is working. Do you know how it is working? Because across the country, there is a feel that there is a shortage of hard and soft drugs also particularly the capital and this was well supplied before by drug barons. The mini synthetic laboratories have nearly disappeared from all over the place. If more money were to be budgeted in this war. So be it we must win.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now focus on the issue of parallel imports particularly import of medicine. Parallel imports have always been the subject of intense debate. However, it is no secret that the price of medications keeps on rising in Mauritius. However, it is no secret that the price of medication in Mauritius keeps on rising. Many are of the opinion that should parallel imports be available, then it will certainly bring a lowering of

price of medication. Basically, what parallel imports mean is allowing the importation of medicine by a different supplier other than the local trade representative.

I and all our friends here, every time we sit for lunch and dinner, they are all concerned about their cholesterol. They all talk about their blood sugar. Did you know that if you were to buy the local trade representative tablet of Crestor, it will cost you Rs1,500 while if you were to buy from parallel import, it will cost you only Rs650? So, it is a big difference. The Government has a duty of care, however, and responsibility to ensure that where those parallel imports will come from are safe and reliable, and where imported countries have good monitoring system. The Ministry of Health, my good friend, hon. Anil Bachoo, should ensure that these importers or their agents do get not involved into fraudulent products, forfeited products, dump products, fake Certificate of Good Manufacturing Practice (COMP). This is the essence; this is the gold standard of bringing medication in this country.

The Pharmacy Act is very clear – it should protect the patients, the customers. However, there is much concern about so many of the importers of drugs because some blue-eyed boy who knew the back door entry had been able to register 200 medications over a period of four years, where their competitive supplier, could only register 6-5. It is to be noted that it should not be used. So, the Pharmacy Board has to be looked into well because now that that has been reconstituted, it should not fail to how it failed under the former Minister who took pleasure in making sure that the Pharmacy Board had members of his own family and cronies of his liking.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in order to ensure quality and safety, we need to have gold standards like the Federate Trade Agency in the United States and the Minister of Health will have to have a high-tech laboratory to evaluate and inspect the medical products allowed in the country. Whether parallel imports must be restricted to only expensive and lifesaving products, is a matter of further discussion and the Competition Commission must also ensure that there is a very fine balance between parallel import over those local trade representatives who are the sole supplier. It is very important that such commission keep a close eye on that.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am also confident that once parallel imports become a reality where prices will be more reasonable, it will set the pace for pharmacare. A system whereby anybody can have his medication free from any local pharmacy, should it not be available in the hospital pharmacies.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, health for all; the budget speech on health, as we have seen it, is a stark reminder of the paradigm shift this Government plans for healthcare of the nation. In essence, priority is being given to human capital and resources rather than brick and mortars.

Le succès de tout établissement de soin de santé et perçu de l'ensemble de la population, repose sur des résultats objectifs ; la qualité de notre système d'urgence. Et c'est la raison pour laquelle il faut savoir ce que les patients nous disent ; le temps d'attente, des soins spécialisés, le service de radiologie ou de secours. C'est la vitrine de notre service de santé ; la raison pour laquelle dans ce budget il y a le recrutement des *qualified emergency physicians* au lieu des *generalist physicians*, et j'en suis sûr que cela apporterait un plus à un niveau très acceptable de notre soin de santé dans les hôpitaux publics.

Deuxièmement, l'espérance de vie, le taux de mortalité, le taux de *morbidity*, ce n'est un secret pour personne que nous avons un taux élevé des maladies non transmissibles, et aussi une augmentation inquiétante du cancer. Pour contrer cette tendance, le budget prévoit à la prévention et à l'éducation en ce qui concerne le mode de vie. Le programme de rémission avec R 47 millions pour 450 000 diabétiques et prédiabétiques, un comité consultatif sur les maladies cardiovasculaires et le diabète pour pratiquer ce qu'on appelle *evidence-based practice*. J'ai toujours parlé de cela et cette fois-ci, j'en suis ravi que le *evidence-based practice* fera partie des hôpitaux.

Un dépistage complet du cancer du côlon – et cela est très important – et du cancer du sein. Nous avons un taux alarmant du cancer à Maurice et ce n'est que juste avant le budget que ce document fut publié. Un document qui publie le dépistage du cancer du côlon et si on ne le fait pas, le cancer du côlon deviendrait le premier cancer de mortalité parmi les jeunes de 30 à 50 ans. La mise en place de 500 diabétiques et un programme de santé scolaire d'efficacité clinique, c'est comparer combien de nurses on a pour les patients. Il faut rétablir ce ratio et je suis pleinement ravi que le ministère de la Santé va procéder au recrutement d'environ 1000 nurses et la formation et renforcement des capacités contribueront sans aucun doute à la réalisation de ces objectifs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, e-Health, it is not going to be Rivière des Anguilles dam. A long-awaited reform taking off for real, a project since 2012 where such delay has caused real frustration. What was missing was its execution. Today, we finally have the willpower, institutional setup, technical readiness and expert guidance.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as a consultant in the field of medicine, I have seen firsthand how digital platforms can transform healthcare, digitalise patient records, streamline our patients, ensure data security. These has been the main failings of e-Health and we have to be extremely cautious because anybody who has a password within that establishment can get access to your personal and confidential files. The ICT framework goes a long way to help in this project. As Member of Parliament and even backbencher, I want to ensure that the same innovation reaches our public healthcare system when it is most needed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the seriousness of health for all which lay the basis for a fairer future will be a stark reminder of the legacy that has been left since 2009 until 2024 by the former Government and particularly, the rogue Minister who did not hesitate to allow his cronies to ransack this country. Where to start? The juicy contracts of Hyperpharm? The panic buying of Chloroquine? The damning special audit on emergency procurement of Rs1.5 million? Our dear and so much debated Pack & Blister? Molnupiravir which had a 200, 300, 400, 500, 700 increase, 100% increase in the initial price? Buying Remdesivir and Ronapreve during COVID which was not even necessary? The STC saga; masks, PPEs? *Les bijoutiers, les quincailleries, les amis d'enfance, les hôtesse de l'air, Neeteeselect*, the golden handshake of the former Chief Executive?

The Fact-Finding Committee on the deaths of 12 unfortunate dialysed patients. I was sitting there, I do not know what name was given, the *poulailler* or whatever they said there – I questioned the Minister who was there and asked him – ‘will you set up a fact-finding committee on the dialysed patients who have unfortunately died?’. And his answered as usual with his cynical manners, he said ‘no’. Three days later, his own Prime Minister brought his pants down and said that a fact-finding committee had to be instituted. And today, we have the judicial inquiry going on and you are present there as well, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and I have personally made the request to depone on the judicial inquiry because I will say what these people have endured and in my own opinion, how reckless and possibly erring on the side of criminality they have behaved during these days.

No mortuary, the *quarantaine* hotel saga, VVIP-VIPs were living the *quarantaine* saga; lack of oxygen, no preparedness, you had to go Reunion to get it; burnt out staff, a young girl passed away, laboratory not equipped for PCR despite preparedness, despite the WHO mentioned that the COVID-19 was a public health emergency of international concern. Such were the glaring wastage of public funds. Never again these people should be allowed to be at the helms of Government. It is good they are not here anymore. I do not see them.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will fail in my speech if I do not say a few words on the so much canvassed pension reforms. The so-called wonder reform, as brought by the ex-Minister of Finance, to support the pension fund, the CSG, was a complete fiasco! Let me remind the House that the CSG has been dilapidated, depleted, ransacked and left the Government with a debt of Rs9 billion. It is a fact that the pension at the age of 65 does bring an element of uneasiness among certain sectors of our workers and population.

The question we all have to ask is: is the current system sustainable over the years, keeping in mind the coming generation; an ageing population; an increased number of retired employees; a ratio of two working people for one retired person; a ratio of three working people for two retiring persons in the next coming years, and young individuals contributing now and not having the guarantee that their Basic Retirement Pension will be paid?

This budget has not changed the retirement age. This budget has kept the retirement at 65, and it will remain at 65. But we have to be careful because the number of workers is shrinking and the number of old-aged pensioners are soaring. The BRP is starting as from 67 years in most developed countries. In this country, it was 1.9% of our GDP from 2010. Today, it is nearly at 7.8%. We have to be careful that the ageing population will rise from 184,000 people to 200, ...

The Deputy Speaker: You have one minute to conclude!

Dr. Aumeer: However, a safety net for heavy duty workers, sick people, housewives, vehicle drivers, construction workers, amongst others, must be considered. Appropriate discussions with relevant stakeholders will surely find a common ground for these people. We have all heard the sounds of the boots on the ground, and the sound of the boots on the ground that we have been hearing is not exclusively for a few. We have an obligation, and we have to be mindful of the political mileage of some criticisms. The reason why the Prime Minister acted promptly, diligently and with empathy for the vulnerable, and he instituted two inter-ministerial committees.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am nearly finished. Please, bear with me.

The Deputy Speaker: Conclude!

Dr. Aumeer: On a more positive note, I am fully supportive of the call that sacrifice must be made from all Members of this House, Chief Executives of parastatal bodies, Directors and Chairmen, previous Heads of States, Ambassadors, among a few. High expenses and travelling of parliamentarians, which are a necessity at times, are often the subject of discussion by people out there. *Parce que le petit peuple est toujours appelé à serrer la ceinture, ils sentent la pression.* Due attention must be given to them!

I will say to hon. A. Duval, who talked about the particular issue of sacrifice, if he really means sacrifice, I will tell him what I am prepared for. I am prepared to chip in and to participate, if there is any contribution that the Government will set up to help the needy. But will he forego a pension fund he acquired after only 78 days of being a Speaker? I am sure he will not! He loves his money!

To conclude, since the Budget Speech, I have heard a former Minister on a private radio saying: ‘*sa bidze-la finn met larm dan lizie bann mama!*’ If he is listening to me, I will tell him that his government, for six years, *finn met larm disan* in the eyes of mothers, fathers, grandfathers, uncles as young people have died because of the scourge of drugs! He should not teach us any lesson! That former Minister has forgotten one thing. I insist everybody to remind him of this: him and his colleagues will never dry the tears of blood of Mrs Kistnen, whose husband was one of their agents and was brutally murdered!

To conclude, it is a very bold budget with some measures that may not be politically popular at the moment, but whose success will lie in the welfare of our children and future generation will savour them. I finish with a quote of Albert Camus. This quote is for the hon. Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has, in an interview of one of the *quotidien du matin*, dit: ‘*J’ai les épaules assez larges parce que j’ai fait la traversée du désert.*’

You know what Camus said about this attitude? –

“In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer.

And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there’s something stronger – something better, pushing right back [the criticism].”

I am done. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Minister Gondeea!

(3.55 p.m.)

The Minister of Arts and Culture (Mr M. Gondeea): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has been through a decade of drift, a decade of missed opportunities, growing inequality and economic stagnation, to mention only a few.

Our people have endured years of economic pressure: basic necessities became harder to afford, opportunities shrank under the weight of nepotism, and household budgets were stretched to their limits. All this while debt skyrocketed and policies lacked visions. The burden of mismanagement has taken its toll on the population. It has been heavy and it has been deeply felt. Development was stalled, vital infrastructure neglected, and instead, white elephants were given centre stage. Trust in public institutions eroded, and the promise of progress dimmed for families across the island.

When I listened to the speech of the Leader of the Opposition yesterday, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it only confirmed that the country already knew. The speech was the reflection of the reason why Mauritians rejected the former government so decisively. It lacked direction, substance and relevance. It is no surprise then that it took more than six months and this very budget for Pravind Jugnauth to finally make a public appearance! A historic 60-0 defeat does not come without cause, it comes when people feel unheard, unserved and desolation. That speech gave us every reason to remember why we are here today. The people of Mauritius demanded change. Not slogans, but leadership!

The Budget we are debating today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is not just a set of numbers. It is a declaration of intent, a roadmap for positive change, national recovery, renewal and hope. It is about economic empowerment, jobs dignity and justice. It is about restoring hope where there was lost of faith and giving every Mauritian, whether a farmer, a teacher, an entrepreneur or an artist, a real chance to thrive.

Under the decisive leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, and the Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Paul Béranger, this Government is restoring sound economic stewardship, planning for sustainable development and committing

to inclusive growth. We are building an economy that works for people, beyond figures and statistics. We are catching up and forging the way forward by investing in infrastructure, education, healthcare, food security, innovation, sports, artistic and cultural rebirth. This budget is about reviving our beloved Mauritius so as to meet the challenges that lie ahead. We shall do so by being people centric, that is, by placing people at the centre of the policy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now turn to the area under my direct responsibility: arts, culture, heritage and the creative economy. This is certainly not a sector on the margins. It is a cornerstone of national identity, intercultural dialogue, peace and sustainable driver for economic resilience. For too long, it has been treated as ornamental, something nice to have, never something necessary. But ask a dancer whose stage was silenced, the painter whose work went unseen and just days before the music day, the artist who never received a reply for a concert permit, they will tell you. This was more than neglect; it was deliberate erasure.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, today I do not rise merely to support a budget, I rise to deliver a reckoning. This budget is our collective declaration that we will never again allow culture to be pushed aside. It is a rebirth, a rupture from the past. It is the moment where we say with full conviction that the soul of our nation is worth fighting for.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for ten long years our nation wandered in a fog of uncertainty, debt and despair. What should have been a golden decade opportunity became instead an era of wasted potential and institutional decay. The arts and culture sector which is our soul, our history, our story and our identity was pushed into the shadows, ignored by a government that treated it as an afterthought. No plan, no direction, no care, just silence.

Under the previous administration, the arts and culture sector was deprived of strategic investment and coherent national policy nor cultural indicators were developed to measure the contribution of arts to sustainable development, no soft diplomacy, no cultural diplomacy, no digitalisation of heritage, no structured support to allow our artists to thrive at home or on the global stage. It was as if the creative heartbeat of our nation did not matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget marks a turning point, a restoration of faith, direction and dignity. Under the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, we are not only reversing a decade of indifference but we are igniting a cultural renaissance. As I have always said this Government understands that culture is not a luxury, it is a right. It is a foundation for identity, unity, stability, peace and economic innovation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me elaborate on the specific measures that will transform the sector. First, the establishment of a National Arts Open Commission will be a historic reform. This Commission will bring together practitioners, experts and policy makers from across disciplines to shape a national arts and culture policy. It will address infrastructure gaps, propose reforms, set measurable goals and ensure that our sector is guided by a long-term vision. That is, one driven by actors in the sector themselves. Those who live and breathe the arts.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our artists and event organisers have long been victims of an archaic opaque and frustrating permits system. Under the previous government, obtaining a permit for a concert or festival, was an ordeal. Weeks, not to mention months of bureaucracy, unclear requirements and arbitrary decisions. This system stifled creativity and prevented artistic expression from reaching our communities.

To address this, a dedicated cultural desk is being set up at my Ministry, this is something our artist and event organisers have been demanding for years, crying out for a clear, accessible and responsive point of contact within government and for ten long years those calls were ignored. Artists were forced to go from ministry to ministry, department to department, facing bureaucratic indifference and a total lack of accountability.

This Government is finally acting where the others have failed. The cultural desk will not be symbolic, it will be functional, empowered and digital. It will fast-track approvals, streamline procedures and ensure transparency. In collaboration with the Economic Development Board and the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, we will develop a modern online application system that allows artists to submit, monitor and receive timely responses to their request. This is not a favour to our artists; it is a right that they have long been denied and which this Government is determined to deliver.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are also re-imagining the role of art in the economy in a way that is bold, ambitious and long overdue. For too long, the idea that art could a source of wealth, economic empowerment, investment, soft diplomacy and international influence was considered foreign to our shores. The previous administration failed to understand its strategic importance, not to mention initiate a conversation on this. We are now setting records right with conviction.

Through this budget, we are launching a pioneering initiative to position Mauritius as a regional hub for high value art trading house within the freeport zone. This innovative

initiative will attract international collectors, investors, galleries and institution trade, store and showcase artworks in Mauritius, leveraging our strategic location, security and favourable business environment. It will create a vibrant market for both local and international art, stimulating foreign direct investment and promoting Mauritius as a destination for cultural capital.

But even more importantly, it creates an unprecedented opportunity for our Mauritian artists to break into the global art economy. Our talented painters, sculptors, photographers and multi-media creators will now have access to new markets. This aligns with the measure as outlined in the budget which recognises art, not just as an expression of culture but as a viable export activity. A special facility will be created within the freeport to support the trading of international artworks, making Mauritius a hub for investment, especially targeting ultra-high net worth individuals from around the world. This will not only boast foreign investment but also create a platform for our local artist to gain international exposure, access new markets and attract collectors.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this measure represents a radical shift in mindset. It recognises art not only as culture but as capital. Something that builds value, commands respect and create job. For the first time, Mauritius will speak the language of global culture with confidence and pride.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our national heritage has also suffered deeply. The outdated National Heritage Fund Act 2003 remains unrevised. The result: theft, loss of artefacts, deteriorating heritage buildings and a disjointed approach to conservation. The previous government did absolutely nothing. This Government will change that by launching the Heritage Steward Scheme. This bold new initiative will invite credible private sector partners to invest in the restoration and management of heritage sites under strict guidelines that preserve public ownership and cultural integrity.

These sites will be revitalised into active engaging spaces that serve a both historical monument and economic engines through cultural tourism. Linked to this, we will reposition heritage as a key pillar of our tourism strategy. Heritage buildings and museums will be transformed into dynamic cultural destinations, offering performances, guided tours, workshops and artisan markets. This will stimulate local economic development, job creation, decentralise cultural opportunity and bring new life to rural and underserved areas.

Mr Deputy, Speaker, Sir, for over a decade, our parastatal bodies operated without clear mandates or any incentive to innovate. This resulted in inefficiency, duplication and inertia. Now, every parastatal and state-owned enterprise under my Ministry, will require to develop a research development and innovation plan, aligned with our national vision of an innovative Mauritius.

These institutions will embrace new technologies like augmented reality, virtual tours, AI driven visitor experiences and digitise collections. This will benchmark against international standards, open virtual museums, launch online archives and explore creative revenue models. This shift will help us reposition Mauritius as a competitive and vibrant cultural hub in the global arena. We will also invest in open data and big data infrastructure. The absence of data has long hindered our sectors' ability to advocate, plan or grow.

Talking of data, the latter is crucial for informed decision-making. We are working with international institutions such as UNESCO for putting in place proper data collection. We act, we get things done, we will finally be able to measure the economic and social impact of arts and culture, aligned with UNESCO's 2030 cultural indicators for sustainable development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, intellectual property remains another crucial area that suffered from complete neglect. For too long, the Mauritius Society of Authors, (MASA) has existed in name but not in effectiveness. Once conceived to protect the lifeblood of our nation's creators, it has in recent years, become synonymous with distinction. Its systems are outdated; its reach is limited and its support to artists is minimal. Artists across Mauritius have waited months, sometimes years, for royalty payments that never came. They have asked for help in protecting their work and received little more than silence. Many no longer even bother to register their creations, having lost all faith in the institution that is meant to safeguard their rights. That is not just a failure of administration; it is a political failure of the previous government. It is betrayal towards the artist.

M. le président, ce que nous voyons là, c'est un refus clair et net de l'ancien gouvernement d'assumer ses responsabilités. À l'inverse, nous, le gouvernement d'aujourd'hui, avons la volonté ferme de faire avancer les choses avec détermination, sérieux et engagement.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget proposes a complete and uncompromising overall of MASA. We will restructure its governance, modernise its processes and make it a fully accountable body with real results. We will also strengthen the broader legal framework

around intellectual property with focus on copyright, collective rights and creators' rights, both locally and internationally. This is more than reform; it is a restoration of dignity. No artist in Mauritius should ever again feel invisible, powerless, deprived of their rights or unprotected. Under this government, their rights will be defended, their labour valued and respected, their voices heard.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the very first time, this government has earmarked funds to embrace artificial intelligence across all sectors and the arts and culture sector will benefit directly. Unlike the previous government, which showed no vision or willingness to modernise; we are embracing the tools for the future.

AI can transform how we preserve, promote and create culture through smart technologies and restore old photographs and art works, digitise archives and even power immersive virtual exhibitions. We have to harness the power of these innovation to help us reach new audiences, preserve our heritage and open fresh opportunities for artistic expression. At the same time, recognise AI challenges and concerns on ownership, originality and creativity of the human artist. We will follow these developments closely, grasp and optimise the opportunities to new technologies such as AI Unleashed while ensuring that we respect, protect and encourage human artistic creativity. We will embrace innovation but always to the protection and empowerment of our artists at heart.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on the other hand, it is high time that Mauritius moves beyond a narrow sector-specific approach to cultural investment. While the previous government maintained a Film Rebate Scheme, it failed to extend similar support to other vital areas of the arts such as music, dance, theatre, literature, visual arts and inter-disciplinary projects. As a result, the creative sector remained fragmented, underfunded and disconnected from national development priorities.

The cultural rebate scheme will support all artistic disciplines, encourage private sponsorship and investment in culture and democratise funding. It is a bold step towards making creativity a recognised pillar of our economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry currently operates a wide range of support schemes for artists, each targeting a different stage of artistic development and professionalism. These include –

- the scheme for concerts;
- the scheme for the development of performing arts group;

- the International Development Grant Scheme for Performing Artists;
- the Artist Incubator Scheme, and
- the scheme for international competitions, among others.

While I am informed that these schemes have provided essential support over the years, it is clear they have remained largely static. There has been little assessment and whether they effectively respond to artist aspirations in a fast-changing creative landscape. Under the previous government, these schemes were treated as checkboxes offered in name but never truly evaluated for impact.

Through the forthcoming *Assises des Arts et de la Culture*, we will engage directly with the artistic community to understand their expectations of the end beneficiaries. Are these schemes still relevant? Are they accessible? Do they provide the depth and continuity of support artists need? What are the shortcomings? How could it be enhanced?

The answers to these questions will guide a complete restructuring of our funding mechanism.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are committed to moving from a model of passive disbursement to one of active development. Schemes will no longer simply provide assistance. They will be aligned with national objectives for creativity, entrepreneurship and inclusion. This is how we build a sector that thrives and not survive.

Finally, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the status of Artist Act 2023 will have to be revisited on the basis of the expectation of artists and the realities of the sector. Our artists need to be given the opportunity to be more meaningfully engage. I understand from consultations held with the artistic community that their life experiences, their unique challenges and their expectations of institutional support were reflected in the final document. As it stands, there are various issues the artistic community wishes to address through this Act. The very people this Act is aimed at protecting and giving legitimacy have, in the press, voiced out its shortcomings.

We will provide them the opportunity to submit their proposals to review the legislation. This Government will not repeat the mistake of the past. This time artists, creators and stakeholders in the creative ecosystem will be meaningfully listened too. Their concerns will be taken seriously, their life experiences respected and their voices integrated into the redrafting of the law. We will work closely with artists, cultural workers, legal experts and civil society to co-create a revised framework that truly reflects the realities of the sector.

Because, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the recognition of artists as workers, as professionals, and as right holders must not be symbolic. It must be written in law, implemented through policy and respected in practice. Only then we can say that we have honoured our artist, not with words, but with justice.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before I conclude, the hon. Leader of the Opposition claimed yesterday that this budget marks the last mandate for many of us on this side of the House. Yet, let me remind him with respect and clarity that in the last general election, he was not even among the top three elected candidates in his own constituency. In fact, he did not even make it to the top five. He sits in this House today, not by the will of the electorate!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the budget presented by the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance does not divide. It unites. It does not patch, it rebuilds. It does not whisper, it sings. It says to every Mauritian that you matter. It says to our artists, our custodians of memory and imagination that they are no longer an overthought. They are the heartbeat. Let us honour them and let us honour every Mauritian who kept going through the darkness because today together we turn a page. From the pain to possibility, from neglect to nationhood, from abyss to prosperity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us be creative, walk this bridge together with resolve for our beloved motherland and for our fellow citizens in peace, justice and liberty. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

We will break for tea. I suspend the Sitting for half an hour. Thank you.

At 4.23 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.09 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Ms V. Leu-Govind! The floor is yours.

The Junior Minister of Arts and Culture (Ms. V. Leu-Govind) : Merci Madame la présidente.

Madame la présidente, je prends la parole aujourd'hui avec une profonde émotion, une grande responsabilité et une foi inébranlable en notre devoir collectif de redresser notre pays non seulement économiquement mais aussi moralement. Ce budget représenté avec courage, lucidité marque une étape décisive dans notre engagement pour une société plus juste, plus équitable et plus digne.

Avant tout je voudrais féliciter mon ministre, l'honorable Mahen Gondeea, qui est en train de faire un travail formidable pour redonner sa lettre de noblesse au ministère des Arts et de la culture sans faire de film comme certain *roco*.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Comme certain quoi ?

Ms Leu-Govind : La perte de la culture peut entraîner une perte d'identité. J'estime essentiel de dresser un état des lieux honnête de ces 10 dernières années de la politique culturelle. Vision absente entre 2015 et 2024, aucune stratégie nationale culturelle n'a été adoptée. Les instances consultatives, fonds national des arts, conseils des arts sont restés lettre morte, dépourvus des moyens humains et financiers.

Des infrastructures en déchéance, le théâtre de Serge Constantin n'a pas été rénové depuis son ouverture. Les problèmes d'accessibilité, de sécurité et de climatisations demeurent irrésolus. Les maisons de jeunes à Flacq, Curepipe, Rodrigues ont été abandonnées, privant notamment des troupes amateurs de lieux de répétition. Les soutiens financiers mal calibrés, les 50 millions annuels du fonds national des arts ont été absorbés par les projets isolés, sans suivi ni bilan.

La bureaucratie paralysante pour monter un festival 1000 à 3000 personnes, il fallait d'obtenir plus d'une vingtaine d'autorisations auprès de huit services différents avec des délais d'instruction supérieure à six mois. Des patrimoines fragilisés, le musée de Mahebourg et de Port-Louis n'ont pas bénéficié de programmes de restauration ou de numérisation de leur collection. Ces constats n'est pas qu'un réquisitoire mais la preuve de l'urgence qui s'impose, réparer les fractures, créer un cadre cohérent et assurer un pilotage transparent.

L'art et la culture est comme un pilier de notre société. En tant que Junior Minister des Arts et de la culture, je me réjouis des mesures fortes et concrètes prises pour revitaliser notre secteur artistique et culturel. Le budget 2025-2026 traduit une volonté claire, celle de replacer la culture au cœur de notre projet national. L'avenir de l'art et de la culture, Madame la présidente, dépend de beaucoup de choses, surtout de la coopération Maurice, Rodrigues et Réunion. La coopération ne doit pas être un *one shot*. Il nous faut un plan constant, suivi et partagé.

Dans cette dynamique de relance et de structuration de notre secteur culturel, je tiens à souligner les formidables perspectives de coopération entre île Maurice, Rodrigues et l'île de la Réunion tel qu'identifié lors de ma mission officielle et de ma participation au marché de

musique de l'Océan indien. Cette collaboration ouvre la voie véritable, enrichissement mutuel et permettra de renforcer la formation de nos artistes, techniciens et opérateurs culturels d'inspirer une structuration professionnelle de la filière et stimuler des échanges à travers des résidences, des festivals communs et des projets création partagés.

Ensemble nous pouvons bâtir un véritable écosystème régional du spectacle vivant. C'est dans cet esprit que j'ai pris l'engagement de proposer un débat sur le sujet lors des National Open Arts Commission afin que les artistes et les acteurs du terrain soient pleinement associés à l'élaboration des politiques publiques culturelles. Cette coopération régionale est pour nous tous une chance, une inspiration mais surtout une réponse concrète aux défis auxquels notre culture confronte, aujourd'hui.

Madame la présidente, les femmes au foyer sont souvent les héroïnes invisibles. Je veux aussi saluer une décision qui me touche personnellement, la création des comités sous le *chairmanship* du Premier ministre qui va revoir le support, les personnes âgées entre 60 et 65 ans et qui inclut les femmes au foyer. Trop souvent oubliées, ce sont elles qui nous ont élevé, éduqué, transmis les vraies valeurs. Elles n'ont pas toujours eu la chance d'aller à l'école mais elles nous ont transmis la vérité, le respect et surtout la discipline.

Il serait irresponsable de parler du redressement sans évoquer les injustices profondes subies par nos concitoyens les plus vulnérables, Madame la présidente. Sous l'ancien régime, de nombreuses personnes en situation de handicap ont été brutalement privées de la pension sur la base de décisions opaques du *Medical Board* qui jugeait soudainement apte à travailler ou prétendait qu'elle ne représentait plus un taux d'invalidité supérieure à 60 %.

On est en droit de se demander si cette vague de suspension n'avait pas pour but de faire artificiellement baisser la masse budgétaire des pensions. À cela s'ajoute les retards inacceptables des paiements des heures supplémentaires pour plusieurs ministères y compris dans les hôpitaux où les soignants n'ont pas perçu leurs dus pendant des mois malgré leur dévouement quotidien. Et que dire, les entreprises ayant obtenu des contrats publics et qui se sont retrouvés soit impayés, soit confrontés à d'énormes retards de règlement, *se enn governman ki ti pe met zanon*.

Madame la présidente, le leader de l'opposition a déclaré que notre gouvernement est rapidement devenu impopulaire et nous l'assumons pleinement mais contrairement à d'autres ne nous n'avons ni coupé l'Internet ni fait taire ceux qui manifestent. Nous écoutons, nous dialoguons et surtout, nous ne gouvernons pas par la peur mais avec conviction. Et si je dois

choisir entre un gouvernement impopulaire qui prend ses responsabilités et un gouvernement populaire mais voleur, je préfère rester dans un gouvernement impopulaire mais *ki pa kokin* parce que à la fin, ce n'est pas la popularité qui fait la grandeur d'un mandat, c'est l'intégrité, la justice et le respect du peuple.

Le leader de l'opposition a parlé de trahison. Je vais lui poser une question, est-ce que les anciens parlementaires du *gouvernman lepep* qui ont dilapidé les fonds publics qui nous ont mis dans la situation que l'on est, aujourd'hui, méritent-ils une pension parlementaire y compris son Premier ministre ?

Madame la présidente, permettez-moi d'exprimer ma reconnaissance au Premier ministre et au DPM pour la confiance qu'ils ont placée dans la jeunesse mauricienne. Ils envoient un signal fort : préparer la relève, c'est d'agir avec lucidité avec courage et responsabilité. Lucidité – un mot qui a cruellement manqué à l'ancien régime, car au lieu de dire la vérité au peuple, ils ont maquillé la réalité, endetté le pays et distribué sans compter juste pour donner l'illusion que l'économie allait bien. Mais, l'illusion est tombée, et aujourd'hui, ce gouvernement n'a pas d'autres choix. Nous avons hérité d'un pays fragilisé, d'un appareil d'état affaibli et d'une économie laissée dans un état critique.

Je le dis avec gravité, nous avons la responsabilité de restaurer la prospérité et la soutenabilité de notre nation, non seulement pour aujourd'hui, mais pour les générations à venir. Et parmi les décisions difficiles que nous devons prendre, figure la réforme de la pension. Cette mesure impopulaire certes, mais indispensable si nous voulons garantir que nos aînés puissent encore bénéficier d'une pension digne à l'âge de la retraite dans 10-20 ans mais, je vais plus loin, Madame la présidente. Je suis pour des réformes à tous les niveaux. Nous devons également revoir l'ensemble des privilèges accordés aux serviteurs de l'état car si nous parlons de responsabilité budgétaire, d'austérité, de la justice, des sacrifices doivent venir de tous, y compris de nous, les parlementaires.

Il est également temps de renforcer les pouvoirs de la *National Audit Office* pour que chaque roupie dépensée par un ministère ou une institution publique soit de manière judicieuse, efficace et transparente. Oui, nous avons demandé à la population de faire un sacrifice mais nous devons en faire aussi. Ensemble unis avec nos concitoyens, nous pouvons redresser l'économie que le précédent régime nous a laissée en ruine et c'est en agissant comme une seule nation, avec unité et sincérité que nous redonnerons à Maurice sa place de Tigre de l'Océan Indien.

Mais, comment parler de justice sans dénoncer les abus ? Madame la présidente, nous n'avons pas oublié l'épisode du coquelet perché sur la chaise du *Loud Speaker* – 78 jours en poste, trois voyages qui ont coûté plus de R 700 000, seulement quatre séances présidées et déjà éligible à une pension. C'est tout simplement inadmissible, et aujourd'hui, il a le culot de venir nous donner des leçons. Il est aussi complice que le MSM. Je vais le dire sans détour, si nous en sommes là aujourd'hui, dans un pays où les fonds publics ont été dilapidés, où les institutions n'inspirent plus confiance, c'est à cause du MSM. Ils ont transformé la politique en un business où les plus puissants s'enrichissent pendant que le peuple s'appauvrit.

Lorsque nous avons pris les rênes de notre ministère, le ministère des Arts et de la culture en 2024, Madame la présidente, nous avons trouvé à peine R 200 000 dans les caisses. Et je vous le dis franchement, si les élections avaient eu lieu à la fin de 2024, nous aurions hérité d'un ministère vide. Et pourtant, ces mêmes personnes osent critiquer. Ce sont eux qui doivent rendre des comptes. Ce sont eux qui doivent expliquer la largesse accordée à certains très bien connectés. Ce sont eux qui doivent justifier des milliards de la MIC distribués à droite, à gauche sans transparence.

Pour conclure, Madame la présidente, c'est à nous, la nouvelle génération, de montrer que la politique n'est pas une carrière, mais un service, un sacrifice, un devoir et je fais pleinement confiance à mon gouvernement, et je salue le cran qu'a eu le Premier ministre et le Deputy Prime Minister de venir proposer un tel budget difficile, comme on dit 'impopulaire'. Mais, il faut avoir du cran, que l'autre Premier ministre n'a pas eu.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: *Je vous remercie !* Yes, hon. Parapen!

(5.24 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mr K. Parapen): Madame la présidente, lors de la présentation du dernier budget du gouvernement sortant, la dette publique du pays pour la période 2024-2025 était estimée à la hauteur de 71.1% du PIB. Et nous voilà douze mois après, cette même dette publique est estimée à 90% du PIB.

Donc, qu'a-t-il bien pu se passer en douze mois pour que le taux d'endettement du pays s'affole de la sorte ? On parle quand même ici d'une augmentation de près de 20 points de base. Un scénario cauchemardesque. Ce nouveau gouvernement s'attendait à hériter d'une situation économique difficile, mais un endettement à 90% du PIB est à n'en point douter le

worst of the worst case scenario. Le seuil de la dette est largement dépassé. Comme l'honorable Leu-Govind l'a si bien rappelé, le leader de l'opposition parle de trahison, et je pense qu'effectivement il y a eu trahison. Dans toute cette histoire, il y a des traîtres. Mais, quand l'honorable leader de l'opposition, Joe Lesjongard parle de trahison, il ferait bien de se mettre devant un miroir, ou même de faire un selfie en ramenant tout l'état-major du MSM autour de lui et leurs acolytes ; les Ganoo, Obeegadoo, Collendavelloo et même le clan Duval.

La manipulation des chiffres économiques sous le régime MSM est odieuse, voir criminel. Ils mentent comme ils respirent, et cela dure depuis des années. Pensez-vous, Madame la présidente, que l'Alliance du Changement aurait fait les promesses qu'elle a faites pendant la récente campagne électorale si elle savait que l'endettement du pays allait être de 90% en juin 2025 ? Certainement pas ! On s'attendait à hériter d'une maison en mauvais état. Nous avons hérité d'une maison en ruine.

Madame la présidente, sans fausse modestie, je pense être l'un des mieux placés dans cette Chambre pour pouvoir parler du *rating* de Moody's. Ayant travaillé quelques 15 années sur les marchés financiers internationaux, j'ai eu l'occasion d'étudier en profondeur la structure de dizaines d'économies à travers le monde et d'apprécier l'approche des agences de notation comme Moody's vis-à-vis de ces économies. Et je dois dire que je suis surpris que Moody's n'ait pas encore baissé la notation du pays, surtout après la découverte de la falsification des chiffres par l'ancien régime. Et tout se jouera sur ce budget, et si le gouvernement n'arrive pas à convaincre, je pense qu'on passera facilement en territoire *junk*.

D'après mes recherches, il y a une vingtaine de pays qui sont passés d'*investment grade* à *junk status*, et pour la majorité de ces pays, ils ont eu énormément de mal à réintégrer la catégorie de *investment grade*. Il est beaucoup plus facile de subir un *downgrade* que de voir sa notation réhaussée. En moyenne, cela a pris sept ans. Oui, sept ans pour qu'un pays qui passe en *junk state* puisse revenir à un niveau de *investment grade*.

Dans le cas de la Grèce, par exemple, cela a pris près de 20 ans pour qu'elle retrouve une notation '*investment grade*'. Autant dire que c'est, aujourd'hui, extrêmement important pour le pays de préserver à tout prix sa note Baa3. Un *downgrade* serait néfaste pour le secteur financier et bancaire principalement, mais aussi, par extension, pour l'économie en général. Et pour ce faire, il n'y a pas trente-six solutions : il faut baisser le niveau d'endettement du pays et il faut le baisser aussi vite que possible.

La moyenne d'endettement pour les autres pays avec une notation similaire à la nôtre, c'est-à-dire Baa3, se situe autour de 70% du PIB. Nous en sommes actuellement à 90%. Le compte est vite fait. L'honorable Uteem nous a clairement expliqué la problématique du déficit budgétaire pour l'année financière 2024-2025. Un déficit budgétaire à 9.8% où l'État dépense trop et ne récupère pas assez d'argent. Donc, il faut s'attaquer, à la fois, à diminuer les dépenses, et aussi, à augmenter les revenus. C'est exactement ce que ce budget s'attelle à faire.

Un certain syndicaliste, proche, me dit-on, de l'ancien régime, a qualifié ce budget d'ultra-libéral. Alors que l'action en bourse de la banque principale du pays, la Mauritius Commercial Bank, a perdu quelques R 40 de son cours depuis l'annonce du budget, soit presque 10% de sa valeur, et que la capitalisation de la bourse locale, le SEMDEX, est tombée de 5.4%, il faudrait que ce syndicaliste m'explique sa compréhension de l'ultralibéralisme un de ces jours !

De mémoire, aucun budget n'a pris autant aux fortunés de notre société et au secteur privé –

- taxe plus progressive sur les salaires ;
- *fair-share contribution* de 15% pour les revenus individuels au-dessus de R 12 millions ;
- *fair-share contribution* pour les entreprises ayant une profitabilité au-dessus de R 24 millions ;
- taxe additionnelle sur les banques ;
- l'introduction d'une *alternative minimum tax* ;
- augmentation des revenus par rapport au secteur immobilier ;
- réduction drastique des *fiscal incentives* pour les *smart cities* ;
- imposition d'un *tourist fee* de 3 euros par nuitée pour le secteur touristique.

Ce budget a le mérite d'aller prendre l'argent où il se trouve.

Puisqu'un exercice budgétaire est avant tout un exercice de chiffres, donnons-nous la peine d'analyser certaines données chiffrées. Pendant longtemps, le fardeau fiscal de notre pays a reposé trop lourdement sur les épaules de la classe *travayer*. D'ailleurs, les chiffres le montrent clairement. En 2023-2024, les taxes sur les produits et les services comprenant la TVA représentaient 60% des revenus récurrents de l'État. Oui, Madame la présidente, on

demandait aux pauvres et à la classe moyenne de contribuer R 6 sur chaque R 10 que l'État prélevait en termes de taxe.

Savez-vous le poids de la TVA dans le présent budget, Madame la présidente ? Elle tombe à 51.7% pour l'exercice 2025-2026 et on projette un recul encore plus conséquent à 48.8% en 2027-2028. Oui, 48.8% – moins de 50%, soit un recul 12 points de base. C'est une grande victoire pour la population, surtout pour celles qui peinent à finir les fins de mois. On pourrait même dire que c'est une avancée historique. Et là, je ne peux que dénoncer le silence de l'opposition parlementaire et extra-parlementaire à ce sujet, aussi bien que le silence des syndicats.

Le rééquilibrage fiscal tant voulu par *Rezistans ek Alternativ* n'est finalement qu'un mirage et représente une solide avancée progressiste pour le pays. Cependant, je demande au ministre des Finances de s'assurer à ce que ce rééquilibrage soit de nature permanente. Aujourd'hui, avec ce budget, c'est une injustice de plusieurs années qui est rétablie. Il ne faudrait donc pas que, dans quelques années, le gouvernement fasse marche arrière et redemande au petit peuple de porter de manière disproportionnée le fardeau de la taxe.

D'ailleurs, il y a un élément dans le budget qui a peut-être échappé à beaucoup, mais pas à moi. Cet élément, c'est l'appellation de la taxe additionnelle sur les gros salaires et les profits au-dessus de R 24 millions pour les entreprises. On parle de *fair-share contribution on high-income earners* et de *fair-share contribution on corporates*, qu'on peut traduire littéralement comme contribution équitable pour ceux qui touchent de gros revenus et pour les entreprises profitables.

Ce qui sous-entend aussi qu'en l'absence de ces prélèvements dans les budgets précédents, la situation n'était pas équitable et que les individus touchant de gros revenus et les entreprises profitables se gavaient, alors que d'autres, moins fortunées, devaient contribuer plus aux caisses de l'État de manière inéquitable. Je compte, donc, sur ce gouvernement pour maintenir un environnement fiscal équitable dans le futur.

Permettez-moi, maintenant, d'aborder la réforme de l'âge auquel un citoyen mauricien peut accéder au *Basic Retirement Pension*. J'entends plusieurs de mes collègues dire qu'on n'avait pas le choix de faire autrement. Je ne suis pas d'accord. On aurait bien pu garder l'éligibilité au *Basic Retirement Pension* à 60 ans. Mais à quel prix ? La réforme du *Basic Retirement Pension* sur les cinq prochaines années permettra au pays de faire des économies

de R 30 milliards et de quelques R 90 milliards sur les dix prochaines années. Et donc, dans le plan de consolidation des finances de l'État, la réforme du *BRP* est cruciale pour pouvoir ramener la dette publique à des niveaux plus soutenables.

Ces économies conséquentes vont permettre au pays d'investir massivement dans des secteurs clés pour booster la productivité et ainsi relancer la croissance. C'est à la page du *Public Sector Investment Programme: 2025-2023* qu'on comprend le plus les investissements ambitieux de notre gouvernement. Sur les cinq prochaines années, 42 milliards vont être investis dans les *State-owned enterprises* qui croulent, aujourd'hui, sous la dette, héritage de l'ancien gouvernement.

Parmi ces *State-owned enterprises*, on retrouve –

- 13 milliards pour les projets capitaux de la Central Electricity Board ;
- 13 milliards pour Airport of Mauritius Ltd. ;
- 3.5 milliards pour la Cargo Handling Corporation ;
- 2.7 milliards pour la Mauritius Ports Authority, et près de
- 7 milliards pour les logements sociaux qui se retrouvent sous la NHDC et la NSLD.

Voilà de quoi remettre certains secteurs de l'économie mauricienne sur les rails du progrès et du développement.

Je ne peux, cependant, terminer mon allocution, Madame la présidente, sans un cri du cœur. Il est indiscutable que nous héritons d'une situation économique extrêmement difficile. Je suis persuadé que les mesures courageuses qu'entreprend ce gouvernement porteront leurs fruits dans quelques années mais pour l'heure, il nous faut faire des sacrifices, c'est l'ADN même de ce budget.

Mais peut-on continuer de prêcher quand on a les pieds au chaud ? Il y a une perception grandissante parmi la population que l'esprit de sacrifice épargne les élus du jour. J'estime essentiel que les élus montrent l'exemple et sacrifient certains de leurs privilèges. Doit-on rationaliser les *per diem* pour les voyages à l'étranger ? Doit-on revoir les modalités pour les *duty free cars* ? Je propose qu'un comité se penche sur la question et fasse des propositions concrètes dans les plus brefs délais car je trouve difficile de demander à un travailleur touchant le salaire minimal de sacrifier quelques années supplémentaires de sa vie pour notre pays alors que nos privilèges demeurent intacts.

Pour terminer, Madame la présidente, l'opposition parle sans gêne d'un supposé démantèlement de l'État-providence par ce gouvernement. Quel culot ! Alors que pendant dix années, ils se sont attelés à détruire ce que notre peuple a pris plus de cinquante ans à construire. Alors qu'ils ont achevé la *National Pension Scheme*, alors qu'ils ont égorgé notre démocratie, alors qu'ils ont guillotiné la liberté d'expression, alors qu'ils ont violé la séparation de pouvoir, alors qu'ils ont instauré un totalitarisme puant, ils ont le culot aujourd'hui, de prôner la bienséance. *Shame on them !*

Madame la présidente, le loup ne s'inquiète pas de la brebis qu'il a mangée, c'est la raison pour laquelle ce samedi le loup s'affichera avec la brebis au Champ de Mars. Après tout, ne dit-on pas que l'appétit vient en mangeant ? Alors que nous, nous continuerons de rebâtir notre société aussi pénible soit la reconstruction. Car nous avons un pont vers l'avenir à construire, un *welfare state* à préserver.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker : Je vous remercie. Je remercie les deux qui viennent de parler d'avoir plus que respecter l'heure, ça fait gagner du temps.

Mademoiselle Anquetil, hon, Chief Whip !

(5.43 p.m.)

Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Je vous remercie, Madame la présidente.

Madame la présidente, *I don't promise to take you to heaven but I shall certainly prevent you from going to hell*. Autrement dit, je ne promets pas de vous conduire au paradis mais je vous empêcherai certainement d'aller en enfer. Madame la présidente, permettez-moi de revenir sur cette célèbre et puissante citation choisie par le Premier ministre pour conclure son grand oral sur le budget. Ces mots empruntés de Dag Hammarskjöld, ancien Secrétaire Général des Nations Unies ne révèlent pas de la poésie politique, ils traduisent une posture de responsabilité, de lucidité et de courage. Ils incarnent un leadership qui ne déroge pas, qui ne maquille pas la réalité mais qui assume pleinement avec humilité le poids du moment et ce moment est grave.

Nous connaissons tous le lourd héritage laissé par le précédent gouvernement MSM. Le Rapport sur l'état de l'économie en dit long. Aujourd'hui, l'Alliance du Changement

s'efforce de remettre de l'ordre dans les dossiers longtemps négligés. Le gouvernement sortant de Pravind Jugnauth a laissé derrière lui une économie saignée à blanc et des caisses de l'État dangereusement vidées, un pays profondément fragilisé. Leur passage au pouvoir, Madame la présidente, restera dans l'histoire comme une période de dilapidation massive et de mensonge organisé. R 45 milliards évaporé depuis l'introduction de la CSG. R 160 milliards dilapidé à travers la MIC. Un déficit commercial dépassant les R 200 milliards, ce n'est pas un accident. C'est le fruit d'un cynisme électoral où les ressources publiques ont été utilisées comme caisses noires de campagne. Sous couvert de mesures populaires, le gouvernement MSM a dépensé sans retenue, non pas dans l'intérêt général mais dans l'unique obsession de s'accrocher au pouvoir coûte que coûte.

Nous avons hérité, Madame la présidente, d'un pays vidé de ses moyens, asphyxié par des années de gestion opaque et des dérives électoralistes. Les finances publiques ont été détournées à des fins partisans. Ce passif pèse lourd sur chaque citoyen. L'avenir de notre pays a été compromis par des décisions dictées, non pas par une vision, mais par la peur de perdre le pouvoir au prix de la stabilité financière du pays et de la confiance de nos institutions.

Madame la présidente, il est temps de tourner la page, de reconstruire avec lucidité, responsabilité et transparence. Ce budget n'a pas été conçu pour séduire mais pour redresser. Il vise à réparer ce qui a été brisé, à restaurer la confiance et à rebâtir sur des fondations saines, juste et durable. Ce budget remet l'humain au cœur de nos priorités : pour une éducation qui ouvre les portes, une santé qui soigne avec dignité, un logement qui protège et un travail qui respecte.

Madame la présidente, les politiciens vampires du MSM ont bu le sang du peuple jusqu'à la dernière goutte, sans pitié. Les finances publiques doivent à nouveau servir le peuple et non le pouvoir. La route sera longue mais nous la parcourons ensemble dans la vérité, avec le courage et avec le respect dû à celles et à ceux qui attendent de nous des résultats et non des discours. Notre pays a payé cher les dérives du passé. Il mérite mieux. Il mérite une véritable reconnaissance et cette reconnaissance, nous l'avons déjà engagée avec détermination, lucidité, la volonté farouche de construire un avenir à la hauteur de nos espérances. Reconstruire exige du courage politique, de la solidarité, de l'innovation au service du bien commun et une volonté inébranlable de regarder la vérité en face. Nous n'avons rien à cacher. Gouverner après le chaos laissé par le gouvernement MSM, c'est

redonné un cap. Gouverner après la peur, après les menaces instaurées sous le régime de Pravind Jugnauth, c'est restauré la confiance.

Madame la présidente, je porte un nom chargé d'histoire. Le nom Anquetil, un nom qui n'a jamais été associé à la résignation mais à la lutte, à la justice sociale, à la dignité des travailleurs, à l'émancipation d'un peuple. Ce nom m'impose de ne jamais détourner le regard, surtout lorsque des réformes risquent de frapper les plus vulnérables d'entre nous.

Aujourd'hui, l'état de notre économie affaiblie par des années d'inertie et un endettement préoccupant nous oblige à envisager des mesures difficiles mais nécessaires. Le report de l'âge de retraite à 65 ans en fait partie. Ce n'est pas une décision de confort mais une décision de responsabilité. Notre système de pension est sous pression et le maintien de la pension de vieillesse à 60 ans, dans sa forme actuelle n'est plus soutenable.

Notre pays fait face à un déséquilibre démographique majeur. Il y a désormais moins de travailleurs que des retraités dans notre pays. Malgré cela, nous continuons à verser une pension universelle coûteuse qui est devenue insoutenable. Près de R 55.4 milliards par an, ce modèle fragilise dangereusement nos finances publiques. Le risque de déclassement pour les agences comme Moody's est désormais réel et imminent. Ce désastre budgétaire est le fruit direct de l'héritage dévastateur du régime MSM qui a sacrifié la viabilité économique du pays sur l'autel de ses calculs électoralistes.

Madame la présidente, nous ne fuyons pas nos responsabilités ; nous faisons face avec lucidité et courage pour éviter un effondrement du système. Ne pas agir aujourd'hui, c'est compromettre l'avenir des pensions de demain. Nous devons à tout prix préserver le droit à une retraite décente pour les générations futures.

Madame la présidente, le monde du travail a changé, tout comme les réalités sociales. La pénibilité et la précarité demeurent et toute réforme devra être juste, humaine et progressive parce que tous les métiers ne peuvent pas être exercés à un âge avancé. Une aide-soignante, Madame la présidente, qui a commencé à 18 ans, un chauffeur de bus dont le dos est usé, une couturière, une caissière, un maçon – eux comptent les années qui leurs restent à tenir, souvent dans la douleur.

Peut-on ? La question s'impose – peut-on traiter dans la même façon un cadre et un ouvrier ?

Madame la présidente, chers collègues, je ne suis pas là pour faire de l'idéologie, je suis là pour défendre un principe simple, hérité de ceux qui m'ont précédé. Travailler, ce n'est pas seulement produire, c'est aussi mériter de vieillir dans la dignité. Fidèle à mes racines syndicales, je crois au dialogue, à la concertation. Ce débat de ces derniers jours n'est pas technique, il est profondément humain. Et, c'est dans cet esprit que deux comités ont été mis en place pour accompagner cette réforme avec justice et discernement.

L'un présidé par le Premier ministre pour examiner les mesures des soutiens possibles aux personnes âgées de 60 à 65 ans, travaillant dans des secteurs aux conditions particulièrement difficiles ainsi qu'aux femmes au foyer et mères, éventuellement éligibles sous condition des ressources.

L'autre comité, présidé par le ministre de la Sécurité sociale pour réétudier les aides possibles destinés aux personnes en situation de handicap ou d'invalidité liée à leur état de santé les empêchant de poursuivre leurs activités professionnelles.

Ces initiatives, Madame la présidente, témoignent de notre volonté de protéger les plus vulnérables et d'adapter notre système aux réalités humaines sans laisser personne sur le bord du chemin. Alors oui, oui appelons à la responsabilité collective. Construisons un système de retraite qui protège les plus vulnérables, qui respecte le travail accompli et qui soit viable pour les générations futures.

Refuser d'en parler, Madame la présidente, c'est fuir nos responsabilités. L'aborder ensemble, avec justice et courage, c'est honorer nos luttes passées et préparer un avenir digne.

Madame la présidente, je porte en moi une profonde reconnaissance envers les habitants de Belle-Rose/Quatre-Bornes que j'ai l'honneur de représenter. Je m'engage à rester à leur côté pour défendre leurs intérêts, leurs difficultés et leurs espoirs.

Depuis mon arrivée, j'ai découvert une circonscription marquée par 10 ans de négligence. Routes en mauvaise état, équipements publics laissés à l'abandon, congestion routière persistante – la situation était critique. En seulement sept mois, grâce à une collaboration active avec les ministères et notamment celui des Collectivités locales, suite à mes questions parlementaires, plusieurs projets concrets ont vu le jour à Belle-Rose/Quatre-Bornes, circonscription no. 18.

À la source, l'ancien gouvernement avait mutilé un terrain de foot en y installant, sans consultation, des bordures en béton au milieu du terrain pour un soi-disant parcours de

jogging. Une décision absurde, dangereuse et méprisante ! Avec la municipalité de Quatre-Bornes, nous avons fait retirer ces installations. Le terrain de foot à Pavillon, grâce à ma question parlementaire B/242, le *fencing* rouillé et dangereux laissé à l'abandon depuis 20 ans, a enfin été remplacé entièrement sans interrompre les activités sportives.

Madame la présidente, chers collègues, voilà ce que j'appelle agir concrètement. Voilà ce que signifie une politique de terrain. La rénovation du complexe municipal de Résidence Père Laval, laissé à l'abandon sous le précédent régime, les habitants n'en pouvaient plus – électricité défectueuse, éclairage inexistant, peinture écaillée, plomberie et sanitaire hors d'usage – tout était à reprendre ! Nous avons tout refait et ce n'est pas fini. Bientôt la toiture sera étanchéité pour en finir avec les infiltrations.

Même chose à, Jeewoonarain Lane, un aire de jeux abandonné, dépourvu de *fencing* – incroyable. Inimaginable ! Une peinture défraîchie, un sol dangereux, c'était inacceptable. Aujourd'hui, les enfants, ils jouent en toute sécurité sur gazon artificiel dans un espace propre, éclairé, entièrement rénové. Et oui ! On l'a fait.

Ce n'est pas tout, Madame la présidente. C'est n'est pas tout, chers collègues. Depuis janvier de 25, nous avons reprogrammé le feu de signalisation à Hillcrest Avenue, afin de renforcer la sécurité des automobilistes après une trentaine d'accidents recensés à cette intersection. Aujourd'hui, Madame la présidente, chers collègues, les voitures ne se croisent plus. C'est ça la volonté politique.

Tout récemment, nous avons procédé la réouverture du Old Moka Road, à côté du cimetière St-Jean. Les travaux avaient été retardés sous l'ancien régime. Résultats, pas moins de 250 tombes endommagées, un désastre causé par l'incompétence des anciens députés du gouvernement Jugnauth au no. 18.

Ils passaient plus de temps à se chamailler qu'à travailler pour le peuple. Le traumatisme reste vif à Colville où les habitants se souviennent encore des tombes qui avaient fini dans leurs cours.

Madame la présidente, je vous l'ai dit, on ne s'arrête pas là. D'autres chantiers majeurs sont en cours, notamment la rénovation complète du terrain de football de Bassin – clôture, éclairage, vestiaire, gradin, terrain synthétique. Ainsi que le lancement des travaux du centre communautaire de Beau Séjour, entre autres.

Pour conclure, je remercie les habitants de Belle Rose-Quatre Bornes pour leur confiance et leur patience. Ce mandat, Madame la présidente, chers collègues, n'est pas un

privilège. C'est une mission. Une mission que je continuerai à honorer sans relâche, sans détours, avec engagement et détermination. Je vous remercie pour votre attention.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Thank you for gaining more time. We are doing very well!

Hon. Dr. Sukon!

(6.00 p.m.)

The Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research (Dr. K. Sukon): Madam Speaker, today, I stand before this August Assembly not to defend a budget, but to champion a revolution. A revolution that will transform Mauritius from a nation that consumes knowledge to one that creates it. From an economy dependent on others innovation to one that leads through its own discoveries.

Indeed, to my knowledge, it is the first time that a budget has put so much emphasis on research, development and innovation. Rightly so! This will definitely propel sectors like the bio economy. I wish to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister for crafting such a document despite the limited *marge de manœuvre*.

This budget allows us to move from abyss to prosperity, from financial fiasco to financial fiscal phonics. True it is that we are forced to reform the BRP and the F-test. But I would like to ask who is that politician who voluntarily, willingly would like to come up with unpopular measures. If you show me that brave soul, I will show you the one who does not know his job description. So, every politician would like to do *la bouche dou*, but unfortunately, the legacy that we had from the previous government, which I call *kalaminnidas* experts, because they had mastered how to inflate data out of nothing.

They have forced us to begin by consolidating our economic foundation already in the first year of our five-year mandate. A task roughly equivalent to rebuilding a House when we know the past tenant is lighting fire in the basement. Madam Speaker, on several occasions, we have heard the Opposition talking about the document State of the Economy which is an official document of the Government of Mauritius.

For my speech, I went to do some research from the UK – the report from the UK government is available on the site gov.uk – whether they had the name of the people. Unfortunately, I could not find one that had the name of the people. The only thing they had was the copyright of The Crown. Instead of talking about the data of the document, the

Opposition is talking about the cover! They are used to judging a book by its cover. That is why they are here, in the Opposition.

It is abundantly clear that rather than engaging with the substantive economic data and analysis contained within that document, the Opposition has chosen to focus on the formatting conventions. Let us dig deeper into what the previous government did. As a mathematician, I am convinced that they were using calculators of the stone age.

Let us not forget what the previous government did. At the time when telephone was attached to a wire, people were free in Mauritius to talk. During the last ten years, when the mobile was cordless, people were no more free to talk. That is not all! They have mastered the printing of bank notes with such an enthusiasm as if a teenager has a new console to print bank notes. Making our rupee even lighter than a bird which is flying.

Their fiscal stewardship resulted in inflation rates that would even make a hot air balloon jealous. Public debts levels that reached astronomical heights, and an economy so creatively managed that even the most optimistic accountants required therapy following the publication of the last few Moody's reports. The hon. Leader of the Opposition dared to say that this is the worst budget he has ever seen in 25 years. Come on!

Let me remind him and the population that in April 2023, when the hon. Leader of the Opposition was in Government – he had already spent eight years in Government –, the Competition Commission affirmed that the price of cooking oil, chicken, milk, cheese increased by 26 to 52%. Our Government immediately decreased the price of several food items already mentioned by my colleagues.

Let us not also forget that Père Labour who was invited by Radio plus on 07 April 2023, *un vendredi saint*, said –

« *Li pa vre ki finn kass lerin la drog parski la drog p pran lanpler.* »

Eight years have passed in power, and what did they do? They failed miserably in the fight against drugs. This Government, immediately after coming into power, took bold measures, especially by setting the National Agency for Drug Policy and Coordination.

I was surprised to hear hon. A. Duval today saying that = Mauritius is not drug free. But they were in power for 10 years! What did they do? They worsened the situation! If today you find drugs everywhere, it is because they did not do anything. In this same National Assembly, on 28 March 2023, the then Minister of Education affirmed that more than 96% of

students from Extended Programme had failed. Can you imagine? They had already spent eight years in government and they came in this Assembly that the education system has failed. *Un aveu d'échec!* Above all how can we forget Serenity? The flop film of the flop government that took Rs140 m. of taxpayer's money!

Madam Speaker, from this depth of financial creativity and to embark on a journey towards genuine prosperity, we are making an appeal to everybody to work with us as President Kennedy so eloquently declared when announcing Humanities Lunar Ambition –

“We choose to go to the moon not because it is easy but because it is hard.”

Similarly, we choose fiscal responsibility and not political convenience because financial reality, unfortunately, has a way of being remarkably stubborn.

The foundations of this budget may taste somewhat like medicine to some palates – bitter but it is necessary. Rest assured, we are going to administer it with the best dose of intentions. We are confident that the eventual harvest will be sweeter than the fineness dessert you find in the diplomatic banquets. Today's careful planting of these admittedly unpalatable fiscal rules will yield bountiful economic harvest that the children will enjoy while fondly remembering our generation that chose long-term wisdom over short-term comfort. We are not merely balancing books; we are rebalancing the future itself.

Unlike Members of the other side of this Assembly who are purporting that the work did not start immediately after the elections. Let me remind them in my Ministry, we set up seven committees right after the elections. First, to look at our research strategy because we want to ensure that research becomes a pillar for this country. We had a second committee on branding and marketing because we would like Mauritius to be also known for its high education and research. Third, we set up a committee on TVET and pathways so that technical education becomes the first choice that they have the dignity. We have also set up a committee on internationalisation which appeared in the Government Programme. So, how to ensure that Mauritius is ready to accommodate international student? We had a committee on science diplomacy, study in Mauritius and finally teaching and learning, because we realise that there are universities, higher education institutions that were deciding on the roles, the number of hours they could teach, and the number of hours they could do online. So, we had to put some order, and therefore, we set up these committees.

The findings were presented at the High Education Summit held on 4th to 6th June 2025. We are not waiting for the plan that will be eventually developed to start

implementing. We are already implementing. For example, we have already started with a National Research Week for the first time in Mauritius, we have brought all the high education institutions to work together for the National Research Week. We have also signed a historic agreement with the QAA, UK. It is for the first time that we signed an agreement with QAA, UK, so that British universities offering their programmes either directly or through their partners, would not have to go for double accreditation.

I heard the Leader of Opposition during his speech saying that we are introducing AI without proper regulatory framework. False! The guideline for the use of AI in tertiary education has already been developed with the stakeholders. The Higher Education Commission has already come up with the guidelines for the use of AI in higher education. *Contrairement à ce que l'honorable leader de l'opposition a dit hier sur l'intelligence artificielle, le gouvernement ne fonce pas la tête baissée.*

We have also signed, as I said, an agreement with many other universities in order to strengthen the partnership. Madam Speaker, there exists a phrase so perilous that I wish government will come with a health warning. The phrase is: 'we have always done it this way'. The Opposition parties have embraced this mantra with great enthusiasm. They championed the time-honoured traditions of the borrowing money like teenagers with their first credit card, accumulating public debt with the determination of the collector hunting rare stamps and practicing fiscal responsibility or I should say irresponsibility with all the precision of the blindfolded dart player.

This budget boldly rejects the quaint notion that Small Islands States must for ever the play the role of civilisation adorable psychics, charming perhaps, but never the hero of the innovation story. We refuse to accept that our geographic coordinates somehow limit our intellectual attitude. The real challenge as it turns out is not hatching brilliant new ideas overnight. The Herculean task is prying ourselves away from the comfortable embrace of outdated thinking which clings to us like a well-meaning but overly affectionate relative at family gathering.

We categorically reject the premise that Mauritius must remain perpetually seated at the global knowledge buffet politely sampling what others have prepared for us. Instead, we choose to don the chef's hat and start working innovations that will have the world asking for our recipe. As Winston Churchill so eloquently proclaimed during Britain's least convenient historical moment –

"The empires of the future are the empires of the mind".

Today, with this budget, we commence construction of Mauritius's intellectual empire. Madam Speaker, this budget transcends the mundane task of funding education. We are investing in something far more ambitious – the radical act of thinking itself. The audacious pursuit of innovation and the delightfully subversive business of transformation. Madam Speaker, the centrepiece of our transformation is the establishment of the National Research and Innovation Institute (NRII). This is not merely another institution; it is the beating heart of our innovation ecosystem.

When Singapore right in 1991 establish its agency for science, technology and research, they made a decisive commitment to research excellence. Today, they are globally recognised as innovation hub. As Singapore's founding Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, proclaimed, the quality of the nation's human resources is the decisive factor in its development. Our NRII will coordinate, consolidate and catalyse. Where we had fragmented efforts, we will now have focused excellence. Where we once had isolated research, we will now have integrated innovation. The Rs200 million research fund represents an unprecedented increase in government research funding. To contextualize this investment, South Korea, for example, increased their research and development investment between the years 2000 and 2019, directly contributing to their transformation from a developing to developed economy. We are positioning Mauritius on a similar trajectory.

As Marie Curie said –

"Research is to see what everybody else has seen and to think what nobody else has thought."

We are investing the Rs200 million not just in research but in revolutionary thinking and innovative policy crafting. Through NRII, we choose to live and not to follow.

Madam Speaker, we have set ourselves an ambitious target, to double our foreign population within three years. Some call it audacious; I call it inevitable. The global evidence is compelling. Australia's international education sector contributes 25 billion Australian dollars to their economy, making education their fourth largest export. Similar for New Zealand where it contributed 4 billion in 2019, creating 6,000 jobs, and in Canada contributed around 30 billion to their economy in 2022. Malaysia which is one of the reference countries which has transformed itself into a knowledge hub, despite receiving 130,000 to 170,000, has set a target for itself for receiving 250,000 students by the end of this year.

In Mauritius, we already have all the necessary advantages that most education hubs lack; peace, political stability, English as an official language, multicultural society, strategic location and most importantly, a government committed to educational excellence. The new Hall of Residence at Réduit is not just an accommodation, it is a declaration that we welcome the world to learn with us. When students from Madagascar, Seychelles, Reunion and beyond choose Mauritius, they bring not just their fees in foreign currency, they bring their dreams, perspectives and futures. Our study in Mauritius brand will position us as the education destination of choice in the Indian Ocean and beyond, just as studying in Canada, studying in Australia have become global brands. Unfortunately, I must admit that we are very late. We create a brand today; it is not going to create magic tomorrow but nothing has been done over the last ten years. So, it is better we start it now.

Madam Speaker, we stand at the threshold of the fourth industrial revolution. AI is not coming. AI is already here. The question is not whether we will adapt but how quickly we will lead. Making AI a mandatory module across all public higher education curricula is a world first initiative. While other countries debate AI ethics, and I heard the Leader of Opposition yesterday taking that statement, we are embedding AI literacy in our national DNA. Institutions like McKinsey and PwC already project that AI will contribute around 15 trillion dollars to the global economy by 2030, more than the current output of China and India combined. The AI pioneering emphasises AI is the new electricity. Just as electricity transformed almost everything 100 years ago, today I actually have a hard time thinking of an industry that I do not think AI will transform in the next several years. Our graduates will not just enter the job market; they will create it. They will not just use AI; they will develop it. They will not just adapt to change; they will drive it.

Madam Speaker, the Rs438 million infrastructure investment represents most probably the largest single investment in educational infrastructure in our nation's history. Modern infrastructure is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Cambridge university's computer science building costs 75,000 million pounds and position them as a global tech leader. We are making proportionally similar investments. Our research laboratories will endeavour to rival those of the best universities. Our digital learning facilities will prepare students for tomorrow's economy. As Victor Hugo wrote –

“He who opens a school door, closes a prison.”

We are opening doors to infinite possibilities.

Madam Speaker, excellence is not negotiable. The amendments to the Higher Education Act proposed in the budget, including the recognition of micro credentials position us at the forefront of educational innovation. The global micro credential market is projected to reach 20 billion US dollars by 2030. LinkedIn reports that skilled-base hiring has increased by 76% since 2019. By recognising micro credentials, we are not following trends, we are setting them. As said by the business guru Peter Drucker –

“The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't said.”

What traditional credentials do not capture is the growing importance of specific targeted skills. IBM's SkillsBuild platform has trained over 30 million people globally. Google certificate programmes have become industry gold standards. I must say after our Prime Minister announced that our students will follow AI module, the UK Prime Minister announced on 9 June that 7.5 million of employees will have to follow a module on AI up to 2030. So, we were ahead of them then.

So, the review of the Free Tertiary Education Scheme is a strategic optimisation. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition in his speech said –

“(...) beaucoup vont abandonner.”

We have reassured that all the students, part time or full time who are already registered in public higher education institutions will continue to benefit from free tertiary education. *Ce que nous faisons aujourd'hui c'est garantir la pérennité du système, surtout après des années de mauvaise gestion budgétaire.*

Madam Speaker, the Rs70 million annual allocation to the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council over five years, demonstrates our unwavering commitment to research excellence. To contextualise this investment, let me give a few examples.

Finland spends 2.7% of GDP on R&D and ranks among the world's most innovative countries. Denmark spends 3.1% and leads in sustainable innovation. Our per capita research investment is well on track to approach these benchmarks. As the inventor Edison proclaimed –

“Genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.”

We are investing in both research and innovation. Through MIC, we are preparing minds for groundbreaking discoveries. Switzerland, despite its small size, consistently ranks

as the world's most innovative country, spending 4.3% of GDP on research with strong university industry link.

Madam Speaker, our incentives package to attract foreign research labs is generating international interests, I hope. Just as BMW established its Research Centre in Singapore, where it brought invest, knowledge transfer and supply chain development or when Google open its AI Research Lab in Zurich, it transformed Switzerland's tech ecosystem. The premium investment certificate for research labs, coupled with fast-tracked permits, infrastructure access, creates an ecosystem where global research meets local innovation. This is how Singapore became a pharmaceutical hub, how Ireland became a technology centre and how Mauritius will become an innovation destination.

Madam Speaker, the arithmetic of education investment is compelling. Every dollar spent in higher education generates 3-7 dollars in economic growth according to OECD. If we successfully double our international student population from the current level to 6,000, the direct economic impact would be very commendable. The indirect benefits, job creation, cultural exchange, knowledge spillovers would double.

Madam Speaker, the Noble Prize Winner, Paul Romer, demonstrated that economic growth occurs whenever people take resources and rearrange them in ways that make them more valuable. Education is indeed the ultimate rearrangement of human resources.

Reputation is not built overnight, but it can be lost in a moment. We are building Mauritius' reputation as a serious education destination, a credible research hub and a reliable partner in knowledge creation. When international students return home as alumni, they become ambassadors. When researchers publish papers with Mauritian affiliation, they elevate our profile. When innovations emerge from our laboratories, they enhance our credibility.

Madam Speaker, we bear responsibility to future generations. They will judge us not by obstacles we face, but by the opportunities we created. They will measure us not by the problems we inherited, but by the solutions we bequeath. Students entering universities today will graduate in a world we can barely imagine. Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, space explorations – these are not distant possibilities, but immediate realities. We must prepare our students not just for jobs that exist today, but for careers that will

emerge tomorrow. As said by John Dewey, education is not preparation for life; education is life itself. Today, we breathe new life into Mauritian education.

Madam Speaker, the theme of this Budget, ‘From Abyss to Prosperity: Rebuilding the bridge to the future’ shows that education is that bridge, research is the foundation, innovation is the pathway. We stand at a crossroad; we can choose mediocrity and accept our current position or we can choose excellence and claim our rightful place among the world’s educational and innovation leaders.

The budget measures presented represent more than financial allocation. They represent our faith in Mauritius, our confidence in our people and our commitment to our nation. I do not ask Members merely to approve this budget. I ask you all to embrace this vision. We seek your partnership in building the future –

- Together, we will establish the National Research Innovation Institute as a symbol of excellence.
- Together, we will double our international student population and establish Mauritius as a regional education hub.
- Together, we will integrate AI across all curriculums and prepare our graduates for the future economy.
- Together, we will invest in modern infrastructure.
- Together, we will transform Mauritius from a consumer of knowledge to creator of innovation.

As Martin Luther King Jr. declared –

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

Today, we stand for educational excellence, research innovation and national transformation. The future of Mauritius is not pre-determined. It is our choice. With these budget measures, we choose excellence, we choose innovation, we choose transformation, we choose to build the bridge to prosperity. The future starts today. The bridge to prosperity begins here.

As Mahatma Gandhi taught us, be the change you want to see in the world. Today, Mauritius becomes the change the world needs to see. I commend this Budget to the House.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Junior Minister, Mr Pierre, please!

(6.36 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Pierre): Madam Speaker, there is a lot of stress on all hon. Members from the past days and weeks since the presentation, the First Reading of the Appropriation (2025-2026) Bill. We have been in the press, on social media, and we can all feel that burden. I tried to prepare a speech, but I could not have a structure to it.

Today, “the road” is angry. We can see it on the social media. We have all been in the press; Junior Ministers, Ministers, *Rezistans ek Alternativ*, the DPM and the Prime Minister. I should correct myself. Not everyone is angry. There is a little group people who is very happy and is taking benefit of what is happening today.

Let me, at the outset, mention that I stand by my Prime Minister and I stand by this Government. I do not want to be Alfred Hitchcock. Yesterday, I heard on social media that there was a gentleman in front of Parliament, un *maçon*. In the very beginning of my career, I have been a *maçon*. *J’ai été casseur de pierres*. I thought I would have started my speech on tourism – the topic that I really cherish. *Mais je serai lâche et je fuirai devant mes responsabilités sans parler du BRP, le sujet qui fait l’actualité en ce moment.*

Vous savez, un *maçon*, quand il a terminé un plafond, ce n’est même pas jusqu’à 60 ans qu’il attend, car, le lendemain, il ne peut même pas aller travailler. Et je pense à tous ces milliers de personnes qui, après l’annonce du budget, se sont dit : ‘Qu’est-ce que je vais faire ? Où trouverai-je le courage d’aller travailler encore un an, deux ans, trois ans, quatre ans, cinq ans ?’

Vous savez, some weeks prior to Nomination Day, I sent a message to the Prime Minister. I told him that I still had doubts and that I am not sure if I would run for the elections. He phoned me and said, ‘I need you in Parliament. I will do whatever I can to get you elected, but I need you in Parliament.’ Hon. Prime Minister, maybe it is this day, today,

and even if this is my last speech, even if this is our last mandate as young politicians, probably this country, in this particular hour, needs this Government.

Joseph de Maistre, je crois a dit : ‘chaque pays mérite son gouvernement’. Je crois que le temps est venu pour ce pays d’avoir ce gouvernement. Vous savez un jour j’avais dit au Premier ministre : ‘*you know, Mauritius needs you, maybe a last time*’. *You know what? I didn’t know what I was saying at that time.* Mais je me pose la question aujourd’hui, est-ce qu’il y aurait un Premier ministre qui aurait eu – je ne dirais pas les mots que je pense mais – le cran et le courage de prendre les décisions que nous sommes en train de prendre aujourd’hui ?

I have not the intention to make you laugh or cry because it’s a very important topic because in three days the people will be in the road following –je ne me souviens plus qui l’a dit, je crois que c’est mon ami l’honorable Kugan, – le loup dans la bergerie ; je ne sais pas où se tiendra la manifestation. Mais c’est très important de comprendre. On joue avec les chiffres, l’opposition joue avec les chiffres. Oui, c’est dur, les décisions que nous prenons aujourd’hui mais nous aurons la responsabilité devant l’histoire si nous ne prenons pas ces mesures. Ne parlons pas que d’un an, deux ans, trois ans, quatre ans, cinq ans mais parlons des gens. Si nous sommes demain en défaut de paiement, je ne suis pas aussi éminent que mon ami Reza ou Kugan pour parler des chiffres mais je sais que nous frôlons, si nous ne sommes pas encore, il l’a bien dit. Il est étonnant que Moody’s ne nous ait pas encore enlevé notre rating. Défaut de paiement, plus d’argent pour payer l’éducation, la santé et je vous le dis, mon cœur est brisé quand je pense aux gens qui ont auraient dû toucher la pension.

Mais vous savez quoi ? You know why I am standing by my Prime Minister and by my government? Because this man, I met in 2017, the first day we did not agree on all items and we still don’t agree on all items but I told him I know that this man will stand for les plus vulnérables, pour ceux qui ont vraiment besoin, c’est pour ça que ce n’est pas la peur de ne pas être élu. Non, ce n’est pas, and I am saying it, nous n’avons pas peur de ne pas être réélus. No, we are not here for that. If I am not re-elected, if you are not re-elected, we go back to work and you know what? I don’t want to mention that here because I can see a lot of people talking about our cars, per diem, etc... You know what being here, it’s a real sacrifice, financial sacrifice, not only for me, for lots of us: CEOs of companies because this country now in this particular time needed that Government, this sacrifice.

Hon. Damry has been in the press. Junior Ministers have been in the press. People are thinking we are earning lot of big junk salaries in this current budget but this country needed this team and I ask the population of Mauritius who's listening to me today, to really make the difference between this team and that team, this is the real difference. And the journalists and all those joining them and you know what there won't be any pressure, we don't have SSTs, no. You can go because this is democracy.

And you know what? I was not in Mauritius; I was following what was happening. Social media, I did not put any post on Facebook but you know what? The people, this little group of people thought that there are four groups, different parties, symbols in this alliance, *ils pensaient que cette alliance allait faillir, non. Le leader de l'opposition a repris une citation de Jean-Pierre Chevènement : 'Si t'es ministre, tu fermes ta gueule ou tu démissionnes'. Non ! Nous, on est solidaire puisque nous sommes dans le gouvernement : ministre, député, nous sommes solidaires. Il pensait qu'une brèche allait s'ouvrir, ce n'est pas le cas. Et je salue le courage de mes amis Rezistans ek Alternativ, vous avez été lynchés dans la presse, j'ai suivi. Mais nous sommes avec vous. Nous avons peut-être un différent symbole, nous sommes avec vous. DPM, nous sommes avec vous. L'honorable Damry, nous sommes avec toi. Nous sommes solidaires puisque pour relever ce défi, nous avons besoin de la solidarité.*

Anyway, notre cœur est brisé parce que, excusez-moi, Madame la présidente, de reprendre les paroles d'une chanson comme une citation : « ces salauds ont mis le feu à notre paradis ». Cette bombe a déjà éclaté. Je ne vais pas citer les chiffres. Je crois que l'île Maurice a appris par cœur R 642 milliards, la dette publique 90% de notre PIB et je m'en passe de tous les chiffres que tous mes collègues et tous les amis vont citer. C'est ça la réalité qui nous amène aujourd'hui.

Il a raison, l'honorable Kugan, oui, nous avons le choix de ne pas prendre cette décision puisque c'est un choix, mais que faisons-nous ? Que faisons-nous ? L'opposition de la chaise vide. Que faisons-nous ? Est-ce qu'au Champ de Mars dimanche, je ne sais pas où ce sera, est-ce qu'il y aura des valises de billets de tout cet argent qui a été volé ? Et je ne dis pas ça pour faire rire ou pleurer mais c'est important, c'est la vérité, Maurice.

Madame la présidente, je m'arrête ici sur le sujet de la BRP parce que je souhaiterais parler du tourisme qui me passionne et c'est pour cette raison. Vous savez – paix à son âme – j'ai demandé à mon papa *when the call to be in politics came. He said to me: you know what?*

It's difficult because our family being destroyed because of politics. He said: mais tu as devoir to give back to your country what your country gave you and if you think this is why we are here, it's here for a purpose, do it! And then, I decided to join in and I am very happy. And hon. Richard Duval and myself, for the last weeks now, we have been travelling in the same car, we have been moving together because there is a lot that is being said about what is happening in tourism.

(Interruptions)

No, you know what? You have seen us, you know why? You know, yes of course, all of us back benchers and Junior Ministers when we knew that we would not be Ministers, we were disappointed, that's for sure. Let's call a spade a spade, yes. But we are here to serve and do you really think a minute – and I hope my Prime Minister didn't think that – that because I am not minister, I will let that industry which represent almost 9% of our GDP down? Let me give you some figures now. We have been sharing figures, we have been talking and if you want to talk about – my colleagues are asking where are my notes, these are my notes, okay.

The State of Economy, it's my Minister and myself who wrote the page 40. Let me read to you everything that's wrong with the industry. Labour shortage, page 40, State of the Economy, we can sign it and give a copy to the Leader of the Opposition if required: limited air connectivity, expensive destination, shortage accommodation, lack of planning for hotel development, unregulated tourist accommodation, every reliance on traditional market, limited tourism product, climate change. If you listened to me on radios or my interviews, I always mention: 'I have been tasked by', 'I have been tasked by', 'I have been tasked by', because this is the real definition. I don't like the word Junior Minister, *ministre délégué*, Deputy Minister, if you want. I have been tasked by because if he does not task, ask me to do, not later than today I sent a note to MTPA again. I will talk about... Madam Speaker, how much more time I have, please?

Madam Speaker: Oh, my dear, I will tell you in a minute.

An hon. Member: Seven minutes!

Mr Pierre: Seven minutes, okay. Let me tell the country where we are standing as an industry and you knew where we were.

Madam Speaker: You got time!

Mr Pierre: For those of you who are passionate about tourism and read, there is a paper this weekend that appeared on the same page, two different journalists give two different copies of our situation. So, I am asking the people now to analyse on tourism, on the economy and not to listen to what they are saying and to look at the figures because it is very important. I really thank the people of Mauritius that on 10 November, they made the right choice. Because just imagine for just a minute if that government would have been in power, we talk about Moody's. I don't even want to think about where we would have been today.

This is a document of l'AHRIM – *Association des Hôteliers et Restaurateurs de Ile Maurice*, official, issued on 01 June – this is a forecast where everybody is saying, 'yes the situation is not good'. I will take one quote from that journalist in Week-end –

« Maurice ne va pas mal. Mais sa situation, de monde, elle ne va pas assez bien pour continuer sans transformation. »

And, this is what we have been doing. It is here in a 'Bridge to the Future' – transforming the industry. We've started that already; we were not waiting for the budget. Since the first day we took office, we have been meeting private sectors, we have been meeting DMCs, we have been meeting and you know what, pressured us about budget, and it's a mistake we did not go to ITB, we did not go to ATM but we need to invest. We need to invest in all those pillars that will bring revenue. This is responsible business people, responsible government. We need to invest. That's why we are investing Rs541 million on promotion. People think is Rs900 million. No, promotion is only Rs541million.

And, it's not a lot of money, I can tell you, but it is something if managed properly, we will have the desired results because just bear in mind that the previous budget was dedicated to one hotel only. You remember that, I don't want to mention names here but you know where our marketing was going.

Now, the team under the leadership of hon. Richard Duval, we are really scrutinising every single activity. Not later than today, I sent him a letter to vet to be sent to MTPA. We will scrutinise every single activity, every single market. You know what, we are talking of a budget of current economy but there is a crisis actually in Israel and in Iran. And, for those of you, who have lived a time of George Bush, you will remember, we had an issue with European market. And, European market today represents 64% of our tourist arrival. We are working on diversifying those markets – Africa which is next door, Eastern Middle-East

market, Reunion Market, we have a long list of initiatives. What happens if Europeans cannot come to Mauritius? We need to have a plan B.

So, let me conclude, on giving you those numbers – I am very nervous when I talk about tourism.

We are in June. For the month of June, l'*AHRIM*, which represents 79%, the sampling of hotels, excluding the informal sector – the hotels' 14,000 rooms represent 54% of our business, 45% the informal sector. So, l'*AHRIM* is forecasting 69% for the month of June.

So, this 69% is 6 points more than last year – 6 occupancy points. I am not giving you all the figures. I went back and looked where we were standing in February just for you to see what our Ministry has been doing. In February, we were standing at 26 compared to 29 and we were 3 occupancy points behind last year whereas today 6 points ahead. I can give you all those numbers until the month of October but let me give you the good news. We are 26 occupancy points ahead from June to October 2025. Yes, not everything is rosy but there is team under the leadership of the Prime Minister, really bringing all the pillars of economy in the right direction because, otherwise, we won't survive that crisis that's waiting for us ahead.

You know what, I will conclude, Madam Speaker, because I have no track on time. I will conclude by saying that we have a long way to go. Five years! Mr Assirvaden promised that electricity will go down after three months. Yes, my friend, hon. Yuen Sik Yuen, came with a '*chochou*' in Parliament. Yes, it is true. We have seen that. Yes, hon. Dr. Ms. Jeetun, mentioned those Bhojpuri words that Weetabix kept on increasing. This is the reality and this is what we wanted to do, if we had the means. Yesterday, hon. Uteem clearly explained that this government inflated their revenue and they did not have a look at their expenses which were going in all directions.

The words of truth are the one that will guide this population because that team there and all the people going in Port-Louis, they are not saying the truth to the population. We are telling are telling the truth; we are coming with figures. We are coming with facts; we are coming with plans, with proposals.

And I am very glad that the hon. Prime Minister has instituted these two committees to take care of those that are really in need. I have looked at the Budget where this compassionate government, unlike the previous one, has shown empathy for people with inabilities and who are not able to work.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Babajee, please.

(6.57 p.m.)

Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we are here today, standing in this House, to debate the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026, and as my friend just said – there are lots of gossips, there are lots of rumours, there are lots of manipulations outside on the road but as a team here, we are all together, trusted by the public, to change the lives of those people.

People need to understand that we are not the *Alliance de Lepep*, to give everything or to offer everything freely. We are here to build the bridge as we said and we need to understand that when we won the election on 11 November and when this team came to this House, we had to analyse the outgoing-government's performance and that's why we had the State of the Economy. We had a choice; we were at the junction of a road where either we brought more skeletons in the cupboard or we changed it to build the future of the next coming generations.

Madam Speaker, I shall start my speech today, by quoting this famous expression of general truth –

“Ordo ab chao.”

These few words have echoed through centuries of human civilisation. This is the general truth which means ‘order after the chaos.’ We had ten years of chaos behind us and it is time to react or not to react.

By chaos, we refer to the chaotic economic wreckage of the faltering *Lepep* government, left for the present government, scarred by fiscal mismanagement and marked by the quiet suffering nation, let down by a leader who lacked vision.

Madam Speaker, we need understand that a budget is not just an annual financial statement of the financial year detailing government income and expenditure. It is about thinking about reforms and new economic pillars for the next generation. To do all this we need reforms, we need bold reforms. The 2019-2024 government, despite being conscious of the economic realities, promised the moon and sun to specific chunks of the electorate. We all

know when they promised the 14th month bonus which chunk of electorate they were looking for.

When they promised for pensions, the BRP, that is, what they we are debating, which chunk of electorate they are looking for. It was all like Alice in Wonderland with the electorate out of touch with realities. But the people outside, the population were not in their favour, and they gave a good lesson to them by infringing a 60-0 to the Alliance for Change. Let us have a look how they finished the financial part of government.

The national debt is fast approaching the annual GDP of the country. Budget deficits were deliberately camouflaged to a minimum and trade deficits and balance of payments reaching unsustainable levels. Under the ancient regime, Mauritius had reached a situation where the IMF, the World Bank and Moody's were threatening to intervene. The IMF had already instructed the Bank of Mauritius to pull out of the Mauritius Investment Corporation (MIC) as the role of the former was deemed to be incompatible with that of the MIC. But the authorities ignored the IMF's directives and went ahead with their plan.

Today, we know the extent of dilapidation that went under MIC and the amount of funds transferred to Dubai and elsewhere in the United Arab Emirates in private accounts. If we are in this position today, Madam Speaker, the result is the 10 years of incompetency of that government. After the chaos, now, let us take the firm commitment to rebuild the real order.

Today, under the steady hand of our hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, we stand at the start of a new chapter with the 2025-26 budget and the chaos ends here. The rebuilding begins now. We all know that globally, life expectation is increasing. The proportion of old age pensioners to the declining number of workers to sustain one pensioner, the old age pension budget is becoming unbearable.

It is high time to bring bold reforms. Today, I am proud to have two experienced leaders, especially one who is the most experienced with the number of years in this House. Also, we have in front of us a number of seniors who know the economy of Mauritius since decades. The Members who are all in the Cabinet are not timid and are not faint hearted, and are also a competent team to act according to the facts we have seen in the State of the Economy. Now, we take our stand.

This is where our resurgence begins. In this Government, we do not recoil from chaos, we work to transform it. One of the fundamental values of Alliance du Changement is that we

do not fear the chaos', but confront it with the intention to rebuilding the bridge to the future. A bridge to the future is more than some words of wisdom. It is a vision of meaningful blueprint for transformation, which requires guts, courage and determination as a strong stead.

It calls for a deeper kind of order. One built on the pillars of justice, anchored in truth, and sustained by equality. It envisions a society not ruled by dominance, but united by a shared harmony. The harmony that echoes across every community, that reaches every citizen and every corner of our nation.

Madam Speaker, today, I stand with a profound sense of duty, pride and conviction to support the 2025-2026 Budget Speech, delivered with clarity, courage and compassion by the hon. Prime Minister.

From Abyss to Prosperity: Rebuilding the bridge to the future, it is not just a mere title on a document. It is the emergence of a new philosophy and it is a clarion call for utter transformation. It reflects our collective will to move from the brink of collapse to the dawn of renewal. It reflects the character of a Government that listens, that acts and that leads with long term vision.

When the people of Mauritius entrusted us with their vote, they were not merely seeking a change of faces. They were demanding a change of fate. What we inherited was a fragile economy, record public debt and people losing hope. The whole nation is expecting that this Government comes with daring measures so as to take the country out from being red-listed by international organisations. What we offer for this budget is a new covenant, a renewed social contract centred on inclusion, dignity and bold reforms.

Madam Speaker, Mauritius is miles away from being autonomous. We, therefore, need good partnerships and strategic alliances. This budget strategically elevates Mauritius as a pivotal actor in the Indian Ocean geopolitical architecture. The eight newly ratified bilateral agreements with India, spanning critical sectors, including tertiary education exchange programmes, integrated health care system development and joint maritime domain awareness initiatives constitute a comprehensive framework for shared prosperity.

These instruments operationalise our parallel commitment to democratic governance and regional stability, creating institutional linkages that transcends transactional diplomacy. These are not just documents signed in ceremony. They are the building blocks of a new regional order where Mauritius stands as an equal partner, shaping the future through shared

democratic values, mutual respect and prove that small nations can with big influence. Our partnership model demonstrates how middle powers can leverage shared democratic principles into concrete multilateral gains.

We have rewritten the rules of international corporation. Rather than accepting handouts, we are creating exchanges where both nations win. Our strategic location and maritime expertise together with technology and knowledge that will power our future. This is how small nations grow mighty by turning every asset into opportunity. The world is taking notice, not of what we need, but what we offer. When global powers seek Mauritius partnership, they are recognising our value as keepers of vital sea lanes.

Models of multicultural democracy and innovators in sustainable development. These agreements prove that we are no longer just participants in the international system. We are becoming architects of it. Every close sign represents another step towards our destiny.

Not as a small island nation but as a giant of the Indian Ocean. As an island nation climate change is not an abstraction, it is a lived the reality, it is the rising tide lapping at our doorsteps. The bleaching corals in our lagoons, the unseasonal storms battering our shores. This budget faces that truth head-on with real solutions. The corporate climate responsibility levy is not just another tax; it is our collective insurance policy directly funding the fight to save our homeland. Every rupee will shore up our beaches against the hungry waves, power homes with clean Mauritian sunshine instead of foreign oil and protect the unique wildlife that makes Mauritius not sit idle while the climate crisis worsens. We will lead, will innovate and we will act.

The world may debate climate change; we are too busy defending our future. While others talk, we are planting mangroves; while others hesitate, we are building solar farms. This is the Mauritian way seeing the danger clearly. I need to salute the Minister of Environment for the action he took to clean Île aux Bénitiers together with the Junior Minister. I am saying the action you took to clean Île aux Bénitiers after having closed it for three months, but now people are happy, especially our mandates - they were thinking, they were doing. This is seeing the danger clearly, then rolling up our sleeves to outsmart it.

Our children will not inherit excuses; they will inherit solutions. The time for action is not coming, it is here and Mauritius is just not participating, we are pioneering with vital initiatives, that is, coastal rehabilitation, clean energy programmes and environmental

preservation. This is how we protect our beaches, safeguard our biodiversity and prepare for a greener tomorrow.

Madam Speaker, I will now conclude by a call to unity and purpose. The chaos was the delusional situation, the economic vandalism, and the economic wasteland left by the precedent government. A landscape of broken promises and plundered potential where the only growth industry was despair. I will conclude by saying that chaos meets its budget in Budget 2025-2026 not just numbers on the page but a declaration of war against failure itself.

In this visionary document, the Prime Minister has done what few leaders dare. He has looked into the abyss and answered with audacity and has re-established the order. This is the budget that will lift Mauritius by its bootstrap and make our nation breathe again. I stand in awe of a Leader who, amidst global storms has, charted a course, not to just to survival, but to supremacy. A Leader who understands that true statesmanship is not about popularity, it is about having the courage to redistribute when others would haul, to reform while others would retrieve, to dream big when others would settle for small.

This budget carries the fingerprints of that rare political bravery, the kind that transforms nations. The people of Mauritius are not just watching, they are waiting for the medicine to reach to the clinics, waiting for their pay checks to feed their families, waiting for the light at the end of a very long tunnel. This budget is neither the light nor the tunnel. It is the catalyst which would help to shorten the tunnel so that the whole nation sees the rising light in couples of years.

There is no perfect budget, Madam Speaker. There is right budget and this budget is the right one at the right time pulsating with purpose. It is our covenant that no Mauritian will be left behind in the march to prosperity. As our Prime Minister's words echo through this august Assembly, we will rebuild, will rise together. Let them also echo in everyone's home where a mother budgets every rupee, every shop where an entrepreneur chases their dream, every classroom where our children imagine their future.

This is more than a budget, it is our redemption song, I will quote Martin Luther King Jr. –

“All progress is precarious, and the solution of one problem brings us face to face with another problem.”

We remain confident that with the trust of the population placed in us, we shall overcome any problem that shall arise. With every conviction in my soul, I commend this

blueprint for national resurrection to the House and to the courageous people of Mauritius who deserve nothing less than the extraordinary future we will build together. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you so much. That was very good timing indeed. I understand that some Members who were to talk this evening are not going to talk but hon. Yeung Sik Yuen will be moving for adjournment.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Madam Speaker, I beg to move for the adjournment of the debates.

Ms S. Anquetil rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Thursday 19 June 2025 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The House stands adjourned!

At 7.16 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Thursday 19 June 2025 at 11.30 a.m.