



EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

FRIDAY 20 JUNE 2025

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GCSK, FRCP

Prime Minister,

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Minister of Finance,

Minister for Rodrigues and Outer
Islands

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Hon. Rajesh Anand Bhagwan

Minister of Environment, Solid Waste
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Hon. Govindranath Gunness

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Hon. Ashok Kumar Subron

Minister of Social Integration, Social
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Hon. Gavin Patrick Cyril Glover, SC

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Minister of Financial Services and
Economic Planning

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Hon. Sayed Muhammad Aadil Ameer Meea	Minister of Industry, SMEs and Cooperatives
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MAURITIUS

Eighth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 19 of 2025

Sitting of Friday 20 June 2025

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

The National Anthem was played

(The Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

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

Office of the President

The Special Report June 2025 of the Ombudsperson for Children on the protection of the rights of child artists and child athletes. (In original)

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR – CONTRACTOR REGISTRATION & GROWTH STRATEGY

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to the construction sector, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Construction Industry Authority, information as to the –

- (a) number of large and small contractors currently registered thereunder;
- (b) projected growth for the sector over the next five years, and
- (c) strategy to support same.

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as you are aware, the construction industry is a very dynamic sector, which comprises the construction of buildings, roads, bridges, drains, dams, among others. The public as well as the private sector play a key role in the development of the construction sector. A number of measures have been announced in the Budget Speech to give the much-needed impetus to a crippling construction sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, pertaining to part (a) of the question, I have been informed that there are 36 large contractors and 1,463 small contractors.

I am sure that the hon. Leader of the Opposition forgot to add the medium category contractors in his question, but for transparency's sake, I am going to provide the information. There is a third category of Medium contractors, which is divided into Medium I and Medium II, comprising 31 and 362, respectively.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, therefore, the CIA categorises contractors into four categories, namely –

- i. Small with a ceiling of Rs20 m. per contract;
- ii. Medium II with a ceiling of Rs200 m. per project;
- iii. Medium I with a ceiling of Rs500 m., and
- iv. Large which has no ceiling.

It has been found that over time, concerns have been raised regarding the relevance and the effectiveness of the current grading system. This includes the gap between the different ceilings, misalignment with the actual financial and technical capacity of contractors. This led

to challenges faced by contractors in progressing from one grade to another, and problems faced by new entrants in the construction business to secure registration.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius being Mauritius, a huge number of contractors being of small size do not register with the CIA. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have to reassure the contractors that the CIA is coming up with a series of innovative measures to support the development and growth of the Construction Industry. These include –

- (i) A new contractor's grading system;
- (ii) A feasibility study on Building Information Modelling (BIM);
- (iii) Updating of the existing national schedule of rates which date back to 2021;
- (iv) The development of the national building code, and
- (v) Introduction of a security of payments legislation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, pertaining to part (b) of the question, I would like to remind the Hon. Leader of Opposition that statistical figures are quite dynamic and not static. The previous government indicated a growth rate of 25% in 2023, which has now been revised to 13.3%.

The previous government was very apt in inflating statistics in almost all sectors. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do not want to indulge in forecast which will prove us all wrong, but I can safely state that once confidence of the citizens is restored in our institutions – which was not here – with the new government, we are restoring the confidence in all institutions, our sector would certainly be an engine of growth in the next five years.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the new budgetary provisions, I am sure that in the next couple of years, the economy should be back on track and interest in this sector grow even higher. I would not like to engage in futile forecast as was being done with the previous government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, pertaining to part (c) of the question, the construction sector fully qualifies to be registered as SME where various benefits under several schemes have been given. For the present financial year and to date, 199 small and medium contractors have benefitted directly from jointly work schemes relating to technology, ERPS, equipment consultancy and others.

The above figure added to 391 beneficiaries from the previous 3 years takes the total number of beneficiaries from small and medium contractors to 590 direct beneficiaries of schemes offered by SME Mauritius over the past 4 years.

The CIA in its venture to ensure that the appropriate skills and trainings are transmitted to the contractors, regular trainings are provided on project management, on health and safety issues on bidding procedures, dispute resolution, among others.

I am also advised by the DBM that there exists a loan scheme for small contractors. However, although the maximum loan is Rs 25m., there has been no application received from small contractors. Was it not *seulement une mesure d'annonce* for small contractors? Because although the scheme has existed, no one has been able to benefit from it.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I intend to talk to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance so that we can revisit and re-engineer these loan schemes.

The intent of this Government has been made clear in the current budget and in the Budget Speech. I am going to ensure that necessary amendments are brought to the CIA Act.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, two major road projects have been recently been announced in the Budget Speech, namely the M4 and the Ring Road Phase 2. I fail to understand why during the past 10 years, these projects were not deemed to be a priority, despite the fact that these projects would not only make life of inhabitants of the surroundings easier, but will give our tourists a second road from Plaisance to the North via the East coast. The Ring Road will also decrease the stress level of all drivers coming in and out of Port Louis every day due to their professional commitments. All necessary consultations will be undertaken, and the alignment of the Ring Road will be worked out with the consultation of all the stakeholders.

May I also, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, remind the House of the gross negligence of the MSM government which has been announcing *en grand fanfare* – the Riviere des Anguilles Dam. But unfortunately, 10 years, nothing happened. Again, in the present budget, funds have been earmarked to make this happen and we are committed to it.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I can assure everyone that during this mandate, this project will be successfully implemented, not for the sake of implementation, but to alleviate the hardship to everyone who is deprived from basic necessities of life – water, which is potable, drinkable and safe for consumption.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with an investment of about Rs180 billion in the coming five years in public infrastructure, you need not be an economist to know that there will be a multiplier effect over the whole economy in the next five years as there will be lots of jobs creation, leading to opportunities in all regions of Mauritius, which will further create more wealth, in line with the vision of this Government.

Would you believe that in 2025, Mauritius doesn't have the Building Information Modelling (BIM), which should have made this sector more dynamic, efficient, as well as effective? The BIM project, which should have been implemented long ago, was completely forgotten by the previous regime. But in all fairness to the sector, I have ensured that we are going to initiate this project in weeks to come with the understanding that in a couple of years, we have a proper system in place. This system will be equipped with the appropriate platform for everyone to share knowledge and information so that the efficiency of projects will have a positive impact, not only in terms of cost, but in terms of effectiveness.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I note that the hon. Minister has not provided us with any forecast for such an important sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the latest report of the IMF on Mauritius acknowledges the contribution of the construction sector in terms of real GDP growth, and recognises that the sector is resilient. Will the hon. Minister agree that the measures announced in this Budget for the construction sector will lead to a contraction of the sector, and also to job losses in that sector?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when I listen to the Leader of the Opposition saying that there will be a contraction in the construction sector, I am not agreeable with him. I must remind him that we are investing Rs180 billion over five years!

We must also bear in mind that despite the budgetary situation they left us behind with a debt of Rs642 billion in the country; with all the debts that we have to pay in different sectors, despite that, the Ministry of Finance, the Prime Minister *n'a pas hésité de mettre de l'argent* where we must put – in construction, in development, in infrastructure, in dams, in

roads, and in buildings. We have invested where we have to invest. I am sure that this investment will bring growth in the country.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you. So, can the hon. Minister inform the House of the number of new public infrastructure projects that the Government will implement over the next three years?

Mr Gunness: I think if the hon. Leader of the Opposition would have gone through the Budget, he would have known the projects. If you would have gone through the Estimates, it is well detailed in it.

Now, we have presented Program-Based Budgeting. So, all the projects – the dams, the drains project, the buildings project, new schools, and the repair to schools, are found in the Budget. If he would have taken the pain to go through that, he would have known!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: There are only two important projects in the Budget and that too will be implemented during the third year. Will the hon. minister inform the House whether, since the presentation of this Budget, he has met with the representatives of big, medium, and small contractors to discuss with them the measures for the construction sector in the budget?

(Interruptions)

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, regarding the first part of the question, he saw only two projects in the Budget Speech. I think all the details are not in the Budget Speech; they are in the PSIP Programme, they are in the Annex, they are in the Estimates. If you go through the Estimates;...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Quiet! Quiet!

Mr Gunness: ... you go through the Annex, you go through the PSIP, you will see all the projects are detailed. Now, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is asking me whether since the presentation of the budget, I have met the association of contractors. Let me tell him...

An hon. Member: *Ti bizin donn Nundun Gopee mo krwar.*

Mr Gunness: Let me remind him that since I took office, I met the contractors, the Association of Contractors once or twice, but now, it is two weeks since every day we are in

the House, we are debating the Budget. So, once the budget debates are over, if they will ask for an appointment, they will certainly get an appointment, and I will be more than happy to meet them.

Mr Jhummun: Even Gopee?

Mr Gunness: No!

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The NDU and the LDA, two strategic departments of this ministry, in the fight against climate change, have been transferred to the Ministry of Local Government.

The Deputy Prime Minister: *To en retard.*

Mr Lesjongard: Can he explain the reasoning behind?

The Deputy Prime Minister: What is the reason that you are behind?

Mr Gunness: I think I will ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition to be patient because we have not yet voted the budget. So, be a bit patient, then you will know.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question!

Mr Lesjongard: Yes. Mention is made in the budget for the construction of the phase two of the Ring Road Project. I believe that phase two, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, of that project will again include the construction of two tunnels through the mountains. Is the hon. Minister aware that this region is landslide-prone?

Mr Gunness: Again, I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition has not gone through the budget, because we are not embarking on phase two right now. There is money for consultancy for phase two. There are geotechnical... Funds have been provided for consultancy work, and we have said that we are going to see, rework the alignment and we are going to go through consultation with the people who are living on the alignment over there.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Next question!

Mr Lesjongard: If he is giving that reply before announcing the project, can he inform the House whether that project is technically feasible?

Mr Gunness: I just said that we are appointing a consultant. I do not know why you cannot understand a simple answer. I am not a consultant! I am not a consultant; we are appointing a consultant to go, to do the work and then we report to the ministry and then, from thereon we will see.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in terms of environmental concerns, will the hon. Minister agree that the construction of those two tunnels will disrupt the mountain ecosystem and it will be a project with a lot of legal risks?

An hon. Member: *Kontinie!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Let the hon. Minister answer, please.

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, again, I am not an engineer. That is why we appoint consultants. That's why we appoint professionals to do the work. So, let them do the work and then when we get the report, we will see.

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: My next question is not an engineering-based question. Will the hon. Minister inform the House that when the ring road project will be completed, it will not be subjected to toll road charges?

An hon. Member: *Li pena kestion.*

Mr Gunness: I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition wants to make the people, who are outside, have fear. So, that is why he is coming with the idea of toll. We have not even discussed about toll idea.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Listen to the answer!

(Interruptions)

Mr Gunness: Who said that? You read that in the budget?

An hon. Member: *Kan ti ena toll?*

The Deputy Speaker: Ask your next question!

Mr Bhagwan: *Kan in koz sa? Zamin in koz sa.*

Mr Assirvaden: *Li pe vin koz menti ici.*

Mr Mohamed: Another lie!

Mr Lesjongard: Can I ask hon. Assirvaden to withdraw what he just said. He said that I am lying in the House.

Mr Mohamed: No, I said that. I said that. I said “another lie”.

The Deputy Speaker: You did not say...

Mr Mohamed: Just like he lied about the hon. Prime Minister buying a new car. Liar! Liar! Liar!

An hon. Member: Liar!

Mr Mohamed: So, that’s a fact!

Mr Assirvaden: ... pension CEB *aussi* lie!

Hon. Members: Liar!

An hon. Member: Withdraw the car!

Mr Mohamed: I am not withdrawing!

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if he spurts out on truths, I cannot say that he is speaking the truth. Now, he has to understand, I am speaking the truth. He is not telling the people the truth. He has lied about the hon. Prime Minister buying a car and he said it in a standing position. Apologise!

Hon. Members: Apologise!

The Deputy Speaker: Come on. So, you will have an opportunity to explain about the car.

Mr Mohamed: I will!

The Deputy Speaker: And he will have an opportunity to clarify matters.

Mr Lesjongard: He has to withdraw what he just said.

Mr A. Duval: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on a point of order: you cannot attack the character of another hon. Member unless by a Motion! You cannot call a Member a liar!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: He is a liar!

The Deputy Speaker: No, he has not.

Mr A. Duval: ... someone is not telling the truth, but you cannot call someone to his face a liar in this Parliament.

The Deputy Speaker: No, he has not treated....

Mr Lesjongard: He has already said....

Mr A. Duval: So, I will ask you to ask him to withdraw that.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hold on!

(Interruptions)

He has not treated....

(Interruptions)

Excuse me! I have listened carefully to what the hon...

Mr A. Duval: He said 'liar' five times now!

The Deputy Speaker: He has never said that he is a liar. What I have heard hon. Minister Mohamed say is that: what he has said is a lie; he has not said that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is a liar. Let's carry on!

Mr Lesjongard: ... a liar.

The Deputy Speaker: No, I have not heard him say 'a liar'. We will verify.

Mr Lesjongard: Can I ask you then, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we suspend the Sitting for you to listen to what he said?

The Deputy Speaker: We will have an opportunity to listen and if there is a need to make a statement, we will make a statement thereafter. Let us carry on with the PNQ.

Mr A. Duval: So, you did not call him a liar right now?

The Deputy Speaker: No, he said...

(Interruptions)

Now, come on, I have already...

(Interruptions)

I have already..

(Interruptions)

I have already..

(Interruptions)

No! No! No! Hon. A. Duval please...

Mr A. Duval: On a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Which point of order?

Mr A. Duval: To preserve the decorum of the House, you cannot call someone a liar. He could say, he is not speaking the truth, but just go and attack his character....

An hon. Member: Another lie.

Mr A. Duval: To preserve the decorum of the House...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: I have already stated that what I heard hon. Mohamed say is that what the Leader of the Opposition has said is a lie. He has never attacked his character saying that he is a liar. Now, if you want me later to listen to the audio, we will listen and come to a statement. Let us carry on with the PNQ please. Next question!

Mr Lesjongard: May I, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, humbly request you to suspend the Sitting and listen to whether he said the word "liar".

(Interruptions)

Because this is not acceptable in this Parliament, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a next question, hon. Leader of the Opposition?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, but let us clear the....

The Deputy Speaker: The session will not be suspended. We will take our time to listen to the recording, and like I said, if need be, we will come with a statement and see if the word 'liar' has been used against your character, then we will take up the matter.

Come on, let us continue. Thank you.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware of the number of contractors working on government projects who have not been paid since the beginning of this year?

(Interruptions)

Will he inform the House when those contractors will be paid?

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is because of their mismanagement of the finance of the public finance that today in hospitals, overtime is not being paid.

Mr Mohamed: This is not a lie.

Mr Gunness: We are delaying payment for contractors because of their mismanagement. They overspent and today, where the country stands, it is because of their doing! It is not our doing! We are trying with this budget...

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: You have been in power for the past eight months!

Mr Gunness: ...once financed...

(Interruptions)

...because...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Let the Minister reply, please! Let us all listen to the reply of the hon. Minister!

Mr Gunness: It is their budget that we are managing!

(Interruptions)

It is not our budget!

(Interruptions)

2024-2025 is your budget! So, you have to answer as to why funds are not available in the different ministries to pay! So, you are...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Dan tou minister!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Gunness: So, it is an own goal for yourself!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Adrien Duval!

Mr Mohamed: *Li pe defann MSM li!*

Mr A. Duval: May I ask the hon. Minister, the construction industry is going to be impacted, as we know, by climate change and one of the major impacts is flooding. He has promised along with *Alliance du Changement* to make public the Land Drainage...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: He must ask whether...

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: I am asking my question!

(Interruptions)

May I? Without interruptions!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Poz bon kestion!*

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: So, where is the master plan?

(Interruptions)

Where is the flood map that was supposed to be made public eight months ago? Where is it?

An hon. Member: *Dimann Bobby!*

Mr A. Duval: When can we expect it to be made public? Along with the Land Drainage Master Plan!

(Interruptions)

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in all transparency, we are going to give the answer. There was a Land Drainage Master Plan...

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: Bobby master plan!

An hon. Member: *Synthe!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Gunness: Government decided to set up a technical committee to look at that master plan, and that technical committee will produce a report. Once the report is ready then Government will decide what to do with that report.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, do you have a question?

Let us listen to our friend from Rodrigues.

Mr François: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister confirm whether the NDU and LDA will continue to implement drain projects in Rodrigues to help the construction industry as well as to remedy the flooding problems thereat at the various places as identified?

Mr Gunness: Let me just inform my good friend that we already have three projects which are ready for award stage in Rodrigues. Three major drain projects!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Adrien Duval!

Mr A. Duval: Thank you. May I ask the Minister, with regard to the Drain Infrastructure Construction Ltd, which caters for the construction of drains; which he has criticised in the past for opacity in awarding contract that it does not fall under the Procurement Act, can we know whether the Minister has appointed a new board and whether funding has been made available for contracts to be given under the Drain Infrastructure Construction Ltd? For transparency!

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we know who was the Chairman of Drain Infrastructure Construction Ltd!

(Interruptions)

The same Mr Gopee who has benefitted from the MSM regime Rs3.4 billion!

(Interruptions)

And, once, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: No, no...

(Interruptions)

Mr Gunness: Listen! You put a question! At least have the manner to listen!

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Malelve sa!*

The Deputy Speaker: Listen to the question!

Mr Bhagwan: *Tande, tande !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Gunness: You put the question, whether the board has been constituted. Yes! And we have reviewed the board. It is Mr Nastili who is the Chairman, not like Mr Gopee! We have a full board constituted, and we have revamped the DICL.

And I must tell you, compared to how it was before, where they did not even seek the clearance of the Ministry of Finance to launch contracts; there are certain contracts which have already been started with contracts not signed. These are things of the past!

(Interruptions)

Now, they work according to regulations. Strict regulations! The DICL is performing!

And you asked whether funds are available? Rs2.4 billion have been put in the budget for drains. Go and read your budget!

Mr A. Duval: But it will not be at the public procurement ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, one last question.

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: *Eta ale!*

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir...

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Eta ale do koson!*

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: *Pran to kritik al lakaz do ta!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: I withdraw!

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Minister inform the House, how many projects implemented by the former government, has he inaugurated since he has assumed office?

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Let us listen to the answer!

Mr Gunness: ...they could have started a project but when we came in Government, we had to monitor that project. We had to do improvements in that project. You want to know what you did? You made cycle lanes everywhere just to make money!

An hon. Member: *Pou bez kass!*

Mr Gunness: Go and see in what state the cycle lanes are today! You can go and see! Nobody is cycling on that. So, we are going to review...

An hon. Member: *Kokin!*

Mr Gunness: ...all the mess where you have used public money just to make a mess.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Zot fer cycle lanes apre zot kokin!*

An hon. Member: *Bez kass!*

The Deputy Speaker: No more questions? So, we go to the next item.

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

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

The Deputy Prime Minister 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.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Ramtohul!

(3.31 p.m.)

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Dr. A. Ramtohul): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is with a deep sense of pride and purpose that I rise today in august Assembly to express my unwavering support for the visionary budget 2025-2026 presented by the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

I wish to begin by saluting his leadership, supported by the Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Bérenger, and foresight in proposing a budget that not only meets the immediate challenges of our time, but sets in motion a bold and transformative vision for our country. A vision aptly captured in the theme ‘Abyss to Prosperity: Rebuilding the bridge to the future.’

This budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is not merely a fiscal exercise, but a courageous statement of economic reconstruction. It is a roadmap for a stronger, smarter, more resilient and inclusive Republic of Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are living in a VUCA world –

- V for volatility.
- U for uncertainty.
- C for change.
- A for ambiguity.

Internationally, there are a lot of challenges whether it is at the social front, financial front or even with regard to the political climate. If Mauritius is to do well as a society, as a community, as a nation, we have no other choice, but to become a more resilient society. We have seen over the last ten years – hon. Jhummun mentioned that yesterday – instead of

teaching people how to fish, we have been giving them fish as a meal. Thus, rendering the population within the framework of a mindset that is more of assisting.

So, it is an assisted mindset, and the need for Government help has sort of become a right. That has to develop; that has to change. A serious fundamental change needs to be brought.

Coming to the issue with regard to the payment of the pension. Today, 26% of our budget is being occupied by the BRP. A lot of statistics have been mentioned in this House. Already in 2023, 20% of the population was aged more than 60. By 2057, 35% of the population would be in that age bracket. This means a lot of financial pressure on today's BRP model. The ratio in 2017 was five workers or five contributors to one retiree. There is a lot of pressure on that ratio with an ageing population. If we leave it as it is, by the year 2037, it will be only 2.4 contributors to one retiree. Obviously, as it has been stated severally in this House, it is unsustainable.

We are all aware of the sword of Damocles – Moody's is watching us. It is good to realise what will happen in case we do get relegated to the junk status. It has been mentioned but I feel it is important to repeat that for the population. We would be suffering from high interest rates on our loans, and what could be paid in terms of pension could largely be consumed by loans because a lot of Mauritian families are burdened by loans. There would be capital outflows because our investors would want to go explore other shores and an inevitable depreciation or further depreciation of the Mauritian rupee, including additional or bringing additional pressure on our *ménagers*. Loss of confidence of investors in Mauritius as a land for investment and, obviously, a higher rate of inflation with a reduction in our purchasing power.

So, if the system is maintained as it is, these actions or these implications would be almost inevitable. Actually, I should rather remove the word 'almost'. We salute the decision of this Government and we strongly stand by the decision of this Government to reform the pension system.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it thrusts into prominence that Information and Communication Technology is not bolted on this Budget but, it is inherent to each and every Ministry and their strategic objectives. In the past, ICT was seen more as an expense item on the budget but, as from this Budget, ICT is seen as a value-add, as a driver because ICT is

here to drive the society towards a digital democracy through digital inclusion while constructing equitable opportunities for our people.

We are in an era where the pace of technological advancement is unprecedented. Digital technologies are reshaping our society, the economy and disrupting the way business models and even governments work. In this context, the Ministry of IT stands not merely as an enabler but as a driver for digital transformation. It is in this spirit that we launched the Blueprint, and as we said, the bridge to the future, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will be digital. At the heart of this Budget lies a bold affirmation, Artificial Intelligence is not in the future, it is the present, as also stated by hon. Dr. Sukon.

This technology, it used to be a science fiction, it was in the realm of science fiction but now, it is helping in healthcare; it is helping to fight crime; it is also helping to protect children from online harms. However, and as the Leader of the Opposition, himself, mentioned, there is the flipped side to Artificial Intelligence but the question that we have is: What was done in the past to protect this nation from the flipped side of Artificial Intelligence? We cannot also forget the failed attempt of the MSM Government to bring AI to the Mauritian landscape through the 2018 Strategy Paper, which featured 40 recommendations but not a single recommendation was implemented. What was implemented, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, was the idea that a lot of what *Missie Moustass* presented in the past was generated by AI. They tried to make people believe that it was all AI-generated, and since then, a lot of people have some form of apprehension with regard to this technology. But we are reinstating confidence in the minds of people, that AI is here to help the people.

With regard to the legislation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it does seem that the Budget was read by the Leader of the Opposition selectively. I say this because it is clearly stated in the Blueprint that a framework is being developed to govern, not just the usage but also, the development of Artificial Intelligence. The very people who made this nation believe that all what *Missie Moustass* presented was AI, are the very people who, today, are coming and standing by the nation, claiming to be the messiah of the people, especially in the case of the pension issue. It is good for us to know that there are some people behind who are pulling the string, at least some people are getting to pull the string. It has been really sad to see that not enough justice was done to this technology that we call AI. There have been several other failures of the MSM Government with regard to digitalisation and it is time to change.

It is now time to change and this Budget sets the tone. Firstly, the provision of Rs25 million to kick-start a Public Sector AI Programme – the first time ever measure for this. This is a direct investment in equipping all Ministries with AI tools to enhance policy making and service delivery. Such measures, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, directly fuel our ambition to accelerate the implementation of intelligent automation. To deliver the above, there is a need for data of volume, variety and velocity.

In as much as first efforts of digitalisation, back then called computerisation, started in 1977, with the establishment of the then Data Processing Division, we have seen very reduced efforts in the last 10 years but this Government takes AI very seriously and this is why the Budget establishes an AI Unit within my Ministry to consolidate information from various other Ministries. This AI Unit and the data or information that we accumulate there will provide for data-driven policy formulation.

The Government collects data from various touch points on a daily basis but that remains siloed and duplicated. In order to avoid that, we are establishing what we call a citizen data hub. This will be the single source of truth for all citizens information. This measure will help us do more with less in a time where we are really constraint by budget.

While AI is helping humanity, it is, as we said, critical to govern the development and use of it. Therefore, in the Budget Speech, the hon. Prime Minister made reference to the Blueprint, as we said. It is important to note that in the UK, they have taken the approach of a principles-based regulation for AI while in the European Union, they have taken a risk-based approach. Therefore, discussions need to take place in order to find out what would be the right way forward for Mauritius.

An AI for us is not just a statement, it is a philosophy and we want to ensure that the approach that we take to regulate AI will be human centric, innovation-friendly, transparent. It will have the element of accountability, fairness and robustness. Every Mauritian will be included in this transformation through enablement and empowerment in order to build a future-ready nation. In order to stimulate private sector growth, my Ministry will engage with the private sector operators to establish virtual labs and Fab Labs to democratise access to AI platforms for all and especially, for research and development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a cardinal fault of the MSM Government not to have established what we call a disaster recovery site. As we took office, we realised this blunder

and, very quickly, we initiated efforts to establish the DR site. I am pleased to say that with the support of the Prime Minister, we have been able to define the right way forward and, very soon, we will have that DR site.

So, the MSM government could not even protect people's data, and they dared claim that they would protect our people, our economy and our dignity. In fact, *missie Moustass* sniffed his way through right from Baie du Jacotet to the PMO in Port Louis and on the way, ripping us off of our dignity. This is what has happened.

Many Mauritians are still unaware of what *Missie Moustass* may have about them in his bag. Some people, after having faced the unforgiving defeat, may still be suffering from insomnia. Our Prime Minister, as we said, the moment he took office, dismantled that equipment to return to Mauritians their serenity and the integrity of our digital networks. It's not the Serenity of what was produced earlier! It's the real serenity of our people.

In order to strengthen the foundational elements of our digital landscape, this budget provided for the disaster recovery site. This will significantly boost our national resilience and ensure continuity of services. This is yet another example where we are having to clean up the mess that was left behind by the MSM government.

Our focus, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is on citizens centric services, which is being now reinforced. For example, for digital health, it's good that I mention to the House that the way the system was earlier designed wouldn't have added value to the patient's experience. It wouldn't at all! In fact, it would have created more frustration. Hon. Bachoo and myself are having to work very closely to, again, clean up the mess over there. Without fear, we are actually taking our time, but we are doing what is right for the people. In fact, the people who need medical services are already suffering from some kind of a problem. Our moral duty is to alleviate that pain, not to increase it. This is why the Prime Minister is giving special attention to this project.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it's good that I also speak about the information system at the Social Security, which has been there for more than 20 years now. Out of that system – this has been mentioned in the Audit Report of 2024 –, there has been an overpayment of Rs187 m. in 2024. In 2023, it was Rs134 m, which implied a 40% increase on overpayment of pensions. The information system which is being used is still there, and it's thanks to that system that such a loss has been incurred! Such a waste rather I should say!

So, over the last two years, an amount of Rs321 m. have been overpaid for pensions. In other words, wasted! You call this governing? Rs321 m., I am just trying to make it clear! The previous government suffered from a serious lack of political will to address this unacceptable wastage of public funds. It seems it didn't really matter to them.

Let me tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for this Government, every taxpayer rupee matters to us, and every life matters as well. Here, I would like to commend my colleague, hon. Subron, for his courage to fight against this system, which is currently allowing waste of public funds. It goes without saying that many digital services, in fact, today, as our people go to consume government services at different counters, they still need to queue up! Today, they are not able to effect payment but in cash! That refers to an earlier point made by hon. Beechhook at some point.

Therefore, we are working on technologies that will allow online payment also for government services. One clear example is the launch of the MVL System which we did in collaboration with hon. Osman Mahomed. The MVL System has been totally revamped. A lot of people complained that when they go to government counters, they already provide their information to the person attending the counter, but they have to produce the same information over and over again: bring your birth certificate, bring your National ID, bring a photocopy of specific documents. When we are talking about digitalisation, this should be behind us now.

Therefore, this blueprint has a very clear concept of 'tell us only once,' which implies that when you have provided your information to the government, you don't need to provide it a second time again. So, as you use the MVL System, you would see that all your vehicle details already appear on it. You just need to use a few clicks and you make it happen. But that wasn't done earlier because the focus was just to sign the contract. The focus wasn't to make sure that justice is done to the public funds, and that the public is able to benefit from what the digital revolution has to offer.

Coming to cybersecurity, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as our digital footprint expands, there is a stronger need to protect our nation's data. This is why legal and regulatory reform is indispensable. My Office is working very closely with the Office of the Attorney-General to bring the legislations required or amendments to existing legislations. Over the past years, with respect to social media, a rising number of cybersecurity incidents have been registered. We have seen hate speeches, dehumanising language, and calls for violence.

Our social media, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has, today, turned into a jungle. People are posting pictures they want and people are making comments that they want without even fearing anything. Only last year, there were more than 5,000 cases reported, I am saying 5,000 cases ‘reported.’ There may be many more that were left unreported. We know that over the years, there has been only one conviction out of infringement of ICT Act. But every day, on a daily basis, we see a language that is unacceptable and that is nearing illegality. There has been very saddening *laissez-aller* on part of the MSM government. It was probably serving their purpose. But now, we are going to bring some method to that madness and we will be working on legislation that will ensure that while protecting the rights of expression of our people, some languages are not used.

The enforcement of Cyber Security and Cybercrime Act 2021 requires critical infrastructure entities to conduct regular IT security assessments. This will be conducted. However, ensuring consistent complaints across various sectors may be challenging because of resource constraints. But we have a National Cyber Security Committee that will be working on this issue, and changes to legislations will be recommended.

We have also seen a lot of online harms that were committed. Everybody will remember the case that took place on Telegram, where a lot of nude pictures of minors were being shared. That happened in 2023-2024. It was really saddening. Thanks to our colleague, hon. Ms Navarre-Marie, actions were taken and there were arrests with the collaboration of the Police. Here, a CERT-MU is developing a national lexicon that will serve as a tool to identify language that is not acceptable. There would also be the establishment of a Cyber Forensic Lab for investigating incidents and to analyse digital evidence for cases that have been launched with the Police.

The mandate at the Data Protection Office is clear: it is to uphold the fundamental right to privacy, to ensure compliance with data protection laws and to empower individuals with control over their personal information. There also is a lack of sensitisation among the population with regards to their own data rights. People aren’t well aware of what their data rights are. And, there would be specific actions in that direction.

So, the Data Protection Act in Mauritius has not evolved over time while the EU GDPR has evolved; so, there is a gap. And, there are a lot of private operators in Mauritius which are dealing with data of European citizens. Therefore, it becomes very important for us to work

on what we call the EU Adequacy. This will encourage further investors to explore the land of Mauritius for their activities.

Furthermore, the Data Protection Office is preparing a comprehensive guideline on Artificial Intelligence and data privacy to address AI governance and to address ethical considerations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we also have seen a lot of evolution in the telecommunications arena. And, it has become very necessary now, at this stage, to review what we call the Licensing Regime and there has been a very strong need for reform. Just this morning, I was spending time with some operators in the TELCO sector and they expressed their wishes to see the development take place. And, I am very pleased to announce that the blueprint makes provisions for quite a number of changes in that space. The need for a reform in Licensing Regime has long been felt and the ICTA is actively working on this.

And, talking about ICTA, it is important to note also that there is one project that we completed and that project is about opening the space for satellite connection with the internet for our country to benefit from that. Talking about satellite, maybe I should remind the House that there was this satellite called MIR-SAT1 which was a nano-satellite project, for which Rs30 million was spent and out of which we got 15 images, which means that there was Rs2 million that was spent per image and finally the satellite *inn eklate*.

There is a pressing need as we said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for Licensing Regime to be reviewed and we are looking at the ICTA Act 2001 as well and the Electronic Transactions Act, together with the legal framework for Maupass.

Now, as a Small Island Developing State, the Republic of Mauritius is highly vulnerable to adverse effect of climate change. And, we also see flash-floods and more intense cyclones coming our way. So, I am pleased to announce that this budget also supports what we call a Cell Broadcast System. This system actually sends targeted and dedicated messages for people who are on specific region where that region could be at risk of a flood or cyclone, and this we are doing for saving lives of people.

The ICTA intends to also move progressively towards a unified licensing framework as we mentioned and here, engagement have started already for us to go that route. Now there are two vital reforms that we need to bring.

At the back of the Freedom of Information Act, we need to modernise our open access policy. Therefore, we will be reviewing what we call OpenData portal. This is because there

is a need to ensure fair and non-discriminatory access for all service providers to information. So, the ICTA will be mandated to identify some actions with regards to the open data policy where they would need to also bring some input.

Now, the Next Generation Network, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, particularly with the roll out of 5G, will be very important for us in our digitalisation efforts. So, the ICTA will soon be releasing, as well, licenses for that to take place. And, as we mentioned, for Maupass, there are additional services that we are going to deploy, for example, the Penalty Point System which has been discussed as well with hon. Osman Mahomed.

Our Electronic Transactions Act, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will be reviewed as well, to reflect the latest version of what we call as the UNCITRAL Model Law. This will allow our electronic documents for imports to be recognised from the ports, from where goods are being shipped. Today, those documents are being sent manually, creating delays in shipping transactions to be concluded. Therefore, as soon as we bring these changes, there will be a reduction of several days for those shipping transactions to be concluded.

And, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget as we said, is not just a collection of isolated initiatives. It's a coherent and comprehensive strategy to reimagine Mauritius. Through our digital transformation blueprint and the policies backed in this budget, we are laying the foundation for a smart, sustainable and inclusive nation.

Before ending, I would just like to talk a little bit about Constituency No. 10. It's a big constituency with 56 000 voters but a huge or a vast majority of those voters have been suffering from defective roads, an acute problem of drug trafficking, disruption in water supply and low-quality infrastructure. While I was very pleased to see the M4 Project being announced for two /three years from now, the other problems remained. The problem mainly of water supply but I know that we are actually with, hon. Assirvaden, defining the plan for having water storage at strategic points that will be applicable to the Constituency No.10, as well. Yet, the problem of drugs remains a key issue. We are very often faced with mothers who are crying the loss of their children. And, we would really want to see this Drugs Board being operational, very soon and we look forward to that.

And, on this note, I would like to conclude with just this statement. It is the vision, dedication and the cooperation of our people, our public servants, private sectors and civil society, together, that can bring this digital transformation to life. And, together, we can build

a Mauritius where every citizen, regardless of their age, income or location, can access opportunity, realise potential and contribute to the collective prosperity of our nation.

Let us rise to this moment and let us build the digital bridge to the future.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you!

Hon. Rookny. The floor is yours for the next 20 minutes.

(4.04 p.m.)

Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is with unwavering determination that I rise today to speak in support of the Budget 2025-2026; a budget that is not only defined by numbers but by values, a budget that carries the imprint of compassion, responsibility and the courage to act where others have turned a blind eye.

Permettez-moi de commencer en rendant hommage à la vision et le courage du Premier ministre. Il a eu l'audace de poser la question que beaucoup évitait.

Comment garantir un système de pension durable sans trahir notre jeunesse et nos générations futures ; le tout, en jetant les bases nécessaires pour le redémarrage de moteur de notre économie ?

We stand at crossroads of economic renewal and social transformation. This budget is not merely an accounting exercise, but it sets the stage for the immediate, medium and long-term. We all have lived through a decade of decadence of wastage, pillaging of our nation's wealth, and probably, worse of all, the loss of our freedom and alienation of our youth. The very day we set our foot in office; we started addressing each one of these issues. Phone taping was stopped immediately. The DPP was given the sole prosecutorial powers. Institutions were made independent again. They now function as they always ought to have been.

Even the MBC is functioning! The MBC does not take any instructions from any politicians now. When we ask, but what does all of this has to do with the budget? What does it have to do with the life of the country? A budget exercise is, as I said, not merely an accounting exercise. It sets the stage. Now, why is that important? The small country that we are, with limited natural resources, we are so dependent on FDI. How do we get FDI?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, of course, our balance sheet needs to look good. Looking good does not depend entirely on the reserves of US dollars that we have, as the Leader of Opposition was saying. Looking good means how much, we have now, how much we will have in the foreseeable future after having taken consideration of all our liabilities, and after having made good accumulated budget deficits year on year. My dear friends on this side of the House have explained lengthily how the previous government have dug our deficits to unsustainable heights; how colorable devices have been used to hide the true extent of our liabilities, and how they have criminally played with the Estimates. We all know how the Director of Audit was abused thanks to *Moustass Leaks*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will not delve further on this matter as my friends have already explained it earlier. I will lay my faith in our institutions to deal with the crimes the cronies of the previous government have done to this nation and to our generation. International financial institutions and *le bailleur de fonds* know well of the tricks of dubious governments. That is why they lay a lot of credit on peer reviews and on credit rating agencies like Moody's. This is not news to the previous government and certainly not to the previous Minister of Finance. As explained yesterday by hon. Ramful, this is why he hid the report in his drawers that required of him to change our economic model because that was not to the tune of his liking!

On avait crié sur tous les toits pendant la campagne que le pays allait mal. On voyait les milliards de largesses que le MSM faisait profiter aux proches de *lakwizinn*. Mais malheureusement, une fois au pouvoir, on n'a pu que constater que notre pays était dans un ICU économique. On a sûrement été naïf, mais jamais on n'aurait pu croire qu'un ministre des Finances qui se respecte puisse fausser les chiffres afin de paraître moins mauvais que l'on était déjà.

M. le président, ce pays a voté pour le changement. Ce pays a voté pour la rupture. Ce pays a voté pour la transparence. Ce pays veut d'un avenir meilleur pour tout le monde. Mais surtout, ce pays ne veut plus jamais qu'un gouvernement puisse lui rouler dans la farine. Au risque de me répéter, M. le président, the previous government left behind a fiscal landscape act into a war-torn battlefield. Over the past decade, we have witnessed a sinister pattern of fiscal irresponsibility. Last year, the deficits stood at a staggering 9.8% of GDP with public debt soaring to 90%. This is just not numbers. These figures translate into the daily struggles of our citizens – the unfulfilled dreams of our youth and the eroding foundations of our social fabric.

We all know how the value of our rupee eroded. We know how for the first time, Forex had vanished from the official markets. Yet, the Leader of the Opposition wants to spin doctor this problem, trying to convince the population that it is our doing. *Le peuple n'est pas dupe. Elle vous l'a démontré lors des derniers législatifs. Nous avons une responsabilité collective – celle de ne pas allow them having a free run, de marteler cela dans la tête de la population. Du moins, moi, je ne vais pas le permettre.*

Remember in 2015, the previous government had promised a Mauritius of milk and honey. At one point, they had promised two jobs per person! To others, they had promised *delo 24/7* when they were not busy doing KYC by looking in the eyes of people that have already been rejected by the Bank of Mauritius! Let alone two jobs; they put this country down on its knees! Our people started emigrating at an unprecedented rate. It is now so rare to see our fellow Mauritians working in restaurants or in gas stations. IT companies find it difficult to set up in Mauritius, not because they do not want to, but because they cannot recruit. Not because the universities in Mauritius have not produced people with qualifications, but people with qualifications have left!

The previous government was in a perpetual electoral campaign, giving away sweets every now and then. But that was only a scrim because the real ambition was to enrich themselves. By themselves meant to put all of their friends in *lakwizinn*. We have seen during COVID-19 how their economy grew whilst *le petit peuple a été contraint de souffrir dans le silence. Quitte à ce que le ministre de la Santé d'alors faisait du 'koukou roukou' !*

M. le président, ce n'est pas souvent qu'un pays se retrouve face à son destin. Mais quand c'est le cas, ce n'est pas d'un politicien qu'il lui faut. C'est un homme d'État, a *statesman*. Dans leurs moments difficiles, l'Angleterre a eu Churchill. La France a eu De Gaulle. Mon pays a eu Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, épaulé par nos partenaires formant l'Alliance du Changement.

The statesman is not in an electoral campaign. *Il redresse le pays*. Today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have a Government that is serious about turning the tide. This budget is a testament to our Prime Minister's commitment to rebuild Mauritius. It is a budget that speaks the language of fiscal consolidation while singing the song of social justice.

Adjusting the age of eligibility to the basic retirement pension to 65 was not an easy decision but it was the right one. A decision rooted in truth, in data and above all in justice, inter-generational justice. We have to be honest with ourselves. The current pension system is

under immense pressure and it has been so since 2014. *Ce n'est pas nous qui le disons, tous les experts s'accordent sur ce sujet.*

As a nation, we are living longer, retiring earlier and placing greater strain on a system that was built for a very different time. Today, Rs55 billion go to pensions each year and the bill is an ever increasing one. That is more than we can spend on educating our children, caring for our sick or building homes for our families *et pourtant ce que nous faisons, n'est pas un sacrifice, c'est une promesse tenue. La promesse de ne pas laisser exploser une bombe à retardement dans les mains de nos enfants.*

We are not dismantling Basic Retirement Pension; we are saving it. We are not abandoning the elderly; we are targeting our support so that those who truly need it, continue to receive it. That is why the hon. Prime Minister went on to institute two committees precisely to look at and ensure that nobody between 60 and 65 is left without a safety net. That people facing medical challenges will continue to receive support and I am sure new schemes will reinforce solidarity and dignity for our seniors.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to say to those who are angry – we understand. To those who are afraid, we hear you and to those who feel forgotten, we are with you. We are not just putting a lid on fiscal chaos. We are laying the foundations for a long-term reform by targeting the primary budget surplus and reducing public debt to 75% of GDP by the end of our mandate. We are restoring confidence. This budget is not a one-year fiscal plan, it is a generational charter.

Let us look at the emphasis on economic renewal through innovation and investment. By establishing the National Research and Innovation Institute and allocating Rs200 million for research, we are sowing the seeds of a knowledge-based economy. This is not just about creating jobs; it is about creating a future where our youth can thrive in an AI driven world. We are investing Rs30 billion in renewable energy over three years. This is not just about clean energy; it is about energy independence.

As regard the health sector, the path to remission programme for diabetic and pre-diabetic patients is a proactive approach to tackling non-communicable diseases with 450,000 citizens set to benefit. This programme is a beacon of hope for those battling diabetes. By introducing a renewed social contract for education and allocating Rs438 million for infrastructure improvement across learning institutions, we are ensuring that every child has access to quality education and most importantly, my dear friend, hon. Minister Dr.

Gungapersad, will now be in a position to tell me when he will upgrade the schools in my constituency.

Dr. Gungapersad: I will, soon.

Mr Rookny: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now turn to financial services. We are not just defending a sector; we are re-inventing it. From fund administration to green finance, from Fintech to AI-driven compliance, we are building a reputation based, regulation smart and an innovation-focused hub. *Nous ne voulons pas être une simple juridiction financière. Nous voulons être un modèle d'intégrité, de technologie et de transparence.*

We are making Mauritius the most business-friendly destination in the region and most importantly, we are building trust and certainty. No financial sector can be built without these. How do we achieve this? How do we tell the world that Mauritius is not about the law of the jungle but it is a civilized state that will listen to you, not one that will shut you down in a cell because they listen to your telephonic conversations and it was not happy with what it heard.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have started these financial services reengineering well before the budget exercise. It is being strengthened during these debates and will continue along the same lines with us in Government.

Ce que je veux dire, M. le président, c'est que notre investissement dans nos services financiers ne s'arrête pas aux chiffres alloués au ministère des Services Financiers mais elle s'étend aux efforts que nous faisons pour étendre la démocratie pour enfoncer l'émancipation de la femme, pour valoriser nos jeunes, pour combattre la drogue, pour améliorer nos réseaux routiers. Avant qu'un investisseur décide de s'implanter chez nous en substance, ce sont toutes ces critères qui sont prises en considération et non pas qu'un faible taux de fiscalité.

But how are we going to build trust and certainty if credit rating agency such as Moody's downgrade us effectively? Would a downgrading not mean that we cannot be trusted to honour our obligations? How will we then convince investors to house their investments in our jurisdiction? Instruments like letters of credit that bear the same rating of the country where the banks are based will be of no value. How then, can the traders in Mauritius, the people who do imports, be able to have a value of their letters of credit, how would they be able to offer this to suppliers who will be very unwilling to accept these letters of credits and when they are accepted, at what cost?

The Deputy Speaker: You have one minute to conclude hon. Member.

Mr Rookny: I will try to conclude. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to be honest with ourselves. A downgrading will have dire consequences for all of us.

The very moment our financial services start to slow down, the very youth that we want to protect will leave the country. The very youth that will tomorrow be productive so as to finance our future pensions, will have to leave the country. That is why, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget does everything to maintain our credit rating on the international front so that we can maintain our status.

Dans son discours, l'honorable Leader de l'opposition a ricané en disant que la réforme que nous menons signera notre mort politique. Il n'a rien compris, il n'a rien compris ! Combien de mamans ont envoyé leur fils au front tout en sachant que des fils envoyés en guerre retourneront amputés, défigurés, traumatisés à vie ? Mais, la liberté n'a pas de prix et c'est pour cela que nous préférons partir au front aujourd'hui que de devoir enterrer nos enfants dès demain.

M. le président, quand il s'agit de nos enfants, on est tous d'accord pour faire tous les efforts qu'il faut, sacrifier nos voyages, sacrifier nos plaisirs afin que nos enfants puissent avoir un avenir meilleur et ce que ce budget demande de nous, c'est de protéger notre avenir, de protéger notre économie, de reconstruire notre nation. Ensemble, on peut le faire et dans les mots de l'honorable Premier ministre qui avait si bien dit, 'nous sommes devant un paysage en ruine'.

L'État a fait naufrage. Mais nous sommes prêts à reconstruire. Nous sommes prêts.

Let us rebuild together. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: *Merci.*

Hon. Dr. Saumtally!

(4.25 p.m.)

Dr. R. Saumtally (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. At the very outset, I wish to express my profound appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, for his visionary leadership.

The Budget 2025 is not merely a fiscal plan. It is a national blueprint for transformation. It comes at a time when the global landscape remains uncertain. Yet, Mauritius stands resilient. This budget is anchored in a clear strategy to move away from a consumption driven model towards one that is investment-lead, innovation focused and

productivity enhancing. The budget is not merely a financial exercise. It is a declaration of intent of a country determined to rise.

It introduces four poles *de croissance* in –

1. renewable energy.
2. waste to wealth.
3. the blue economy.
4. the creative industries.

Each serving as a growth engine for our future.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to structure my intervention in four parts –

- (i) the mess we inherited from the previous government;
- (ii) the hope offered by this budget of purpose, principle and progress;
- (iii) the real change being delivered to Constituency No. 10, and finally
- (iv) a message of unity and delivery.

Let us start with the first one – the mess we inherited.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us not sugarcoat it. What we inherited was a financial, institutional and leadership mess, one that affected every household, businesses and regions in Mauritius. It is like walking in a house that looks fine from outside. But once inside, we find the fridge empty, the roof leaking, the electricity bill unpaid and the credit cards maxed out. Worse still, the previous owners took out loans in our children's name. Now, we are left to clean it up.

Let me explain the numbers, not as an economist, but as a citizen in plain and simple facts. Public debt had reached Rs642 billion, that is, 90% of everything we produce in a year. The deficit was 9.8% of GDP. It means for every Rs100 in revenue, we have to spend Rs110. The Bank of Mauritius printed over Rs180 billion between 2020 and 2023 with no long-term plan. Our trade deficit hit Rs204 billion in 2024. It means that we import far more than we export. Rs21.8 billion will go just to pay interest on debt this year. Nearly the same as our education budget! These numbers are not just figures. They explain why prices soared, the rupee weakened and the quality of services have suffered.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the audit reports, over the last five years, paint a clear picture: millions of rupees wasted, contracts awarded without due process *à des ti kopins et aussi ti kopinn*, and basic financial rules ignored. Who was in power during that time? The same people now pretending to be shocked, which includes our dear hon. Leader of the Opposition

as well. *Aster pe deklar pli saint ki saint. Nou ki pou bizin netway sa la.* This budget is not only about politics, but it is about responsibility. We are merging agencies, cutting waste and enforcing strict controls. In just seven months, we have begun restoring trust at home and on national level.

Secondly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget is a blueprint for national transformation grounded in purpose, principle and progress. At its heart is three national priorities –

- Economic renewal;
- A new social order, and
- Fiscal consolidation.

With investment strategies anchored in four new poles *de croissance* to unlock regional opportunities. These are not buzz words. These are the pillars of a recovery that is both bold and responsible. The Government is seeking to rebuild the Mauritian model from the ground up. This Government has promised and will deliver on achieving a primary budget surplus in the near term in bringing public sector debt down to 75% of GDP with a statutory path to reach 60%, and reducing the budget deficit and borrow requirements, not through cuts that hurt people, but through smart and long-term reforms.

Just as important, this budget protects people. Basic pension has been increased by Rs1,000 from January 2025. The Equal Chance Allowance of Rs2,000 per month which will go to the most vulnerable households was maintained. Free public transport continues for students, seniors and people with disabilities. Food affordability is protected with VAT removed on infant food and frozen vegetables. A new Rs10 billion price stabilisation fund created to fight inflation. Nearly Rs19 billion is allocated to the healthcare. In education, Rs20 billion will upgrade infrastructure, introduce AI and robotics, support technical training and better serve students with special needs. This is how we invest in our future.

In the digital space, Rs200 m. will pilot AI in government digitalised services and build resilience. I also strongly welcome the creation of two high-level committees to reform our pension system. In an ageing society, this is not politics; it is leadership. Reform must be done with care, consultation and courage.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now turn to what this budget means for constituency Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East. Let me start with the biggest announcement for our region. The M4 motorway will be extended to Bel Air. This long overdue investment will give our families safer roads, better access and more opportunities. After years of

neglect, it is not only about building infrastructure. It is dignity. It is a clear message that the East, particularly Constituency No. 10 now matters.

Now, let us talk about something that defines our region – agriculture. From small planters to large plantations, the budget honours them. It confirms Rs35,000 per ton price for sugarcane. It commits Rs800 m. to smart agriculture, covering modern tools, climate resilient seeds, AI integration and fertiliser support, and opens the door for our youth to see agriculture not as survival, but as an opportunity. For families struggling to own a home, this budget offers a real solution.

The NHDC eligibility threshold has been raised to Rs48,000 monthly, so, more working families can finally qualify.

The Government has also announced Rs128 billions of investment over the next 5 years in housing, transport, water, electricity, wastewater and land drainage. These investments will directly impact with the regions that flood too often or remain poorly connected. *Pou nepli bizin bato pou rame aster!*

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget is not about wishful thinking. It is about hard choices made with heart and it is made possible by one thing – leadership. Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam has once again reminded the nation what it means to lead with courage and compassion. He has taken Mauritius from crisis to clarity, from inflation and debt to stability and strategy.

This Budget delivers on the hope of every citizen: a fairer tax system, lower food costs, better schools and jobs that lead to dignity. If implemented with discipline and integrity, it will restore our financial credibility, attract serious investment and rebuild public trust. Let us rise beyond party, beyond ego. Let us deliver for our people and our children. Mauritius deserves not less.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member. Hon. Lukeeram!

(4.37 p.m.)

Mr C. Lukeeram (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am most grateful to be given an opportunity to address this august Assembly

on the Budget 2025-2026 which is aptly entitled, 'From Abyss to Prosperity: Rebuilding the bridge to the future'.

Firm. Compassionate. Hopeful. These three words, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in my view, depict the Budget 2025-2026. One might think that these three words do not get along well but, in my view, in the world that we live in today, in our country, given the state of our economy, they resonate as if we had no choice.

- Firm by the disciplined approach outlined in this Budget which seeks to implement rigid measures within our country, in particular regarding the financial chasm in which we have unjustly been thrown.
- Compassionate because we care for the people who fiercely believe in us *à juste titre* and whom we must protect earnestly.
- Hopeful because a beautiful life is also made of expectations, dreams and, first and foremost, an optimistic mind.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I concur, in difficult times, we must remain disciplined, empathetic and positive. The Budget 2025-2026, presented by Dr. the hon. Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, is not just a financial plan but a turning point of our economy. The Budget lays emphasis on economic renewal and the measures which will be devised to achieve this end. We have already, during these few days, heard some shocking figures regarding how the public funds had been previously used or misused, to say the least. I do not propose to add more. I would rather say this: Yes, there is an abyss and we need to measure up to these challenging times and come up with structured and thoughtful solution. I commend the line adopted in the Budget 2025-2026, namely to shift the economic paradigm with structural reforms.

As part of the strategy for economic renewal, we have measures implemented to protect the purchasing power of consumers and this was one of the major concerns of the people. The Price Stabilisation Fund of Rs10 billion, which will be established, is to be favourably considered. We are not insensitive to the increase in products on an international level which impacted our country. However, with this measure, we will reduce the pressure exercised on consumers and producers.

I welcome the decision to request the Competition Commission of Mauritius to conduct sector-wide pricing and profitability orders, especially regarding essential goods. This shows

that the Government is hereby acting responsibly. In that, it aims to ensure that the rights of consumers are protected. A good decision is also to enact legislation to protect consumers from unscrupulous practices, which was an absolute necessity. By protecting the purchasing power, this Government will ensure that the people will have better opportunities to have good quality of life. A good quality of life also entails having access to water.

With the measures brought about in this Budget 2025-2026, the Government will be investing in water infrastructure such as replacement of waterpipes, upgrading and rehabilitation of water treatment plants and new service reservoir. I, myself, witnessed loads of cases in my constituency, that is, Constituency No. 12 Mahebourg-Plaine Magnien, whereby people were deprived of water in their homes in some instances. Due to the lack of proper waterpipes, I saw the difficulties these people had to face and how this was affecting them in their day-to-day life.

We can now reassure the population that this Government has listened to their grievances. This Government has at heart to restore some long-overdue measures such as the replacement of waterpipes and new service reservoir to provide a better quality of life. Access to resources such as water is essential for the development of individuals.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I also comment on the decision to allocate Rs800 million to support farmers, planters and breeders through various schemes and assistance programmes. This is a very good decision which will not only allow them to develop their business but it will also allow the population to have better access to local food products. It is also part of the Budget to ensure that sugar cane planters earn a fair income, which in itself, is a laudable decision.

There was a necessity to restore the confidence of the people in the Government and to convey to them that this present Government will be attentive to their expectations. This can further be shown by the aim of this Budget 2025-2026 to empower more women to start their own business. By providing assistance to women entrepreneurs, we ensure a healthy society, creating opportunities for personal development of women whilst strengthening our economy.

The Budget 2025-2026 comes up with innovative actions to review the education system and strengthen the workforce. Education has always been at the core of this present Government's aim, that is, to ensure our education standards remain high and the workforce

remains a vibrant multi-skilled labour force. With the STEM Education Programme, integrating Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, youngsters will be encouraged to consider more alternatives thereby creating a dynamic labour force offering more possibilities.

However, good education also requires having the proper infrastructures. I fully commend the initiative that a comprehensive audit of all public primary and secondary school infrastructures be carried out.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our waste to wealth strategy is turning trash into opportunity. Refund on plastic bottles, industrial composting and support for green industries are the future economy – circular and regenerative. Let us not forget the Rs164 m., investment in protecting our coast, reefs and marine ecosystem. For a Small Island State like ours, this is not just an environmental policy. It is survival. These are not token gestures; these are structural shifts. We are building climate resilience, creating green jobs and laying the foundations for sustainable prosperity.

It is our duty to not only have a budget for the current year, but a vision for our next generations. This budget places sustainability at the heart of our national agenda, and I fully agree. Protecting our future generations also entails to combat drug abuse. The message is clear: we will be zero tolerance. It is a very good initiative to have drug prevention programs set up in schools, as proposed in the Budget 2025-2026, by sensitising our children to the havoc which drug abuse creates. We can more confidently believe that children will think twice before considering going along this destructive route.

We must protect our children. We must uphold our values. We must instil a measure of responsibility in each and every one. This starts by inculcating healthy and solid values within our children. For it must not to be forgotten that happy families are those who feel safe in their country. With the advent of an increasing number of drug addicts in our country, we had to act. The Rs3.5 m. provided for the implementation of a structured Drug Rehabilitation and Reintegration Centre at Petit-Verger Prison is a very sound decision in the fight against drug abuse.

Happiness within the population will also be ensured by the measures provided to encourage sports, physical and recreational activities. It was also long awaited and we are moving in a positive direction than to provide for court infrastructure, improvements

allowing judges, magistrates, law officers and legal professionals to work more efficiently. Thereby creating amongst members of the public, respect and assurance that the proper means are provided so that justice is dispensed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some might still be disillusioned, but we will never stop reminding them of what we have inherited from the previous government, as aptly remarked in the Budget speech 2025-2026 of Dr. the hon. Prime Minister, Minister of Finance. To those who are still disillusioned after going through the Budget 2025-2026, may we instil in them confidence that this Government aims to act responsibly. To act responsibly demands making difficult decisions.

One of such difficult decisions pertains to the age eligibility for the Basic Retirement Pension being increased to 65 years. It has already been canvassed in the Budget 2025-2026 of Dr. the hon. Prime Minister, Minister of Finance that it is a very difficult decision. Although it is, the decision remains. Let us be honest, this is presently a matter of concern within the population. The people are questioning this decision and wonder how it was reached. But in a democratic society, the people are perfectly entitled to ponder over government's decisions. To those people, may we refer them to the justifications provided and may we reassure them that there has been a reflection behind. It was not made for us, but it was the choice to make for the future generations.

This Government promised to rebuild the country and to act fairly. This is what this Government is presently doing: to redress the economy whilst acting in the best interests of the people and for our future generations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I shall say that the tone of the Budget 2025-2026 is certainly grave for we all know what we have inherited. However, it is also punctuated by bold measures to ease the lives of our people and to reassure them that there will be a bright future.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when we go through dark times, we tend to be disappointed. But it does not last for long. For those who believe, there will always be hope. This is why most of the hon. Members of this august Assembly have decided to end on a positive note. I shall follow suit.

To rebuild, we must be firm. To support, we must show empathy. And to illuminate, we must rise above the chaos. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. We shall break for tea now.

I suspend the Sitting for half an hour.

At 4.51 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.28 p.m., with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Junior Minister, hon. Narsinghen. The floor is yours.

The Junior Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr H. Narsinghen): Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor.

I will start by being a bit provoking. Some people in this country have murdered a number of people. You have heard about John Maynard Keynes, Milton Friedman, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Stiglitz and A. Gupta Banerjee. You know what is common with all these people? They are macro-economists. Unfortunately, people from the MSM, spearheaded by Dr. Padayachy, he has reinvented macro-economic turning it into *padanomics*.

So, before coming to the gist of my intervention, let me tell you, Madam Speaker, that while I have to repeat, unfortunately, number of arguments, brought forwards by my friends, I cannot reinvent the wheel. However, it is important to repeat to make our people understand because when people are telling lies – okay, Mr Adrien Duval, did not want to use the word ‘telling lies’ ...

An hon. Member: *Non, zot fini ale!*

An hon. Member: Happy hour!

Mr Narsinghen: So, I can allow myself to say, one people telling lies, saying lies ten times, or 1000 times, these lies can become true at the end of the day.

So, my hammering and repeating from different angles, will dispel these blatant lies.

Today, Madam Speaker, our country is suffering from cancer, with metastasis stage. Fortunately, it can still be saved. Two experienced surgeons – one, hon. Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam and secondly, hon. Paul Bérenger, along with all the MPs who are like specialists, doctors and nurses who have been elected, are ready to save the country.

So, unfortunately, a number of demagogues want to shoot the two experienced surgeons and the doctors and nurses. I would invite the population to shoot first, who are absent today, the real culprits who have induced cancer. This is not natural cancer; it is

induced cancer. Why? Because sugar-coated poisons along with drugs and synthetic drugs concocted by *Lakwizinn*. And, they have the gut to say *la caisse pas vide*.

Hon. Leader of the Opposition and Dr. Padayachy and the leader of the MSM. I must tell why *la caisse est vide*.

Firstly, the State Bank, once a beacon, has been looted and yesterday itself, we took full cognisance of toxic loans and non-performing loans. Never has it happened in the history of Mauritius for the State Bank – Rs4.5 billion vanished in thin air in India; approximately Rs4.5 billion vanished, also, in Kenya. We need immediate investigation. Mr Mungur, who was arrested yesterday, is presumed to be innocent, possibly an accomplice but who are the co-authors and real accomplices?

We have to lift – the Attorney General is fully aware – in company law, we have to lift the veil of incorporation. Let us look behind the veil – who are the real people from *Lakwizinn* who have looted the State Bank. The team has also looted MIC, more than Rs40 billion out of the Rs80 billion squandered or given as freebies to nears and dears.

Your team, worst, has crashed Air Mauritius – real air crash. The ex-Minister of Finance, the expert in *padanomics*, has printed money and prompted both devaluation and depreciation. Some also stole on Pack & Blisters and Molnupiravir. Some stole at the CWA, CEB or at least tried to do so. Some did a stop-over in Switzerland and took a train to go to another country; I don't know if you are aware about this. Even regarding the tower at the airports and the laying of pipes, they stole.

In 2015, they took two years, - don't forget – to repair Verdun Road, a few cracks and spent billions whereas, our dear friend, who was the then Minister of Public Infrastructure took only one and a half years and spent around Rs15 billion to make the Verdun Road.

They also made us, the public of Mauritius, pay more than Rs6 billion in their greed to replace Betamax by their cronies. They squandered and grossly mismanaged – not only mismanaged –grossly mismanaged the CSG and the NPF. So, *la caisse n'est pas vide, monsieur le leader de l'opposition*.

An hon. Member: Happy hour!

Mr Narsinghen: Unfortunately, *sharam nay ba!* And, on that point, very important to say, many people phoned me asking me whether there has been an attempt to make a

mockery of our beautiful Bhojpuri and also a mockery of one of the most competent ministers in this House.

Let me tell you – I don't want to degrade people but can you compare some of the lady ministers who were sitting in this House previously with our lady ministers today? So many scandals! I prefer to stop here. I just want to show how the looting and squandering have prevented us possibly to delay the reforms. But the reform was necessary. *Ce n'est pas seulement conjoncturel. Le problème est structurel. Évidemment, on a pris la décision ; le Premier ministre, le Deputy Prime Minister, et les autres ministres ont pris la décision. Je reviendrai sur ce point tout à l'heure.*

In a nutshell, today is Music Day. I was attending a function in my constituency. Unfortunately, my colleague, hon. Sydney Pierre, took that song yesterday « *Les salauds ont brûlé le paradis.* » I am not a music composer. I do not know music very well, but I like to listen to music. I reworked on that song and I gave it to one very good friend, Mr Zul Ramiah. Unfortunately, time was not on his side. Otherwise, he would have reworked on this beautiful, very telling song « *Les salauds ont brûlé le paradis.* »

Some people are angry on the road, I agree. My colleagues, hon. Ms Daureeawo and hon. Jhummun are in every nook and corner of our constituency. We know some are not happy. That is why we are taking the time to address all these issues. I have to congratulate the Prime Minister for having been set up two committees. Some people are accusing and blaming the two hon. Members from *Rezistans ek Alternativ*. Now, there is a golden principle in our Westminster model. When you are a Minister, a Junior Minister, or Deputy Minister, there is the principle of collective solidarity: You can protest. You can shout. You can discuss.

Here, I have to commend both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister for the liberty they gave to all the MPs, all the Ministers and all the Junior Ministers to discuss. For Ministers, it is during the Cabinet. For the other members, it is during the parliamentary meetings. This is democracy – this is internal democracy which is taking place right now. So, who tells you that Mr Ashok Subron is not arguing? Who tells you that I am not saying anything? But we tell it internally. This is a very important point.

I have profound respect for people like Mr Atma Shanto, Mr Jack Bizlall and Mr Sadien. They have a right to protest. I did many protests when I was a social activist. This is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution. I am not here to give any lesson. They

have their rights. At times, people will truncate what you are saying, put it on social media and manipulate it. The people in MSM are experts in manipulation!

Notwithstanding the fundamental right to protest, yesterday, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition asked you for ‘protection.’ And you did! Unlike the bouncer, you did give protection. I understand that people from the MSM, including the Leader of the Opposition and Mr Padayachy intend to go to the protest. Can anybody guarantee them; they are the looters, they are the people who have been looting the country, and they are going to accompany the trade unionists! Trade unionists can, and have the fundamental right guaranteed by our Constitution to protest. But I would advise them not to spoil if ever there is a small protest. You saw how quick the Commissioner of Police gave permission!

When I was in Opposition, Mr Jayen Chellum and I had to rush with my friend, Kavi Bhuckory, the attorney, to court to get permission to do street protest. But things have changed! We give the people the right to protest. This is the new Government. But even these people – they are my friends – have to see to it that there is a profound respect for law and order.

When I was on my way, a friend of mine who failed his Standard Six twice, told me, ‘You are using a lot of big words in the budge – “From Abyss to Prosperity.” What does abyss mean?’ This morning when I was preparing my intervention, I remember what hon. Patrick Assirvaden said about the holes. He used the word « *les trous*. » I will be more diplomatic – I am in diplomacy – I will still use the word holes. So, you are fortunate, hon. Patrick Assirvaden, that the Leader of the Opposition was occupying the same position as you are doing. He created three or four holes.

The guy in my constituency created not three holes, but many holes everywhere!

An hon. Member: Oceans!

Mr Narsinghen: Oceans! The very meaning, the etymology of the word ‘abyss’ means it is a big chasm. Like a crater – a bottomless hole! So, you imagine the daunting task facing the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, the Deputy Prime Minister along with other Ministers, Junior Ministers and the MPs?

It is also important to explain the meaning of ‘abyss’ to our citizens.

Also, they asked me what do we mean by Moody’s? My good friends have been using this word couple of times. Each time, it comes back to the IMF or the World Bank. So, we

have to take the time. This is where I am inviting my good friends, MPs and Ministers, to explain to people the meaning and the function of all these institutions, whether it is Moody's, which is a rating agency. Just like in human rights, we have rating agencies. We have to explain to them what is the function and the role of Moody's. What is the distinction between IMF and the World Bank – one looking at structural, long-term changes, long-term loans as opposed to short-term loans. Also, we forget – nobody has mentioned that up to now – about the Financial Action Task Force.

My good friend from Constituency No. 18 asked me to explain all the concepts. It is important also to remind you that we have a duty to explain to people. As a professor at the university, I have been complaining to lawyers that they do not take the law to the people. My neighbour is a professional economist. My colleague in my constituency, my good friend, is a teacher of Economics. Likewise, we have to take time to explain to people about all these concepts.

So, all these organisations are setting standards. Obviously, these standards are not binding. We know about it. Can you be completely blind to these standards? Yesterday, two days back, the Leader of the Opposition was trying to convey that we should not listen to Moody's, to IMF, to World Bank and to the Financial Action Task Force. I told you my distant cousin failed Standard Six twice. It does not matter. You can fail exams. But the MSM failed four times in front of four different institutions.

So, instead of blaming the examiners, blaming the institutions, blaming the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, blaming the Junior Ministers, they should blame themselves! Otherwise, other countries like Argentina, Greece, Sri Lanka and even South Africa have been downgraded and now qualified as junk states. What are the consequences of being a junk state?

This will certainly lower investment – it has already been explained by my friend – I am just trying to put some order in it. Increase borrowing costs and have negative impact on social programmes; even on the pension and infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, from 2019 to 2024, our country went through an economic mirage, it is not a miracle as presented by the ex-government. However, the nature of the illusionary economic miracle was such that it defied the very basic and establish concepts of economics and fiscal management. The cooks and crooks of *Lakwizinn* literally cooked the books of our country, Madam Speaker. Indeed, their new text book could have also been entitled 'Kitchen

Macro Economics'; giving the recipe of how the country's key economic statistics can be exaggerated.

My friends who are economists here can explain – the Economics we learned from books 20-25 years ago is not the same. My son sent me a paper on hedging. It took me three days to understand because that paper contains 90% of Mathematics and Statistics. So, the figures speak for themselves. This is why I completely disagree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition when he says that the Government, the hon. Minister of Finance is trying to invent certain figures; figures that come from credible international institutions.

So, you see it is my way as ex-academic – once an academic, always an academic – not to mention the names of people but when I read the interview of Dr. Padayachy – same words: “*sharam nay ba!*”. At least, for one to three years, he should not have given an interview but he dared to give an interview and used very strong words and I will qualify him as a sort of ‘Arsène Lupin, Gentleman Burglar’ and why gentleman, Madam Speaker? Because in a way rumours were afloat that he is also a real gentleman. Real gentleman in the sense that he could give lots of jobs to a number of models at the FSC, EDB and also the Bank of Mauritius. Hon. Damry may be aware of it; he can tell us more about it. So, somehow, somehow, because the gentlemen burglar stole half of your money from your pocket by way of depreciation and devaluation and looted through MIC, today, we are having to pay a heavy price. So, the economy is in the red, complete red. The blue sea has become red unfortunately.

Coming back to the figures, if you are an economist, national debt has ballooned from Rs251 billion to nearly Rs642 billion. Real GDP growth since 2014, it remained almost stagnant reflecting a poor management of the economy. Debt to GDP ratio, from 60% in 2014 when hon. Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam left power to nearly 90% of GDP in 2024. Our rupee, our currency has also seen a freefall against all the major currencies. This is why, Madam Speaker, I used the term ‘Kitchen Macro Economic’ and ‘*Padanomics*’. This has brought our country on its knees.

Madam Speaker, I will now shift to my constituency. It is important to understand that in spite of the fact that we had two senior Ministers in No. 13, I used the term last time that in a way, the south has unfortunately been for multiple reasons – *les damnés de la terre*. They did not do anything. They gave a few jobs – some families got four jobs and other poor people did not get any job.

I understand that hon. Bachoo, our very competent Minister, has got a good budget. We have to upgrade the Souillac hospital, we have to upgrade the Mediclinic of l'Escalier, we have to upgrade the Mediclinic of Grand Bois which is an empty shell for the time being. It is a shame. At the same time, I know that both hon. Rajesh Bhagwan and hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger are very responsive but at the same time, I want the allocated also to be equitably distributed to the south specially to No. 13 and this is very important.

In the same vein, my very good friend hon. Ajay Gunness has got an important budget in spite of all the constraints. I expect that my constituency get a fair share. I also wanted to talk about my dream. It is one of the rare constituencies which does not have a highway. I have been discussing with my colleague, hon. Jugurnauth and hon. Babajee that we need – not for this budget, not for this year – but before we complete our term, I hope that we also get a highway starting from Bel Ombre, Baie de Cap to Nouvelle France which is very crucial for the country. This is what I call equitable sharing.

Madam Speaker, I also wanted to speak about my Ministry, about Foreign Affairs. We have seen what the hon. Prime Minister has done regarding Diego Garcia. You have seen what we are doing in terms of our love for Africa. We really love Africa. We love India, we love China, we are a small Switzerland, this is how we do diplomacy. My last quotation as a conclusion – Madam Speaker, let me finish with what Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam said and the wisdom of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam should be celebrated and be used to guide us.

In spite of the fact that the government of the Jugnauth tried to erase the name of Sir Seewoosagur just like they tried to do for our hon. Prime Minister Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam – maybe some people are not aware – he was then Chief Minister and Minister of Finance from 1961 to 1965. He had to present a very difficult budget like the one that our actual hon. Prime Minister is facing. This is what he said. I quote –

“I know that my budgetary proposals, I should enter unpopularity in some quarters but any other course without being a shirking of our responsibility as a government. I have put the interest of the country before sectional interest.”

Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo did the same before, became unpopular but he saved the country. The hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Paul Bérenger did the same in 1982, he saved the country.

This time, I am pretty sure, we will come with corrective measures for the Pension Scheme. I am sure about it. The vulnerable should be saved but this time, we may be temporarily unpopular but in the medium term, long term, I am very sure that we will get

back our popularity – this is what I pledge. In my group, even in this alliance, nobody should betray the country and nobody should betray No. 13 and if this happens, I know what I have to do in my life.

So, I trust the hon. Prime Minister, I trust the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, I trust all my colleagues that we are going to sail through. We are having a tough time but we are going to have early harvest hopefully in two to three years' time. Thank you for your attention.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Ms Babooram!

(5.55 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Ms A. Babooram): Madam Speaker, I speak today not just as a Member of Parliament representing my constituents but also as a mother of an 11-year-old daughter whose future depends on the decisions we take in this House.

Every policy we pass today does not just impact us. It echoes into the lives of the next generation. If we do not act responsibly, that echo might turn into a cry for help. In a rapidly ageing population, that is like asking a school kid to carry her grandmother in a backpack. Strong legs? Maybe. But a broken future? Definitely. Today it takes two working individuals to support the Basic Retirement Pension of one retiree. By the time my daughter will be my age, that is in 29 years from now, she may have to carry the burden of one retiree alone. We had to act, not to destroy the welfare state, Madam Speaker, but to save it.

Now, let us take a detour just for a moment. A few years ago, my daughter tried selling lemonade outside our home. She charged Rs10 a cup, but gave away cookies for free. She made a loss of Rs200 in 30 minutes. Then she told me: 'It is called customer loyalty, mama'. I realised then some economic models are just unsustainable, much like the BRP model that we inherited. We had to guarantee the welfare state. We had to maintain it, to protect it. I have heard the Leader of the Opposition accusing the very guardian of the welfare state of dismantling it. We are not dismantling the welfare state, Madam Speaker. We are preserving it.

A World Bank report, after the COVID-19 pandemic, referred to Mauritius as one of the most generous countries when it comes to retirement pensions. But generosity without sustainability is like throwing a wedding party using a credit card and hoping no one checks the bill. The report clearly pointed out that over 50% of social spending went to BRP. An amount that is ballooning poorly, targeting and pushing people to retire early.

At page 150, the report says, I quote –

“Pension increases over the last few years have routinely exceeded GDP growth and were largely based on political considerations.”

Political considerations, what about social considerations? There was no sustainability. It did not matter at all what would happen to future generations. The International Monetary Fund, in its 2022 Consultation Paper, suggested increasing the eligibility age for BRP from 60 to 65 by 2030. Without such action, the pension system would crash definitely, not in theory, but in our children’s lifetime.

Now, did our Prime Minister announce this measure *par gaieté de cœur*? Certainly not! It was not a sweet decision, but a surgical one like defusing a time bomb with a whole country standing behind you. It takes a true statesman to make such unpopular and necessary choices. I know all my colleagues before me have said this. This is the truth, in fact.

This brings me, Madam Speaker, to the indomitable Lee Kuan Yew. A man who transformed a tiny resource-scarce country into a global powerhouse. He made decisions that were often tough and painful, but he was a visionary. He once said, I quote –

“If you want to reach your goals and dreams, you cannot do it without discipline.”

That is exactly what we must show today: discipline in governance, discipline in spending and discipline in facing inconvenient truths. Like him, our Prime Minister has shown the courage to lead, not to please. He had all the reasons, for instance, to request the Commissioner of Police to refuse permission to those protesting against this measure tomorrow, but he did not do this.

Instead, he has stood as a true statesman and acted as a true democrat and allowed people who have a different opinion from his to manifest, to protest tomorrow. Going to such an extent, that even Mr Kokil who tried to prevent the public gathering, his contract of employment has been terminated.

However, a word of caution to those who will participate in the protest tomorrow. Beware of the political prostitutes who are pretending to be virgins! Because do not forget that when the IMF made that report, the World Bank made that report and the recommendations, they were in Government! And they did not take any action. For six months, they could not come out in the political arena. They waited until we made this unpopular decision for them to come out. *Koumadir tang inn sorti dan trou.*

One Mr Seeruttun, former Minister who claimed to be *imbattable* in Constituency No. 11. Yet, he came fifth for the general elections! Recently, he has been commenting on the budgetary measures. I wish to remind him, Madam Speaker, and his acolytes that we have stopped celebrating Christmas in June. Santa Claus does not come in June anymore. Santa Claus will come in December for the children who believe in him, not for grown up adults who are supposed to work for the economy and contribute for the welfare of the country.

I recently read a comment on Facebook by one – who is well known – Mr Suttthudeo Tengur, *président de l'association pour la protection des consommateurs*. He said, I quote –

“Ramgoolam prefers to be buried politically than to bury his country.”

This makes me think of the statement of the Leader of the Opposition, once again, to the effect that some of us are one-off and that we will not be elected again.

Madam Speaker, we were elected for a reason – to serve. If I can achieve this brilliantly, it is immaterial whether I am elected again or not. I shall stand by our Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister to change the history of this country, to make our children proud, to make the right choice, not for ourselves as selfish individuals, not for ego and fame, but because convictions matter. Our privileges do not matter.

I did not join politics for pecuniary reasons. I come from a modest background and I have no shame to go back to where I come as long as I go back there with dignity and respect instead of being shameful for having jeopardised the future of our children!

One of the criticisms we have heard after the Budget Speech related to the allowances of the Junior Ministers, Madam Speaker. There has been much force, amplified noise about allowances for Junior Ministers. Let me clarify this once and for all. We were not back paid. This is not a salary hike disguised as a gift. It is an administrative correction. PPS became Junior Ministers, with added responsibilities and no added fortune.

Speaking of responsibility, Madam Speaker, I must say that the Junior Ministers posts have never been cosmetic. It is simply a change in name from what used to be called PPS to what is in the Constitution, the supreme law of the land, that is, Junior Ministers. PPS used to be attached to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure whereas Junior Ministers are attached to different Ministries, with accrued responsibilities over and above their functions as representatives of their respective constituencies. When we were appointed as Junior Ministers on 22 November 2024, no provision was made for our salary. This is why it had to

come under the Budget. We were not back paid; our salary is still the same. *Il y a eu beaucoup de démagogies à ce sujet.*

However, Madam Speaker, I wish place on record that a former Minister – the same former Minister I mentioned – Mr Seeruttun, member of the MSM, said during a press conference – just for the record, let me set things right, I did not listen to that press conference, someone sent me the extract and I was surprised to learn what he said – that our Government is being run by Junior Ministers. This Government is being run by all of us sitting here, not only Junior Ministers.

An hon. Member: And not *Lakwizinn*!

Ms Babooram: The post of Junior Minister is provided for by the supreme law of the land, the Constitution, and it took visionary leaders to reengineer a government by re-establishing the post of Junior Ministers and appointing those who know the field in which their respective Ministry deals with. For instance –

- Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger's dedication in environmental matters are well-known. As Chairperson of the MMM Sustainable Development Commission, she has been at the forefront of numerous battles to protect our environment and is now serving as Junior Minister at the Ministry of Environment.
- Hon. Jean Sydney Pierre has had a remarkable career in the tourism industry and hospitality management, and now serves as junior Minister at the Ministry of Tourism.
- Hon. Ms Karen Foo Kune-Bacha, who is not here right now, is known for her extensive contribution to the sports sector and now serves as Junior Minister at the Ministry of Youth and Sports.
- Hon. Fabrice David holds an Advanced Masters Degree in Environmental Management and Sustainable Development and is now serving as Junior Minister at the Ministry of Blue Economy.
- Hon. Ms Veronique Leu-Govind has been the former Chairperson of Le Morne Heritage Fund and is now serving as Junior Minister at the Ministry of Arts and Culture.
- Hon. Kugan Parapen has had 15 years of experience in asset management industry and advocated for progressive economic and social reforms, including a

more progressive fiscal approach, constitutional reforms and sustainable economic development. He is now serving as Junior Minister at the Ministry of Social Security.

- Hon. Rajen Narsinghen, who has also been my lecturer, has been a Trade Advisor in Geneva, working as consultant at the World Trade Organisation and as consultant in international trade law, he is now serving as Junior Minister at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Hon. Fawzi Allymun, who has extensively contributed to solving regional and municipal related issues for years, is now serving as Junior Minister at the Ministry of Local Government.
- Hon. Dhaneshwar Damry, he needs no introduction anymore. He has left his *empreinte* in the business and financial world before becoming the Junior Minister of Finance.

As for me, I have had the privilege and honour of serving as member of the National Human Rights Commission and as Adviser at the Ministry where I am currently serving as Junior Minister.

Each of us are called to bring our own contribution to our respective Ministries, alongside our Senior Ministers for a better Mauritius. This Government does not govern by trial and error, Madam Speaker. Our leaders are not amateur, they are visionaries.

Now, let us talk about the allowances of the Opposition Leader and that of the Whip of the Opposition. For how many hours do they sit in Parliament? Should their allowances be made proportionate to the number of hours they sit in this Parliament? This should remind us of a famous incident that occurred in this very Assembly years ago, in 1992, when the then Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, tried to recall Parliament at a time when the then Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Ramgoolam, could not make it to this place. He tried to make a motion to declare his seat vacant. However, the Supreme Court, consisting of a full bench, disallowed this motion and Dr. Ramgoolam was allowed to act as Leader of the Opposition until he became the Prime Minister again in 1995.

Yesterday, Madam Speaker, you acted as a democrat and suspended the Sitting while the Leader of the Opposition was taken up in traffic, and he was given ample time to come here and address his PNQ to the Prime Minister. He is even allocated additional time when he complains that he does not have enough time for his questions. This is real democracy. We

are all proud to sit in this august Assembly with you as Speaker. Else, who knows, there could have been a colourable device, and the Members of the Opposition would not have been allowed in this Parliament.

Let us come back to the Budget, Madam Speaker. This Budget is focused on creating wealth for the future generations. I have heard previous governments constantly saying that we need to make more children. However, all they gave were allowances so that we could make children. Our Government has a more holistic approach to this issue. It is not about money because money is not the answer to solve demographic issues. Our Government believes in fostering a culture of hard work, ensuring a minimum salary of Rs20,000 per month instead of dependence on monthly allowances. Young people are also exempted from paying income tax. We are modernising our society through new technologies. We are creating job opportunities, combatting the drug scourge, and most important of all, we are making sure that sports is also *redynamisé*.

Before I end my speech, Madam Speaker, ...

Madam Speaker: But you will have to end now!

Ms Babooram: I will end on this note.

Madam Speaker: 30 seconds!

Ms Babooram: Before I end my speech, Madam Speaker, I must tell you something that has been of particular interest to me in this budget, especially concerning sports. I am speaking about a feasibility study concerning the construction of a rally circuit for our young rally enthusiasts.

I have been invited to attend various Price Giving Ceremonies organised by the Motor Racing Club of Mauritius. Being myself a car rally lover, I must tell you that I am deeply moved by this initiative because I believe that this initiative, should it happen, will not only encourage another type of tourism, but will also reduce road accidents.

On this note, Madam Speaker, I thank you and everyone for their attention. I will tell you something that Lee Kuan Yew once reminded the world –

“I always tried to be correct, not politically correct.”

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

It's a good thing I tell everybody that I have been giving one minute to each of you.

So, it was not just for the Leader of the Opposition. I am giving one minute to everybody, more or less.

Hon. Allymun, try and keep within the time, please!

(6.17 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Local Government (Mr F. Allymun): Madame la présidente, c'est avec un profond sentiment de gratitude que je vous adresse ce premier discours sur le budget présenté par notre Premier ministre et ministre des Finances, l'honorable Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, il y a deux semaines.

D'emblée, je dois dire que c'est un budget courageux, un budget de réparation, mais aussi un budget d'espérance, allant même jusqu'à dire que c'est un budget qui remet les pendules à l'heure.

Ce premier discours, Madame la présidente, est basée sur un principe fondamental - la justice sociale. Permettez-moi de dire que ce budget marque une véritable aire de vérité, de justice sociale et de respect envers chaque sou de la République. En tant que parlementaires, nous avons la responsabilité de réparer une injustice historique faite au petit peuple.

Madame la présidente, ce budget est un message fort au peuple mauricien. Nous sommes un gouvernement qui écoute, qui agit et qui change la donne. Oui, on ne pratique pas une politique d'autruche. On parle avec conviction. Ce budget répond à un constat clair. Le petit peuple a souffert du poids des politiques passées. Le coût de la vie avait explosé, rendant les quotidiens de nos citoyens de plus en plus difficiles. C'est le fruit d'un passé où la gouvernance n'a pas toujours été au service de la majorité. Trop longtemps, l'ancien régime, le MSM et ses alliés ont favorisé les plus riches, les clans les plus connectés et ceux qui savaient naviguer dans les couloirs du pouvoir.

En tant qu'élu qui valorise la nation et qui comprend l'engagement que nous avons envers nos mandants, envers la population, on ne peut pas nous empêcher de nous indigner face à certains comportements du passé. Et là, je déplore l'absence du leader de l'opposition, comme à l'accoutumée. Je lui ai entendu dire, lors de son discours, il nous a parlé des voyages que les membres du gouvernement, les ministres, ont faits pendant les six mois.

Mais j'aurais bien aimé lui rappeler qu'en 2022, après la Covid, alors que tout le monde essayait de reconstruire, il y avait 13 ministres du gouvernement MSM qui se sont rendus pour les *jalsa* Dubaï. Il y avait des questions au Parlement par l'honorable Ritesh Ramful sur les coûts. Cela a frôlé les R 90 millions qui ont coûté à l'État. Le ministre des Finances avait répondu qu'il y aurait eu un investissement de R 4.5 milliards. Aujourd'hui, on pose la question, *kot sa 4.5 milyar la ete ?* Ça, c'est la gérance du MSM. Ils osent nous faire la leçon aujourd'hui.

Ils osent se poser comme les défenseurs. Je dois dire, pendant les 3-4 jours qui viennent de passer sur Facebook, ils ont mis un communiqué pour inviter et mobiliser les gens pour aller au Champ de Mars demain. La population a vu les communiqués, et ils ont pris un tollé sur Facebook. En catimini, ils ont dû supprimer le communiqué pour remettre un autre communiqué pour dire qu'il faut mobiliser, mais ce n'est pas eux qui organisent la marche de demain. Si seulement le ridicule pouvait tuer, Madame la présidente !

Ce pays, Madame la présidente, a été endetté, vidée, affaibli par des années de dilapidation des fonds publics. Ici, je pense à la MIC. Des contrats gonflés, Pack & Blister, Molnupiravir, des projets fantômes – *Vacoas pou vin Manhattan*, des copinages, l'ami d'enfance de l'autre, orchestrés par nous savons qui, dans l'hôtel que nous savons déjà. Il nous fallait un budget de vérité. Ceux qui ont mis le pays en feu et à sang devront répondre de leurs actes. J'ai confiance en notre Premier ministre et le DPM, qui, je suis sûr, ne resteront pas les bras croisés et iront jusqu'au bout pour faire la lumière sur les détournateurs de fonds.

Ce budget n'est pas une fin en soi, mais le début d'un long chemin. Il pose des bases solides, celle de la justice, de l'intégrité et surtout de la solidarité. Nous n'avons pas le droit de nous cacher derrière les mensonges pour embêter le peuple. Nous avons le devoir de leur dire que l'ancien régime, le MSM, a mis les caisses de l'État à sec. Ces pseudos parlementaires, comme les zachero et les tombaroli de l'époque, ont agi comme des pilliers de tombe, laissant derrière eux un pays vide, surendetté, et dépendant.

Nous remettons l'humain à cœur dans nos décisions. Il est temps d'effacer leur trahison du passé et de redonner dignité et fierté à notre nation. Nous ne cherchons pas la revanche ou la critique stérile, mais plutôt la construction d'un avenir meilleur. La véritable force, c'est la capacité à comprendre et à avancer dans l'unité et la solidarité. Notre objectif est de faire de Maurice une île où chacun peut vivre et respirer librement, vivre heureux et prospérer. Nous ne perdons pas notre temps en des critiques destructifs, des démagogues de la dernière heure

qui parlent seulement pour être présents sur la presse. Mais nous orientons nos efforts vers la réalisation de cette vision d'un pays plus juste, plus uni et plus fort.

Ce budget 2025-2026 marque un tournant décisif dans la politique économique de Maurice. Il rompt clairement avec l'ancien modèle basé sur la stimulation et la consommation, un modèle qui a été inefficace, insoutenable et qui a creusé notre déséquilibre macro-économique. Ce que nous proposons, c'est une nouvelle vision centrée sur l'investissement à l'impact. Nous voulons créer de la richesse durable, réduire nos dépendances aux importations et rééquilibrer nos fondamentaux économiques.

Deux mesures fortes élisent cette volonté. Tout d'abord, R 30 milliards seront investis dans la production d'énergie verte. Un pas essentiel vers la transition énergétique et la souveraineté énergétique de notre pays. Cela permettra de réduire significativement notre facture pétrolière et de simuler une nouvelle filière industrielle. Ensuite, R 80 millions seront alloués à une agriculture durable pour renforcer la sécurité alimentaire et réduire notre dépendance aux importations alimentaires.

Ce changement de cap édicté par un héritage économique lourd, depuis dix ans sous la gestion du MSM, notre pays a accumulé des dettes, vidé des réserves et affaibli son économie. Les importations des produits alimentaires et énergétiques dépassent R 100 milliards chaque année, ce qui vide nos réserves et nos devises étrangères. Le déficit commercial atteint R 200 milliards. La dette publique est de presque R 642 milliards. Le déficit budgétaire frôle les 10% du PIB. La dépréciation de la roupie depuis 2014 a dépassé 45%, aggravée par une injection massive des fonds dans l'économie, souvent au bénéfice d'intérêts proches du pouvoir.

Tout cela, Madame la présidente, a entraîné une flambée des prix, une pression énorme sur les ménages et une perte de pouvoir d'achat. La fiscalité a été injuste, favorisant certains au détriment des autres, ce qui a creusé les inégalités et a alimenté les ressentiments populaires.

Nous avons aussi une responsabilité envers notre planète. Le tri des déchets est un projet crucial pour protéger nos ressources naturelles, réduire la pollution et atténuer l'impact de notre déchet. Plusieurs pays comme l'Allemagne, la Suède et le Japon ont réussi dans ce domaine. Pourquoi pas Maurice ? Ce projet nécessitera environ R 1.7 milliards pour sa première année et pour l'achat des logistiques, des bacs à ordures et pour renforcer nos

ressources humaines. Bien que coûteux, ses bénéfices seront immenses –un environnement plus sain, une meilleure qualité de vie, une santé renforcée pour notre population.

Enfin, je souhaite souligner l'état de nos institutions, Madame la présidente. Plusieurs d'entre elles ont des lourds déficits. Encore une fois, c'est dommage que le leader de l'opposition ne soit pas là. Je commencerai par dire qu'au collectivité locale, nous sommes à R 1.7 milliards de déficit. Qu'ont-ils fait avec l'argent ? Où sont les projets ?

Et, les déficits dans le fonds de pension, encore une fois, on n'arrive même pas à croire. La PSEA, un déficit des plus de R 9.5 milliards, la MRA plus de R 5 milliards, la MBC plus de R 2 milliards. The *Mauritius Cane Industry Authority* plus de R 1.5 milliards ; les chiffres parlent d'elles-mêmes. Et, comme je disais, les chiffres montrent l'urgence de redresser nos finances pour garantir un service public efficace, équitable et durable.

Notre gouvernement travaille dur pour évoluer notre société. Nous ne sommes pas en train de passer d'un système d'aide basé sur l'assistanat à un système d'autonomisation. Le Premier ministre a dit qu'aucun politicien n'aime prendre des décisions impopulaires surtout celui qui a promis des changements mais il est nécessaire de faire face à la vérité même si cela peut faire mal, pour bâtir un pays plus fort, plus indépendant et plus fier.

Je suis convaincu, Madame la présidente, qu'à la fin de ce mandat, notre peuple comprendra que notre vision et celle de la nation ne dépend pas des autres, se relève grâce à ses propres forces et peut être fier de ses réalisations. La patience et la détermination finiront par porter leurs fruits.

Madame la présidente, avant de clore, permettez-moi d'évoquer les mots de Molière dans *Tartuffe*, pièce intemporelle sur la fausse vertu et la vérité dévoilée.

« Couvrez ce sein que je ne saurais voir. »

Cette réplique part *Tartuffe* incarne l'hypocrisie de ceux, qui tout en se proclamant vertu, dissimulent leurs vices derrière les beaux discours, comme le Leader de l'opposition. De même, aujourd'hui, ceux qui crient au scandale, à l'injustice ou à la rigueur budgétaire, ne font souvent que masquer leur propre culpabilité – celle d'avoir affaibli notre nation sous le poids du favoritisme, du gaspillage et de l'incompétence.

Nous ne tomberons pas dans les pièges de ces faux dévots de la politique, de ces *tartuffes* modernes, ces charlatans, ces oiseaux de malheur et surtout ces démagogues de la dernière heure qui prêchent l'éthique après avoir trahir les biens communs.

Ce gouvernement mené par le PM et le DPM, agit non pas avec des mots enjôleurs mais avec des actes concrets pour redonner à notre peuple ce qu'il mérite – la dignité, la justice et l'espérance. Que cette vérité nous éclaire l'avenir et que la république se relève et la nation avance.

Je vous remercie.

Madam Speaker : Merci. C'était un record, en termes de temps.

Hon. Woochit. Yes, Minister!

(6.29 p.m.)

The Minister of Local Government (Mr R. Woochit): Madam Speaker, today, we stand at a remarkable crossroad in our national journey; at a crossroad between the abyss of decline and the promise of prosperity.

This Budget Speech, does more than merely outline figures. It charts a course, inspires confidence and above all, restores hopes. It is a bold commitment to transformation, accountability and progress. 'From Abyss to Prosperity: Rebuilding the Bridge to the Future', is not just a title. It is declaration of intent; it acknowledges the pain of the past while refusing to be paralysed by it. It dares to imagine a better future and lay the bricks of policy and investment to build it.

First, Madam Speaker, let me commend the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for tabling a budget that seeks to strike a balance between the economic growth, social investment and fiscal prudence. Yet, we cannot move forward without confronting the precarious legacy left by the previous government; a legacy that threatened the prospect of our children, our elders and even ourselves.

The State of the Economy Report, as well as Moody's rating on 31 January 2025, which downgraded Mauritius to Baa3 with a negative outlook, are direct consequences of fiscal deterioration and rising debts under the previous government. The State of the Economy Report revealed a deliberate and, I would say, criminal manipulation of data by the previous government, specifically by Dr. Renganaden Padayachy. This was not mere incompetence but a calculated attempt to create a false sense of economic security, reassuring the population to complacency.

The establishment of *Maurice Stratégie*, under the guise of research and consultation, was in reality a vehicle for circulating spurious figures inflating economic indicators and

painting a misleading picture of growth and development. For example, the growth rate for the year 2023 was inflated by 25% and that for 2024 by 27%. The rupee depreciation would have continued to downgrade had the previous government remained in power. Only the timely intervention of the Bank of Mauritius, under this present government, prevented a further downward spiral in our currency value.

The State of the Economy Report underscores a period of economic slowdown marked by declining growth rate, persistent inflation, freight imbalances and labour market challenges. The previous administration's policies left Mauritius vulnerable with the illusion of progress making, deep-seated structural weaknesses.

The new budget directly addresses these issues through a necessary structural reform, investment in human capital and prudent fiscal and even monetary policies to steer the economy towards sustainable growth.

Madam Speaker, this budget is therefore a budget for economic rebirth; it focuses on economic recovery through job creation, infrastructure development and support for small businesses. These are not just abstract goals; they are the lifeline of our people and the people have desperately awaited. The comprehensive plan of action is built on three pillars – economic renewal, a new social order and a fiscal consolidation.

The hon. Prime Minister has paved the way for economic renewal through shaping innovative Mauritius initiative. The new economic model is based on 6 principles -

1. Research and development and innovation;
2. Resource repurposing for high operativity;
3. Transformative investments;
4. Updated freight strategies;
5. Smart investment and productive infrastructure;
6. A focus on consumer wellbeing

This is a sharp departure from the previous government's superficial growth model which relied on inflated statistics and short-term fixed. The new approach is grounded in reality and aims for sustainable inclusive development.

To this end, Madam Speaker, the budget takes concrete steps to empower women, making the labour market more accessible and supporting women entrepreneurs. The grace period under the Women Entrepreneur Loan Scheme has been increased from 12 to 18 months and the maximum credit limit has been raised from Rs500,000 to Rs1.2 million.

These are not token gestures but substantial measures to correct years of neglect and marginalisation. Protecting the purchasing power of consumers, especially those with modest income, is another pillar of this budget. The establishment of Rs10 billion for the Price Stabilization Fund and a series of measures to remove consumers from poverty is a direct response to the previous administration failure to address the purchasing power. To this effect, an amount of Rs2 million has been earmarked for this financial year.

Madam Speaker, the prioritisation of education, healthcare, and youth development sends a powerful message. Our people are not a burden; they are our greatest asset. Investment in people is an investment in the very future that we are trying to rebuild. Significant allowances have been made to enhance the quality of education, including the establishment of a National Education Council and a National Curriculum Advisory Board. Special emphasis has been placed on inclusive education, with dedicated funds, to integrate and send students into the mainstream system.

These initiatives rectify years of underinvestment and indifference. A cornerstone of this method is progressive tax reform aimed at easing the financial burden on citizens, by simplifying the personal income tax system from 11 bands to 3, with the first Rs500,000 of annual chargeable income being tax-free. Approximately, 44,000 individuals are removed from the tax net and an additional 75,000 middle-income earners receive relief. This approach contrasts sharply with the previous government's regressive tax policies, which disproportionately affected the most vulnerable.

Madam Speaker, while striving for fiscal discipline, this new government emphasises the need to reduce the budget deficit and national debt with the imperative of protecting the most vulnerable in our society. By maintaining social allowances and lowering taxes for lower and middle-income groups, we are ensuring that economic reforms do not come at the expense of those who need support the most. The future of our economy lies in innovation and sustainability. The budget outlines plan to position Mauritius as a regional hub for high education, research and innovation, aiming to double the number of foreign students within three years.

Madam Speaker, investments in renewable energy and the blue economy further underscore our commitment to sustainable development; priorities that were ignored or underfunded by the previous administration. Strengthening institutional capacity is essential for effective reform implementation. The restructuring of the Economic Development Board

and consolidation of the E-licencing platform are steps towards greater transparency, efficiency and accountability; values that were sorely lacking in the past.

Madam Speaker, Ministers are expected to provide further details on policies that are within their area of responsibility, and it is with this in mind that I now turn to local authorities. The performance of local authorities in Mauritius has been the subject of increasing concern, as revealed in recent Audit Reports and public surveys highlighting significant challenges in governance, financial management and project management, and even in public trust.

I was elected in November 2019 elections and I took part in five budget debates as a Member of the Opposition between June 2020 and June 2024, but, this time, I am participating in the budget debates as the Minister responsible for the local authorities in response to the Budget presented by the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, hon. Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam. From the moment I was appointed Minister, I made it a priority to be out on the field. While it is true that I was Chairperson of the District Council of Rivière du Rempart and Pamplemousses in 2005 and 2012, I had to go back on the field, particularly to observe public service locations such as market terminals, playgrounds, amongst other amenities. I have visited several markets, namely Pamplemousses, Rivière du Rempart, Rose Belle, Rivière des Anguilles, Vacoas, Chemin Grenier, Goodlands, amongst others, and I can say that in most cases, I was not satisfied. Some of the markets do not even have fire certificates. There is a lot of room for improvement. I gave instructions and hope that with the budget allocated to them, the work will be done.

Right here, Madam Speaker, I have answered numerous Parliamentary Questions, especially regarding the management of the Municipalities and District Councils. All I can say is that there was a sense of neglect from the different Municipalities and District Councils. Do you know the reason of this situation, Madam Speaker? There were Councillors who led these Councils for 10 years and at the same point, they became content just holding the position without truly having the interest of the towns' people at heart.

The government elected last November, committed to regional democracy, organised municipal elections and now have the result. All the five Municipalities are under the control of *l'Alliance du Changement* Government. The performance of the local authorities in Mauritius presents a complex landscape, while certain Councils have excelled in service

delivery and innovation; while others have systemic issues such as financial mismanagement, declining public trust, and voters' disengagement persists.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach, including a strict financial oversight, enhanced accountability measures, and reform to empower local government with greater autonomy and responsiveness to citizens' need. Madam Speaker, let us not sugar coat the reality. Local government in Mauritius underwent significant adverse changes with the Mouvement Socialiste Militant, that is, MSM-led government. The MSM government postponed municipal elections multiple times, citing the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for local government reforms.

The most recent delays were in May 2023, with the result that no municipal elections were held until May 2025. The MSM government centralised authority, reducing the autonomy of local councils; amendments to the Local Government Act in 2023 were measures to consolidate power at central level. However, the *Alliance du Changement* Government held municipal elections in May 2025 and won 117 out of 120 seats, thereby confirming citizens' dissatisfaction with the outgoing government.

The Municipalities and the District Councils have faced financial distress and liquidity problem over the years, with some Councils facing insolvency. Mr Padayachy has created a series of Special Funds, namely –

- (i) Project Development Fund;
- (ii) Climate and Sustainability Fund;
- (iii) Lotto Fund;
- (iv) National Environment Fund;
- (v) National Resilience Fund;
- (vi) Poverty Reduction Fund.

where billions of rupees had been allocated. The purpose of these Funds was purposely to fund, *inter alia*, the projects of local authorities.

Madam Speaker, these Funds were set up with the objective to fund projects out of the budget of the line ministries but also to put people as chairperson and members of the board managing these Funds. Today, several local authorities are facing financial difficulties to meet contractual obligations.

For instance, there are several capital projects which are being funded under the Special Fund, one of them being the Project Development Fund. Funds are not available and the

contractors are not being paid on time, and the latter want to claim interests on late payments and to sue the local authorities.

Madam Speaker, this situation is unwarranted and if this really happens, then taxpayers' money will be used to pay the interests. The Director of Audit's reports over the years have exposed irregular expenditure and stalled development projects.

This budget does not hide from these truths; it confronts them. Local authorities faced a range of challenges. These issues span administrative, financial, environmental and social dimensions. Madam Speaker, many local authorities operate with limited funding affecting their ability to maintain infrastructure and deliver services that were management and vote maintenance.

There is a high dependence on the GIA which reduces local autonomy and flexibility. In fact, over the years, all the Municipalities and District Councils have been running significant budget deficits. Each year, a midterm review is being carried out to review the finance of the local authorities. Let me cite some figures for the financial years, the total deficit faced by the local authorities stood as follows –

- Year 2021-2022, around Rs334 million deficit;
- Year 2022-2023, Rs602 million deficit;
- Year 2023-2024, around Rs748 million deficit, and
- Year 2024-2025, Rs1.2 billion deficit.

This is the result of drastic cuts made by then Minister of Finance, Dr. Padayachy. The purpose of these cuts was to project a balance budget on paper only without taking into consideration the contractual commitment of Local Authorities.

Madam Speaker, the funding of the local authorities usually comes from two sources namely –

- (i) Grant-in-aid from the Central Government, and
- (ii) own funds that is the revenue raised from taxes, trade fees etc.

Local Authorities were also faced with a decrease of an average of 60% internally generated revenue over the years. The decrease in internally generated revenue arose, namely from –

- (i) Abolition or exemption of some rates and fees from local operators or
- (ii) These fees and rates have been transferred to other local authorities or Ministries.

The total revenue foregone as a result of these measure amounts to some Rs580million on average per year. Although the GIA provided by the then Ministry of Finance covered part of the revenue foregone, the effect was diluted in the overall GIA in view of –

- changes in legislation;
- increase in services being provided;
- servicing and maintenance of continuous addition of assets from other Ministries or department;

The expenditure of local authorities has considerably increased over the years from 2021 to 2025 by an average of 18% while the revenue of the local authorities has decreased during the same lapse of time by an average of 6%. The main causes of the rising expenditure are increase in salaries and related cost; general prices increased on hire contracted services, electricity and water charges.

The hired contracted services have usually increased due to the additional claims with respect to increase in salary cost resulting from the new change in legislation related to minimum wage and salary compensation as from January 2024. The new contract price now being quoted or signed for scavenging and other contracts like cleaning of toilets, security services have also increased enormously.

Other increases in cost related to a general increase in prices specially in items like electricity charges and material for maintenance of roads and buildings have caused the overall estimated expenditure to rise greatly.

In the year 2024-2025, the then government in a bid to hide the Government deficit introduced an unfunded item known as 'Efficiency Gain' in its calculation of the grant formula. This efficiency gain in 2024-2025 was deemed to generate some Rs585 million for the local authorities. However, this amount never materialised as the Efficiency Gain was just a balancing act to hide the budget deficit incurred by the previous government.

This Efficiency Gain never materialised with a result that there is a short fall of Rs1.27 billion and this has resulted in local authorities facing utility problems. The Government, Madam Speaker, will need to find the funds for meeting these financial gaps faced by the local authorities. Let me be clear – no officials, no councillors, no contractors will remain above the law. We will no longer store money into the leaking pipelines literally or metaphorically.

Madam Speaker, regional administrations have an important role to play in improving the daily life of villages and towns people. Whether, it is about street lighting, waste collection or organising sports or literary events, these District and Municipal Councils are always present. Certainly, there is room for improvement and for that, we are counting heavily on a revision of the Local Government Act. Yes, Madam Speaker, this Government will propose a new Local Government Act.

In fact, the previous Government deceived the public and found excuses to postpone the municipal elections three times and it did nothing. Madam Speaker, as soon as the new Government took office, an interministerial committee was set up under my chairmanship.

At our first meeting, we decided that any amendment in the current legislation deserves suggestion and proposal. This is why we asked everyone to submit their proposal and at the Ministry level, these are being compiled and in the coming weeks, we will decide whether to hire a consultant to work on all these proposals to prepare a plan. I can assure the House that the Government is determined to implement a modern Local Government Act after consultation of the next inter ministerial committee.

The time has come to review the Local Government Act 2011. Over a decade has passed and the realities for governance in Mauritius have evolved. We must ensure our local authorities are modern, autonomous and efficient. This means strengthening decentralisation, enhancing accountability and empowering our council to respond swiftly to the needs of our citizens. The Act must reflect today's challenges from digital transformation to urban growth to climate change, and citizen's engagement.

We need to improve service delivery representations and transparency while aligning with the international obligation and sustainable development goal. The review is not just timely, it is necessary. It is our duty to ensure that local democracy remains vibrant, responsive and future ready. Madam Speaker, we are equally aware that increased funding must come with increased responsibility. This Government remains committed to driving transparency, improving procurement practices and professionalising Local Government.

Madam Speaker, I was able to meet all the mayors and their deputies to chart the way forward for the development of towns and for the betterment of the citizens through a collaborative approach and I am confident that they will fulfil their roles brilliantly.

We will continue working with local authorities to enforce audit recommendations, train councillors and staff and support localised anti-corruption frameworks and to this end,

my Ministry is working with the FCC to devise a code of conduct for Local Government officers and even for Councillors.

Madam Speaker, our local Councils are doing their best with what they have but the system is out dated, underfunded and far too slow to meet the demand of the 21st century. We live in a digital age yet many local authorities are still running on paper form, legacy software and outdated process. Residents are forced to queue all hotlines that never pickup or wait weeks for simple services. It is inefficient and even worse it is unfair, Madam Speaker, nothing has been done by the previous government to facilitate the lives of the citizens.

Digitalising Local Government is not a luxury; it is a necessity. We need online portals where people can pay bills, report problems and access services with the same ease they order a takeaway.

We need real time data to manage traffic, housing and public health. This will not happen without leadership and without proper investment. This Government says it supports innovation, yet Councils are being told to do more with less. It cannot run a 21st century Council on a 20th century budget. If we truly believe in levelling up, if truly believe in empowering local communities, we must fund digital infrastructure, train municipal council staff and ensure no one is excluded from digital services, especially the elderly and those in deprived areas such as Panchvati, Chamarel, Karo Kalyptus, among others.

Digitalisation of the local authorities will ensure that no one is left behind in the socioeconomic development of the country. The choice is simple: modernise or fall further behind. We owe our citizens better, and it starts with bringing local government into the digital age.

Madam Speaker, the local authorities through poor contract management, project monitoring and project implementation have caused the government to pay more than around Rs677 to contractors in arbitration due to dispute arising during project implementation. In a bid to prevent such occurrence, my Ministry is in the process of introducing the e-Local Government System, wherein the lifecycle of each project and each implementation will be closely monitored. It is also noted that in some local authorities, there is connivance between officers and suppliers. The local authorities have been requested to enlarge their pools of suppliers to further democratise the economy.

By doing so, they will espouse the vision of the hon. Prime Minister to enable women entrepreneurs to have access to markets. The e-Local Government System will also ensure

transparency and fairness in the procurement system by tracking the different stages of the process.

Madam Speaker, presently, the local authorities undertake the repairs and maintenance of vehicles by both in-house labour and outsource. Minor repairs and servicing of vehicles, minor panel beating and electrical works are done by in-house labour, whereas major repairs are outsourced. The average annual cost of repairs amount to Rs48 m. for the local authorities. However, some local authorities do not have a workshop. In some cases, they do not have the qualified personnel. As a result, several lorries and equipment are lying unrepaired in the yards. In view of the high budget implication and lengthy procedures, my Ministry has decided to put in place a centralised mechanical workshop to provide fully equipped and efficient facilities for repairs, maintenance and testing of the mechanical components, equipment and machinery.

Thus, to ensure the operational continuity, there is a need for a proper mechanical workshop. My Ministry has requested the Ministry of Housing and Lands and Landscape Mauritius Ltd to identify a plot of land to an extent of 10-15 acres for setting up of the centralised mechanical workshop, which would be centrally located, for instance, at Côte d'Or or Belle Rive, Wooton. With this project, the cost of repairs and maintenance will be reduced considerably as procurement will be done on a large scale. We will recruit professionals to work in the mechanical workshop so that we can attend all the repairs on our own. This will also reduce the length of stay in the workshop and the impact of grounded vehicles on service delivery will be greatly reduced. By this way, the service will be improved in all local authorities.

Madam Speaker, the safety of our citizens remains one of the highest priorities of this Government. In this regard, we are committed to modernise our fire and rescue services to meet the evolving challenges of urbanisation, climate change and technological risk. This year, our budget includes dedicated funding for the acquisition of state-of-the-art fire engines, specialised equipment for industrial and high-rise firefighting and advanced rescue tools.

As for the Ministry of Local Government, the allocated amount is Rs68.5 m. for the purchase of vehicles for the Fire and Rescue Service. We shall also construct a modern fire station in the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters at Quatre Bornes with the assistance of a line of credit from India. We will also invest in training programmes to upskill our firefighters in modern techniques including disaster response, hazardous material

handling, and emergency medical care. Furthermore, we are expanding the digital capabilities of our fire services, enabling faster response time through GPS integration, automated despatch system and improved communication infrastructure. Through these efforts, we aim to build a fire service that is not only creative, but proactive. One that protects life property and the environment with efficiency and professionalism.

To further enhance public safety, we are placing strong emphasis on community outreach and rapid response capacity. The actual average response time to attend emergencies by the MFRS is nine minutes. This is too much, Madam Speaker. The aim is to reduce the response time to five minutes in line with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710 Standard. In view of modernising its fleet and to increase its operational capabilities, the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service will be equipped with high technology state-of-the-art vehicle and equipment response to emergency such as high-rise firefighting and rescue operation in flooding and other disasters.

Madam Speaker, presently, there is only one fire station located in Port Louis which is deemed insufficient to meet the growing demands resulting from rapid development in this region. Significant infrastructural expansion and the emergence of diversified activities in the ports area, City Centre, Jin Fei, Riche Terre, Terre Rouge, and surrounding localities have led to an increase in the number of new structures, including industrial and commercial complexes. To address these emerging challenges, a new fire station will be set up at Jin Fei, Riche Terre on a plot of land measuring approximately 16 acres of land that have already been vested for this purpose.

Before I conclude, Madam Speaker, let us be clear, the journey from the abyss will not be easy. Bridges are not built overnight, but with this budget, we are laying a strong foundation as our Prime Minister said. More importantly, we are doing it together as Government, as private sector, as communities, as citizens. This is not just a budget; this is a blueprint for rebirth. Let us walk forward with caution, cautious optimism, bold determination and collective will. Let us not squander this opportunity to truly rebuild the bridge to the future. From the abyss, we have come, to prosperity we now go together.

This is a turning point, Madam Speaker, from collapsed service delivery to community dignity; from the abyss of decay to a future of shared prosperity, and from broken promises to a bridge that leads all of us forward.

Madam Speaker, paragraph 310, to quote our Prime Minister –

“310. We are leading the way out of the mess not by doing what is easy or popular for Government but what is right for our country.”

I thank you all for your attention.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister! It was very challenging to speak at this time.

Hon. Minister Osman Mahomed!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Madam Speaker, I beg to move for the adjournment of the debates.

Dr. Boolell 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 Monday 23 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 7.05 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Monday 23 June 2025 at 11.30 a.m.