



**EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**PARLIAMENTARY**

**DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**(UNREVISED)**

**FIRST SESSION**

**WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE 2026**

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(Formed by Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam)

Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, GCSK, FRCP	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands
Hon. Mrs Marie Arianne Navarre-Marie	Deputy Prime Minister Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Shakeel Ahmed Yousuf Abdul Razack Mohamed, GCSK	Minister of Housing and Lands,
Hon. Rajesh Anand Bhagwan, GCSK	Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
Dr. the Hon. Arvin Boolell, GOSK	Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries
Hon. Govindranath Gunness	Minister of National Infrastructure
Hon. Anil Kumar Bachoo, GOSK	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Christian Harold Richard Duval	Minister of Tourism
Hon. Ashok Kumar Subron	Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
Hon. Gavin Patrick Cyril Glover, SC	Attorney-General
Dr. the Hon. Mrs Jyoti Jeetun	Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning
Hon. Patrick Gervais Assirvaden	Minister of Energy and Public Utilities

Hon. Dhananjay Ramful	Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
Hon. Darmarajen Nagalingum	Minister of Youth and Sports
Hon. Muhammad Reza Cassam Uteem	Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations
Hon. Mahomed Osman Cassam Mahomed	Minister of Land Transport
Hon. John Michaël Tzoun Sao Yeung Sik Yuen	Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Dr. the Hon. Kaviraj Sharma Sukon	Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research
Hon. Sayed Muhammad Aadil Ameer Meea	Minister of Industry, SMEs and Cooperatives
Dr. the Hon. Mahend Gungapersad, PDSM	Minister of Education and Human Resource
Dr. the Hon. Avinash Ramtohol	Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Lutchmanah Pentiah	Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reforms
Hon. Ranjiv Woochit, OSK	Minister of Local Government
Hon. Mahendra Gondeea, OSK	Minister of Arts and Culture

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**MAURITIUS**

**Eighth National Assembly**

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**FIRST SESSION**

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**Debate No. 17 of 2026**

**Sitting of Wednesday 24 June 2026**

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

**The National Anthem was played**

*(Madam Speaker in the Chair)*

**PAPERS LAID**

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Papers have been laid on the Table –  
**Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change**

The Annual Report on Performance of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Solid Waste Management Division) for the financial year 2023-2024.

**FOREIGN LABOUR – WORK PERMIT SYSTEM – SECTORAL WORKFORCE –  
ILLEGAL EMPLOYMENT – RECRUITMENT LICENSING**

**The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard)** (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations whether, in regard to foreign labour, he will –

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, hon. Minister of Labour!

**Mr Uteem:** Madam Speaker, the consequence of an ageing population is not just on pension and on public finance, but also on the workforce. We have less and less Mauritians joining the workforce.

One of the measures announced in last year's budget for Financial Year 2025-2026 to address the acute shortage of labour and skills, which severely impinges on investment and therefore on economic growth, is to expedite the recruitment of foreign workers through a fast-track and simplified Rules-based work permit system to be managed by the Economic Development Board.

Thereafter, on 08 August 2025, Government agreed to the implementation of the Rules-based work permit system, which will be a new revamped system for the issue of work permits.

The system will be founded on the following three prerequisites –

- (a) A Standardised Job Classification and Codification through the establishment of a system to record job grades and all relevant details as outlined in various Remuneration Orders. The system will also generate a template contract, preventing employers from modifying job requirements or conditions of employment with a view to ensuring equity and discouraging exploitation;
- (b) An Accredited Employer Framework for the accreditation of employers to ensure mandatory compliance with relevant legislation, and

- (c) A Labour Market Information System, which will be a single Employment Portal with advanced AI features to assist employers and job seekers. This will provide employers with a transparent mode of advertisement, whereby job seekers will be notified of job openings.

It was also agreed that a Steering Committee chaired by the Prime Minister's Office and comprising representatives from my Ministry, the Passport and Immigration Office and the Economic Development Board will be set up to coordinate the active involvement of various stakeholders and ensure implementation of the System.

However, Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Economic Development Board that the fast-track and simplified rules-based work permit system has not yet been implemented. I am informed that a first tender exercise for the System launched by the EDB was not successful. Fresh procurement procedures have been initiated, and the bids were relaunched by the EDB on 12 June 2026.

Madam Speaker, as regards part (a) of the question, my Ministry has not yet undertaken an impact assessment on the scarcity of various sectors of the economy.

However, in January 2025, an Inter-Ministerial Committee was set up by the Government on work permit issues chaired by myself. The Committee met various stakeholders and took stock of the scarcity of labour and skill across all sectors of the economy. The Committee also heard representations, especially from Trade Unions and NGOs, on the impact which recruitment of foreign workers may have on the recruitment of Mauritian workers. We also heard concerns raised about dormitories for foreign workers in highly residential areas. And all those concerns, Madam Speaker, were taken on board in the report of the Inter-Ministerial Committee.

One of the main recommendations of the Inter-Ministerial Committee is that before an employer is allowed to recruit a foreign worker, he needs to demonstrate his inability to recruit locally, in particular, the employer must have advertised the post and gone through the database of job seekers as well as the Mauritiusjobs platform to try to recruit locally. To avoid abuse, it is the Employment Information Centre (EIC) of my Ministry that issues a certificate attesting that the applicant has been unable to recruit locally. It is only upon presentation of that certificate that consideration is given for an employer to be able to recruit foreign workers.

When determining the scarcity areas in which a foreign worker can be recruited, my Ministry stands guided by the detailed list of occupation in persistent demand in Mauritius published by the Human Resource Development Council which falls under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Human Resource.

Madam Speaker, during my meeting with the Director General of the International Labour Organisation earlier this month, I asked for the technical support of ILO precisely to prepare a study on the socio-economic impact of foreign workers in Mauritius.

To address the concern raised by many people, especially neighbours, relating to the mushrooming of residential houses used as Lodging Accommodation for foreign workers in densely populated areas, Government has recently approved the Occupation Safety and Health (Centralised Lodging Accommodation) Regulations 2026.

My Ministry will now license building premises which meet international standards to accommodate hundreds of foreign workers. An employer will no longer need to convert a resident house into a dormitory. He will now be able to simply rent one or more rooms in one of those centralised accommodations duly licensed to accommodate foreign workers.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (b) of the question, as at 31 May 2026, the two main employing sectors employing foreign workers were the Manufacturing Sector, employing 22,949 foreign workers, and the Construction Sector, employing 15,272. That is around 80% of the foreign workers. As regards the Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry Sector, the number of foreign workers was 2,618, and for Accommodation and Food Services Activities, that is, the Hospitality Sector, the number of foreign workers was 1,941.

As far as nationality is concerned, there are currently 15,840 foreign workers from India, 14,821 workers from Nepal, 9,995 from Madagascar, and 8,975 workers from Bangladesh, amongst others. Those four countries account for over 98% of the total number of foreign workers in Mauritius.

I am tabling the requested information country-wise and sector-wise. I need to point out, Madam Speaker, that those figures do not include foreign workers holding occupation permits which are delivered by the Economic Development Board. They relate to only permits issued by my Ministry.

Madam Speaker, as regards part (c) of the question, I am informed by the Passport and Immigration Office that as at 15 June 2026, there were 6,921 irregular migrant workers in

Mauritius, out of which, 2,886 were reported missing, and 4,035 were required to leave as their work permit and residence permit had expired.

I am further informed that since January 2026 to date, there has been no deportation under the Deportation Act. Since January 2026, the Police Department has intensified crackdown operations across the island targeting irregular migrants. During the period 01 January 2026 to date, the Police Department, I am informed, has conducted 49 operations resulting in the arrest of 428 illegal foreigners. Out of these, 400 migrants have already been repatriated.

Madam Speaker, I am further informed that the Police has already initiated immediate action to track down illegal expatriation in the country and a hotline has been established at the Police Headquarters to report the presence of illegal expatriates.

Madam Speaker, it is a fact that an employer who employs a worker without a valid work permit commits an offence, a serious offence. And unfortunately, I am informed by the Passport and Immigration Office that since January 2026 till date, no employer has been prosecuted, let alone convicted, for having illegally recruited a foreign worker. Unless and until criminal sanctions are taken under against employers who illegally employ foreign workers without a permit, there will continue to be an incentive for foreign workers to run away and work in the black economy without any protection for employers.

At the level of my Ministry, we have sought legal advice from the State Law Office as to the sanction that our Ministry administratively can take against an employer who employs foreign workers without a valid work permit. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the advice that we have obtained from the Attorney General's Office, was to the effect that we could not impose any penalty or other sanction on the employer who is failing to renew its work permit because the law does not give us the power today to do so administratively and we will have to amend the law to give the Ministry the power to sanction those illegal employers.

Nonetheless, to curb the practice tolerated – listen to this, hon. Leader of the Opposition – and encouraged under the previous regime of allowing employers to continue employing foreign workers after the expiration of their work permit, my Ministry has taken a policy decision that we will not entertain any application for work permit or renewal of work permit unless the employers have regularised at least 90% of the workers who are under his employment and whose work permits have been expired.

And this has given the necessary, expected result. Today, a lot of these employers who kept employing workers, especially in the Textile and Construction Sector after expiration of their work permits are now having to either renew the permit, pay the permit fees, or repatriate the workers before being allowed to recruit additional workers.

Madam Speaker, as regards part (d) of the question. I wish to inform the House that the operations of private recruitment agencies are governed by the Private Recruitment Agencies Act of 2023 and the Private Recruitment Agencies Regulations of 2025.

The legislation makes provision for three types of licenses, namely for the recruitment of –

- (a) citizens of Mauritius for employment in Mauritius;
- (b) citizens of Mauritius for employment abroad, and
- (c) non-citizens for employment in Mauritius.

The Private Recruitment Agencies Regulations only came into operation in October 2025. Therefore, as from January 2025 to October 2025, no agency was issued with any recruitment license by my Ministry. All licenses issued under the previous regulations by the previous regime had lapsed and were not reviewed as we were in the process of reviewing the legal framework to ensure ethical recruitment of foreign workers.

Now, following the promulgation of the Private Recruitment Agencies Regulations back in October 2025, my Ministry has, to date, issued 20 licences for the three categories.

Madam Speaker, I do not understand the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He comes and tells us, during the budget debates that we do not have sufficient growth. The private sector tells us: ‘Give us more workers. We cannot operate without the workers.’ It is in all sectors,

whether it is construction, textile, hospitality, restaurant, hotels. They are telling us: 'We need night or they do not want to work during the weekend.'

criteria of 'inability to recruit locally' is there, precisely, to protect local employment of

:

...

t of foreign workers, it will never – I repeat – never be at the expense of Mauritian workers.

Can the hon. Minister...

on form, to be able to obtain a recruitment licence for foreign labour? And I am tabling, Madam Speaker, ...

...where it is stated that documents to be submitted with the application, No. 7 – financial

r issuing of recruitment licence – we worked together with the United Nations, the International Organisation for Migration – was to review the criteria because under the no...

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First is – how do you demonstrate it? Either you already had a recruitment licence in

ition – your financial resources. Now, how do we determine the financial resources of a

No, listen to me. I am asking you, how do you ensure...

, but I am the one who is telling...

Un jour il faudra venir s'asseoir ici à ma place.

Let me read. Regulation 4(4)(a)(i) –

“the applicant –  
of workers;”

a series of applicants – this morning, my PS has informed me – that have already been

**Mr Lesjongard:** C'est ça le retour de la démocratie dans cette...

**Madam Speaker:** ...if there is anything illegal, ...

*(Interruptions)*

... If there is anything illegal...

*(Interruptions)*

**Ms Anquetil:** Le MSM, la démocratie...

**Madam Speaker:** Ça suffit!

*(Interruptions)*

Chief Whip! Chief Whip, please!

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Ça suffit de tous les côtés. Ça recommence comme hier là.

I am trying to be as fair as I can. If there is anything...

**Mr Lesjongard:** If you are fair, give me my last question!

*(Interruptions)*

**An hon. Member:** *Diktatur! Diktatur koumsa!*

**Madam Speaker:** I counted, and now, I am told the Minister replied for 16 minutes. But I still gave you more time. If I keep giving you more questions, because, obviously, it is very important, then, we can stay for a whole hour!

Ms J. Bérenger, you wanted to?

**Mr P. Bérenger:** Yes! Did you hear what the Minister just said concerning hon. Ms J. Bérenger?

**Madam Speaker:** I told her I am...

**Mr P. Bérenger:** And you have allowed him to say that and sit down!

**Madam Speaker:** No! I am giving the floor now to Ms J. Bérenger.

**Mr P. Bérenger:** Oh! You did not hear when ...

**Madam Speaker:** No! She asked. I told her to wait.

**Ms J. Bérenger:** I would like the hon. Minister to substantiate. And again, he is calling me Ms Joanna Bérenger. I suppose I am an honourable. But he needs to substantiate what he just said.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, Minister, you must ...

**Mr Uteem:** Yes, I will. I am substantiating. I did not want to disclose.

**Madam Speaker:** You have... One moment! One moment!

**Mr P. Bérenger:** Disclose if you ...

**Mr Uteem:** I will!

**Mr P. Bérenger:** Lâche!

**Madam Speaker:** One moment! Don't get...

We are getting very far from what we started.

**Mr P. Bérenger:** He is always getting personal!

**Mr Uteem:** Ah!

**Madam Speaker:** Let me talk, please! Please, let me talk!

Hon. Minister, it is not proper to call an hon. Member 'Miss'. This is the second time. So, please, stop doing that, first of all.

Secondly, what was it that you said? He must substantiate?

**Ms J. Bérenger:** He must substantiate or he withdraws what he said about ...

**Madam Speaker:** About? Somebody close to you?

**Mr P. Bérenger:** This is imputing motives.

*(Interruptions)*

**Ms J. Bérenger:** About my proximity with a supposed agent.

**Mr P. Bérenger:** Lâche!

**Ms J. Bérenger:** He is imputing motives. And, again, a lot of ...

**Madam Speaker:** Minister! Okay.

**Mr Uteem:** I did not want to disclose names because it is not proper to disclose names in this Assembly. An agency extremely close to the former Deputy Prime Minister, Brabant, applied for a recruitment licence. Nothing personal.

**Mr P. Bérenger:** I do not even know.

**Mr Uteem:** Brabant! You don't know who is Brabant? Your...

**Mr P. Bérenger:** I don't know whether he has applied!

**Mr Uteem:** Okay, but you know he is close to you!

**Mr P. Bérenger:** What has that had got to do with...

**Mr Uteem:** I am going to come to it! I am going to come to hon...

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member!

**Mr Uteem:** ... to the hon. First Member of Vacoas & Phoenix, Constituency No. 16.

**Madam Speaker:** Floréal! Vacoas & Floréal.

**Mr Uteem:** Floréal! Vacoas & Floréal, Constituency No. 16.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr P. Bérenger:** *Li pa...*

**Mr Uteem:** Her own...

*(Interruptions)*

Her own...

*(Interruptions)*

Her own...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Lesjongard:** Madam Speaker, are we not losing time now?

**Madam Speaker:** What can I do?

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Uteem:** Let me answer! Let me answer!

*(Interruptions)*

Let me answer! Let me answer!

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** And people are speaking from a sitting position!

**Ms J. Bérenger:** He is always getting personal! Always!

**Mr Uteem:** Let me answer! Can I answer?

**Mr P. Bérenger:** Always! You allow him.

**Mr Uteem:** Can I answer?

**Madam Speaker:** I don't allow him! And you...

**Mr P. Bérenger:** You allow him!

**Madam Speaker:** And you are speaking to me from a sitting position! I am trying to be as fair as I can.

I said we will stop this game. You will table!

*(Interruptions)*

You will table!

*(Interruptions)*

You will table!

*(Interruptions)*

That's enough!

(Interruptions)

That's enough! We have gone...

(Interruptions)

**An hon. Member:** *Les li reponn!*

**Madam Speaker:** That's enough!

(Interruptions)

**Ms J. Bérenger :** *Depi talerla li pe koze. Les leader lopoision...*

(Interruptions)

**Madam Speaker:** Let us...

**Mr Uteem:** 30 seconds to...

**Madam Speaker:** No, no need! Because I have stopped the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr Lesjongard:** No, Madam Speaker. I protest strongly that you are not giving me my last supplementary!

**An hon. Member:** *Debout!*

**Madam Speaker:** I am not going to give you another supplementary question. You know full well that I have always given more time than needed, globally speaking.

J'ai déjà noté tout le temps que je vous ai donné. Ne venez pas me dire que je suis injuste. Vous pouvez le penser. Chacun a le droit de penser ce qu'il veut. Après, quand vous passez votre temps à dire que *this has been the practice before*, vous voulez que je fasse comme mes prédécesseurs ? C'est ça que vous voulez ?

**Mr Lesjongard:** I have not said that, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Ah bein ! Alors, arrêtez de me traiter comme-ci je ne sais pas ce que je fais. Vous hurlez dans tous les sens. Je dois prendre le temps qu'il faut pour pouvoir agir et réagir.

Bien sûr, je ne suis pas parfaite. Mais là, je vais arrêter. *This PNQ is over!*

Hier, c'était pareil. Je ne sais pas ce qui se passe !

**Mr Lesjongard:** Hier, je n'ai pas posé de questions.

**Madam Speaker:** Pas vous ! Mais vous avez accusez ; je ne vais pas revenir là-dessus.

Okay, now, time is up for PNQ!

*(Interruptions)*

People can think what they want, okay?

**Mr Uteem:** Madam Speaker, I ... explanation!

**Madam Speaker:** No! Minister, I am not going...

*(Interruptions)*

Minister, I am not...

**Mr P. Bérenger:** Shame!

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** I am not going to let you. Please, bow down to my decision. Bow down to my decision!

**Mr Uteem:** ... serious allegations...

**Ms J. Bérenger :** ...fait des *allegations* !

**Mr P. Bérenger:** He makes allegations; you allow him, and then he says we make...

**Mr Uteem:** I have to state...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Ça suffit ! Ça suffit !

*(Interruptions)*

I am raising ; *Je m'en vais* !

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr P. Bérenger:** Shame! Shame!

*Dir sa deor!*

**Ms J. Bérenger:** *Jenito, to ferm lizie! Jenito to pa trouve? Jenito to pe amene ilegalman!*

*At 12.16 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.*

*On resuming at 12.23 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.*

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, hon. Members, please be seated!

**MOTION****SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)**

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

**The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.**

*Question put and agreed to.*

**PUBLIC BILL**

*Second Reading*

**THE APPROPRIATION (2026-2027) BILL**

**(NO. IX OF 2026)**

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the Appropriation (2026-2027) Bill (No. IX of 2026).*

*Question again proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, hon. Minister!

(12.23 p.m.)

**The Minister of Industry, SMEs and Cooperatives (Mr A. Ameer Meea):** Madam Speaker, before I start my speech, I just want to remind the House and the hon. Leader of Opposition, since he was protesting of not having a last question, of a notorious speaker who was named Phokeer. I just want to remind him that since you are in the Chair, not a single hon. Member has been expelled out of this House. Not a single hon. Member has been named. Not a single hon. Member has been deprived of his rights and today he is protesting because he did not get a last question.

**Madam Speaker:** Please get on.

**Mr Ameer Meea:** I just wanted to remind the days of this notorious Phokeer.

Madam Speaker, let me come to my...

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Minister, get on with your debate please!

**Mr Ameer Meea:** Yes, let me come to the Budget Speech. Madam Speaker, this is a budget of responsibility but it is also a budget of ambition. It repairs what had to be repaired, it protects what had to be protected and it launches a serious national shift towards production, exports and enterprise. A shift that lies at the heart of the work of my Ministry.

I thank the hon. Prime Minister for entrusting me with this portfolio and with this challenge. I do not regard it as a title, I regard it as a mission to rebuild production, to support enterprise and to make Mauritius more competitive in a world that will not wait for us.

Madam Speaker, when this Government took office in November 2024, we found an economy in a far more fragile health than our people had been led to believe.

Look at the public finances we inherited. Deficit for the Financial Year 2024-2025 had reached 9.3% of GDP. Public sector debt was pressing towards the 90%. The cost of merely carrying that debt was crushing. In 2025-2026, Rs26.9 billion were spent on interest payments alone, more than a tenth of everything the State spent. Money gone before it could reach any classroom, a hospital bed, a road, a pension or a single productive investment.

To grasp how far we have fallen, we should recall the position barely a decade earlier. In 2014, this country held its debt under 60% of GDP and it kept its deficit to around 3%. You just imagine for 10 years; we went from 60% to debt to almost 90% of debt for this country and in 10 years, that discipline was squandered. The room for manoeuvre was lost and the bill was quietly handed to the next generation. That, Madam Speaker, is the inheritance.

The figures in this budget tell a different story; a story of repair. The deficit has been cut that inherited 9.3% of GDP to an estimated 6% in 2025 to 2026 and it is set to narrow again to 3.7% in 2026-2027. In two years, we have more than halved it, that is genuine repair of the public finances. We have done it without inflicting blunt posterity on our people.

The debt is turning too. Having stood at 88.5% of GDP in 2025, public sector debt is put at Rs681.9 billion by the end of June 2026 equal to 87.8% of GDP and it is projected to ease to 85.55% a year after that and Government has fixed a clear objective, we want to bring it back under the 80% mark by June 2029.

The wider economy is also showing clear signs of recovery. The economy grew by 3.2% in 2025 and income per head rose by 3.3%. Inflation which had run at roughly 7% in a

year between 2022 and 2024 and at a point touched a painful 11.3%, was brought back to 3.7%. Unemployment fell from 6% to 5.7% among the lowest rates we have known in 20 years and this is not merely our own assessment.

The institutions that watch us closely have taken note. In its issuer comment of May 2026, Moody's to the first tangible sign of progress in the execution of our budget, acknowledging that this Government has taken the difficult fiscal decision the moment demanded and the agency has kept Mauritius at its investment grade Baa3 rating.

The International Monetary Fund, concluding in 2026 Article IV Mission to Mauritius, found that Mauritian economy has, in its own words, exhibited resilience, even as a conflict in the Middle East weighs on our region, and it singled out our graduation to SDDS Plus as proof of our commitment to transparency. The World Bank, for its part, has highlighted the resilience of our diversified economy and a labour market that has driven unemployment to its lowest level in two decades.

When the rating agencies, the IMF and the World Bank all agree that Mauritius is moving in the right direction in one of the most turbulent global environments in living memory, that is recognition worth having.

The job is not finished. Our debt remains too high, and we must hold our nerve and stay the course. But the drift has stopped. The country has turned from decline towards discipline, and discipline is what now gives us the means to invest in the productive economy.

Madam Speaker, fiscal stability is necessary, but on its own, it will not build prosperity. Reducing expenditure is necessary. Eliminating waste is a duty. But let us be honest with this House and the nation. No country ever became prosperous by spending less. Countries become prosperous by earning more. You earn more by producing more, by making more, by selling more to the world. No nation has ever saved its way to greatness.

A country must produce. It must make things. It must innovate. It must export. It must create value at home and sell that value to the world. It is a deeper shift this Government is making: moving Mauritius from an economy built on consumptions, on imports, to one built on production, enterprise, and growth. The trade figures alone show why we cannot delay. Statistics Mauritius puts our merchandise trade deficit at Rs211.3 billion in 2025, up from Rs207.8 billion in 2025. It is expected to climb towards Rs 215 billion in 2026.

No country can read such numbers and pretend that consumption alone will carry its future and no one imagine that production is something for poorer countries do. It is something a modern economy outgrows. The very opposite is true. Singapore, one of the world's greatest financial centres, deliberately keeps manufacturing at around one-fifth of its economy, treating it as a strategic anchor of growth and employment.

Switzerland, among the wealthiest nation on Earth, remains a manufacturing powerhouse in pharmaceutical, in precision equipment, in machinery. These are not economies that have abandoned the factory floor on the road to prosperity. They held on it deliberately. If nations of that wealth and sophistication refuse to give up production, a small and exposed island like ours has every reason to hold on it too. We have already learned the price of leaning too heavily on a narrow set of sectors. The pandemic taught it. Disruption to global shipping has taught it.

The geopolitical tensions of today are teaching it again. An island that imports a large share of what it eats and almost everything it uses cannot allow its productive base to collapse. When external shocks come, production is not a luxury. It is a national resilience.

This is why manufacturing must return to the centre of our economic strategy. Manufacturing is not a marginal sector. It is the backbone of our tradeable economy. It accounts to around 13% of GDP and around 15% of total employment and around 80% of domestic exports. It used to be 18%. Switzerland, which is a service-based economy, has its manufacturing base around 20%, Madam Speaker.

Today, it is supported by 223 export-oriented enterprise, 284 large domestic-oriented enterprises, and 17,213 manufacturing SMEs. For more than a decade, however, the production base has weakened. Let the numbers speak plainly, Madam Speaker. The share of manufacturing fell from 15.5% in 2014 to 12.8% in 2024.

The combined number of oriented enterprise and domestic enterprises fell from 684 in 2014 to 512 in 2024. Domestic exports stagnated around Rs 50 billion in 2024. A level reached back in 2014. In real terms, adjusted for the depreciation of the rupee, domestic export has contracted from Rs50 billion to Rs 37 billion, a decline of roughly 26% masked only by currently currency weakness. FDI into manufacturing run on average at only about 5% of total flows over the past decades. By 2025, it had fallen to just Rs38 million. A figure that speaks for itself.

Madam Speaker, this is not industrial transformation. It is the cost of industrial neglect. I say it with care. Our manufacturers in Mauritius did not fail. They kept investing. They kept exporting and employing through difficult years. They fought rising costs, labour shortages, freight disruptions, fierce competition, and uncertain market access. What failed was the absence of a serious national production strategy, industrial policy, its focus. Export promotion was weakened. Investment promotion for manufacturing was never given the urgency that other sectors enjoyed. The result is there in the numbers, and we cannot hide from it.

This Government will not repeat this mistake. Madam Speaker, the international environment is unforgiving. Our exporters face slow low-cost competition, high trade barriers, and constant pressure to defend and expand their market share. They face uncertainty over preferential access, including the future of AGOA. They face geopolitical tension, disruption to shipping routes, and weaker growth in the very markets they sell to. At home, productivity remains too low and the uptake of technology too uneven. Our standard must be sharpened.

We need an industrial architecture that would move faster, support firms better, and open markets more aggressively. The answer is not to shelter inefficiency. The answer is to build competitiveness. This is the heart of this budget.

Madam Speaker, to meet these challenges facing our manufacturing economy, Government is putting in place a serious industrial policy. At its centre, a new Industry Bill. Its purpose is to give modern legal foundation to rebuild our industrial and export capacity and to make Mauritius once again a competitive home for manufacturing and a credible platform for selling to the world. This is one of the most important reforms for the productive economy in a generation.

We need it because the world has changed. Competition is tougher. Buyers are more demanding. Tariffs are more uncertain. Compliance is stricter. The technology cycle is faster. In that world, Mauritius cannot run its industry with yesterday's tools. We need a framework that is agile, forward-looking, practical. Institutions that move at the speed of investors and markets. And policy that is not trapped in files, but translated into factories, jobs, exports, and foreign exchange. The Industry Bill is, therefore, not a narrow legal exercise. It is an economic reset, Madam Speaker.

The Bill will re-empower my Ministry as a driving force and the gateway for industrial development, with a stronger framework for policy, coordination, export promotion, investment facilitation, data, standards, and delivery.

Alongside it, my Ministry is preparing a new industrial sector strategic plan for 2026 to 2030 with the support of UNIDO, due by December this year, to chart the next phase of industrial development around higher value-added production, technology adoption and export competitiveness and market diversification.

Most important of all, this budget entrusts my Ministry with establishing the Mauritius Industry and Export Development Agency. The operational arm that will accelerate investment in manufacturing, increase the pool of exporters and broaden our reach in export markets. This is not about creating bureaucracy. It is about creating focus. For years, manufacturing had to compete for attention inside bodies with many other mandates.

It is now consistently crowded out. A country that wants to export must have an institution built to export. A country that wants to industrialise must have an institution built to industrialise. This agency will be manufacturing's dedicated champion, attract industrial investment, support exporters, open markets, help firms scale, and make Mauritius a credible production for the region and the world, and the budget sets a bold target to match; doubling the value of our goods export, lifting it from 1.5 billion USD to 3 billion USD within the next five years.

Madam Speaker, a production-led economy needs investment and this budget rewards it. The investment tax credit for manufacturers worth 15% a year over three years, 40% in all, applies to what any manufacturing company spends on new plant and equipment, on Artificial Intelligence solution, on patents with motor cars excluded. The relief was due to expire on 30 June this year. We are extending it to a further three years to 30 June 2029 but investment without productivity will not carry us. Low and declining production is among the weakest and the estimates identify that the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council (NPCC) will draw up and deliver a productivity master plan to lift productivity right across the economy. We cannot build an export economy on weak standards.

The Mauritius Standards Bureau will go on playing its essential role in testing, certification, calibration and conformity assessment and we will strengthen the wider standards system so that our producers can meet the most demanding markets with confidence. This is a question of fairness here too. A local manufacturer who meets every

standard, pays fair wages, pays taxes and invests in quality should not be undercut by cheap sub-standard imports. This is why quality infrastructure; market surveillance and conformity assessment are not paperwork. They are industrial policy. Alongside the Bureau, we will continue to support the Assay Office and Mauritas as pillars of trust in our production system.

Madam Speaker, our exporters operate in a difficult global market. They need targeted support linked to real production, export readiness, certification, trade promotion and access to new markets. Government will continue to help them make full use of trade agreements, including AfCFTA, COMESA, SADC and our preferential arrangements. The renewal of AGOA up to December 2026 brought relief, but uncertainty remains. That is why Government has re-engaged seriously with the United States through the agreement on reciprocal trade process with the hope of securing a bilateral trade agreement that gives our exporters and investments greater certainty. Our Washington mission in April 2026, me and my colleague Minister Ramful, allowed Mauritius to defend its operators, show its commitment to labour standards and to push for more stable trade framework. We will keep widening our market across Africa, Europe, the United States, India and the Indian Ocean so that no single market decides our fate.

Madam Speaker, if manufacturing is the backbone of the tradable economy, our small and medium enterprises are the engine of inclusion. They are in every village, every town and every region where a small enterprise grows, a family rises with it. When SMEs join the formal economy, the tax base widens. When they innovate, the whole economy grows more resilient. This budget gives them a clear path. Government will bring in an SME Bill to make the business environment friendlier for small enterprises, while a new Business Facilitation Bill cuts through the procedures and bottlenecks that hold them back. SME Mauritius will build a single digital platform that gathers in one place all the support Government has to offer: schemes, grants, tax incentive and access to finance. An entrepreneur should not need a map, a lawyer, and three prayers to find the help that is meant for them.

Madam Speaker, we will broaden the exemption from custom duty on eligible utility vehicles so that registered SMEs in transformative sectors qualify too, helping them cut cost, move goods and equipment and invest in capacity. We will press on with formalisation. Many in the informal economy have real talent and drive, yet they stand outside the system. They cannot borrow properly, they cannot bid for public contracts, they cannot scale. Formalisation is not a penalty; it is a bridge to opportunity. The budget startup agenda will support SMEs as

well, and eligible startups will enjoy a 10-year income tax holiday from its very first day of operation, and Government will build a proper ecosystem around it –

- a dedicated Startup Act;
- a Startup Council;
- an Accelerator Scheme,
- a strong support for innovation.

Madam Speaker, the SMEs for the next decade must be digital, productive, green and ready to export. We will accelerate the take-up of e-commerce, digital payments, Artificial Intelligence and modern management tools. We will spread proven productivity methods such as Kaizen and lean manufacturing, and we will work with financial institutions to widen access to finance for technology adoption, business expansion and sustainable investment. We will help our SMEs into regional and global value chains, including through AfCFTA, and we will encourage green certification, cleaner technology, rooftop solar, battery storage, energy efficiency and circular economy practices. The budget also tightens public procurement in our producers' favour.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the co-operative sector. Co-operatives are not a relic of the past. Properly modernised, they are a power tool for grassroot production, food security, entrepreneurship and shared prosperity. This budget supports their modernisation through *Le Terroir Mauricien Coopérative* label, which will promote authentic local products made by co-operative societies, planters, farmers, breeders, beekeepers and agribusiness operators. A sum of Rs7 million has been allocated for the project to be carried out with the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry, reaching out around 50 co-operative societies. It will include a digital product identity through a 2D barcode system, business support to open up new markets and a distinctive label to lift visibility in supermarkets, hotels, public procurements, fairs and export channels. The aim is clear; produce well at home, create value, win the local market and then go international. The Co-operatives Act will also be amended to strengthen governance, business transparency, accountability, facilitation and categorisation by size, and also bringing credit unions offering financial services within the scope of our AML and CFT obligations.

Madam Speaker, let me say a few words quickly on the amendments brought to the Waqf Act because there are some misunderstandings and people are going in all directions. I

believe some clarifications will be helpful and I offer it in that spirit. These amendments are not a Mauritian initiative, and they are directed at no one. They are simply the application of standards set by Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the same body that placed Mauritius on its grey list in 2020, a chapter this country worked very hard to put us behind. Waqf appears expressly in the text of FATF recommendations themselves, recommendation 14, under the heading Other Legal Persons, refers, and I quote to –

“Foundations, Anstalt, Waqf and limited liability partnerships (...)

Where a Waqf is constituted as a legal arrangement, it falls instead under recommendation 25. The oversight of the sector as a whole is guided by Recommendation 8 of non-profit organisations, which the FATF, itself, revised to ensure that such measures remain proportionate and never excessive. In other words, the Waqf is named by the FATF across its own standard. At all, what this Bill does is bring our law gently in line with them.”

I would simply like to offer reassurance to the point that caused the most concern. We are not touching the independence of the Waqf Board. We are not touching the independence of the Board of Waqf Commissioners. We are not transferring our Waqf to any outside agency. Some of them are creating some disruptions to make people believe that this Government is touching the Waqf. We are not doing that.

If anything, we are doing the opposite. We are entrusting the board itself with the means to oversee the Waqf in its own charge, to keep proper records, to know the true beneficiaries, and where it should ever be necessary, to remove a person unfit to manage what is after all a sacred trust. The intention is not to weaken the board, but to strengthen it and to align our law with standards.

Madame la présidente, je tiens à remercier le Premier ministre d'avoir accueilli avec attention les propositions de mon ministère et d'avoir placé le secteur manufacturier, l'exportation, la compétitivité et l'innovation au cœur de ce budget. Je remercie également mes mandants de la circonscription no. 3, tous mes mandants, le régional MMM du no. 3, et mon équipe pour la confiance qu'ils ont bien voulu placer en moi.

Je sais précisément pourquoi je siége dans cette Assemblée. Je suis là pour travailler. Je suis là pour relever les défis. Je suis là pour livrer des résultats. Je le dis avec fierté, en ma qualité de membre du Mouvement Militant Mauricien, un mouvement dont l'histoire toute

entière se confond avec l'engagement pour le dialogue, pour la solidarité et pour le service. Le MMM a toujours été porté par une conviction : le changement durable ne naît pas des gestes spectaculaires ni des ultimatums, mais de l'engagement dans la durée et de ce travail patient, souvent ingrat, qu'est la construction d'un pays. Ce sont ces valeurs que je porte au sein de ce gouvernement et ce sont ces valeurs que ce gouvernement met en œuvre chaque jour.

Madame la présidente, je ne peux conclure sans dire quelques mots sur la réforme des pensions, surtout sur la manière dont ce gouvernement a répondu. Le budget a introduit une réforme du régime de pension, et je ne vais pas faire semblant que cette réforme a soulevé des interrogations. Les critères de ressources, le *means test*, posaient un véritable problème, en particulier quant à leurs impacts sur les plus vulnérables, sur les principes d'universalité auxquels les Mauriciens se sont profondément attachés.

En tant que membre du MMM, j'ai partagé mes préoccupations, mais ce qui compte, Madame la présidente, c'est la manière dont nous les avons traités. Nous ne sommes pas allés sur les réseaux sociaux. Nous n'avons pas convoqué une conférence de presse. Nous ne sommes pas allés sur un plateau de radio pour alimenter la polémique. Nous n'avons pas brandi des menaces.

Au MMM, nous ne faisons pas du spectacle et nous ne faisons pas des palabres. Nous avons fait ce qu'un partenaire responsable doit faire. Nous nous sommes réunis samedi dernier au bureau politique. Nous avons analysé la situation sérieusement. Nous avons examiné des solutions alternatives. Nous avons sollicité une rencontre avec le Premier ministre, à travers le *Deputy Prime Minister*, et il nous l'a accordée. Et nous nous sommes assis autour d'une même table avec toutes les parties concernées, partageant les mêmes lectures, les mêmes choses. Nous avons discuté, nous avons pris une décision ensemble, collectivement, parce qu'un gouvernement porte une responsabilité collective, Madame la présidente.

Le Premier Ministre a écouté. Il a fait preuve de sagesse en décidant de geler l'application des critères de ressources, le temps d'une réflexion plus approfondie. Je tiens à le saluer et à le remercier sincèrement pour cette ouverture et pour cette écoute. C'est exactement cela le changement que nous avons promis aux Mauriciens : un gouvernement qui se parle à lui-même avant de parler aux médias ; un gouvernement qui règle ses

différents autour d'une table, non à coup de déclarations ; un gouvernement qui collabore plutôt que de colporter, Madame la présidente.

Comme l'a dit un jour Jürgen Klopp, l'ex-entraîneur de Liverpool, à ses supporters : *'We have to change from doubters to believers.'* Tel est l'état d'esprit qu'exige la vie publique. Lorsque le match se complique, on ne quitte pas le terrain. On reste soudés et on repart de l'avant, vers le progrès et en continuant de se battre les uns pour les autres. C'est ainsi que je conçois mon devoir de ministre. C'est dans cet esprit que j'invite chaque acteur de notre économie à aborder le travail qui nous attend.

Quand nous sommes au gouvernement, Madame la présidente, même lorsque nous faisons face à des critiques, nous devons les assumer avec responsabilité. Nous ne choisissons pas la voie des discours populistes, ni celle des déclarations destinées uniquement à récolter des likes sur Facebook ou à prédire des défaites électorales plus que le 60-0. La démagogie ne fait pas partie de notre ADN, Madame la présidente.

Lorsqu'on appartient à une équipe, on reste uni et solidaire dans des moments faciles comme dans des moments difficiles. Chacun doit jouer son rôle avec un sens de responsabilité. Une équipe ne peut pas avancer si certains de ses membres passent leur temps à marquer des *own goals*. Notre devoir est de défendre collectivement nos convictions, d'assumer et de travailler ensemble.

C'est dans cet esprit que nous continuons d'avancer avec sérieux, responsabilité et toujours dans l'intérêt du pays.

Madame la présidente, nous avons choisi la responsabilité, car le leadership politique ne consiste pas à préparer la prochaine élection, mais à protéger la prochaine génération.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, since we have lost a bit of time this morning, I am suspending for one hour.

*At 12.57 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.*

*On resuming at 2.02 p.m., with Madam Speaker, in the Chair.*

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, please be seated.

Yes, hon. Edouard.

(2.04 p.m.)

**Mr J. Edouard (Fourth Member for Rodrigues):** Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor.

Madame la présidente, ce qui tue une nation, ce n'est pas seulement l'échec, c'est le pessimisme devenu culture. Je ne veux être de ce pessimisme collectif.

**Madam Speaker :** Parlez un petit peu plus fort.

**Mr Edouard :** Une nation se reconstruit aussi avec de la foi, de l'audace, de l'exigence, de l'encouragement. Encourager ne veut pas dire applaudir aveuglément. Faire confiance ne veut pas dire se taire. Aimer son pays ne veut pas dire défendre l'indéfendable. Notre premier réflexe doit être d'observer, d'analyser ou d'encourager. J'ai emprunté ces mots d'un ami d'Afrique, à qui d'ailleurs, je dis merci. Comme je n'ai que quelques minutes, je veux dire quelques mots sur le système de santé et ensuite principalement sur Rodrigues.

Madam Speaker, as we consider the 2026-2027 National Budget, it is important that we continue to invest in initiatives that strengthen health systems, promote gender equality, and ensure equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services, continued attention to HIV prevention and treatment services, domestic violence prevention, adolescent health programmes, robust data systems, and evidence-based policy making remain essential if Mauritius is to sustain progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 5.

The SADC Parliamentary Forum Governance Programme on SRHR, HIV and AIDS demonstrates the important role that Parliament can play in promoting accountability, strengthening oversight, and fostering multi-sectoral partnerships.

Through the establishment of a national working group, which I presently chair, Madam Speaker, capacity building activities, stakeholder engagement, and support for discussions on the domestication of regional instruments, including the SADC Model Law on gender-based violence, the programme has contributed towards strengthening parliamentary engagement on health, gender equality, and social development priorities.

I besides commend the initiative of the hon. Deputy Prime Minister who has yesterday introduced in the National Assembly the Domestic Abuse Bill. The menstrual leave in this budget is also a bold measure aligned to these objectives. I also commend the commitment of hon. Bachoo to improve health services. Continued parliamentary oversight will remain

important to ensure that resources allocated to these sectors are efficiently utilised, equitably distributed, and responsive to the evolving needs of the population, thereby contributing to a healthier, more inclusive, and resilient Mauritius, including Rodrigues. I therefore welcome sustained commitment towards initiatives that support evidence-based decision-making and advance our national, regional, and international commitments in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV and AIDS.

Madame la présidente, maintenant avec votre permission, je vais parler de Rodrigues. Mais avant, je tiens à féliciter l'honorable Premier ministre et ministre des Finances pour ce qu'il y a de bon dans ce budget. Les autres orateurs avant moi les ont déjà énumérés. Mais tout en lui demandant de revoir ce qu'il y a de moins bon, comme la réforme de la pension universelle, une révision qui a débuté d'ailleurs avec le gel annoncé et qui, je pense, doit faire l'objet d'une plus grande consultation, incluant aussi ceux qui sont les plus concernés.

D'ailleurs, l'année dernière, lors des débats budgétaires, j'avais fait la même proposition. Il faut aussi revoir les nouvelles dispositions de la *Public Gathering Act* proposées. Et dans ce contexte, je soutiens ma collègue Ms Savabaddy qui s'est exprimée sur ce sujet. Et je suis également d'avis que dans une démocratie, un simple préavis devrait suffire pour organiser une manifestation et non dépendre de ceux contre qui on va manifester. Je ne vais pas revenir sur ce que mes collègues ont dit sur Rodrigues et auquel j'adhère pleinement. Cependant, en tant qu'un des représentants du peuple résilient de Rodrigues, ma voix doit aujourd'hui faire écho aux réalités uniques, aux défis et aux aspirations de notre île.

Madame la présidente, notre vision d'indépendance économique. Certains tentent souvent de présenter les allocations financières à Rodrigues comme une simple forme d'assistance sociale. Permettez-moi de corriger immédiatement ce récit réducteur. La nature n'a pas doté Rodrigues de vastes réserves minérales ni d'industries lourdes, mais notre économie repose entièrement sur quatre piliers solides – l'agriculture, la pêche, l'artisanat et le tourisme.

Investir à Rodrigues n'est pas un fardeau national. C'est une expansion stratégique du PIB de notre république tout entière. Pour parvenir à une indépendance économique, nous ne pouvons pas simplement dépendre des subventions. Nous devons transformer nos défis en opportunités à forte valeur ajoutée qui diversifie notre économie et renforce notre résilience climatique.

Dans le secteur du tourisme, le budget doit financer activement notre transition vers une destination d'écotourisme durable de tout premier plan. En lançant un fonds vert pour l'écotourisme, nous pourrions aider les gîtes locaux à moderniser leurs infrastructures, à adopter les énergies renouvelables et à attirer des voyageurs internationaux à fort pouvoir d'achat.

De plus, nous devons interconnecter nos secteurs. Nous devons financer un programme d'intégration agritourisme qui relie directement nos agriculteurs traditionnels qui produisent nos fameux limons, notre miel biologique et nos haricots rouges à notre secteur hôtelier. Cela garantira que chaque roupie dépensée par un touriste pour sa nourriture aille directement dans la poche.

**Madam Speaker:** De l'agriculteur.

**Mr Edouard:** De nos planteurs locaux.

**Madam Speaker:** Voilà!

**Mr Edouard:** Excusez-moi. Il est temps d'affronter la réalité climatique. Rodrigues est confronté à des sécheresses graves et prolongées qui menacent notre mode de vie traditionnel. Nous ne pouvons lutter contre la nature, nous devons donc la contourner.

Nous demandons un budget qui abandonne l'agriculture pluviale et investisse massivement dans des infrastructures intelligentes et résilientes face au climat. Premièrement, une allocation budgétaire pourrait servir à la construction de micro-usines de dessalement solaire interconnectées, dédiées exclusivement à l'agriculture.

Ces usines alimenteront des réseaux d'irrigation goutte-à-goutte automatisés dans des zones agricoles clés. Grâce à l'énergie solaire, nous éliminons les coûts énergétiques d'exploitation, garantissant ainsi à nos agriculteurs un approvisionnement en eau bon marché et fiable toute l'année.

Madame la présidente, le défi du budget de développement, *capital budget*. C'est dans ce même esprit de collaboration constructive au sein de la majorité que je dois soulever une préoccupation urgente concernant le développement de nos infrastructures.

Depuis 2025, nous constatons une baisse préoccupante de l'allocation de notre budget de développement. Le développement n'attend pas. Lorsque les dépenses en capital diminuent, la construction des infrastructures essentielles ralentit. La création d'emplois stagne et notre indépendance économique à long terme est retardée. On tentera d'exploiter

cette situation en affirmant que l'Assemblée régionale de Rodrigues devrait gérer seule ses crises de développement. Ce serait une lâche tentative de fuir le devoir national. L'Assemblée régionale de Rodrigues gère l'administration régionale, mais le gouvernement central gère les infrastructures nationales, les cadres de fret maritime et les politiques macroéconomiques.

Une véritable collaboration signifie que les deux niveaux de gouvernement avancent au même rythme. J'exhorte le ministère des Finances à travailler en étroite collaboration avec l'Assemblée régionale de Rodrigues pour inverser cette tendance et injecter les capitaux nécessaires à la relance de nos projets locaux.

Madame la présidente, autonomisation de nos producteurs, la commercialisation du bétail. Nos éleveurs rodriguais travaillent sans relâche et tirent une immense fierté de leur bétail. Pourtant, leur pouvoir d'achat et leurs moyens de subsistance sont sévèrement limités par le manque de soutien adéquat pour commercialiser leurs produits à Maurice.

Nous avons besoin d'un financement immédiat pour débloquer la logistique de l'exportation agricole. Ce projet doit faciliter la mise en place d'un pont de fret Rodrigues-Maurice, créant un système de transport maritime subventionné à tarif fixe, spécifiquement dédié aux animaux vivants et aux produits frais.

Pour compléter cela, nous devons investir des fonds de développement dans la construction d'une infrastructure de chaîne du froid moderne à Port Mathurin. Enfin, établissons un centre de commercialisation rodriguais dédié à Port-Louis. Cela permettra à nos agriculteurs de contourner les intermédiaires et de vendre directement aux consommateurs mauriciens, garantissant ainsi les marges bénéficiaires équitables qu'ils méritent amplement.

Valoriser une économie bleue, une pêche durable. Madame la présidente, tout comme nos terres ont besoin de soutien, nos eaux en ont également besoin. Nos pêcheurs artisans sont le pilier de nos communautés côtières, mais le lagon est appauvri.

Pour atteindre l'indépendance économique, nous devons développer notre économie bleue de manière durable. Premièrement, nous devons injecter des fonds dans notre programme de subventions pour la flotte hors lagon, afin de doter nos pêcheurs des équipements et de la formation nécessaires pour s'aventurer en toute sécurité au-delà de la barrière de corail en haute mer.

Deuxièmement, nous devons soutenir nos pêcheurs pendant les périodes plus cruciales de conservation. Lorsque nous imposons des fermetures saisonnières pour la pêche à l'ourite

ou à la senne, afin de permettre à la faune marine de se régénérer, nos pêcheurs doivent être soutenus par des allocations rehaussées et des formations à des activités alternatives.

Enfin, nous devons cesser de perdre de la valeur. Nous devons investir des capitaux pour construire des chambres froides alimentées à l'énergie solaire dans nos débarcadères locaux et implanter une usine de transformation de poisson certifiée éco-responsable à Rodrigues.

En mettant sous vide, en séchant et en labellisant nos prises rodriguaises de qualité supérieure, nous pourrions exporter des produits de la mer à forte valeur ajoutée directement vers les marchés mauriciens et internationaux, assurant ainsi un avenir prospère à nos familles de pêcheurs.

Continuité territoriale et coût de la vie. Madame la présidente, la continuité territoriale n'est pas un luxe. C'est un droit fondamental pour chaque citoyen de la République de Maurice. Une famille rodriguaise ne devrait pas faire face à des désavantages structurels ou à des coûts plus élevés pour les services de base par rapport à une famille vivant à Port-Louis ou à Quatre Bornes.

Actuellement, notre population souffre d'un coût de la vie nettement plus élevé, directement causé par des frais de fret et de transport maritime exorbitants. Notre île dépend entièrement des produits importés, et lorsque le coût du fret augmente, c'est le prix du panier de la ménagère qui prend l'ascenseur. De plus, je dois aborder la récente réduction et l'incertitude entourant la subvention sur les billets d'avion.

Le pont aérien entre Rodrigues et Maurice est notre ligne de vie. Ce n'est pas un voyage de loisir. C'est ainsi que nos étudiants se rendent à l'université, que nos malades accèdent à des soins médicaux spécialisés et que les familles restent unies. Réduire cette subvention impose un fardeau financier injuste aux familles rodriguaises et freine directement notre secteur touristique.

Nous exigeons une véritable continuité territoriale, garantissant exactement la même accessibilité, les mêmes infrastructures et les mêmes structures de coûts pour tous les services que ceux dont bénéficie l'île Maurice.

Madame la présidente, un budget ne vaut que par son exécution. *Actions speak louder than words*. Même lorsque les fonds sont légitimement alloués à Rodrigues, nous sommes souvent confrontés à des retards administratifs majeurs dans le déblocage des fonds.

Ces goulets d'étranglement bureaucratiques paralysent directement notre capacité de dépense. Le temps que les fonds arrivent sur nos comptes, le coût des matériaux a augmenté à cause de l'inflation et les calendriers des projets sont compromis. Je demande instamment un mécanisme plus souple, décentralisé et plus agile pour le décaissement des fonds afin que l'Assemblée régionale de Rodrigue puisse exécuter son mandat efficacement.

Et je conclus. Un avenir construit ensemble. Nous sommes une seule république. La prospérité est celle de Maurice et celle de Rodrigues sont profondément liées. J'ai toute confiance dans la capacité d'empathie et d'esprit de collaboration de ce gouvernement. Travaillons main dans la main pour éliminer ces obstacles.

Garantissons notre continuité territoriale, abaissons notre coût de la vie et donnons les moyens d'agir à nos agriculteurs, nos éleveurs et nos pêcheurs. En prenant ces mesures, nous transformerons Rodrigues d'une région ayant besoin de soutien, elle deviendra un partenaire prospère et économiquement indépendant au sein de la République de Maurice.

Je vous remercie.

(2.21 p.m.)

**Madam Speaker:** Yes. Hon. Baboolall!

**Mr C. Baboolall (First Member Montagne Blanche & GRSE):** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to intervene on this Bill presented by the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker, before I begin, I must say this. The people of our Republic are deeply disturbed. Never in the history of Mauritius has a budget left the population so uncertain about their future, even while the debate is still ongoing in this August Assembly. The first pillar of this budget is anchored on leveraging AI and digitisation but let us be honest. It seems that this budget itself is an artificial budget. The way it unjustly punishes our senior citizens.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister stated that the means test has been frozen. This means the Appropriation Bill (2026-2027) (No. IX of 2026) is now short of some Rs30 billion for this coming financial year. How can we have a proper discussion on all the estimates when everything has now been unbalanced? On top of that, the Rs10 billion included from the Chagos deal which is uncertain. In total, meaning, we have an uncertain amount of Rs40 billion.

Madam Speaker, the Government has made a lot of noise about turning Mauritius into a future-ready economy, heavily leaning on AI and digital services but there is no supporting infrastructure to implement it. Madam Speaker, how can a country become digitally forward when its youth are grappling with worsening drug scourge and brain drain?

Madam Speaker, pensions today account for nearly 25% of Government expenditure. The worker-to-pensioner ratio has collapsed from 16 in 1962 to just 4.7 in 2025, and this is projected to decline further. Instead of reforming the state, the Government is reforming the citizens by replacing the Basic Retirement Pension with a State Age Pension and an attempt to introduce the means test. Yes, Madam Speaker, the public outcry forced a temporary freeze. *Zot met enn own goal, plis zot tap latab* but the intent is crystal clear: claw back pension from the very people who built this country. Where do we draw the line? Does it mean that if the means test has been frozen, a person taking the reduced pension at the age of 60 years, will continue to have the same reduced pension for a lifetime? The population needs answers.

The country's financial problem was never created by pensioners. It was created by decades of bad decisions, poorly designed projects and spending whose results no one seriously evaluates. Madam Speaker, instead of safeguarding vulnerable citizens and respecting the workers who dutifully contributed to the system, the administration is squeezing those who rely on the Basic Retirement Pension for survival.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister boasts that inflation has decreased to 3.7% in 2025. If this is true, let the Government MPs go to the supermarket and tell the single mothers, labourers, and civil servants that this is the case. Madam Speaker, prices of food, electricity, and healthcare remain suffocatingly high. Families are being forced to choose between putting food on the table and paying their utility bills.

Madam Speaker, Rs 2 billion has been injected into the Price Stabilisation Fund, but this is déjà vu, repeated year after year without robust price controls or meaningful subsidies. Madam Speaker, the Government speak of resilience but the people feel exhaustion. Madam Speaker, a new income tax band for high earners have been introduced. But what about the middle class? What incentives are there for them? Why charging an additional 5% on insurance?

Madam Speaker, indirect taxes remain suffocating. Every shopping cart is taxed. The extension on sugar tax and excise duty on consumer goods hit working-class families the

hardest. This budget taxes the shopping cart, not the yacht. Madam Speaker, the budget proposes making renewal of motor vehicle licence conditional on upfront payment of traffic fines. This is a lazy revenue collection. Citizens caught in bureaucratic delays or contesting fines in court will be unfairly penalised.

And then, Madam Speaker, the number plate fiasco. Contradictions between the hon. Prime Minister's speech and the hon. Minister of Transport's clarification yesterday have created confusion and public outcry. A second freeze. *Deziem* own goal.

Madam Speaker, this budget fails to protect local SMEs from unfair competition and rising operational cost. We are placing too much emphasis on attracting foreign high-impact investments in the new SEZs while neglecting foundational businesses that employ the vast majority of our citizens.

Madam Speaker, Mauritius needs structural reforms, not cuts in acquired rights. What our people demand are solutions that touch their daily lives. We must secure our food supply by investing in local agriculture and reducing dependence on imports. Madam Speaker, we must fix our water system by repairing leaking pipes, modernising reservoirs, and exploring desalination. We must stabilise electricity cost by accelerating renewable energy and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. And above all, we must demand accountability. Every rupee spent must deliver results, not vanity projects. Madam Speaker, Mauritius must reform the state before reforming the citizens.

Madam Speaker, the easy path is always to cut pensions, raise taxes, or borrow more. The hard path is to confront inefficiency, waste, and entrenched privilege. But it is the hard path that leads to sustainable progress. Mauritius deserves a Government that reforms itself before reforming its citizens.

Madam Speaker, we will continue to fight for dignity, fairness, and accountability. We will stand with the pensioners, the workers, the families. Madam Speaker, this budget is one of broken promise. It is a fake budget without the actual reality that has been presented to the population.

Mauritius deserves better. Madam Speaker, even if the Public Gathering Act is amended to impose stricter penalties, people will be on the street like before to voice out when there is need, because Mauritius belongs to them.

Madam Speaker, Mauritius must choose transformation over deception, reform over regression, courage over cowardice. That is the path forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you so much.

Yes, hon. First Member for La Caverne and Phoenix!

(2.30 p.m.)

**Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I will not go into points raised by fellow Members in this House because we are all very well versed on what is happening with all the measures that have been presented.

Let me from the very beginning say to this august Assembly that I have listened carefully to the message of the Prime Minister on 01 January 2026 and the message was *2026 sera l'année de l'économie*. He went on to say that *2026 sera l'année de tous les chantiers aussi*.

We saw the establishment of the Constitutional Review Commission. We saw consultation that has started on the electoral reforms. Now, through this budget – part or most of it – there have been measures that are establishing structural reforms to attract more investors and also to lay down the foundation of a new economy, because the compass of this Government, Madam Speaker, is this: A Bridge to the Future. This is the compass of this Government. There is a mandate of five years to make this document happen with regard to all the measures that were being announced.

In 2025, Madam Speaker, the main objective of this Government was to restore democracy and to have independent institutions functioning properly. We have seen how the powers of the DPP were restored. We saw how and we are seeing how the FCC is working. This was part of this document. When I go further, Madam Speaker, this document talks also about a new economic model. So, my main argument is when we speak about a new economic model, we need to start building on what we already have. We have a very vibrant constitution that we will be amending, I hope so, by the end of this mandate. I hope so. This is the hope of the population. There are structural reforms with regard to energy transition that should be made.

The water sector, Madam Speaker, I have seen in this budget Rs6.4 billion over three years will be allocated in this sector. I must say this is in the right direction. However, we do not see structural reforms with regard to the water sector. We have seen almost every day

hon. Minister Assirvaden using his good office to make his voice heard with regard to how CWA should do their day-to-day management. We all are concerned. In most constituencies, we do not get basic water. It is not about management of water resources in case of a drought, but it is a question of management of the organisation itself. You apply for a house connection; you will get it in a year maybe. This is the plea that we get almost every week from our constituents.

So, the answer is in this document as well, Madam Speaker, at page 33 of the Government Programme, I quote –

“The Government will review the National Water Policy and the National Integrated Water Resources Management Plan. There are currently four different institutions associated with the management of water resources in Mauritius with hardly any coordination among them. This calls for a revamping of the governance structure of those institutions.”

This is in the Government Programme. Madam Speaker, way back in 2013, there was a comprehensive report from the Ministry of Public Utilities by the then Labour Government that was prepared with the help of experts from Singapore and they advocated that we need a water board, a water authority. We need to harmonise all the organisations that are being used to manage water, be it irrigation, waste water, potable water, but we need to harmonise those institutions. So, structural reforms should start with such a vital sector because year in, year out, we have the same problem.

The hon. Minister will always use his good office to try and solve matter on a day-to-day basis. We cannot continue like that in a modern society. Right to water is a constitutional right. We have a problem. The World Bank said way back in 2008 that Mauritius will be a water-stressed, a water-scarce country. So, all Governments that have been coming have neglected this very fundamental part of reforming this water sector.

The CWA Act, Madam Speaker, dates back to 1971. The CEB dates back to 1951. Yes, there has been some amendments made, but these two sectors are very important for this country, Madam Speaker. So, maybe in the weeks or months to come, independent of budgetary provisions, Government will come forward with structural reforms with regard to these two sectors: energy and water.

With regard to – I heard my hon. friend Baboolall and also hon. Adrien Duval who is not here – talking about Chagos, that *manque à gagner* in the government's coffers. Yes, that

is true. *C'est un manque à gagner*, but we need to unite on the Chagos issue, not divide. We cannot do politics on Chagos, Madam Speaker. We know what the problem is all about. When Government took over in November 2024, with the efforts and experience of the former Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Bérenger, the hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Attorney General, the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, they embarked in a vibrant economic and diplomatic quest with the British people, with the British Government.

We all know. We read every day about the unpredictability of the temper of the President of the USA, Mr Donald Trump. One day he says something, the other day he changes! Of course, we have to put up with all that. All the efforts were put. All the efforts are still being put. But we need to know the reality and the facts.

The facts are that, Madam Speaker, way back in 2010, it was the first legal challenge before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea that gave the impetus to Government to go ahead and claim. It was done by the hon. Prime Minister at that time, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell. That was a milestone, a major achievement in what we have acquired so far.

So, Chagos should be above politics. We all want the rights of the Chagossians to be respected, but also our sovereignty, which is unquestionable on this issue. We will be looking forward to the diplomatic or in any event legal actions of the Mauritian Government because we know that we have signed a political agreement with the British in May 2025, and they have to abide and respect international law.

With regard to increasing prices, hon. Baboolall has been mentioning same, but I was listening to hon. Minister Yeung Sik Yuen yesterday, Madam Speaker. He came with a list, very comprehensive, very vividly presented, of more than 700 products that, as from 01 July, will have a decrease. So, this is a laudable initiative.

I have also taken note that the Prime Minister will also encourage, maybe in the weeks to come, this issue of parallel import. So, this will also be a game changer with regard to decrease in price and curtailing the high cost of living.

We have spoken largely about AI. This is the future. We have to adapt and adopt those methodologies. The hon. Minister Dr. Ramtohul, was very explicit in his explanation. It was very clear to the nation on where we are targeting and where we are going. So, it is now a question of implementation but, Madam Speaker, what is also very encouraging is, now, the

Government is seriously taking into consideration a very important pillar of our economy: the port. When we were in the Opposition, hon. Uteem, hon. Minister Dr. Boolell, myself, and other Members, we were asking the previous government with regard to where they were with their master plan. There was a master plan way back in 2021. The then hon. Prime Minister said, 'No, we will not implement it. We will prepare another one.'

In the meantime, what has happened, Madam Speaker, we had had the report of the Container Port Performance Index, published jointly by the World Bank and the S&P Global Market Intelligence. Port Louis Harbour was severely penalised from its operational inefficiencies, and it was dragged down. Out of 348 ports, Madam Speaker, we have been ranked 327. We all know, in the whole world, we are known as the star and key of the Indian Ocean. We have been known for our port. And when we see the fate of our port today, Madam Speaker, it gives us hope that those billions of rupees, billions of dollars, that will be forthcoming in investing in the port sector will be also a game changer in terms of FDI.

Madam Speaker, I have made a rough calculation in terms of the number of big vessels that pass through our territorial waters. Around 35,000 to 40,000 pass through our territorial waters, but very few will stop for bunkering purposes at the ports of Mauritius. So, this is an immediate call for economic diplomacy to be used to give facilities to those big vessels. If you can attract some 500 to 1,000 more of those vessels to Mauritius, it will generate around Rs5 to Rs10 billion a year. So, investment in the port is important, and the implementation phase is also very important, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, with regard to capital projects for my constituency, unfortunately, none in the Budget. We do not see any new capital projects in this Budget.

With regard to the pension – I have got only two minutes, and I will conclude on it – true it is that the hon. Prime Minister froze this decision of the means test for the Basic Retirement Pension. I heard hon. Baboolall, but way back in June 2025, there was only one or two MPs that voiced out, myself and hon. Juman. And I stand by my position way back in June 2025. We are for the maintenance of the Basic Retirement Pension. This is one of the pillars of the welfare state. With my political conviction as a member of the Fabian Society, I cannot accept the re-introduction of means test in this country.

The people should know that we did have means test way back in 1950. There was an ordinance in 1951, whereby we had means test for old age pension. It was repealed and

replaced, in 1958, by an ordinance presented by the then Sir Guy Forget. Then, it was on a temporary basis. In 1975, it was consolidated with other pension schemes, and it became one of the three pillars of our welfare state – free education, free healthcare, and basic retirement pension for our old people.

It is about dignity, Madam Speaker. So, I would humbly propose that we do create a select committee of this House. Let us all give our views as per our convictions and positions. Let us all harmonise our views because we meet people. We see how the cry of the people has been placing it on all Members that have been visiting their constituencies. I appreciate that Government and the Prime Minister have heard the voice of the people. So, I would ask for the implementation of a select committee of this House to study the interim report that we, Members of Parliament, have never seen.

For pension reforms to go ahead, it is just like constitutional reforms and electoral reforms. We need wide consultations. Even if we have got 60-0 victory, we do not have the popular mandate to come with pension reforms. We need to consult our people, like when amending the Constitution or bringing electoral reforms. These three reforms should be widely circulated in the population, properly disseminated and explained so that we can come with an informed decision or whatever legislation the Government might deem it fit.

So, I would rest my plea, my submission, my speech on the fact that we cannot have an economic model that would look only at figures, GDP. We need to look at the welfare, the wellness, the well-being and the mental health of our society. We need a people-centred economy. This new economic model should pave the way for a future people-centred economy. We have to move away from this neoliberalism economy. It has served us since World War II, but it is *dépassée, déphasée*. There is a famous economist, Mrs Mariana Mazzucato. She is advocating that around the world, that it is time to move on. We cannot stay in the same stereotyped economic model, or else it will be just playing with figures, positive, negative, profit and loss. But what about human dignity? After COVID, it has been an eye-opener for survival of the human being.

So, I need and I hope that Government will consider to move on this new economic path, new economic model, to have a people-centred economy in the near future.

I thank you for your kind attention, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you.

Yes, hon. Junior Minister!

(2.49 p.m.)

**The Junior Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Pierre):** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the floor to intervene on the Appropriation (2026-2027) Bill (No. IX of 2026). I would like to apologise to the audience because of the quality of my voice, but I was not given the chance to change my slot. Believe it or not, two days ago, I could not even say a word, and I hope you will understand the speech.

I would like to start with a quote from Martin Luther King –

“There comes a time when one [needs to make a decision], take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, [not even] popular (...).”

And I will agree and argue with both sides of the House.

We have been, in this country, debating about the BRP, the pension reform, for more than a year now, since the introduction of the new model for the BRP. We have had people on the road; we have had people in the press and in this august Assembly debating on the pension reform. I cannot – I hope you will accept that this is not out of context – not talk about the introduction of the State Age Pension and the story of where it begins.

The hon. Prime Minister mentioned that you cannot go to the beginning and change it, but we can start where we are today. But I would like to go back to where it all started. It all started in 2014 when our debt to GDP – source from the IMF and the Bank of Mauritius – stood at 60%, 59 something or 60%. This is where it was. This is the record. I think Members of Parliament, the press and the people who read figures need to educate the population.

I really commend the intervention of hon. Beehook yesterday. He was talking about why Moody's and the IMF are important, and why our rating is important. Not because Moody's has something to do with our economy, but because our peers rated at BAA3, and even the recommendation of IMF, is to bring the debt below 75% to GDP. We stand today at approximately, close to 90. I cannot commend; I have heard my colleagues commending the Bill. But we cannot commend it. It is being changed.

The means test has been frozen, which means your debt figures have been changing. I do not even know if anyone in the Assembly can give us the real figure of what the debt will be now that it is frozen, and what the deficit of Rs31 billion that is mentioned in the budget will be. We don't have this figure.

I am supportive of a lot of reforms. I would like to say at the outset – I apologise because I won't have time – that I commend the work that has been done by a lot of ministries; hon. Minister Assirvaden and hon. Shakeel Mohamed. They didn't pay me!

I would like to talk for the people as well. The new reforms to ease the population with water; the new reforms for the people of NHDC; reforms from gender equality, even if we know that there are some fine tunings that need to be done. I won't extend myself on that.

I would like to talk about the SAP, and of course, I would like to talk a little bit about tourism. It is my field. I would also like to talk about the voices of the people. I am not defending a voice of a community. I think this is over. This time is over. Our people are clever than that.

We are all Mauritians. When the pension is reformed, when the tax is increased, it affects all population. *Ce n'est pas une guerre de race. C'est une guerre de classe.* I think, once and for all, the people need to understand. Looking at what happened when the hon. Prime Minister read the Appropriation Bill – I cannot not come to that topic because it has been in the press – a group of Ministers went to see the hon. Prime Minister. It was in the press that some Ministers wanted to resign. It has been public. So, I think we need to understand.

Reading to some members commending the hon. Prime Minister moved to change the means test. *Let me say at the outset : je suis contre l'abolition d'une pension universelle. Je pense que malgré tout ce que les éditorialistes écrivent relatant l'historique de la pension, quand est-ce qu'elle a été changée et est-ce qu'elle a été contributive ou pas, notre peuple ne comprend pas cela. Ce qu'elle comprend, c'est qu'elle a fait provision d'un budget.*

Je connais quelqu'un qui attendait la pension. Et puis, il y a eu le budget de l'année dernière. On lui a dit qu'il n'aurait pas de pension à 60 ans. Il a attendu encore une année, croyant qu'il allait l'avoir. Et puis, est venu le budget. On l'a lu. On lui a dit : 'Non, maintenant, si tu touches plus que R 50 000 ou R 14 000, il y aura des ajustements.' Je veux juste qu'on puisse comprendre ce que ressent la population.

*Je sais que nous avons besoin de regarder.* I will also like to move on one side saying that we need to reduce the debt. We cannot keep on going like that and keep on increasing the debt to GDP. I understand the motives, and I will not blame those people working on that. I can understand the motives and intentions. We can all understand where they are coming from. Even when you raise the tax on insurance for car, for housing, on sugar, etc., you are trying to add rupees to rupees. But you also need to understand what does that mean. We have read this morning in *Le Défi* that the small businesses are complaining *parce que les prix des kalamindas deviendront maintenant* unreachable.

Je parlerai même – je l’ai dit au départ : je ne serais pas populaire – du fait qu’on a augmenté le prix des cigarettes. Je ne suis pas pour le tabagisme ni l’alcoolisme. Cela a détruit ma famille. Mais essayez de comprendre. Ce fumeur ou ce buveur, il prendra dans le budget de sa famille pour continuer à acheter ses cigarettes. Oui, faites des campagnes de lutte contre le tabagisme et l’alcool. Je suis d’accord. Mais continuez à aller dans cette direction et essayez de tout augmenter, à la fin de la journée, le pouvoir d’achat ne sera plus soutenable.

Et je dois dire – puisque je ne suis pas d’accord avec l’honorable Baboolall parlant du pouvoir d’achat des prix – que je devrais aussi saluer l’effort – et je crois que la population le voit – du ministère des Commerces. Même si notre pédagogie n’est pas ce qu’elle devrait être, notre communication a encore beaucoup de chemin à faire, mais personne ne peut nier qu’il y a un ministère, aujourd’hui, qui lutte pour le pouvoir d’achat ; les subsides, les prix qui ont été réduits. Il y a la liste. Trois documents ont été déposés. Donc, il faut reconnaître les efforts qui sont faits ici et là. C’est une vérité.

Mais je plaide ici, aujourd’hui, en faveur des Mauriciens. Un ministre a dit que ce budget a été fait par des gens non élus. Et je suis d’accord avec lui ! Un ministre a dit, ici, qu’on devrait aller chercher l’argent là où se trouvent les dividendes. Je suis aussi d’accord avec lui. Je suis aussi d’accord avec le monde des affaires puisque je viens des affaires. On a besoin d’être attractif pour les affaires.

Donc, oui, nous avons des *Advisers*, mais nous sommes les élus du peuple. Il faudrait nous écouter. Je rejoins l’honorable Lobine qui dit : « Il faudrait nous écouter. » Nous avons des experts dans cette Chambre. C’est pour cela que la population nous a élus également.

Je souhaiterais attirer l’attention de la Chambre sur quelque chose. Il y a tellement de choses que je passerai rapidement. Je rejoins ma voix à celle de l’honorable Savabaddy et

l'honorable Beehook concernant le *Public Gathering Act*. Bien que je comprenne les motivations qu'on peut avoir encore plus d'argent, mais le message qu'on envoie à la population n'est pas celui que l'Alliance du Changement a envoyé en 2024. Nous avons rétabli la liberté et la démocratie. J'insiste pour qu'on puisse aller chercher l'argent ailleurs.

Ce n'est pas quelques milliers de roupies en plus, comme ce que nous avons économisé sur le BRP quand on a annulé la pension. Et laissez-moi dire d'emblée : j'ai dit que ce n'est pas un discours *safe*, et même si je devais m'asseoir quelque part là-bas, il n'y a absolument aucun problème. Quand j'ai démissionné de mon travail pour venir rejoindre, ici, cette auguste Assemblée, c'était encore plus *unsafe*. Et aujourd'hui, vous le comprendrez.

Laissez-moi lire quelque chose pour le monde des affaires aussi. Vous savez, l'ADSU ne peut pas aller dans toutes les maisons chercher s'il y a de la drogue juste pour prétendre dire qu'on lutte contre la drogue. Je prends cette analogie pour parler du *Banking Act*.

*The Banking Act will be amended to* [Dans l'annexe numéro 30] –

“ (a) provide that the duty of confidentiality will not apply where a financial institution is ordered to disclose information (...) [*sans l'avis d'un juge*].”

Je vous laisserai lire.

J'attire l'attention de la Chambre sur le fait que sans l'avis d'un juge de la cour, la FCC, demain, pourra aller questionner toutes les banques sur n'importe quelle entreprise, sur votre business. Je comprends l'idée. Je comprends les motivations.

Mais posez-vous la question : quelle entreprise, quel entrepreneur décidera, demain, de venir s'établir à Maurice ? Même si on envoie une lettre anonyme sur votre business ou sur votre entreprise, on sera obligé d'envoyer un mot à toutes les banques pour questionner. Est-ce que cela va dans le sens des business ?

Je ne sais pas quelle heure il est ou si j'ai encore du temps, Madame la présidente ? Dix minutes au moins, non ?

**Madam Speaker:** Ah non, non ! Pas du tout. Une minute !

**Mr Pierre:** Je n'ai même pas encore ...

**Madam Speaker:** Je vous en donne deux.

**Mr Pierre:** Non. Non. Non.

**Madam Speaker:** Deux, je vous en donne deux.

**Mr Pierre:** 48, j'ai regardé l'heure. 48, l'honorable Lobine, il a pris encore plus de temps. Il a eu 24 minutes.

**Madam Speaker:** Allez, je vous donne. On fait du marché maintenant.

**Mr Pierre:** Je prends 5-6 minutes pour terminer.

**Madam Speaker:** Non, 3 minutes je vous donne.

**Mr Pierre:** D'accord.

**Madam Speaker:** On négocie.

**Mr Pierre:** Je n'ai même pas encore commencé mais ce n'est pas grave. J'ai mis quelques notes ici. Je souhaiterais parler un peu du tourisme. Nous avons beaucoup de défis à relever. Mais ce que je suis en train de dire, c'est que, avant d'approuver *l'Appropriation Bill 2026-2027*, et j'attends du *summing up* qu'on puisse nous donner les chiffres du déficit budgétaire, des chiffres du ratio de la dette par rapport au Produit Intérieur Brut (PIB).

Qu'on aille chercher, puisque le peuple n'a pas voté des comptables, sinon ça aurait été très facile de mettre des experts-comptables à la tête du pays, prendre ici, diminuer ici et réduire là-bas et faire comme on l'appelle nous sur *Excel*, un *goal seek*. Je demande à l'Excel d'aller chercher une dette au GDP qui me ramène à moins de 80 ou 70 ou ce qu'on veut.

Non, on a besoin des politiciens, même si je ne suis pas partisan de la politique de Macron, mais quand il parlait en même temps, on a besoin de s'occuper de l'économie, mais nous avons également besoin de comprendre la population, de chaque cas, de chaque situation.

Quand on enlève, quand on ajoute des taxes ici, oui, on n'a pas augmenté la TVA, mais c'est comme si on l'avait fait. Regardez là où les taxes sont parties, combien de personnes payent l'assurance médicale, combien de personnes payent l'assurance d'une voiture – 5 % dessus.

Je souhaiterais aujourd'hui, avant de terminer dans deux minutes, faire un aveu que nous avons pris une bonne route. Quand je regarde aujourd'hui le casse-tête déjà que l'honorable Premier ministre a, en entendant tous les gens le féliciter d'avoir enlevé le *means test*, que je suis contre également, moi je suis pour la pension universelle ; même si tu touches un million de roupies, on te donne la pension. On va le chercher dans les taxes. On a la possibilité de te retracer, d'aller le reprendre dans les taxes.

Tout le monde dans ce pays, vous pourrez me donner toute l'historique de la pension, quand elle a commencé, quand elle a été contributive ou pas. Nous sommes tous d'avis aujourd'hui qu'on a la possibilité d'aller chercher la pension de ceux et celles qui n'ont pas besoin, avec notre méthode de taxation. Je termine par le tourisme. Nous avons aussi des défis. Pendant que je vous parle ici, vous voyez les chiffres tomber vous-même dans la presse. J'ai noté deux points mentionnés.

L'honorable ministre a parlé hier de *branding*, je ne l'ai pas vu dans le budget. On a parlé de l'école hôtelière. Depuis le premier jour arrivé au ministère, l'honorable ministre sera d'accord, on a milité et l'honorable ministre de l'Éducation n'est pas là, il est important, le rapport d'audit va tomber, j'ai été dans ce comité. Vous allez voir le rapport d'audit. On ne peut plus garder et il faut le dire fort, d'une manière ouverte – si nous voulons vraiment résoudre le problème de main d'œuvre et de qualité dans le tourisme, l'école hôtelière doit revenir, doit être sous le ministère du Tourisme et non pas sous le ministère de l'Éducation.

J'ai combattu, Madame la présidente, pendant des années, 30 ans, dans cette industrie. Je ne répondrai pas à mes détracteurs. Juste, j'ai vu un article, mais bon, je suis politicien même si ma peau n'est pas encore la peau d'éléphant.

**Madam Speaker:** On ne se réfère pas.

**Mr Pierre:** Ce n'est plus la peau d'hippopotame. Madame la présidente, je termine mon discours, s'il vous plaît.

**Madam Speaker:** Non, mais on ne se réfère pas aux journaux.

**Mr Pierre:** Non, non. Je vous dis ce que je pense, c'est tout. Je ne me réfère pas. Je vous dis que j'ai lu un journal ce matin. Je ne suis pas en train de répondre à une question, je fais ma plaidoirie. Je dis ce que j'ai vu – *Junior kot sorti sa banla*. Il y en a beaucoup de ces honorables *Junior Ministers* qui sont constamment critiqués partout. Mais allez voir leur CV, regardez leur CV. Je vous donne le mien sans faire très éloge de tout ça. *Senior Vice-President* dans un des plus grands groupes hôteliers mauriciens, *Executive Vice-President* dans des plus grands groupes hôteliers du monde, *CEO* d'un conglomérat en Afrique.

*Junior* aujourd'hui, c'est ce qu'on nous appelle, mais regardez ce qu'on a fait. Pendant la période de crise, j'ai présidé une réunion de crise pour trouver des solutions pour rediriger moins 60 % de passagers qui ne pouvaient tomber avec Emirates. Même si notre contribution à tous, je parle au nom de tous les honorables *Junior Ministers* qui ne parlent pas, nous sommes là pour contribuer à ce gouvernement, à cette économie et tous ces *Juniors*, comme

moi, n'auront aucun problème demain à partir et aller ailleurs si notre contribution n'est pas reconnue.

Je vous remercie, Madame la présidente. Merci, même si je n'ai pas eu le temps qu'il me fallait pour dire tout ce que j'avais à dire. Merci.

**Madam Speaker:** Merci. Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs! I am sorry about the time. You do not realise but I gave you quite a few minutes.

**Mr Pierre:** No, only one minute, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Non, non, non. C'est comptabiliser.

**Mr Pierre:** Yesterday some MPs had 24 minutes. We have records as well.

**Madam Speaker:** Mais nous aussi on a des *double records*.

Hon. Minister!

(3.06 p.m.)

**The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr D. Ramful):** I also hope that I will have the same treatment, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes. I am noting. Now, you are starting at 15.06 p.m.

**Mr Ramful:** Merci, Madame la présidente. Permettez-moi d'abord de répondre à l'honorable leader de l'opposition sur la réforme de la pension parce qu'il oublie ou plutôt fait semblant d'oublier les vraies raisons qui ont conduit à ce gouvernement d'entamer une réforme du système de pension non-contributif – le *Basic Retirement Pension*.

Madame la présidente, ceux qui me connaissent le sait, j'ai un franc-parler. Je ne parle pas le double langage parce que, Madame la présidente, on ne guérit pas les plaies en les léchant avec une langue de bois. Ce pays est financièrement gravement malade. Il y en a deux raisons principales, Madame la présidente. Un manque de courage politique de la part du leadership du MSM d'imposer des mesures impopulaires mais nécessaires afin d'assurer la pérennité financière du système de la pension face au vieillissement de la population. Deux, l'obsession du MSM de rester au pouvoir, favorisant des mesures populistes aux dépens de la dégradation financière et de la dilapidation de la caisse publique.

Résultat, Madame la présidente, après 10 ans de règne du MSM, on hérite en 2024 une situation financière avec les besoins budgétaires de R 91 milliards, équivalent à plus d'un deux tiers de nos dépenses uniquement pour la protection sociale, incluant le BRP.

Madame la présidente, un pays est dans l'obligation de protéger financièrement ses citoyens les plus vulnérables en leur donnant une protection sociale. Mais plus important encore, un gouvernement a aussi le devoir de gérer les finances de l'État à ce qu'il puisse réserver un budget adéquat aux plus vulnérables.

Le MSM a clairement failli sur cette gérance et nous a légué une croissance très moyenne pendant les 10 dernières années avec un déficit budgétaire qui ne cesse de grandir, des milliards de roupies imprimés pour couvrir ces déficits, les fonds de nos paraétatiques dilapidés et une dette de 90 % de PIB qui avoisine les R 600 milliards. C'est ce que nous avons hérité du MSM et tout le monde dans cette Chambre le connaît, sauf l'honorable Leader de l'opposition. Très peu de pays dans le monde – je dis bien – très peu de pays dans le monde peut soutenir financièrement un budget où plus d'un tiers de dépenses sont réservées aux protections sociales et ce sont surtout les pays développés de l'OCDE.

Même pour ces pays, la pension est soit contributive ou ciblée au profit des plus vulnérables. Un petit pays état insulaire comme le nôtre, sans réserve pétrolier, sans réserve minérale et sans réserve naturelle, soutenir un tel budget est devenu financièrement très difficile, surtout avec la situation catastrophique que le MSM nous a léguée. A Maurice, il faut aussi le reconnaître, qu'en plus d'un budget pour la protection sociale, presque tous les services essentiels publics sont gratuits – l'éducation, la santé, le transport pour les *seniors* et les écoliers, les subsides sur les gaz ménagères, le riz ration, la farine, l'électricité et même l'eau, Madame la présidente.

Ce qui est dommage, Madame la présidente, c'est que malgré les avertissements répétitifs des institutions internationales, telles que le FMI et les agences de dotation, malgré le fait que sous la gérance du MSM, la note de crédit souveraine de Maurice est passée de BAA1 à BAA3 en 10 ans, le MSM continuait sa politique de faire *labours dou*, de grossir le budget sur la protection sociale, mais sans un plan de financement soutenable.

**Ms Anquetil:** C'est vrai !

**Mr Ramful:** Leur soi-disant plan de financement, la Contribution Sociale Généralisée, a été un flop. Le ministre Padayachy lui-même avait confirmé dans cette Chambre, deux ans après l'introduction de la CSG, que les 25 milliards, une taxe sur les salaires des travailleurs de ce pays, ont été dilapidés en deux ans seulement. La caisse a été dévidée, Madame la présidente. Et en plus, la NPF, le plan de pension des travailleurs, a été gelé. C'était cela leur plan de financement pour la pension.

Un échec total, Madame la présidente ! Et ils osent parler de voleurs de pension ? C'est eux qui ont volé les pensions des travailleurs de ce pays en dilapidant le fond de la CSG. C'est à cause de leur mauvaise gestion que nous sommes forcés aujourd'hui de réformer notre système de la pension. Et maintenant, comme des pompiers pyromanes, ils veulent qu'on arrête tout et mettent en danger l'avenir de nos pays et de ces jeunes.

Et maintenant, ces pyromanes disent qu'à leur retour au pouvoir, ils vont retourner la pension à 60 ans. D'abord, ils ne vont pas retourner au pouvoir. Deuxièmement, il faut leur demander comment ? Comment vont-ils le faire ? En imprimant de l'argent ? En augmentant la CSG ? En augmentant la *VAT* ? En taxant la population ? Alors, il faut leur demander. C'est trop facile de le dire. En dépréciant la roupie ?

L'autre jour, dans une émission sur une radio privée, j'avais posé la question à l'honorable leader de l'opposition, s'il s'avérait vrai que le MSM avait fait fi des recommandations du FMI sur le besoin urgent d'une réforme de la pension. Et vous savez ce qu'il m'a répondu, Madame la présidente ? *Rapor IMF, mo met dan tirwar mwa* ! C'est exactement cette attitude qu'a adoptée le MSM pendant 10 ans !

Et, malheureusement, c'est nous qui avons maintenant ce fardeau politique et financier d'apporter des changements dans le système de pension afin d'assurer sa pérennité financière pour nos aînés et pour les générations futures. On doit, Madame la présidente, saluer le courage et la compréhension de l'honorable Premier ministre. Malgré qu'il sache que cette décision pèsera lourd sur sa politique de consolidation fiscale et qu'il doit maintenant difficilement défendre ce budget devant les institutions internationales, il a décidé de geler cette réforme sur la pension.

Mais on craint – je ne le souhaite pas – que le prochain rating des agences de notation nous laisse dans une situation extrêmement difficile. Et j'espère que ces politiciens provocateurs, agissant comme des pompiers pyromanes qui profitent de la situation financière pour provoquer le peuple, auront la décence d'assumer leur responsabilité.

Madame la présidente, je vais m'arrêter sur la question de la pension. Et j'espère sincèrement que la population comprendra la situation financière du pays, qui est très difficile.

There is an expression in English which says that when a patient is ill, he is not cured by changing doctors. He is cured by getting the right medicine. This country was financially

sick under the MSM. You believed in us and you voted for us. We will make sure that we find the right medicine together.

Madam Speaker, allow me also to reply to the Opposition Whip, hon. Adrien Duval, who is unfortunately not here, concerning expenses of my Ministry.

He is never here. Exactly!

Il parle de gaspillages dans les missions étrangères *as if it is our doing*. Vous savez, moi, je suis quelqu'un qui fait mon travail tranquillement. Je respecte mes adversaires politiques, mais je n'aime pas qu'on fasse de la démagogie. Parce qu'en se faisant, on est en train d'insulter l'intelligence des Mauriciens.

First of all, where on earth did he find in the budget an increase in expenditure of my Ministry by an additional Rs203 million? In fact, the budget has decreased by Rs300 million from Rs1.9 billion in the last financial year to Rs1.6 billion this financial year. I do not know if the excise duty on hard liquor is having some effect on him!

Secondly, on the item for expenses relating to our missions abroad, the budget has increased by Rs100 million, mainly because of capital projects regarding renovations of the government-owned properties abroad. Let me remind him what the MSM government did at the expense of taxpayers.

*The very MSM, which he had gladly embraced as Speaker!* Les gaspillages mentionnés dans le rapport de l'audit de 2024, que l'honorable A. Duval ne mentionne pas, et que je dois maintenant remédier. En 2022, the High Commissioner of Maputo, nominated by the MSM, pocketed Rs2.5 million of taxpayers' money staying in a hotel for 11 months despite the availability of an alternative fully furnished apartment at a lower rate.

Since 2021, again, under the MSM regime, Rs18 million of taxpayers' money have been spent on maintenance of an unoccupied building to house the High Commissioner in Washington. The house comprises 18 rooms and is found on two acres of land. Rs18 million spent on an unoccupied building! I wonder where was the Opposition Whip then. *Aster ki so somey finn kasela? Li ti pe koz koze ek MSM!* It is now that we are in the process of selling that property, which will bring back to the consolidated fund above Rs100 million. Since 2017, we have spent Rs8.9 million, 4000 euros *par mois*, as rental for housing the First Secretary in Paris.

This is because the building owned by government was vacated for renovation. Nine years later, no renovation works have been carried out. Immediately after I took office, I caused the building to be repaired and is now housing the First Secretary, thus saving public funds. Where was the Opposition Whip then? Where was he? *Ti pe bwar dite dan la kwizinn!*

En 2019, the High Commissioner's residence in London – *ekout sanla. Fami Pravind Jugnauth sa!*

**An hon. Member:** Nunkoo!

**Mr Ramful:** Again, a government-owned property was vacated because of renovation works. Up until now, no renovation work has been carried out. Again, a rented apartment was taken to house the High Commissioner. The total rent spent by the MSM Ambassador for his stay amounted to nearly 60 million of taxpayers' money. *Sa ki apel gaspiyaz!*

*(Interruptions)*

Now, in this budget, we have allocated money...

*(Interruptions)*

We have allocated funds for renovation work. *Ekout sanala*, in New York, the then ambassador was staying in a tower – not Trump Tower, another tower – paying a monthly rent of 28,000 USD per month, Rs1.3 million *par mois*. Today our ambassador in New York is paying less than half that amount. In 2022, Government had spent Rs238 millions for the construction of a new building in Addis to accommodate the chancellery, the home-based staff and the then ambassador. The MSM-nominated ambassador refused to move in that building on the ground that the apartment did not ensure his privacy. The floor assigned to him remained unoccupied since June 2022 and in the meantime, Government had to pay an additional sum of Rs8.4 millions to accommodate the ambassador in a hotel where he was paying 6,000 USD monthly. This is how public money was being wasted under the MSM and I wonder where the Opposition Whip was at that time. If I may borrow the words of hon. Joanna Bérenger, *li ti pe bat bat boul ar MSM*.

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, I heard the Whip of Opposition making reference *aux dépenses pour les voyages officiels*. Where were his apprehensions about waste of taxpayers' money when he effected three missions spending Rs778,000 in 78 days as an MSM-elected Speaker? Madam Speaker, on this, I rest my case against the Opposition Whip.

Madam Speaker, allow me now to get into the philosophy of this budget. Mauritius enters this budget cycle from a position of hard-won stability, but still, with significant work ahead. Real GDP growth stood at around 3.1% in financial year 2026 and an acceleration to 3.5% is expected in financial year 2027. Inflation has fallen to approximately 3.7%, down from an average near 7% between 2022 and 2024. Gross official reserves have climbed to more than 10.3 billion USD, the highest level in decades. Total investment – the Leader of Opposition was talking about investment – reached approximately 146.7 billion in 2025, while unemployment has eased to around 5.7%. These are not merely statistics. Lower inflation protects household purchasing power, strong reserves strengthen confidence in our economy, higher investment creates opportunities for businesses to expand. Together, they provide the conditions necessary for stronger and more sustainable economic growth. What has improved is the foundation on which stronger growth can be built.

The strategic objective of Budget 2026-2027 is therefore clear; we have to convert stability into momentum and to move Mauritius from a consumption-driven and debt-supported model towards a production-driven, investment-led and export-oriented economy. The budget is guided by four principles –

- responsibility;
- solidarity;
- economic efficiency, and
- social justice.

At the same time, the fiscal deficit, although one percentage point around more than what was initially projected before the decision to freeze the pension reforms, will continue to narrow. Fiscal consolidation and economic growth are not competing objectives. In this budget, they reinforce each other.

Madam Speaker, investors will not commit long-term capital to an economy whose future direction is uncertain. Stability is not a constraint on growth. Stability is the foundation of growth. When businesses decide where to invest, they evaluate risk. They ask whether inflation will remain under control. They ask whether the currency will remain stable. They ask whether Government finances are sustainable and whether policies can be relied upon over the long term. This budget provides reassuring answers to those questions. Inflation has returned within target level. International reserves stand at record highs. The deficit is on a

declining path. Public debt is being placed on a more sustainable trajectory. Each of these developments reduces the risk premium attached to Mauritius.

A lower risk premium translates into a lower cost of borrowing and a lower cost of capital. That makes it easier for businesses to invest, expand, and create jobs. This is why fiscal credibility matters. The reforms contained in this budget, the rebalancing of corporate taxation toward productive investment, and the commitment to strengthen the primary balance are not simply accounting exercises. They send a powerful signal that Mauritius remains committed to sound economic management. That confidence matters because every new investment project ultimately translates into economic activity, employment opportunities, and higher incomes for Mauritian families.

Madam Speaker, while macroeconomic stability attracts investors, ease of doing business determines whether these investments will materialise. For too long, one of the greatest obstacles facing investors has not been taxation but delays. Time lost in permits, licenses, and administrative procedures increases cost and discourages investment. This budget addresses that challenge directly.

The new Business Facilitation Bill and the comprehensive review of permits and licensing procedures will reduce unnecessary delays, simplify processes, and create a more efficient interface between businesses and Government. Reducing the time required to start and operate a business effectively increases the return on investment without imposing additional costs on taxpayers. The budget also strengthens the investment framework; a more streamlined occupation permit regime, a golden visa pathway to attract high-value long-term investment...

*(Interruptions)*

It is too late, too late.

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Speaker:** Members! Members!

*(Interruptions)*

Members! Minister, do not be distracted!

*(Interruptions)*

Don't be distracted!

**Mr Ramful:** ...an enhanced investment tax credit of up to 45% for productive investment, automation, and technology adoption, new migration and skills development measures to address labour market needs. The objective is simple, Madam Speaker. It is to make Mauritius one of the easiest places in the region to invest, operate, and grow a business. More investment means new factories, new offices, new hotels, new logistic facilities, and new economic opportunities. It means more jobs for our youth, more opportunities for entrepreneurs, and greater demand for local suppliers and service providers.

Madam Speaker, if stability is the foundation and facilitation is the gateway, then industry is the engine of growth that this budget seeks to strengthen. The proposed Industrial Bill represents a major step towards rebuilding Mauritius' productive capacity and strengthening its position as a competitive manufacturing hub. This is not about returning to low-value production. It is about moving up the value chain through technology, automation, AI, innovation, and higher productivity. Most importantly, the Government has established a clear and measurable objective; to double goods exports from approximately 1.5 billion USD today to 3 billion USD within the next five years. This target matters because exports are one of the most sustainable drivers of long-term growth.

My Ministry has recently completed the negotiations on the deepening of the Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU and the ESA countries, and together with our other preferential and free trade agreements, such as the AfCFTA, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, the SADC and COMESA, with the African continent, the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Trade Agreement with India, the Free Trade Agreement with China, we will ensure that opportunities are translated into meaningful outcomes.

We are also engaging with the USTR on an agreement on reciprocal tariff. We are also engaging with Congress for a long-term renewal of AGOA.

With Japan, following the opening of our embassy, we are now engaging with them, where we are working on an investment protection and promotion agreement.

It is also important to note that at the regional level, following negotiations with Iran, the latter has gracefully agreed to withdraw its candidature to the vice-chair position of the IORA. Therefore, Mauritius will be assuming the vice-chair position this year, and we will be the next chairperson next year, Madam Speaker.

Combien de temps il me reste ?

**Madam Speaker:** Vous avez 4 minutes, Monsieur le ministre !

**Mr Assirvaden:** Il faudra retourner à la page 5. Il vient d'arriver!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Ramful:** Madam Speaker, doubling exports means more factories operating at capacity. It means new production lines being established. It means more opportunities for local suppliers, transport operators, logistic providers, and professional services firms. It means more jobs and stronger incomes across the country. The logistics measures contained in the budget support this ambition. The introduction of greater competition in port operations, expansion of transshipment activities, increased bunkering services, and the advancement of the Island Container Terminal Project will strengthen Mauritius' role as a regional logistic hub.

A competitive economy must be able to not only to produce, but also to connect efficiently with global markets. Unfortunately, under the MSM government, one amongst their many failures was the management of the port. Their mismanagement rather, Madam Speaker. According to the World Bank's 2023 Container Port Performance Index, the port of Mauritius has dropped 39 places from its previous ranking, placing it at 369<sup>th</sup> globally among 405 ports.

Air connectivity is also important. I welcome the Government's decision to allow Ethiopian Airlines to connect Mauritius to Addis Ababa, even though on a provisional basis.

Madam Speaker, while industry and exports form the backbone of the growth strategy, this budget also develops new engines of economic expansion. The establishment of a cultural hub, the development of the film industry, the establishment of the special economic zones, and the investment in artificial intelligence and digital transformation are essential. These initiatives will lay the foundation for economic growth.

None of these ambitions can be sustained without continued fiscal discipline. Interest payments currently absorb a significant share of government expenditure. Every rupee spent servicing debt is a rupee unavailable for infrastructure, education, skills development, and

productive investment. That is why fiscal consolidation is not an obstacle to growth. It is a prerequisite for sustainable growth, and this is what this Government is doing.

Madam Speaker, the central purpose of this budget is growth, but growth of a higher quality –

- growth driven by investment rather than consumption;
- growth driven by production rather than borrowing;
- growth driven by exports rather than dependence on domestic demand alone.

The budget makes coherent and mutually reinforcing choices. It strengthens macroeconomic stability, improves the budget environment, rebuilds industrial capacity, supports exporters, develops new growth sectors, and preserves fiscal sustainability.

The target of doubling goods exports to USD 3 billion within five years is not merely a trade objective. It represents new factories, new businesses, more employment opportunities, stronger income, and greater prosperity for Mauritian families.

The measures are sound. The direction is clear. The opportunity is real. The task before us now is execution because the future depends on what we do in the present. The present calls for delivery, discipline, and the confidence to build a stronger and more prosperous Mauritius. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you. That was perfect timing!

Hon. Junior Minister, David.

(3.36 p.m.)

**The Junior Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Mr F. David):** Madame la présidente, c'est la septième année consécutive que j'interviens sur le budget de l'État dans cette Assemblée nationale. Et j'y vois une différence fondamentale entre une absence de développement économique du passé et une vision stratégique du présent tournée vers l'avenir.

Il y a 4 ans, à la question d'un journaliste au ministre des Finances de l'époque – ce ministre qui a rendu une marque de savate très populaire –, le journaliste lui pose la question sur les pôles de croissance de son budget. J'avais été surpris d'entendre le ministre des Finances de l'époque répondre : « La construction de drains. »

Certes, le secteur de la construction est un pilier économique important, mais à cette même question, aujourd'hui, le ministre des Finances, qui n'est autre que le Premier ministre, lui, nous parle d'intelligence artificielle, de *fintech*, d'énergie renouvelable et d'économie bleue. Il nous parle d'emploi, d'innovation, de richesse et de croissance.

Voilà toute la différence, Madame la présidente, entre un ancien régime qui voyait le développement à travers le béton, à travers les annonces et les dépenses visibles, et ce gouvernement du changement qui voit le développement à travers les compétences, la productivité, la technologie, la sécurité alimentaire, l'océan et la souveraineté économique.

La vraie modernité, Madame la présidente, ce n'est pas seulement de construire des ouvrages ou des infrastructures, mais c'est de construire l'avenir. Si le budget de l'année dernière était celui de la réparation, le budget de cette année, lui, est celui de la reconstruction.

Madame la présidente, ce budget a une qualité rare en politique. Il ne ment pas au pays. Il ne promet pas que tout sera facile. Il ne prétend pas que l'on peut réparer en une année seulement ce qui a été abîmé pendant longtemps. Il dit la vérité, mais il ne s'arrête pas au diagnostic. Il montre déjà les premiers signes du redressement –

- l'inflation recule ;
- le chômage baisse ;
- les réserves se renforcent ;
- le tourisme repart, et
- l'économie retrouve une trajectoire de stabilité.

C'est cela, Madame la présidente, la responsabilité : regarder la réalité en face, refuser les illusions faciles et choisir le chemin exigeant mais nécessaire de la reconstruction nationale.

Madame la présidente, avant de parler de projets, j'aimerais parler de réalité. Notre population mauricienne stagne autour de 1,2 million d'habitants. Nous comptons environ 550 000 personnes en âge de travailler, dont plus de la moitié ont déjà dépassé l'âge de 40 ans. Nous comptons près de 265 000 personnes âgées de plus de 60 ans. Donc, dans ces conditions, la véritable question est la suivante : comment continuer à financer l'éducation gratuite de nos enfants, la santé gratuite pour tous, le transport gratuit pour nos aînés et en même temps garantir une pension universelle ?

Et je me dis que si la réponse à cette question était simple, Madame la présidente, d'autres avant nous l'auraient trouvée. Mais la difficulté, voyez-vous, appelle à la responsabilité tout en faisant preuve de générosité. Et c'est précisément la manière dont gouverne notre Premier ministre. Il ne réforme pas pour affaiblir l'État-providence. Il réforme pour le sauver.

Madame la présidente, certains voudraient aujourd'hui réduire le mandat du changement à une simple addition de promesses financières. Ils se trompent profondément. Le peuple mauricien n'a pas voté seulement pour quelques roupies de plus. Il a voté pour reprendre son pays. Il a voté pour retrouver ses libertés, sa dignité, son état de droit et sa confiance dans les institutions et le changement n'a pas été seulement un vote économique. Il a été un vote moral, démocratique et national.

Madame la présidente, un véritable enjeu de ce budget est la jeunesse parce que les retraites de demain seront financées par les travailleurs d'aujourd'hui ; parce que la prospérité future dépendra des compétences que nous développons maintenant ; parce qu'un pays qui n'investit pas dans sa jeunesse aujourd'hui, investit dans ces problèmes demain et c'est pourquoi ce budget prépare l'île Maurice au monde qui vient. Un monde où l'intelligence artificielle ne sera pas une option, mais une réalité. Un monde où la compétitivité dépendra de la connaissance, de l'innovation et de la productivité. Nous devons armer notre pays, armer nos jeunes de nouvelles compétences, armer nos PME de nouveaux outils, armer notre administration de nouvelles capacités, armer notre économie pour la compétitivité mondiale.

Madame la présidente, permettez-moi d'aborder le ministère que j'ai l'honneur de servir aux côtés du l'honorable ministre Dr. Boolell – le ministère de l'Agro-industrie, de la Sécurité

alimentaire, de l'Économie bleue et de la Pêche. Le ministère de la terre et de la mer. Le ministère de ce que nous mangeons, de ce que nous produisons, de ce que nous protégeons, de ce que nous transmettons. Oui, le ministère du *fish and chips*, mais surtout le ministère de la sécurité alimentaire, de l'économie bleue et de la souveraineté vivante de Maurice. C'est aussi, Madame la présidente, le ministère de l'île Maurice qui se lève tôt.

**Madam Speaker:** Ne perdez pas de minute. Allez-y !

**Mr David:** C'est le ministère de l'île Maurice qui se lève tôt. Qui se lève tôt *pou al dan karo*, qui se lève tôt *pou al lor bato*. Le ministère des agriculteurs, des planteurs, des éleveurs, des pêcheurs, des agro-entrepreneurs. Le ministère de la biodiversité, des forêts et du bien-être animal. Et cette année, nous remercions l'honorable ministre des Finances qui a compris l'urgence de ce ministère, car notre budget est passé de R 4,5 milliards à R 5,2 milliards dont R 2,2 milliards consacrées à la sécurité alimentaire et R 1 milliard de à l'économie bleue et à la pêche.

Madame la présidente, la pandémie, les conflits internationaux, les crises géopolitiques et les perturbations des chaînes d'approvisionnement nous ont rappelés une vérité simple ; un pays qui ne produit pas suffisamment sa nourriture est un pays vulnérable. La sécurité alimentaire n'est pas seulement une affaire d'agriculture, c'est une affaire de souveraineté nationale.

Et quand les chaînes d'approvisionnement se bloquent, quand les prix mondiaux explosent, quand les bateaux tardent, quand les conflits lointains font monter les prix dans nos supermarchés, bien que sur ce point, nous avons été rassurés hier par les listes de prix déposées à la Chambre par l'honorable ministre du Commerce, nous comprenons une chose simple ; dépendre excessivement de l'extérieur, c'est exposer nos familles à des décisions que nous ne contrôlons pas. Produire davantage chez nous, ce n'est pas revenir en arrière, c'est reprendre le contrôle sur notre avenir.

C'est pourquoi l'honorable Premier ministre et l'honorable ministre des Finances a lancé avec détermination l'initiative *25by35*. Son objectif est clair ; produire au moins 25 % de nos besoins alimentaires avec une dépendance minimale aux intrants importés d'ici 2035. Doubler les terres consacrées à la production alimentaire pour atteindre 25 000 arpents. Augmenter la production locale de poisson pour passer de 5 000 à 15 000 tonnes.

Voilà notre vision de la sécurité alimentaire et l'honorable ministre Boolell, demain dans son intervention, donnera des détails sur les mesures prévues pour atteindre ces

objectifs. Madame la présidente, j'entends parfois certains détracteurs affirmer que l'économie bleue ne serait qu'un slogan creux ou une vue de l'esprit. J'aimerais leur répondre par quelques faits. D'ailleurs, j'aimerais commencer par dire que notre ministère, au-delà du ministère de la planification économique, est le seul ministère à porter le mot économie dans son intitulé.

Maurice est petite par sa terre, mais elle est immense par son océan. Et pendant trop longtemps, nous avons regardé la mer comme un paysage, comme un décor touristique, comme une carte postale. Il est temps de la regarder comme une frontière de croissance, de recherche, de sécurité alimentaire, d'innovation et de souveraineté. Et contrairement à l'ancien régime qui s'est contenté de répéter timidement l'intitulé pendant 10 ans, nous avons commencé à construire le contenu.

Dès notre arrivée au ministère, avec l'honorable ministre Boolell, nous avons créé une *Blue Economy Unit* avec une équipe, un mandat, une feuille de route. Nous avons organisé les assises de l'océan en octobre dernier, qui ont réuni près de 500 acteurs du monde maritime, comprenant les institutions publiques, le secteur privé, la société civile, les professionnels de la mer et la communauté scientifique. Et tous, tous ont contribué à la préparation de propositions et de solutions.

Nous avons lancé le mois dernier la première édition du Mauritius *Ocean Week* pour reconnecter les Mauriciens avec leur océan. Le mois prochain, la première *Blue Economy Strategy* de Maurice sera finalisée par un consortium d'experts internationaux et locaux avec un objectif ambitieux, Madame la présidente, celui de passer la contribution de l'économie bleue de 10 à 20 % du PIB d'ici 2035 avec des projets qualifiés, quantifiés, chiffrés et planifiés.

Et avant la fin de l'année, le *Blue Economy Bill* sera présenté au Parlement par l'honorable ministre Boolell pour définir le cadre légal et l'écosystème autour de projets de conservation et de développement océanique. Madame la présidente, parce que l'économie bleue est par sa nature transversale, nous travaillons de façon décloisonnée et concertée avec plusieurs ministères. Nous travaillons avec le département du plateau continental du bureau du l'honorable Premier Ministre sur le *Marine Spatial Planning*. Nous travaillons avec le ministère de l'environnement, l'honorable ministre Bhagwan, sur le *National Carbon Market Framework* où le carbone bleu capturé par les écosystèmes marins peut être valorisé sur le marché du carbone sous forme de crédit carbone.

Nous travaillons avec le ministère de la Recherche, le ministre Dr. Sukon, sur la création de *l'international Center for Ocean Studies* à l'Université de Maurice, comme annoncé dans le présent budget et qui fait suite à l'engagement pris par l'honorable Premier ministre l'année dernière à Nice lors de la conférence des Nations Unies sur l'océan. Nous travaillons avec le ministère de l'Education, l'honorable ministre, Dr. Gungapersad, pour introduire les sciences de la mer dans le cursus scolaire. Nous travaillons avec l'honorable ministère de l'Energie, le ministre Assirvaden, pour lancer un premier projet pilote de production d'électricité à partir de l'énergie des vagues. Nous travaillons avec l'honorable ministère des Affaires étrangères, l'honorable ministre Ramful, pour renforcer la diplomatie bleue de Maurice sur la scène régionale et internationale.

Madame la présidente, l'économie bleue n'est pas une théorie, mais elle crée des projets concrets. Et je citerai un exemple parce que le temps est compté : un projet pilote mauricien d'algoculture – la culture d'algues, utilisant un système à terre de recirculation de l'eau de mer, développé avec un partenaire néerlandais et avec le soutien du *Albion Fisheries Research Centre* de notre ministère.

Après la phase pilote, l'objectif sera de produire 200 tonnes d'algues par an pour l'industrie alimentaire, car les algues sont devenues ce que l'on appelle des *superfood*, très riches en vitamines, en minéraux et en protéines végétales et j'espère qu'on pourra vous en servir prochainement à la cantine du Parlement. Le but est de faire de Maurice un *hub* régional d'algoculture dans l'océan Indien. Et je profite de cette occasion pour rendre hommage, Madame la présidente, au fondateur visionnaire de ce projet, Monsieur Vincent Ah-Chuen, qui nous a quitté il y a exactement deux semaines.

Madame la présidente, certes, l'avenir ne se résume pas à l'économie. Il repose aussi sur les valeurs. Et c'est pourquoi je me réjouis particulièrement du retour du programme NICE, *National Initiative for Civic Education* ; un projet dont la presse n'a pas du tout parlé, alors qu'il s'agit d'un investissement marquant de ce budget. Et je félicite l'honorable Premier ministre qui, 14 ans de cela, avait déjà amorcé les premiers pas du projet NICE.

Entre-temps, l'ancien régime a mis ce projet au placard et dès cette année, grâce au leadership du Premier ministre, le projet *National Initiative for Civic Education* (NICE), qui est un projet de formation calqué sur un modèle singapourien, en immersion totale sur deux semaines pour des jeunes Mauriciens. Il réunira 200 jeunes, 100 garçons et 100 filles, qui se retrouveront dans un environnement encadré par des formateurs pour apprendre le civisme, le

patriotisme, la discipline, le respect, le leadership, le service communautaire et le vivre-ensemble.

Dans 20 ans, Madame la présidente – et je termine bientôt –, ces jeunes auront une trentaine d'années. Ils seront des enseignants, des infirmiers, des entrepreneurs, des ingénieurs, des policiers, des pêcheurs, des agriculteurs et des députés. Ce sont eux qui financeront nos retraites. Ce sont eux qui prendront les décisions politiques, sociales et économiques. Former un jeune, ce n'est pas seulement lui donner un métier. C'est aussi et surtout lui donner des valeurs, une ambition et une direction.

Madame la présidente – et je termine –, dans 20 ans, j'aurai 65 ans. L'âge dont tout le monde parle aujourd'hui. Dans 20 ans, j'ose le dire, l'honorable Premier ministre sera à la veille de son centenaire.

**Madam Speaker:** Nous aussi !

**Mr David:** J'espère qu'il sera encore là pour voir le système de pension qu'il aura contribué à sauver, mais aussi pour voir la jeunesse qu'il aura contribué à former. Une jeunesse compétente. Une jeunesse disciplinée. Une jeunesse innovante, une jeunesse profondément attachée à son pays. Madame la présidente, je termine avec une image.

Dans les eaux tranquilles, des capitaines, on en trouve à l'appel. Sur les plateaux radio, dans le confort des salons ou derrière un écran sur les réseaux sociaux. Mais ce sont les eaux difficiles qui révèlent l'expérience, le courage, la vision et le leadership. C'est là que l'on maintient le cap. C'est là que l'on protège l'équipage. C'est là que l'on prépare l'arrivée à bon port. Ce port, Madame la présidente, nous le préparons, ce port, nous le voyons. Ce port, nous l'atteindrons avec notre honorable Premier ministre.

Je vous remercie.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes!

**Mr Subron:** Madam Speaker, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

**The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.**

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Debate adjourned accordingly.*

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Thursday 25 June 2026 at 11.30 a.m.

**The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.**

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Madam Speaker:** The House stands adjourned!

Adjournment Matter!

Yes, please!

### **MATTER RAISED**

(3.54 p.m.)

#### **POTATO PLANTERS – DEFECTIVE SEEDS – COMPENSATION**

**Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal):** Je vous remercie. Ma requête s'adresse au ministre de l'Agro-industrie et concerne la situation particulièrement difficile vécue par les planteurs de pomme de terre, qui sont nombreux dans ma circonscription.

En 2025, ils ont acheté la semence auprès de l'*Agricultural Marketing Board* et ont ensuite subi des pertes considérables en raison des semences défectueuses, comme déjà confirmé par la FAREI et l'AMB. Si le coût des semences est déjà en cours de remboursement, les planteurs demeurent privés de compensation pour les importantes dépenses engagées en matière de préparation des terres, main-d'œuvre, engrais, irrigation et autres coûts de production.

Pour beaucoup, il s'agit de pertes représentant des années d'économie. Près d'un an après ces investissements, les planteurs attendent toujours une décision finale. Donc, je demande à l'honorable ministre de bien vouloir accélérer les mécanismes de remboursement, de compensation plutôt, et de veiller à ce qu'une indemnisation juste et adéquate soit accordée

dans les plus brefs délais afin de rétablir la confiance de ces planteurs qui sont découragés aujourd'hui et de soutenir les objectifs d'autosuffisance alimentaire pour le pays.

Je vous remercie.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes Minister!

**The Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell):** I thank the hon. Member for raising the matter, but I can reassure her that she has been wrongly informed. I am sorry to say so.

In relation to the subsidy that has to be disbursed, we have cleared it with the Ministry of Finance. And in relation to seeds, they have 75% on the cost of seed.

Secondly, in relation to the alleged scam, that was a scam. So, that is why I am saying – I know what I am saying, all right? – that matter was raised in the press without any substance.

In relation to preparation of land and suitability of land, now that financial resources will be disbursed, this matter will be addressed.

You can rest assured that I am in touch with potato growers. We meet them on a regular basis. Notwithstanding what appeared in the press, there has been no registered complaint from any planter.

**Madam Speaker:** Alright, no debate on issues. Okay?

The House stands adjourned!

*At 3.53 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Thursday 25 June 2026 at 11.30 a.m.*