



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

SIXTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**PARLIAMENTARY****DEBATES****(HANSARD)****FIRST SESSION****MONDAY 08 AUGUST 2016**

CONTENTS

QUESTION (*Oral*)

MOTION

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

BILL (*Public*)

ADJOURNMENT

THE CABINET

(Formed by the Rt. Hon. Sir Anerood Jugnauth, GCSK, KCMG, QC)

Hon. Sir Anerood Jugnauth, GCSK, KCMG, QC	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs, Minister for Rodrigues and National Development Unit
Hon. Charles Gaëtan Xavier-Luc Duval, GCSK	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism and External Communications
Hon. Showkutally Soodhun, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Lands
Hon. Ivan Leslie Collendavelloo, GCSK, SC	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities
Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Minister of Finance and Economic Development
Hon. Seetanah Lutchmeenaraidoo, GCSK	Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
Hon. Yogida Sawmynaden	Minister of Youth and Sports
Hon. Nandcoomar Bodha, GCSK	Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport
Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun	Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research
Hon. Anil Kumarsingh Gayan, SC	Minister of Health and Quality of Life
Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo	Minister of Local Government
Hon. Prithvirajsing Roopun	Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment
Hon. Marie Joseph Noël Etienne Ghislain Sinatambou	Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Ravi Yerrigadoo	Attorney General
Hon. Mahen Kumar Seeruttun	Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security
Hon. Santaram Baboo	Minister of Arts and Culture
Hon. Ashit Kumar Gungah	Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection
Hon. Mrs Marie-Aurore Marie-Joyce Perraud	Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare
Hon. Sudarshan Bhadain, GCSK	Minister of Financial Services, Good Governance and Institutional Reforms

Hon. Soomilduth Bholah	Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives
Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo	Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions
Hon. Premdut Koonjoo	Minister of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries, Shipping and Outer Islands
Hon. Marie Roland Alain Wong Yen Cheong, MSK	Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms, Minister of Environment, Sustainable Development and Disaster and Beach Management
Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn	Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

Madam Speaker	Hanoomanjee, Hon. Mrs Santi Bai, GCSK
Deputy Speaker	Duval, Hon. Adrien Charles
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hurreeram, Hon. Mahendranuth Sharma
Clerk of the National Assembly	Lotun, Mrs Bibi Safeena
Adviser	Dowlutta, Mr Ram Ranjit
Deputy Clerk	Ramchurn, Ms Urmeelah Devi
Clerk Assistant	Gopall, Mr Navin
Hansard Editor	Jankee, Mrs Chitra
Serjeant-at-Arms	Pannoo, Mr Vinod

MAURITIUS

Sixth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 22 of 2016

Sitting of 08 August 2016

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

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

BASIC INVALID'S PENSION – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the children with disabilities, she will state –

- (a) the number thereof below the age of 15 who will henceforth benefit from the Basic Invalid's Pension, indicating –
 - (i) if the eligibility criteria to benefit thereunder will be the same as presently obtained;
 - (ii) how the autistic children will be included thereunder, and
 - (iii) the sums provided in the Budget 2016-2017 for the implementation thereof;
- (b) the Non-Governmental Organisations that will benefit from the 50% grant-in-aid increase, and
- (c) how the Strategic Paper purporting to review the Special Education Needs sector will be prepared.

The Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that the payment of the Basic Invalid's Pension is governed by the provisions of section 8 of the National Pensions Act and is in accordance with the Sixth Schedule of the Act. As a matter of fact, section 8 provides for a person to receive a Basic Invalid's Pension where the person is likely to be so disabled for a period of at least 12 months. As the law stands presently, eligibility to that pension is tied with an age criterion, that is, the person should have reached the age of 15 and should be under the age of 60.

It is worth highlighting that for the purpose, “disabled” means “suffering from a disablement of not less than 60% and resulting from loss of mental or physical faculty.” Thus, as announced in the Budget Speech, at paragraph 327, henceforth an applicant below the age of 15 qualifies for the Basic Invalid's Pension provided he is medically assessed as suffering from a disability of not less than 60% and which disability is likely to last for a period of 12 months.

In reply to part (a) of the question, I have to inform the House that presently there are 3,130 children below 15 who are drawing the Carer's Allowance under the Social Aid Act. These children would, without the age criterion, normally have qualified for the Basic Invalid's Pension. It must, however, be pointed out that payment of Carer's Allowance under the Social Aid Act is income-tested, that is, the aggregate income of the parents must not exceed Rs350,000 annually. A beneficiary under that scheme may qualify for a benefit ranging between Rs2,972 and Rs3,872, depending on whether the beneficiary is also drawing either an Incontinence Allowance or is bedridden.

Madam Speaker, it is a fact, that quite a number of applications have not been favourably determined although the medical assessment revealed more than 60% disability over a period of at least 12 months, just because the parents did not satisfy the income requirement. With the modification of the parameters of eligibility for Basic Invalid's Pension, those cases now become candidates for consideration for the benefit.

From records available, it has been found that there are some 500 such cases. I personally consider that, as a caring Government, such discrimination should not be allowed. As a logical conclusion, these cases will now be reviewed while ensuring that the necessary administrative procedures are followed.

With this major change that is being operated under the Basic Invalid's Pension, all those children will, henceforth, qualify for the Basic Invalid's Pension at the present rate of Rs5,250 monthly. The Ministry of Social Security is making immediate arrangements for all these cases to be duly processed. I am assuring the House that I shall ensure that this is done within the shortest possible time frame, so that no undue hardship is caused to these beneficiaries.

Regarding part (a) (i) of the question, as I have explained, the eligibility criterion has been changed; more precisely, in terms of removal of the restricting age factor and the income-test.

As for part (a) (ii) of the question, I am informed that diagnosis of autism is a very complex exercise. It involves a multi-disciplinary team of medical specialists, namely Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Speech and Language Pathologist, and Speech Therapist. The system currently in place already provides for applicants who suffer from autistic spectrum disorder to be entertained by my Ministry.

The nature and extent of the pathology are usually certified by either the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life or Specialists from the private sector. I am further informed that, previously, autism was classified under mental retardation, but in the recent past, the medical certification is more precise and it indicates that the person is suffering from autism.

Madam Speaker, it will be good for me to inform the House that, on 21 September, last year, the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life had diagnosed 51 patients suffering from autism, with 37 out of them being between 0 to 10 years, 13 between 10 to 20 years, and 1 above 20 years. These cases are examined by the Medical Unit of my Ministry to assess any specific needs such as Carer's Allowance, Incontinence Allowance, severity of disability, and whether the persons are bedridden. A Basic Invalid's Pension is payable to those who are above 15 and who have a 60% degree of disability, and a Carer's Allowance is payable to those below 15 years of age. Over and above, on a felt-need basis, they are paid Rs450 for being bedridden, Rs450 for being incontinent and Rs450 for being severely disabled. Besides, bus fare is refunded to the parents accompanying their autistic children to schools and Day Care centres.

With the revision of the Basic Invalid's Pension Scheme, to cater for children below 15 years, children suffering from autistic disorders will be duly taken care of. After consultation with the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, autistic disorders have been included in the medical guidelines whereby such disorders carry a more than 60% disability. Thus, children with autistic disorders will, henceforth, qualify for the Basic Invalid's Pension and any additional support will be paid out on a felt-need basis as may be recommended by the Medical Board.

With regard to part (a)(iii) of the question, necessary budgetary provisions have been made for payment of Basic Invalid's Pension for children below 15 years, who qualify for such a benefit. In this connection, Rs130 m. have been transferred from the Social Aid vote from where Carer's Allowance was being paid to Item 22-103 Basic Invalid's Pension. Additionally, Rs70 m. have been provided under that said vote item bringing the total provision to Rs200 m., which should, in principle, be sufficient.

Insofar as part (b) of the question is concerned, Madam Speaker, I have to inform the House that grants are paid to NGOs from two sources, namely, from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research which have been provided with Rs90 m. for 2016-2017 and the NGO Trust Fund of the Ministry of

Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions which have been provided with Rs20.6 m. for 2016-2017, out of which the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development has provided for Rs1 m. to *Autisme Maurice* as a grant. The grant payable to the NGO Trust Fund is meant primarily for NGOs to meet partly their operational costs and sustain services whereas the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research supports financially the NGOs which are operating as Special Education Needs Schools. Details regarding NGOs which benefit from the grant may be laid in the Library of the National Assembly if the hon. Leader of the Opposition so wishes.

Coming to part (c), the last part of the question, I am informed that, in the context of the Nine-Year Schooling project, the concerns of children with special needs will be taken on board, especially since this major programme is meant to be both inclusive and comprehensive; and that means catering for the needs of all children, without any distinction.

There will be wide consultations with Civil Society Organisations engaged in the sector, so that the new scheme can draw from the broad experience of these bodies to uphold the Nine-Year Schooling project, especially the component which promotes inclusive education.

I am given to understand that the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research intends to leverage on our bilateral and multilateral linkages to tap some of the best practices currently undertaken in different parts of the world.

However, while we will solicit foreign expertise, we will ensure that the strategy is properly developed and is in line with the local conditions and considerations to make it meaningful.

In the final reckoning, such a strategy will be directly aligned considerations with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education.

Mr Bérenger: Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. Minister for the details provided in her answer. On the number of children below 15 who will now benefit from the Basic Invalid's Pension, in his speech, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development said 'around 3,130'. So, is the hon. Minister confirming that there are records that show that there are 3,130 children who fall in that category, and that those who fall now, will not be losing any benefits enjoyed so far as, unfortunately, is the case for the old age pensioners when they reach 60, they lose their Basic Invalid's Pension?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, let me first of all thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for having put this PNQ. We are, today, discussing in an amicable manner the welfare of children with disabilities which is the concern not only of the Government, but the Opposition too. Let me assure the House that our Government is very concerned about the welfare of children with disabilities and their protection should outweigh any other factor. However, the House should appreciate that the Government is doing its level best. We are deploying all efforts to enhance the quality of life of children with disabilities. We have records regarding actual beneficiaries. New applications will be considered against the new provisions of the scheme as is spelt out in the Budget.

Mr Bérenger: Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister has made reference to this 60% ‘guillotine’, that is, they must at least be 60% invalid to benefit from the Basic Invalid’s Pension. Will the hon. Minister agree with me that it is quite arbitrary, why 60% and not 55% or 50%? It is quite arbitrary! In addition, I am given to understand that it is always assessed by Medical Boards. Can the hon. Minister enlighten us why 60% and not 50% and will she look at anomalies, like, for example, if to get Basic Invalid’s Pension, somebody must be invalid at least 60% from both ears; if you do not qualify with one ear, you lose the Basic Invalid’s Pension completely? So, is this arbitrary criterion of 60% being re-examined?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, in any scheme which provides for payment of Basic Invalid’s Pension, the hon. Leader of the Opposition will agree with me that there should be a percentage of disability which qualifies a claimant to benefit from such an invalidity pension. In all modesty, I would say that everywhere, all around the world, this is the principle which governs the benefit of payment of Basic Invalidity Pension. *Ce 60% d’incapacité a toujours été là. Cela existe depuis belle lurette.* So, I think we need to have a range. We need to have checks and balances because the Basic Invalid’s Pension, as we all know, is meant to cater for those who are severely handicapped and for those who need financial assistance. Less than 60% will fall under the Social Aids Scheme.

Mr Bérenger: Madam Speaker, I am particularly concerned about autistic children, children with autism. As the hon. Minister knows, autism was much neglected by all of us, the world over, until recently and we are progressing. But, the additional problem is that it is very difficult to place a figure on autism. There are all sorts of individual cases of autistic children and so on. So, that is why I am particularly concerned about children with autism.

Now, I am surprised - I hope pleasantly surprised - if it is confirmed, that there already exists a Board that examines autistic children and that there are already autistic children benefitting from the Disability Pension. Is the hon. Minister sure of that and, if yes, can I know how many autistic children benefit from the Basic Invalid's Pension today?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Autistic disorders have been included in the Medical Guidelines whereby such disorders carry a more than 60% disability. If I can explain, the medical guidelines have now been updated. The 'Medical Guidelines' is a document which has been prepared by specialists from the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life. We have, most recently, updated the medical guidelines and autistic disorders are indeed mentioned in the medical guidelines. For instance, if a claimant makes an application accompanying by a medical certificate, whether from the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life or a private doctor, he will be assessed by the Medical Board. If the medical certificate certifies that the claimant, be it a child or an adult, is suffering from autistic disorders, the Medical Board will not question the disability mentioned therein.

Mr Bérenger: Can we, therefore, have the figure of autistic children at present benefitting from the Basic Invalid's Pension?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, hon. Leader of the Opposition, let me check with my officers because I, myself, do not have the figure. So, let us see if my officers can be of some help.

(Interruptions)

Unfortunately, we do not presently have the details regarding the number of beneficiaries as all these beneficiaries are classified, I understand, under the Basic Invalid's Pension.

If I may add, Madam Speaker, in the last PNQ that the hon. Leader of the Opposition put to me, I did mention that a survey will be carried out to know about the exact number of persons suffering from disabilities. With the survey, I hope we will be getting the percentage of children and adults suffering from autistic disorders because this will be one of the reasons why the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions will ask for a survey to be carried out.

Mr Bérenger: Well, on autism, again, I hope and I am sure that the hon. Minister must be aware of the letter recently, 05 July 2016, written to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development, on the eve of Budget presentation, on precisely Screening an Assessment of Autism in Mauritius, where they said that they have a Board 'Autisme

Maurice', which is very professional, very dedicated; they have a Board. Are they involved, in any way, in assessing the autistic children who deserve this, who are entitled to this disability allowance?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: I do not think they are involved.

Mr Bérenger: I think I'll move on to the next part of my question because I would have thought that the Minister would have discussed with the Minister of Finance and Economic Development the contents of that letter, but, never mind, we will come back on that.

Can I move on to the 50% increase in the grant-in-aid to the NGOs involved in Special Education Needs? Of course, I wish to have the list if the hon. Minister will place a copy because they all or nearly all deserve that increase. Now, *Autisme Maurice*, I heard the Minister said, has benefitted from a grant. Is it a one-off grant or is it an ongoing grant?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: An ongoing grant.

Mr Bérenger: Thank you, hon. Minister! There is another NGO that is of urgent interest to me, it is the *Bureau de l'Éducation Catholique*. For nearly two years now, it has been agreed by the previous Government and by this Government, that *Le Bureau de l'Éducation Catholique* would take over the running of nine schools at present run by *APEIM* that involves 254 children. So, can I know whether the hon. Minister has taken the opportunity - because this is urgent, they are going to close down, they cannot go on anymore – to discuss it with both the Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research and the Minister of Finance and Economic Development?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: If my memory serves me right, I did say in my last PNQ that I have had consultation with my colleague, hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun. I understand that it will be so.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has been good enough to increase by 50% the grant to these NGOs. Can I know whether the grant-in-aid formula for Special Needs School will also be reviewed upwards?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Yes. Indeed, it will be reviewed.

Mr Bérenger: Thank you, Madam. The last part of my question! Thank you for the information on how the Special Education Needs Sector will get a strategic paper reviewing

the whole sector. Can I know whether it will be by a Committee, by a Commission and, if yes, chaired by whom and the composition thereof?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, I have been given to understand that it will be done by a Committee.

Mr Bérenger: Therefore, has the hon. Minister had the opportunity of discussing with her colleague, about the Chairperson eventually, and the composition?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Yes, the discussion is ongoing.

Mr Bérenger: Through the Minister, can I put the fundamental question? I am sure she is aware since reading the United Nations Report on disabled people in Mauritius, which I referred to recently, that the key issue that will have to be considered by this Special Education Needs Sector Strategic Partner Team, will be that we are stuck now, because for years we have been giving money, not enough, but money to NGOs, not enough as the United Nations says, but, at the same time, we have been not giving money this time to make our schools inclusive, that is, ordinary schools will need to be funded so that they can admit handicapped children as well. Now, we are stuck in a way, in a vicious circle because the NGOs rightly asked for more money. The more money we give here, the less money we have to put into making our schools inclusive. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether she has discussed with her colleague? This is the crucial issue! How are we going to move from the present situation where everything is done with NGOs without enough money to a situation where all our schools will eventually become inclusive? How are we going to succeed in that transition?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: I have been given to understand that gradually disabled children are being included in the mainstream education and special Integrated Units are being created in primary schools, all over the island.

Mr Bérenger: Reference has been made to special units. Is the hon. Minister aware that this is precisely what the United Nations asked us not to do, that is, not to set up special units that are being set up, but to adapt the schools, generally without special units to admit those kids?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, as far as possible, children are being canalised through the mainstream education, but where we cannot, then the Special Integrated Units are being created to provide education for those children.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

Mr Mahomed: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question pertains to the last part, special education needs and training. There is a legal requirement for companies to employ, at least, 3% of their workforce from children with disabilities. Then, on the other hand, there is the Training and Employment of Disabled Board within the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions, the remit of which is to train persons with disability so as to allow them to completely integrate the mainstream society and with a view to securing employment eventually. Companies are not charitable institutions, the bottom line is profitability. Would the hon. Minister be able to clarify us on the following: how is the training, the TEDPB reinventing itself or shaking up itself with a view to providing the appropriate training that is geared to these companies for them to be able to employ them because often times those children, when they finish their training they don't get a job, they stay at home and they feel depressed?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: I do not want to be nasty, but the UN Convention...

(Interruptions)

The UN Convention has been signed in 2007 and ratified in 2010. Mauritius submitted its Initial Report in 2012. Can you tell me what has been done between 2010 to 2014?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Let me finish! The hon. Member will be saying that I am Minister for nearly two years now. Do you know that we do not even have a proper database? The database was not a reliable one. We are setting up a new database. The Hearing Committee was not functioning as it should be. Members were often absent. We are revisiting the composition of the Hearing Committee, the Committee of Employers and creating a new reliable database. All this, Madam Speaker, cannot be done overnight. The hon. Member should be patient.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Baloomoody!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Baloomoody: There is one issue which is not clear. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether those children, who are below 15 and henceforth will get the Basic Invalid's Pension, will still benefit from the Carer's Allowance?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Of course, they will! Indeed, this is a landmark measure. We are a caring Government. Sadly, no Government has bothered to address this lingering concern. I, myself, was receiving complaints from parents all over the island. Parents come to see us saying that they cannot understand why their disabled children could not benefit from the Basic Invalid's Pension. The measure, I must admit, was very unfair. So, we have taken the decision to remove the age limit discrimination. As I have said at the beginning of the discussion, we mean business, we have at heart the interest and well-being of those disabled children. We are on the right track. Be patient and I do hope that if need be, we will come up with additional measures to better protect and promote rights of persons with disabilities.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Last question, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Bérenger: To conclude, I would like to, through the Minister, ask Government whether the time has come to better coordinate action in favour of handicapped people, people with disabilities, children with disabilities to better coordinate action of Government because, apart from her Ministry, there are the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, everything depends finally on the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, also the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research of course, and the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. So, there are five Ministries and there is an urgent need to coordinate much better how Government performs as a team.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Rightly said, there is an urgent need to coordinate all the sectors concerned, Ministries and Departments if we really want to better the system. We will be working on this particular recommendation. I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for his suggestion.

Madam Speaker: Time is over!

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

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

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2016-2017) BILL 2016 (No. XVII of 2016)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Appropriation (2016-2017) Bill 2016 (No. XVII of 2016).

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo!

(12.05 p.m.)

The Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions

(**Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo:**) So, let me continue!

(Interruptions)

Merci, merci! Thank you.

(Interruptions)

In a very polite manner!

Madam Speaker, I am feeling indeed blessed to be a Member of the Government. I have listened with great interest and pleasure to the various speeches of Members from both sides of the House. A wide range of subjects have already been covered by my colleagues on this side of the House for which I am grateful. I will, therefore, limit myself to the measures which touch my Ministry.

Allow me in all modesty and humility to bring my contribution to this very important debate concerning the economy and the welfare of our country. Let me, right from the start,

say that I am satisfied that the 2016-2017 Budget reflects fully the commitment of our Government to meet the aspirations of our Mauritian people.

Vous serez d'accord, Madame la présidente, si je vous dis que ce budget est un budget dynamique qui fait plaisir à tout le monde. C'est un budget qui vise à lutter contre la pauvreté, un budget qui donne un nouveau souffle à notre élan de développement et surtout un budget qui est en parfait accord avec notre Vision 2030. The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has, indeed, marked a new era of development.

The Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions is a very important Ministry. Of course, every Ministry plays a highly important role but the peculiarity of my Ministry is that it deals directly with the public and, most importantly, with the vulnerable segment of our population. A Government is judged by the way it treats its people especially those in need of help and assistance and our Government is deploying all means to alleviate the suffering of those falling under this category.

The yearly budget of the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions is among the largest. This is because we provide a slew of facilities and benefits to the needy. For example, in 2015 and 2016, a sum of Rs13.1 billion was paid out to 179,000 beneficiaries of Basic Retirement Pension. An amount of around Rs1 billion was disbursed for the payment of social aid benefits while Rs1.8 billion was spent on the payment of Invalid Basic Pension beneficiaries.

I wish to point out that a number of departments have experienced progress during the last financial year and we have brought forward many positive changes to the pension system. The Budget 2016-2017 works towards further reinforcing the effectiveness of a fair pension system. In fact, the budget of my Ministry has been increased from Rs19.8 billion for the financial year 2015-2016 to Rs21.2 billion for the financial year 2016-2017. I am confident that these financial resources will help us further enhance the quality and effectiveness of our services with a view to providing more relief to the population.

I will now proceed to share with this House those measures which have been taken to improve the services provided by my Ministry for the public.

As I informed the House last year when debating on the 2015/2016 Budget Speech, Government had decided to construct a Recreation Centre in Riambel and the required funds for the financial year 2015/1016 were provided. Since then, the contract for the construction of a Recreation Centre for the Elderly and Disabled in Riambel, on the basis of a Design,

Build and Turnkey has been awarded on 12 November 2015. The site was handed over to the contractor on 03 June 2016 and works started immediately after. According to the contract provisions, construction works will last for 15 months and the project will be hopefully completed in 2017.

This project, once completed, will allow my Ministry to operate four Recreation Centres in all and thus answer to the needs of more and more elderly persons who are applying for a stay in a Recreation Centre. A stay in one of the Recreation Centres, with all the facilities which are put at the disposal of the elderly persons, is a sure means to provide some enjoyable rest and leisure to these persons.

In line with the Government Programme 2015/2019 which spells out that charitable institutions would be required to install CCTV cameras on their premises, my Ministry has implemented a project in February 2016 whereby all owners and managers of charitable institutions have been supported financially to arrange for their respective institutions to be fitted and equipped with an internal CCTV camera system. This project is meant to enhance the protection and security of the inmates, who vulnerable persons either by the age factor or because of a disability.

To ensure that the system is an effective means for proper surveillance and monitoring of the strategic areas of the charitable institution, the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions has, with the relevant technical advice, set the minimum standard and technical specifications which each institution should respect so that the security device serves its intended purpose.

To date, out of the 27 charitable institutions, 21 have already implemented the CCTV camera project and they have accordingly benefited from the 100% grant payable by my Ministry for that project. To date, an amount of around Rs736,000 has already been disbursed for this project.

To be fair to Charitable Institutions which have already equipped themselves with a CCTV camera system prior to year 2014, that is, before the project was initiated by my Ministry, measures are being devised to provide for a partial refund of their project cost to these institutions.

Hon. Members would recall that last year, I referred to the measures enunciated in the Government Programme 2015/2019, to the effect that special support care will be extended to elderly persons with disabilities and those living alone as part of a strategy to provide a

“*Service de Proximité*” to them. The new scheme allows these elderly persons to benefit from the services of a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist, a psychologist or a social worker as the case may be.

The modalities for providing such a service have been worked out and my Ministry has started to implement the project to cover, initially, elderly persons aged 90 and above and who are in receipt Of Carer’s Allowance permanently.

The project is being implemented as from June 2016 with a target group of 1,500 beneficiaries. It is being operated more or less as a pilot project and based on the outcome of the pilot project, the scheme will gradually be extended for a broader coverage and with adjustments and improvements where so required.

In line with our obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a whole series of actions have been and are being taken to ensure that persons with disabilities are not in any manner whatsoever discriminated against. One of the most important actions in this respect is, of course, the finalisation of a draft Disability Bill.

By now, much ground has been covered and we have reached a stage where the Attorney General’s Office has already given its preliminary vetting in respect of the draft Bill. After official consultations have been held with Ministries and departments concerned in May and June this year, the Ministry is at present working on the consequential amendments which this proposed legal framework calls for. To make sure that all stakeholders are taken on board in the development of such an important legal framework, the draft Bill will shortly be shared with a broader spectrum of stakeholders.

Needless for me, Madam Speaker, to reiterate that Government will spare no efforts to ensure that the best possible conditions are created to enable persons with disabilities to join the mainstream society and to benefit from the full enjoyment of their rights and privileges.

I said it in my reply to a PNQ on 12 July 2016, Government works in close partnership with other stakeholders to uphold and promote its policy aims and objectives geared towards improving the quality of life of our fellow countrymen who are most vulnerable. The role and contribution of NGOs can never be overemphasised. They are a key player. In line with the Government Programme 2015/2019 which aims at “Achieving Meaningful Change”, the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform

Institutions has come up with a strategy to professionalise the social sector and strengthen the capacity of NGOs.

A pilot project on Recognition of Prior Learning in Social Work Practice was successfully completed in June 2016 with a first cohort of 32 NGO representatives who have been RPL certified to an equivalent of a National Certificate in Social Work Level 2. In terms of impact, this is not only going to boost up the self-esteem and motivation of the social workers but it will also impact positively on the quality of services being provided by NGOs.

Promoting Social Entrepreneurship also ranks high on this Government agenda. The vision of creating a Nation of Entrepreneurship will be incomplete if the social dimension is overlooked. As a result, my Ministry is driving and permeating the innovative concept of social entrepreneurship in the NGO sector to enable NGOs to diversify their funding base and to encourage them to come up with activities for the economic empowerment of the vulnerable segment of the population.

Madam Speaker, we know that there have been a few upsurges in the number of occupants of the Rehabilitation Youth Centres despite all efforts made to ward off such occurrences. With the assistance of an expert, namely Mr William Cullen, a Rehabilitation Youth Centre Strategic Plan has been elaborated. Government has approved the implementation of the recommendations made in that strategic plan. The main one is the conversion of the present Rehabilitation Youth Centre concept into a totally different one, which advocates the setting up of Small Therapeutic Homes to accommodate some 5 to 8 girls at a time. This approach focuses on the rehabilitation aspects and emphasises on the reinstatement of the child in the mainstream society.

Government has demonstrated its commitment to help these children with a view to their reinsertion into their family units. Hence, a provision of Rs3 m. has been made in the 2016/2017 Budget to kick start the Small Therapeutic Home Project. This is indeed an important step which is being taken towards turning round the situation and ensuring real and effective rehabilitation of inmates.

As I am here talking about children and juveniles, it would be relevant for me to inform the House that, at the level of Probation and After-Care Service, much effort is being deployed to rehabilitate and guide these adolescents. The staff strength has been enhanced with the recruitment of 10 officers. As a result, the quality of probation work at the level of

social enquiry, supervision of offenders, counselling work and preventive talks in the community has considerably improved.

Suicides and suicidal tendencies have for some time been quite prevalent in Mauritius. The Life Plus Unit of my Ministry is the working hand of the Government in dealing with the problem of suicide.

In September 2015, following the publication of the research 'Study on the Causes and Consequences of Suicidal Behaviour among Teenagers in Mauritius', Government has set up a Steering Committee to work on the recommendations of the study. A National Strategy Paper and an Action Plan on Suicide 2016–2020 has been prepared and will soon be finalised.

Madam Speaker, our ageing population does have an impact on our pension system. At present, I understand there are six employees to support a pensioner and by 2030, there will be three employees to support a pensioner. In order to meet this challenge, the Budget 2016/2017 is providing for the setting up of a high-level committee to make recommendations. By taking a pro-active approach, we will ensure that we are fully equipped to grapple with the challenges we face in the wake of our ageing population.

My Ministry has already established a data-sharing system facilitating the exchange of data thereby enabling my Ministry to reduce administrative burden and prevent overpayment cases. Better control mechanisms for identification of overpayment have been implemented through an automated electronic exchange channel with the collaboration of the Civil Status Office and the Passport and Immigration Office. This has led to timely detection of deaths, remarriages and departures of beneficiaries from the country. There were 2,976 cases of overpayment amounting to around Rs81 m. up to June 2015 compared to 1,688 cases amounting to around Rs89 m. up to June 2016. The total amount recouped in 2015 was around Rs10 m. while in 2016, it was around Rs15 m.. Total refund for new cases for 2015 was around Rs6 m. and for 2016, it is around Rs8 m. thus showing an increase of around 41% in amount recovered, Madam Speaker.

Apart from the pension perspective, we have to look at the problem in terms of review of our existing policies, strategies and facilities as well as other social and health services so that they become responsive to the change in our economic landscape which an ageing population carries in its wake. Thus, a National Strategy Paper and Action Plan 2016-2020 on ageing has been worked out to chart the main actions required.

This Budget 2016/2017 goes further by adding innovation to our social benefit system. We will now benefit from harmonisation of income threshold for eligibility of in-kind assistance under Social Aid. Assistance in-kind used to be provided to beneficiaries of Social Aid with different income ceiling.

The monthly household income ceiling for eligibility of all kind social assistance is now being set to Rs30,000 monthly. We will thus have the same ceiling available for all four categories of in-kind assistance.

This Government has always shown its determination to eliminate gender discrimination. The Budget 2016/2017 has made provision for the introduction of a Widower's Contributory Pension under the National Pensions Fund. At present, when a female spouse contributing to the National Pensions Fund dies, the surviving spouse (widower) is refunded the contributions made by the female spouse as a lump sum. In line with the current policy to provide gender-neutral services, a Widower's Contributory Pension is being introduced to enable widowers to benefit from pensions under NPF in respect of their spouses' contributions. A very good measure!

Furthermore, with regard to refund of contributions to non-citizens, it is worth noting that the National Pension Act 1976 was amended in January 2012 to provide for the refund of contributions to non-citizens at the expiry of their contracts of work. However, the National Pensions Act 1976 does not make provision for refund of contributions in circumstances such as the death of contributors. Provision is being made in the Budget 2016/2017 to now allow refund of contributions to the surviving spouse or the legal representatives of the deceased insured non-citizens in case of death.

For those victims of accidental fire, the Budget 2016/2017 grants a monthly rental allowance of up to Rs5,000 for up to six months. The victims will thus be assisted financially and encouraged to rapidly secure a shelter in the wake of their misfortune. Madam Speaker, at this stage, I will abstain from elaborating on the removal on the age discrimination and disparity with respect to children aged less than 15 years as this matter has already been thrashed out at the level of the PNQ.

I am pleased with the measures enunciated in the Budget 2016/2017. It is in line with the vision of our Government which is, as you are all aware, to bring meaningful change to our country. This Budget lays the foundation for a number of developments and progress and I will go as far as saying that we have embarked on an ambitious welfare reform project.

The measures have already been announced, financial resources have already been allocated, now is the time for the real challenge, which is, of course implementation. Now, is the time for each Ministry and Department to play its part by delving into the practical stage of implementation and therefore this would be the key to real and meaningful change. It is only through successful implementation that we will be able to meet our goals.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, I wish to, once again, extend my heartfelt thanks to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development and to all those who have contributed towards paving our way to this new era of development.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Aliphon!

(12.28 a.m.)

Mr A. Aliphon (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Merci, *Madam Speaker*. Permettez-moi, avant tout, de féliciter ma collègue l'honorable Madame Jeewa-Daureeawoo pour sa réponse à la PNQ et aussi son discours sur ce budget. Je crois qu'elle a obtenu un dix sur dix.

Madam Speaker, c'est avec un immense plaisir...

(*Interruptions*)

Taler nous répond twa!

(*Interruptions*)

... que je m'adresse à cette assemblée dans le cadre du budget 2016/2017.

Malgré l'héritage catastrophique que nous a légué l'ancien gouvernement (et là, je fais référence aux affaires BAI, DBM, Mauritius Post, Route Verdun, sans oublier les R 1.4 milliards de dettes impayées, laissées pour la NDU) et ceci avec, il va sans dire, la complicité de l'opposition actuelle, le gouvernement Lepep a tenu bon, et voilà deux ans qu'il tient fermement la barre.

Cependant, *Madam Speaker*, des réalisations, nous en avons concrétisées, et il serait bon de le rappeler avant tout à la population et ensuite à l'opposition.

Contrairement à cette présente opposition qui n'apporte que des critiques - et là, je m'adresse et je me réfère aux propos de l'honorable Reza Uteem concernant le *standing ovation* à Pravind Jugnauth le jour du budget. Puis-je lui rappeler que le *standing ovation* est

réservé à ceux qui font du bien dans les bonnes choses; sinon à qui serait-il destiné? A cette opposition stérile ? Ou à leurs vaines critiques ?

Voyons ! Nous les comprenons. Finalement, n'est-ce pas là leur rôle que de toujours contester et de critiquer ? C'est ça l'opposition !

Mais en tant que gouvernement responsable, nous avons su manœuvrer pour que malgré l'héritage catastrophique, chaque Mauricien obtienne un petit plus lors des derniers exercices du budget. Oh, elles sont nombreuses les mesures avantageuses réalisées par le gouvernement Lepep ! Je me ferai un devoir et un plaisir de rafraîchir la mémoire de nos amis de l'opposition.

Le gouvernement Lepep est venu avec des mesures de rééquilibrage, avec la hausse des pensions aux personnes âgées, aux orphelins, pour les veuves et nos amis les autrement capables avec -

1. une compensation salariale de R 600;
2. prise en charge par l'Etat des *fees* des examens de la *SC* et la *HSC* ;
3. l'eau gratuite pour les familles défavorisées ;
4. augmentation de l'aide pour l'obtention des *housing loans*,
5. autant pour l'environnement, autant pour la santé, etc.

La liste, elle est longue, et nous pouvons en conclure que le gouvernement Lepep a amorti les inégalités sociales et a rehaussé le pouvoir d'achat du Mauricien. Souvent, l'opposition se veut aveugle et se met en quête de l'impossible !

Mais avançons, *Madam Speaker!* Avançons, et voyons le présent.

Que nous propose ce budget 2016-2017, dans le contexte économique difficile que connaît le monde ?

Une certitude, c'est que nous sommes à la croisée des chemins, et il a fallu au ministre des Finances d'être dans le bon choix et il a dû prendre des décisions courageuses et tournées vers l'avenir.

Il appartient à tout un chacun de découvrir sans secret ce budget dont l'architecture repose sur 10 stratégies clés qui font de ce budget, à mon appréciation, le *master stroke of a budget* ! Mais voilà !

Laissez-moi partager avec vous les quatre mesures qui me tiennent à cœur.

Dans le social déjà -

- Baisse du gaz ménager maintenant à R 270 seulement.
- Le seuil d'exemption pour la taxe rehaussée à R 10,000.
- Le plafond pour bénéficier de l'exemption de la taxe immobilière passe de R 2 millions à R 4 millions.

En somme, un cocktail de mesures concernant aussi les voitures, les recrutements et de développements. Je vous laisse le soin de découvrir le reste, et il y en a pour tout un chacun.

Les PME -

- Suspension de *Trade and Licence Fees* pour les compagnies payant moins de R 5000, pour les trois prochaines années : 75,000 PME sont concernées.
- Pour les entreprises avec un chiffre d'affaires de moins de R 10 millions, elles auront un congé fiscal de quatre ans sur les revenus, encore et encore.
- Avez-vous pris connaissance de l'analyse des entreprises produisant pour le marché local, ayant le label '*Made in Mauritius*'? Les 68 membres de cette association remercient le ministre pour ce budget qui, selon eux, redonne envie d'investir. Quand nous tenons en compte leur poids dans l'économie, ces industries emploient directement 55,000 personnes.

Mon troisième point : La pauvreté

Etant aussi travailleur social, je ne peux que féliciter le ministre des Finances pour ce Plan Marshall tellement complet. Je souhaite à celui qui veut vraiment s'en sortir, de faire le pas ; il lui est donné le moyen de mettre un terme à sa pauvreté s'il a la volonté de vouloir le faire.

Comment ne pas saluer cette motivation aux étudiants et à leurs parents, du *cash prize* qui leur sera donné s'ils réussissent leur Forme III, *SC* et *HSC* dans le nouveau programme éducatif du *9-Year Schooling* ?

Il faudrait maintenant à chaque Mauricien de comprendre l'enjeu économique de l'île Maurice, et ce n'est qu'ensemble que nous pourrons relever ce défi pour un avenir certain.

Je souhaite que les Mauricien comprennent et fassent comprendre à l'opposition que, contrairement à eux, ils adhèrent totalement à cette politique économique, tout comme les hommes d'affaires mauriciens soutiennent les propositions du ministre des Finances et qu'ils ont su découvrir les secrets de ce budget, tout comme ils se retrouvent dans cette réflexion de Salvador Dali – et je cite –

« Qui sait déguster ne boit plus jamais pour le plaisir, mais va à la découverte des secrets. »

Voilà ce que je souhaite à tous pour notre avenir : c'est de se serrer les coudes et aller à la découverte des secrets du budget 2016 -2017, et finir par s'en sortir.

Madam Speaker, qu'en est-il d'Albion et du *Petrol Hub* qu'on projette d'y construire ? Je pense que le gouvernement dont je fais partie fera montre de son grand sens des responsabilités avant l'octroi des différents permis. Je suis convaincu que chaque ministère concerné dans ce projet veillera à ce que les procédures pour l'obtention de tout permis seront scrupuleusement respectées, contrairement à la légèreté avec laquelle le précédent régime a traité le cas du défunt CT Power.

Je souhaiterais, en tant que député et habitant de la région, qu'un *Information Desk* ou des réunions d'informations soit mis en place, afin que les Forces Vives et les habitants d'Albion et des environs soient au courant du projet et continuellement informés de l'évolution du projet. Selon mon collègue ministre Ashit Gungah, c'est en place, cela va venir, et je pense qu'on peut lui faire confiance.

Apres la mise en lumière des mesures du budget qui me tiennent à cœur, je voudrais reprendre quelques critiques de l'opposition :

Selon l'honorable Bérenger, ce budget n'assure pas la relance économique, un porte-à-faux, réflexion totalement contraire à M. Tout le Monde et au monde des affaires mauricien.

Quant à l'honorable Mohamed qui qualifie le budget de mesures cosmétiques, comment expliquera-t-il à nos amis de Rodrigues, qu'avec une augmentation de leurs finances passant de R 3.3 milliards à R 4.4 milliards, que c'est du cosmétique ? Difficilement explicable !

M. Boolell, lui, parle d'un budget confettis et trompeur. Quid de la fermeture du Parlement et des séances parlementaires pendant plus de six mois en 2014 pour des séances

de *koze kozer* ou encore la dette de plus de R 1.4 milliards laissée par eux à la NDU à la veille des élections ? N'était-ce pas là trompeur ?

Enfin, le quatrième et dernier - malheureusement, il n'est pas là - dixit l'honorable Ramful et son conseil : '*don't fool the population again.*' *I just wish to give a ticket to his say: A Return to Sender* qu'Elvis Presley lui aurait chanté s'il était là. And ask him and his friends to wear this hat. They easily forget that it is them that have been thrown away off the Parliament by the Mauritians, because they wanted to fool the population with their *deuxième République* and their 'ON' and 'OFF' dream. I just want to ask him or them to wear this hat, to keep it, do their *mea culpa*, and let this caring Government do its job.

By the way, let me say to our Minister of Finance, 'Hats off dear Minister for this new and good Budget.'

Que pourront-t-ils nous proposer de mieux ?

La réponse serait : Rien !

Donc, subissons leurs critiques, mais ne nous y attardons pas, *Madam Speaker*.

Maintenant, je voudrais m'adresser à vous, Mauriciens, si vous m'entendez. Vous avez fait confiance au gouvernement Lepep en décembre 2014. Gardez confiance. N'ayez pas peur car, ensemble, comme cette belle image de Sir Anerood Jugnauth félicitant son fils, retrouvez-vous en famille, tous ensemble, et avec le gouvernement *Lepep* nous pousserons vers le large pour notre avenir et l'avenir de toute l'île Maurice.

Je ne pourrais terminer sans redire mon appréciation, Madame la présidente, au premier budget du Gouvernement *Lepep*, présenté par l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth, le ministre des Finances, à son équipe et à l'ensemble du gouvernement pour son soutien à ce budget que je qualifie, une fois encore, de *masterstroke budget*.

Madame la présidente, je vous remercie.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mrs Jadoo-Jaunbocus!

Mrs R. Jadoo-Jaunbocus (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this 2016-2017 Budget of hon. Pravind Jugnauth, Minister of Finance and Economic Development is marked by the undeniable style and sincerity in action of hon. Pravind Jugnauth. It is clear that the only interest of the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Madam Speaker, was to put the interest of our country and of our citizens first and foremost. Whether you call it *un*

budget social or a feel-good factor Budget, one thing we cannot deny, this Budget is going to create a new era of development. How, Madam Speaker? I will go on to expand upon this.

But, first of all, Madam Speaker, I want to say this: the 2015-2016 Budget, the last Budget presented, was to set the pace for this era of development. But, unfortunately, we all know that instead of being a catalyst for change the last Budget was held back from the very past from which it had emerged. Last year's Budget, Madam Speaker, which was, in fact, *destiné à la reliance*, has instead been swallowed up with expenses having to mop up the mismanagement of the previous Government. We must not forget that. We have had so many criticisms about the 2015-2016 Budget and the present Budget but we must look what it was set out to do and what has happened in its wake.

It is true that hon. Pravind Jugnauth stated at paragraph 15 of his Budget Speech that the challenges of tomorrow cannot be met with our mindset policies actions and actions locked in the paradigm of the past. But yet, in order to understand and take stock of what has happened, we have to walk back in that immediate past. Let us, for instance, look at the NDU. The Rt. hon. Prime Minister will indeed give figures to the House of how many millions we have to pay in terms of debts of the previous Government. R 1.4 *milliards!* These were the previous Government's largess we have to pay back. Another example, Madam Speaker, is the Terre-Rouge/Verdun saga, the Bagatelle Dam saga where millions have been spent. The Vice-Prime Minister, hon. Collendavelloo, has talked about it and I am sure will address it in his speech. So much has had to be spent to set right the errors.

We must not forget also the MBC, the Air Mauritius, the Amul saga, the D. Y. Patil saga. The hon. Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions has, in answer to a Private Notice Question, stated about the lack of database and having had to spend time and energy for the last two years setting up this database. All this takes its toll and that is why the previous Budget could not do what it exactly sets out to do, Madam Speaker.

The NDU! Indeed, as I said, the *R 1.4 milliards* which we have to pay back every year. We are told that PPSs do nothing. Take note those who write about us up there! You tell us that we do nothing, we have no *bilan!* Why? It is because we are mopping up the mess of the previous Government, we are paying back debts! We have to repair what has been set wrong. For instance, we talk about canals being made, *terrains* being made, *terrains* of foot, PNQs, Parliamentary Questions have been addressed in this House about what the NDU has not done, about the *terrain* of foot in Tranquebar. Yesterday, we finally had the inauguration

- cutting of ribbon of that *terrain*. But, why it took so long? Because the field was not right and it had to be set right, millions of money from the 2015/2016 Budget had to be spent to set it right!

(*Interruptions*)

That is why!

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker: Order! Please!

(*Interruptions*)

Mrs Jadoo-Jaunbocus: Madam Speaker, I can go on and on about such examples. But, surely, this 2016-2017 Budget is setting the pace for us to achieve our objective of ensuring a sustainable growth. Through this Budget, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development has been able to strike out the right balance between the social and economic policies, thus creating the right environment to ensure that the whole country not only takes part, but takes responsibility in achieving this new era of development. The hon. Minister is a responsible Minister who has come here not to ask his people to '*touss sali*' or to do '*macarena*', but to assume his responsibility. It is placing responsibility on each and every citizen of this country.

For example, look at the measures taken for the suspension regarding the payment of trade fees of Rs5,000 or less by medium and small enterprises where a definite timeframe of three years has been set. Clearly, Madam Speaker, this shows the responsibility of the hon. Minister who gives a clear indication to responsible organisations that they will have to achieve their set objectives to become sustainable within that timeframe. We are helping you to help yourself. But become responsible and become independent! This is the message. This Budget is not merely taking taxpayers' money and thrifting it away irresponsibly, as I have just said.

Another example of the responsible Minister's responsible action is the tax holiday given to businesses. For instance, new businesses in priority sectors are being given an 8-year tax holiday and the existing ones will benefit from a 4-year tax holiday. These will also include corporate societies and individuals. Once again, showing that the Minister is giving a chance to everybody to ensure that this era of development really happens and it becomes a reality.

Even as regards the alleviation of poverty, targets have been set. The hon. Minister has shown his very keen interest to ensure that we have a benefit threshold that every family is being cared for. For instance, a family of two adults and three children will have a benefit threshold of Rs9,520, touching some 6,400 families, Madam Speaker, and, this will be for a transition period of two years. Once again, we see the action of the responsible Minister setting specific timeframes in order to ensure that the implementation of his measures gives the *resultat escompté*.

Through the various budgetary measures, it is clear that the thread along the philosophy of this Budget is to ensure social stability so as to create the proper environment that will foster the desired economic development. And, I will say that there are so many measures in the Budget to achieve this, that some - not so many now on the other side of the House – fail to see the wood for the trees. And here, Madam Speaker, I would like to emphasise on the consistency of hon. Pravind Jugnauth in his approach through the various Budgets he has moved in this very House.

It is not only me saying what I have just said. When we look at what KPMG has said, Madam Speaker, on this Budget breaking the myth of high expectations and staying on a stable socio-economic course amidst external uncertainties, what it has to say is this –

“It is commendable that the 2016-2017 Budget has maintained the core philosophy Mauritius is known for, which is to maintain a pro-business and social welfare agenda with measures projecting an outlook where GDP growth rate will be 4.1% in 2017 from 3.4% in 2015/16, and targeting a statutory debt of 50% in 2018, down from the current 65%.”

Is this not an achievement? Is this not a milestone that the hon. Minister has set and is realistically achieving?

Madam Speaker, I would like to elaborate on one particular measure announced in the Budget Speech regarding the agricultural business. The creation of an Agri-Business park at Highlands - proposed creation over an area of 100 acres is a major landmark in our endeavour to modernise our agricultural sector and give facilities to MSMEs and cooperative societies to develop.

Yes, indeed, MSMEs because this Government has created the MSM enterprises, that is, the Micro Enterprises are added to the Medium and Small Enterprises, so, therefore, the creation of MSM Enterprises.

Madam Speaker, it is obvious that such a measure in the agricultural sector can only come from someone who has been the architect of the sugar sector reform and it is well-known success. We are sure that this project, Madam Speaker, will lead to the creation of other Agri-parks in various parts of the island and it will act as a catalyst to our desire to become self-sufficient in vegetable production. This is very important. This is the national flow flowing from the SME and MSME Development Certificate Scheme which ensures the financing of Agricultural Business Parks (Agri-parks) by now providing land for development. We are giving you the finance. We are giving you the land and we are telling you, as the hon. Minister has said: 'Be responsible!'

Our policy to move forward by production or by vegetables will be facilitated surely by the Agri-parks and it is going to create the optimal environment needed for such production. Here, Madam Speaker, I would urge the hon. Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security to consider moving beyond simple food production and offer services of integrated packaging plants within these Agri-parks so as to bring added value to the end product and resulting increase income for the producers. So that the product, instead of being just vegetable produce, will be placed in packets and will reach high levels such as supermarkets directly, thus increasing their income.

Madam Speaker, up to now, I have talked about the very caring side of this budget. Now, I would also like to move to the daring aspects thereof. By the daring, I mean the institutional reform proposals made by in this Budget. This measure is aimed at increasing public sector efficiency. There have been mergers. I will not go into all of it, but just highlight a few because everyone is familiar with the budgetary measures. For instance, the merger proposed between the SMEDA, the Enterprise Mauritius and the National Women Entrepreneurship Council. We have the SPDC, Business Parks of Mauritius Ltd (BPML), the SLDC, the Belle Mare Tourist Village Merger, Le Val Development Ltd and Pailles, the ICTA, the IBA, the MHC, the NHDC and all others.

Moreover, there are measures to bring about the restructuring within the public sector and certain parastatal bodies. Some 13 to 14 of them will all, Madam Speaker, send the right message to investors that the Government understands the need for business to have visibility for the conduct of businesses. In addition, they will promote good governance, accountability and insight, a culture of rigour in terms of Government spending which will further enhance the reputation of our country.

These are not merely observations coming from me, personally and, once more, I turn to what KPMG had to say. Indeed, it says -

“This measure (...)"

Public sector efficiency reform, they call it.

“(...) is very much welcome with a lot of appreciation and indeed leads to the revamping and restructuring and this will increase visibility, accountability and, of course, efficiency of the Government".

What does Deloitte and Tours says in its Mauritius Budget Highlights 2016? It stated that -

‘The budget was presented in a difficult domestic and international economic context with economic growth slowing down to 3.4% and unemployment rate standing at 7.6%, reflecting the mismatch between market demands and the skills available.’

‘The budget is therefore focussed on strategies to improve economic growth before the 3% to 3.5% becomes the “new normal”.’

It goes on to say that they, that is, Deloitte & Touche -

‘welcome the new direction to open the economy for international investors, improvement in efficiency in public sector, minimal changes to tax measures as well as incentives for increased investment and programmes to alleviate poverty.’

It also ponders that the success of the budgets -

‘depends upon the ability of the government to implement the various initiatives as well as the private sector playing a key role in the new era of development.’

Madam Speaker, I will now move to another major pillar of our economy, namely: the Residential and Real Estate and Construction economy, which during the last five years has gone through a contraction with the figure of 8.5% in 2004. The sector, Madam Speaker, is the third largest sector of the country, employing some 46,300 people at the same stroke, absorbing a large percentage of the working population with minimum level of education.

With these facts, Madam Speaker, daring decisions had to be taken by the hon. Minister in order to kick off *la relance* in the sector. When going through the decisions announced by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development in this sector, this sector is expected to achieve a positive growth rate of 1.6% in 2016.

Moreover, the same experts who have commented on this Budget positively project a boost in the construction of real estate sector, which will generate a positive spill over in the economy in terms of job creation, demand on construction materials and linkages with other sectors of the economy, including manufacturing and transportation. Besides, macroeconomic benefits, there will be opportunities and benefits for micro small and medium entrepreneurs to service these residential developments. Of course, we cannot forget our MSMEs.

First-time buyers and middle-income earners will find it easier to acquire building, be it a house or an apartment. Madam Speaker, these are bold measures, very bold measures; measures taken to ensure and secure this era in time. Indeed, these measures are not locked in the paradigm of yesteryear, but these measures are very *avant-gardists*, are very modern and have moved on with the time because it has to answer the challenges of today and tomorrow.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, much has been said by those on the other side - not many left now - and in the press about certain changes and reviews of the Government's decision. Of course, we have read in the press and we have heard it on the lips of the few others there that this is incoherence, this is backtracking, but, Madam Speaker, I call it bold. I call it responsible. Why bold, Madam Speaker? Because this Government has had the guts to dream for this country! This Government has had the guts to dream and wants something much better for this nation, but this Government also adapts to changing conditions. This Government is a responsible Government. Yes, responsible, Madam Speaker, because this Government will not spend taxpayers' money when it has decided to take a path that there are indicators against its project under consideration. Yes, it dares to free certain decisions. Yes, it dares because it does not have hidden agenda.

This Government has not tied its hands to anybody except to its nation. If it is linked to anybody, if it bows down to anybody, it is *le peuple*, so it dares to say stop and freeze. If only our predecessors had dared to do that, we would not have had the Bagatelle Dam, we

would not have had Betamax, we would not have had Terre Rouge/Verdun and so many more.

L'honorable Pravind Jugnauth a été fidèle à lui-même, à ses principes et à ses convictions. We read this through every line of this Budget. We read this and we will see the legacy that hon. Pravind Jugnauth will leave with this new era of development just like Sir Anerood Jugnauth has left a legacy of economic development. This is the true heritage *des Jugnauth*, the heritage of a new era, of a nation worldwide development, national development, national prosperity.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I suspend the sitting for one and a half hours.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.37 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Before passing on to the next orator, I have used my discretion to allow the hon. Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security to make a statement out of turn at this stage. Inasmuch as it relates to the prevalence of the foot-and-mouth disease in Rodrigues and Mauritius, an issue which is of national importance. Hon. Seeruttun!

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE - OUTBREAK

The Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Seeruttun): Madam Speaker, thank you for allowing me to make the following statement out of turn.

I wish to make a statement on the prevalence of the foot-and-mouth disease in Rodrigues and Mauritius and the measures taken by my Ministry to control the spread of the disease.

On 19 July 2016, the Division of the Veterinary Services of my Ministry was notified by the Veterinary Officer of Rodrigues of an increasing number of sick cattle in the region of Terre Rouge and Roseaux in Rodrigues. 32 animals were showing mouth lesions and frothing and two deaths were reported. A viral infection was tentatively diagnosed.

On 21 July, a first set of blood samples were received at the Animal Health Laboratory at Réduit and tests carried out on 21, 22, and 23 July revealed negative results for 6 different viral infections.

In view of the increase in number of reported cases which had reached 70, technical and financial assistance was sought from the Unité de Surveillance of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) on 27 July to investigate the causes of the infection. Accordingly the Veterinary Epidemiologist of the IOC and two veterinary officers of the Division of the Veterinary Services (DVS) proceeded to Rodrigues on 30 July. On 31 July, they reported that 31 farms were found to be infected and clinical evidence was detected in 92 cases.

In the meantime, on 29 July 2016, the DVS informed the Commission of Agriculture in Rodrigues that, in view of the continuous increase in the number of infected cattle, a restriction should be imposed on the exportation of cattle to Mauritius and the embarkation of the consignment of cattle aboard the vessel MV ANNA expected to depart for Mauritius on 30 July 2016 should not be authorised. The Commission replied that the request for the ban on the export of the animals would be considered by the authorities in Rodrigues.

On 01 August 2016, despite the request made by the DVS not to ship any consignment of animals in Mauritius, the MV ANNA berthed in Port Louis with 13 containers of animals comprising 91 heads of cattle, 69 sheep and 75 goats.

A decision was immediately taken by my Ministry to transport all the containers to the Richelieu Quarantine Station to minimize the risks of contamination.

Madam Speaker, on the 01 August, the Veterinary Services of my Ministry became aware that another consignment of animals comprising 82 heads of cattle, 101 sheep and 140 goats had been imported from Rodrigues on 15 July 2016. These animals had been imported on behalf of 19 breeders located in different places in Mauritius.

Meanwhile analysis of a set of blood samples received on 31 July from Rodrigues was carried out on the 01 August at the Animal Health Laboratory at Réduit and showed positive results have been obtained for the foot-and-mouth disease.

Several teams comprising Veterinary Officers and Extension Officers of FAREI have been constituted and have been effecting visits to the different breeding places in Mauritius to enquire about the health of the animals and to advise the breeders concerned not to effect any transfer of the animals from one place to another around the island.

One particular farm in Vallée des Prêtres containing 80 animals including animals imported from Rodrigues on 15 July was visited on 02 August and suspected clinical cases of FMD were detected.

No detection of the disease has so far been made on the other farms visited.

A Crisis Committee comprising representatives of my Ministry, FAREI, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Local Government, the Police Department as well as the Chamber of Agriculture and the Mauritius Meat Producers Association has been set up for a better monitoring of the situation.

Madam Speaker, a meeting was held at my Ministry on Friday 05 August with the Veterinary Epidemiologist of the IOC who had proceeded to Rodrigues and senior officials of my Ministry.

The following options have been proposed -

- (1) The culling of all animals imported from Rodrigues on 15 July and 01 August as well as any other animals which have been infected by the disease.
- (2) The culling of all animals as per the above option plus the vaccination of all other animals found in a radius of three kilometres within the localities where the infected animals are being kept.
- (3) The vaccination of all the herds in Mauritius including cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and deer.

The Crisis Committee met on Friday afternoon and recommended the following measures -

- (1) The immediate culling of all animals found at Richelieu Quarantine Station and on the farm at Vallée des Prêtres given that many of the animals have shown symptoms of the disease.
- (2) The import of vaccines for the vaccination of animals found in the immediate surroundings of farms where imported animals from Rodrigues are being kept.
- (3) The authorisation of the Commissioner of Police to be sought for the culling of animals by gunshot.

I was briefed of these recommendations on Friday evening and I immediately consulted the Rt. hon. Prime Minister for the approval to proceed with the proposed measures. The Rt. hon. Prime Minister has given his consent and the Commissioner of Police has been requested in writing to provide the necessary assistance. Two officers from the Police Department attended an urgent meeting with my senior officers in my presence on the same night to decide on the modalities for the culling exercise during the weekend. As at yesterday, 54

heads of cattle, 144 sheep and goats have been culled at Richelieu, and 60 sheep and goats at Vallée des Prêtres. The culling exercise is being pursued today.

Moreover, an order of 10,000 doses of vaccines was placed on Friday night with a laboratory in Botswana. The consignment is expected to reach Mauritius by DHL.

Additionally, a strict control is also being exercised at the airport to ensure that no raw meat is carried by passengers coming from Rodrigues.

Madam Speaker, with regard to Rodrigues the situation has been worsening and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly has declared the whole of the island as quarantine zone.

Measures are also envisaged to cull all the animals in the reported infected farms. My Ministry will extend all the assistance to Rodrigues for a better control of the situation.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry is seeking the collaboration of all stakeholders and the population at large, both in Mauritius and Rodrigues, for the effective implementation of the preventive measures to prevent the spread of the disease.

My Ministry is closely monitoring the situation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Koonjoo!

(2.43 p.m.)

The Minister of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries, Shipping and Outer Islands (Mr P. Koonjoo): Madam Speaker, I would like, at the very outset, to congratulate all the orators who have taken part in the debate before me and a special congratulation to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for the presentation of this Budget. I will also concur with the Rt. hon. Prime Minister who has rated it as excellent. It is quite abnormal that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is absent. Even he has passed a very positive comment, he said: “*c'est un budget intéressant*”. *Je me rappelle bien, pour la première fois quand le ministre des Finances d'aujourd'hui était ministre des Finances et il avait présenté un budget, à ce moment-là, l'honorable Paul Bérenger disait -*

‘Coup d'essai coup de maître’

C'était les commentaires du Premier ministre d'alors. But you can never rely on the tongue of hon. Bérenger because at times it is good, at times it is bad.

(Interruptions)

Yes, this time it is good. *Autrefois, c'était 'petit crétin', n'est-ce pas?*

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mohamed, no comment!

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Koonjoo: You cannot make any comment on him!

(*Interruptions*)

Madam Speaker: Allow him to proceed!

(*Interruptions*)

Allow him to make his speech, please!

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Koonjoo: *Ouvert to zoreil bien!* Madam speaker, this budget depicts the vision of a man with a heart who has shown empathy to the plight of the most vulnerable segment of the population, a man who has lent his ears to the concerns of the middle class and a man who has been responsive to the expectations of one and all, be it the business community, the small entrepreneurs and even the old people.

This budget paves the way for a new era of development in line with the Government Programme 2015-2019 and the Economic Mission Statement of the Prime Minister. The measures contained therein are bold, realistic and achievable despite the uncertainties and turbulences of the global economy exacerbated recently by the Brexit. This Government has not yet lost sight of its commitment to transform Mauritius into a truly forward-looking, environmentally sustainable, economically vibrant and innovative nation.

Madam speaker, there can be no other stronger evidence than the positive response from the different segments of the population be they trade unions, civil society or the business community to show that the budget has been widely accepted by the majority of the population, and especially those in the extreme poverty trap. Madam Speaker, to be poor is not a curse, it is not a sin. Nobody is born poor, nobody is born rich. Some achieve richness, but some have got richness trusted upon them. This also is true.

This budget, Madam Speaker, has created the necessary feel-good factor in this country. I personally bear witness that it has touched immediate and short-term needs of one and all.

To those eternal pessimists who keep on shouting that this Government is lethargic in action, I would like to remind them that we have already started to reverse the surging unemployment trend from 8.7% to 7.6% during the first quarter of 2016. This is a very good sign, Madam Speaker.

Madam speaker, in the Government Programme 2015-2019, we had pledged to achieve meaningful change with a focus on the vulnerable segment of the population. This Budget has clearly transmitted this strategic touch into concrete outcome through a number of key measures.

For example, I will take a few of them -

- (i) through the payment of a monthly subsistence allowance ranging from Rs2,720 up to Rs9,520 to poor families in Social Register. ‘Poor families’ there was a time we never heard the words ‘extreme poverty’. We heard ‘extreme poverty’ only after the ex-Prime Minister was in power, after a decade of rule people were fed up of him and that was why one man alone - I repeat, Madam Speaker, one man alone - stood up and the whole country was behind him indistinctively of the religion, colour, be it a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian or a Chinese or even the White people. Everybody was behind Sir Anerood Jugnauth and the victory of that time was because of him. History will bear evidence that one man just stood up to fight corruption, to fight the mess the ex-government had created, it was Sir Anerood Jugnauth and everybody believed in him, the youngsters, the old people, men, women, everybody believed in him and it was a landslide victory. Good God the campaign did not go for two weeks more or otherwise it would have been a clean sweep 60-0.
- (ii) Madam, through the increase of the Crèche Voucher Scheme for poor families from Rs1,500 to Rs2,000 per child;
- (iii) through the extension of the basic invalidity pension to some 3,130 children below 15 years of age. My colleague, Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo answered a Private Notice Question of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and it is clear that the measures for the children in this Budget are extraordinary.

Never I think that anybody has seen a Budget where so much is done for the people who are extremely poor. I wonder if people know - I don’t know anybody in this House, I can’t say

anybody – they may know, but can they feel the poverty? Have they ever seen how people live in poor huts, in misery terms, how they manage to feed? No! You have not seen that! You have heard, you know it, but you have not felt it. Have you ever feel the pang of hunger? No, you don't...

(Interruptions)

Nobody because the Labour Party is Labour Party in name only, Madam Speaker. Have you found any Member whose father was a labourer in the Labour Party?

(Interruptions)

You are from the Labour Party? I don't know...

(Interruptions)

Yes!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Koonjoo: *pe gagne dimal?*

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr Koonjoo: Next the drastic reduction in the retail price of cooking gas from Rs330 to Rs270 per 12 kg cylinder. You just ask anybody outside. Go out there and ask anybody especially the poor people...

(Interruptions)

You are not a poor man! You come with a big satchel in the Parliament...

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister...

Mr Koonjoo: ... just like your friend...

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, please! Please, address yourself to the Chair and you can't engage yourself in a conversation with the Opposition! You address yourself to the Chair. Whatever they may say, they will have the opportunity also to reply when they take the floor.

(Interruptions)

There is no insult!

(Interruptions)

Look, you will have the opportunity to reply back...

(Interruptions)

...but you won't be able to reply now. From a sitting position you are not allowed...

(Interruptions)

You should not tell me what I should do!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Mohamed, you should not because this is confrontation to the Chair! You should not tell me what I should do!

(Interruptions)

Okay? You should not! And I will not...

(Interruptions)

If you continue then I will have to order you out!

(Interruptions)

This is a first warning I am giving you!

(Interruptions)

And you should not confront the Chair.

(Interruptions)

Mr Koonjoo: Thank you, Madam. These key measures will have a direct bearing in the lives of thousands of families, Madam Speaker. They will add up to the Marshall Plan which contains a number of concrete measures to tackle the root of cause of poverty.

Madam Speaker, I now come to the budgetary measures relating to my Ministry. Here I would like to, first of all, list down the major achievements...

(Interruptions)

- (i) the National Ocean Council was set up administratively on 26 June 2015. Here, I wish to inform the House that the Commonwealth Secretariat on 08 April 2016

has submitted a preliminary advice report for the Development of the National Ocean Policy for the Republic of Mauritius and Related Matters. My Ministry is currently analysing the proposals contained therein;

- (ii) the construction of Blue Bay Marine Park - lying idle for so many years - Centre has been completed and was officially inaugurated on 29 June 2016;
- (iii) 1.5 m. fish fingerlings were released at selected sites in the lagoon around Mauritius for the replenishment of the fish stock because, unfortunately, our lagoon has been depleted of fish;

(Interruptions)

- (iv) 33 fish business operators are registered with the competent authority seafood for export of fishery products;
- (v) 828 candidates have been trained at the Mauritius Maritime Training Academy this year;
- (vi) secondary school sensitization campaign on career opportunities in maritime sector, presentations have been conducted in 145 schools and attended by approximately 6500 students of Form V and Form VI;
- (vii) fees for the Mauritius Maritime Training Academy candidates have been reduced from Rs11,000 per candidate to Rs2,000 while medical fees down from about Rs10,000 to Rs2,000 just to allow people from the poor section to get trained at the Academy and join the ship or the cruise vessels;
- (viii) the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd which prior to the advent of this Government has registered five years of consecutive massive losses totalling to Rs260 m. has been successfully restructured into a profitable and dynamic company completely free of Government finance to meet its operational and marine maintenance equipment;
- (ix) through the involvement and efforts of the Mauritius Shipping Company Ltd which has managed to attract Bomin Ltd. the fourth largest bunker trading company in the world to commence bunker trade in Mauritius thus, paving the way for Mauritius to become a shipping hub in the region, and
- (x) I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development on the exemption from payment of income tax to

seafarers. This measure, Madam Speaker, would encourage Mauritian seafarers to henceforth take up work on local Mauritian vessels. This is a landmark in the history of fiscality in Mauritius.

Madam Speaker, I now turn towards the fisheries sector.

Madam Speaker, the fishing sector is being called upon to play a vital role in the development of strategy. I wish to inform the House that a new Fisheries Bill is being finalised and will be presented in the House by the end of this year. Madam Speaker, in line with Government's objectives of diversifying its economic base, my Ministry proposes to take the fisheries sector, principally an industrial fishing sector, so that it becomes a major segment of the economic development in the near future.

Madam Speaker, this Budget highlights that 35 hectares of reclaimed land earmarked for petroleum storage, logistics and fishing activities at Port Louis. Moreover, the Mauritius Port Authority will construct break waves at Fort Williams to provide shelter for approximately 120 fishing vessels. No doubt, the investment by the Mauritius Port Authority will increase fishing vessels traffic in Mauritius and will also enable the country to capture a higher fish tonnage. The extension of the port will provide space for the new operators to establish and enable existing operators to extend the activities.

Madam Speaker, with a view to harnessing the full potential of our marine resources and in line with the objectives of my Ministry to develop a national fleet, actions have been initiated with potential promoters to invest in this sector. Afritex is one company, which has already set up a structure in Mauritius and is operating five fishing boats under Mauritian flags. It is exporting its chilled fish to US market.

Madam Speaker, with the introduction of a new incentive scheme, with the tax holiday of eight years to attract industrial fishing companies to operate in Mauritius and contribute to the development of the seafood hub, this sector will develop further. At present, the EU and the US are the main export markets for our fish and fish products. Out of diversification strategy, we are exploring the possibility to export to the emerging sectors like China and Russia. I will just give you the example. Following negotiations with the Chinese authorities, we are now exporting fish and fish products, including fishmeal and fish oil to China. Actions have already been initiated with Russian authorities for the export of our seafood to Russia. Concomitantly, promoting aquaculture production and meeting the

requirements of the international markets for aquaculture products would, therefore, spearhead diversification in the fisheries sector, and help increase in growth.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry is aiming to increase the industrial aquaculture fish production for internal consumption, exports and job creation, and explore links with small-scale operators. Fish farming sites have been earmarked and specific regulations have been prescribed. The farming sites include 20, as mentioned in the Budget, for industrial aquaculture. I wish to inform the House that two major projects have been approved for the culture of Cobia in the sea concessions on the west coast and marine shrimps at Albion Fisheries Research Centre (AFRC). Moreover, Government will set up common facilities on land for aquaculture and fish processing. During the financial year 2015/2016, five local and foreign companies have received approval for implementing major aquaculture projects.

As regards the semi-industrial sector, my Ministry is pleased to note that the Budget has made provision to revitalise this important segment. In an effort to increase the production of bank fisheries, outer reefs and bank fishing, over the above the tax holiday of eight years. The Budget also provides for a grant of 50% up to a cap of Rs4 m. to cooperative societies to enable them acquire semi-industrial vessels, because we are going to fish outside the lagoon. With an EEZ of 2.3 million square kilometres, Madam Speaker, I think it is time now for us to forget the lagoon, go and explore the outside lagoon area. This measure will give a new impetus to our cooperative societies to venture in promoting this sector. I would appeal to the fishermen community, especially the young fishermen, to join us. There are lots of opportunities in this sector. I appeal to them to come and to train themselves. This will lead them to fortune. Thank you!

With a view to alleviating the difficulties of our fishermen communities, measures taken during financial year 2015/2016 include –

- (i) free wire ropes have been given to all fishermen using basket traps;
- (ii) all fishermen have been provided with a lifejacket;
- (iii) ten fishermen benefitted funds to the tune of Rs200,000 grant, each for the purchase of a *canot*, and actions have been initiated for the release of the funds to acquire 10 additional *canots*;
- (iv) training is being provided to 25 skippers now for fishing boats of less than 24 metres in length, and

- (v) 133 fishmongers have been trained at the Fish Handling Preservation and Marketing at FITEC.

Madam Speaker, to enhance production of fish from activities in the lagoons, my Ministry is implementing a closure of the fishing of octopus, now in vigour at a national level, from 15 August, this month, to 15 October this year. In this context, a National Sensitisation Campaign was conducted among the fishermen community and the public at large. I personally attended the meetings held with the fishermen around the island to ensure effective communication and success of the project. We had a pilot project last year in the South, and we found that it brought a big success in the South. We want to imitate for the whole country this year. Unfortunately, we are after *l'île Rodrigues*. They have done it in Rodrigues and the output has been increased from one to five times.

With artisanal fishing reaching its limit, there is need to further reorient the fisheries sector towards higher value-added activities. As a result, fishermen are encouraged to fish around the Fish Aggregating Devices, called FADs, and further offshore, and engaged in farming in the lagoons.

As regards aquaculture, to accompany fishermen communities to engage in fish cage farming, fingerlings have been provided free of cost to existing cage owners. Technical advice will also be provided to potential operators. Cage materials, including nets and cage structures, have been acquired for the setting up of ten cages at selected sites, and these will be handed over to ten fishermen associations shortly.

For financial year 2016/2017, with a view to promoting small-scale aquaculture, the Budget has made provision of Rs12.5 m. for the purchase of ten floating cage structures to allocate to fishermen cooperatives. This measure will help the uplift of the socio-economic status of the fishermen and I am sure they won't miss this opportunity.

As regards the offshore fisheries, my Ministry will continue to impart training to fishermen fishing around FAD or using long lines to fish tuna and related species. My Ministry will ensure that all the FADs will be kept active. The measure earmarked in this Budget relating to the purchase of a multi-purpose vessel, will allow us to carry our research, surveys and training of fishermen and skippers. This will, no doubt, be instrumental in achieving our objectives.

Madam Speaker, let me turn now to the shipping sector. Madam Speaker, Maritime Safety and Security will remain high on the agenda of my Ministry. The MV Benita which

ran aground at Le Bouchon in the South of the island had been making headlines for weeks. The response has been quick and any major risk of oil spill was contained. MV Benita was freed from the rocks within 34 days despite the prevailing adverse weather conditions at Le Bouchon and without using any explosive.

Madam Speaker, in this context, my Ministry is in the process of upgrading our legislation to include the requirements therein by drafting a Marine Pollution Bill, which had never been done in the past. Moreover, we have drafted a Marine Pollution Liability and Compensation Bill to cover requirements under CLC, International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage and an International Convention of Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage.

Madam Speaker, currently we have some 30,000 vessels that ply close to Mauritius, but only around 3,000 (one-tenth) vessels called and are registered at Port Louis yearly. Nearly 30,000 and only 3,000 calling in our Port! This is a big opportunity, Madam Speaker. One can guess the potential to grow the maritime sector. Such a scenario will create opportunities for growth but, on the other hand, shortage of skills acts as a constraint as demand outstrips supply. In our endeavour to address this human resource constraint, this Budget has made provision to increase the intake of the MMTA by 50%, that is, to 1,200 training annually.

Madam Speaker, considering the big demand for recruitment in the shipping sector, we are also opening up Marine Training Market to the private sector. And I believe that, it is always with the concurrence of private and public sector that we can do a lot of things. As in the past, we have done the first economic miracle because there was a lovely togetherness between private and public sector, and that was due especially to our Rt. hon. Prime Minister.

I wish to inform the House that approval for the setting up of a Maritime Training Institution has been granted to a private company. Moreover, to raise the awareness of vast employment opportunities in the sector, my Ministry has carried out a very fruitful sensitisation campaign with college students. We propose to continue with the sensitisation campaign on a yearly basis. It is hoped that our future generation will choose this very promising avenue as a career path.

Moreover, to facilitate employment in the cruise sector, my Ministry has partnered with the local recruiting agents to facilitate and enhance the recruitment and placement of Mauritian seafarers on-board ships, particularly on cruise vessels.

Let me now turn to outer islands, Agalega. Madam Speaker, let me say a few words about Agalega. It is comforting to note that the major infrastructural projects are well underway following a signing of a MoU with the Government of India. A grant of Rs750 m. had been provided for the projects such as airstrip and jetty. And nothing has been done for ten years!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr Koonjoo: Currently, a field survey and other investigations are underway and same are expected to be completed by the first week of December 2016 and the work will start on July 2017. With a view to enhancing the living conditions of Agaleans, the Budget has made provision to the tune of Rs4 m. for the acquisition of two generators to secure continuous electricity supply for the population. It has also earmarked a sum of Rs6.5 m. for a cold room to store food items and fish catch which is, eventually, to be sent to Mauritius.

(Interruptions)

The above measures will definitely enhance the social economic development of Agalega.

Regarding the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd, Madam Speaker, I would like to inform the House that the restructuring exercise has borne its fruits as the MSCL has made a profit of around Rs52 m. as at 30 June 2015 and compared to the loss of some Rs63 m. for the previous audited financial year. The accumulated losses of the MSCL as shown by the audited accounts for the five years up to 2014 stood at Rs260 m.. Moreover, the chartering of the MV Anna as a transitional backup measure pending the acquisition of a new cargo vessel was further extended to January 2018 in order to avoid any disruption in the provision of goods to the Rodrigues.

Mauritius Oceanography Institute! You will agree that research and development, Madam Speaker, is the backbone of a globally competitive and innovation driven economy. Research and development will be crucial for the development of the ocean economy as the next phase of our socio-economic development will be driven by technology and innovation. With the commissioning of the Mauritius Oceanography Institute (MOI) New Research Centre at Albion, we are looking forward to the MOI playing a vital role in the process of applied research in the ocean sector.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce and inform the House that the Government will sign a MoU with the National Institute of Oceanography Goa towards the setting up of a World-Class Research Institute of Oceanography in Mauritius. The measure will enable MOI to undertake advanced research in the field of oceanography.

Madam Speaker, emerging economic subsectors are becoming a reality in Mauritius. In December 2015, the first deed of concession on the Deep Ocean Water Application (DOWA) Project was signed between the Government of Mauritius and Urban Cooling Ltd. As regards the marine renewable energy, following the signing of a collaboration agreement between the Mauritius Research Council (MRC) and the Carnegie Wave Energy Ltd. (Australia) in June last year, the deployment of a wave monitoring device for the Carnegie Wave Energy Project took place in June 2016.

Moreover, I wish to inform that two studies are being concluded with regard to the production of electricity through ocean waves and offshore wind.

Madam Speaker, on a concluding note, I would like to state that in the face of a sluggish global economic environment, this Budget has paved the way to achieve a sustained, strong, inclusive and balanced growth. I must congratulate the Minister of Finance and Economic Development; I know him only since 1995 after the big defeat in the election. After general elections, he stood as a candidate for the municipal elections, and I remember, myself and my friend hon. Showkutally Soodhun, we campaigned door-to-door for him and he was elected alone, I believe, in Vacoas/Phoenix.

(Interruptions)

Yes, 1996. From that day, I know hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. Now, I believe that he is grown up in all senses, every way, mentally - I know he has passed some difficult times, but those different times have made him become strong and, today, after this Budget, anybody you will ask on the way, in any place in Mauritius, ask them, men, women, children, especially extremely poor people, they will tell you that they are happy with the Budget and that hon. Pravind Jugnauth now can step in the shoes of his father; he is the future Prime Minister. You mark my words! The other day, when he presented the Budget, I went and met him, I don't know who saw me and I told him the same phrase: 'Now, you are ready.'

(Interruptions)

I'll tell you what I told him in his ears.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Please!

Mr Koonjoo: There is no secret. I told him: 'Now, you are ready. One step is ahead, it's not too much. In another one or two steps, only one step more.' Maybe the problem of extreme poverty, we can expunge it out from Mauritius and I believe that Mauritius will be the only country where the world will look upon as a determined nation, a determined Prime Minister; with this team, together with him, they can do miracles in this country. We don't have resources, but we have got determination, we have got conviction and I believe that with this Budget...

(Interruptions)

...the Prime Minister to be, in waiting, I say waiting...

(Interruptions)

I believe that we will show the example to the whole world and I tell the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development that myself, my Ministry, all the Ministries, all the MPs and PPSs in this Government, we are with hon. Pravind Jugnauth: "Go ahead, make it happen, hon. Pravind Jugnauth, we are together. Congratulations for this Budget!"

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Léopold!

(3.22 p.m.)

Mr J. Leopold (Second Member for Rodrigues): Madam Speaker, I welcome the Budget of the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development presented to the nation of the Republic of Mauritius on 29 July.

The people of Rodrigues also welcome this Budget formidably. The Rodriguan people welcome those good announcements on measures to ease household expenses, among others. Bearing in mind that in Rodrigues, the cost of commodities are higher than in mainland Mauritius, but many efforts are being made in subsidising basic food items.

Before going further, Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the House once more that Rodrigues Island, which is a territorial continuity of the Republic of Mauritius, accedes to its autonomous status in the year 2001, status granted to us by the present Rt. hon. Prime Minister together with hon. Paul Bérenger in an alliance of MSM/MMM.

But there are fears and suspicion that call for devolution and internal self-government or nothing but a thin cover for eventual secession and independence. That is totally groundless! The near totality of Rodriguans want to remain in a country called the Republic of Mauritius. What the people want is real Executive and Legislative Authority for its development. Of course, there are secessionists, but they are of tiny minority and the OPR Party had kicked them out during the last general elections. They had not only lost general elections, but also had not been able to secure a seat in the National Parliament.

Having said all that, Madam Speaker, despite our autonomous status, it is true that we have our own budgetary exercise, money granted by the Central Government. With that money, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly has the task of setting priorities and executes the implementation of projects. But the State has its regional economic strategy for the sustainable development of its entire outer island and that includes Rodrigues Island, Agalega, St. Brandon, Chagos Archipelago and Tromelin.

What the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has done in this Budget, it's just doing just that, that is, *une politique des îles*, those outer islands which form part of the Republic of Mauritius. I do not think that this is too much to ask in view of developing sustainable economic development of those outer islands. Of course, priority differs from island to island.

Madam Speaker, Rodrigues had, in the past, been neglected. Well, I would rather say that in the past it had been underfunded by the State despite the fact that we contribute our fair bit to the economy of the Republic of Mauritius.

I am so thankful – and the people of Rodrigues as well - to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for having been so considerate in making provision to provide Rodrigues with the necessary tools for its sustainable economic development. Both the Rt. hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development have been to Rodrigues prior to the presentation of the Budget and had consulted the local people and listened to their aspiration, and to see with their own eyes that the money granted to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly is judiciously used for the economic development and well-being of the people of Rodrigues.

Madam Speaker, my generation and the generation that is following me is that of the 21st century generation and we represent the future of Rodrigues Island and that future is happening now. Therefore, to keep pace with our time, we urgently need adequate

infrastructure, high speed internet connection, bigger airport and modern harbour. The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development, I am sure, will agree with me that adequate resources are needed so as to narrow the gap of inequality which exists between the two islands.

It is good to be noted that since 2012, good governance and judicious use of State money are prevailing in the administration of Rodrigues Island. New schools are being built, there are new road access, upgrading of hospitals and improvement of health care system. Those developments happened because of the trust of the Central Government to Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

Actually, Rodrigues lacks some physical structure and facility to enhance its economic growth. The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development is well aware of that.

This present Budget is a translation of the firm commitment of the Central Government in responding to the aspiration of the people of Rodrigues by setting their priorities right.

With this Budget we are going to have a new run way with new terminals, better internet connection via satellite pending the laying of the undersea fibre optic cable and all the necessary measures are taken for the realisation of this project which is long awaiting principally by the young people of Rodrigues. A new and bigger harbour will come into light with the provision made in this Budget.

So why does Rodrigues need all that? Is it just to make Rodrigues fashionable and trendy? No, Madam Speaker, it's all about connectivity (connecting to the globalized world). Years ago, my parents were entrepreneurs too, but they did it for subsistence and self-sufficiency.

Things have changed now. We need to transform our local products and add value to them, selling them to the global competitive market. Twenty years ago, who would have thought that we will have unemployed graduates in Rodrigues? Now, how are we going to tackle the problem of unemployment of graduates in particular? Why do we need to solve the problem of connectivity once and for all in Rodrigues?

Madam Speaker, our economy is based on mainly agriculture, fishing and tourism. They are all linked to the SME. Therefore, connecting to the underwater sea fibre optic cable, having a bigger airport in Rodrigues and having a modern harbour are very important to keep

us update with the 21st century type of development. They are important because they are the instruments in enhancing growth, hence improving the quality of life of all Rodriguan people and reducing poverty.

Those measures announced in this Budget will certainly transform the Rodrigues society by -

- moving people out of poverty;
- creating new jobs;
- enhance human development;
- improvement of health and education and, on top of that,
- a sum of Rs1.1 billion has been earmarked and distributed in various Ministries so as to help Rodrigues and accompany Rodrigues in its development.

Concerning the health services nationally, lots of money have been put in the health service which is a very good thing. But, Madam Speaker, when you, anyone or I are feeling sick and go to the hospital that is too late. When you feel sick and go to the hospital it is too late already. So, that is why we need to focus on the primary healthcare service. We have a lot of trained doctors in Mauritius. I think we have to lay emphasis on the concept of family doctor. We need to introduce the concept of family doctor in the Republic of Mauritius so as to prevent people from getting sick and prevent pressure on hospitals.

Amongst the many reasons, we can use most of the trained doctors we have in Mauritius as family doctors and they can prevent drugs addiction in Mauritius. That is very prevailing in Mauritius now with synthetic drugs. I think one of the solutions with which we will be able to tackle it is by the introduction of family doctors. Amongst that they will be able to stay in communities and even doctors, family doctors, can play a vital role in the prevention of poverty not only diseases but the prevention of poverty and social problems as well.

Concerning taxes on tobacco and alcohol, I think that is a very good initiative by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development but how about those people who are very poor but are addicted to cigarettes? So, I don't think they will stop buying cigarettes, by any means maybe by thieving they will try to go and get the cigarettes. So, we will need to prevent social problems. We will need to tackle the problem of addiction by opening more

secession tobacco clinics so as to allow those people to get out of this addiction and to have a very good society.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, Rodrigues has chosen to engage itself in sustainable development by respecting the environment and its biodiversity and the fight against climate change. Though we are not a big polluter but, when it comes to climate change as a small island we are the most which is getting affected. Now, with climate change, with prolonged winter, we are seeing that there is a new occurrence of new viruses which is not only a threat to animals but a threat to humans as well. As you may know, there is an outbreak in Rodrigues. I associate that to climate change as well because those viruses are endemic and they can stay in the soil maybe because of change of temperature or prolonged winter. That is what is happening in Rodrigues. Now it is hitting animals but, as you might have heard in the world there is the outbreak of Ebola and other viruses which if we don't take great care of even humankind can perish. So, Madam Speaker, I make an appeal to the national Government to give us a helping hand, the usual helping hand, so as to combat the outbreak which is occurring in Rodrigues because, even if the virus is not transmissible from animals to humans, we are suffering from great economic loss. We have a population of approximately 10,000 animals in Rodrigues. We are killing 4,500 now so as to prevent the spread of that virus. So, that will bear on the farmers. On our part, in the Rodrigues Regional Assembly we are making lots of efforts so as to help those farmers in this difficult time.

On these words, Madam Speaker, I thank you for your attention.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Bholah!

(3.36 p.m.)

The Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives (Mr S. Bholah): Madam Speaker, allow me first and foremost to commend the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for the pragmatic approach he has adopted in the formulation of the 2016-2017 Budget.

This Budget marks a turning point in how it has been presented. It stands out as being studiously articulated around 10 key strategies, each accompanied by a forceful and wide-ranging set of measures that are aimed at meeting the expectations of the Mauritian population.

In the face of a sluggish economic context as accentuated by Brexit and Eurozone concerns, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has judiciously sought to

strike a balance between promoting economic growth and social responsibility, while maintaining fiscal discipline.

With this Budget, the Government has hit the bull's eye as it has the merit of being a concrete response to the population's economic and social emergencies. Priorities have been well identified and practical solutions have been brought forward to act upon them. Crafted to give a new impulse to the economy, Budget 2016-2017 paves the way for the adoption of a new economic cycle focused on innovation, boosting exports and private investments. It clearly enunciates a new spirit geared towards public sector reform, notably with enhanced business facilitation and acceleration of public investment in the digital field, a new orientation which is ambitious but sorely needed.

The high point of the 2016-2017 Budget, Madam Speaker, is undoubtedly its social penchant, with a bold and distinct inclination to cater for our fellow citizens who are at the lower rung of the social ladder. This Government has pledged to fight poverty and to empower those families so that they can move up the ladder.

This commitment underpins the core philosophy of this Government and some strong social measures taken in this Budget eminently translate this vision. The hon. Minister of Finance has taken an unprecedented decision – that of eradicating absolute poverty in Mauritius by introducing a new scheme under which every adult on the Social Register will be entitled to a monthly subsistence allowance based on a minimum threshold of Rs2,720 with a maximum threshold of Rs9,520 for a family of two adults and three children along with a designed programme to get out these people of the poverty trap.

Madam Speaker, this is higher than our current threshold of Rs6,200 and 40 per cent higher than that advocated by the World Bank. Isn't that an unambiguous proof of this Government's sincere commitment when it comes to providing a decent quality of life to our most unfortunate citizens?

As stated by the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development and I quote -

“The challenges of tomorrow cannot be met with our mindset, policies and actions locked in the paradigm of yesterday”.

The harmonious blend concocted to meet economic as well as social imperatives indeed sets Mauritius on a new course of its development path. And above all, this budget, with its diversified nature, has, on top of having an invigorating effect, has created a feel-good factor

among various strata of our society, that is, the business community as a whole, youngsters, households and the underprivileged, amongst others.

For more than half a century now, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and its predecessor, Gross National Product (GNP), have been reasonably accurate metrics used to measure a country's economic performance and its ability to produce wealth for its citizens. It naturally takes centre-stage in the present context, as members of the House are keen to debate about the 2016-2017 Budget. There have been and there will be traditionally numerous speculations and comments about the GDP forecast made by the hon. Minister of Finance in his Budget Speech. This is part of the game, given that GDP has always been a powerful benchmark to guide economic development.

Madam Speaker, I have listened carefully to many interventions in this House and I will refer to the intervention of hon. Reza Uteem. In his opening speech, which was - I must admit – delivered in a very nice tone; he criticised in a very constructive manner, I must say, most parts of the debate and I understand him being a Member of the front bench of the Opposition. I will state an extract of his speech where he says –

“However much I would like to believe the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Madam Speaker, no one, no economist, no report from local bank, not even the Bank of Mauritius is expecting GDP growth to exceed 4.0 per cent.”

And he goes on to say –

“And, with the full effect of Brexit yet to be felt, with a downward revision of global growth by the International Monetary Fund, I am afraid that the 4.1 per cent growth is likely to be a mirage.”

This is what he said. Well, the 4.1 per cent which the hon. Minister of Finance has stated in his budget is after taking into consideration the various points he has enunciated. Neither the IMF nor the Bank of Mauritius had this information beforehand. At the same time, I have in a previous intervention in this very House stated that figures are figures and I had already stated that any fruits coming from a good economic performance are not necessarily cascaded down to the people. I have given many examples of countries that are cited in the BRICKS economies and I must go and state today how the GDP came forward. It was back in 1934 when an Economist called Simon Kuznets delivered a report to the US Congress and at a time when the US economy was plummeting, there was no available data, so he came with a report

and he stated about national income. There the question of national income and later GDP came into concept. It was at a moment of crisis as I said. But in this report, there was a warning which most nations and economists tend to ignore today. It is stated that -

“The welfare of a nation can, therefore, scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income”.

He further stated that -

“GDP is a tool to help us measure economic performance, but it is not a measurement of our well-being.”

This is what he said. We have simply ignored Kuznets' warning. We live in a world where GDP is a benchmark of success in a global economy. Politicians boast themselves with GDP going up. Unfortunately, the world is marching to the drumbeat of GDP.

Now, we have to turn to a measurement revolution and it is here that Social Progress Index comes into play. The social progress index is a measurement of a society completely separate from Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is based on three dimensions –

- (i) Basic human needs for survival. Here, any nation must take into account if it can provide nutrition and basic medicines to its population, water, sanitation, shelter and personal safety;
- (ii) Access to building blocks to improve their lives. The elements which are incorporated here are education, information, health and sustainable environment, and
- (iii) Does everyone have a chance to pursue his goals and dreams?

Again, this encompasses human rights, freedom of choice, inclusion and access to advanced education. I believe that if it takes into account all these dimensions then we can say that the fruits of a good economic performance are being enjoyed by the population.

However, despite GDP's success as the key indicator for any society, more and more modern policymakers across the world are questioning this metric's exclusionary focus on economic factors at the expense of other social elements. Let us take the case of oil-rich States in the Middle East – they may have the highest levels of GDP per person, yet they lag behind in terms of civil rights, education and a host of other quantifiable and desirable measures.

I believe that including the consideration of social factors when assessing a nation's performance is more reflective of reality. A country's destiny depends on its degree of economic growth as well as the well-being of its population and of its potential for sustainable development. In this perspective, this budget reassures us as - with, for example, a well-rounded Marshall Plan against poverty, we observe that we are in line with this more holistic approach about a country's overall situation.

Economic growth has lifted many Mauritians out of poverty and improved the lives of many more over the last decades, particularly following the Economic Miracle accomplished by the present Leader of the House during his prime-ministership in the 80s-90s. Yet, with numerous new challenges shaking our society, it is increasingly evident that a model of development based solely on economic progress is incomplete.

Economic growth alone is not enough. A society which fails to address basic human needs, equip citizens to improve their quality of life, and provide opportunity for its citizens is not succeeding. We must widen our understanding of the success of societies beyond economic outcomes. Inclusive growth, which is on top of the agenda of this Government, indeed requires achieving both economic and social progress. That is indeed why almost 50% of the Rs117.4 billion earmarked as expenditure for the fiscal year 2016/2017 will be allocated to such items as social protection, education and health, which are critical to a nation's well-being.

I will thus today urge all MPs as well as external analysts to think out of the box while debating about the 2016/2017 Budget and to go beyond the sole consideration of GDP. Let us call a spade a spade – Gross Domestic Product has too often been inappropriately used as a measure of national well-being, something for which it was, in fact, never designed.

I would like to draw the attention of the House about the Social Progress Index (SPI), which claims to have created a new way of assessing our society beyond GDP. I find it quite revealing that this new measurement index to help quantify social progress, separate from economic indicators, has been developed by the business community itself. This should reassure the sceptics.

I acquainted myself with the 2016 Social Progress Index which includes 133 countries covering 94 per cent of the world's population. Finland is this year's top performing country, followed by Canada, Denmark, Australia and Switzerland in order. The US ranks 19th and has lost grades compared to last year's index. Mauritius ranks 40th and is located in the Upper

Middle Social Progress category, a diverse group achieving a good performance overall, ranking in the top half of countries globally, but with several areas of improvement which have been thoroughly addressed in the 2016/2017 Budget: access to ICT and advanced education, health and wellness and inclusion, amongst others.

It is laudable that the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has come up with a Budget that will trigger growth that benefits all segments of society, rather than growth at all costs. While debating on the Budget, we should assess our country's success in turning the projected economic progress into improved social outcomes for our fellow citizens. Instead of making a fixation on GDP solely, we should truly care about economic growth that goes hand in hand with the imperatives of meeting basic needs, improving the foundations for wellbeing and creating opportunities for our people. Indeed, it is by understanding the relationship between economic development and social progress that we will be able to build a successful, united Mauritian community.

Madam Speaker, I now come to my field of predilection, that is, SMEs. I am particularly thankful to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development and the Budget team as the recommendations of my Ministry as well as of entrepreneurs in general have not fallen on deaf ears.

MSMEs have gone through rough seas for the past few years, particularly with ever-growing competitive environment generated by globalisation. With the 2016/2017 Budget, I am confident that they will indeed breathe a sigh of relief. They are placed at the very front of the stage since the dynamism of local entrepreneurship and its capacity to generate wealth are clearly recognized. SME parks, matching grants and improved access to capital will definitely give a boost to the sector of micro, small and medium businesses.

At this stage, I wish to point out some of the key measures benefiting the SME sector translated into figures: three years suspension on trade fees for licenses up to Rs5,000 and below; eight years tax holiday for start-ups registered with SMEDA; four years tax holiday for enterprises registered with SMEDA having less than Rs10 m. of turnover effective as from 01 July 2016; three years extension for the SME Financing Scheme, with an interest rate to be brought down from 7.4% to 6%; Rs50 m. grant under the National SME Incubator Scheme; Rs100 m. line of credit for factoring services; Rs500 m. into an SME Venture Capital Fund and a 40% reduction in air freight costs to Europe in the textile and apparel

sector over a two-year period. Those figures are eloquent and their potential beneficial impacts are obvious!

Moreover, to the great satisfaction of our entrepreneurs, the Leasing Equipment Modernisation Scheme (LEMS) is being reintroduced to facilitate the financing of new equipment and state-of-the-art technology for manufacturing enterprises that lack the credit or the required collateral to access traditional forms of financing. The Budget equally poses ground works for a transition to the next phase of economic prosperity with the advent of the digital revolution. A critical measure is indeed the VAT exemption on 3D printers, from which all SMEs will benefit. The idea is to provide all companies with the possibility of having access to modern and high-precision production techniques, thus facilitating the adaptation of their products to a highly competitive market.

During my consultations with entrepreneurs, Madam Speaker, the issue of market access has often cropped up and I have always urged them to turn to export. Most of the time, they would legitimately bring forward all the barriers and hassles they are confronted with, engaged in complex export procedures. In this perspective, the setting up of a national e-commerce platform by MEXA, together with Government, will be a gateway to the rest of the world as it will connect consumers from all over the world to the export-ready products of our SMEs.

The projected outcome of such measures is recognizable. Such a strategy which consists in facilitating access to technology for SMEs is about fostering a wave of modern entrepreneurs. Our economy is ripe for change and is entering a new cycle and for this to happen successfully, we indeed need a class of entrepreneurs that is equal to the challenge, and who are well equipped to succeed in the most sophisticated of markets.

The 2016/2017 Budget also makes provision for a series of measures geared towards an appropriate matching of skills. The skills mismatch is a sad reality that significantly affects our SMEs, particularly in technical sectors like woodwork or handicraft. Via this Budget, Government is putting emphasis on training as a prerequisite to address the skills mismatch. Some 4,000 persons will be enlisted under the National Skills Development Programme for training in technical skills that are in high demand. And so as not to do things by halves, the Budget also makes provision for the reinforcement of the corresponding legal framework for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training and the setting up of a Skills Development Authority as an independent regulator.

Madam Speaker, well aware of the constraints that some regulations represent for small businesses and entrepreneurs, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has rightly laid emphasis on the possibility of removing unnecessary burdens at this level. Less administrative overheads will definitely help small businesses to focus on growing rather than on tickling regulatory boxes. Last year, Government removed and simplified around 70 permits or clearances. We also set up MyBiz, the SME One Stop Shop, to act as a single window for all licenses, permits and other clearances required by entrepreneurs. This year, we are going further by, for example, suspending trade fees for licences, as already mentioned, except for those engaged in activities such as gambling, and sales of liquor and cigarette. This measure, Madam Speaker, will benefit new businesses and some 75,000 existing businesses.

Since I have been serving as Minister responsible for the SME sector, I have been concerned by the high rate of mortality among start-ups. Indeed, seven out of ten start-ups generally die prematurely for a variety of reasons ranging from lack of entrepreneurial know-how to problems accessing markets. It is in this context that a Business Incubator was launched few weeks before the Budget in Mahebourg. This new infrastructure provides mentoring services to support young and innovative entrepreneurs and to help them find solutions to their problems. I hereby wish to express my gratitude to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for supporting my Ministry in this mission through the National SME Incubator Scheme. The Rs50 m. grant under this scheme will be a thrust with regard to our commitment to increase the lifespan of those start-ups which will shape the future entrepreneurial landscape of our country.

Madam Speaker, as stated before, the sectors in which our MSMEs are operating are already experiencing unprecedented challenges as a result of trade liberalisation in line with the globalisation process, the World Trade Organisation regulations and the dismantling of safety nets like the Multi-Fibre Agreement or the Sugar Protocol. This situation is further aggravated by very tough competition from imported and imitated products from low cost countries, in particular China. Despite this difficult context, the Government has, once again, and rightly so, propelled this sector to the forefront of the economic landscape.

In a climate of global uncertainty, Mauritius has no choice but to continue to transform its economy to maintain the rapid pace of growth from the previous decade and take it to the next level. As we move towards becoming a high-income economy, the SME sector is being called upon to become the main source of growth, output and employment.

To pursue such challenging targets successfully, it is obvious that we need the most adapted, dynamic and proficient resources.

The mission of the Business and Enterprise Division of my Ministry is to act as a facilitator and catalyst in the promotion, development and growth of a globally competitive and innovative SME sector through the creation of the appropriate legal, institutional, operational and financial framework. My ministry has been, up to recently, endowed with a single entity, the SMEDA, to materialise and implement all actions to be taken within this framework. As per the SMEDA Act, this institution is supposed, *inter alia*, to provide a service delivery network which increases the contribution of MSMEs in the national economy and enhances the contribution of MSMEs in the national economy and enhances economic growth; devise and implement development support programmes and schemes for SMEs; facilitate, assist and provide the necessary support to SMEs to gain market access and business opportunities, and to compete successfully in the national and international markets.

I must say that great was my disappointment when I realised, simply after a few weeks in office, that SMEDA is, in fact, an ailing organisation mired in a deep state of apathy and paralysed by its own bulkiness. Years and years of mismanagement, malpractices and absence of strategic direction have borne this consequential legacy, which is in sharp dissonance with the ambition of this Government to make the SME sector become the engine of our economic growth.

It is a fact that the success of the activities provided by SMEDA to our SMEs is very much mitigated, and most importantly, it does not inspire trust and confidence among its main public, that is, our entrepreneurs.

One of the highlights of the 2016-2017 Budget is the determination of the Government to embark on a series of timely reforms aimed at restructuring public service institutions, including SMEDA, in a bid to increase efficiency. The sector will definitely benefit from the merger between SMEDA, Enterprise Mauritius and the National Women Entrepreneur Council – those three institutions having either overlapping or complementary functions when it comes to enterprise development. On top of leading to a rehabilitation of SMEDA in its current form, the new institution that will emerge from this exercise ought to transcend the efficiency problems arising from the duplication of roles and the fragmentation of operations, as it has been the case to date.

A word of caution, however. I wish to draw the attention of the House and of all the stakeholders involved, without exception, that we have no choice but to get it right from the very beginning when it comes to the merger process. One of the fundamental reasons behind the inefficiency of SMEDA is that it is a bulky organisation with more than 100 employees, three-quarter of which is composed of redundant administrative positions. This is mainly due to the result of the merger in 2005 of the then Small and Medium Industries Development Organisation (SMIDO) and the National Handicraft Promotion Agency (NHPA) into the Small Enterprises and Handicraft Development Authority (SEHDA), which was later renamed as SMEDA.

Prior to the merger, SMIDO had 45 employees and NHPA had 67; SEHDA was set up with all these employees without any attempt to create a common working culture and to propose a conducive structure for the organisation to deliver according to its redefined mandate, as provided in the Act. A reduction of 48 employees was proposed following the merger, but had not been acted upon. A new Act was proposed in 2009 to set up the SMEDA, and once again, the relevant authorities failed to address those severe institutional capacity weaknesses. The consequences of such a '*laisser-aller*' were inevitable, but it is a pity that it is the community of entrepreneurs who has been the most acutely affected by the irresponsibility of successive previous regimes.

A Government that aims at bringing sustainable change and propelling SMEs as a major driver of the economic development of our country does not have the right to repeat the same mistakes made by previous governments. Indeed, the greatest loss that most mergers suffer is not due to a poor match, but rather to poor post-merger implementation.

As far as I am concerned, I am determined to take all adequate measures to ensure that the SMEDA-EM-NWEC merger is carried out '*dans les règles de l'art*' for it to function in the context of an optimum structure, with the required skills and with a performance-oriented approach.

A merger has to be viewed as an exercise of value creation. The fundamental premise of this merger is that the merging entities, that is, SMEDA, Enterprise Mauritius and NWEC, will undeniably be more valuable together than they are separately.

The overarching objective of this major reform, Madam Speaker, should be to re-integrate and strengthen that forthcoming institution's capacity to formulate and develop enterprise policy. I am conscious that we will need to clearly define the specific value that

will have to be created for entrepreneurs from this merger. I am among those who strongly believe that the relationship between citizens and the State is the key feature in any democratic society. Since now, the relationship between SMEDA and entrepreneurs has been fractious and marked by dissatisfaction. The merger will provide us with a golden opportunity to recraft this relationship, in particular by ensuring that it is designed to deliver encompassing, quality services to entrepreneurs, and to contribute effectively to the accomplishment of the economic agenda of the Government.

The institution that will be born from this merger will have no choice but to be the preferred point of contact of entrepreneurs of all horizons when it comes to support and advice in the fields of enterprise development, access to markets and business opportunities. This is a must, and I will be intransigent about this aspect.

Madam Speaker, on another note, my Ministry is fully engaged in informing and training our entrepreneurs through different workshops on how to develop the export-readiness of their products and services, notably due to the restricted size of the local market. This was, however, without counting the shock waves sent to the whole world from the decision of 17.4 million voters in the United Kingdom to leave the European Union (against 16.1 million voters opting to remain). Mauritius is no exception. Many think that Brexit has caught us on the wrong foot with regard to our export-oriented policy.

The Government as well as the business community have indeed expressed their concern about the potential impact of Brexit on our country's economy and on our enterprises. The EU has been the main destination for our top exports for the last five years, with the UK, which represents 12% of our total exports, topping the list. Our main exports to UK in 2015 have been textile and garments, about Rs4.9 billion; fish, Rs2.1 billion, and sugar Rs1.1 billion. Stakeholders affirm that our export proceeds from the UK will be affected by 10% due to exchange risk only. A recent study of the Mauritius Exports Association (MEXA) states that our textile sector will be particularly affected, with significant losses to be expected and about 2,500 jobs in jeopardy.

It is quite clear that the negative impact of Brexit on the Mauritian economy is inevitable. Does this mean that we should resign ourselves to simply accept this state of affairs and endure the turmoil patiently without seeking for new avenues? This, in fact, is the worst-case scenario that we could inflict ourselves and the most counter-productive attitude that we could adopt.

According to Article 50 of the Treaty of European Union, the withdrawal of the UK will be effective after a transitional period of two years following UK notification. Without saying that we should thus sit back and relax as we will continue to trade on a duty free and quota free basis with the UK as per the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement during that period; there is no need, however, for us to give way to panic. This transitional period is a breathing space that ought to be wisely used and maximized upon, notably by adopting a strategic and proactive attitude. This is, in fact, the opportune moment for us to think big by finding ways to improve our productivity, diversify our markets, sharpen our economic diplomacy strategy and explore promising sectors.

In his answer to the Private Notice Question of the hon. Leader of the Opposition on 28 June, the Rt. hon. Prime Minister stressed on our need to continue diversifying our export and export markets, our aim being to move from being a Euro-centric exporter to a more diversified export and tourism-based economy.

Already, with increasingly diversified trade and investment ties with the United States, China, India as well as various African, Middle Eastern, and other Asian countries, our country is slowly but surely paving the way for it to be less economically dependent on its historical partners in Europe. This policy has already started to bear fruit as latest figures show that over the last five years, whilst Europe remained our main export market, its overall market share has significantly decreased from 72% to 55% as a percentage of the total domestic exports.

To build on this positive trend, economic diplomacy, which occupies a prominent place in this new era, will be crucial. The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has extensively catered for this aspect. Since there is an urgent need to expand our economic space, the Budget makes provision for seven more economic counsellors who will be posted around the world to promote our country and explore new markets for our products and services.

Madam Speaker, the USA is one of those new markets. According to the IMF, the USA is among the countries to be least affected by Brexit – its economy is expected to grow by 2.2% in 2016 and 2.5% in 2017. This is good news for Mauritius, particularly with regard to AGOA, which has been renewed to 30 September 2025, we have nine years more to go, and which provides us with the opportunity to benefit from an average of 17.5 per cent customs duty advantage relative to non-African suppliers. We need to free ourselves from

euro-centrism when it comes to exports? AGOA, without being the panacea, is a valuable option. Our exporters, who have traditionally been euro centric, therefore, have to make the efforts required to familiarize themselves with the pipeline structure and behaviour of the U.S. clothing market. According to information that I have, the imports of U.S. through AGOA represents only 2 per cent of its total imports and from this 2 per cent the main chunk comes from South Africa in terms of vehicles which land into the USA duty free and quota free. This only shows the big potential lying ahead and, unfortunately, we have just been relying on the U.S. clothing market whereas AGOA has so many, some 5,000 to 6,000 items on which we can capitalize.

Moreover, so as to fully take advantage of AGOA, we need to shake up the misinterpretation as to the fact that AGOA is basically concerned with textiles and apparel – there are, in fact, 7,000 products eligible under this agreement, with newly-added products comprising, *inter alia*, previously excluded items such as footwear, luggage, handbags, watches, etc., i.e. things that can be produced in Mauritius.

Now, given the size of the island and the constraints on resources, it might not be feasible or it would be naive for Mauritius to consider too large an array of products for export under AGOA. Our entrepreneurs should instead focus on those goods where they can create a niche. Some of the main products that Mauritius could focus on are jewellery and watches, given that our entrepreneurs already have some expertise in the manufacture of these.

The potential of Africa as a reliable partner should not be overlooked. The 2016-2017 Budget precisely advocates to continue to build on our Africa strategy where we have made concrete progress in the past year, with the signing of agreements with Senegal, Madagascar and Ghana for the establishment and management of Special Economic Zones.

Madam Speaker, we are members of SADC and COMESA, which, according to me, are a breeding ground for our SMEs. Figures from 2010 to 2015 show that there has been a notable increase in domestic exports to the SADC and COMESA Member States, moving from 12% to 18%. South Africa stays the main regional export market followed by Madagascar, Kenya and Seychelles. South Africa and Madagascar together make up for 84% of total domestic exports to the region and this fact pinpoints the untapped potential in the SADC/COMESA region. For example, our paint industry has an important role to play in the

coming years for the development of Mauritian exports, particularly in the countries of the SADC, COMESA and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC).

In addition, the conclusion of the Continental Free Trade Area negotiations in 2017 will bolster intra-regional trade through the creation of a wider market, increased investment flows, enhanced competitiveness and development of cross-regional infrastructure. The CFTA comprises the three largest regional economic communities (RECs) in Africa: the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and will cover some 6,000 products. It is expected to create an enabling environment for regional trade through the creation of a single economic space bigger than any of the individual three RECs. It is, therefore, imperative that local entrepreneurs take advantage of the enlarged market within the entire region.

The potential of these sizeable markets (the USA, SADC, COMESA, CFTA) undeniably augurs well for Mauritian exporters. And icing on the cake: as per the 2016-2017 Budget, Mauritius will finalise the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) and Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with India, adding to the existing PTA with Pakistan, thus, ensuring a confident entrance for local exporters in Asia.

On top of diversifying our markets, new sectors are beginning to surface. Indeed, a number of new products such as Animal Feed, Printed Materials and Medical/Surgical Instruments were ranked among our top 10 exports in the year 2015. New markets and new export sectors, at the end of the day, the future does not look that grim, provided that all parties pitch in to make things happen.

After all, we should not be under any illusions. We all know that there has never been a level playing field for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like Mauritius in the process of globalization and being aware of our vulnerability to external shocks, we have always been used to take up such challenges and to confront change. Mauritius is a resilient country and we know that together, we have the capacity to develop adequate mechanisms to adapt to this new economic configuration. This Budget is helping us to build on this resilience by finding ways to improve our productivity, diversify our markets, sharpen our economic diplomacy strategy and explore promising sectors.

Madam Speaker, I will now turn to the cooperative sector. The cooperative sector or the cooperative movement is over a century old. In fact, the first cooperative society was set

up in 1913 and, evidently, it was in the sugar cane sector. So, today, the cooperative movement is 103 years old, we can say. There have been other cooperative societies in the sugar cane sector itself, in the tea sector, in the agricultural sector, in the production of fruits, vegetables, in fishing, in transport and also Cooperative Credit Unions.

However, this sector has not known much progress and the Rt. hon. Prime Minister always reminds me that if this sector, the cooperative movement, would have been taken care of in the right way, it would have been a powerhouse in the economy of Mauritius and I agree fully with him.

We have done much to reactivate the activities for the cooperative sector but this sector has not attracted our youth for various reasons. The cooperative stores, the retail shops, have almost disappeared in Mauritius and there used to be, if not, maybe hundreds of cooperative retail shops in each village and in each town as well. Added to this, there has been the advent of the failure of the Mauritius Cooperative Credit Bank (MCCB) and, thereafter, the Mauritius Post and Cooperative Bank (MPCB). *Et comme dit l'adage 'jamais deux sans trois'*, there has been the case of the Vacoas Multipurpose Cooperative Society last year, qui va rester quand même dans les annales du mouvement coopératif après la MCCB et la MPCB.

Now, coming to MPCB, the Mauritius Post and Cooperative Bank, this was set up in 2001. Of course, the Rt. hon. Prime Minister was also Prime Minister at that time, hon. Paul Bérenger was the Minister of Finance and hon. Pravind Jugnauth was the Minister of Agriculture. I was on the Board of the Sugar Investment Trust (SIT) as Chairperson. When this bank was being set up to give a new boost to the cooperative movement as far as the financial institution is concerned, the SIT approached hon. Bérenger and offered to participate in the shareholding of the MPCB to the tune of 10%. Hon. Bérenger was quite surprised and, of course, he said that he never thought of such a help in putting up a financial institution for the cooperative movement and he welcomed the idea so much so that he offered the then Chief Executive of the Sugar Investment Trust to be the first Chairperson of the MPCB.

So, the MPCB was set up in 2001 and the rest is history; we all know what happened. But what is sad, Madam Speaker, is that today when I am in the process of reviving the cooperative movement, the cooperative movement does not have a financial institution today.

The Vacoas Multipurpose Cooperative Society could have been at the centre point in terms of financial resources, a bank proper for the cooperative movement. This has also failed.

(Interruptions)

Which is more sad, Madam Speaker, is that all the depositors of the Post Office Savings Bank (POSB) that have been merged with the MPCB, have also been deprived of a bank as such. Needless for me to comment on SIT! My colleague, the hon. Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security is here. Back in 2001, every effort was made, starting from the Rt. hon. Prime Minister, with hon. Bérenger as Minister of Finance and hon. Pravind Jugnauth as Minister of Agriculture to, again, give a boost to SIT. We acquired some 7,000 acres of land at Rs125,000 per *arpent* and this group was to become one of the main institutions for planters, for the workers of the sugar industry. Today, we do not recognise this SIT. As former Chairperson of SIT, I am very sad today.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: You can ask this question when you intervene!

Mr Bholah: However, at the level of my Ministry, we are doing our level best to reignite the flame in the heart of co-operators. In this vein, I can list a number of actions that I have already taken. For example, we came up lately with a book which we named 'Top 100 Cooperatives' which was well acclaimed and which gives a lot of visibility to the whole nation as to what the different cooperative societies are doing in this country. We have also launched a Directory of cooperatives which depicts all the services and the addresses of the different cooperative societies.

We have set up a Tertiary Cooperative Society called the Mauritius Cooperative Alliance. The structure of the cooperative movement is such that at the base level, we have primary cooperative societies and then cooperative societies of the same segment of economic activities are grouped into federations. This is the second layer. Now, to complete the third layer which looks after the interests of the whole cooperative movement, we have created and set up the Tertiary Cooperative Society, the Mauritius Cooperative Alliance.

Year after year, we are launching the Mauritius Excellence Award for cooperatives so as to reward the best performing cooperative society. We have also set up the Law Advisory Committee, which is in the Cooperative Act 2005, but which has never been set up by any Government previously. We have also organised a lot of market fairs so that many cooperative societies can exhibit and sell their products.

We are in the process of reviewing the law. The present law dates as far back as 2005 which was brought forward by the then Minister of Cooperatives, hon. Koonjoo. This also is being looked into. We are in the process of computerising the Ministry and I am happy that the Minister of Finance and Economic Development has provided for funds in this respect. Again, in order to train and sensitise people in the cooperative movement, we are putting up a National Cooperative College at Bois Marchand. Again, I am very thankful to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for giving us the appropriate funds.

Madam Speaker, more will be done in this cooperative sector. At the level of my Ministry, I am doing my utmost to again build up the image of the cooperative movement in Mauritius. I am happy that the Rt. hon. Prime Minister has been encouraging me since I assumed duty in this Ministry and we believe that with the help of one and all, we will be able to again project a good image for the cooperative movement in Mauritius.

With this, I thank you.

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

At 4.30 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.05 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Gobin!

Mr M. Gobin (First Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for allowing me the opportunity of saying a few words on the Budget Speech 2016/2017.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my very first words obviously go to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development. I want to tell him, although in his absence, that *il incarne le feelgood factor*. I think the hon. Minister Pravind Jugnauth, indeed, symbolises the feelgood factor. I will give two examples. The fine morning when he was sworn in as a new Minister of Finance and Economic Development in Réduit, we all, as elected Members in our respective Constituencies, received messages showing that feelgood factor which was felt on that very day. And, on the day of the reading of this Budget Speech, Friday 29th, the same feelgood factor was felt in the country at large. I want to underline that as opening remarks.

I want, secondly, to say something about the Budget Speech itself. Well, indeed I want to congratulate the hon. Minister for the hard work he has personally put in in the drafting of the Budget Speech, but I want to underline the degree of care that has been taken

in writing Budget Speech and in designing it. I mean to say that each measure links perfectly well with the next one, so that then there is...

(Interruptions)

Exactly, thank you! There is a harmonisation and everything is synchronised where everything falls into place. This shows the degree of care that has been taken in writing the Budget Speech. One can see that, when reading, not only the Budget Speech, but also the annex and the accompanying documents. So, it shows that this has been thought all through where everything ties up neatly to form an elaborate set of measures to bring change.

Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we can, in Government, change things for the better and this is what this Budget is all about. I now wish to come to some salient features of the Budget. The Budget is indeed about ushering in a new era of development, and this new era is centred around 10 strategies as has been stated by the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development. I will not comment upon all the 10 since I have only a few minutes. I will concentrate and single out 3 out of the 10 strategies.

The first is about fostering a wave of modern entrepreneurs. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not a coincidence that this strategy ranks first on the list of the 10 strategies. It is a measure of importance which is afforded by Government to modern entrepreneurs. Now, under this heading of fostering a wave of modern entrepreneurs, I wish to highlight the following –

First, it is about the fiscal incentives given to SMEs. Here, I will quote from the Budget Speech on the fiscal incentives, at page 5 of the Budget Speech –

“The 8-year tax holiday in respect of business income is being extended to new enterprises set up by individuals or co-operatives societies qualifying under the scheme and registered with SMEDA.”

We have had lots of representations from our constituents regarding existing enterprises. What about the existing ones? The Budget caters for that and provides that –

“Existing enterprises registered with SMEDA with a turnover of less Rs10 m. and engaged in qualifying activities under the same scheme will be given a 4-year tax holiday in respect of their business income. The tax holiday will start as from the year of assessment 2016/2017.”

I want to highlight that as one of the strong measures that has been taken under this strategy of fostering a wave of modern entrepreneurs.

The second point I want to highlight under this very same strategy concerns the agribusiness. There are a number of salutary measures, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, which I think, we have been waiting for very long time. The Budget caters for unutilised and abandoned cane lands of small planters - I wish to underline that which is included at page 10 of the Budget where it is announced that -

“(...) Mauritius Cane Industry Authority will set up an Agricultural Land Management System to bring unutilised abandoned lands of small planters and the productive use.”

We have seen for the past years, a number of lands being abandoned and this is being detrimental to our economy. This is being tackled now.

- The grant facility for sheltered farming is being increased from Rs250,000 to Rs400,000;
- The provision of Rs20 m. for the setting up of an exclusive Bio-Farming/Organic zone with modern infrastructural facilities;
- The Bio-Technology Institute;
- The tea nursery at La Brasserie;
- The reopening of ex-Dubreuil tea factory;
- Rs10 m. earmarked to boost dairy production;
- Additional Rs10 m. to enable milk processors to provide small cow keepers with essential support such as artificial insemination;
- Rs7 m. to support bee-keepers through the creation of bee-keeping zones in different regions, and
- the subsidy on freight for the export of horticultural products.

These measures go a long way to show how we have the Agribusiness sector at heart.

The third issue, under the strategy of fostering a new wave of modern entrepreneurs *c'est un savant mélange de deux secteurs. Le secteur coopératif et le secteur de la pêche* where this budget achieves, if I can say so, *d'une pierre deux coups*, where measures announced will boost, not only the cooperative sector, but also the fishing sector.

I am here referring to the grant of 50% up to a cap of Rs4 m. to be given to cooperative societies to enable them to acquire semi-industrial vessels.

The new incentive scheme with a tax holiday of 8 years will be introduced to attract industrial fishing companies to operate from Mauritius and contribute to the development of our seafood hub.

And finally, to promote small-scale aquaculture, a provision of Rs12.5 m. has been made for the purchase of 10 floating cage structures to allocate to Fishermen Cooperatives.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wanted to highlight these measures under the first strategy of fostering a wave of modern entrepreneurs.

The second strategy I have singled out for purposes of my speech tonight concerns business facilitation coupled with the Public Sector Reform Programme. Our country, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has, indeed, seen complex, onerous and lengthy procedures when it comes to licensing and this has discouraged a lot of our entrepreneurs into engaging in businesses. I salute the measures announced in the budget to streamline procedures, both at the level of Local Government as well as at national level.

I wish also here to highlight this very innovative new regime called the Regulatory Sandbox Licence which, I think, deserves to be mentioned. This will prove to be an effective mechanism to speed up investments in grey areas, then, the BOI can step in and grant the Regulatory Sandbox Licence.

Now, streamlining processors, I have said, will facilitate growth, but it will not happen if there is no effective public sector reform. Here, I want to highlight the provision made in the budget for the public sector reform and we can also see the clear intention of the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development to steer the reform programme personally. He has announced and has made it clear that he will spearhead the public sector programme personally. Hence, the transfer of the Public Sector Efficiency Bureau, under the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development for, precisely, steering the public sector reform.

Now, the third strategy, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, undoubtedly concerns the strategy to deal with the root causes of poverty. Here, I want to highlight that it is not the intention of Government merely to give allowances. We have all heard of the saying that if you give a fish to somebody he will eat for a day, but if you teach him how to fish, he will eat for life. It is not again about dishing out allowances, but it is about dealing with the root causes of

poverty, it is about empowerment. I will highlight just three measures to show how the measures concern empowerment -

- (i) The allowances to be paid for improving educational achievements;
- (ii) We are giving a second chance to students from poor families to resit for SC/HSC and Government will bear the exam fees;
- (iii) The pilot project in 5 ZEP schools to combine academic teaching with community engagement.

All this go a long way to show the commitment of Government to empower the vulnerable citizens of our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now come to the second part of my intervention which is more linked with my constituency. It is my duty as elected Member of Constituency No. 13 to thank the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for a few specific measures pertaining to the southern part of our country.

These measures have, indeed, boosted the moral of the inhabitants in the South. I am here referring to - and there are quite a number of them -

- Rs20 m. provided for the setting up of an exclusive Bio-Farming/Organic zone with comprehensive modern infrastructural facilities at Britannia;
- The construction of a new Police Station at Camp Diable.

Pour la petite histoire, the Police Station of Camp Diable was opened in 1983 when Sir Anerood Jugnauth was Prime Minister. The Commissioner of Police had found a house to rent temporarily, but the Police Station is still in rented premises. The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has walked the talk. It is not only *effet d'annonce*. I have checked in the Public Sector Investment Programme, funds have been earmarked for the construction of 6 Police Stations and one of them is Camp Diable.

We will see the transfer of Souillac District Court to a more convenient location, namely in the building of the SIFB which is empty right now. It will be in a much better environment.

There is provision in this budget for the technical design of a new swimming pool in Rivière des Anguilles. Many of my colleagues here have asked me which formula we have used to get that. My colleague, hon. Jahangeer and myself, have persuaded the hon. Minister

of Finance and Economic Development, he has heard us and he has made provision for the technical design of a new swimming pool at Rivière des Anguilles.

(Interruptions)

Ce n'est pas fini, il y a encore. There is the upgrading of Mont Blanc Water Treatment Plant and the construction of Rivière du Poste Water Treatment Plant.

There is still more! The construction of 47 housing units, 18 serviced plots at Souillac and 50 more housing units, at Souillac still and I have checked the item under the Public Sector Investment Programme, they are under item E503 and E507 of the PSIP respectively.

Ce nest pas fini. The budget earmarks the Rivière des Anguilles Dam and I quote –

“A main project in the pipeline.”

Therefore, Government has not forgotten about it. It is a big project, so it takes time.

There are still more. Extension of the State Secondary School at Saint Aubin and finally, although this concerns more Constituency No. 14, but it will still be beneficial to all the inhabitants in the southern part of Mauritius and it is the construction - finally we can see that - of the recreation centre for senior citizens at Riambel.

(Interruptions)

And, interestingly, the works have started in June. So, our senior citizens will not need to travel to Pointe aux Piments or Belle Mare. When they reach there they are sometimes so sick that they do not enjoy their stay.

(Interruptions)

For all these measures, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the inhabitants of the southern part of Mauritius and, more particularly, my Constituency No.13, they join me and my good friend hon. Jahangeer to say to the Minister of Finance and Economic Development - thank you.

(Interruptions)

I am attracting the jealousy of my hon. colleagues.

(Interruptions)

The third and last part of my intervention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is my duty to give my personal suggestions on other issues and I think the first one is about the African strategy. I have heard the hon. Minister Bholah talk about the Africa strategy and I totally

agree with what he has stated. We need to keep our efforts ongoing and we need to keep the lead that we have. I am appealing to Government and to the Minister of Finance and Economic Development in particular. We need to boost on our Africa strategy more and we need to bring change even on that issue as well. My dream is that Mauritius becomes the investment platform for each and every single investment going into Africa. *Ça doit être comme une seconde nature*. It should be *comme un réflexe*. Any investor thinking of an investment in Africa should think Mauritius! It should come to mind. We need, therefore, a top-of-the mind campaign in terms of our Africa strategy.

When I read that the World Economic Forum had its Conference in May this year it was in Rwanda I had a pinch in my heart and I said: why not Mauritius? It is a very good thing that we are going to have the CPA Africa group in a few days' time, but why not more? When I read about the four nations' tour of Shri Narendra Modi last month visiting South Africa, I think Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique, the first reaction I had was why did not he stop over here on the way to or back home? It should become, as I said, a natural *réflexe* that any investment should be structured, should be headquartered in this safe and beautiful country which is Mauritius.

(Interruptions)

Stepping stone, indeed, Rt. hon. Prime Minister! And, at the upcoming Heads of States and Governments Meeting of the SADC I am appealing to you to attend and make a very bold statement in that regard. I think it is going to be towards end of this month, but I don't have the confirmation as to the date.

Again, I give another example when Shri Pranab Mukherjee, President of India, went for a three nations' tour, he visited Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Namibia. I said to myself: why not a stop over here first? We should give incentives for these businesses because, indeed, these State visits are about stimulating businesses. Should not these investments be structured here for the safety, stability of this country and for the elaborate financial services centre which we are already? So, my suggestion is: we should intensify on our efforts on our Africa strategy.

The second suggestion I want to make concerns the reform in the banking sector which has been announced in the Annex to the Budget Speech. The Annex to the Budget Speech mentions that the Bank of Mauritius Act will be amended for a number of reasons to

“grant central authority over bank holding companies and allow the Bank of Mauritius (BoM) to monitor intra group transactions and those between the group entities and related parties;”

It is also announced that the Bank of Mauritius would –

“issue Rules without the approval of the Minister as is the case for the Financial Services Commission;”

I pause here to wonder whether we are going in the right direction!

It is stated in the Annex that –

“The Banking Act will be amended:

- (i) to remove "investment banking business" from the definition of "bank" so that only the Financial Services Commission (FSC) regulates this business. Consequential amendments will also be made to the Financial Services Act accordingly;”

And here, I pause to remark that if this measure will be implemented I am not convinced whether the FSC, actually as it is, is sufficiently equipped in terms of human resources to monitor investment banking. I am suggesting that we look carefully at that measure. If need be, there should be some capacity building first and then implementation of this issue.

The Banking Act, furthermore, it is stated, will be amended and I quote –

“to remove the supervision of credit unions from the purview of the Bank of Mauritius;”

I am looking at hon. Minister Bholah to say that we have seen, I think in the past, enough fishy business, enough funny business from credit unions and I do not understand why we are going to remove the supervision of credit unions from the purview of the Bank of Mauritius. If this measure is implemented, the question then is: who will supervise the credit unions? If the answer is the FSC then the question is: can the FSC supervise the credit unions? Credit unions advance loans, in fact, to their members and not to any other member of the public. Are they equipped to monitor? In effect, credit unions give loans to their members. They are concerned with issues same as with commercial banks, but perhaps on a smaller scale. I am not even sure that it is on a smaller scale because credit unions these days have become so big that they are granting loans in millions.

So, I am appealing that we have a careful look at this measure and if the Bank of Mauritius is too busy to supervise the commercial banks that it does not have time to supervise the credit unions, then we will create a separate department within that Bank staffed with persons experienced in the business to supervise because the Registrar of Cooperatives cannot do that. Probably, we will have to see this through, ventilate for full debate before it is implemented.

Now, as a member of the Bar, I cannot end without mentioning what I have seen in the Annex concerning the licensing of international law firms. It is announced that international law firms will be licensed by the Financial Services Commission. Well, I would have preferred my learned friend the hon. Attorney- General to be the licensing and supervising authority rather than the FSC. I hope it will be ventilated and there will be thorough debate on that issue before any implementation.

I have said enough, I think I will stop. But, before, I wish to say something - I think we all agree that it will be on the implementation that we are going to be judged. I have no doubt here that the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development will indeed steer this new era of development with success and we all, I know, all my friends here are joining me to assure the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development and the Government generally of our total collaboration and unflinching support.

Before resuming my seat, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to say good luck to all our athletes who are actually in Rio.

I thank you all.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Toussaint!

(5.29 p.m.)

Mr S. Toussaint (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. *Veni, lecti, vici* ; il est venu, il a lu, et il a conquis. Il a conquis les cœurs des Mauriciens en général. Il a même conquis le cœur du Leader de l'opposition qui a trouvé le budget 'intéressant.' Un travail de titan abattu dans un temps limité qui lui était imparti, et, au final, un budget 2016/2017, qui marque un changement profond dans la façon de réfléchir, de procéder et d'implémenter. Bravo à notre ministre des Finances, mon leader, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, permettez-moi aussi de féliciter chaleureusement *the Rt. hon. Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth*, qui a assumé le poste de ministre des Finances et du Développement économique, malgré une charge de travail déjà énorme, et qui, avec son maestria légendaire, a nommé le leader du MSM, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth, comme le grand argentier, avec une réalité et avec un monde en pleine transition.

L'honorable Pravind Jugnauth nous a fait comprendre que l'état des choses au niveau mondial est très difficile, que ce soit sur le plan économique, financier, social et géopolitique. Face à cette nouvelle ère, nous devons apporter de nouvelles réponses et différentes manières de procéder. Je pense que c'est bien cela qu'on appelle une rupture, et il y en a qui ne voyaient aucune rupture. Eh bien, je crois qu'ils n'ont rien compris !

M. le président, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth, lors de la présentation de son budget, nous a montré et nous a prouvé qu'il a privilégié l'aspect humain au lieu de la dictature du chiffre. Il a eu à cœur l'intérêt général de la population. Il démontre qu'avec tout le travail qu'il a effectué, la volonté politique et un pays uni doivent suffire à faire disparaître le quotidien précaire des plus pauvres.

Ce budget démontre que nous sommes là pour la réussite ; la réussite de tous. Nous ne divisons pas ; nous rassemblons. Contrairement à d'autres, nous ne jouons pas avec l'avenir du peuple, nous ne politisons pas le malheur du peuple. *Living in today's world requires a lot more imagination, and those who lack imagination, they repress it on others.*

Je parlerai de quelques points par rapport au budget, parce que quand même il y a pas mal de choses qui ont déjà été dites. En tout premier lieu, M. le président, permettez-moi de parler des mesures qui visent à mettre fin à la pauvreté extrême. C'est avec beaucoup d'émotion qu'en préparant mon discours j'étais revenu un petit peu en arrière, c'est-à-dire en 2013. Je vois l'honorable Nando Bodha qui arrive et il va se rappeler certainement des différentes activités que le MSM avait faites durant cette année-là, l'année de ses 30 ans. Une des activités qui m'a le plus marqué, c'était bien sûr une petite tournée à travers l'île, surtout dans les poches de pauvreté. C'était en 2013. C'était accablant, désolant, inacceptable, aberrant, de voir que nos concitoyens vivaient - et certains encore continuent - dans des conditions vraiment, vraiment difficiles. Un exemple : on avait vu - ce n'était pas une maison, ce n'était pas une hutte, ce n'était pas une cabane. C'était tout simplement quatre poteaux de bois avec un peu de tôles pourries en haut et quelques tôles tout autour. C'était une maison pour cinq personnes. Je ne sais pas si, entre-temps, ils ont pu trouver quelque chose de mieux.

Ces personnes, si je ne me trompe pas, n'avaient de point de toilettes, ni de salle de bain. Ces personnes avaient comme toilettes la nature et comme salle de bain un simple drap attaché autour de quelques arbres. En 2013, nous avons vécu cela, nous l'avons vu. Je suis sûr qu'aujourd'hui, si le ministre des Finances est venu ensemble avec son collègue, l'honorable Roopun, avec des mesures visant à éliminer l'extrême pauvreté, je suis sûr que cette visite les a marqués, tout comme moi, énormément.

On se demande bien ce que pouvaient faire certaines personnes qui étaient à la tête de ce pays-là en 2013. *Ti ena classe et ti pe rempli coffre pendant sa le temps là.*

(Interruptions)

Vision! *Peut-être lunettes ti fausser ça !*

Une promesse faite à ces personnes que nous avons visitées : éliminer l'extrême pauvreté. Le Plan Marshall va s'attaquer à la racine de l'extrême pauvreté. Revoir l'allocation financière n'est qu'une première partie de tout un plan établi pour régler le problème de l'extrême pauvreté. L'extrême pauvreté ne peut pas être résolue seulement en augmentant l'allocation. Ce n'est qu'une partie de toute une structure qui vise à régler ce problème. Leur apprendre à pêcher au lieu de leur donner du poisson tous les jours, les encadrer avec une série de mesures, ce Plan Marshall mis en route afin d'être un *boost* suffisant à ces personnes pour leur permettre de sortir la tête hors de l'eau.

M. le président, nous savons que le combat contre l'extrême pauvreté ne peut être la bataille seule du gouvernement. Nous reconnaissons le travail immense qu'abattent les ONG sur le terrain, et c'est dans ce sens que le montant des fonds accordés ONG passe à R 90 millions. Il y a aussi d'autres mesures comme le *grant* pour la crèche qui passe de R 1,500 à R 2,000. C'est important pour les mamans surtout, parce que cela concerne plus les mamans qui, malheureusement, sont obligés de rester à la maison pour s'occuper de leurs enfants. Avec ce *grant*, ces personnes pourront laisser leurs enfants entre de bonnes mains et trouver un emploi.

Je vais parler un peu maintenant de l'éducation, toujours dans ce contexte de l'élimination de l'extrême pauvreté. Ventre affamé n'a point d'oreilles! L'honorable Pravind Jugnauth a entendu. Pour que les enfants des familles modestes et pauvres puissent se rendre à l'école dans de meilleures conditions, il propose l'exemption de la TVA sur les céréales pour tout le monde et l'augmentation du *meal allowance* pour ceux qui fréquentent les écoles ZEP. *Faudait ventre bien rempli pou capav aprane!* Pour encourager nos jeunes à poursuivre

leurs études - donc, on en a parlé - c'est l'introduction du *cash grant* pour ceux qui arrivent à terminer différents paliers de leur scolarité.

Par rapport à la réforme dans le secteur éducatif, permettez-moi, M. le président, de revenir un peu sur le discours de l'honorable Ramful - qui malheureusement n'est pas là et tout le parti travailliste, je pense, a été décimé. *Personne pas là !*

(Interruptions)

Sauvé ! Je suis désolé de le dire mais j'ai l'impression que l'honorable Ramful n'a rien compris ou il n'a rien suivi ou il fait semblant de n'avoir rien compris.

(Interruptions)

Il parle de *rat race*. Compétition féroce ! Et si ma mémoire ne me fait pas trop défaut, je pense que cette compétition féroce est venue à partir de 2005 avec un certain ministre de l'Education travailliste qui avait introduit le A+. *Zis A pas ti assez ! Ou bizin gagne A+ !*

(Interruptions)

Ça même ça ! Et qui a prolongé, qui a continué avec le A+ et avec la compétition féroce ? Hélas, un deuxième ministre de l'Education travailliste ! C'était le Dr. Bunwaree, il me semble en 2010.

(Interruptions)

Et l'honorable Ramful a aussi dit que nous ne sommes pas prêts, que les parents sont confus, qu'il est confus, qu'il ne comprend pas et qu'il y a toutes sortes de problèmes. Mais si je me souviens bien pour une fois, cela a été une belle initiative. L'honorable ministre de l'Education avait invité tous les parlementaires, n'est-ce pas, Madame ? Tout le monde, sans exception, peu importe quelle couleur de parti vous êtes, à venir assister à une présentation par rapport à la réforme d'où ils pouvaient poser toutes ces questions. Parce qu'il avait posé sa question, je ne sais pas ; je ne sais pas s'il était venu.

(Interruptions)

Il était venu ? *Pas ti ena question lerla !* Il avait beaucoup de questions.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Rutnah !

Mr Toussaint : Et l'honorable ministre et ses officiers ont fait un travail extraordinaire en expliquant la réforme. Très, très bien expliqué, parce que Madame est de profession...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker : Hon. Jhugroo !

Mr Toussaint : Alors, je ne comprends pas ce qu'il y a à ne pas comprendre. Il dit que la compétition va augmenter, que les enfants sont en train de prendre des leçons et ainsi de suite. Enfin, lui seul sait où il voulait en venir. Dans son discours il avait aussi parlé qu'il a l'impression que la BEC et que l'Eglise Catholique n'est pas très d'accord avec la réforme, qu'ils avaient publié des choses sur le *website*, etc. Là, je crois qu'il se trompe complètement, n'est-ce pas ! Il se trompe parce que l'Education Catholique, la BEC a toujours été partenaire de l'éducation nationale tout comme l'éducation privée. Et ils sont actuellement partenaires dans cette réforme ensemble avec le gouvernement. Donc, ce qui m'a aussi chiffonné c'est que l'honorable Ramful a dit, et je vais lire un petit extrait de ce qu'il a dit, avec votre permission, M. le président.

(*Interruptions*)

Tous le temps ! Ça c'est l'honorable Ramful qui le dit –

“I will make a humble request to the hon. Minister: don’t use our students as guinea pigs. Please, don’t!”

A l'époque où ces deux prédécesseurs avaient jugé bon d'introduire le A+ et d'augmenter la compétition, où était M. Ramful, s'il vous plaît ? Qu'importe ! La réforme est là. Le budget a prévu des sommes. Notre ministre de l'Education fait un travail magnifique et je suis sûr et certain, en tant que pédagogues, parents et politiciens, que nous allons réussir dans cette réforme. *Pas bixin prend compte Ramful*, on est là avec vous, Madame !

(*Interruptions*)

L'honorable Pravind Jugnauth a confiance dans la jeunesse, et comme tous les jeunes, certains méritent une deuxième chance afin de pallier un premier échec à leur examen du SC ou de la HSC. Ces étudiants issus de familles modestes pourront ainsi prendre part à leur examen de ratrappage en toute quiétude car leurs frais d'examens seront pris en charge par le gouvernement une deuxième fois.

Ce concept ‘d’un toit pour tous’’, M. le président est une chose très importante pour tout un chacun. Avoir un toit afin de permettre à une famille d’être unie, digne et cela permet à chaque occupant d’avoir d’autres rêves et projets. Il y a toute une série de mesures par rapport aux logements, donc, construction de nouvelles maisons. Il y en a dans notre circonscription à 16eme Mille et on remercie l’honorable ministre des Finances pour cela.

La réhabilitation des complexes de la *NHDC*, très importante. Construction de plus de 8,000 maisons sur les trois prochaines années à des familles à faible revenu. Quelque chose qui nous a vraiment marqué au début de notre mandat, que ce soit vous-même, M. le président ou ma collègue l’honorable Sewocksingh; c’est qu’il y a des personnes qui, en venant nous voir à la *CAB*, qui nous disent qu’ils attendent depuis 10 ans, 15 ans, 12 ans, 20 ans pour avoir une maison de la *NHDC*. Il y en a qui était sur la liste, le conjoint qui vient et nous dit, « *mo bolom inn gagne le temps mort* » et jusqu’à l’heure ils n’ont pas eu une maison.

(Interruptions)

Ti p donne ti baba lacaz ! Exactement !

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Rutnah, please! No comments !

Mr Toussaint : Et quand aujourd’hui l’honorable ministre des Finances vient injecter la somme nécessaire pour que chaque mauricien puisse avoir un toit décent, nous ne pouvons que le saluer.

L’honorable Pravind Jugnauth a aussi montré qu’il a une admiration particulière qu’il pour les personnes en situation d’handicap car elles incarnent la persévérance et la volonté de réussir. Afin de leur donner toutes les chances de parvenir à réaliser leurs objectifs et à faire face à leur handicap et leur différence, il était urgent de prendre des mesures fortes. Le grand argentier l’a fait ! Alors le plus important dedans pour moi c’est, bien sûr, ceux qui ont moins de 15 ans, ils seront maintenant éligibles à une pension d’invalidité. Cette mesure vient corriger quelque chose d’extrêmement importante. Imaginez une famille pauvre, très pauvre même, où il y a dans la maison un enfant en situation d’handicap, une famille qui n’a pas les moyens de payer une école spéciale, de payer un van, un taxi pour emmener l’enfant à l’école. Cet enfant reste à la maison et, encore une fois, bien souvent malheureusement, c’est la maman qui doit rester pour s’en occuper. C’est le papa seul qui va travailler et la famille continue de rester dans l’extrême pauvreté. Avec cette mesure, la famille peut payer une école décente, payer le transport et les deux parents peuvent aller travailler. Et c’est aussi

pour la maman une façon d'être un peu soulagée. Ce n'est pas évident. J'ai beaucoup d'amis, je connais personnellement des familles où il y a des enfants en situation d'handicap. Ce n'est pas évident, ce n'est pas facile de s'occuper de cet enfant ou d'une grande personne tous les jours que Dieu fait ! Ce n'est pas évident !

Je souhaiterai aussi faire quelques commentaires, M. le président, par rapport au domaine des arts et de la culture.

(Interruptions)

The status of Artists Bill qui sera bientôt introduit à l'Assemblée nationale fait l'unanimité. La majorité des personnes qui se lancent dans la musique ou dans la forme d'art, viennent bien souvent des situations modestes et pauvres. Ils veulent, par tous les moyens, pouvoir changer de vie et vivre de leur passion, vivre à travers la musique, vivre à travers la photographie, à travers le théâtre et à travers la danse. Le monde artistique leur promet monts et merveilles, mais, bien sûr, à part quelques rares exceptions, les autres se retrouvent souvent qu'avec les monts à gravir et les merveilles envolées. Nous venons corriger tout cela.

L'honorable Pravind Jugnauth fait de l'artiste un métier reconnu. Un artiste qui pourra dorénavant aspirer à une carrière professionnelle. Et je ne peux que saluer l'initiative d'introduire un *BA Music* à l'Université de Maurice. Et pourquoi pas! Pourquoi ne pas voir plus loin encore ! Et là, je lance cet appel à mon ami, l'honorable Baboo. Pourquoi pas, dans quelques années, avoir un *School of Arts* dans le pays où à part le *BA Music*, ce serait aussi un *BA Drama*, un *BA Photography*, un *BA Dance* et tout ce qui est art ! Et éventuellement, ces personnes, ayant été formées et qui posséderaient un *BA* dans ce domaine, pourraient être utiles à l'éducation parce que justement dans la réforme de l'éducation, nous aurons besoin d'enseignants pour enseigner tout ce qui est art.

De plus, le grand argentier a augmenté la contribution du gouvernement afin que les artistes puissent bénéficier de meilleures royalties. La création d'un musée dédié à l'esclavage. Il était temps ! L'honorable Pravind Jugnauth s'engage à marquer cette période, Oh combien triste, mais important de notre histoire, avec la mise sur pied de ce musée ! Une reconnaissance méritée à nos ancêtres, à notre histoire et à notre République !

Avec votre permission, M. le président, je vais dire quelques mots par rapport à notre circonscription, Curepipe/Midlands, le numéro 17. Les habitants de Dubreuil et des environs accueillent avec une immense joie la réouverture de l'usine de thé qui s'y trouve. Elle sera génératrice d'emploi direct et indirect. Merci à l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth et aussi merci à

mon ami, le ministre de l'Agro-Industrie et de la Sécurité alimentaire, l'honorable Mahen Seeruttun. Avec l'avènement du Metro Express de Curepipe à Port Louis et vice-versa, ce sera le visage même du centre-ville de Curepipe qui changera. Nos mandants attendent cela avec impatience, et merci encore une fois au ministre des Finances et du Développement économique et aussi à notre protecteur, celui qui nous encadre du mieux qu'il peut, l'honorable Nandcoomar Bodha.

M. le président, la République de Maurice a une chance énorme en ayant Sir Anerood Jugnauth comme Premier ministre.

(Interruptions)

Le meilleur pour la fin, honorable *Chief Whip* ! Un peu de patience !

Une chance énorme de vous avoir aux commandes de notre pays, un vrai Père de la Nation. Pendant ces 10 dernières années, notre pays avait été pris pour un grand Monopoly par certains qui ne cherchaient que leur avantage et sans oublier leurs caprices de petits rois, laissant des quotidiens précaires et des joies éphémères pour le reste de la population.

La nomination du leader du MSM au poste du ministre des Finances et du Développement économique est tombée à point nommé, car l'homme est sincère et a du cœur. Un grand homme doit prendre soin des personnes vulnérables et protéger son peuple. Pendant que d'autres balancent des phrases stériles dénuées de tout sens humain et réaliste, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth s'attèle à la tâche pour l'avenir de ces concitoyens. Et aujourd'hui, il y va sans doute que le pays respire, le pays est soulagé, le pays, comme d'autres l'ont dit avant moi, on peut sentir ce *feel good factor*. L'honorable Pravind Jugnauth *is the feel good factor, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir*.

Sur ces mots, je vous remercie tous pour votre attention.

Merci beaucoup.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mrs Perraud!

(5.55 p.m.)

The Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (Mrs A. Perraud): M. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I stand before this august Assembly to deliver my intervention on the Budget Speech for the year 2016-2017 which is the second since the team of l'Alliance Lepep came into power.

At the very outset, I must warmly congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth for the presentation of a Budget which, is at the same time pragmatic, visionary and achievable, and, more significantly, it is in continuity with the pledge which *L'Alliance Lepep* took with the people of Mauritius in December 2014.

The pledge of the *Lepep* Government, as set out in the *discours-programme* was, I quote –

“To bring meaningful change in the daily life of our people, and lead them towards happiness, prosperity and a better future”.

Mr Deputy Speaker, with this Budget, Government is further keeping the promise and is undoubtedly leading the way for a new era of development for the Republic of Mauritius in line with the Government Programme 2015-2019.

The Budget this year concurrently blazes a clear trail to achieving the Vision 2030 for the Republic of Mauritius through the identification of 10 pillars and relevant measures which have been carefully crafted to, *inter alia*:

- consolidate our existing sectors of activities and creating new ones;
- boost standards of living, investment, employment, the ICT sector;
- foster a wave of new entrepreneurs, and empowering vulnerable groups,
- ensure macroeconomic stability and sound public finances, and reducing the unfavourable impacts of climate change amongst others.

There is no doubt that the Budget responds to the aspirations of the population at large and it couldn't be otherwise as there have been wide pre-budgetary consultations with the private sector, Government departments and the civil society.

At this juncture, I wish to commend the Minister of Finance and Economic Development for his efforts in delivering a Budget geared towards social development to create a better life for all citizens of the Republic of Mauritius and better conditions of living for families.

M. le président, je note avec plaisir la continuité dans cet exercice budgétaire. En effet, nous pouvons revoir une vingtaine de mesures que le Premier Ministre adjoint, Xavier Luc Duval, avait introduites dans ses budgets successifs, il y a quelques années. Par exemple

les mesures concernant les PME, comme le *SME Incubator Scheme*, le *SME Industrial Park* et le *SME Financing Scheme*. D'autres exemples, comme le *Youth Employment Programme*, le *Film Rebate Scheme*, *Small-Scale Aquaculture*, *le Fibre to Home*, le *Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education* ou même l'introduction des tablettes tactiles dans les écoles et la subvention pour les crèches. La reprise de ces mesures est l'extension de la vision commune des 2 *leaders* du gouvernement *Lepep*, Xavier Luc Duval et Pravind Jugnauth. Les mauvaises langues auraient beau dire que rien ne va au sein de l'alliance gouvernementale, mais les faits parlent d'eux-mêmes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am also pleased to note that my Ministry has received a budgetary allocation of Rs451 m. to cater for Mauritian families including men, women and children. These provisions fit in the continuance of the new vision of this Government to ensure that economic development is not done at the expense of the welfare of the people. This effort is very much appreciated as it will help to enhance the services being provided to the families of the Republic.

Beyond the frontiers of my own Ministry, this Budget, M. Deputy Speaker, Sir, makes provision for a series of concrete measures that will further contribute to women's empowerment, consolidate gender mainstreaming initiatives to achieve gender equality, foster the development of our children and youth, and further promote the welfare of families.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, domestic violence is and remains '*le mal du siècle*', ruining and dooming our families. From July 2015 to June 2016, 225 new cases for males and 1771 new cases for females for domestic violence have been reported to my Ministry. This Government has lost no time to flag this evil and to start building a wall, a wall against perpetrators, a wall to protect, to save families. The National Coalition against Domestic Violence Committee, set up under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office, has drawn the lines of action for all stakeholders involved to combat this evil.

Regarding my Ministry, a huge step has been achieved with the adoption of the new PDVA, a few weeks back, to afford better protection to victims of domestic violence by widening the definition of domestic violence to include intimidation, harassment amongst others. Increased penalties will also, certainly, act as a deterrent for those who tend to adopt domestic violence as an easy solution!

All necessary measures are being taken for that precious piece of legislation to be promulgated at earliest. Provision has also been made for the setting up of a command centre

for domestic violence and it will act as a one-stop department for all issues pertaining to domestic violence including support to all members of family.

The recommendation to set up additional shelters for women victims of domestic violence is also being addressed with the collaboration of NGOs in the field. A Domestic Violence Information System is also being implemented on a pilot basis. The DOVIS is a computerised system for the registration of reported cases of domestic violence which shall be used as a tool to monitor, access, record and generate specific reports on such cases dealt at the Family Support Bureaux (FSBx). DOVIS will allow for improved coordination among the Family Support Bureaux and better record keeping for faster answers to queries regarding domestic violence issues and cases.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a study is currently being carried out to better understand the phenomenon of the Intimate Partner Violence and concurrently, a Costed Action Plan on the implementation of the recommendation of the *Assises de la Famille* is being elaborated.

The Action Plan will enable my Ministry to take concrete measures for the promotion of family welfare with the collaboration of stakeholders. There are also ongoing initiatives for training and capacity building of partners to include components on strengthening family values in programmes being implemented at regional and national levels. The Special Collaborative Programme for Support to women and children in Distress operated by my Ministry will continue to provide funding to NGOs with a budget of Rs24 m. for this financial year.

As Minister responsible for the promotion of gender equality, child development and family welfare, I am taking actions to ensure that a greater number of NGOs and community-based organisations – big or small - dealing with women and children in distress may take advantage of the funding to implement their projects or embark upon new projects. Government recognizes the immense contribution of such civil society organizations to help cure social evils.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, beyond the mobile caravan which has been adapted and refurbished in order to cater for various services and activities aimed at empowering women, children and families, my Ministry will embark on an information campaign on the Special Collaborative Programme with the aim to mobilize the energies with NGOs and bring innovative solutions to contemporary problems of women and children in distress.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I now come to child protection. As Minister responsible for children, I am most delighted to note that the Budget 2016-2017 reiterates the commitment of this Government to uphold the principles advocated under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. No doubt, amongst the various measures spelt out by the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development, the foundation of an enabling environment essential for the holistic and integral development of the child is set.

The vast array of programmes and policies available at the level of my Ministry to ensure the ongoing promotion and protection of the rights of children do necessitate resources in terms of trained and skilled personnel, logistics inclusive of e-services, appropriate and adequate infrastructure. Since the beginning of my mandate, I have initiated a thorough restructuring exercise of the services related to children.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some programmes are obsolete while others are very valuable but almost dormant and under-performing. Revisiting, rehabilitating, revamping and restructuring a sector that needs to address issues being encountered by our children today. Programmes introduced 15 to 20 years back cannot provide solutions for evils threatening our children in 2016! Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to announce that provision has been made for the restructuring of the CDU around 3 proposed pillars –

- (i) child protection services - primary care and intervention and emergency services;
- (ii) rehabilitation and reintegration services - residential care, foster care and child mentoring, and
- (iii) Child Care/Guidance and Development - policies, legislations, ECD (which means Early Childhood Development), prevention and the setting up of the Child Perpetrator Support Unit.

This unit, the Child Perpetrator Support Unit, *une grande première*, will be set up to provide adequate psychosocial support and mental health care to juvenile offenders. Till now, psychological services in my Ministry have focused mainly on children and families in distress. Little attention has been given to this particular group. This measure will provide a proper structure for juvenile offenders to avail of quality and effective mental health services that would pave the way towards their rehabilitation and reintegration in the society. We must not forget that children are not born violent.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the harm done by their environment draws them into vicious circles of crime, but it is our duty to pull them out of these circles. They can be saved. Appropriate rehabilitative programmes will be designed and targeted to assist offenders to develop skills to reduce reoffending. I am thankful to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for this ever ready support in endowing the Child Development Unit with nine additional staff to strengthen psycho-social support to children in distress. As per the recommendations of the Fact-Finding Committee on Residential Care Institutions, efforts are being pursued towards de-institutionalising children victims of violence who are more and more placed in smaller units with home-like settings and trained carers; professionalising the foster care support to children with conducive familial environment; scaling up the Child Mentoring Programme for children who lack adequate parental support and role model; consolidating Community Child Protection Programme for safe communities, and rehabilitating and empowering biological families of children victims of violence for their early reintegration therein.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Attorney General's Office is on the other hand finalising the Child Care and Protection Bill, which, while also making provision for structures, services and means for promoting and monitoring the sound physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional and social development of children; shall act as a *première* in offering a chapter in respect of guidance on implementation of the best interest principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as an innovative measure, the provision in the budget for tablets to children for lower primary levels is indeed a commendable initiative. This last decade has brought us into a new era, the 'smart' era, smart phones, smart TV, smart toys. A new breed has been stepping into this world, 'smart' kids! It is not easy, but we need to be smarter than them! Their propensity to master smart technology should be channelled to respond to new ways of acquiring knowledge and take full advantage of being part of this full-fledged digital society.

My Ministry is implementing and reinforcing the Child Protection Register which is a key innovative computerisation project that aims at enabling the Child Development Unit (CDU) to record and address cases of children in distress reported at its level with increased efficiency, or should I say, 'in a smart way'!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, early childhood is the most prolific period of development in a human life. Children who participate in well-conceived Early Childhood Development Programme tend to be more successful later in their schooling. They are more competent socially and emotionally, and show higher verbal and intellectual development than children who are not enrolled in high quality programme. Investing in equal access to adequate standard of early childhood care is indeed an investment for the future. In that vein, the commitment of this Government to increase the monthly grant under the crèche voucher scheme for poor families from Rs1,500 to Rs2,000 per child is acclaimed as it will enable more children from vulnerable background to access quality child care services and facilitate the entry of more women in the employment sector. Investing in the children of the future is a form of grandeur, a legacy by the LEPEP Government for a better world.

The National Children's Council will, on the same chapter, multiply efforts to ensure that the largest number of eligible existing *crèches* benefit from the grant of up to Rs200,000 under the Support to Child Day Care Centres Scheme and thus enhance their level of service delivery to small children attending the *crèches*. My Ministry is also reinforcing the project related to Early Childhood Development. These include supportive legal and institutional frameworks, capacity building, licensing of Day Care Centres, development of strategies for parent education and community awareness, development of curriculum and learning material for ECD and integration of children with special needs to ensure a holistic approach to ECD in the interest of the overall development of the Mauritian child.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, once said, and I quote –

“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.”

This budget is impregnated with the belief that we cannot win with only half of the team, but we need to rope in the other 50%+ of our population on this journey to a fairer society. Measures to address women's empowerment and gender equality are testimony to the strong commitment and political will of this Government to have a just and equitable society by enabling women to be at par with men.

It is an undeniable fact that women, who constitute more than half of our population, are determined to contribute their competitive potential. It is, therefore, crucial that the untapped potential of this large segment of our human capital be unlocked. I, therefore,

applaud the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for the bold initiative taken in terms of requiring all public companies listed on the Stock Exchange to have at least one woman on their Board of Directors. This is an important milestone in our history as, through this measure, more women will be able to break the glass-ceiling and ultimately aspire to reach and participate at the highest level of decision-making within these organisations. I would wish to refer to the Global Gender Gap Report 2015 of the World Economic Forum, whereby Mauritius ranked 120 among 140 countries! The Economic Participation and Opportunity index has been pulling Mauritius down in the global rating and this revolutionary measure will undoubtedly turn the tide. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is in our mandate to, I quote –

“ensure responsible and judicious use of public funds and to pursue the crusade to weed out wastage”.

In that respect, many institutions with cross-cutting and juxtaposed mandates are being fused. One of the objectives of merging SMEDA, Enterprise Mauritius and the National Women Entrepreneur Council into one organisation is to avoid duplication of services and provide one stop service to women entrepreneurs. I suggest that this merger dedicate a unit specifically to guide, advise and mentor women entrepreneurs, especially very small ones and beginners, who can somehow become lost in the system when it comes to competing with male counterparts, for instance, regarding funding or other incentives. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the allocation of an amount of Rs200,000 respectively to five key Ministries is yet another stepping stone towards ensuring that gender permeates in all policies and programmes.

For the very first time, Government has deemed it strategic to come forward with the concept of gender analysis which is an essential element of the socio-economic evaluation of a country. Ultimately, this important assignment will feed information into the Gender Development Index that will be developed in order to monitor the progress of our society towards gender equality. As the House is aware, UN countries have pledged to take national commitments for the Planet 50-50 by 2030. This Budget is leapfrogging to reach the target and I am confident that we will catch up for lost years through all these measures.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the National Gender Machinery, my Ministry will also be coming up with a National Costed Action Plan for Gender Mainstreaming in the coming year. The objective, thereof, is to formally conceptualize concrete measures that all stakeholders

need to take to promote gender equality. We need not forget that as party to the commitment taken at international level, mostly in regard to the new global agenda for sustainable development, Mauritius needs to be bold in achieving the agreed targets. Measures proposed in this Budget are, therefore, very much aligned to our commitments. Furthermore, the setting up of a Parliamentary Women Caucus will be strategic in enabling and regrouping parliamentarians in carving out a space for them; around common positions regarding women's empowerment and gender equality issues; to make their voices heard; and bring forth changes in legislations whilst adopting a gender perspective. For a long time, women have been discouraged to step into politics, but since day one, the Lepep Government has been taking bold measures towards elevating the status and nurturing respect for women.

In a similar manner, as Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, I have found it strategic to repeal the National Women's Council Act of 1985, which, in today's society was no more responsive to the aspirations, needs and concerns of the contemporary womenfolk. Since my assumption in office, I have made it my priority to expedite matters and to have this new legislation passed in the National Assembly, last May. This new Act will serve as an appropriate platform to rally Women's Associations and other organisations having as primary objective to work for women's empowerment and gender equality. The ultimate objective is to make the Council more dynamic and vibrant and pave the way for the emergence of innovative ideas with a view to addressing prevailing gender gaps, whilst adopting a bottom-up approach. Moreover, the National Women's Council is in the process of formulating a Strategic Framework covering period 2016-2020 that will identify the short, medium and long term strategies that would be required to enable the Council to achieve its set objectives.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the main thrusts of this Budget focuses on the root causes of poverty. We cannot be complacent with a situation where Mauritius is to become a high income country whilst at the same having a situation where some 6,400 Mauritian families are still living below the absolute poverty threshold of US Dollars 3.10 per day per individual, calculated on the basis of the purchasing power parity set out in the latest World Bank Report. Researches around the world have shown that poverty has a woman's face and such situation tends to perpetuate a cycle of violence and discrimination. Therefore, it is the concern of all of us and we have to act collectively if we really want a united, equitable and prosperous society.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Nobel Prize Winner Amartya Sen observed that, I quote –

“poverty is not just a lack of money. Instead, it is not having the capability to realize one’s full potential as a human being”.

I would, therefore, like to express my deep appreciation to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for the very bold and laudable initiatives announced in his Budget Speech regarding the Marshall Plan against Poverty. I am convinced that taking direct action to address absolute poverty through increasing monthly entitlements to every adult on the Social Register, with a minimum threshold of Rs2,720 and a maximum threshold of Rs9,520 for a family of two adults and three children, will bring great relief to the poor and vulnerable of our society.

It is also the case that the other measures related to easing access to housing units, possibilities to acquire municipal land on which housing units were erected at a nominal price and the cash awards to address educational attainments of children from poor families provide strategic entry points to tackle poverty in a holistic manner.

It goes without saying that the vast, courageous and audacious measures, as recommended in the Plan, will undeniably support the vulnerable ones. Ultimately, they will be able to get out of the vicious circle of poverty.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the different measures announced under the 10 different pillars in the Budget Speech benefits the family in one way or another. *Depuis mon arrivée à la tête du ministère responsable du bien-être de la famille, je ne cesse de constater à quel point la famille mauricienne est fragile. Les mutations sociales, l'évolution du statut de la famille et les fléaux de notre temps ont fragilisé l'institution même de la famille. Ce budget peut être considéré comme un budget familial qui s'applique à soulager les familles de différentes formes de pressions qu'elles subissent.*

As a caring Government, we have not relented in our efforts to ease the financial burden that families have to bear to sustain their livelihoods. Basic day-to-day commodities, including clothing, cereals, diapers, toys, lighting sets, household articles, glass mirrors, drinking glasses, amongst others, have been exempted from customs tariff. Additionally, the decrease in price of cooking gas by Rs60 will also reduce to a great extent the household expenditure of families. The abolition of customs duties and the transformation of Mauritius into a duty free island clearly demonstrate that this Government cares for families.

Let’s take another example which demonstrates the immense consideration of this Government for family welfare: Investing in Round the Clock Water Supply. This measure

will definitely improve the living condition of families in the lower income bracket, thereby improving sanitation and hygiene conditions and the immediate living environment. We can try to imagine the load of stress upon families, *surtout les mères de famille*, who have to struggle and juggle due to water supply problems. Serene and peaceful families in a country makes a world of difference and, at times, all we need is ‘a few more drops of water’!

The main challenges facing us as a Nation and the pressing and urgent need for us to push back the frontiers of poverty as we strive towards our goals of creating jobs have no doubt taken into consideration the different perspectives. The decision of the Minister of Finance and Economic Development to invest massively in employment creation will also bring significant relief to the unemployed. In that respect, we need to applaud the measures that are directly linked to employment, namely the upskilling of young unemployed graduates under the National Skills Development Programme and the Youth Employment Programme.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I once again congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for the presentation of a Budget geared towards relieving the low-income group and the population at large.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

(6.32 p.m.)

Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): *Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.* D’abord, avant de féliciter le ministre des Finances, je voudrais apporter ma solidarité aux éleveurs qui passent par des moments difficiles avec l’épreuve traumatisante de l’abattage, comme mentionné par ‘*Le Mauricien*’ d’aujourd’hui.

Je voudrais féliciter le ministre des Finances pour ce budget. Je le félicite pour de nombreuses mesures apportées pour soulager les plus démunis, les moins chanceux et ceux au bas de l’échelle.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in acting together, we can prepare ourselves for a better future for all. At the very start of his speech, hon. Pravind Jugnauth, Minister of Finance and Economic Development stated, “Today, we choose to come on top.” Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, we choose to come on top for the benefit of our nation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us have a look at history. In 1961, the American Economist, James Meade, predicted a gloomy future for the small island of Mauritius. For the 1977 Nobel Prize winner, the outlook for peaceful development was poor, as Mauritius was highly dependent on the agricultural sector and with no natural resources. Yet, we are still proving that he was wrong.

I would like to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for the presentation of this Budget, which has not only touched the heart of Mauritians, but also by bringing new hope for them and improving their quality of life as well as the different strategies that have been mentioned in this Budget to enhance development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, different measures and provisions have been undertaken in this Budget, which are as follows –

- (i) address the problem of unemployment;
- (ii) enhance poverty alleviation;
- (iii) promote the development of small and medium enterprises; and last but not least,
- (iv) other essential measures to boost up economic growth in the forthcoming future.

This Budget shows that we are a caring Government. This can be justified by the following –

By imposing a heavy tax on alcoholic products and cigarettes. Such measures will impede to induce the above-mentioned products and which in turn will not be considered as a burden to the Government and society as a whole.

In order to combat unemployment, much emphasis has been laid upon to better matching of skills and create more job opportunities for our youth, women and men;

7,200 vacancies will be filled in the public sector;

900 additional Police Constables will be recruited;

600 Educators from both primary and secondary schools;

A special scheme will be launched for the placement of 200 trainee Engineers in the public sector bodies;

Provision of 2,000 employment under the YEP.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we cannot deny the fact that we are indebted to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Xavier-Luc Duval, who first initiated to enhance poverty alleviation when he was Minister of Social Integration. His contribution is considered to be a landmark for others to follow. In this respect, I would like to congratulate the present Minister who is doing a very good job. Very often, I congratulate him for what he is doing.

M. le président, le PMSD a toujours été fidèle à ses principes: loyal envers le pays et sincère dans ses actions. Pour nous, le peuple passe avant tout. Pour nous, il n'y a pas de 'On' and 'Off'. Notre priorité c'est la solidarité au sein du gouvernement Lepep. Pour nous, on est tous élu sur la base d'un programme, et nous faisons entièrement confiance au Premier ministre, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, who will lead the nation to a better destiny.

(*Interruptions*)

Coq pou contiye santer, soleil pou lever ! Carré carré nou pou dresse sa pei là !

In this respect, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister left a legacy whereby the works have to be continued by hon. Pravind Jugnauth ...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: No cross talking, hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Abbas Mamode: ...the Minister of Finance and Economic Development to boost the socio-economy development of the country. Despite the past Brexit event, he is making efforts to strengthen the tourism sector whereby the sector is increasing by 10 per cent.

Let me remind our colleagues on the other side of the House that, when the MMM took power in the City Council of Port Louis, the first thing that they did was to close a child day-care centre at Cité Vallijee which was opened, thanks to hon. Xavier-Luc Duval who heard the vulnerable mothers, when he was Minister of Social Integration.

In addition, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerning arts and culture the credit goes to hon. Baboo, Minister of Arts and Culture who has contributed to preserve the historical and cultural heritage site and its structures for our new generation. A sum of Rs50 m. has been earmarked for this Budget, thanks to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development. I have heard the hon. Minister of Gender, Child Development and Family Welfare, hon. Mrs Perraud, talking about 'smart'. Fortunately, we have got a smart Minister of Finance!

I would like to draw the attention of the House that the very first synthetic football ground, which is found at Magon Street, Plaine Verte, was my doing at the City Council.

(Interruptions)

Don't worry, hon. Aadil Ameer Meea, I heard you on the radio this morning. At the NDU...

(Interruptions)

Be it!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: No cross talking!

Mr Abbas Mamode: I am from the PMSD and we are in alliance with the MSM and the ML, and the Government is going strong. You wait for on and off till I don't know which year you will be waiting for!

Moreover, all my colleagues will agree...

(Interruptions)

Yes, thank you Rt. hon. Prime Minister.

Moreover, all my colleagues will agree with me that education is the foundation of human development. In this respect, the Budget 2016-2017 provides us with the following facilities. It highlights that students coming from poor families can achieve higher level of education.

I quote page 41, section 304 –

“Rs15,000 for successfully completing the grade 9 level under the nine year schooling;

- Rs25,000 for successfully completing the school certificate level or equivalent vocational certificate, and

- Rs35,000 for those successfully completing the Higher School Certificate or equivalent technical qualification.”

Moreover, those who have to re-sit for the HSC or SC will be exempted for the first time.

With regard to decent housing in the context of Marshall Plan, the Government has come forward with new mechanisms which comprise the following –

- 800 housing units will be constructed over the next three years, and
- Low-income families will benefit under the NHDC Social Housing Scheme from Rs10,000 to Rs20,000.

Least, but not last, a series of drains and road projects for the financial year 2016-2017 in my constituency are ongoing projects. Je voudrais mentionner certains : la Route Desbouchers à Roche Bois, 115 Impasse Magon à la Plaine Verte, Thrisnapolly Street, Plaine Verte, Pellegrin Street, Louis Vel, Coringa, Indian Lane, Samuel Fouquereaux, Cité Martial.

Concernant les drains : Depierre à Roche Bois, Allée Tamarin à Roche Bois, Quartier Shell, Canal Anglais, Cité Martial, Impasse Makow, Rohan Street, Indian Street, Maulana Abdul Rashid Nawab à la Plaine Verte pour très bientôt; Yoloff Street, Camp Yoloff.

Upgrading of roads, *mon cher ami !* Impasse St. Martin à Roche Bois, Impasse Rohan à Cité Martial ; Samuel Fouquereaux, Cité Martial, Madura Street à la Plaine Verte, Dr. Hassen Sakir pour très bientôt, Maulana Abdul Rashid Nawab...

(Interruptions)

Ce sont des projets, l'honorable Amer Meea! Already getting the blessing of the Rt. hon. Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth! And very soon there will be the upgrading of sport facilities around the region.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: No cross talking, please!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to sum up, I would like to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, hon. P. Jugnauth, who made tremendous efforts to satisfy all the social strata of the population.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is high time to put our heads together and say 'Yes, we can!' for the betterment of our society and contribute to the socio-economic development of the country.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr S. Soodhun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr I. Collendavelloo) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to tomorrow Tuesday 09 August 2016 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

MATTERS RAISED

BEAU BASSIN – BOOKMAKER SHOP - APPLICATION

(8.46 p.m.)

Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have two items to raise at Adjournment, one is concerning the Ministry of Local Government.

I would like to make a plea on behalf of the inhabitants of the centre of Beau Bassin. I raised the issue sometimes back with the hon. Minister. There has been an application made by one firm, Value Plus Ltd. to operate and run a proposed development of a bookmaker shop and odd betting on football matches played outside Mauritius. This application has been dealt with by the municipality of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill.

There have been strong objections from the College BPS which is in the surroundings, the Catholic Church, the residents of centre Beau Bassin with regard to the security of, not only schoolchildren but also people living in the vicinity. The case has been heard by the Municipality. There have been objections and, unfortunately, on 15 July, one of the persons who had objected has been informed that the application has been approved by the hon. Minister of Local Government. I think it is the procedure. So, I have raised the matter with the hon. Minister, my good friend, and I have gathered some information and have been made to understand that even the *Police des Jeux* had made an objection to that application. Ultimately, I don't know what happened to the file.

So, knowing this centre Beau Bassin, the allocation of this permit, if it goes through, will create a lot of problems not only security problems but parking problems and, especially

with the children attending the College BPS and those attending the Masses at the Sacré Coeur Church.

Can I appeal to the hon. Minister so that he can have a fresh look at the file and then do the necessary, within the parameters of the legislation?

Thank you.

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have gone through the file. I understand the concern of the hon. Member. The shop is situated at Royal Road Beau Bassin.

It is in a commercial zone where such activity is permissible according to the outline scheme and the PPG. I have checked about those who are protesting. There was one person objecting out of three close neighbours. We did not find any protest from the school and not from any religious organisation or even from the Police. I can assure the hon. Member.

I understand your concern and this is why I will go through it again. The thing is that the licence has been given by the GRA. That is why it was approved the last time, but I can have a look at it again and then we will see.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan!

(6.49 p.m.)

CORNER ARIANE & BAMBOUS ROAD, MONT ROCHES - TRAFIC LIGHTS

Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some two weeks back, I raised a matter here - unfortunately hon. Bodha is not here – regarding the concern of the inhabitants of Roche Brunes and Mont Roches concerning the security aspect at Corner Ariane and Bambous Road at Mont Roches. I even made a plea to the hon. Minister to have traffic lights installed. Day by day, the security problem is becoming more alarming. Even this morning, unfortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, il y a eu un mort et un blessé grave, la collision s'est produite à quelques mètres de la Boutique Savannah, Rue Raymond Rivet, Mont Roches à 6.30 ce matin. One young boy passed away and there is one who is severely injured and is at the hospital.

So, the purpose then of me asking the hon. Minister to have traffic lights fixed. Had there been traffic lights there, that accident would not have occurred in that particular way.

More so, along Bambous Road, there is the bus service by the United Bus Service for the people of Canot and Albion and also illegal parking on both sides of the roads.

Can I make a plea to Government, through any Minister who will pass on the message to the Minister of Public Infrastructure to have this traffic light urgently installed at Corner Ariane and Bambous Road, and, secondly, to have a fresh survey with the Traffic Management Unit of the measures which can be taken to avoid any future recurrence of such types of accidents?

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr S. Soodhun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have listened to my hon. Colleague. I am going to pass on the message to the hon. Minister concerned. I am sure that my colleague is going to take proper action in order to remedy the situation.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

(6.51 p.m.)

SCRAP METAL - DISPOSAL

Mr R. Uteem (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I would like to raise an issue which is addressed to the hon. Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection and it relates to the scrap metal business.

As the hon. Minister is aware, export of scrap metal has now been banned since 30 June 2016 and answering to a PQ on 17 May 2016, the hon. Minister stated that there was a proposed agreement with Samlo Koyenco Steel Co. Ltd. pursuant to which Samlo was going to buy all the ferrous and non-ferrous scrap metal from dealers at a price, and I quote the price –

“(...) international market rate, that is, the International Scrap Metal Price Index (...)”

However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the agreement has never been signed and today all the scrap metal dealers are having problem to dispose of all these scrap metals. Samlo Koyenco Steel Co. Ltd. is not buying all of them. So, we are having a problem stocking all these metals. Some of these metals especially those by-products from the manufacturing sector are quite toxic.

Therefore, I would humbly request the hon. Minister, if he can look into the matter and if he needs to talk to Samlo or finds alternative means to address the issue of scrap metal disposal.

The Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection (Mr A. Gungah): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank hon. Uteem for having raised the issue today. Definitely, I will look into that because I was not aware of the problem that the hon. Member just stated.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

(6.53 p.m.)

ALLÉE TAMARIN, ROCHE BOIS – ROAD REPAIRS

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Le problème que je vais soulever aujourd’hui concerne le ministère des Administrations régionales, c'est-à-dire la municipalité de Port Louis. On a entendu à la radio ce matin. Allée Tamarin à Roche Bois, qui est très fréquentée, se trouve dans un piteux état. Il y a le trafic qui vient de la Route Nicolay menant vers la Route Cocoterie et le rond-point de Roche Bois.

Je demande au ministre s'il peut faire le nécessaire rapidement pour essayer de rabibocher tous les trous qu'on a sur ce chemin-là et essayer d'avoir une solution temporaire avant qu'on refasse le chemin complètement.

Merci, M. le président.

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if I understand well, there are some CWA works going on there. So, once that is over, we will try to sort out the road problem.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Rughoobur!

(6.54 p.m.)

PEREYBERE, GRAND GAUBE & GRAND’BAIE - WATER SUPPLY

Mr S. Rughoobur (Second Member for Grand’ Baie & Poudre d’Or): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Public Utilities.

Following my PQ B/624 dated 20 June 2016 on the problem of water supply in the regions of Péreybère, Grand Gaube and Grand' Baie, the hon. Minister referred me to the list of projects that he tabled and I had the opportunity to peruse. I have noted that there are, at least, two projects that have been identified in the region. One is from St. François to Cap Malheureux, and the second project is at Péreybère.

Regarding the one from St. François to Cap Malheureux, unfortunately, there is a legal problem with the contractor and the one at Péreybère was supposed to start. I hope it will start in the coming month, that is, by September 2016.

For the regions of Grand Gaube and Grand' Baie where the problem is acute - hon. Minister Gungah will confirm - I propose that there is provision in this budget for a service reservoir of, at least, 20,000 m³ to 25,000 m³. Well, I have not seen this in the budget, but I would request the hon. Minister to please take up the matter at the level of his Ministry first if funds could be provided because I am telling you, the problem is really acute and we are getting heavy pressure from the inhabitants in the region. Thank you.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr I. Collendavelloo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of these inhabitants happens to be my mother; she does not complain to me at all.

(Interruptions)

Yes, we are all three of us there.

Let me reassure my hon. friend. On Cap Malheureux issue, there is an issue as to the quality of the pipes which the contractor wanted or still wants to supply. We do not agree with low quality pipes and we are insisting on the pipes being as per specification. This is a big issue. Long ago, these sorts of issues were settled around a table or should I say under a table,

(Interruptions)

More likely, under! Now, today, this is unacceptable. It is holding up the project, but I told the CWA, we are not going to accept any deal which is short of the contractual terms.

The other areas are being attended to. I am not too sure whether the situation is as dramatic as that in Grand' Baie. As I have told you, my information is not the same, but we will check everything.

(Interruptions)

The answer is not necessarily ‘in a reservoir’. You know we can build 200 reservoirs in Mauritius, but that does not mean we will get more water. I will come back on this during my speech on the Budget.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Lepoigneur!

(6.58 p.m.)

MONT ROCHES – ROAD WIDENING & PAVEMENT

Mr G. Lepoigneur (Fifth Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête est adressée à l’honorable Nando Bodha concernant le même sujet que l’honorable Bhagwan vient de dire. C’est concernant la route de Mont Roches qui mène vers St. Martin. Vraiment il y a un gros problème. Il y a eu plusieurs accidents là-bas, il y a eu mort d’homme. Et pas plus tard que ce matin, il y a quelqu’un qui est mort et puis il y a eu un blessé grave qui est à l’hôpital. Moi je pense que le ministre doit faire un *site visit* et peut-être qu’il y a une possibilité d’élargir le chemin et il faudra aussi mettre des trottoirs pour les piétons.

Merci.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr S. Soodhun): M. le président, mon ami peut compter sur moi. Je vais référer le cas au ministre concerné et on va trouver une solution.

At 6.48 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 09 August 2016 at 11.30 a.m.