



SIXTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

FRIDAY 05 AUGUST 2016

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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
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MAURITIUS

Sixth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 21 of 2016

Sitting of 05 August 2016

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

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

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

A. **Prime Minister's Office –**

The Transfer of Prisoners (Conditions for Transfer) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2016. (Government Notice No. 159 of 2016)

B. **Ministry of Finance and Economic Development –**

Mauritius in Figures 2015.

C. **Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research –**

The Annual Report of the Mauritius College of the Air for period 01 January 2012 to 11 July 2012.

D. **Ministry of Health and Quality of Life –**

- (a) The Medical Council (Continuing Professional Development) Regulations 2016. (Government Notice No. 160 of 2016)
- (b) The Dental Council (Continuing Professional Development) Regulations 2016. (Government Notice No. 161 of 2016)

E. **Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security –**

The Annual Report and Audited Accounts of the Irrigation Authority for the financial years 2014 to 2015

F. **Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection –**

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-Taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2016 (Government Notice No. 162 of 2016).
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-Taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 21) Regulations 2016 (Government Notice No. 163 of 2016).

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

POVERTY ERADICATION & MARSHALL PLAN AGAINST POVERTY – SUMS EARMARKED

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to poverty eradication, he will state the –

- (a) number of adults/households who/that will be entitled to the payment of a monthly subsistence allowance under the new proposed scheme, indicating the –
 - (i) criteria that will determine the quantum thereof payable thereto, and
 - (ii) sums provided in the Budget for the payment thereof over the period 01 December 2016 to end June 2017, and
- (b) programmes and actions in the Marshall Plan Against Poverty that will be implemented in 2016/2017, indicating the sums provided in the Budget for the implementation thereof.

The Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment (Mr P. Roopun): Madam Speaker, with your permission, I will reply to this Private Notice Question.

I wish to thank the hon. Leader of Opposition for giving me the opportunity to elaborate and shed light on the proposals contained in the Budget Speech with regard to the payment of a Subsistence Allowance and the implementation of the recommendations made in the Marshall Plan against Poverty.

Eradication of absolute poverty has always been the priority of priorities of this Government since our taking over in December 2014. The Government Programme clearly states at paragraph (20) thereof the elaboration of a medium to long term Marshall Plan to combat poverty and social exclusion.

This was further reaffirmed in the Budget Speech of last year and also in the Economic Vision Statement of the Prime Minister.

The Marshall Plan is a reality today, since we have even made provision for the implementation of the flagship recommendations contained in the Plan as from this year.

With regard to part (a), I wish to inform the House that, as at to date, the income threshold for the absolute poor is Rs6,200 per household per month irrespective of the family

size for Mauritius and Rs5,000 for Rodrigues. Presently, there are 13,267 households in Mauritius and 1,400 households in Rodrigues who are registered and found eligible in the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM) for support under the National Empowerment Foundation's (NEF) programmes and the Child Allowance respectively.

The monthly household threshold of Rs6,200 which was determined in 2012, is no longer adequate and has already served its purpose. In our bid to find a fairer and more equitable threshold, we have reviewed it taking into consideration international prevailing methodologies for the determination of an appropriate poverty threshold for Mauritius including Rodrigues. As per international poverty line of USD 1.25 a day per person, it would have been lesser than what we are providing. At that level, the proportion of households as per Statistics Mauritius (SM), in absolute poverty, is less than 1%.

However, we have calculated the new Poverty threshold taking into consideration all incomes derived by the poor households which stands at Rs2,720 per adult per month. This is 40% higher than the World Bank threshold of US Dollar 3.10 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) equivalent to Rs1,938 per person per month for developing countries. For obvious reasons, children under the age of 16 have been considered half of that amount.

The proportion of poor households, based on the World Bank threshold, is 1.73% equivalent to 6,400 families or 2.7% of the number of poor persons representing 34,200 persons based on total income of the household including Rodrigues.

I wish to inform the House that the above mentioned figures are mere estimates and the actual figures can only be determined after a full-fledged survey which my Ministry will carry out in collaboration with other stakeholders as from next week. For Rodrigues, the survey will start at the beginning of September 2016.

The whole survey is expected to be completed by end of October this year which will be followed by home visits with a view to calculating the assessed income through a revised Proxy Means Test.

We are confident that payment of this income support will be effective as from December 2016.

I seize this opportunity to seek the collaboration of all Members to sensitize poor people of their Constituencies who fall within the new poverty threshold to register themselves at the Registration Centres that will be communicated in the Press.

With regard to part (a) (i), the House will note that the eligibility threshold per adult per month is Rs2,720 while, depending on the family size, the maximum threshold for a household will be Rs9,520 per month. For the benefit of Members, I am circulating a copy of

the new thresholds. Just as an example, I may state that for one adult and two children the new threshold will come to Rs5,440, for two adults and two children, the new threshold will be Rs8,160 and for two adults and three children, it will come to Rs9,520. The sum to be disbursed will be the difference between the threshold and the assessed income. For example, for a household of two adults and two children, the new threshold being Rs8,160 per month. If the assessed income of the household stands at Rs5,000 per month, the additional amount eligible to be paid to this household will be the difference between the assessed income and the new threshold, i.e. Rs3,160 per month.

As I stated earlier, the new threshold is fairer and more equitable as larger families will now qualify for support as compared to the current uniform threshold of Rs6,200.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that all support provided by NEF is already subject to a social contract which is a mutual agreement between the beneficiary and NEF. This monthly Subsistence Allowance is a new scheme to empower the vulnerable households under the social contract which will run for two years and will be reviewed accordingly.

With your permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that we have already secured the assistance of UNDP to review the existing social contract with a view to making it more appropriate and effective. In addition, the UNDP Team will also assist in the restructure of NEF and the setting up of an appropriate Management Information System (MIS) for better monitoring and evaluation of individual households who will be accompanied and handheld during this period of two years.

I am confident that with these new measures, we are adopting a holistic approach in our fight against the scourge of absolute poverty. The households will no longer be left on their own as they will always be supported by a Case Management Officer of the NEF.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) (ii) - payment of monthly Subsistence Allowance, the amount as provided in the Budget is Rs200 m. for Financial Year 2016/2017 and Rs300 m. for Financial Year 2017/2018.

With regard to part (b), the Marshall Plan has made a series of actionable programs to be implemented over the short, medium and long term by several Ministries including, amongst others, Education, Housing, Labour, Environment, Social Security, Gender, Youth and Sports, Health.

As the House is aware, several of these actions have already been initiated in the Budget Speech for those eligible under SRM. Provision made in Financial Year 2016/2017 is as follows -

1. Rs 200 Million Subsistence allowance based on the new poverty threshold
2. Rs 60 Million Educational support as follows -
 - A one off School Completion Premium of -
 - Rs15,000 for students successfully completing the Grade 9 level under the nine year schooling;
 - Rs25,000 for students successfully completing School Certificate or equivalent vocational qualifications;
 - Rs35,000 for students successfully completing Higher School Certificate or equivalent vocational qualifications -

This amount will be credited in a savings account opened in the name of the child and can only be accessed when the latter reaches 18 years. This amount can be used by the child to pursue further education or set up a small business.
3. Rs3 Million Community based school to be implemented in five ZEP schools on a pilot basis by the Ministry of Education;
4. Rs4 Million Crèche Voucher Scheme, i.e. an increase from Rs1,500 to Rs2,000 per child;
5. Rs30 Million Cash grant for purchase of school materials as follows -
Rs1,500 for Pre-Primary and Primary students, and
Rs2,000 for Secondary including Pre-Voc and Tertiary students;
6. Rs10 Million to offer a second chance for students for exam resits at SC and HSC levels under the Vote of the Ministry of Social Security;
7. Rs15 Million Funeral Grant will be increased from Rs4,950 to Rs10,000 under the Vote of the Ministry of Social Security;
8. Rs350,000 in respect of fire victims to enable them to secure accommodation for a maximum period of six months, i.e. Rs5,000 per month under the Vote of the Ministry of Social Security;

9. Review of CSR by the setting up of a National CSR Foundation whereby, at least, 50% of CSR funds collected will be channelled to the Foundation;
10. Rs10 Million for recruitment of 50 Case Management Officers and Psychologists at the NEF, including Rodrigues, in the context of the reorganisation of the core activities of the case workers;
11. Rs200 Million for the New Decent Shelters Programme. A Committee is currently working on its implementation.

Madam Speaker, I am confident that the series of measures enunciated in the Budget Speech, and which we are implementing, will undoubtedly bring about substantial improvement in the living conditions of those in extreme poverty.

Mr Bérenger: I am quite surprised that it is the Minister of Social Integration who is replying to the PNQ. I refer to paragraph 299 of the Budget Speech, where it is announced that a new monthly subsistence allowance scheme will be set up, and it says '(...) a new scheme under which every adult on the Social Register will be entitled to a monthly subsistence allowance (...)’ and so on. My first question to the Government is: Will that monthly subsistence allowance be paid, as is spelt out in the Budget Speech, to every adult or to every household?

Mr Roopun: Madam Speaker, as I stated, it is going to be paid to households on the basis of the number of persons within that family.

Mr Bérenger: In the Budget Speech, it is said ‘every adult’, and when you turn it into household, it divides by two. So, can I ask again? Are we going to stick to what is said in the Budget Speech; that every adult will be paid that allowance? Or will it be every household?

Mr Roopun: Madam Speaker, the threshold is per adult and the payment will be per household.

Mr Bérenger: In the Budget Speech, the Minister says to every adult. Now, we have been told that there is now going to be a full-fledged survey and so on. I want to have a figure. How many adults as from 01 December are going to benefit from that new allowance? Can I remind the Minister that, in the Estimates, for his own Ministry, Ministry of Social

Integration and Economic Empowerment, there is no question of a survey. It is said there is no question of a survey, and I quote –

“(...) amongst the main achievements for financial year 2016/2017, registration of 13,267 households with a monthly income of less than Rs6,200 under the Social Register of Mauritius.”

So, my second question is: Are we now going to carry out a survey or as promised by the Minister of Finance, all these adults, all the 13,217 people who are on the Social Register of Mauritius will be paid as at 01 September this new allowance?

Mr Roopun: Madam Speaker, first of all, allow me to lay a copy of the table which I mentioned earlier. I wish to clarify one thing. When I came at the Ministry, there was no Social Register, although - the ancient Government - since a few years ago, it was clearly stated that all beneficiaries of the NEF should be registered under the SRM. The SRM was based under a threshold of Rs6,200 per family, and this dates back to 2012. It was this exercise that I carried out last year. This has been completed. Under this exercise, the amount 13,000 and something households was found out, and it was on this basis that we effected all our interventions last year. But the House will realise that this new threshold is something which has been announced in this very Budget, and the whole calculation has now changed. It is *per capita* based on a totally different mechanism. The amount itself has increased. It is for this purpose that a fresh exercise will necessarily have to be carried out if we want to implement the new measure under this Budget.

Mr Bérenger: My point is simple, Madam Speaker. We have had a speech from the hon. Minister of Finance who says that every adult on the Social Register of Mauritius will be paid this new allowance. The Minister concerned has said that there is an existing Social Register with 13,267 households, and the Speech said that adults are going to be paid. So, my question was simple. I do not want to hear about the new survey. Carry out the number of surveys! But there is, according to your own Ministry - the Attorney General is going to advise the other one! Keep to your place!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order, please!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: My simple question is ...

(Interruptions)

Yes, it is a shame what is taking place!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order, please!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

I am on my feet! I have said order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Bérenger: We have 13,267 households on the Social Register which the hon. Minister has set up. Are they going - every adult - to be paid this special allowance? Yes or no?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Can I call the House to order, please! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you will have to ask your question to the Minister, and it is up to the Minister to reply. Whatever happens in between is no concern of the House.

(Interruptions)

To the Minister!

(Interruptions)

This is what I am telling the Minister. He has to reply to your question, but whatever happens in the Chamber is no concern of anybody.

Mr Roopun: Madam Speaker, I wish to repeat again. I am sure that the hon. Leader of the Opposition will appreciate that whatever is in the Budget is done at the level of the

Ministry of Finance. Of course, we are consulted, but we should realise that these are two different exercises. The first exercise carried out is, in fact, per household, but here we want to help the poorest among the poor. A new mechanism is being established where it is going to be *per capita* instead of being per household, with a cap of Rs9,520.

Mr Bérenger: I do not think it is worth carrying on, Madam Speaker. We have seen that it is pure bluff as far as the eradication of poverty is concerned. I am not carrying onward.

(Interruptions)

It should be a shame on him!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

No, this is not acceptable! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, whatever you said is not acceptable!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Leader of the Opposition, please withdraw those words '*bous to lagel*', which have been said!

(Interruptions)

Please! Please!

Mr Bérenger: Madam Speaker, you have ruled! Yes, I withdraw! You have ruled! In the recent past, when the Prime Minister said 'shut up!' to somebody, you have ruled that it is parliamentary. So, shut up!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: No! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I am just drawing your attention to the fact that whatever the Prime Minister said, he had withdrawn.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Leader of the Opposition, have you finished...

(Interruptions)

...others have questions!

Hon. Osman Mahomed, you have a question!

Mr Mahomed: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question pertains to the Marshall Plan. Now, in the Budget Speech, more specifically at paragraph 289 on the Marshall Plan, provision is being made for Rs50 m. for 1,000 housing units. My first question is: does that pertain to the Marshall Plan, and if so, what is the size of houses that is being envisaged, because in the past when the Marshall Plan was being initiated, the question was to provide larger houses because the hon. Minister rightly mentioned larger families are being catered for, and whether the roof, instead of being Corrugated Iron Sheet (CIS) at the moment, will be in concrete? Because we are talking about Rs500,000 per housing unit?

Mr Roopun: The previous social housing was of an area of 31 m². This is being increased up to 50 m², depending upon the size of the plot and it is going to be in concrete. This is our intention: a concrete building up to 50m².

Madam Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

Mr Ramful: May I refer the hon. Minister to the Household Budget Survey 2012 where the poverty line for two adults and two children, the average household income, was calculated at Rs13,330. Now, with the new calculation that the hon. Minister has tabled, for two adults and two children, the monthly income threshold has been reduced to Rs8,160 and in 2012, there were 33,800 households which were within that threshold. Now, with this new calculation, wouldn't there be a number of those households which would be outside the bracket?

Mr Roopun: Madam Speaker, today with this measure, we are concerned with extreme poverty, absolute poverty and the other threshold relates to relative poverty. We want, first of all, to deal with the poorest among the poor, that is, those in extreme poverty

with this provision in our Budget. We are not, at this stage, concerned with those who are in relative poverty. For those, we will have to seek other mechanisms.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Barbier!

Mr Barbier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In his reply, the hon. Minister stated that Rs3 m. will be allocated to the community-based schools and it concerns five schools, I suppose, in the *ZEP* zone. May I know from the hon. Minister whether these schools have already been identified, and if so, whether he will give us the list of schools which have been identified?

Mr Roopun: The list has not yet been finalised. It is being worked out at the level of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. Minister the following question. Reference is, in fact, made to the Social Register in the Budget Speech by the hon. Minister. Do we have a Social Register? Because there are questions which have been asked in this very House under the previous Government, and we were told that this is a dynamic register, and that people come in and get out and there is, in fact, nothing as a Social Register. Isn't this a confusing situation? Why does the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development make mention in his speech about 6,400 families? He mentioned that there are some 6,400 families still living below the absolute poverty threshold and in the Estimates, reference is made to about 13,000 families in the same category as has just been mentioned by the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Roopun: I wish, once again, to clarify this issue which, I think, is very pertinent. The 13,000 was based on the threshold of Rs6,200 per household and it was on this basis that we conducted the registration last year. And now, it is completely a new mechanism that is going to be put into place, based on this threshold per adult equivalent of Rs2,720. It means that within the first list of 13,000, we will have to revalidate and find out, because within that register we did not take into consideration the number of persons per family, but it was based essentially on the household. We are coming with a completely new system of calculation which is fairer and which, we believe, is going to target most specifically those who are the poorest among the poor.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon Rutnah!

Mr Roopun: Excuse me, Madam Speaker! So far as the Social Register is concerned, the one which has been prepared and which is mentioned in the Supplement under my Ministry, we do have a Social Register right now which is with the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions, and I may add also that in this Social Register, we have been able not only to have a list of those families, but we know exactly per village how many households are on this Register. We know in each and every Municipal Council, in each Ward, which are those families. We have also worked with Statistics Mauritius to know specifically, geographically where they are situated, and even within each village, it has been divided amongst enumeration areas and we know exactly where they are. Now, we wish to ascertain that there is no exclusion error. The exercise is going to be carried out with the help of the community, and then with this database, for the first time, we will be able to come with a proper and clear way of fighting poverty. But, in the meantime, we had a new policy designed through this Budget. We will have to adjust and take into consideration these new factors, and then, we are going to proceed with our strategy as planned earlier.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Rutnah!

Mr Rutnah: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Will the hon. Minister agree with me that in order to eradicate absolute poverty, it is not only about the amount of money allocated to poor families, but in line with paragraph 302 of the Budget Speech, at page 41, where this Government proposes to introduce major programme to empower these families to break away from poverty cycle and stand on their own feet, that is, other than monetary terms, this Government undertakes to bring other sorts of programmes in order to empower these families?

Mr Roopun: In fact, Madam Speaker, the payment of this income support is the first step towards empowerment. We want, first of all, to ensure that those families have the strict minimum for their daily needs, and from there, then comes the major challenge. The major challenge is to take all those families out of assistance and try to empower them. This is where the new role of the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF) is going to be very important. This is why we are enlisting the support of further field workers who are going to manage the families. They are going to hand-hold those families and try to take them out of

poverty, help them in different manners, try to train them, be at their side, support them and ensure that they graduate out of poverty and they become independent and they fully integrate in society, and can participate fully in economic and other social activities designed for each and every Mauritian.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Bérenger: I don't have any further question.

Madam Speaker: You don't have any further question. I am sorry then, because the privilege is for you. 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. Roopun!

(3.31 p.m.)

The Minister of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment (Mr P. Roopun): Madam Speaker, with your permission, may I continue on the same trend and start, first of all, by expressing my deep sense of pride to rise in support of the Budget presented by the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development to the nation last Friday.

This exercise has, from all accounts, raised the spirits of our countrymen and has been acclaimed unanimously by Mauritians of all walks of life, including, various hon. Members from the other side.

This, in itself, is a rare feature. *En effet, Madame la présidente, c'est intéressant de voir que le leader de l'opposition trouve ce budget intéressant.*

Such consensus, however, has not been obtained by sheer accident.

When hon. Pravind Jugnauth returned at the helm of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, we all know that everything was set for the presentation of the Budget on 06 June.

On assuming office, he could have stuck to the schedule and proceed as planned. However, instead of taking the route of facility, the hon. Minister preferred to have a fresh look all over again. He ensured that everything fits perfectly within the philosophy of this Government and our Vision 2030. And in so doing, he also gave due consideration to the most important exercise of this House. He had further brainstorming sessions and meetings and he has worked relentlessly for the last eight weeks towards the elaboration and finalisation of this Budget. This has proved, once again, Madam Speaker, the sincerity of purpose and the commitment of the hon. Minister in his endeavour to propel the economy on a high growth trajectory to create jobs, to reduce inequality and eliminate poverty. For this, Madam Speaker, he deserves all our admiration and gratitude as he has, once again, shown his profound dedication and sense of leadership. To borrow an expression from the hon. Leader of the Opposition, let me say that this fourth Budget of hon. Pravind Jugnauth was really a “*coup de maître*”.

Madam Speaker, since we assumed office in December 2014 to date, what were our objectives? What have we done? Our utmost priority was to bring the economy from the backburner to the centre of our preoccupation and lay firm foundations for a renewed prosperity while ensuring social justice.

During our last Budget, we proved that it was possible to increase substantially social allocations of the most vulnerable without any increase in taxation. We came with a no tax budget and set the scene right to answer to all challenges the country has to face. Unfortunately, barely nine days after our last Budget, we were engulfed with a big mess, the so-called BAI Saga. We had to take all timely measures to avert irreversible damages to our economy, already battered after the passage of the last Government.

Despite the doom and gloom scenario propounded by the Opposition, we remained resolute and for the municipal elections which followed, the population renewed their confidence and gave us an overwhelming victory.

Madam Speaker, there will always be debates about what was the best course to deal with the BAI Saga. But, as a Government, we had to act there and then and thrash out issues as they were unfolding. For anybody, it is easy to be wise after the event. But everyone in his right mind will agree that bold decisions had to be taken ever since 2013, but no one dared.

Fortunately, Madam Speaker, for this country, the most difficult has now been handled and this chaotic situation is now behind us. We have successfully been able to protect most depositors and policyholders while safeguarding jobs. Our economy showed resilience and the way the Government tackled the whole issue has enhanced our credibility on the international scene. Whatever a few may say, we should acknowledge the personal dedication of hon. Minister Bhadain in tackling this very delicate situation.

Madam Speaker, the main spokesman of the Opposition, in his speech, mainly raised two issues –

He was very critical towards the ex-Finance Minister on the figures he had projected. The figures turned to be over optimistic. In any event, Madam Speaker, optimism is better than pessimism.

However, everybody can surmise what would have been the situation without the BAI Saga, the growing uncertainty in the World Economy, the slowdown in China and other emerging markets like South Africa or Brazil. Despite all odds, the economic performance of Mauritius has been much more than honourable.

Madam Speaker, hon. Uteem also mentioned that there was underspending on Capital Budgets. It's good to know what has been the *modus operandi* of the last Government on this score. When we arrived, there were over Rs1.3 billion of outstanding payment at the NDU. Once funds had been secured, it came to light that for projects in hundreds, some dating as far back as 2011, claims could not be processed as procedures had not been followed. There were cases where we did not have any indication about the exact contract amount. At times, there was no indication about the duration, about the exact scope of work, required test results were missing and all this mess had to be cleared before effecting payment.

I cannot blame Members of the Opposition, of the MMM or even the new Members of the Labour Party for asking questions, but this was the Augean Stable we had to clean.

All hon. Members will appreciate that we could not dish out millions of rupees unless we are sure of the genuineness of those claims and I understand there are still some backlogs to clear. But we all realise that the necessity of timely implementation of projects is vital and I would also join to urge all concerned of the necessity to act with diligence in the execution of all projects.

Coming back to our present Budget, Madam Speaker, I do not want to quote too many figures. Yesterday, hon. Seeruttun gave us an insight and it is clear that the economic indicators have improved in most sectors though we agree that there is still room for improvement.

Just to come back with a few examples –

- The MBC which was fraught with Rs1.2 billion worth of debts has this year registered an operating profit of around Rs80 m.
- Casino of Mauritius a real “*panier percé*” which had been in the red zone since 2008 with a loss of Rs121 m. is expecting to end its financial year with a profit.
- Likewise for the DBM which is now starting to make profits while lately it had bad debts of over Rs300 m.
- The same can be said about Air Mauritius which is flying back into profitability.

As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, most of the criticisms levelled towards this Government were based on unfounded premises, but little was it realised that we were focusing on systemic changes instead of superficiality.

We were not diagnosing the symptoms, but we were concentrating more on how to address the root causes of the dysfunctions in many public enterprises.

On a totally different note, Madam Speaker, we should also acknowledge that after decades of chaos, this Government has also been successful in tackling the delicate issue of street hawkers. Similarly, the Terre Rouge-Verdun link road is now operational. Uncertainty, which has been looming regarding the DTAA with India, has now been settled and our financial sector can now develop activities with more substance and generate further employment.

Madam Speaker, due to time constraint and so as not to be repetitive, allow me to come straightaway to my Ministry.

I would like, at the very outset, to thank the hon. Minister of Finance for the special consideration he has given in this Budget for the fight against extreme poverty. I am also grateful and glad that all the measures announced regarding poverty alleviation are being fully endorsed by hon. Members from both sides of the House.

We should give credit to hon. Pravind Jugnauth who, as Minister of Finance, has always had a soft corner for the most vulnerable and in all his four Budgets we have testimony for that. Again, this time he launched the Marshall Plan by coming with a measure which is nothing less than revolutionary.

Allow me, Madam Speaker, at this juncture, on behalf of the whole Government, to express once again, our deepest gratitude to the UNDP for their support in the elaboration of the Marshall Plan. After a first draft obtained in November last year, the final version was received in March this year, but due to the far reaching financial implication of its recommendations, it had to be considered by the Ministry of Finance in the context of this Budget.

Let me hasten to add, however, that the collaboration with the UNDP is still ongoing with regard to the implementation as we wish to have their technical support with regard to four issues, namely -

- (i) restructure of NEF;
- (ii) Impact Assessment of NEF Activities;
- (iii) MIS System for NEF, and
- (iv) elaboration of a Social Contract

In so far as NEF is concerned, Madam Speaker, glaring dysfunctionalities in the service delivery were apparent and a profound reform and reorientation was imperative. Despite the fact that the precedent Government had, itself, took a policy decision that only households registered in the SRM would be eligible to the services provided by NEF, the latter continued to use its own database. This was manifestly demonstrated during the distribution of school materials so much so that in January 2015, when we assumed office, it came to light that some 50% of children attending ZEP schools had been excluded in that exercise.

Another concrete example is the construction of social houses. Out of 750 houses constructed, more than 150 remained unoccupied for various reasons such as lack of water and electricity connection; no absorption pit and even for personal reasons some preferring to continue renting a house rather than to move in. This shows a blatant lack of follow-up on the

part of the NEF and necessary actions are being taken in order to remedy this disturbing state of affairs. In addition, due to lack of proper monitoring, more than 90% of beneficiaries who have to pay a monthly instalment of Rs500 are in arrears. This represents an amount of over Rs5 million while there are also instances where not a single instalment has been repaid. As a result, a tracking system has now been set up at the level of NEF to recoup all outstanding sums. Concerning the construction of CIS houses, lots of abuse and corruptive practices have been noticed and same was discontinued.

The Gros Cailloux Housing Estate project is illustrious of the absence of proper implementation which led to excessive costs overrun. The project initiated as far back as 2011 was estimated at around Rs40 m.; the works were completed only in 2015 and by then it has cost Rs51.6 m. It was only after the houses had been erected that it was realised that the main door was unfortunately too narrow. I am not the one who tested it, I must tell you. Additional costs had to be incurred to remedy this situation. After handing over, the housing units contained a lot of snags. Provisions had not been made, for example, for individual electricity and water supply and a lot of other additional costs such as access road and drains were not included in the project design.

Another service of the NEF is training and placement. It was noted that most of the training and placement of beneficiaries were not from the SRM list. No proper record was kept of the beneficiaries. Life Skill Training was intermittent and without any defined goals. Monitoring and evaluation of the services provided by NEF was cryingly inexistent. It is against this background that it was resolved that prevailing programmes should be completely overhauled with clear objectives and strategies put in place to ensure clarity and coherence of purpose. Both Qualitative and Quantitative changes have been brought.

The Ministry of Good Governance was in the first instance approached to carry out an overall assessment of the services provided by NEF. Nine reports were submitted between March and December last year and all of them were damning. Various acts of omissions and commissions have been revealed by the internal control reports. Many cases have been reported to ICAC.

Not acting promptly, Madam Speaker, to steer the course of NEF northwards would have meant settlement for complacency and acquiescence. Appropriate actions were taken towards situating responsibility. This led to the institution of disciplinary actions against the Chief Administrator and the Financial Manager who both have been shown the exit door.

I am not going to pick holes in the functioning of NEF before December 2014. Nonetheless to say that NEF was like a *“bateau sans gouvernail”* will be an

understatement, Madam Speaker. That is why the reorientation of NEF including the conditions of service of its employees has always been a priority of priorities. And, as mentioned earlier, the UNDP will provide consultancy on this matter and the final reports are expected to come out by end of November.

As the House may realise meeting our targets turned out to be a really tough task. Faced with many challenges, my Ministry left no stone unturned and the achievements are encouraging.

With regard to database of NEF, we decided that a fresh survey should be carried out to determine the eligibility of households as per SRM criteria. Accordingly, we started the survey of beneficiaries in July last year and by March this year we were able to establish a credible and reliable register. Earlier on, I mentioned about what has been the result and, of course, with the change in threshold as announced in the reply and in the Budget Speech, a new survey will now be conducted as from next week and this will last till end of August. After home visits of new applicants, we are confident to generate a new Social Register by end of October thus enabling payment of Income Support as from December.

With regard to the social housing policy, two fundamental changes have been brought. There is a paradigm shift in this policy: namely shift to fully concrete houses; increase of size of house from 31 up to 50m² depending on the land size for owners of lands or having obtained legal permissions. The cost of a housing unit will increase from Rs274,000 to above Rs750,000.

Furthermore, NHDC has agreed to allocate 10% of its houses to be constructed islandwise to landless families in the Social Register. We are also exploring the possibility of having recourse to prefab houses to bring down the costs, but without compromising on durability and safety. In this connection, expression of interests have been launched.

As announced in the Budget, fire victims in the Social Register will receive a monthly allowance of Rs5000 up to six months to rent a decent dwelling pending a final determination of their situation. And I should thank the Minister of Finance for this, as this was among our main concern. Many victims were being sheltered in community centres without proper access to basic sanitary facilities.

The issue of school materials being subject to criticisms in terms of quality of the materials as well as deserving beneficiaries being excluded had to be dealt with diligently and in this respect, steps taken towards improving the system bore promising results. Quality of materials was improved and it was subject to control by the Mauritius Standard Bureau.

As a first step, the initial list was reviewed to include all missing ZEP students. Subsequently, after finalisation of the Social Register, the cost has been drastically reduced from about Rs70 m. to Rs40 m. while complaints received were negligible. With regard to Rodrigues, we resorted to cash allowance and the response was positive.

With the Marshall Plan now launched, the Poverty Observatory set up at the level of my Ministry is being finalised in order to create a permanent and independent platform for all relevant stakeholders to sustainably address the issue of poverty in all its forms. It will also act as an advocacy group in the fight against poverty and create linkages with the SADC Regional Poverty Observatory for sharing of information and best practices. The Observatory will also conduct surveys and publish relevant reports on poverty.

In October last year, my Ministry signed a MoU with the International Poverty Reduction Centre in China, based in Beijing. This Centre is the only institution of its kind in China, and has assumed a prominent and influential role as a platform for exchanging information and encouraging international collaboration on poverty reduction. It has also built a commendable track record as a centre for training, research and high-level policy dialogue and will hence help us with the running of the Poverty Observatory.

Madam Speaker, I do not propose to come back on the new monthly subsistence allowance which has been the subject of the PNQ, but to drive the House on the most important part of my intervention. I wish, of course, to state what we believe is most important and in line with our objectives, is that the poor be helped to move out of the poverty trap. In this aspect, empowerment is the bridge that has to be crossed if we want our poor to integrate the mainstream society.

Access to education has proved to be a powerful tool of empowerment. Provision of a decent shelter and training the poor to acquire appropriate skills will definitely help them to climb the social ladder. The provision of an income support, as provided in the budget will, undoubtedly, give a soothing balm to those underprivileged and destitute. This will allow the household to concentrate on the empowerment programmes.

The income support is not unconditional, as it is subject to the beneficiary entering into a social contract for empowerment such as sending kids to school, joining skill development programmes and tapping employment opportunities offered to them. Empowerment will be the backbone of our interventions.

We all know that today knowledge and talent management are being laid at the forefront to keep pace with the ever fast changing society with technological revolution and we are living in a digital era. We want to make sure that no one is left behind. At the heart of this change, lies education which is the catalyst factor to drive all the development change at the human and societal levels.

Bearing this in mind and notwithstanding the present conditional cash transfer payable to a maximum of three children to improve school attendance, we are going a step further to ensure that wards of poor households have the opportunity to become successful in life by integrating in the knowledge-based world. I talked also about the initiative we have taken regarding the school premium. Just to add, we have also the voucher system scheme, which is going to put into place in replacement of the previous system, where we were giving school materials. Now, we are going to give a cash grant in lieu of school materials and we hope that this will be easier both for Government and for the beneficiaries, so that everything will be done in a timely manner and families will, of course, make best use of these facilities as it was before.

We also note that with the Nine-Year Schooling there are going to be further interventions as I mentioned the community-based education and so on. I do not want to dwell further on that, Madam Speaker, for the time being.

Just to add, Madam Speaker, in the light of the new Marshall Plan, the Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment is being called upon to effect the overall coordination across all lines and in different Ministries for the implementation and monitoring of the Plan through the Poverty Observatory.

So far as the NEF is concerned, its core activity will be the provision of operational support at the community level for the management of social contracts with beneficiaries. To this end, there is going to be a reorientation of the NEF and, as I stated, the UNDP is working in this direction and we hope to have recommendations by the end of November.

Another crucial measure announced in the budget is the setting up of the National CSR Foundation. The removal of CSR guidelines created some confusion here and there. Vehement representations have been made across by NGOs to the effect that they are getting difficulties to access funding from the CSR companies to sustain their activities and projects. Hence, their very existence is threatened.

It was also being argued that it kills the spirit of social advocacy and activism which is of paramount importance in a democratic society. In line with the outcry that the removal of guidelines has created opacity in the use of CSR Funds, we have now come with a new set up by the establishment of a CSR foundation which will undoubtedly help in bringing more transparency and ensure that the CSR funds are being utilised judiciously towards the upliftment of the poor and their integration into the mainstream society. At the same time, we hope that it will give a new impetus to the private sector and the civil societies to synergise their efforts and to participate actively in the nation-building.

This foundation will function under the aegis of my Ministry and will be managed by a Board comprising of representatives from both the public and the private sectors. The core objectives of the foundation have been highlighted at paragraph 340 of the Budget Speech where it is clearly mentioned that the top priorities are poverty alleviations, educational support and social housing which are in line with Goal 1 of the SDG.

Madame la présidente, ce gouvernement s'est fixé un objectif précis, celui d'éliminer la pauvreté absolue d'ici la fin de son mandat. De par la pluri-dimensionnalité de la pauvreté, c'est sur plusieurs fronts que nous menons ce combat.

Ceci s'explique, en effet, par la provision dans ce budget d'une pléiade de mesures financières et matérielles, des moyens nécessaires pour avoir accès à un toit décent, des incitations pour encourager la scolarisation ou encore diverses formations professionnelles et techniques pour faciliter l'employabilité de tous ceux se trouvant dans le registre social.

Ces mesures, Madame la présidente, sont sans précédent et révolutionnaires. Mais ce gouvernement est entièrement conscient que la pauvreté est un phénomène complexe qui ne peut être réduit qu'à une simple expression monétaire et matérielle. On reconnaît parfaitement que la pauvreté est aussi un sentiment d'exclusion. C'est le sentiment terrible de ne compter pour personne, de n'être représenté et de n'être écouté par personne. Ce que la pauvreté met en lumière, avant tout, c'est la perte du lien social.

Pour ces familles qui connaissent la pauvreté, l'enjeu n'est pas simplement de leur venir en aide même si c'est, bien entendu, nécessaire et vital. C'est aussi et surtout de les accompagner jusqu'à leur retour au cœur même de la société et par la suite, les rendre autonomes. C'est dans ce contexte qu'on a adopté une approche de responsabilisation totale

et d'encadrement des populations à la base dès la conception et la mise en œuvre des actions de développement.

Ainsi, pour conclure, Madame la présidente, je lancerai un appel solennel. Je demande la collaboration de tout un chacun, les membres de cette auguste Assemblée, les membres de la presse, le secteur privé et public, les ONGs, les collectivités locales, les responsables des villages, la communauté dans son ensemble sans oublier nos aînés qui regorgent de sagesse, d'expérience de vie et de valeur.

En effet, chaque attitude, chaque geste compte pour combattre la misère et l'exclusion. Il existe de multiples manières d'agir, quelles que soient nos compétences et nos disponibilités.

Madame la présidente, je prie pour que chacun d'entre nous aille au contact de ceux vivant dans la pauvreté, de les écouter, d'être proche de leurs préoccupations et surtout de leur garantir que pour eux aussi l'ascenseur social fonctionne encore.

C'est la seule façon de garantir à toutes et à tous qu'ils ont leur place dans la République de Maurice.

Je vous remercie, Madame la présidente, pour votre attention.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(4.02 p.m.)

Mr O. Mahomed (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):
Madam Speaker, I have been following the Government speeches and statements offered both inside and outside the House. What do they add up to? Scarcely, a can of beans! For they tried to tell us, this Budget exercise is a social Budget and often times a *budget de rupture*.

If the Government believes that their muddled thinking will move us hey presto into a new era of development, they must be living in a different world, a different planet. Perhaps, that is where they go to in all their foreign travels and in those private jets. Off to Neverland to be with Sheikh Peter Pan.

Madam Speaker, the most talked about social measure of this Budget is the reduction of the price of cooking gas which represents a saving of Rs40 a month for an average household. We are talking about Rs1.30 per day, which was long overdue. We have heard it in this House - better late than never. *Ene ti l'economie!* But on the other hand, the price of sugar has gone up. Now, only this morning I was talking to the *ladoo* seller who was complaining that he has to increase the price from Rs12 to Rs14. Consumption has gone down and so has his business.

Madam Speaker, on the next day following the presentation of the Budget, the special adviser of the hon. Minister Finance and Economic Development, Mr Gérard Sanspeur made a highly political statement on radio to the effect that he was surprised that previously nothing was done to the 6,400 families who were still living below poverty line. Now, this is a scandalous statement! This afternoon, we hear the hon. Minister being very critical about his predecessor, for it is an undeniable fact that it is under the Prime Ministership of Dr. Navin Ramgoolam...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr Mahomed: ...that the Trust Fund for Vulnerable Groups was established and that this was subsequently upgraded in a full-fledged Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment in 2010. Hon. Ms Sewocksingh reminded us yesterday...

(Interruptions)

...that hon. Xavier-Luc Duval was the first appointed Minister of that Ministry under the Labour led alliance. When hon. Duval moved to the Ministry of Finance, Mr Surendra Dayal took over that Ministry...

(Interruptions)

Hold on! *Pas pressé!* Here are some figures as at October 2014. From the National Empowerment Foundation, submitted in the context of the National Day for the eradication of poverty. I take housing; CCIS, Concrete cum Corrugated Iron Sheet houses, from 2011 to 2014 with some spill over in 2015, a total of 1,475 units almost equally distributed between Mauritius and Rodrigues were produced.

Now, CIS, Corrugated Iron Sheet, what we call '*tôle-du bois*'; 3,171 houses were completed. It will take too much time for me to list all the figures. I am instead going to table the report at the end of my speech. In there, anyone who is keen to learn about the truth will see that there has been implementation of several...

(Interruptions)

...infrastructural projects in areas where there were pockets of poverty and there have also been several child development programmes be it at pre-primary and primary schools' level. Now, I wonder what the *bilan* of the National Empowerment Foundation has been over the last 19 months. Now, they can't keep on taking credit for what was done by the previous Government. When your cupboard is empty and you need to rely on your neighbours, don't criticise them.

Madam Speaker, I will now move to the so called '*budget de rupture*'. Now, if *rupture* there has been, one can sum it up to the total refrain from using the words 'economic miracle' anymore. A term that for long, and although I am not an economist, that word does not even exist in economics. But on the basis of which '*l'Alliance Lepep*' has been elected over the last general elections. In last year's Budget, there were highly politicised and gloomy statements about the situation that this Government has inherited at the last general elections and after 19 months, yesterday, we hear again, hon. Mahen Jhugroo talking about the former Prime Minister.

(Interruptions)

Now, go and ask the people what do they think of the performance of this Government!

(Interruptions)

There has been a net deterioration in the economic situation since this Government took office.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr Mahomed: Now, if I need to rest my case with an example, it is

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order! Please, order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mahomed: undeniably the construction sector, a most straightforward barometer for the economy, is the fact that there are 200 unemployed engineers at the moment in the country and the Government is launching a scheme for the placement of 200 trainee engineers in public bodies at a time when engineers of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure themselves do not have their plate. We are not constructing schools, neither hospitals, nor stadiums...

(Interruptions)

I will keep Heritage for later!

(Interruptions)

Icing on the cake!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order, please!

(Interruptions)

Order! Allow the hon. Member to proceed! When others had intervened, he was silent and listening to you, okay! Now, it is his turn!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mahomed: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are not constructing stadiums as the previous has done in the past.

In the last *sondage de popularité*, the current Government lost 19 points because of three main reasons: performance as regards the economy; mishandling of the BAI affair...

(Interruptions)

...and the number of Ministers who have had to step out of their Ministries because of alleged act of corruption.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Toussaint!

Mr Mahomed: Madam Speaker, Members will recall that the first *présentation de rupture* made by this Government was the Government Programme 2015-2019 itself, ‘Achieving Meaningful Change’, followed by Budget 2015, ‘Mauritius at the Crossroad’. Then came the ‘Economic Mission Statement’ presented by the Rt. hon. Prime Minister himself,...

(Interruptions)

...which I attended. So, I am talking on *connaissance de cause*. On 22 August 2015...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Rutnah! Don’t interrupt!

Mr Mahomed:...the title of which is ‘Achieving the Second Economic Miracle and Vision 2030’. Last week, we had Budget the 2016-2017, ‘A New Era of Development’. Although I agree that *il faut reculer pour mieux sauter*, we cannot possibly *continuer* to *reculer et ne jamais sauter*. We are certainly at crossroad, but this Government seems to be without a map.

Quatre présentations de relance en 19 mois ! Now, if you need *un aveu d’échec*, this is one! When I see this situation, I cannot refrain myself from thinking about the former US President Harry Truman, whom, when completed his mandate as President of the United States of America, was questioned by a journalist about what was the one person that he wanted to meet, but got never to meet while he was in office. His reply was a one-handed economist. Puzzled, the journalist asked why a one-handed economist. He said, “because throughout my term in office, I had economists coming in front of me and telling me, on the one hand, there is this and, on the other hand, there was that. And look what has happened to me!”

So, if this Government...

(Interruptions)

The point is...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr Mahomed: ...at the crossroad, this Government is advised on all options, either they turn left or right, but don't go backward!

Madam Speaker, the way in which this Budget has been presented pressed some serious issues insofar as long term and medium planning is concerned. Currently, planning is being done in a fragmented and dispersed manner. This results in lack of proper coordination, inadequate policy and project analysis, and coherence in the elaboration of an overall macroeconomic development framework, which slows down implementation and execution, as evidenced by the percentage of capital spending yearly, around half of what was projected, was spent last year.

On account of the absence of an efficient and effective monitoring system, to my view, this is why we are going back to offer incentives in this Budget, to support or to try to develop new sectors, creating distortions in the economy and creating even more exasperation that certain operators are being favoured. I think I should also mention that the general perception is that forecasting and economic projections are totally absent at micro level.

Countries like India, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and many EU countries, including France, are still maintaining a certain degree of planning in support of their development. Here, we see too many captains in charge of finance and so-called governance who have no feel for the merits of systemic planning. They just make up their brief as they go along. This is not just my view, but that of the World Bank as well, which has recently expressed concern on the absence of planning in our budgetary framework. The core mandate of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Developing is budgeting and ensuring that fiscal discipline is complied with.

In the newspaper articles that have appeared over the weekend, experienced journalists have been writing, and I quote -

« Le budget est un exercice avant tout comptable qui ne semble passionner que les opérateurs économiques. »

While focusing on its core mandate, I am of the view that the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, which cannot effectively deliver on a planning framework, should entrust the same to a more appropriate body within Government, and I am going to come to my first suggestion.

The PRB Report of 2016 has made provision for a Strategic Policy and Planning Department with a view to charting out a well-defined direction and vision. As a concerned patriot, I am today proposing that this PRB proposition be given serious consideration. If not, we are going to have yet another *ad infinitum budget de relance* next year.

The above being said, I will now move to some specific sectors as they are presented in the Budget.

Madam Speaker, if there is one domain in this Budget that to my view departs from the work that has been done so far, as is viewed in the Budget presentation, is the Blue Economy. All along, previous governments and the present one used the term ‘Ocean Economy’, be it in the Government Programme 2012-2015 and even in the current 2015-2019 Programme, more specifically at paragraph 216, which rightly led to the creation of the Ministry styled Ocean Economy. The term used in the Budget marks a radical departure from established policy. Now, there is a vast conceptual difference between ‘Blue Economy’ and ‘Ocean Economy’. Those who have prepared this Budget Speech have failed to realise that the difference which, to my view, may ultimately be sending the wrong signal. It is one of these few cases in which a rose, if called by any other name, does not smell as good.

Let me explain myself. In Blue Economy, the focus is primarily on conservation, and in Ocean Economy, it is about economic development, but in a sustainable manner, as prescribed by ‘*Maurice Ile Durable*’, the over-arching sustainable development policy of the previous Government of which Ocean Economy is one of the four main programmes of implementation.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr Mahomed: Mauritius like other SIDS has always had a fishing industry. We have been aware of the importance of maintaining our lagoons for tourism and more recent years talked of seafood hub, but the idea behind ocean economy is that we need to move up to the next level. An integrated approach to developing an ocean economy that encompasses all ocean related industries and services, existing ones and new ones that can still promote, and this is what it is all about.

Now, this is what precisely we did in July 2013, during the national dialogue on the Ocean Economy, which ultimately culminated in a roadmap on the Ocean Economy. The Cabinet of Ministers took note of the roadmap on 25 October 2013, and the roadmap was

published by the Prime Minister's Office in December 2013. This is the roadmap. I am going to table it at the end of my speech. It is a document that sets the way forward and which, whilst in an integrated approach to all ocean economic activities, came forward with seven clusters of activities, which I shall now list for the benefit of the House.

- (i) seabed exploitation for hydrocarbon and minerals;
- (ii) fishing, seafood processing and aquaculture;
- (iii) deep ocean water application, commonly referred as seawater air conditioning, whose future is now threatened due to the proposed movement of several Ministries to the Heritage City. To my view a catastrophe for Port Louis, but I am not going to talk about it now. I am going to come to that later.

At this stage if you ask me, there is no need to even start the Heritage City Project!

(Interruptions)

- (iv) marine services;
- (v) seaport related activities;
- (vi) marine renewable energies, and
- (vii) ocean knowledge.

I remember when the previous Government first evoked the term 'Ocean Economy' as a pillar, the members on the other side of the House said we are now talking about *poissons* and *goémon* and that we ...

(Interruptions)

I will tell you later!

Madam Speaker: No!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mahomed: And now, what do we see in this Budget? That we are restricting ourselves to aquaculture development, fish processing and, of course, we have the famous *bambaras* ...

(Interruptions)

Sorry about that, but I have to mention it!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker, with this...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Mind your language please!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mahomed: Madam Speaker, we do not need to reinvent the wheel. All we need to do is to build up on this roadmap. Madam Speaker, this roadmap generated a lot of interest at international conferences, including the SAMOA SIDS Conference of September 2014, which I attended, and during which...

(Interruptions)

... I witnessed how all oceans economy roadmap documents that we brought along with us for promotion purposes went like hot cakes. Just to give you an idea how much international interest was generated on this!

Madam Speaker, I shall now talk about public transportation, a major concern today. In reply to Parliamentary Question No. B/425 put by me to hon. Minister Bodha on 17 May this year, we learnt that Government would be reconsidering the Light Rail Transit Project and I am glad that the Budget makes provision for financing or part financing for the Metro Express. I am glad because the Labour Party has worked extensively on this and, had we been in power...

(Interruptions)

Had we been in power, the project would have been almost completed today!

(Interruptions)

Never mind! Never mind, we call it the Metro Express instead of the Light Rail Transit. However, I have a few concerns to raise here today. Paragraph 176 of the Budget makes mention of 'a new mass transit system' with its network of Urban Terminals to be known as

the Metro Express. Now, why the word 'new'? Does the word 'new' entail that we are going for a new project with new technology, with new alignment and revised number of stations? If this is the case, then we are in for a long shot. A slow boat to China, if I should quote one of my engineering professors at the National University of Singapore!

Madam Speaker, successive Governments have spent more than Rs800 m. on consultancy services for the light rail transit since donkey years, 1999. Huge sums of money have also been spent on land acquisition for the project by the previous Government. The project was shovel ready and was waiting only for the signature of the final document for implementation.

Furthermore, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Lands has been making public statements to the effect that he now shall hold or has held negotiations with the Public Infrastructure Development Fund of Saudi Arabia for implementation of the Metro Express Project on a build-operate-transfer (BOT) basis.

(Interruptions)

I will come to that! My first concern is as follows. Well, I will not dwell on 20 October 2014, letter of hon. Pravind Jugnauth to Shri Modi Ji because this is, I think, behind us now. But still, there is Indian funding and Saudi funding - from what I read from the papers. Up to now, there is nothing wrong with that.

However, the recent photos showing the Vice-Prime Minister, hon. Soodhun, in front of a private jet raises some serious concerns regarding ethics. It raises some ethical issues to my view. In fact, one of the weekly papers talked about it extensively the day before yesterday.

My second concern is how much will a train ticket cost if it were to be implemented on a build-operate-transfer (BOT) basis, when we know the previous Government had made it clear that the price of the train ticket will not be more than the current bus fare. This was to be ensured by a system of cross subsidisation from income generated by commercial activities that were to occur around the 19 stations.

My third concern is that there is an absence of a bold plan with bus and taxi system that is well regulated and safe; there is also an absence of a car population policy that aims at encouraging the use of public transport instead of private cars, like –

- (i) road pricing, and
- (ii) slowing down the importation of cars.

The hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport has been referring to a plan *à trois étages* in the aftermath of the Parliamentary Question that I had asked him. Well, I don't quite see it at the moment in the Budget presentation and I look forward to him enlightening us during his speech. I look forward to that!

Furthermore, I would like to point out that the revised taxation on cars and construction of additional roads are not good signs of sustainable land transport management. Now, as former Managing Director of the National Housing Development Company (NHDC), I will now touch on social housing - it is a pity that the hon. Minister Soodhun is not here. But, still I have to say it. The Government Programme 2015-2019 states that Government will increase housing supply and home for the economically and socially disadvantaged by constructing some 10,000 social housing units during this present mandate. After 19 months in power, the present Government is still inaugurating housing units that have either been constructed or started by the previous Government under the 1,000 acres of land acquired in 2007 under the deal with the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association.

In the previous Budget 2015-2016, funds were provided to the Ministry of Housing and Lands for the construction of 1,000 units and funds were also provided for the construction of 700 units in the next two years for vulnerable families under the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF). I am referring to last year's Budget. My questions are as follows –

1. Construction of how many housing units has been initiated by the NHDC anew over the last Budget year?
2. How many units by the National Empowerment Foundation?

I look forward to hear the hon. Vice-Prime Minister on the progress there.

Regarding the sales of municipal land to house dwellers at nominal price of Rs2,000, I must point out that there is a tremendous backlog at the Ministry of Housing and Lands for actual purchase, following amendments brought to the State Land Act to allow for the first time, the historical measure for the sale of State land - it was the first time and it was done in 2007 - whereby 30,000 units are still concerned.

My last Parliamentary Question on the backlog was replied by the hon. Minister of Youth and Sports, hon. Yogida Sawmynaden, because the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Lands was on mission. But I look forward to listening from him on how he intends to clear that backlog because people out there are impatiently waiting for their contract for the purchase of their plot at Rs2,000 dating back to 2007!

Now, talking about hon. Sawmynaden, who said in his speech that the Labour Government has done a lot of harm to the youth of the country, I certainly would like to react to that. Now, go and see what has become - I use my Constituency as an example here - the four football grounds that the Labour party has constructed over the last five years preceding the general election. Now, if you are too busy to go, please read this letter, which I am going to table at the end of my speech.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, you should address yourself to the Chair and not to the Minister, please!

Mr Mahomed: Yes. That has been signed by 25 teams of the Ward IV region in Port Louis - I believe he was from Ward IV region when he was a child - deploring the degradation of these facilities that they have been experiencing over the last 19 months and for which they are now paying much higher fees in order to play football under this Government.

At a time when synthetic drug is plaguing the Constituency, yet the hon. Minister of Health and Quality of Life says that the problem is not alarming. I have a Parliamentary Question coming on Tuesday and it is about drugs in school. I look forward to the reply on this.

Now, talking about my Constituency, I deplore the replacement of some 180 kms of old and defective pipes across the island. That project singularly excludes my Constituency. I have raised questions regarding the water problem in Tranquebar and Vallée Pitot - either on Parliamentary Questions or at Adjournment Time. But, here, I must thank hon. Collendavelloo, who, on each occasion, addressed the problem that I have brought on the CWA, be it for the water fountain at Tranquebar or the replacement of defective pumps which has since enhanced the water supply in Tranquebar and Vallée Pitot.

I will now talk about Heritage City and I shall end on this note. Let me mention my immediate reaction on hearing its downscaling as mentioned in the Budget Speech.

(Interruptions)

No, when the Budget Speech was pronounced.

Madam Speaker: Please, do not interrupt!

Mr Mahomed: It is going to lead to a half-baked project and I was wondering if its implementation was still viable on account of the offsite infrastructure that will nevertheless still be needed for a much smaller project.

Madam Speaker, in an earlier Parliamentary Question this year, I had asked the hon. Minister of Financial Services, Good Governance and Institutional Reforms, what guarantee he would give to the House that Stree Consulting, the master planner, would not create an equal mess as the one we have had in Ébène.

(Interruptions)

And I believe that a damning report has been debated in Cabinet this morning; it is in the papers. It is publicly articulated that a due diligence on Stree Consulting is being very vehemently requested, whose fees are very high and the selection of which - well, without a selection process actually - is tantamount to serious poor governance issue from the Ministry of Financial Services, Good Governance and Institutional Reforms itself. What a case of the kettle calling the pot black! In Creole, *la mare moque la boue*.

(Interruptions)

Another way of putting it!

One can read in the press this morning, and I quote –

« Les lacunes majeures dans la manière dont Heritage City est conçue et développée à travers Heritage City Co. Ltd. »

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Please, hon. Shakeel Mohamed, I have drawn your attention to the fact that you should not interrupt!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mahomed: Comme écrit dans son introduction –

« Si le nécessaire n'est pas fait à ce stade, cela mènera à une escalade majeure du coût pour devenir un embarras majeur pour le gouvernement. »

Going further, I quote –

« Stree Consulting a déjà empoché R 150 millions en dépit des manquements relevés dans son plan. Maintenant, elle veut qu'on étende son contrat pour R 600 millions additionnels (...) »

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, can I ask you from what you are quoting?

Mr Mahomed: From *l'Express*.

Madam Speaker: From *l'Express* of this morning.

Mr Mahomed: Yes.

Madam Speaker: So, you take your responsibility.

(Interruptions)

Mr Mahomed: As a responsible Parliamentarian, whom the people have elected, I cannot possibly solely rely on press reports for my work, although I do not doubt the integrity and good faith of our journalists. So, I am most formally asking that a copy of the said report be immediately tabled in this august Assembly just like I am tabling all the documents that I have mentioned at the beginning of my speech. On this note, I thank you for your attention.

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

At 4.39 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.15 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Hurreeram!

Mr M. Hurreeram (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Madam Speaker. From our first days as a nation, we, the Mauritian people had only our resolve and determination to make our country a land of opportunities. We struggled at the beginning. We stumbled and we lacked the leadership, but the Mauritian people did not give up. They chose an able leader in the Rt. hon. Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, who has

a vision and the will to make our island the centre point of the region. He with his team have delivered a yet to be equal economic miracle.

Time flew and we had false dawns incarnated by the Labour Party. We saw the juicy contracts awarded to special friends. We saw the *décadence* and we had enough. And the political miracle of December 2014 took place. The year 2015 has been marked by the cleaning up winning out. Call it as you wish! A necessary step to have a fertile soil to sow the seeds of progress and the 2015-2016 Budget did just that.

Today, this Government is laying the foundation for another economic vision which will again bring Mauritius to the forefront as an economic powerhouse in the region and again be an example of social welfare. *C'est dans le feu que le fer se trempe et devient acier.*

(Interruptions)

C'est dans la douleur que l'homme trouve la révélation de sa force. This quote beautifully describes the leader of MSM, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development.

(Interruptions)

He has shown time and time again that he truly qualifies to lead and is the right custodian of the future of our country. We thank the hon. Minister and his dedicated team for this Budget and that this Budget has the merit of establishing a renewed feel good factor in the population. At this very time, I am talking to this august Assembly...

(Interruptions)

this Budget is being widely acclaimed outside. I am very much afraid to say it, my very good friend hon. Osman Mahomed is cut off from the reality.

(Interruptions)

Even some of the naysayers are describing this Budget as a social one. While those *de mauvaise foi* are just too blinded by their own petty agenda to say that this Budget lacks ambition or are making it out as insufficiently growth oriented. Well, they missed out important fact!

Listening to my friend, hon. Osman Mahomed, it is like I was hearing the prophet of doom and gloom. Lot of the documents he has been tabling, we understand maybe he has been attending lot of conferences, lot of travelling, lot of per diem...

(Interruptions)

But 10 years in power nothing has been translated into action. This Government is a Government action!

(Interruptions)

This Prime Minister is a proactive Prime Minister.

(Interruptions)

This Prime Minister is a Prime Minister who can take decisions. This Prime Minister is holding the destiny of this country.

(Interruptions)

My good friend has also been claiming to be smarter than smart, to be whiter than white. Let us recall the MID Fund has guaranteed to pay Sarako more than Rs250 m. from public funds over 15 years. Rs250 m.!

(Interruptions)

And this was done just to guarantee the majority of his party in power.

(Interruptions)

We also recall the Rs100 m. fund in coffers of his then Leader and his still current leader. If, as he says, he has a duty of patriot towards this country, he should have resigned immediately.

(Interruptions)

He has been talking about NHDC which he has been chairing also. We all remember in this House. NHDC, instead of giving housing to poor people, to needy people, has given NHDC houses to minors in Trou-aux-Biches.

(Interruptions)

If this is how a country should be run, I'll rather resign immediately and go!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mahomed: On a point of order, I think my colleague has got the timeframe wrong. At that time, the alleged allocation of housing units was done to minors; I was not the Managing Director of the NHDC.

(Interruptions)

Not Chairman as well!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Madam Speaker, this is not a point of order!

Madam Speaker: It is not for you to rule out.

(Interruptions)

Do you want to come and take my seat? It is for me to rule out. It is a point of clarification!

Mr Hurreeram: Madam Speaker, anyway, listening to my good friend and other Opposition orators, it is clear that they have missed important facts. Allow me, with your permission, to enlighten them. All budgets are social in that the ultimate purpose is to create the necessary wealth to ensure that we all, as Mauritians, are better off tomorrow than we are today.

In the 2016-2017 Budget, one is for the people because it lays down the foundations for that better future we all aspire to. This budget is a strategic one. It revolves around several important axes -

- (i) our people;
- (ii) our economy, and
- (iii) our future.

This budget addresses several key questions like how to create internal wealth, how to create more opportunities and how do we tackle the growing international uncertainty. We have to admire the hard work and the intellect that has gone into the drafting of this budget and how each of the axes I mentioned and the questions are addressed.

This budget shows that this Government believes that our biggest asset is us, the people, our youth, our hard working population. Several measures taken in this budget comfort us that we cannot reach the next level without investing in our people and in education. Free education does not always mean access to education when hurdles of life always push our youngsters out of the system creating a widening gap between the elite and the less fortunate.

The nine years compulsory schooling is the mean to ensure that our children, the future workforce have enough academic baggage to allow them to contribute more productively to the future of Mauritius. We would not only have the infrastructure in form of smart cities, but we will have smarter and adequately trained people and individuals to run those smart cities. Young graduates will also be able to gather important experiences through the Youth Employment Programme. This budget makes provision to take on board, at least, 2,000 of these dynamic youngsters. A major milestone in achieving a stellar economy goes hand-in-hand with providing a high quality of life to the citizens of this country.

This budget brings together a set of laudable objectives like investing in round the clock water supply, makeover of the judicial ecosystem, strengthening our human resource value, investment in modern equipment and vehicles, enforcing and toughening up the battle on drugs. The aim is to create an environment and individuals equipped to face the numerous issues which have affected or can affect our society.

No society can truly be flourishing and happy even if a small part of it is poor and miserable. Here again, this budget has made a bold statement, the eradication - yes, eradication - of absolute poverty, a commitment that no other Government has taken. This alone shows that hon. Pravind Jugnauth is, indeed, a leader who does not live in an ivory tower or busy filling his coffers and is committed to the population of this country.

The backbone of a budget is strategic planning. I agree with my friend, hon. Osman Mahomed, it is strategic planning, but he has not got it right and a philosophy to uplift and better the lives of people, alleviating the sufferings and the poor living conditions of the downtrodden is among basic fundamentals. This Government has, through this budget, initiated such bold and laudable measures to cater for the social and financial needs of the people of the lowest rung of the ladder. Let me cite a few examples. Much has already been said, Madam Speaker, but allow me just to cite a few -

- The downward revision of the LPG;

- The removal of Value Added Tax on a number of items;
- The construction of housing projects for the needy amounting to Rs1 billion in addition to the 800 housing units with a renewed focus on affordable housing;
- Cash reward to needy children. This is really innovative upon successful completion of stages in their studies;
- Payment of examination fees in case of resit for needy students again;
- Increase of grants for crèche vouchers and in ZEP schools. Again, here, the attempt is to correct the dysfunction that ejects students from the education system;
- Also, exemption of registration duties for first time buyers of a plot of land to encourage our youth to go and get their houses;

The support of this Government in favour of people with severe disabilities also need to be appreciated.

Madam Speaker, this Government, through this budget, has once again addressed the issue of poverty alleviation in such a majestic way. The whole population, including our opponents have been pleasantly surprised to learn that henceforth the financial assistance to our compatriots living in dire conditions would know an unprecedented increase of up to Rs9,520. This measure in itself would genuinely alleviate the suffering of poor people.

This House has also been apprised of a series of measures announced for the needy by a revamped CSR Programme. A lot has been said about this Government's ambition to create a second economic miracle. We know who are those who doubt and we know who are those who are sceptical.

But, Madam Speaker, Government has a firm belief in its own capability. Having studied the economic shift and given it a direction, in 2015, this budget set the course towards an objective and economic revolution. Never ever had we got a budget that created such ease for investment! Despite the pressure to adapt to the ever evolving and uncertain international landscape, Mauritius continues to have one of the most reasonable tax regime worldwide. This budget continues on this track and announced a number of fiscal initiatives to boost the various economic sectors.

With this budget, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development has significantly contributed towards the building of the Mauritius International Financial Centre as a robust jurisdiction. A number of pro-business measures announced in the budget indicate

that expanding the economic space, economic activity and value creation are key priorities. For example, concrete measures to help re-boost the manufacturing sector through a 40% subsidy towards air-freight for textiles for three years, the Agriculture Land Management System and promotion of other agro-processing activities will also give a new life to the agricultural sector.

This budget, Madam Speaker, has also envisioned the creation of new sectors such as the petroleum hub and a goal and a diamond exchange, the setting up of blue economy is ambitious, but yet realistic. These new economic zones will surely hoist employment opportunities.

After the SME Bank providing the starting capital of new SME's, the introduction of a tax holiday and the removal of the trade licence under Rs5,000 for most SMEs and other investment areas will also come as a breather for our existing local businesses who only require the right push to become successful and job creators.

A few years ago, hon. Pravind Jugnauth presented the vision of the duty-free island concept. Today with the abolishment of excise duty on a number of products leaving only a few which are subject to tax, Mauritius has moved closer to that economic model which will be a sustainable pillar in the future. The skills and the infrastructure issue having been addressed, this Budget also humanely tackles the inefficiencies of the public sector by providing the required funds for its modernisation through ICT and processing re-engineering.

When this Government talks about *budget de rupture* and I hope here I truly enlighten again my very good friend hon. Osman Mahomed, it is not about discontinuation...

(Interruptions)

... it is to him that I am replying - from the previous Budget by our Government, but a welcome change from nonsense and inefficient measures that the previous regime made a habit to present. We remember taking food out of our kids' mouths...

(Interruptions)

We remember taxing our hard earned houses.

(Interruptions)

We remember taxing our saved money. It is *rupture* from this type of Budget, Madam Speaker!

(Interruptions)

Budget de rupture also means, Madam Speaker, innovation, a new approach, a paradigm shift which are all in this Budget, Madam Speaker. The way to turn our economy around is not by making rich people poorer, it is by making poor people richer, Madam Speaker. It means to have a cohesive strategy and yes, this Budget is a strategic Budget.

In my maiden speech, Madam Speaker, I had envisioned an evolution of Mauritius to a techno hub which is both smart and connected, a vision for a Mauritius 2.0. I also made the observation that we should implement a legal framework and associate with international patent offices to protect the intellectual properties. I am pleased to note that this Budget has taken up these initiatives. This Budget embodies the cohesion and leadership of this Government. Thank you to the Rt. hon. Prime Minister.

(Interruptions)

It is right and just and it shows vision. A vision where we invest in our future while living within our means where we make sacrifices, but we do not bear the burden alone, where we provide for our citizens and broaden horizons for our children. Let us now create a new era of development.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for your attention.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Dr. Joomaye!

(5.35 p.m.)

Dr. Z. Joomaye (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac): Thank you, Madam. This is the second Budget presented by the Government of *l'Alliance Lepep*. It is presented by the third person in this Government to act as Minister of Finance in less than two years of office. This fact in itself tends to give the impression that, to some extent, there has been trial and error, a big disillusion and a comeback *raté*, but taking all aspects into consideration, it is better to realise early and take action early. Now, action has been taken and we have a fresh Minister of Finance.

It would have been unfair and not realistic if straightaway we would have said in the Opposition that this Budget does not contain anything good. Finding interesting points and measures does not mean that there is an agenda behind its interpretation. We will criticise in a constructive way what we think is not good, what is wrong and where we think that enough is not being done.

This Budget is a social one. Some measures are welcome and will benefit the most vulnerable of our compatriots. The removal of duty on several commodities will definitely help the families living under the poverty threshold. The decrease in the price of gas for domestic use was long overdue, but still, it had not been done. Providing for construction of additional social lodging and renovation of the NHDC apartments can only help to improve the daily life of several Mauritian families.

Apart from the social measures, Madam Speaker, we fail to have visibility upon how the economic measures announced would stir up investment and restore the confidence in the business community. Madam, several questions have to be asked still. Do we have a clear strategy when it concerns economic diplomacy? Is the BOI functioning as it should have been otherwise would the FDI decrease? Does it not need a revamping or a rethinking? Are our embassies and missions being used optimally as trade focused institutions? Do we lack expertise in promoting Mauritius as a business hub? We understand that new advisory posts will be created in our missions abroad. Let us hope that it will be the right, deserving and productive persons who will be appointed and this would not be used as gratification for a happy few.

What about Africa? Where is our African strategy? What has it produced till now? Or is it only loose talks during Budget time? How can we expect to have better visibility in Africa when not a single representative of Mauritius attends important Summits of SADC, COMESA or even the African Union?

(Interruptions)

Important travels need to be done! Does the Government have a clear foreign strategy and does it speak as one voice when it comes to negotiate with other countries? When it concerns major issues which can jeopardise the future of a whole sector, do we send the right person to negotiate with a clear mandate and designated targets to achieve?

Madam Speaker, the answer is no and this is where the Government has failed till now. There has been a lack of economic leadership. The new Minister of Finance has to give...

(Interruptions)

... a sense of direction. I won't say new because there was not any! This is his biggest challenge. Since 2014 we have been served with quite a few slogans as has been said by my colleague hon. Mahomed 'Towards Second Economic Miracle' then 'Achieving Meaningful Change'' last year it was 'Mauritius at the Crossroads', just after that we had 'Vision 2030''. Now the Budget is entitled 'A New Era of Development'. I hope it is not just a *slogan creux* this time...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker, it is very important that our Minister of Finance realises the needs of the health sector. A healthy population is a productive population. A lot of progress is constantly being done in the practice of medicine. Technology is advancing fast. New drugs are more effective, but more costly. Diagnostic devices are permanently being updated and need renewal to keep up with international standards.

It is highly appreciable that this post of expenditure has been increased by 12%. It is now the duty of the Ministry of Health to ensure that this sum is optimally spent to secure - I quote from the Budget Speech -

“(...) an efficient and effective health care system.”

But the main question remains. How do we improve delivery of service in our public sector? A lot of money is being injected. Yet, if we do a satisfaction survey among patients in public hospitals, the satisfaction rate would be very low. The objectives of all governments regarding health sector are the same. The mission statement and strategic direction cannot be challenged. But, Madam Speaker, can we continue to have 8.5 million attendances in our public institutions every year? There is obviously too much pressure on the public health care system. Modern medical service ...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Please, can you have some respect for the hon. Member and for the Chair, at least?

Dr. Joomaye: ... comprise timely diagnosis, followed by appropriate treatment. This is rewarded by satisfaction and gratitude by the patient only if there is communication and compassion. To communicate, the health care professionals need time. Structured as it is, a consultation in the public sector lasts only a few minutes. Recruiting more staff is part of the solution. But the real way forward is the decentralisation of dispensation of health care. The future is public/private partnership, which would allow optimisation of human and technical resources. I have read that the Ministry of Health is going in that direction, but let us see what will happen.

To reduce attendances and better select and screen patients who attend regional hospitals, the only solution is to implement the long overdue family doctor system quoted in the Governmental Programme, but not a single word in this Budget. This would further address the unemployment problem among young doctors and diminish the burden of the permanent establishment.

Providing for the upgrading of infrastructure and acquisition of new equipment is the mission of every government, and same goes for vaccination programmes, which have been catered for in the Budget. Even if the reference to cancer has not been very extensive in this Budget Speech, we welcome the provision made for the construction of a new Cancer Centre. We need a new approach, more global, taking into consideration all aspects of this pathology. The comfort of the patient can be enhanced, even if sometimes fatality cannot be avoided.

In line with this, the introduction of a Palliative Care Department is a must. Modern oncology, Madam Speaker, is all about precocious diagnosis, which improves chances of remission and rates of survival. Latest tools like the Intensity modulated radiotherapy and PET scan should be made available. Prevention programmes should not be neglected regarding risk factors of cancer. On the other hand, the control of the use of pesticides in the agro-industry is mandatory. The increase in price of alcohol and tobacco is fully justified. These are two main causes of cancer.

Madam Speaker, one major threat that is continuously and dangerously gangrening our society is substance abuse. It is of national interest that we have a coherent strategy towards harm reduction. It should not be a passionate debate, but a constructive one. We are

facing several challenges. New drugs are on the market. The consumption pattern has changed. Drug dealers are constantly modifying their strategies. Our children and youngsters are dying after consuming synthetic drugs, amongst others. *On ne peut continuer à nous voiler la face.* The *Observatoire de la drogue* needs to be more productive and give us the exact situation on the ground. NATReSA has been amputated of all limbs and closed down. The New Harm Reduction Unit is still crawling.

The Methadone Exchange Programme and Needle Exchange Programme for which Mauritius has been quoted as example for Africa, for having curbed HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C, has been considerably slowed down and changed. The new Suboxone Programme is still under evaluation. The global approach is wrong. *En matière de drogue, le tout répressif ne marche pas. La stigmatisation ne permet pas d'avancer. On doit comprendre que le toxicomane est un malade avant tout. Nous devons impérativement restaurer la confiance et le partenariat qui existent avec les ONG.*

It is important, Madam Speaker, that the drug addicts who should to quit be given a real chance. We need to have appropriate and realistic rehabilitation programmes. The goals of any programme would be to –

- reduce consumption of drugs - ideally become drug-free;
- reduce needle sharing;
- reduce criminal activities associated with addiction, and
- maintain and improve social and familial behaviour.

Our Methadone Dispensation Programme has found several problems. Dispensation centres have been closed down and transferred to Police stations, often due to protests and complaints from the neighbourhood. Dispensation of methadone in Police stations is a huge deterrent for drug addicts. Thinking through, we could inspire ourselves from what is being done in Canada or in Germany regarding methadone substitution programmes and in the US regarding Suboxone. In these countries, methadone is dispensed in accredited and registered community pharmacies.

The programme remains government driven, but the dispensation done under the supervision of local pharmacists. I refer to a study published long time back in the American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse. This study reports one-year follow-up data of 96 patients who received methadone at selected community pharmacies instead of traditional programme

dispensaries. The outcomes are comparable to those reported for traditional programmes; that means that the results were the same. Security measures were not a problem on dispensation.

The results indicate that most patients can begin methadone maintenance at a pharmacy without a period of stabilisation at a programme unit. Of several factors studied, arrest record, both preceding and during treatment, based on official police data, was a single factor significantly associated with unemployment and continuation in methadone treatment. In conclusion, community pharmacy dispensing of methadone is a useful means of operating a methadone treatment programme.

Madam Speaker, we have more than 300 pharmacies and our pharmacists are respected professionals. We should trust them. Offenders regarding the Dangerous Drug Act are rare. I firmly believe that the responsibility of the dispensation of methadone or other substitution therapy can be entrusted to our pharmacists. The prescription could be given by designated and trained addiction medical practitioners according to a regional distribution. This is evidence-based medicine. I can make available a report from the Ontario College of Pharmacists about how the programme is structured and implemented there. This is a proposal, and it can be tailor-made and adapted to our local context.

The burden of drug addiction cannot rest on the shoulders of the State and the Government only. It concerns everyone. We need national solidarity and involve all the stakeholders.

Most of us, Madam Speaker, are parents in this House. Imagine if one of our children, and God forbid, get caught in the trap of substance abuse. And if we manage to convince him or her to get out of the hell of drugs, not anyone of us here, in this House, would find it comfortable to accompany an adolescent to a Police station every day to collect his dose of methadone. For those who have the means, they would send their children in rehabilitation centres abroad. That is why we need to rethink and change the whole system.

Methadone has to be dispensed elsewhere than in Police Stations. We have to continue to empower the Suboxone Programme which can give better results for the reinsertion of former drug addicts into social and professional life. I am not standing here, Madam Speaker, to seek political mileage out of such an important issue.

I will conclude that we urgently need to have a National Drug Policy whose definition, according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction,

would be a system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action and funding priorities concerning illicit psychoactive drugs and promulgated by Governmental entity and its representative. It is seen as a vision of a Government to manage the drug topic in its country in terms of demand, supply and harm reduction.

Thank you for your attention.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Dr. Husnoo!

(5.52 p.m.)

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. A. Husnoo): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would just like to say a few words about my colleague who has just spoken before me. I think it was a very good speech with a lot of research articles. However, I would just mention one or two words about the Methadone treatment. In fact, as you are aware, I was for the Methadone treatment. I still believe in the Methadone treatment, but there are quite a few problems as we all know.

Madam Speaker, the distribution of Methadone, as it was being done before in the middle of a residential area, was not the solution. You would agree with me, it was not the solution. It was creating a lot of problems; in my Constituency as well. Finally, we decided to move for want of a better place to the Police Station and it has proved itself. Okay, there are still problems! I know that in my Constituency, in Roche Bois, it was still in the residential areas, but it has moved a few weeks ago to a different place. We know the problems that the residents had to face with the distribution of Methadone every morning in the residential areas. Because these people sometimes, let's face it, they just stay there all the day long. The hon. Member knows the problem. That is why this Government had to take this step of distributing it in the Police Station. This is one thing. The Government is not stopping at that level. The hon. Member knows the programme that is being done at Mahebourg where, instead of putting the drug addicts on Methadone, they are being put on Suboxone now. The trial has started and after two weeks' treatment, they are being weaned off onto Naltrexone. So, Government is trying to find new method of treatment. The hon. Member is aware of it. I mean, we have been giving Methadone for the last 10 years.

As we know, once they are on Methadone, they tend to stay on Methadone for a long time. Some people have even been on that for the last 10 years. How long do we continue?

We have to find other ways of treating such patients. That is what this Government is doing and we are doing it in the South, in Mahebourg.

(Interruptions)

Exactly, that's what he is doing! I think it was a good speech. Congratulations again!

Madam Speaker, I would like to come to one or two points that my colleague...

(Interruptions)

...hon. Mahomed said earlier with regard to municipal housing estates. When the Bill was passed for the State lands to be given to tenants, there were some problems and we are still having some problems. In fact, I get the impression the hon. Member said that we should think twice about it. You know the problems that these people are getting: they have a house, the land is not on their name and if they want to make some repair to their houses, to take a loan or whatever, they encounter difficulties. So, that is why we are going in this direction.

Madam Speaker, I would wish, at the very outset, to associate myself with those, who, before me, have been supportive of the Budget presented by my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development. *Ce budget est intéressant. Oui, c'est intéressant!* In fact, the choice of this term is more than appropriate when we take into consideration the economic environment, which is far from being positive: the economic growth is slowing down to 3.4%, unemployment rate at 7.6%, budget deficit estimated at 3.3% and public debt at 55.6%. Further, on the international front also, as we all know, the situation is not so brilliant, with events such as Brexit and the change to the global business environment. All these international features, unfortunately, provide, so to say, a backdrop of uncertainties, and have an adverse effect on our current economic situation.

However, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development has skilfully traced the road map to accelerate the engine of growth, to enhance investment and create the conditions for sustainable development, poverty eradication, job creation and more social justice for the poor, with some very bold people-centred budgetary measures. On this side of the House, Madam Speaker, we know where we are heading and we are confident that we shall live to the expectations of the people and make the country prosper further still. People from all walks of life have supported this Budget. They know we mean business. They know we shall

leave no stone unturned to make things happen and fast, within a framework of good governance and economic transparency.

The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has articulated this Budget on 10 well thought out strategies which will, undoubtedly, unlock opportunities for the relevant stakeholders to overcome challenges, innovate, cope with change and seize opportunities to perform better.

On the social front also, a number of interesting measures to support poor families and low income earners have been announced. These include, among others, a monthly allocation of up to Rs9,520 for a family of five to address the issue of absolute poverty in the country; a 100% increase in the monthly income limit for eligibility under the NHDC Housing Scheme from Rs10,000 to Rs20,000 and a cash grant ranging from Rs15,000 to Rs35,000 to encourage students from poor families to achieve higher level of education. Measures like these, I am sure, will lay to rest any misgiving or doubt anybody may have about the intention of the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, about his aim and commitment to helping the very poor and needy section of our community.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo, it is for me to see whether there is much noise or not, and not for you! Excuse me!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Husnoo: Madam Speaker, the strategy for the country to move towards a fully-fledged digital society needs to be stressed. Digital divide should no longer be acceptable when we see how fast technology is evolving worldwide. We need to build an IT culture that will not only support innovation, but also encourage and promote the spirit of entrepreneurship. Our school and university students should shift their mindset from being job seekers to job creators. I strongly believe that the measures announced to accelerate the creation of a digital society will be greatly beneficial, especially to our younger generation, as this will provide them the opportunity for being creative with the desire, skills and belief to make a difference.

Madam Speaker, this Budget reflects the philosophy and the fundamental principles of this Government, advocating the people to move to a new era of development – yes, to a

new era of development. The Minister of Finance and Economic Development has set the tone in his Budget Speech, by stating that “where we have to be bold, we must be bold”. These words exactly describe the budget measures announced and the strategic direction identified.

In the face of international economic and political challenges, fluctuations in foreign currencies and other international threats, we have no choice, but to look for new opportunities. We need to think out of the box. We need not only to encourage the setting up of new innovative enterprises, but also invest in smarter education and professional skills. We need to build a more solid economy so as to continuously improve the quality of life of our people whilst ensuring that we save for our future generations. To this end, I strongly believe that the introduction of the concept of “Regulatory Sandbox Licence” in our business environment is a laudable initiative and I am confident that the captains of Industries will make use of this tool, which will, no doubt, boost investment and provide opportunities for job creation.

I will also add that this Budget should encourage all of us to remain prudent in our expenditures, be it in our Ministries and Departments or even at home and ensure that each rupee is spent in a responsible manner.

I also wish to highlight the fact that in this Budget everybody has been taken care of: the people, the business community, the tourists, the foreign investors, the labour force, all of us stand to gain from this Budget.

Madam Speaker, I shall now comment on some of the measures and issues which are of direct relevance to my Ministry.

As the Minister of Local Government, I am fully aware of all the challenges and difficulties that prospective economic operators have to face prior to starting their business. A number of measures have been announced in the Budget to ease these economic operators to start their businesses.

To start with, the process for the determination of Building and Land Use Permit is going to be greatly simplified and modernised. Applications will be examined by the Permits and Business Monitoring Committee only and will not need to be referred, either to me, as Minister, in some specific cases, or to the Executive Committee in all cases, as it is at present. We are going to have only one Committee looking after; it is the PBMC, because now they

are taking too much time. This simplification of process will enable applications to be quickly processed and determined.

The approval of the Minister will no more be required for granting Building and Land Use Permit except for places of worship.

Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that since 2011, the Minister of Local Government's approval was required prior to issuing the Building and Land Use Permit for all developments along mountain reserve, river reserve or a motorway, or for use as a night club, private club or carrying out any activity licensed under by the Gambling Regulatory Authority. This process was lengthy and involved additional resources leading to the determination of such applications well beyond a month after their submission at the relevant Council by the applicants.

In line with the budgetary measures announced, my Ministry is working on the amendments to be brought to the Local Government Act in the forthcoming Finance (Miscellaneous) Bill for such applications to be determined, within the statutory timeframe of 14 working days by the Permits and Business Monitoring Committee of the Council without the approval of the Minister of Local Government.

Also, previously the applications for Building and Land Use Permit required the approval of the Executive Committee of the Council. While recognising that our local councillors need to be aware of developments in their areas, it is also important to ensure that there are no unnecessary steps or procedures at the level of processing and determining development applications. Whenever the Executive Committee of the Council was not in concurrence with the recommendations of the Permits and Business Monitoring Committee, the matter was being referred to the Minister of Local Government for determination, thus adding more processes and resulting in further delays for the determination of the application. With a view to simplifying this process, I fully concur with the proposed measure of removing the requirement for obtaining the stand of the Executive Committee in the process of determining an application for an Outline Planning Permission or Building and Land Use Permit.

Henceforth, applications for Building and Land Use Permit will be processed and determined only by the Permits and Business Monitoring Committee. The decisions of this Committee will no more require either the approval of the Executive Committee or my approval. To this effect, the Local Government Act 2011 will be amended. I have no doubt

that this measure, aiming at accelerating the issue of Building and Land Use Permits will greatly contribute in the ease of doing business in the country.

Madam Speaker, in the past, applicants have had to interact with the officers of the Councils at several stages of their applications to provide additional information and documentations or clearances. This process not only lengthened the processing time, but also added on the list of practical difficulties for the developer. With the proposed measure, applications are going to be verified by competent personnel of the local authorities and request for additional information, which may be required must be done within a certain statutory time frame of eight working days only. So, if somebody deposits his application and something is missing, the Council would have to inform them within eight working days. No more than that.

Furthermore, developers will also be able to submit their applications for Building and Land Use Permit, by using the online Portal of the Local Authorities. Such online applications will remove human interference – very important - and will save them both time and money, as well as enable them to submit their applications on a 24 hours/7 days basis. This Portal will be enhanced so as to allow for online interaction between applicants and the local authority - I mean online, not personal - as well as to provide a tracking mechanism on the status of applications. Because now when somebody puts in an application, after one month they don't know what is happening to their application. Now, if it is online, you can track your application, you know at what stage it is. Upon approval of the applications, payment of relevant fees will also be allowed electronically, thus relieving the applicant further trouble. I am also waiting on a proposal to make the online application more user-friendly.

The application mechanism will be further simplified and modernised to make it mandatory for Building and Land Use applications for non-residential development to be made online.

Madam Speaker, SMEs everywhere contribute to GDP growth, employment and innovation to a large extent. We are all aware that SMEs create dynamism in a society as they provide a range of services and products that are essential to our day-to-day living. They constitute a fast growing part of our economy. So, we should give more attention in improving the business environment of the SMEs and encourage them to do well and succeed. In this context, with a view to allowing the economic operators to consolidate their

businesses, a number of measures have been announced in this Budget. A major boost is the exemption from the payment of annual trade fees by the economic operators who pay a trade fee of Rs5,000 or less annually. This measure, Madam Speaker, will indeed give an added impetus to the small and medium enterprises. Some 75,000 traders out of 80,000 operating now will be exempted from the payment of the trade fee. Imagine, Madam Speaker! Now, we have 80,000 traders across the island and 75,000 of them, nearly 90% of them will be exempted from the payment of Trade fee.

We are doing that just to make the life of these people of the SMEs a bit easier. Examples of traders who will benefit from this measure are, for example, owners of Automotive workshops, owners of Beauty Care Centre, Cyber Café, Dental Mechanic, General Retailer Foodstuff and Non-food stuff, Pastry shop and so on. I am confident that this measure of my colleague, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, will definitely promote further economic development, particularly for those falling in the lower economic brackets.

Madam Speaker, our economy relies a lot on tourism sector. With a view to encouraging the entertainment industry and other leisure activities, the levy of admission charges by local authorities, which stood at 10 per cent of the admission fees to parks, gardens, zoos, fairs, exhibition halls etc., will be abolished. This levy amounts to 10 % on the turnover and you would agree with me this is quite excessive. So, we are going to abolish this levy on the admission tickets.

Madam Speaker, we have noted that, with the recent development trends, new commercial developments have moved away from the town centres leading to our urban areas slowly losing their attraction for shoppers and visitors, thus reducing the revenues for shopkeepers, small businesses and market traders. There is, therefore, an urgent need to regenerate our urban areas.

In this context, the proposed investment in the new mass transit system along with a network of modern integrated urban terminals comprising parking facilities, food courts, commercial spaces, dedicated hawker areas and green spaces will address the key challenges that lie ahead of us to develop our towns and villages into a more balanced, sustainable and inclusive manner. The new mass transit system will also help to reduce the road congestion, and other adverse environmental impacts of thousands of motor vehicles converging to the City of Port Louis during the week days. Madam Speaker, in addition to the efforts being

made to smarten our existing towns, the development of new 'Smart Cities' will definitely change the look of our urban and rural areas.

Madam Speaker, since the coming into operation of the Local Government Act 2011, all new constructions and additions to existing immovable properties in the City of Port Louis and the four other Municipal Council areas are not being subject to the levy of general rates unlike those put up before December 2011 due to a loophole in the Local Government Act 2011 which is currently in force. Can you imagine a number of these newly built high rise buildings in Ebène, in Port Louis and in other cities are not paying any general rates at all at present! This situation has not only led to an important shortfall of revenue for the Municipal Councils, but has also created an unfair situation where owners of immovable properties existing before 2011 were charged for general rates, whilst owners of new buildings after 2011 are not paying any rate.

The Budget is addressing this issue and legislative amendments would be made in the forthcoming Finance Bill to enable the Government Valuer to value these buildings and all new buildings to be put up in urban areas and work out updated valuation list for the purpose of enabling urban councils to levy rates on all immovable properties in their administrative jurisdiction. This measure will, obviously, result in additional revenues accruing to the Urban Local Authorities.

Madam Speaker, the provision of accessible social and community infrastructure contributes to the quality of life for all and it is important that such facilities be provided concurrently with the development of new buildings and neighbourhoods. In this respect, an amount of Rs120 m. will be put at the disposal of the Local Authorities for the implementation of new local infrastructure and we would ensure that our citizens benefit from same in the shortest possible delay. My Ministry would facilitate the Local Authorities to implement local development projects, such as construction of new village/social halls, sports amenities, children gardens and leisure parks/green spaces, thereby catering for the well-being of all categories of end users.

Madam Speaker, I have to mention this as well, I have received repeated representations from the inhabitants of Constituencies Nos 2 and 3 to the effect that there is a shortage of sports infrastructure for the youth of these regions. I have relayed my concern on this issue to my colleague the Minister of Finance and Economic Development. I am glad that he has agreed to make a provision for the consultancy study in respect of the construction of a Multipurpose Sports Complex at Plaine Verte which will provide the inhabitants with modern indoor sports and leisure activities. We need our youth to work and contribute towards

building a prosperous nation and not falling prey to the social ills and becoming a burden for their families and the society.

I am also glad to note that provision is being made for the funding of three major capital projects for the local Authorities namely, the renovation of the Port Louis Theatre, Consultancy for the renovation of the Plaza Theatre - Phase III and the renovation of the Town Hall of Curepipe. This demonstrates, Madam Speaker, the commitment of this Government to preserve our ancient and historic buildings. The House may wish to note that the Municipal City Council of Port Louis is currently preparing the bidding documents for the first phase of the renovation of Port Louis Theatre; the renovation of the Administrative Block of Plaza Theatre (Phase II) is also in progress. The Municipal Council of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill will shortly start working on the Expression of Interest for consultancy services for the Phase III of the project. As regards the restoration and renovation of the Town Hall of Curepipe, the Municipal Council of Curepipe is currently carrying out a survey of the existing building and will subsequently initiate procurement procedures for the project.

Madam Speaker, following the floods which occurred back in February 2016 and which affected several localities across the country, a priority list of drain-related projects has been established. These works would be undertaken by both the Local Authorities and the National Development Unit. An amount of Rs304 m. has been earmarked over the next two financial years for the construction of drains by the Local Authorities.

However, we are all aware that, with the climate change, we cannot predict which locality may be affected by the next torrential rains or flash floods. We cannot construct all the drains at one go. So, we will proceed on a priority basis. Moreover, it is worth noting that the Land Drainage Authority would be set up in due course and the Local Authorities would provide their full cooperation to that Authority.

Another measure which is going to help our citizens living on the Municipal Estates – we have about 13 Municipal Housing Estates in Port Louis, Beau Bassin, Quatre Bornes and Curepipe. Madam Speaker, in 2013, the State Land Act was amended with a view to giving to those families, who have a housing unit on leased land belonging to the State, the option to buy the land at Rs2,000 per lot. In a spirit of equity, we consider that this measure should be extended to those families having their housing units on the Municipal land as well. Previously, as I mentioned, this measure applied to State land, but now we are going to extend this measure to people living on Municipal land. The Local Government Act will thus be amended accordingly and owners of housing units on Municipal Housing Estates like Les

Casernes in Curepipe and Sookdeo Bissoondoyal in Port Louis will have the option to buy the plot of land on which stand their housing units at the nominal price of Rs2000 per plot.

Madam Speaker, one of the salient characteristics of this Government is that we dare to take bold decisions for the benefit of this country. We are all aware of the numerous problems which the hawking activities in the City were causing to the road users, registered traders, market traders, tourists and to the pedestrians.

To this end, with a view to managing and curtailing illegal hawking activities in the city, the Municipal City Council of Port Louis has, in collaboration with the Police, put up in place appropriate mechanisms, since December 2015, to control hawking activities. There was a need to control and manage the situation by containing the influx of hawkers so as to prevent a chaotic situation, besides ensuring the security of our citizens as well as that of the tourists, alleviating traffic problems and maintaining law and order. Moreover, there was also a need to ensure fair competition and safeguard the interest of the shop owners and traders.

Madam Speaker, as a short-term measure, pending the long-term solution in the context of the implementation of a Road Decongestion Programme for Port Louis, which is currently being worked out at the level of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport and which will cater for the hawkers also, temporary sites have been set up with necessary amenities and placed at the disposal of registered hawkers. From feedback received, the pedestrian flows as well as the traffic flow are much more fluid these days.

Madam Speaker, if you would allow me, I shall now turn to the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service. With the growing development in the southern part of the country, a state-of-the-art Fire Station is required. In this context, a new Fire Station would be constructed, soon, at Rose Belle. It will provide fire and emergency cover to the localities in the Districts of Savanne and Grand Port and it would also assist the Saint Aubin and Mahebourg Fire Stations in case of major disasters.

It is expected that this new Fire Station would not only serve the local community, but also the International Airport, the Omnicane Smart City, the Rose Belle Business Park and the neighbouring localities. Moreover, the response time to the incident site would be greatly reduced in that part of the country and it would also serve to decentralise the service offered by the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service.

Moreover, as regards the relocation of the Quatre Bornes Fire Station project to a more suitable site having better access to the road network, procedures are underway for the acquisition of land in the region of Sodnac. The Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service plays an important role in fire fighting and rescue exercises, as well as during natural disasters. In this

context, besides the recruitment of 100 additional fire-fighters to reinforce the existing manpower of the service, efforts will be made to equip the service with high-tech vehicles and equipment to respond to emergencies, such as flooding and other natural disasters, technological disasters, seasonal crop and vegetation fires. Water tenders and high volume water pumps, personal protective equipment and other fire fighting gears will be purchased to improve emergency response to fire outbreaks, rescue operations and other types of emergencies.

Moreover, the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service has already set up a Special Operations Division which comprises of three specialised units, namely: the Technical Rescue Unit, the Swift Water Rescue Unit and the Hazardous Materials Response Unit. They are staffed by highly trained personnel and specially equipped to operate at unusual and highly hazardous incident sites, where the threat to life is very high. This Special Operations Division will provide backup support to station crews during major incidents and disasters.

Madam Speaker, the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service is entrusted with the duty of taking all necessary steps for *inter alia* protecting life, property and the environment in case of emergency and in that context it may cooperate with any entity that provides a service in case of emergency. The implementation, by the Police, of a new Integrated Emergency Response Management system that links the SAMU, the Fire Services and other agencies with a project value of Rs50 m. is, therefore, a very good initiative. In any major accidents, as we are aware, one or two minutes can make the difference between life and death. So, such an agency which is going to pull together the expertise of the SAMU, Police and the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service is most welcomed.

Madam Speaker, The Minister of Finance and Economic Development has titled this budget as “A New Era of Development”. Feedback from all quarters indicates that the public at large has welcomed the measures enunciated in the budget which will, no doubt, contribute in opening up the economy and bringing in more relief to the poor and the needy.

With this budget, we are indeed paving the way for the country to respond to the main challenges for a sustainable growth and prosperity. I am confident that, in the short and medium terms, we are going to witness major transformations in the socio-economic landscape of the country and each and every citizen of this country will stand to benefit therefrom.

Before resuming my seat, Madam Speaker, allow me to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development once again for the way he has crafted the budget

which clearly translates the vision of the Government to create an intelligent, forward moving and caring society.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister has set the vision. The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has provided the economic planning and the financial means. The population at large has accepted the budget. What is left now is for us to roll up our sleeves, get down to work and implement the measures announced in the budget. If we don't deliver, Madam Speaker, I am sorry to say we won't have anybody else to blame.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Benydin!

(6.27 p.m.)

Mr T. Benydin (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Madam Speaker, allow me, first of all, to sincerely congratulate hon. Pravind Jugnauth, Minister of Finance and Economic Development for the excellent measures spelt out in the Budget Speech for 2016/2017.

It goes without saying that the Budget Speech has been acclaimed widely by the population to yet give further a real meaning to the intrinsic values of social justice and equitable distribution of income and solidarity measures for the have nots and the middle income group in spite of the spectre of Brexit, global economic slowdown and turmoil in the advanced countries.

Madam Speaker, if we have to give a score to the Budget Speech of hon. Pravind Jugnauth, certainly his score is ...

(Interruptions)

10 points on 10 points!

(Interruptions)

Passed with distinction! *Tel père, tel fils*, goes the saying!

Le ministre des Finances a, sans nul doute, reçu l'approbation et la bénédiction de notre Premier ministre et *Leader* de l'Alliance Lepep, pour la présentation des grandes

orientations et des mesures contenues dans le discours du budget. Avec les mesures courageuses tant sur le plan économique que social, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth a réussi à redonner confiance et rétablir le *feel good factor* aux citoyens de notre pays. Même les adversaires les plus acharnés et coriaces et ceux qui ont l'habitude de tout critiquer ont dû se taire sinon de faire des commentaires très limités à l'instar du *Leader* de l'Opposition qui qualifie ce budget d'intéressant. D'autres qualifient ce budget d'innovant avec des composantes innovatrices qui visent à booster notre économie, éliminer la pauvreté et redessiner une nouvelle architecture de développement pour, entre autres, reformer les services publics, éliminer les gaspillages et gagner la bataille de la modernisation surtout avec le *Metro Express*, l'agrandissement du réseau de fibre optique et le *full-fledged digital society*.

Madame la présidente, le *Leader* du Parti Travailliste, en panne d'arguments plausibles, a dû prendre cinq jours pour donner ses réactions. Il a même été battu par mes confrères syndicalistes, qui ont commenté le budget avec promptitude et qui ont apprécié le volet social de ce budget.

Madame la présidente, ce budget est aussi le fruit d'une politique de dialogue social et de consultations avec plusieurs *stakeholders* et la société civile. À cet effet, je cite ma collègue, Jane Ragoo, sur ses commentaires faits à l'hebdomadaire 'Week-end' du 31 juillet. Je cite –

« Dans l'ensemble, c'est un budget avec beaucoup de points positifs. J'apprécie que la voix de la société civile ait été écoutée dans la majeure partie des mesures. »

Même 'l'Express' du samedi 31 juillet, fait les commentaires suivants dans sa rubrique sur le budget, je cite –

« On a cru qu'il allait augmenter les taxes, dont la TVA. Mais Pravind Jugnauth n'a pas été impopulaire comme il l'avait laissé entendre à la presse. »

Madam Speaker, hon. Pravind Jugnauth - a bit of literature - he came back as Minister Finance and Economic Development. He saw and he conquered. Indeed, Madam Speaker, he conquered the hearts of thousands of Mauritians with his courageous and daring measures through his 10-pronged strategies geared at ushering a new era of development. I would like to mention, *inter alia* -

1. fostering a wave of modern entrepreneurs;
2. creating more job opportunities for all;
3. entering a new economic cycle;
4. reforming business facilities;
5. lifting the quality of life for one and all;
6. addressing the root causes of poverty, and
7. ensuring macroeconomic stability and social public finances.

Madam Speaker, by coming forward with a comprehensive action, plan to deal with the root causes of poverty the hon. Minister Finance and Economic Development confirms the commitment of our Government to empower those who are economically at the lower rung of the ladder and to contribute to make Mauritius a more equitable society. By launching the Marshall Plan against poverty, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has given a clear signal that market opening measures and economic consultations should not necessarily predominate over social ones and that the social dimension should be an essential component in any development process.

While recognising that an effective State should ensure high and stable economic growth, it has also a bounded duty to raise the capacity of people, especially the vulnerable and marginalised groups through universal access to education, health, shelter, decent employment, social services and also the promotion of gender equality. To this effect, the provision of necessary funds to set up a Parliamentary Women Caucus regrouping women MLAs from all political parties to discuss issues and policies pertaining to the promotion of women in our society, undoubtedly translate Government's policies to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on sex.

Madam Speaker, whilst appreciating the strategy to broaden the fiscal incentives given to SMEs, priority must as well be given to raise the productivity of the informal sector and to integrate it into the economic mainstream and to enhance the competitiveness of entrepreneurs.

Equally important, is a coordinated recovery for a more sustainable growth in jobs and income. To this end, the second strategy of the Budget, that is, to create more job

opportunities for youth, men and women is very commendable as Government is expecting, through various measures, to create employment to around 21,400.

Madam Speaker, it is also of growing importance that the green and blue economy can also boost the economy and can have job recovery through large-scale and labour intensive investment in green infrastructure such as renewable energies and transport decongestion schemes while addressing, at the same time, environmental issues.

Madam Speaker, with regard to improving the quality of life of vulnerable groups of society and to enhance social safety nets, this Budget highlights numerous measures to eradicate absolute poverty urgently. We have, for reference, the new scheme relating to monthly subsistence allowance of adults on the Social Register which will, henceforth, be higher than the present threshold of 6,200, that is, a maximum of 9,520 for a family of two adults and three children.

The reduction of the retail price of cooking gas from Rs330 to Rs270 for a 12 kg cylinder is another major breakthrough and unprecedented action to give relief to households. The grant of cash award to students of poor families to achieve higher education, strengthen Government's political will towards capacity building and empowerment to improve vulnerable families out of the poverty cycle.

Madam Speaker, in so far as fundamental public sector reform is concerned, particularly emerging of like-minded institutions translate effectively Government's action to re-engineer a new model of economic development which fosters quality public services, to avoid duplication and arrive at greater coherence and synergy. We, therefore, look forward that public sector reforms will stimulate the creation of high-quality employment across a wide sector as it is a fact that quality public services can make a vital contribution to social cohesion and equity which alongside effective administration strengthen and provide better services to our citizens.

Madam Speaker, it is a fact today that many young persons still favour public sector employment since they believe that jobs in the public sector have better social status as well as better wages and fringe benefits, and above all, job security. But the reality is that public sector employment represents less than 85,000 on the strength of our labour force. Therefore, it is imperative that jobs have to be created in the private sector, particularly with the series of incentives and facilities that are being granted to them for expansion. It is essential also that

labour standards have to be respected and barriers have to be removed in the private sector to change the perception held by young people that public sector employment is good and private sector employment is bad.

Madam Speaker, in this context, the legislation that has recently been passed to guarantee a national minimum wage to workers in all sectors of the economy, will undoubtedly contribute to bring a new mindset and attitude to workers and jobseekers. The more so that reforms in labour legislation based on the decent work agenda can also usher social peace and eliminate all apprehensions regarding job security in the private sector. It is also relevant to underline that despite strong gains in level of educational attainment, young people still face lower chances of finding employment because of their relatively job specific work experience vis-à-vis other older applicants. To do away with this experience constraint, there should be a policy of implication to combining school with work experience and including jobs search skills and career guidance programmes in educational institutions to encourage school to work transition. In some countries, strategies that encourage gaining of work experience, while in school, have yielded positive results in lowering the experience gap and made it easier for youth to find employment after graduation.

The YEP programme, Madam Speaker, is therefore central to personal development of young men and women. I would like, to this effect, to quote from an ILO document on Global Employment Trend for Youth. I quote –

“A lack of decent work, if experienced at an early age, often permanently compromises a person’s future employment prospects and frequently leads to unsuitable labour behaviour patterns that last a lifetime.”

The same document also highlights the productive potential of young labour – not Labour Party – and stresses that focussing on youth makes sense to a country from a cost benefit point of view.

Madame la présidente, sur le plan social, surtout en ce qui concerne le Plan Marshall, il faut souligner les diverses mesures visant à soulager les groupes vulnérables et à éliminer les causes profondes de la pauvreté, notamment la construction et la finalisation de 1,900 logements sociaux de 50 mètres carrés, le plafond d’éligibilité pour la *NHDC social housing* qui passe de R 10,000 à R 20,000, l’augmentation du *meal allowance* pour les écoles ZEP de R 40 à R 60, le droit au *Basic Invalidity Pension* pour les enfants avec des *disabilities* de moins de 15 ans.

D'autre part, Madame la présidente, nous accueillons également la décision de revoir le *Corporate Social Responsibility Framework* dans un souci de plus de transparence et d'efficacité, la mise sur pied d'un *National CSR Foundation* géré conjointement par les secteurs privé et public, avec de nouveaux critères de contribution des entreprises, 50% la première année, 75% pour l'année suivante, est de bon augure et aidera les ONGs et la société civile à présenter des projets pour combattre, entre autres, la pauvreté, aider à la construction de logements sociaux, et surtout, dans les campagnes, visant à combattre les fléaux de la drogue et d'aider les familles en difficulté.

Madam Speaker, one such measure that is of personal interest to me - and I am sure my colleagues from the NDU - in this Budget, is the announcement of the reform of the Public Service, and as a Parliamentary Private Secretary, that of the NDU, and in particular the Citizens Advice Bureau, commonly known as 'CAB.' Since its inception in the late 80s, CAB has played a significant role in the upgrading of the quality of life of our fellow citizens.

A glimpse in the history of CAB can shed more light to understand its significance even today. At that point in time, the Mauritian territory was divided into municipal zones looked after by the Municipal Councils, the rural areas which fell under the responsibility of District Councils, and also there was what we call the "no man's land", left on their own as orphans. Sir Anerood Jugnauth, the then hon. Prime Minister, conceptualised the setting up of CAB offices throughout the island with the objective of bringing development at the doorsteps of the citizens and, in particular, in the "no man's land" areas.

During the first half of the 90s, regional development reached its peak under the leadership of Sir Anerood Jugnauth, recorded statistics of callers spoke for themselves. However, with the taking over of the Labour Party in 1995, things started to fall apart, the more so with the detachment of the Citizens Advice Bureau from the Prime Minister's Office. By that time, the CAB started to lose height with the advent of mobile phones, IT facilities and private radios. People found it easier to post their complaints on Facebook or to phone the private radios instead of calling at the CAB offices.

Madam Speaker, it is rightly so that the announcement of the revamping of the CAB can contribute to the eradication of poverty and to socioeconomic development process and welfare of citizens.

Despite all the criticisms that are being heard about CAB, I am satisfied that the CAB offices under my responsibility and those of my colleagues do respond to the calls of the

public, and we are leaving no stone unturned to upgrade the quality of life of our fellow citizens. We are addressing the issue of flooding by providing drains where required, upgrading of road networks, equipping the children's playgrounds and upgrading sports infrastructure wherever the need is felt, among others, while taking into consideration the budget allocated to us.

Madam Speaker, the introduction of an Advisory Committee, with the participation of the private sector at the level of each CAB, can help to revamp the services offered. Public exposure of CAB and well-defined role and responsibilities of CAB office can help the citizens to better understand the work and limits of Government's activities.

CAB has, so far, only an intervention capacity, and it is, therefore, the duty of other service providers to play their part in meeting the expectancies of the general public. We need a better synergy and coordination with organisations such as community and social welfare centres. They do not have necessarily to be shaken up by private radios to react to public demands. Public officers have a moral duty to perform their work with the collaboration of the CAB offices. After more than a quarter of a century today, CAB is again under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office with again, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, who is the Prime Minister, and he wants things to improve.

In the past, the glory days of CAB was contingent upon the close monitoring by a PPS Council on its day-to-day business, short term and long term visions. Everything pertaining to the smooth running of the CAB was channelled through the PPS Council which had in return to report directly to the Rt. hon. Prime Minister at regular intervals. As such, the objectives of CAB were viewed and reviewed to meet the target fixed in service delivering, that is, the CAB which was one of the main antennas of the Prime Minister's Office.

Madam Speaker, it is my humble request to propose the re-introduction of an Advisory Committee with involvement of the grassroots, which is a *sine qua non* condition to put man at the centre of development and the resetting of the PPS Council. This can contribute, Madam Speaker, to bring back the golden days of the CAB and return its *lettre de noblesse*, hopefully. CAB offices given the necessary boost and support can be the agent of change we want to see. CAB can help to build up an active citizenship network, and the numerous problems registered at the CAB office can be the stepping-stone towards policy formulation for regional and national changes.

Before ending, I would like to thank the Minister of Finance and Economic Development and all Ministers of the Government concerned for developments, with regard to Constituency No. 15, La Caverne/Phoenix and I would like also to mention the construction of the new ENT Hospital in Vacoas. Thank you, Mr Minister of Health and Quality of Life for setting a new hospital in Vacoas, in our constituency, and the constituency where our Rt. hon. Prime Minister also resides - we should not forget about that.

(Interruptions)

Yes, No. 16! Also, I would also like to thank the Minister of Finance and Economic Development and hon. Ivan Collendavelloo. I think he heard the pleas of the citizens of Highlands who are actually facing some difficulties regarding sewerage problems. I have seen in the Budget already a sum has been earmarked for sewerage projects in Highlands. I would like to thank him for that. Thank you very much. We note also that there is the setting of a pilot Agri-Business Park in Highlands over an area of 100 acres.

With these words, Madam Speaker, I thank the House for the kind attention extended to me. To end on a good note, I will say, again in a Shakespeare mood, 'here is a Budget when come such another.'

Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Callichurn!

(6.51 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training (Mr S. Callichurn): Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I am commenting on this Budget. At the very outset, I would like to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development, hon. Pravind Jugnauth, for having shined on the occasion and lived up to the expectation of the population.

Madam Speaker, the dilemma of any national budget is to allocate limited resources to unlimited demands, hence, the need for prioritization. The Budget is an opportunity to review our national economic and social objectives. This Budget is the fruit of wide consultations with all cross sections of the population. The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has proved that economic imperatives can be met without jeopardizing social needs. He has presented a Budget that whips the economy, consolidates

our Welfare State, creates new opportunities for the youth and opens new landscape for development which surely will propel us to a high income society.

As you are aware, Madam Speaker, impressive cyclical and structural challenges have repeatedly shaken the economy violently. Dealing with the precarious state of most macroeconomic fundamentals, the adverse consequences of Brexit on the important sectors of the economy, together with the volatility, uncertainty and unpredictability of global growth and trade must, no doubt, have been a Herculean task.

Madam Speaker, the Minister has rightly stated that our traditional sectors face headwinds. Textile and clothing are facing serious challenges. Both the sugar and non-sugar agriculture are struggling to attain a reasonable level of food security. Financial Services are facing new challenges. The average growth of the ICT sector has declined and moderated to 6%.

Madam Speaker, of course we should reckon that some events have been favourable to the economy. For instance, the grant from India, low interest rates, the falling prices of oil, gas, and coal. However, these by far are outnumbered by the current challenges.

Navigating through such an economic setting, and aware that he will be judged on his economic stewardship, leadership, vision and audacity, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has risen to the occasion and has been daring and bold and financially responsible to confront many of the structural deficiencies.

Bold, decisive, innovative measures and structural reforms have had to be taken. Public spending has had to be rebalanced towards productive investments and wasteful expenditures have had to be curtailed. Some of the subsidies and grants have had to be revisited for more efficiency and equity.

In the absence of such good mix of policies and measures to address the macroeconomic imbalances, sectoral weaknesses, eroding competitiveness, rising inequalities and emerging challenges, there will be no desired annual growth, no significant job creation, no desired increase in GDP per capita and no shared prosperity. Focusing on some sectors is crucial given our limited resources.

Madam Speaker, indeed this much awaited Budget has unsurprisingly been positively acclaimed and welcomed by almost all stakeholders except for the Labour Party, be it by the private sector, business community, the trade unions, social workers and most importantly by the civil society.

While espousing the philosophy and principles outlined in this Government's electoral manifesto, the 2016-2017 Budget provides bold steps to break free from traditional

approaches which are no longer responsive to current and emerging economic challenges and to the high aspirations and expectations of the population. This Budget heralds a new era of development, hinging on ten key focus areas; one of which is directly related to my portfolio, namely, the creation of more job opportunities for all.

Madam Speaker, I have followed with keen interest the interventions of hon. Ramful and hon. Uteem. Hon. Uteem in his intervention mentioned that unemployment rate is high among the youth and women. This is a fact which cannot be denied. But when we look at the trend of unemployment rate among these sections of the population, over the past decades, we will realise that practically nothing was done to remediate the situation. We, in this Government, are doing our utmost best to address the problem at its root. We are tackling the problem of mismatch by introducing tailor made courses to match the needs of the industry. We are creating new training programmes to empower the unemployed. In this Budget itself we have introduced a new Skills Development programme which will provide training for some 4,000 young people in fields that are in demand, I must precise.

Hon. Ramful has been very critical, but his criticism has not been constructive.

(Interruptions)

Unfortunately, he is not here. He was the president and he presided over the HRDC for two years. I give him the benefit of doubt for the first year, i.e. in 2013. The time he took to settle down, I agree. But, in 2014, Madam Speaker,...

(Interruptions)

In 2014, a Budget of Rs316 m. was provided to HRDC and out of these Rs316 m., several millions were provided for training programmes. Do you know how much were actually spent? Very less! I have figures here.

(Interruptions)

Out of the Rs10 m. which was allocated for Apprenticeship Scheme, only Rs6 m. was spent! Out of Rs1 m. for Training Cluster and Coordinating Training for SMEs, none was used!

(Interruptions)

If I go through the list, you would see that not even a quarter was spent from the money which was provided to him. So, he cannot be more *royaliste que le roi, dirai-je*. When you criticise, it must be constructive criticism.

Another fact that hon. Ramful said is that, here, our Government is creating precarious jobs through the Youth Employment Programme (YEP). He argued that the Youth Employment Programme serves no purpose in view of its short duration. He added that it

disguised short duration employment. Let me remind him that YEP was introduced in 2013, then nobody from his Party raised objections or criticised the programme at that time.

(Interruptions)

At that time, it was right and perfect to do so and now the same programme suddenly becomes useless and purposeless in his eyes. I think...

(Interruptions)

I do not think it is proper for me to use this word, but I will say it anyway '*ki grand paquet li fine cassé là-bas*'.

On the contrary, I must congratulate the then Minister of Finance, hon. Xavier Duval for the laudable initiative of introducing Youth Employment Programme (YEP) as a measure to improve employability skills of our youth.

Madam Speaker, let me clarify and set records straight. In the skills mismatch dilemma, the private sector has consistently harped that our unemployed youth do not have employability skills. In fact, the Youth Employment Programme is perfectly designed to enable our youth to acquire these employability skills through on-the-job training and exposure to workplace environment. Allow me to add that a substantial percentage of those who joined the Youth Employment Programme have now acquired full-time employment.

Since the launching of YEP in January 2013 up to December 2014, some 8,471 youths were placed out of a total number of 20,541 registered, which represents a percentage of 41.2% and those were placed by the previous Government in two years. It is worthy to point out that since I took office as from January 2015 to July 2016, some 7,810 youths have been placed out of a total number of 14,902 registered under this programme, which represents a percentage of 52.4% and that is only in 17 months and we have seven months more to go. Talking about failure! He has failed! It is him who failed in his duty as Chairman of HRDC.

Madam Speaker, the YEP was initially conceived for placement and training of youth in the private sector. In view of the prevailing high rate of youth unemployment, Government decided to extend the programme to the Civil Service and parastatal bodies. Under the proposed scheme, 1,000 unemployed youth have already been placed. The initiative of the Minister of Finance and Economic Development to increase the number of beneficiaries under the YEP to 2,000 is, therefore, laudable.

Youth unemployment is a worldwide phenomenon. One of the major reasons for youth unemployment is skills mismatch, which is an ongoing challenge impacting on all sectors of the economy. There is a need for rethinking and re-engineering of our institutions as past policies have failed. There is room for coordination and for more collaborative efforts among institutions to address the skills mismatch issue.

I understand that my colleague, the Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, has already initiated action on revamping the Career Guidance Service. In the same vein, my Ministry is coming up with the establishment of professional career counselling services under the National Employment Agency.

The introduction of the National Skills Development Programme in specific sectors such as ICT, Tourism and Hospitality, Nursing and Paramedics, and Construction and other industries, is one of the first measures to address the problem of mismatch.

Madam Speaker, I, therefore, commend the proposal of setting up of a Skills Development Authority as a Regulator in the sector, which will focus on technical and vocational education and training. With the measures announced in the budget, Government is addressing the skills mismatch issue in a holistic manner. Therefore, “A Culture of Continuous Training and Development for a Decent Job for All” will be fostered.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, to address the problem of mismatch, Government has introduced the Dual Training Programme (DTP) which is tailor-made to meet the demand of the private sector. This programme is inspired from the German dual system which combines on-the-job training with institution-based learning to provide the trainee with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Madam Speaker, funds were provided for the training and placement of 300 young persons. Aggressive marketing campaigns were carried out with some 200 employers. It is noted with concern, however, that since July 2015 to date, only 20 companies have participated in the programme and just some 100 trainees have been placed. Questions must be asked, Madam Speaker, why this reluctance on the part of the private companies to support Government’s initiative in spite of several financial incentives provided to them.

It should be understood that Government alone cannot address the skills mismatch and training challenge. Social partners have to assume their responsibility and should work hand in hand with the Government to address the problem of unemployment. I exhort the private sector to avail themselves of the incentives in place and also those provided in the current budget in order to facilitate the creation of jobs. Here, I must put emphasis on the fact

that job creation is the concern of all and as true patriots, those in the private sector should play their part to achieve this goal.

Another programme which was introduced to address unemployment among women above 30 years is the 'Back To Work programme'. The programme was initiated to enrol 600 women to facilitate their integration in the world of work. Again, I fail to understand the reluctance of women to join this programme despite having a high rate of unemployment among them. The figures speak for themselves. Since June 2015 to date, 92 employers have participated in the programme and some 304 women have been placed.

Hence, to boost up this programme, my Ministry is contemplating to introduce the concept of home-based working - "work from home". This should enable more women to gain employment.

Madam Speaker, history will judge us on our actions and not on our ability to deliver speeches. And this Government will go down in history as the only one having the courage to tackle once for all the challenge of poverty. We have promised, in our Government Programme to alleviate poverty and today the budget provides concrete and well-thought policy measures to address the issue.

We cannot dream of joining the high-income League of Nations, but at the same time, hiding an oasis of poverty. We do not believe in the duality of development, one for the rich and one for the poor. We are charting the way for an inclusive society.

We had to break the cycle of poverty and the budgetary measures are targeted precisely to do so. When the poor cannot keep their body and soul together and cannot have a square meal, any pro-poor policy is doomed for failure. This is where we make the difference.

With the social allowance of Rs9,250 per family and an additional Rs2,000 for children at the *Crèche*, we are physically liberating the poor family from daily worries of basic human needs. Thus, we are removing the barriers and shackles of poverty and empowering poor families to join the mainstream development.

This Government and specially, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development will go down in history as the one who dared to rise to the challenge for poverty alleviation. In our poverty alleviation strategy, all institutions will be galvanised to create the enabling environment by setting up reach out targeted programmes. Our institutions will have to join hands to meet the challenge. The Budget further provides for cash incentives to students from poor families to excel in their studies as we firmly believe that education is the panacea for development and the gateway to move out of poverty.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the measures which concern my Ministry. You would concur that employment is at the core of our development strategy, as opposed to it being simply a by-product of the growth of our country. In collaboration with the private sector, we are assessing all possible ways and means of using the development of industries in the fight against poverty.

For the financial year 2016-2017, my Ministry has been allocated a budget of Rs613 million which represents an increase of about Rs184 million. This is indeed a feat, Madam Speaker, not witnessed for several decades. These additional resources allocated to my Ministry will be spent judiciously.

Madam Speaker, this is particularly pertinent as the slowdown in economic growth is a global phenomenon where the unemployment rate is prone to increase and existing jobs are being threatened. Nevertheless, this Government rose to the challenge and implemented bold and broad measures to counter the situation. This is evidenced by the sharp decrease in the unemployment rate from 8.7% in the first quarter of 2015 to 7.6% for the same period in 2016. This shows that measures taken to address unemployment are yielding positive results.

Madam Speaker, despite positive strides taken, this Government is not resting on its laurel. It is embracing new activities to leapfrog into the digital arena. The removal of VAT on 3D printers is a powerful positive signal to promote emerging sectors and to spur job creation. My Ministry will continue to play its forceful role as facilitator of training and counselling to prepare the future labour force.

There is need to foster an enabling environment for training to take place with a view to enhancing job creation and promoting employment facilitation. In this context, I shall soon present to the House a National Employment Agency Bill, to provide for the establishment of the National Employment Agency to address demand and supply needs of the labour market.

The National Employment Agency will mark a paradigm shift from the traditional, reactive system of managing the labour market to a more proactive and sustained one. It will emphasize on one-to-one counselling session with jobseekers to understand and respond to their specific needs, design customised training programmes in order to enhance their employability skills, conduct research and labour market surveys to identify labour market trends and skills gap.

A new system, that is, a National Interactive Information Dashboard, will also be set up within the framework of the National Employment Agency. Same will harness Labour Market information for research and analysis for formulation of appropriate policies. It shall

be a real-time user interface, conveying information regarding the labour market, inclusive areas of economic interests and the employment situation.

The National Employment Agency will be based on the French model of 'Pole Emploi'. To that end, our endeavours with the employment authorities of France have been ongoing; and the Vacoas Employment Information Centre has already been transformed into the prototype office. This prototype office will be replicated across the island.

The National Employment Policy is yet another endeavour of ours to enable the country to achieve its employment goals of decent and productive work for all. A coherent, integrated and well-designed employment policy will cut across all sectors of the economy and will address both labour demand and supply to tackle employment related problems.

Madam Speaker, on the employability front, my Ministry is pursuing a number of Government to Government agreements for enhanced opportunities for placement of Mauritians abroad. I am informed that a number of job opportunities exist for Mauritians in Africa and other countries. Circular migration is gaining increased prominence as a means to fill labour-market needs and to move towards enhanced mobility of labour. Efforts are being made to encourage Mauritians to work abroad. Over the past three years, the number of placements overseas, effected by recruitment agencies, has increased more than two-fold from 1300 in 2013 to nearly 3200 in 2015. In particular, in the Maritime Sector, 2,038 workers have been placed by private recruitment agencies in 2015 to March 2016. The opportunities for employment on cruise ships are being optimally tapped. In this context, 1000 young people will be trained by MITD as waiters. More than 700 have already registered and training programmes have already started for them.

Madam Speaker, the Rt. hon. Prime Minister has announced Government's intent to improve business facilitation and expedite delivery of permits. To this end, my Ministry has already embarked on the e-path with the modernisation and review of the existing work permit system. As at date, the e-work permit system, enabling the online submission, processing and delivery of permits, has already been commissioned. Concurrently, the processes involved therein have been successively streamlined and as such that the time taken to process and deliver permits has known a significant reduction from 30 to 21 days.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the Labour and Industrial Relations Division of my Ministry. You will concur with me that industrial peace and harmony is essential for economic development and prosperity. I am pleased to report that, since I took office, my Ministry has taken appropriate initiatives to ensure industrial peace is maintained. I hasten to add that this would not have been possible without the collaboration of our trade unionists. I

seize this opportunity to express my appreciation for their exemplary support. This is proof of the success of social dialogue. In line with the philosophy of this budget, I am coming forward with a series of measures to better protect workers' rights.

Madam Speaker, during the UN General Assembly in September 2015, decent work and the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda – employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue – became integral elements of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda calls for the promotion of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work, and will be a key area of engagement for ILO and its constituents. In fact, decent work has now become a universal objective and has been included in major human rights declarations.

Madam Speaker, Mauritius being a strong proponent of democratic principles and ILO ideals has already successfully completed the First Generation Decent Work Country Programme in December 2015. I am glad to inform the House that my Ministry has, in close collaboration with the ILO and other social partners, embarked on the formulation of the Second Generation Decent Work Country Programme which will focus on the following four pillars namely, employment creation, rights of workers, social protection and social dialogue with gender equality as a cross cutting objective.

Madam Speaker, National Minimum wage stands high on the Government's Agenda. More so, it forms part of our strategy to combat poverty and income inequality.

The National Minimum Wage Consultative Council Act which has been passed in the National Assembly has been proclaimed and gazetted and will take effect as from 01 September 2016. The Council will provide for the first time a national minimum wage in the private and public sector and is aimed at combating poverty by improving the living conditions of the lowest paid workers. Arrangements have already been made to accommodate the Office of the Council. The Ministry will shortly set up the Council, which will be operational soon.

In our Government Programme, we had taken the commitment to review our labour laws. In this context, I have already embarked on wide consultations with stakeholders to consolidate the fundamental rights of workers and ensure better protection of workers' rights. I also intend to reinforce freedom of association and negotiating rights in line with ILO Conventions. The dispute settling mechanism for a timely and more effective settlement of

disputes will also be reviewed. I shall shortly proposed amendments to the Employment Rights Act and the Employment Relations Act.

Madam Speaker, with a view to further protecting the rights of workers in respect of their retirement benefits, consideration is being given for the introduction of a “Portable Severance Allowance Scheme”. It will enable every worker to benefit from a compensation on reaching retirement age, irrespective of the number of employers with whom he or she has worked.

I also intend to take appropriate measures to promote the development of collective bargaining and voluntary negotiations in all sectors of employment following the recommendations of the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards at its 105th session in 2016. To this end, the provisions of the Employment Relations Act will be reviewed to facilitate negotiations of trade unions and independent and voluntary negotiations in this respect.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry also proposes to revisit the criteria for enlistment of the present unemployment benefits under the Workfare Programme. Presently, a worker whose employment has been terminated without a valid reason has to wait for his claim to be lodged at the Industrial Court to benefit from the Transition Unemployment Benefits. This process causes much hardship to these workers who have lost their jobs and are left without any financial assistance. I am, therefore, proposing that all workers be allowed to be admitted straightaway into the Workfare Programme.

Madam Speaker, further to the report of the US Department of State on Trafficking in Persons, my Ministry is taking concrete measures to combat trafficking in respect of migrant workers. In this respect, the Special Migrant Workers’ Unit will be reinforced in order to increase the number of inspections by three fold. A Migrant Mobile Squad will also be set up to monitor employment of migrant workers to track down labour trafficking. The present approach and policies to combat human trafficking will be reviewed and improved.

Along the same line, My Ministry is collaborating with the Passport and Immigration Office and will be issuing ID cards to all migrant workers. This will enable our enforcement authorities to exercise control and tighten the monitoring of migrant workers in Mauritius. As a matter of fact, this policy will significantly curtail illegal and unethical practices in the recruitment and employment of migrant workers in Mauritius.

Furthermore, with a view to better protect migrant workers, awareness campaigns at the workplace will also be organised and conducted in their native language in order to sensitise them of their rights and responsibilities with special emphasis on the risk of human trafficking.

My Ministry will also arrange for the publication of simplified version of our labour legislation in the main languages of migrant workers.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry has already embarked on a crackdown programme against child labour all over the island. For the past months, some 800 surprise inspections have been carried out, mainly in the informal sector. In this regard, the collaboration of the *Brigade Des Mineurs*, Child Development Unit, Ministry of Social Security, Police Officers, Municipal Councillors, NEF, NGOs and *Forces Vives* has been solicited.

My Ministry will also launch sensitisation campaigns through media, including radio programmes, short video clips on television and the distribution of pamphlets and posters.

It is also envisaged to create a hotline at the Ministry so as to allow members of the public to provide anonymous information to better track child labour.

Madam Speaker, the Labour and Industrial Relations Division of my Ministry has so far done a marvellous job despite a reduced labour force. For instance, during the Financial Year 2015/2016, 1,432 inspections were carried out and 1,262 cases were dealt with at the Industrial Court by the Labour Inspectorate, whereby a total amount of Rs96,868,000 was recovered on behalf of the workers of this country. Furthermore, 5,943 laid off workers were admitted in the Workfare Programme and approximately Rs325 m. have been paid as Transitional Unemployment Benefits to workers whose employments have been terminated.

Nevertheless, I am taking remedial action and reviewing the present organisational structure of the Labour and Industrial Relations Division to provide for the setting up of an Inspection Squad which will result in a wider coverage as regards inspections to ensure compliance with our labour legislation.

Madam Speaker, the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Division of my Ministry has the mandate to ensure that every employee is provided with a safe and healthy working environment at every workplace through the enforcement of appropriate legislation on occupational safety and health, covering both the private and the public sector. This Division

also promotes a national safety and health culture through awareness campaigns and undertakes several activities so as to enhance safety and health in the country.

The Occupational Safety and Health Division of my Ministry has effected 4,773 inspections at places of work, including factories in different sectors of the economy. It has investigated into nine notifiable fatal accidents and 190 non-fatal accidents. It is worth mentioning that through the sustained and concerted effort of the OSH Division, accidents are on a downward trend over the years and the fatality rate which was 2.55 in 2010 has decreased to 1.23 in 2015. But, I am aiming at a higher standard of occupational safety and health in the country and I will take all measures possible to reduce further the number of occupational accidents. Occupational Safety and Health Division is also taking measures such as prosecution and prohibition orders against employers who are not complying with Occupational Safety and Health legislation.

The OSH Division also plays a key role in promoting a national safety and health culture, which I believe is a prerequisite if we want to move higher up in the safety ladder. In this regard, it has conducted 198 training sessions at its training centre and delivered 136 training sessions on sites, which have led to the sensitisation of 6,675 persons on different safety and health topics.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker, there will be several major construction projects throughout the island including the Metro Express, development of Small and Medium Enterprises through entrepreneurship, setting up of an oil refinery and onshore storage facilities at Albion, development of the gold business, setting up of bicycle and motorcycle plants and pharmaceutical village. The development of the tea sector, agro-business, dairy industry and aqua-culture is also most welcomed. But we should ensure safe and healthy working conditions at all these work sites as occupational accidents and diseases will affect the quality of life and well-being of those employees and, by extension, that of their families, which implies an increase in the cost of production of those enterprises, thereby impacting on the productivity and competitiveness.

Madam Speaker, as you are aware, a substantial number of migrant workers are presently employed in different sectors of the economy. There have been many criticisms regarding their living conditions. Let me inform the House that from July 2015 to June 2016, my officers conducted some 1000 inspections which represent an all-time record for inspections in employees' lodging accommodations.

I am pleased to note that several posts have been created in the Occupational Safety and Health Division. This will definitely give an impetus to the Occupational Safety and Health Division to ensure proper enforcement of the occupational safety and health legislation in force and lay particular emphasis on the sectors I have mentioned previously. With the additional resources, I am setting up an “Employees Lodging Accommodation Unit” and a “Construction Unit” to ensure proper enforcement of the legislation in the construction sector and employees lodging accommodations.

However, I wish to point out that the development of the above new sectors will require capacity building of my staff and, in this context, I am planning to enlist the support of the ILO under the second generation Decent Work Country Programme and other international institutions as far as practical. In fact, it is well known that OSH is a multidisciplinary technical field and taking into consideration the number of technical regulations that have recently been made by the OSH Division, emphasis will have to be laid on capacity building.

Let me conclude, Madam Speaker...

(Interruptions)

The hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development has indeed come up with bold measures. However, questions are being put regarding the implementation of those measures. I am convinced that all the measures announced in the Budget will be implemented, given the seriousness and commitment which this Government has so far shown and is showing. However, it is imperative that all stakeholders play their roles. I am therefore making a special appeal to all actors to collaborate for the successful implementation of the measures announced.

Madam Speaker, I seize this opportunity to thank the Rt. hon. Prime Minister for his visionary leadership and guidance in the preparation of the Budget.

This Budget sets the scene for a new era of development.

I, therefore, add my endorsement to the Budget 2016-2017 and I thank you all for your attention.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Armance!

(7.37 p.m.)

Mr P. Armance (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Thank you, Madam Speaker. First, before I comment on the Budget, I would like to join all my other colleagues to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development for the

Budget he put to the House on 29 July 2016 and my friend hon. Callicurn for his long speech in this House today.

Madam Speaker, this Budget 2016-2017 announces a number of positive development, enlarging the space for wealth and economic value creation and provides a general feel-good factor among the population. Considering the unfavourable international economic setting, this Budget provides us with the tools to clearly define our future as Government or, may I say, as a responsible Government. The new era of development will definitely be the key to a successful and brighter future for our country.

Madame la présidente, ce budget offre une opportunité d'avenir à nos entrepreneurs. Les petites et moyennes entreprises vont bénéficier de *8-year tax holiday* et je pense que ce sera un atout majeur pour pouvoir développer et promouvoir les SMEs. On parle souvent de donner l'assurance aux jeunes. On parle souvent d'encadrement de nos jeunes. Ici, je vois une réelle opportunité pour nos jeunes d'être des entrepreneurs de demain et mettre leur savoir-faire au service de notre communauté et de bénéficier des avantages multiples qu'offre le gouvernement à travers ce budget. *Le fast track desk for micro enterprises* deviendra le facilitateur qui manquait aux *SMEs* pour la bonne mise en place de leurs projets.

Dans la même foulée, Madame la présidente, la création d'emplois qu'offre ce budget aiderait certainement à combattre le chômage qui persiste à Maurice surtout parmi nos jeunes. Je salue favorablement l'initiative du ministre de pourvoir 2000 emplois à travers le *Youth Employment Programme* ainsi que les 7,200 postes dans le service civil. Nombreux sont des jeunes diplômés qui peinent à trouver un emploi pour débiter leur carrière. Il ne faut pas être parenté à un ministre ou avoir des connections politiques pour aspirer à un emploi. Je souhaite que nos jeunes diplômés tout comme ces 200 jeunes ingénieurs pourront saisir les opportunités qui leur seront offertes pour mettre leurs connaissances acquises après de nombreuses années d'études au service de l'île Maurice.

Madame la présidente, dernièrement l'ancien gouvernement avait pour projet d'implémenter une centrale à charbon à Pointe aux Caves, projet connu sous le nom du CT Power. Avec le support et la collaboration de mon collègue, le ministre des Services publics, ce projet a été abandonné et j'en suis très reconnaissant étant moi-même un habitant qui aurait été exposé à ce mal. L'annonce dans le budget 2016-2017 des projets d'énergies renouvelables tels que la création du *Renewable Energy Company*, la production d'énergie avec l'utilisation du photovoltaïque, l'agrandissement des centrales hydroélectriques et de projet *waste energy* placera Maurice sur la carte mondiale des producteurs d'énergies vertes.

Certains continuent à parler de *blackout* alors que le budget annonce une grande réforme dans notre production d'énergie allant même jusqu'à prendre des mesures avant-gardistes pour contredire ce fameux *blackout*. Dirigeons-nous tous ensemble vers une île Maurice verte où les habitants se sentiront à l'abri de la pollution.

Madame la présidente, je suis un habitant de Port Louis depuis ma naissance. Je rêve toujours de revoir la capitale se transformer en un espace agréable pour circuler où tous les marchands ambulants et autres commerces ont les espaces dédiés.

J'accueille favorablement la construction dans notre capitale; la gare Victoria offrira un nouveau visage à notre Port Louis. J'ai eu l'occasion de voir la présentation du ministre des Infrastructures publiques. J'ai hâte de voir sortir de terre ce projet, venant ainsi alléger mes mandants qui sont pour beaucoup des marchands ambulants, et régulariser leur situation. Nul doute que Port Louis sera une ville où notre culture ne sera pas négligée. Outre les *recreational zones*, je note une *culture zone* où on pourra se retrouver dans nos pensées les plus anciennes de notre ville.

Port Louis a besoin d'un nouveau souffle. Port Louis a besoin d'une nouvelle orientation en gardant ses valeurs ancestrales. Je regrette cependant que le projet de décongestionner la région de Grande Rivière ne soit pas décrit dans le budget. On se bat tous les jours contre les embouteillages pour entrer et sortir de la capitale. Je souhaiterais que le ministère de tutelle considère de mettre en chantier très prochainement l'ouverture du vieux pont de Grande Rivière et autres mesures qu'il a annoncées pour pouvoir vaincre cet embouteillage monstre dans cette région de Port Louis. Certes, avec la construction du *link bridge* de Sorèze à Coromandel, on verra diminuer le nombre de véhicules à Grande Rivière. Cependant, Grande Rivière reste un point de transition incontournable pour rejoindre Pointe-aux-Sables, Petite Rivière, et la région de Pailles.

Madame la présidente, certaines régions de ma circonscription souffrent depuis des décennies de la distribution d'eau. Malgré l'annonce dans le budget 2015 du projet de remplacement des tuyaux pour avoir une distribution d'eau plus régulière, certains endroits de ma circonscription sont toujours laissés à leur soif. Je souhaite que le ministre aille au plus vite avec ces remplacements. Ce fut une promesse électorale de fournir l'eau à nos électeurs. Comme on le dit si souvent, l'eau c'est la vie, et un foyer sans eau s'expose à beaucoup de difficultés.

Madame la présidente, recruter 900 policiers sera certes un atout pour le *law and order*. La création d'une *Training Academy* aidera ces policiers à répondre mieux à nos attentes, mais, Madame la présidente, je souhaiterais surtout saluer la décision d'allouer R115 millions sur les deux prochaines années pour la fourniture d'équipements modernes à nos policiers afin de leur permettre de servir efficacement la nation. De nos jours, la drogue synthétique fait ravage, surtout parmi nos jeunes. Plusieurs barons de la drogue fructifient toujours leur argent à travers la vente de leur saleté. Ayant une police qui peut répondre à l'attente du peuple, de pouvoir nettoyer nos régions de la drogue, faisons en sorte que la police mauricienne devienne l'exemple dans l'océan indien pour combattre la drogue et surtout en ce moment où la synthétique bat son plein, et cela même, selon certains journalistes, dans nos écoles et autres institutions.

Madame la présidente, jour après jour, on note la dégradation de nos plages, la dégradation des coraux entourant nos lagons. Nos plages longtemps classifiées parmi les meilleures au monde, souffrent aujourd'hui de l'érosion. C'est le moment propice pour agir; agir avant que ce ne soit trop tard et que les dommages ne soient irréversibles. Injecter plus de R 100 millions pour réhabiliter et protéger de l'érosion, c'est une mesure qu'a annoncé le ministre des Finances pour honorer nos engagements pris pour la COP 21. La circonscription No. 1, Madame la présidente, a des possibilités de plage énormes. De Sable Noir à La Pointe, on y retrouve des plages non exploitées par le secteur touristique, et on note des dommages énormes par rapport à l'érosion. J'espère que le ministère concerné viendra avec des projets pour remédier à la situation dans les plus brefs délais pour ouvrir cette partie de l'île aux touristes et autres investisseurs.

L'item 233 du budget parle du cancer, ce mal qui ronge peu à peu plusieurs Mauriciens. Madame la présidente, j'ai perdu des amis, des membres de la famille, rongés par le cancer. Les soins palliatifs sont une approche qui améliorent la qualité de vie des patients et leurs familles confrontées aux problèmes liés à cette maladie mortelle par la prévention, et le soulagement de la souffrance aux moyens d'identification précoce et d'évaluation et le traitement de la douleur et d'autres problèmes physiques.

Madame présidente, avant de conclure mon discours, je souhaiterais élaborer les mesures concernant notre prise de position pour vaincre la pauvreté. Dans la circonscription No. 1, Madame la présidente, il existe plusieurs poches de pauvreté. Je cite notamment la région de Baloram Lane, certains endroits de Pailles, Cassis et de Pointe-aux-Sables. On y

retrouve la misère dans tous ses états, surtout les enfants qui sont laissés à un avenir sombre. Je me fais aujourd'hui le porte-parole de ces personnes de ma circonscription qui ne jouissent pas d'un encadrement adéquat pour sortir de la pauvreté absolue. Parmi les mesures, je note favorablement - encourager nos enfants à se tourner vers l'éducation à travers des *cash prize*, subvention des frais d'examen du SC et HSC, augmentation du *meal allowance* pour les écoles ZEP.

Madame la présidente, semaine après semaine, je reçois mes mandants au CAB ou à mon bureau et je peux affirmer avec certitude qu'un des problèmes majeurs de ma circonscription, c'est un toit décent pour les familles au bas de l'échelle. Récemment, on a vu des cas où des gens dorment au sol, où des enfants n'ont jamais connu le confort d'un lit, où le toit d'une maison peut s'effondrer à n'importe quel moment sur la tête de ses habitants. Ces gens-là, Madame la présidente, on peut les rajouter à la longue liste des personnes qui connaissent la pauvreté. Je ne peux rester insensible à la démarche du ministre de pouvoir construire 800 maisons pour les démunis et 1,900 maisons additionnelles de 50 m².

Récemment, j'ai eu l'occasion de visiter le Perseverance Island aux Seychelles. C'est un exemple de développement intégré pour aider à vaincre la pauvreté. Il y a même des écoles, des crèches, des facilités de loisirs et autres sur un seul complexe résidentiel. Un toit pour tous, Madame la présidente. Même les personnes qui touchent actuellement entre R 10,000 et R 20,000 y auront droit maintenant puisque la limite a été revue dans ce budget.

Pour conclure, Madame la présidente, j'accueille favorablement l'idée du ministre des Finances d'avoir un *women caucus* pour le Parlement mauricien. Je propose au ministre des Finances d'inclure en même temps un *youth caucus*, car les jeunes c'est l'avenir de demain et leur voix mérite d'être entendue et considérée.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Madam Speaker, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Mr Koonjoo rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 06 December 2016 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

Hon. Uteem!

MATTER RAISED

(7.47 p.m.)

POLICE OFFICERS - PROMOTION

Mr R. Uteem (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to raise a matter which concerns the Police Force. It is addressed to the Rt. hon. Prime Minister.

As the Rt. hon. Prime Minister is aware, since 22 December 2015, there has been the assignment of duties of around 76 Police Officers to the post of Chief Inspector, Assistant Superintendent and Superintendent of Police. These Police Officers were on probation for a period of six months, which has come to an end at the end of June. Since the end of the month of June, their extra duty allowance has been cut and their assignment has not been confirmed into a promotion. This is causing distress to the Police Officers and also undermine their authority vis-à-vis members of the public and their junior.

So, may I make a humble request to the Rt. hon. Prime Minister, if he can take up the matter with the Commissioner of Police as regards the promotion of these Police Officers.

Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, I will take it up with the Commissioner of Police.

At 7.51 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Monday 08 August 2016 at 11.30 a.m.