



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 11 JUNE 2024

CONTENTS

MOTION

BILLS (*Public*) –

The Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) Bill

The Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill

ADJOURNMENT

THE CABINET

(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity
Hon. Louis Steven Obeegadoo	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism
Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology
Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management
Hon. Alan Ganoo, GCSK	Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail
Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy	Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
Hon. Georges Pierre Lesjongard	Minister of Energy and Public Utilities
Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, GCSK	Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
Hon. Soomilduth Bholah	Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance
Hon. Kavydass Ramano	Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
Hon. Mahen Kumar Seeruttun	Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security
Hon. Maneesh Gobin	Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional

Integration and International Trade

Hon. Jean Christophe Stephan Toussaint	Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation
Hon. Mahendranuth Sharma Hurreeram	Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development
Hon. Darsanand Balgobin	Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn	Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training
Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo	Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage
Dr. the Hon. Mrs Marie Christiane Dorine Chukowry	Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Dr. the Hon. Anjiv Ramdhany	Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms
Hon. Ms Naveena Ramyad	Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 10 of 2024

Sitting of Tuesday 11 June 2024

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

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

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

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

PUBLIC BILLS

Second Reading

THE SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION (2023-2024) BILL

(No. III of 2024)

Order for Second Reading read.

(11.33 a.m.)

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that the Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) (No. XIII of 2023) Bill be read a second time.

The Bill makes provision for a supplementary appropriation of six billion and seven hundred million rupees (Rs6.7 billion) in respect of services of Government for the Financial Year 2023-24.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in June last year, the National Assembly had voted a total sum of Rs174.8 billion for Financial Year 2023-24 for meeting expenditure under 73 votes. The sums appropriated under five votes will not be sufficient to meet expenditure up to June 2024 mainly due to new policy decision taken during the course of the financial year. These include –

- (a) the payment of the 2024 Salary Compensation;
- (b) double pay for officers working on a shift system;
- (c) salary review of the Mauritius Revenue Authority;

- (d) implementation of the award delivered by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in favour of Patel Engineering Limited, and
- (e) purchase of SDRs from the International Monetary Fund.

No provision was made for the above mentioned expenditure in 2023-2024 Budget Estimates as these policy decisions were taken only during the course of the year and as such were not known at the time of budget preparation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, Section 105 (3) of the Constitution stipulates that where it is found that the amount appropriated under any Vote of Expenditure in any financial year is insufficient or that a need has arisen for expenditure for a purpose for which no amount has been appropriated, then a Supplementary Appropriation Bill needs to be introduced in the National Assembly to provide for the appropriation of those sums.

Accordingly, a supplementary appropriation of Rs6.7 billion is required in respect of five votes of expenditure where the appropriated amount will not be sufficient.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me know elaborate on these five votes that require supplementary appropriation.

First, Rs277 million will be required under Vote 2-6: Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity as additional grant to the RRA.

As the House is aware, the Budget of RRA is presented in the Regional Assembly by 31st March at latest. On the other hand, new measures at national level are announced in the Budget Speech in June every year. As such, the RRA Budget does not include provisions for these new measures at national level.

This supplementary amount of Rs277 million will, therefore, enable the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to meet, *inter alia*, cost associated with the increase in the rate of basic pensions and CSG retirement benefit, implementation of the 2024 Salary Compensation as well as the increase in bad weather allowance paid to fishers.

Second, Rs1.893 billion is needed under vote 3-1: Housing and Land Use Planning in view of the award delivered by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in respect of termination of the lease agreement over a plot of land situated at Les Salines.

The sum, inclusive of interest, has already been paid to Patel Engineering Limited in April this year through an advance from the Consolidated Fund. Supplementary appropriation is now required to clear the advance and account for the expenditure in the books of Government.

Third, Rs600 million is required under vote 7-1: Finance, Economic Planning and Development to enable the Mauritius Revenue Authority to meet the cost of the implementation of its Salary Review with effect from 01 July 2023.

The report on the Salary Review was approved by the Board of MRA in January 2024 and will cost Rs600 million annually. The cost implication was not known at the time of the budget preparation, and that is why no provision was made.

Fourth, Rs1.2 billion is needed under vote 18-1: Ministry of Health and Wellness as follows –

- (a) Rs250 million for payment of an allowance equivalent to twice the daily rate for work performed on Sundays to officers working on a shift/roster basis and whose shift roster falls on a Sunday. This measure is effective from January 2024;
- (b) Rs300 million for medicines, drugs and vaccines due to provision of services, a new health facility, increase in prices and payment of arrears.
- (c) Rs450 million for medical disposables and equipment that were required in view of increase in prices, the outbreak of Dengue and settlement of arrears, and
- (d) Rs200 million for purchase of reagents used in laboratories in the context of Dengue.

Finally, Rs2.73 billion is required under vote 24-1: Centrally Managed Initiatives of Government to cater for the following –

- (a) Rs865 million for payment of 2024 Salary Compensation to officials working in the civil service, local authorities and parastatal bodies financially dependent on Government.

As from January 2024, a salary compensation of 10% with a minimum of Rs1,500 was awarded to workers earning up to Rs20,000 per month and a flat of Rs2,000 to those earning more than Rs20,000.

This measure has benefited some 110,000 employees in the public sector and 350,000 paid employees in the private sector. Moreover, this the highest salary compensation ever paid to workers.

- (b) Rs915 million in respect of SDRs that were purchased from the International Monetary Fund under the Voluntary Trading Arrangement.

I wish to inform the House that Mauritius entered into the VTA with the IMF in September 2022. The VTA are bilateral arrangements between the IMF and the participating countries in which the VTA participants agree to buy and sell SDRs within certain limit, unless they instruct otherwise within one business day. There are presently some 40 countries participating in the VTA and Mauritius is the first in the African region.

Since October 2022, Mauritius has sold SDR 19.97 million, equivalent to Rs1.04 billion, and has purchased SDR 17 million, i.e., Rs1.03 billion. Over this period, we have sold more SDRs than we have purchased. The proceeds from the sales of SDRs are credited directly into the Consolidated Fund and the payments for purchase of SDRs are met from that Fund.

Appropriation of funds is, therefore, required for the purchase of SDRs, like any withdrawal from the Consolidated Fund.

- (c) Third, Rs500 million for equity injection made in MauBank Ltd, through MauBank Holdings Ltd.

MauBank Ltd is a fully owned subsidiary of MauBank Holdings Ltd with 99.96% shareholding. In turn, the sole shareholder of MauBank Holdings Ltd is Government.

The performance of the bank has improved significantly since 2020 following the capital injected by Government and also due to its increasingly diversified operations, the robustness of its business model as well as continued focus on prudent risk management.

For financial year ended 30 June 2023, the bank registered a profit after tax of Rs381 million compared to a loss of Rs347 million in financial year ended 30 June 2019.

This additional capital injection of Rs500 million will enable the bank to further expand its activities and increase its profitability. The capital adequacy ratio of the bank will also increase to around 16.9%, well above the regulatory threshold of 12.5%.

This will eventually enhance the attractiveness of the bank.

- (d) Fourth, Rs450 million for payment of CSG Income Allowance due to a higher number of beneficiaries.

This Scheme was introduced in the 2022-2023 Budget. The monthly allowance payable to employees and registered self-employed were reviewed in the 2023-2024 Budget as follows –

- Rs2,000 to those earning up to Rs25,000, and
- Rs1,000 to those earning above Rs25,000 up to Rs50,000.

The average number of beneficiaries of the CSG Income Allowance has increased to some 343,000 in Financial Year 2023-2024.

The five Votes of Expenditure as well as details on the Items of Expenditure that require the supplementary appropriation are set out in the Estimates of Supplementary Expenditure that have already been laid before the National Assembly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that this supplementary appropriation will be partly offset by underspending of some Rs4.7 billion in other Votes of Expenditure. As such, total expenditure will increase by only Rs2 billion. The budget deficit for the current financial year would be 3.9% of GDP and Public Sector Debt would be around 74.5% of GDP as at end June 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now commend the Bill to the House.

The Ag. Prime Minister seconded.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, before I call the next orator, I wish to draw your attention that debates on the Bill must be confined to the reasons as to why the extra money is being sought in regard to the Votes of Expenditure listed in the Schedule and for the specified period.

Now, I will call hon. Uteem!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Komie minit li ena?* How many minutes have been allocated?

Mr Speaker: Quiet! Quiet!

Mr Uteem: So that we do not have a repeat of yesterday, can we know...

Mr Speaker: No, this is not the way!

Mr Uteem: ...what is the amount of time allocated to me?

Mr Speaker: Yes, this is a better way. Third party, I gave a ruling! Third parties are not considered. You are the orator!

(Interruptions)

Please! Please! Please! Please!

(Interruptions)

Mr Ameer Meea: The Whip is not here!

Mr Speaker Please! Third party, please! Honourable orator ...

Mr Uteem: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: It is your duty and I agree it is your right; it is your duty to ask how many minutes are allotted to you.

Mr Uteem: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Not third parties!

Mr Uteem: In absence of the...

Mr Speaker: Honourable orator...

Mr Uteem: In absence of the Whip...

Mr Speaker: It has been agreed... Please!

Mr Uteem: In absence of the Whip, I am making the...

Mr Speaker: Please! Please! It has been agreed that you are allotted ten minutes.

Mr Uteem: Okay.

Mr Ameer Meea: *Ein? 10 minit pou koz lor enn lalwa?*

(Interruptions)

Mr Uteem: Can I start?

An hon. Member: *Aret plengne!*

(11.46 a.m.)

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): We are asked to vote Rs1.8 billion to pay for a judgment awarded against us in favour of Patel Engineering Ltd and the hon. Minister of Finance has not given us an explanation as to why we lost this case. Why are taxpayers being requested to pay Rs1.8 billion to Patel Engineering?

Let me tell him why! In December 2009, the Government decided to grant a lease of 58 arpents at Les Salines to Les Salines Development Ltd, a subsidiary of Patel Engineering to construct a Waterfront development project known as Neotown. At that time, the then government was expecting the project to generate foreign direct investment to the tune of Rs16 billion and the creation of up to 10,000 direct employments. The period of the lease was 99 years. At that time, there were several PQs and even a PNQ mainly from MPs from the MMM because the lease was awarded without a proper bidding exercise and the promoter was going to pay rent at a discounted rate for the first ten years of the construction phase.

In those days, the MSM was in government...

Mr Speaker: No!

Mr Uteem: C'était le temps des grands amours !

Mr Speaker: No! No! Hon. Member, this is a technical matter. This is...

(Interruptions)

This is Supplementary Appropriation – specific matter, Supplementary –; you have to limit yourself, not to politics, but to facts and figures. I will allow you facts and figures! No time for politics!

Mr Uteem: Facts and figures! When at that time, there was nothing against this project from all partners in government. However, shortly after the MSM took government, in fact, three months later in February 2015, the MSM government decided to terminate the lease. As a consequence, Patel Engineering brought arbitral proceedings against the State of Mauritius before the Permanent Court of Arbitration under the Mauritius-India Bilateral Investment Treaty.

Now, what is the Bilateral Investment Treaty? It is an agreement establishing the terms and conditions of private investment by the national of one country in state of another country (in another state). Bilateral Investment Treaty is meant to protect a national of a foreign state against expropriation of its investment by another state. The distinctive feature of a Bilateral Investment Treaty is that it allows an alternative dispute resolution mechanism whereby an investor whose rights have been violated could have recourse to international arbitration rather than sue the host state in its own court. This is what Patel Engineering did. It went in front of the Permanent Arbitration Tribunal.

In December last year, 2023, the Arbitral Tribunal published a partial final award in favour of the company for, and I quote –

“Wrongful termination and expropriation of the lease for an amount of Rs1.35 billion plus interest at LIBOR rate +2% until payment.”

So, today, Mr Speaker, Sir, taxpayers have to pay Rs1.893 billion, close to Rs1.9 billion because the government led by MSM terminated the lease and an Arbitral Tribunal has found out that the termination was illegal and wrongful.

So, can the hon. Minister table a copy of the legal opinion that the government in 2015 received before they decided to terminate this lease and tell us the reason for terminating this lease? Because at that time, Mr Speaker, Sir, three Ministers: hon. Lutchmeenaraidoo, hon. Soodhun, and hon. Bhadain held a Press conference and said that the lease was terminated because the land was required for development of portal areas.

We were going to make a port on this land. 10 years later, the land has still not been developed. No new port has been constructed. No new lease has been awarded. So, we need to know why the lease was terminated. Was it simply political revenge?

And it is not the first time, unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, that taxpayers have to pay because of an illegal decision of this Government to breach the terms of its contract. I am not going to extrapolate on the amount of 6 billion paid to Betamax or the 25 billion paid to BAI. This has to stop! The laws are here to be obeyed. Contracts are meant to be obeyed. Contracts are binding. A new government should not be allowed to rescind a contract entered by a former government on flimsy grounds, out of pure political fanaticism.

Now, if there are legal, valid reasons for terminating a contract, yes, please go ahead and do so but, do not terminate a contract which will result in taxpayers forking out billions of rupees, because the money is not coming from your pocket; it is coming from everybody's pocket. All taxpayers now have to pay 1.9 billion. And this is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, more than ever, there is a need to have a Fiscal Responsibility Act to prevent the recurrence of such reckless decision, which ends up costing billions of rupees to taxpayers. This Rs1.9 billion, am sure, the hon. Minister of Finance will agree, could have been better spent on giving allowances and implementing projects.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will quickly move on two points. First, the additional 450 million to be paid under CSG Income Allowance – I am a bit surprised that the reason advanced is that Government underestimated the number of beneficiaries. It is quite surprising because CSG is paid by Government. So, you are supposed to have a list of people who are going to pay this

allowance and you are supposed to know how much allowance you are going to pay unless this relates to new recruits.

Finally, with the limited time imparted, let me talk about MauBank. We are asked to provide Rs500 million in capital to MauBank Holdings Ltd to be injected into MauBank Ltd as equity. We have been told that the money has already been disbursed from what I understand. Now, the question is: why are we injecting money into MauBank? According to the abridged financial unaudited interim financial statement published by MauBank, as of 31 March 2024, the Bank had reported a post-tax profit of Rs709 million. So, that is a lot of money. They have a lot of money – Rs709 million. The stated capital is at Rs2.7 billion. And as the hon. Minister has himself stated, the capital adequacy ratio, before the capital injection was at 15%, which is higher than the statutory requirement of 12.5%. So, why are we injecting more public funds into that bank? Why is MauBank, for example, unable to finance its own expansion through loans or other means? Why does it need public funds to be injected to finance a commercial bank?

Some time back, this Government, in a former budget, announced that it was looking to dispose of certain strategic assets, including MauBank. Is that still on the cards? The State already owns a major stake in a commercial bank, State Bank of Mauritius. They already have the Development Bank of Mauritius. Does the State require another commercial bank? Shouldn't we be disposing of MauBank, instead of injecting more money into MauBank? And may I remind the hon. Members that MauBank is a result of a fusion between the Mauritius Post and Cooperative Bank and the National Commercial Bank, which took over the banking business of the Bramer Bank. And isn't it ironic, today, that Rs500 million of taxpayers' money is being injected into that former Bramer Bank when the Bank of Mauritius revoked the licence of that very same bank because the promoter failed to pay Rs350 million in 2015? Another case of revenge politics costing millions of rupees to the taxpayers!

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Gobin!

(11.56 a.m.)

The Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr M. Gobin): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I intend to address only Vote 3-1 Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning concerning provision required for the payment of compensation to Patel Engineering Ltd., Mr Speaker, Sir.

I have listened very carefully to the previous operator. Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, it pains me, today, this morning to hear *qu'aujourd'hui, le MMM a été réduit à défendre l'indéfendable.*

Mr Ameer Meea: *La pa politik la !*

Mr Speaker: Wait! Wait!

Mr Gobin: Yes, *défendre l'indéfendable.* I say it again.

Mr Uteem: *1.8 milliards indéfendable !*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Uteem!

Mr Speaker: This is rebutting!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Ah bon?*

Mr Speaker: *'Ah bon?'* You don't know? 10-15 years you are in the Opposition, you don't know what is rebutting!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members are reminded that whatever they say in a debate would be rebutted. So, keep quiet and listen! This is parliamentary democracy!

Hon. Minister!

Mr Gobin: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I say it again, *défendre l'indéfendable*, whether it comes to the arbitration of Patel or even the last comment concerning injecting money into the former Bramer Bank. The former Bramer Bank – I was not intending to comment on it but you were the ones saying it is a Ponzi. And now, today, you are saying that we are having... *Défendre l'indéfendable!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem, if you want to stay in the House, this is a second warning!

Mr Gobin: I owe it on behalf of Government that we need to explain to the people, and I will do it. This provision for the payment to Patel Engineering, Mr Speaker, Sir, arises out of the arbitration between Patel Engineering v The Republic of Mauritius. The legal dispute arose in 2015 and the matter was referred in terms of arbitration to an arbitral tribunal consisting of one presiding arbitrator and two arbitrators. The award was handed down on 23 December last year and of course, following legal advice we have received from our external lawyers, Government decided that it had no other legal recourse than to effect payment of the sum provided in the award. The question which arises, Mr Speaker, Sir, and this is what the people of Mauritius want to hear: why did we have this legal dispute?

Let me say very clearly, this matter arises out of a lease which was signed between the then Government, and it is the Government between 2005 and 2010. The MSM was not in the Government, let me say it. It is very important to say that. On 16 October 2006, Mr Speaker, Sir, the then Commission for the Democratisation of the Economy of the then Prime Minister's Office writes to Patel Engineering and say –

“Dear Mr P.,

We have been apprised of your interest as well as that of your company in investing and developing business in Mauritius. We further understand that the investment sectors would be specifically looking into the housing estate development [...] and infrastructure development.

We appreciate your interest in investment [...] and would be happy to meet you and your team in Mauritius to further discuss the possibilities raised. We would therefore recommend that you visit us in a near future.

This will certainly provide us with an opportunity to take the matter forward [...].”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling this letter. This is an invitation! Have we seen that? PMO is inviting an investor, ‘Please, visit us. Please visit us and invest.’ I say it again, October 2006. *Démocratisation de l’économie. C’est ça la démocratisation de l’économie?*

An. hon. Member: *Pa posib!*

Mr Gobin: I have not finished Mr Speaker, Sir. You are defending *l’indéfendable*. *C’est ça le MMM d’aujourd’hui ? Le 14 janvier 2008* – let me open a parenthesis, this land in those days was under the jurisdiction of the Mauritius Ports Authority. What is the arrangement then? Mauritius Ports Authority leased it to the Ministry of Housing; the Ministry of Housing subleased it to Mr R.P. in that company, Patel Engineering. Have you seen that? Leased to the Ministry of Housing and on the same day subleased to this so-called, I say so-called, because this investment was a bogus investment. January 2008, Chairman, Mauritius Ports Authority –

“Further to our correspondence, we wish to inform you that we are in the process of working the modus operandi for the implementation of Les Salines Waterfront Development Project.

We would be grateful if you could make arrangement at your end for a team to be present in Mauritius around the second week of February 2008 for a working session with a view to finalising modus operandi. ” Signed by Dr. M. Siddick Chady, Chairman!

We know what it means ‘come and meet us for modus operandi’! We know what it means!

Now, the investor indeed travels to Mauritius and let me say that he arrived in Mauritius on 24 October 2006. I open a parenthesis, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am talking out of the official records available in the files of government. I am not referring to any secret or privileged document. On 24 October 2006, the investors arrived – and listen to this very carefully – they met with the then Prime Minister personally with whom they discussed the possibility of

investment. In 2006! All the Members of the Opposition will agree with me, we all know in this House, even the population of this country, we all know. Even Ministers in the Labour Party government are not given any appointment with Prime Minister Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam. They keep waiting! They never get an appointment to meet their Prime Minister but this investor meets with the PM, *d'un claquement de doigt!*

And the investment is done. This is what is called *défendre l'indéfendable*. Let me say when do they sign? Further to the meeting with the PM, in October 2006, they conducted a site visit in Port Louis, they met the Chairman of MPA and they discussed there, I say it between 'their modus operandi.' Yes, I am tabling these letters.

They leased, Mr Speaker, Sir, 24.62 hectares in this prime location of port area. We all know that the port area is always prime land strategic importance. That Government then leased 24.62 hectares for a term of, mind you, 99 years! Contract heavily pitched in favour of the investor and not in favour of government, *alors que c'est un bien public de l'État*. The then MMM Opposition...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Minister, you want to stay in the House?

Mr Lesjongard: Sorry.

Mr Gobin: If we refer to Hansard, at the Sitting of Tuesday 10 of May 2011, the Leader of the Opposition, hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger asked a PNQ to the Minister of Housing and Land whether in regard to Les Salines Waterfront Development Project (Neotown Project), he will (a), (b), (c), etc. The then Minister of Housing, hon. Dr. Kasenally, let me quote Hansard for that Sitting, it starts at page 9 of Hansard for the Sitting of 10 May 2011. I will go straight to page 21 of Hansard for that Sitting of 10 May 2011, I quote –

“**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that Mr Patel has boasted that he got all this for a steal, *du pain du beurre* and being given the *cadeau*, one billion and two hundred million rupees and that, in fact, Mr Patel had made fools not only of Government, but the way that he has commented on Government and on Mauritius, being given all this, will the Minister advise Government to cancel that deal and go for open bidding...”

Then, there is “Interruptions, Interruptions, Order, Order, Order.” What is the reply of hon. Dr. Kasenally, Mr Speaker, Sir? I quote at page 22 of Hansard –

“**Dr. Kasenally:** Yes, I am answering the question. There is no question of cancelling the project. We are determined because it is a mega project, maybe we will review certain things ...

(Interruptions)

...but there is going to be no retreat, no surrender on this project.”

This is Hansard! Today, the MMM is coming here *pour défendre l'indéfendable?*

In one word, what is this project? *C'est un « méga scandale »*, Mr Speaker, Sir ! I look at l'Express of 06 April 2011 : « Neotown : un «méga scandale» pour un méga projet à Les Salines, dans la région de Caudan. »

I read from this article, I quote one paragraph –

« Tandis que les détails du bail étaient inconnus du public mauricien, c'est par le biais du procès-verbal d'une vidéoconférence réunissant des actionnaires de Patel Engineering Ltd que le voile est levé sur les concessions faites par l'État mauricien. Le CEO de la compagnie, Rupen Patel, résume le deal en une phrase éloquente : *«The land is available as a steal. »*

Rupen Patel a avancé des arguments convaincants pour prouver à ses actionnaires qu'il a réussi un joli coup. *« Le terrain est estimé à Rs 15 milliards, mais nous ne paierons qu'un loyer annuel de Rs 15 millions, soit 0,1% de la valeur du terrain ».*

I am also tabling this article!

There is another one, Paul Bérenger –

« Neotown: Un «véritable cadeau» à Patel Engineering, selon Paul Bérenger. » L'Express du 5 mai 2011.

I also table this.

I table another one, l'Express de 14 mai. Le ministre du Logement et des terres avait induit en erreur...

(Interruptions)

Cela fait mal ? Bien sûr que cela va faire mal, parce que vous êtes en train de défendre l'indéfendable !

Mr Ameer Meea: *Ki fer mal?*

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

What is happening ?

Mr Gobin: L'Express du 14 mai 2011 !

An hon. Member: menteur!

Mr Speaker: What is happening? Continue!

Mr Hurreeram: ...*kasiet dan...*

Mr Gobin: *Yes!* L'Express du 14 mai 2011, le ministre du Logement et des terres aurait induit le public en erreur alors qu'il répondait à la *Private Notice Question* sur l'octroi des 58 arpents de terre à Patel Engineering selon le Leader de l'opposition.

All this has happened and you want us to continue with a contract like this in 2015? You are now the president of *la commission économique du MMM*, if ever that still exists, but then, *c'est mon bon ami – je le dis haut et fort – c'est mon bon ami Vishnu Lutchmeenaraidoo qui était le président de la commission économique du MMM et tu étais son junior mon cher ami ! Excusez-moi de vous avoir tutoyé, honorable Uteem.*

Donc, you know very well what was going on then. Today, you have a new leader Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, *ein?* And you come here you want us to believe you? No!

(Interruptions)

Mr Hurreeram: *Laont! Laont!*

Mr Gobin: No! No! No! Of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, it pains us all to pay compensation in such a case. I have very, very strong reservations. I am standing more than 20 years at the Bar and I am saying I have very, very strong reservations against this arbitration. However, it is neither the time nor the forum for me to give my opinion about those reservations. I prefer to give it, perhaps in an arbitration forum or in an arbitration publication, but I will surely share my opinion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, we have had to pay because of this arbitral award. It is the first international arbitration award that we have lost. I know you will refer to Betamax; it is not an international arbitration under IPPA. It was a domestic company against Government of Mauritius. This is the only international arbitration we have lost.

Unfortunately, either we pay or we don't pay. If we don't pay, you know what will be the consequences on the rating of Mauritius as an investment destination! This is why we have to pay! We have to pay as we are cleaning the mess created by the then government. It pains me today ! *On est le 11 juin 2024 ; le 11 juin 1982, ce parti-là, le MMM avait emmené les 60 zéros de ce pays et aujourd'hui, vous êtes réduits à défendre l'indéfendable, à défendre Navinchandra Ramgoolam !*

I am done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

An hon. Member: *Laonte! Laonte!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: Voleur!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Now, I call MP Dr. Aumeer!

(12.10 p.m.)

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have listened to the previous orator. I have two simple questions. If so many wrongdoings were felt, why did the MSM make an alliance with the Labour party in 2010 after the lease...

Mr Ameer Meea: Rebut!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No! Again, hon. Dr. Aumeer, you have the right to rebut but don't indulge in politics. I listened carefully to hon. Gobin rebutting; no involvement in politics.

Dr. Aumeer: ... and held proudly our emblematic flag!

Now the simple question is: if the scandals were so deeply rooted with so much tantamount evidences that you just brought to the House, why on earth, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, has sanctioned you to pay the 1.8 billion dollars? Why?

(Interruptions)

This is a simple question and I am sure the people of this country will judge you by what you have discussed with it.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Aumeer: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the beginning of this mandate, we have been voting year after year excess expenditures and over the last five years, as of today, we have been asked to vote Rs78 billion. This is what we have voted. We do not have to be an expert in finance or in financial matters. This boils down to the result of poor planning and budgeting.

I come directly to the estimates of supplementary expenditure with regard to the Ministry of Health, where an extra Rs1.2 billion is being requested, out of which had already been budgeted of Rs15.7 billion. The payment of extra duty allowance will now only be possible if and when the extra Rs250 m. being requested today will be voted out of the Rs1.2 billion requested.

How come the finance of the Ministry of Health is in the red and has put so many workers under stress and financial constraints, and not able to honour the engagement despite having had a hefty, very generous amount from the Ministry of Finance of Rs15.7 billion, last year? Such delay should never have occurred unless funds were either mismanaged or shifted to other projects. And, I hope that those who are working overtime today, working during weekends and doing extra duty will not have to wait another for six to eight months before there is a wake-up call to pay for extra funds.

Mr Speaker, Sir, information that has been gathered so far says that suppliers and service providers of the Ministry of Health are queuing to have their payments which long overdue. And I wonder whether the extra Rs1.2 billion requested today will partly be used to cater for these payments. COVID-19 is well behind us and understandably during the pandemic, it was acceptable for extra payments. I do take note that the Ministry of Health has gone the extra mile to try to recover the Rs480 m. of the so-called Pack & Blister, and hopefully, if that came back to the coffers, we would not have been asked to vote for another Rs1.2 billion – Rs473 m.

And now there are Rs300 m. being requested for medicine, drugs and vaccines. Let me talk about vaccines – which vaccines? Details of which vaccines are we talking about today? Are they related to vaccines linked to COVID-19, where they were bought for hefty amounts for the third dose and the uptake was poor? A detail of the vaccines and how much they cost; how much is been left over, and how many are expiring would have been very interesting to know.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since you told me to stick to the expenditure and not to do politics, I will abide.

Mr Speaker: This is as per Standing Orders.

Dr. Aumeer: I fail to understand, why the Ministry of Health and Wellness with regard to dengue fever, needs that much money when dengue fever is well known to be present in Mauritius. Had there been any preparedness plan during pre-budgeting times last year to ensure that they have sufficient amount of money either for logistics, manpower, treatment and laboratory tests? Today, why do we need extra money? According to the Minister of Health and Wellness himself, around 600,000 cases of dengue have been registered since 11 December 2023 out of which 6000 cases have been officially announced – attest too many. Have we, because we

did not have that preparedness plan and the finance available that fumigation exercises were not done in accordance with established protocol? Cleaning campaigns were late to start. Mosquito repellents were not distributed when they should have been during the early phase and there was no stock available as mentioned by your own officer on Top FM a couple of months ago.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we just hope that we do not enter the same scenario and the vicious circle with leptospirosis, where we know, if we look at the Audit Port of CSD where rats are having a good time there and therefore, we should make sure that appropriate steps, and once again, I will use the word 'preparedness' is being taken care of. I sincerely wish that the hon. Minister can ensure that public hospitals do not become a source of infection for patients, especially through medicines provided there.

The last part of my intervention is with regard to the supply of medicines. Now we are going to look for extra money in this Supplementary Appropriation Bill, we have to take note that it has been highly reported and well documented in the Audit Report of the shortage of medicines, of the expired medicines worth Rs88 million. 213 million expired pharmaceutical and medical items over the last five years, expired drugs. We have to note that this has become necessary because of the failure of the electronic management system to come up with an accurate stock of medication and expired drugs. And whoever looks after this unit bears the full responsibility for such wastage of public funds. And, today, we have to fork out another Rs300 m. to make do with medicines and supply of medicines.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I can go on but I limit myself to say that all the problems we are seeing today is the result of inappropriate planning and mismanagement. And *c'est le mal qui affecte le gouvernement en entier*. It's not only poor management as per what we looked in the Audit Report where extra funds have been badly used, but we also necessitate extra funding because of the zeal of political vendetta by this Government.

I make myself clear, we have lost Rs21 billion when it comes to the dismantling of BAI, Rs6 billion to Betamax and Rs2 billion to Patel Engineering. This Government has failed miserably in managing public funds and today, has the indecency to ask us to vote for such a considerable supplementary budget totaling Rs6,700 million.

Hopefully, this is the last time we have to vote for this supplementary expenditure. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I now call the hon. Minister Jagutpal!

(12.19 p.m.)

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to provide explanations and clarifications pertaining to the extra budget for this session.

Mr Speaker, Sir, This intervention is crucial, especially when it comes to our commitment to improve the healthcare. Healthcare sector, as we all know, has been in particular facing unprecedented challenges for the last few years. It is not only COVID, but also the post-pandemic – after COVID and the war in Ukraine; we know what is happening with the prices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, unlike what stated why we have to pay – we have to pay because *ce gouvernement a comme priorité le bien-être et la sécurité de la population. Ce gouvernement est déterminé à faire tous les efforts nécessaires pour la santé de la population.* That's why we need extra money because we care for the population and the population is our priority

Mr Speaker, Sir, under the first Item, that is, *Hospital and Specialised Services*, a provision of Rs1,160,000,000 was made for the current financial year. However, this budget has been exceeded and the Ministry will need an additional provision of Rs250 million and for that it is to pay allowances equivalent to twice the daily rate for work performed on Sundays for some 8,683 officers in post in the Ministry of Health. And, it is this Government, under the Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth who announced this historical measure on 01 January 2024.

This government *reconnait les compétences et c'est une juste récompense. Ils se sacrifient – les employés, pour fournir un service de qualité et sauver des vies, that's why we really need this amount of amount and that they do work 24 sur 24 and 7 days out of 7. Ces travailleurs sont présents sur leur lieu de travail que ce soit les dimanches, les jours de congés publics pendant les cyclones, les pluies torrentielles.* So that's why we need to pay them for them to deliver their service. When everybody is at home also when Dr. Aumeer is at home, we keep on delivering the services.

New healthcare facilities have come up, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I will just name a few of them –

- National Cancer Centre;
- 4 Mediclinics at Coromandel, Stanley, Quartier Militaire, Bel Air;
- Area Health Centre at Petite Rivière;
- Community Health Centres at Baie du Tombeau, Phoenix, Pointe aux Sables, Grand Baie, Trou d'eau Douce;
- 2 Autism Centres, one already operational at Triolet, the other two are at Beau Bassin and Bois Chéri.

So, all these facilities necessitate more health personnel and an increase in personnel also means an increase in the allowance. So, that's why we need to pay them. Mr Speaker, Sir, it means finance is not in the wreck as stated by hon. Dr Aumeer.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another item is provision of one billion and two-hundred and eighty five million rupees made under Item *Medicine, Drugs and Vaccines* in the last financial year. However, we need another provision of Rs300 million that is required. So, just to give some factual data –

- a) Attendance in the Public Health Service has reached the pre-pandemic level with 8.9 million visits in 2023.
- b) In 2023, we had 1.1 million visits to Accident and Emergency.
- c) 1 million visits at Outpatient Departments, that is, patients coming on appointment.
- d) 2 million visits at Primary Healthcare Centres. So it means that there is a public confidence in the health sector in Mauritius and that is why we are having so many patients.
- e) With that number of people coming to hospitals, more than 52,000 surgeries are being performed in our hospital which already means that more than 75% of the population is attending the public health services.

Let me congratulate all of the healthcare staff working for the population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, also, I have to add on and it is not a question of mismanagement of funds or giving overtime just for any other thing. We also introduced new type of drugs for diabetes, for treatment of psychiatric disorders, treatment of cardiac diseases, blood disorders and what hon. Dr. Aumeer was saying while for this vaccine, this is a vaccine that we purchase that is the Human Papilloma Virus vaccine and already, I believe more than 20,000 adolescents have already been inoculated with these vaccines. I have been replying to so many PQs on this issue and that is why we need this money to pay for all the costs that have been incurred.

Our small size market trade cost is also the challenges we face in price. That is why we need more fund is required. Let me give you the costing of some drugs –

- One injection called Dexamethasone intravitreal implant costing Rs20,000 per unit .
- Cardiac drugs Emicizumab costing Rs104,000 per unit.
- Basiliximab costing Rs58,000 per unit.

You can imagine the cost of drugs that will be required. There has always been the opinion that we are mismanaging funds. Mr Speaker, Sir, in two minutes, I will explain how this is happening because they kept on talking about the expiry of drugs, about surpluses of drugs but this is not the case.

First, there is a Committee of Needs. It is about the users, the quantity of drugs required and the drugs that are required. Through this, once you know the quantity, it is the approval given by the Permanent Secretary of the Procurement Section and that gets the approval of the SCE and after that, there is the Departmental Bid Committee.

It is good to know because being always in Opposition, they will not know about this. That Committee will decide the specification and they are ones who look after all the procurement issues. After that, it goes to the procurement tenders and again, back to the Bid Evaluation Committee. So, there are so many procedures. I hope the public officers are listening to me and how they go on doing the procedures and it may happen that there is an overestimate or an underestimate. Yes, we agree about overestimate and underestimate because this service has to run 24/7 and it is impossible to know the exact amount of drugs. What not has been said about Pack & Blister? Later on, during my speech on Thursday, I will give a good reply for the

Pack & Blister and the 480 million. I have been saying it repeatedly but I will clear that at a later stage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the other Item that is in 2024, *the cost of Medical Disposables and Specialised and Laboratory Agents*, the costing for all the different tests that we have amounts to 887 million and that was significantly higher during the last two years as it amounted to 731 million and so, an additional provision of 450 million is required to settle arrears. The process of payment does not mean that in one year, all payment has been done. There is always a carrying forward happening because at the time, the Procurement section receives the drugs or the consumables; it does spill over the next budget. That is why it kept on having some difference between what is being voted and why additional budget for these tests are needed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the dengue fever, there is always a preparedness plan. In terms of budget, you can never be prepared for an epidemic. There is a plan; even for any epidemic, you can have a plan but the budget required will take time. That is why we need to pay for that. It is not a question of not having preparedness. We do have preparedness, we do have the facilities, the meetings being chaired regularly but obviously, when it comes to the payment, we need the approval of this House to pay for the different activities being involved in dengue fever.

So, it is not a question of being prepared or not. To make it clear again, fighting dengue is not only for the Ministry of Health. Fighting dengue is for the whole nation because dengue is spread by mosquitoes and you cannot eliminate all mosquitoes without each and every one's input. So, this is what I want to say, Mr Speaker, Sir. Medicines have always been available. There will always be a percentage of drugs that will expire because no one can predict what is going to be the exact amount of drugs that will be required in a financial year. There will always be 3-5% expired drugs or there would be a shortage or a surplus of drugs. This is a normal recurrence which is internationally accepted. It is happening in all countries and we will try to be efficient in our spending on drugs.

Thank you. Mr Speaker Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine has withdrawn! So, I call hon. Dr. Ramdhany!

(12.30 p.m.)

The Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms (Dr. A. Ramdhany): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am privileged and honoured to be given this opportunity to participate in this debate and provide my humble contribution on the Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) Bill which is being presented by the hon. Dr. Renganaden Padayachy, Ministry of Finance, Economic planning and Development.

The aim of the Bill, as its appellative implies, is to provide for the supplementary expenditure in respect of some Ministries and Departments both recurrent and capital to cater for services of Government for the Financial Year 2023-2024 in excess of the expenditure appropriated by the Appropriation Bill 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for many the presentation of this Bill may seem to be a routine exercise to cater for unforeseen expenditure that was not accounted for in the Budget 2023-2024. However, this Bill has its own significance and importance, it forms of the financial management system of the Government and is provided is the Financial Management Manual of the Ministry of Finance, Economic planning and Development. However, it is my first intervention regarding the Estimate of Supplementary Expenditure. It has to be highlighted the amount of some Rs6.7 billion concerns three main Ministries, namely –

- i) Prime Minister Office;
- ii) Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development and;
- iii) Ministry of Health and Wellness.

I have noted that this sum has been used to allow the Ministry of Health to pay overtime for officers and warrants to public officers, particularly those working on shift and roster. This is in line with the announcement made by the hon. Prime Minister in his address to the nation on the occasion of the New Year 2024 for double pay to those on duty on Sundays. However, it pains me to say that the Labour Party, and hon. Dr. Aumeer as his leader, always criticise the public service and the public officers.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to intervene on two specific aspects. I will wear two hats today, firstly, as the Minister of Public Service and secondly, as a medical practitioner. First, I would wish to express how gratifying it was to contribute to the implementation as the Minister

of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms of this historic and life changing measure following its announcement by the hon. Prime Minister. I seize this opportunity to express my gratitude on behalf of all public officers, for the consideration and commitment hon. Prime Minister has for the public service and of our public officers who provide selfless and round-the-clock citizen-centric services to the population.

Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are many officers who are called upon to work, as per exigencies of services, in a roaster or shift system that generally spans from Monday to Sunday, including on public holidays. When the hon. Prime Minister announced that public sector employees working in the essentials services on the shift system would receive the double pay on Sunday, it was met with cheers and approval and gratitude from the concerned workers, who saw it as a well-deserved recognition of their efforts and sacrifices.

This decision was also welcomed as it had addressed a long-standing anomaly that those officers were receiving extra pay when on duty during public holidays, but not on Sundays, although Sunday is defined as a Public Holiday in the Public Holiday (Amendment) Act 2015. It was, therefore, fair and reasonable that working on these days be formally recognised. These moments should be reckoned as disrupting the work-life balance of officers, who over and above working in a challenging environment, are also called upon to be on duty when many of us are having quality time with our families and friends.

However, implementing such a measure in the public service needed proper planning and establishing clear guidelines inasmuch as different sectors have different roster patterns and different conditions attached thereto.

I am extremely proud that my Ministry spearheaded the modus operandi of this measure, met with different stakeholders and agreed on the implementation roadmap. I am, today, pleased to inform that the arrangements have already been made for officers concerned to be paid their dues by the end of this month. I am elated that the bold decision taken by the Government under the able leadership of the hon. Prime Minister has been implemented to satisfaction of one and all, including Trade Union representatives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like now to comment on this Bill as a medical practitioner. I still vividly remember the demanding and yet rewarding years of my preregistration in a public

hospital. There, I witnessed firsthand the unwavering commitment of public sector medical practitioners to serving everyone despite working in challenging situation and environment. Their dedication and professionalism regardless of their individual background is a cornerstone of our healthcare system. In addition to competitive salaries that attracts and retain top talents, recognising the critical need for a doctor to be available at all times demonstrates this Government's commitment to provide them with conditions of service that they truly deserve.

This investment will strengthen public healthcare, a critical pillar of a healthy and productive society. It's not just fair compensation; it's an investment in the future of our healthcare system, consolidating our welfare state. Our people deserve to benefit from a world-class health system and our medical practitioners together with a team of medical and non-medical workers have still to contribute towards uplifting of our health condition islandwise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I fully support the bill and commend the Prime Minister for this historic measure that will be remembered for generations to come. I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Now, I will call the hon. Minister!

(12.37 p.m.)

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, avant toute chose, permettez-moi tout d'abord de remercier les honorables parlementaires qui sont intervenus aujourd'hui à l'occasion des débats sur ce projet de loi. Je tiens tout particulièrement à saluer la prise de parole mes collègues ministres pour leurs interventions remarquées. Ils ont fourni de pertinents détails sur les sommes que nous affectons aujourd'hui et je les en remercie.

A cet égard, il est évident que ces crédits supplémentaires sont votés et utilisés à bon escient. Dans mon propos, je m'attacherai à compléter les informations fournies par les membres siégeant de ce côté de la Chambre et à réfuter les contre-vérités que certains autres membres ont tenté d'avancer.

M. le président, je commencerai par le paiement de la compensation salariale de 2024. En tant que gouvernement à l'écoute de la population, de ses attentes et de ses aspirations, nous avons accordé la compensation salariale la plus élevée de tous les temps.

En effet, en 2023, nous avons octroyé une compensation salariale mensuelle de 1 000 roupies à tous les employés. Et cela alors que le taux d'inflation amorçait déjà sa baisse. Cette année, nous sommes allés plus loin. En adéquation avec la philosophie humaniste de notre honorable Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, nous avons accordé une compensation salariale encore plus élevée, allant de 1 500 à 2 000 roupies, à compter de janvier 2024.

Et ce, alors que le taux d'inflation en 2024 continuera de baisser pour se rapprocher progressivement de la fourchette visée. Depuis hier, j'ai entendu à de nombreuses reprises les membres de l'opposition questionner l'action de ce gouvernement en faveur du pouvoir d'achat des Mauriciens. M. le président, soyons clairs et précis dans nos propos. Permettez-moi ainsi de leur rappeler avec la plus grande fermeté et fierté que c'est bien ce gouvernement qui a introduit le salaire minimum et l'a progressivement rehaussé.

En outre, dois-je également leur faire souvenir que ce gouvernement a également mis en place d'importants soutiens financiers à destination des foyers les plus modestes et de la classe moyenne, à l'instar de la *CSG Income Allowance*. A partir de juillet 2023, nous avons notamment augmenté la *CSG Income Allowance* de 1 000 à 2 000 roupies pour ceux qui gagnent jusqu'à 25 000 roupies par mois. Au total, nous avons porté le revenu minimum garanti à 18 500 roupies à partir de janvier 2024.

Cela représente une augmentation de plus de 50 % du revenu minimum garanti, qui passe de 12 075 roupies versées avant juin 2023 à 18 500 roupies. Ce faisant, nous avons considérablement amélioré le pouvoir d'achat et le niveau de vie de nos travailleurs. Les chiffres ne trompent pas. D'après *Statistics Mauritius*, le revenu mensuel moyen des ménages mauriciens a augmenté de 51,1% entre 2017 et 2023 pour atteindre 55 600 roupies.

La proportion de ménages gagnant moins de 25 000 roupies par mois a elle diminué de 43% en 2017 à 19,6% en 2023. C'est une augmentation du niveau de vie sans précédent. Et ce nivellement vers le haut est allé de pair avec une croissance robuste de 7% et d'un taux de chômage en baisse continue à 6,1% l'an dernier. Par nos engagements et nos prises de décisions, nous élargissons le champ des possibles pour tous les Mauriciens.

Nous faisons en sorte que les besoins de base, pour se nourrir, se loger, se soigner et s'éduquer, soient assurés et que de nouvelles aspirations se transforment en une réalité.

« La justice sociale, c'est cette revendication d'égalité qui constitue la racine de la conscience sociale et du sentiment du devoir. »

Ces mots, je les emprunte à Sigmund Freud et les revendique avec force et conviction.

M. le président, j'en viens maintenant à la *MRA*. Au cours des dernières années, il est indéniable que la *MRA* a été en première ligne pour la mise en œuvre de différentes mesures du Gouvernement. Elle a joué un rôle déterminant pendant la pandémie dans la mise en œuvre du *Wage Assistance Scheme* et du *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme*. Le personnel de la *MRA* a été d'un soutien remarquable.

Je saisis cette occasion pour saluer le travail acharné et l'engagement sans faille des officiers des institutions publiques mauriciennes pendant cette période troublée. Ils ont été remarquables, nous sommes fiers d'eux.

M. le président, en sus des soutiens au paiement des salaires pendant la pandémie, la *MRA* a également mis en œuvre divers régimes d'aide financière dans des délais stricts, tels que –

- Le paiement de l'allocation *CSG Income Allowance* ;
- Le paiement de l'allocation *CSG Child Allowance* ;
- La collecte des contributions *CSG* ;
- La mise en œuvre du *Housing Loan Relief Scheme* ;
- Le versement de l'allocation *Independence Allowance* aux jeunes éligibles qui ont atteint l'âge de 18 ans le 1^{er} janvier 2023 ou après cette date ;
- Le versement aux boulangeries d'une subvention sur les pains programmés ;
- La mise en œuvre du programme de la Prime à l'emploi ;

- Le versement d'une aide financière de 5 roupies par litre de diesel à certaines catégories d'entreprises ;
- Le versement d'une aide financière pour le paiement du salaire minimum ;
- Le versement de la compensation salariale par les PME et les *Export Oriented Enterprise* ; ou encore
- Le paiement du droit d'accise négatif sur les véhicules électriques.

Plus encore, la *MRA* a intensifié ses efforts pour le recouvrement des arriérés de recettes.

Au cours de l'exercice 2022-2023, le recouvrement des arriérés a augmenté de 35 % pour atteindre 3,5 milliards de roupies. Pour l'exercice 2023-2024, le recouvrement des arriérés devrait s'élever à environ 4,5 milliards de roupies, soit une augmentation de 1 milliard de roupies. À l'avenir, les officiers de la *MRA* devront acquérir de nouvelles compétences et s'adapter à un nouvel environnement numérique. Et cela car la *MRA* digitalise ses procédures au bénéfice des contribuables et du commerce, ainsi que pour la protection des frontières. Il est essentiel de reconnaître le travail et l'expertise des officiers de la *MRA* à leur juste valeur. La révision des salaires est donc pleinement justifiée et je m'offusque de sa remise en question.

Il en va de même pour les crédits à voter au titre de la santé. Comme l'a dit mon collègue ministre l'honorable Dr. Kailesh Jagutpal, il a tout à fait raison que c'est mérité pour nos professionnels de santé, qui sauvent des vies et sont mobilisables 24h sur 24 et 7 jours sur 7, soient rémunérés à la hauteur de leur engagement. Soyons reconnaissants.

M. le président, je vais maintenant apporter quelques précisions au sujet de la MauBank Ltd. Comme je l'ai indiqué dans mon discours de seconde lecture, les résultats financiers de cette banque commerciale se sont considérablement améliorés. L'injection de capital supplémentaire de 500 millions de roupies permettra à la banque d'étendre ses activités et d'accroître encore plus sa rentabilité. En fait, la banque met déjà en œuvre le *Contractor Payment Scheme* qui permet à ces derniers d'obtenir des facilités financières à l'avance pour la construction de 8 000 unités de logement social. En outre, MauBank Ltd envisage actuellement de concevoir un système de prêt pour les bénéficiaires des unités de logement social. Il est clair que le champ d'activité de cette

banque s'élargit et que l'injection de capital sera cruciale pour la soutenir dans les objectifs de développement.

M. le président, le dernier point que je souhaiterai aborder est celui qui concerne le FMI. Notre participation à l'accord commercial volontaire du FMI, le *VTA* en anglais, témoigne de la confiance que la communauté internationale accorde à notre économie et à notre secteur financier. Seul un groupe restreint de pays participe actuellement à cet accord et Maurice est le premier pays d'Afrique à en faire partie, et cela à la demande du FMI. Je tiens également à souligner qu'au cours de l'exercice 2023-2024, nous avons contribué à hauteur de 1 million de DTS, ou *SDR* en anglais, au *Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust* du FMI. Une nouvelle fois, Maurice a pris part à cette initiative sur l'invitation du FMI. Fort de cette reconnaissance de la part des instances de Bretton Woods, au cours de l'exercice 2024-2025, nous investirons au total 12 millions de DTS dans le nouvellement créé *Resilience and Sustainability Trust* du FMI.

Ces investissements permettront aux deux fonds d'accompagner efficacement les pays à améliorer leur résilience macroéconomique face aux chocs externes et au changement climatique. Nous serons le premier pays africain, aux côtés des grandes économies du monde telles que la France, le Japon et l'Allemagne, à contribuer au *Resilience and Sustainability Trust*. Lors des récentes réunions du printemps du FMI en avril dernier, Mme Georgieva, Directrice générale du FMI, a, dans son *Press Statement* du *IMFC*, félicité publiquement Maurice pour son investissement dans le *Resilience and Sustainability Trust*.

Sur ces mots, M. le président, je vous remercie de votre attention et recommande le projet de loi à l'Assemblée.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ESTIMATES OF SUPPLEMENTARY EXPENDITURE (2023-2024) OF 2024

&

THE SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION (2023-2024) BILL**(No. III of 2024)****The Chairperson:** Please be seated!

(12.48 p.m.)

Vote 2-6 Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity (Rs277,000,000) was, on question put, agreed to.

(12.49 p.m.)

Vote 3-1 Housing and Land Use Planning was called.

Mr Uteem: Hon. Minister, may I know, out of this Rs1.8 billion, what is the amount that has been paid to the lawyers and also the name of the lawyers who represented the State of Mauritius in those proceedings?

Mr Gobin: Mr Chairperson, with your permission, I will reply to this question. Mauritius had retained the law firm Foley Hoag LLP based in Washington DC. That was for the arbitration. After the arbitration, we have retained UK lawyers as well as Foley themselves to obtain opinions as to the courses of action opened to the Government. Insofar as fees payable, I am not in a position to reply at this stage, Mr Chairperson, I also wish to add that we are still awaiting the final order as to the costs. This award is the partial award. There will be a final one as there are some leftovers if I may say so. Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

Mr Ameer Meea: Can I ask the hon. Minister, since he mentioned that this is a partial award, does this sum include any interest that has been approved?

Mr Gobin: This has already been fully canvassed in this House, Mr Chairperson.

Mr Ameer Meea: No!

Mr Gobin: This is my reply!

Mr Ameer Meea: We are asked to vote Rs1.8 m. Why do you say that this has already been canvassed?

The Chairperson: No! You refer to the Chairperson!

Mr Ameer Meea: He is refusing to give the figures!

The Chairperson: Please, please! Refer to the Speaker! No cross talking! You don't have that right! In a debate, in the House, you refer through the Speaker. Anything? Any complaint? What is it that you want to raise?

Mr Ameer Meea: We are asked to vote Rs1.8 billion of taxpayers' money. I asked the hon. Minister, very clearly, in simple terms, whether this – since he mentioned that it is a partial amount that is being voted to then be paid later – amount includes any interest that will be payable to Patel Engineering.

Mr Gobin: I reiterate, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is a specific question which was put in the House by way of a PQ to which I have already provided an answer.

The Chairperson: So, what do you want more than that? Storm in a tea cup! Any other question?

Mr Ameer Meea: *Kassiet! Laverite pou sorti pa gagn traka!*

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. May I ask the hon. Minister of Health, whether the allowance that is going to be paid besides nursing...

The Chairperson: Don't rush! Don't rush! Be patient! Now, I put the question.

Vote 3-1 Housing and Land Use Planning (Rs1,893,000,000) was, on question put, agreed to.

(12.53 p.m.)

Vote 7-1 Finance, Economic Planning and Development was called.

Vote 7-1 Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Rs600,000,000) was, on question put, agreed to.

(12.53 p.m.)

Vote 18-1 Ministry of Health and Wellness was called.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. I would just like to have some clarifications from the Minister of Health with regard to allowances, whether, besides nursing, medical and paramedical staff will also be included for having done over time?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Chairperson. In fact, this sum is required for some 8,683 officers. There is a long list, including the nursing officers, drivers, records, laboratory staff, everybody. It is a long list and all the officers are included for this sum of money.

The Chairperson: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Under Item 22140001 – *Medicine, Drugs and Vaccines*, may I know from the hon. Minister, the name of the successful bidders, the amount paid to them and the procurement method used to allocate the contract to those bidders?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Chairperson. So, under this item, in all, there are some 34 items. I got all the details here. I will probably table it. You can have a look at the details.

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Under Item 22140001 and also 22140005, the details that we were given is for the purchase of medicine, drugs, vaccines and also, medical disposables and minor equipment. But in the details, mentioned is also being made 'payment of arrears' and 'settlement of arrears'. May we have a breakdown of the amount that has been paid for medicine and the settlement of arrear and what was it related for?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Chairperson, I have all the details. It is a compiled list. I am going to table all of them.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. May I ask the hon. Minister with regard to Laboratory Apparatuses and Supplies, whether the provision of reagent will be only for reagents in the laboratory or will that include rapid testing as well?

Dr. Jagutpal: It includes the rapid testing as well. In fact, all the details are in these papers which I am going to table.

Vote 18-1 Ministry of Health and Wellness (Rs1,200,000,000) was, on question put, agreed to.

(12.57 p.m.)

Vote 24-1 Centrally Manage Initiatives of Government was called.

Mr Uteem: Under the CSG Income Allowance, may I know from the hon. Minister, the number of expected beneficiaries and whether it also concerns parastatal bodies or just the civil servants?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, cela concerne environ 343 000 individus, dont 209 000 qui reçoivent une allocation mensuelle de R 2000 et 134 000 qui reçoivent une allocation de R 1000 mensuelle. Donc, en plus, il y a eu le paiement double au mois de décembre. Cela concerne aussi les *parastatal* et les *self-employed*.

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 32155059 – *MauBank Holdings Ltd*, can I ask the hon. Minister, including the Rs500 million that we are being asked to vote now, what is the total amount of money that has been injected by Government in this bank? And if he has the figures, what is also the rate of return so far?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, l'investissement total dans MauBank a été de 4,1 milliards de roupies. 1,6 milliard à partir de 2016. Je n'ai pas les informations concernant les *return*, mais comme je l'ai dit tout à l'heure, c'était une banque, comme vous le savez, qui était en mauvaise posture. C'était la reconstitution d'une banque à partir de trois banques qui étaient en mauvaise posture et qu'on a injecté des fonds pour la remettre à niveau. En 2019, je crois l'avoir dit dans le discours que cette banque avait toujours des pertes d'une part assez élevée de *non-performing loans*.

Actuellement, cette banque est en train de retrouver le chemin d'une profitabilité et d'une gestion saine et, nous, nous avons injecté encore du capital dans cette banque de par le développement qu'on veut pour cette banque, en particulier, cela relate avec la construction des maisons sociales. Nous sommes en train de privilégier cette banque pour accorder des prêts à tous les bénéficiaires qui vont avoir accès aux 8 000 logements. C'est la raison principale de cette injection dans cette banque.

J'ajouterai, par rapport au *return*, je reviendrai par la suite et je déposerai à la Chambre les montants concernant les retours sur investissement. Merci.

Vote 24-1 Centrally Manage Initiatives of Government (Rs2,730,000,000) was, on question put, agreed to.

The Estimates of Supplementary Expenditure (2023-2024) of 2024 and the Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) Bill (No. III of 2024) were considered and agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with Mr Speaker in the Chair, Mr Speaker reported according.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) Bill (No. III of 2024) was read a third time and passed.

Mr Speaker: Now, I suspend the Sitting for one hour.

At 1.04 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.08 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2024-2025) BILL

(No. IV of 2024)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill (No. IV of 2024).

Question again proposed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Léopold!

(2.07 p.m.)

Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I must thank the people of Rodrigues once again for the immense privilege given to me, to be present in this august Assembly, to scrutinise and vote this Budget 2024-2025 and I have to thank them again for giving me the chance for the 10th time to act on their behalf, and to make sure that their needs are met, and that the economic growth is sustained to the present and future generation.

With our decentralised form of government, which most of us are aware now, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act received the assent of the President of the Republic of Mauritius on 20 November 2001, presented and voted in the National Assembly by the led coalition Government MSM/MMM by the two Leaders, Late Sir Anerood Jugnauth and hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly was predominantly led by the then Commissioner Louis Serge Clair and history will recall that he was the main actor in convincing the central government for Rodrigues to have a decentralised and devolved sub-national government.

The Rodrigues Regional Act allows the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to adopt its annual budget estimates upon consultation with the Ministry of Finance, followed by approval by the Cabinet of Ministers and then incorporated in the national estimates, under the vote item 2-6: Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity under the subtitle of Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the reason for the OPR Party to convince the national government, to further democratise their system of governance, that is, from national governance to decentralised governance is enormous.

While the OPR Party was in office, during its tenure it was very clear that we had demonstrated to the central government that the two Leaders of the MSM/MMM coalition government, were right in their judgment, by the way we were governing under the leadership of Serge Clair.

Because we, the OPR Party have demonstrated that with the decentralised form of government – this decentralised form of government fosters political stability and economic development.

Rodrigues has made considerable progress ever since the accession of autonomy under the leadership of the non-alliance OPR party. The OPR Party is the only political party within the Republic of Mauritius, which had never partnered with any political party to win elections.

If you look at the present configuration of Rodrigues Regional Assembly, you will see a fragmented government and a unified OPR Opposition side which belongs to only one political party – OPR Party. The OPR party is a whole rupee, not 5 *sous*. At the national level, the OPR Party usually sits at the government's side after formation of government. We do not influence the formation of national government. OPR Party is the most independent party in the Republic of Mauritius. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is called political sustainability.

Decentralisation of power has been and will remain very important for the development of Rodrigues. Truly so, when transfer of resources and responsibilities are carefully coordinated and inter-governmental relationships are fully respected within the established legal framework, decentralisation has proven to be effective as it has improved efficiency and responsiveness by the locals, for the locals. It facilitates coordinated measures of transferring powers to locals, then enhancing good governance and the promotion of economic development at a local level.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for autonomy to be successful, it must be guided by good governance principles. Autonomy, decentralisation of power, devolution, for us OPR Party, also means good governance. It means acting in the best interest of the local people by promoting transparency and accountability. The significance of good governance within a decentralised government, to us, means participatory democracy, consensus-oriented decisions, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and to follow the rules of law. Without these principles, the decentralised form of government will not grow further, and at the level of OPR Party, we have done just that for the success and the devolution process of our sub-national decentralised government to grow.

What we are witnessing today, Mr Speaker, Sir, in Rodrigues, is a weakening in good governance since 2002, with the change of regime. The population in Rodrigues is feeling more

and more the absence of equity and inclusiveness in the regional governmental approach. Those members of society are especially the most vulnerable. Opportunities are not given to them as it is supposed to be – to maintain and improve their well-being. There is a slacking government which is inefficient, failing to produce results to meet the needs of the population. This is so evident in the catastrophic management of healthcare service in Rodrigues by the Commissioner for Health and the absence of policy on the increasing demands of social housing for the neediest.

All these are happening, Mr Speaker, Sir, because of the estranged multi-party coalition government made of five political parties with the only objective of reversing power, with no ability to work together and to govern. The five political parties which make up the Regional Assembly are like chickens with no heads, spectacularly moving abruptly all over the place with no sense of direction.

Mr Speaker, Sir, decentralisation – its core objectives are to bring stability, good governance and because of the five political parties that are constantly in conflict with each other, this is bringing a lot of instability within the Rodrigues Regional Government and the people of Rodrigues are having the strong feeling that there's no government in Rodrigues, no direction, no political head. The only reason the regional government is still in place is because of the strong grip on their own respective position. Any Rodriguan can feel the lethal mixture or stiff and stagnation of this present regional government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, why did we ask for a decentralised government? Why did OPR ask for a decentralised government? We asked for that to bring power closer to the common people so that their needs are met and that they participate in the local socio-economic development – that to evolve solutions to political, economic and societal problems and work towards improving the quality of life of the local people.

What we are noticing with the new regional government which is comprised of, as I said, five headless political parties, is a total deviation from the core notion of what entails a decentralised government, that is, a deviation from the notion of service to the people and the society. What is apparent in their way of governance is an ego-centric power struggle among the five political parties and the very few moneyed people who are thinking of their own personal

and their respective party's interests, aiming at making immediate personal gains. They are indeed competing in knocking one another out by any possible means. Isn't that right, hon. Armanche?

The only barrier which is preventing them from achieving their immediate political agenda is our solid constitutive framework, but this is also becoming a problem as they are attempting to bypass the rules to satisfy their political agenda. What matters most in the chopped-off heads, is what suits a particular leader and the political party at a particular time; everything, but not the issues of morality and constitutionality.

What we are seeing, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a small bunch of elites having intra-elite conflict and political war with one another. This is not what we want. This is not what we fought for. We did not fight for the decentralisation of power for the five headless political parties to do interest-based politics. What we are noticing everyday are all their dramas in willing to go to any extent to protect political power ambition and their economic interest instead of the principles of good governance.

As a result of their brute and narrow-based politics is the weakening of good governance as a result of all their shenanigans and devilments. The outcome of all their devilry and mischievousness comes to their predictable weakening of good governance, with evidence-based proof such as –

- Dysfunctional public fund management.
- Non-implementation of budgeted projects.
- So many projects kept on hold despite the availability of fund.
- Disbursement of fund in favour of companies without memorandum of understanding.
- Incorporation of new companies without prior approval among so many.

This multiparty dysfunctional government cannot continue that way. This present regional government is a threat to our long-awaited autonomy. With these poor performances and mismanagement, they are enhancing the re-centralisation of power instead of devolution. Having said all that, Mr Speaker, Sir, I said it and someone has to say it, I am not going to repeat myself

on all the measures enumerated in this budget exercise. Hon. Mrs Mayotte, who spoke before me, has already enumerated most measures that I wanted to reinforce. Those measures have been beautifully explained and simplified by hon. Mrs Mayotte. A beautifully crafted speech as an artist!

I must seize the opportunity to thank and encourage the effort of both hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance for their tenth consecutive budgetary exercise.

- This budget is gender sensitive aiming at giving more autonomy to women.
- This budget addresses the growing problem of the decrease of fertility rate in the Republic of Mauritius.
- This budget is sustaining and empowering our youths.
- This budget is addressing the social and medical issues associated with the increasing trend of an ageing population in the Republic of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Rodrigues is small, but it has some needs which must be addressed. We need to address the increasing demand for a better healthcare system and service delivery. We need an adequate water supply. We need proper infrastructures such as airport infrastructure, adequate internet connectivity and port infrastructure for prompt delivery of goods for prosperity and sustainable socio-economic improvement. We need to develop our fishing industry and create more jobs.

It is high time for the Central Government to consider a full-fledged air ambulance for timely evacuation of critically ill patients from our outer islands to seek or to have advanced treatment to the main island, Mauritius. I will also appeal to the Central Government to extend all the incentives cited in the National Budget in the agricultural sector so that Rodrigues can continue to maintain food security for the Republic of Mauritius.

I am made to understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this time, the Home Ownership Scheme and Home Loan Scheme will be extended to Rodrigues and this will help first-time homebuyers of Rodrigues to benefit from this facility. I welcome the excellent effort of the Central Government in recognising the efforts and hardship of our fishers who also play an important role in feeding the population.

It is unfortunate that we are still awaiting the recommendation of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly on an updated fisheries regulation. This would have allowed regulating and

recognising professional fishermen in Rodrigues and hence allowing more fishermen in Rodrigues to have the bad weather allowance, which has increased with merits to Rs800 per day.

Anyway, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are so convincing that with the new leadership of OPR, in the name of hon. Francisco François who will be very soon become the next Chief Commissioner. He will bring back confidence and serenity to the people of Rodrigues and the Central Government in getting our autonomy back on track. The multi-party governance in Rodrigues will soon be disintegrated. They have already lost public trust and there is no longer any confidence among themselves, with their declining authority.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Rodrigues cannot afford to lose the status of autonomy. OPR party will never let that happen. This is my contribution to the debate on The Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill. I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Charles Gaëtan Xavier-Luc Duval!
(2.29 p.m.)

Mr X. L. Duval (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that my colleague, hon. Patrice Armance has given me, if necessary, ten minutes of his time. So, I would be grateful if you could take note of that.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not going to spend a lot of time replying to my friend, the previous orator. I just want to say that his lack of knowledge on decentralised principles of government, to my mind, surpasses his lack of knowledge of reality on the ground. Quite clearly demonstrated by the fact that it seems all are happy to have a Regional Assembly and at the same time a PPS representing Central Government on the ground from his own party. As far as fighting, there may be or may not be, I hope not in the coalition in Rodrigues. I mean nothing compared to the present-day fighting between the minority leader and the PPS which is very well known in Rodrigues!

Mr Speaker, Sir, having said this, my speech will be on three-pronged approaches. I am going to deal with the undeniable truth about this budget and the Mauritian economy. I have 12 points on this score. Then, I will speak about *des grands absents* du budget; issues which I believe have been largely omitted, and Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to talk about the action required for Mauritius to reach a high-income status, greater prosperity and happiness.

So, I will start, Mr Speaker, Sir, on the undeniable truth. Firstly, Mr Speaker, Sir, I was in my constituency during the weekend. I met a couple; both of them work as cleaners for a private sector firm. This couple have two young children. Both are cleaners. With this budget, as of 01 July, they will be able to bring home a total of Rs44,500 a month.

Now maybe if you earn Rs300,000 a month or so or Rs600,000 or whatever, you can consider that Rs44,500 a month is a meager sum but it is not. By all means that you can calculate income in Mauritius - disposable income - this amount - Rs44,500 for a couple that is working, Mr Speaker, Sir, as cleaners, is a substantial amount. Until a few years ago, Mr Speaker, Sir, only middle-ranking cadre, middle-ranking managers could take home this sort of money. Now today, as I mentioned, this is possible for even two small cleaners working for a private firm but, of course, I will speak later of the threat that inflation causes to their new-found revenues.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the undeniable truth – we have the lowest unemployment figures in a quarter of a century. 6.3% on 31 December 2023 we are told by the Minister of Finance that it is now 6.1%. But I would like to say one thing on this. You can achieve low unemployment figures by people withdrawing from the labour force but it is not the case. If you look at the latest social and economic indicators, in fact, the labour force over 2023 has increased by 30,000 people. So, when the labour force increases by 30,000 people and yet, you have a reduction in unemployment, what does it mean? Anyone can tell you that it means that there has been substantial job creation. That is another undeniable truth! And as we know, giving someone a job is probably the greatest gift that you can give to anyone and that is what I wanted to point out.

Thirdly, Mr Speaker, Sir, something for our youth. Youth unemployment has fallen to an all-time low of 17%. Usually, youth unemployment is around 25%. So, we have many more young people working nowadays than they would be working before. Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, we all want to use figures obviously to our own advantage but let's say that we agree that the IMF is a fairly reliable and independent arbiter in all this. Now, the IMF calculates that the per capita income of Mauritians, per capita being the revenue per person in Mauritius, has now increased to nearly USD 13,000 that is, Rs51,000 per month, that is, figures published by the IMF. Now the interesting thing is that if you want to reach high-income status which every country aspires to reach, well, the minimum threshold for high income status is Rs54,000. So we are in fact not far

at all. This country is not far at all from reaching high-income status. It is USD13,845 against USD 12,997 per annum which translates in rupees to the figure that I have given to you. But, we all know that it is extremely hard to get from a middle-income status country to a high-income status country and I will come to that in a moment because not only do you want to get there but you need to stay as a high-income country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now the fifth point concerns growth – growth of 7% in 2023 which is extremely respectable. IMF calculates growth at 4.9% for 2024. The Minister of Finance for Financial Year 2024-2025 has a higher figure and this again, Mr Speaker, Sir, is extremely respectable. Mr Speaker, Sir, all these are figures but what about what we see on the ground? I will give you an example of why I think, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is prosperity in the country and I will give you another undeniable figure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I look at the registration of new cars, new vehicles in 2023. In Mauritius, 29,862 vehicles were newly registered, the new and the imported second-hand in Mauritius. Of these 29,862, 11,500 were new cars compared to only 7,100 in 2014. So, there has been an increase in new car registrations of 65% in those years. 65% increase! 11,500 new cars in 2023 compared to 7,000 in 2014.

Mr Speaker, Sir, so far as public sector debt is concerned, now we all know that debt is never an absolute figure – it does not mean anything to quote what the debt is in rupees. It is always a percentage of the GDP. When you go to a bank and you look for a loan, the first thing that the banker will ask you is what your revenue is. Once they know what your revenue is, they will tell you – ‘well, this is how much money I can lend you’. Debt is always a function of your revenue, nothing else. If I borrow USD 1 million, it is a lot of money for me, if Bill Gates borrows USD 1 million; it is not even peanuts for him. It is less than peanuts. So, it is always a question of percentage.

And here, we are told that the debt burden, whatever it may be in rupees, is, in fact, 74% of GDP. It is higher than usual, especially if you take into account the 158 billion rupees that the Government has taken from the Bank of Mauritius. Mr Speaker, Sir, I think this is something that needs to be very carefully monitored in view of the expenditure that is being incurred by the

government. So, we need to watch wastage, we need to watch expenditure on non-productive investments and we need to ensure that growth is there.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another point, is the undeniable support given in this Budget – one to planters and second to fishermen and that is across the board. Now I live by the sea and I have said before in this House, that I feel for the fishermen who have to go out and fish in all weather conditions, especially with this climate change. I am extremely happy that the Bad Weather Allowance has been increased to Rs 800 per day. Just think of it, Rs800 per day – Bad Weather Allowance. That's an excellent substantial amount of money and – I am not looking for claps – but I hope, Mr Speaker, Sir, living in Grand Gaube, that will find things to do also for these fishermen, that they don't stay idle at home, that they are given the opportunity to earn further income by being occupied during that time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in Rodrigues, the new airport at Rs7 billion, Rs900 million for water and electricity supply amongst others, there is a desalination plant of Rs540 million at Pointe Cotton. These are major expenditures in Rodrigues. The main objectives, the main vision of any Rodrigues government must be to make Rodrigues autonomous economically, that is, it should never put itself in a position of having to come every year to see the current Minister of Finance who is nodding or myself, when I was there before or whoever else to say this 'let's have money for this and that project'.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we, in the PMSD, want Rodrigues to be economically autonomous. That will give a huge range of possibilities and much better life to the Rodriguans. This is all I wanted to say about Rodrigues.

Finally, the eleventh point, Mr Speaker, Sir, which I wanted to highlight, is Animal Welfare. We are all so saddened to see stray dogs everywhere, not only as a social hazard and health hazard but also economic hazard so far as our beaches are concerned and I welcome these two mobile vet clinics that will come. I hope that these clinics will come quickly so that we can start sterilising the dogs and cats also, Mr Speaker, Sir. Cats also is a big issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is no doubt what I would call a social-partial budget. There are a few things here and there but the great bulk of this budget concerns social problems. Money that is being taken from the Consolidated Fund and given to various people is very targeted. You

know this has taken a lot of imagination, I presume, to have so much targeting. Various types of groups are targeted: the vulnerable groups. Hats off for the young cancer patients! That is a good example!

Mr Speaker, Sir, I know the groups that have been targeted are the numerically strong groups where there are lots of people. There are pensioners, these are groups which have been targeted again in this budget and then, also a bit more surprisingly, the influential groups. Now, big increases for sociocultural associations! Okay, fine! Duty-free for priests and also taxi drivers. Every five years, we hear of taxi drivers in the National Assembly as the elections come up.

So this, Mr Speaker, Sir, social transfer budget targeting these groups in our population, all these social transfer targeting are potentially threatened by inflation. All of it! The rise in inflation, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a threat to everything. All the goodies that this budget has promised to everyone because as you know this budget is injecting a large amount of money into the economy and this large amount of money in the economy will, in fact, increase consumption. When you increase consumption, you increase imports, when you increase imports, you put greater pressure on the rupee and when you put greater pressure on the rupee, the rupee devaluates. This is, in fact, the vicious circle that needs to be avoided by this Government and the next government, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, basically, we have imported inflation with a constantly depreciating rupee, meaning a constantly appreciating US dollar and euros also, but let us stick to the US dollar and the euros. Mr Speaker, Sir, one thing to ask ourselves is: is there a shortage of dollars in the country? Do we have a shortage of dollars in the country? So, I went back to the Annual Report of the Bank of Mauritius which was published in December 2023 and I will give you a figure which might surprise you. The foreign currency held by local Mauritian banks on 31 December 2023 was equivalent to Rs1.1 trillion. That is Rs1,000 billion held by Mauritian banks in foreign currency. Of that Rs1.1 trillion, Rs900 billion was held in US dollars and Rs100 billion held in euros and the rest in sterling, etc. So, we are talking about Rs1.1 trillion – Rs1,000 billion held in foreign currency in Mauritian banks. This is official, you can check it. It is Table 26 of the Bank of Mauritius.

Now, this compares to Rs431 billion in 2014. So, how come – ask yourselves – there is so much money in the banks in foreign currency and yet, such a great shortage on the market when you actually want to get some funds? I think, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this is also the fault of the Government. First, I must say that Rs1.1 trillion is not all local companies. A lot of it consists of global business companies and the like that hold these currency balances, nevertheless, that is a huge amount of money. Mr Speaker, Sir, I think here the fault lies with the Government because the attitude of the Government is unclear as to the exchange rate policy, giving the impression that they actually enjoy the rupee depreciating because that creates additional revenue for the Ministry of Finance, that reduces automatically any debt that is denominated in rupees. So, as I said last time in my budget speech and I will say the same thing again, inflation is the best friend of any Minister of Finance, but it is also the worst enemy of many sections of the population, those that are not exporting.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, what is to be done? Is the Government going to tolerate continued depreciation of the rupee, accelerating inflation or is Government going to put a stop to the depreciation of the rupee? Now, it is very simple – believe it or not – to put a stop to the depreciation of the rupee because the fundamentals are okay. The issue, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the Government tends to give the impression that they favour a depreciating rupee for economic and budgetary purposes. Singapore is a good case in point concerning exchange rate management. Now, most countries in the world have a monetary policy based on interest rates. They set the interest rates and they allow the exchange rate to fluctuate. Singapore being very much like Mauritius, very much bigger, but very similar to Mauritius, has adopted a monetary policy based on exchange rates. It says every six months what it wants the exchange rate with the dollar for instance to be. Once it says what is the exchange rate, it is to be expected there is no speculation.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, people in Mauritius keep money in foreign currency – they are quite right to do so – because they expect the dollar or the euro to increase in value and therefore it is a good economic practice. Nobody can blame them. They keep their assets in euros or in dollars, but if the Government wants to stop speculation – I am not sure it does – but if it does want to stop speculation on the rupee, it has to come up with a clear exchange rate policy by an

independent Bank of Mauritius supported verbally at least by the Ministry of Finance and the Government. That is so simple to do, yet so difficult it seems to achieve.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we had last year an inflation rate of 7%. What was the inflation rate in Seychelles? Very comparable to us: 0.5%! Not even 1% in Seychelles. What was the inflation rate of Maldives? I have not taken the USA or Europe! What was the inflation rate of Maldives? 3%, less than half of what is the inflation rate in Mauritius! So, with due respect, whatever Ministers have been saying, it is inflation, is imported from Ukraine, God knows we do not buy gas from Ukraine! It is inflation from Ukraine, this and the other. It does not hold water. There is no logic in what is being said. It does not make sense because countries very similar to us which have been able to manage their currencies and keep their currencies stable have had low inflation. We know the damage that inflation has caused to people and will cause to all these social transfers which are being made to all these targeted groups.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, the policy tool exists. We need to – like in so many things – copy Singapore. Perhaps in one sentence, the trade-weighted exchange rate in Singapore is allowed to fluctuate within a policy band, the level and scope of which are announced semi-annually to the market. Mr Speaker, Sir, talking about inflation quite rightly in this House, I as well as the previous Leader of the Opposition, raised the issue of parallel imports. I believe, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we should allow parallel imports. There are conflicting views on how this will work in the economy. There is only one way to sort it out. Let us take 100 products and allow parallel imports for these 100 products. After six months, nine months or one year, we will know whether the effects are positive or negative; what is the effect.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sad to see that this budget does not do that because we cannot forever talk about parallel imports and never act on it. There is only one way to act on it: it is to act partially. Let us see what happens and then he extends it. And I, Mr Speaker, Sir, say that we need to be very careful on parallel imports of medicines because medicines are swallowed basically and it can be dangerous. Counterfeiting can be dangerous. The laboratories in Mauritius are not sufficiently equipped to deal with that. So, we would need to sort out our laboratories first for testing and then allow the importation of medicines, unless we are talking about over-the-counter medicines like cough syrup, etc., which are probably less dangerous.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, parallel imports will be proof of whether the Government wants to have consumers get value for money or not. And there is no reason why we cannot start with a hundred items of goods and see how effective parallel import is, Mr Speaker, Sir.

On the issue of medicine, as I am on that, it is high time, Mr Speaker, Sir, that doctors can prescribe alternative generic medicine. Some sort of legislation must, Mr Speaker, Sir, be enacted to ask doctors to provide a choice. For instance, the brand name and the generic name so that someone who is ill can afford the actual brand name, can opt, if he or she wishes, for the generated name.

Mr Speaker, Sir, many things have been left out of the Budget because I presume that the elections are not far and the Minister of Finance did not want to waste his time or waste the time of the House, leaving it to the next government to deal with it. Nevertheless, they need to take it into account. We talked about inflation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to talk about drugs. We need to talk about the proliferation of drugs. I have been around the country and I have talked to so many people. You know the first issue when I asked, when we were preparing for the women's congress, that women talked to me about? It was not domestic violence - I would have expected something like that - it was drugs. They are terrified for their children. They are terrified. The word is not too strong. They are terrified for their husbands and maybe for themselves too. Drug is a huge, huge social problem in Mauritius and it has not been dealt with adequately in this Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir. Hardly mentioned!

We have the excellent report of the Commission on Drug Abuse by Lam Shang Leen. I forgot the exact name. Now, we all know that when you have recommendations, you can apply it with vigour, with energy or you can just apply it like that, just to tick the box. The feeling is that for many of the recommendations of the Commission, the boxes have been ticked without vigour. I will take one example. The Commission has asked that people who just consume *gandia* or are just found in possession of a small amount of *gandia* are actually, rather than being prosecuted, taken Drug Users Panel so that they are being given instead rehabilitation. The Minister of Finance himself gave us the figure, 25,000 arrests made in the last few years. Out of this, he proudly tells us that only 46 have been sent to the Drug Users Panel. Now, this obviously

gives you an idea of exactly what I mean, that is, you can tick the box for the recommendations but you do not actually implement it as you should. And the Report of Lam Shang Leen dates back six years. You cannot say that you have just applied this recommendation but you have only put 46 cases. It is called the Drug Users Administrative Panel. Only 46 cases so far have been dealt with by the Drug Users Administrative Panel. There is obviously something wrong. The recommendation was made six years ago.

Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, on the drug issue, we need to sort out an adequate number of state-of-the-art rehabilitation centres. We need to fast-track drug barons going and being dealt with by the courts. There was a PNQ which I, myself, asked. And I think out of so many hundred cases, only a few of them have actually been dealt with by the courts or even taken to court. Now, we saw Mr Franklin, he left a few weeks ago, God knows, a few months ago and he has already been sentenced in Reunion Island to six years – fast justice. Here, it will take you years and years and years. There is something wrong that has to be dealt with in terms of our sentencing, of our prosecuting and sentencing drug barons, especially. I am talking about the big boys that do not get prosecuted, do not get sentenced, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, only a few of them ever do.

There is a case for a Special Prosecuting Unit, both at the level of Police and at the level of the DPP because you need, obviously, specialised people who will want to process these cases. And why not a Special Drugs Court to fast-track drug cases? We cannot just accept that. Next door to us, the people in Reunion are not super humans; they are people like us. How can they be able to sentence people to long terms in prison within weeks and we take 10 years? Something is wrong. It needs to be dealt with, Mr Speaker, Sir. Also, the Forensic Science Laboratory, whether it is ill-equipped or unwilling, I do not know, it takes a lot of time to deal with drug cases. So, there are, obviously, ways that other countries have found to deal swiftly and effectively with drug barons and this, Mr Speaker, Sir, for whatever reason it is, is not the case in Mauritius. I am, in fact, understating it rather than overstating it. This is, in fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, the case.

Moving from drugs, there is climate change. We are in Port Louis now, it is not raining. Thank God. If it was raining, we would have rivers flowing down our streets in Mauritius –

rivers. I have no doubt, the Minister concerned is doing his best but maybe here, the best is not good enough. When we had landslides in Mauritius, at La Butte, I think it was Sir Anerood Jugnauth who was Prime Minister at the time, the Government had asked for the help of Japanese experts. The Japanese came, they did what they had to do and we never had a landslide again at La Butte – never. And I tell you, landslides are far more complicated to deal with than just rain coming along a drain.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what we require, what this country requires and what the people are begging for are solutions to the flooding in Port Louis, in my constituency, in Quatre Bornes, flooding caused by Metro Express. We all know that. We need foreign experts, foreign consultants, and foreign firms to come and help us. We cannot afford to have Port Louis continue to go like this. It is not possible. It is not acceptable. No one can accept it. And therefore, one can only be sad to see that this has not been given the importance that I believe it has in the population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming out to education. The Minister of Education is not there. It is okay, I understand she has a lot of work. But, how can this Government accept a programme called the Extended Programme? 3,000 or so children join the programme every year and upwards of 90% failed that same programme after 3-4-5 years. 5 years I think it is. No, it is 4 years. It used to be 5 years because of COVID-19.

How can that be accepted? In which country would you accept that? 3,100 children do the exam, 70 pass, 3,030 fail. And that's not even calculating the people who actually drop out during the years at school in that programme. It's horrendous, Mr Speaker, Sir. It has to be dealt with. It's not a political issue; it's a human resources issue. These children are entitled to have a good education. They are entitled to have a certificate. They fail the PSAC, they fail the NCE, and what do they do? They will just be branded failures all their life. That is not acceptable. I am speaking on behalf of the children. There are about 15,000 probably in the schools at the moment as I speak. It's not acceptable. It has to be dealt with, Mr Speaker, Sir. Also, how can you ask people who have failed PSAC to take two foreign languages as compulsory pass subjects for NCE? They probably speak Creole, they might speak Bhojpuri, I don't know. But they are forced, so that they can succeed in the NCE. They are forced to know English well and they are

forced to know French well. I would accept that to be responsible citizens, they might have to master one of the two. Even in the UK, you don't have to pass compulsory in French. In Mauritius, you are asked to do two foreign languages if you are a PSAC failure, English and French as compulsory. That is horrendous. How can you expect people who failed to be able to master two foreign languages? Is that even relevant? Is that even productive? Should you not be telling them to do something more useful in their lives than learn both English and French? Just one, either English or French, I will be happy with. Anyway, I don't want to get too excited on this subject, but I am speaking from the heart, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, on the five credits issue, there is a step in the right direction. They are now going to be free of charge. They will probably save about Rs15,000 or Rs20,000 in exam fees when they take it again. We still think, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we should come to the three credits as a much fairer deal for disadvantaged families, because they cannot afford it. Even on a re-seat, they cannot afford to pay for the private tuition that is required in all these five subjects. This is something, Mr Speaker, Sir, that needs to be dealt with. As far as schools funded by the PSEA, there is an attempt by the Minister to sort out a very unfair situation as far as funding of private schools by the Government is concerned. But we are not there yet, and it has to be worked out much fairer because people who have education establishments may be passionate about it, but it is also their livelihood, it is also, in a way, their business, and they must not be expropriated. They must be given the chance to make a decent return from their schools, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming quickly to the Champ de Mars, well, I think we all can see, if you don't believe me, just go there. Champ de Mars is a *bidonville*, Mr Speaker, Sir; it is nothing more than a *bidonville* at the moment. This is disgusting. That's all I can say about it, and it is high time that it be returned to the Mauritius Turf Club and that we get again some pride in our races. That's all I needed to say about that.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I talked about CSR. I am a proponent of returning CSR to what it was under me, under Lutchmeenaraidoo, particularly. But I must say that the triple deduction given by the Ministry of Finance, it's again a step in the right direction that you can deduct from your taxes, from your chargeable income any money you spend on poverty alleviation, drug abuse, and gender-based violence. What does that mean? It is that the Government will, in fact, fund

57% of your expenditure. So, you spend Rs100,000; in fact, the Government will deduct Rs57,000 from your tax bill. That's not bad, but it could be better, and I hope that we come back one day to the CSR, Mr Speaker, Sir.

As regards tourism, more money to MTPA, whatever it is, that's not the point. The point is how do we get the product to improve substantially? How do we get the product to become a world product? We all like to go to Singapore, we go to Sentosa Island, whatever it is. Where is our Sentosa Island? You also have tourism infrastructure that will attract tourists, and this is why I said before, Mr Speaker, Sir, that Government needs to invest in these tourist villages; with central government, local government, the police, everybody on board, the local businessman also, everybody on board, so that we have places where tourists just love to go, where it is safe, where it is clean, where it is enjoyable, where there is good food, where there is decent nightlife. That is what needs to be created in any tourism industry. You cannot just give money for promotion. It is just like I have a car with no tyres and I say okay, I want to sell it, I am going to spend money; just put it in the newspaper. It doesn't work. You need to have the proper product then you don't need so much promotion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope that happens, because it's important that our tourists have an enjoyable time. We have 1.3 million tourists. If each one of them had an enjoyable time and went back and told two or three of their friends that they had a great time in Mauritius, we could close the MTPA, we wouldn't need it, because we are a mature tourism destination. Well, I won't go, because I am going to run out of time.

Road accidents, Mr Speaker, Sir. What are we going to do about these bikes that run around like crazy in Mauritius? Many of them have no number plates. Many of these people don't have licences. Often, they don't run with their lights on. Even in Port Louis! And the police just sit there; they will stop the poor guy in his car; they will not go after these guys because it's difficult. We need, Mr Speaker, Sir, specialised Police effort to control the sort of hooligans today that are using these bikes without licences, without number plates, without lights, all over the island. And this is where criminality starts, when you do not take care of these relatively small issues, Mr Speaker, Sir. You will continue to get road accidents if this does not stop. And the other thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, have you ever seen a country, which is as

popular as Mauritius, with no pavements for the people to walk on? So many cars, so many roads, so many flyovers, and not a word on pavements. Not everybody has a car; there are lots of cars. Most people do not have a car and they have to walk. Children have to walk to school; ladies have to walk to go to work, and so many accidents of people being knocked over by cars because there are no pavements, and that's the only reason. So, it's time to stop this madness. It's time to stop, and we need to look again at our road policy, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have got a few minutes left and I am going to talk about high-income status. Why do we want to have a high-income status? Because we want to be able to have better healthcare, better education, better lifestyle, better leisure, better everything, hopefully. And the IMF has gone to the trouble of telling us what's to be done. I can see that it's not in this budget. Nevertheless, the Government has taken note of what the IMF has asked for. IMF has said okay. We will not reach high-income status if we don't do structural reforms. Now, I think the Minister once asked what are structural reforms. Structural reforms are deep reforms of the structure of the economy. That is structural reforms. That's it! Just look it up. Structural reforms are important deep reforms to the economy. The first reform, Mr Speaker, Sir, is training to upgrade the skills of our workforce, because a workforce that is highly skilled is a productive workforce, and a productive workforce is a workforce that creates wealth.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, it's important. There is also the use of IT. So many Mauritians, workers, ordinary workers cannot use IT, cannot send an e-mail, cannot do a web search. It affects them in their work. Even driving licences; driving licences are essential for workers to be able to be productive because then you don't need to have a driver and an employee. You just have one to do both jobs. Driving licences, literacy and numeracy, Mr Speaker, Sir, are things that are required; basic things to upgrade skills.

Mr Speaker, Sir, quite rightly, the IMF wants us to strengthen governance and the anti-corruption framework. Mr Speaker, Sir, they want us to foster digitalisation.

An hon member: *Bien dire!*

Mr X. L. Duval: I pronounced it right this time. Now, why do they want us to be digital? Because they want the lives of our citizens to be facilitated. We don't have to drive from

Mahebourg to Port-Louis to do anything; you just go on the internet and you get it done. Business facilitation also is huge. It has started a little bit, only MRA, fortunately or unfortunately, it is up to you which side of the coin you want to look at – but only the MRA has got a decent digitalisation policy. That's the truth.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, if we want to improve lives, foster much greater efficiency, reduce traffic because we would not be taking the cars to physically go somewhere, improve education – all these rainy days and you hear that Government Schools are lagging behind and actually giving digital lessons, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, this is what the IMF wants to do. The IMF wants us to increase women's labour force participation. I had a look as to why they say that. Mr Speaker, Sir, the labour force participation in Mauritius is around 40%; a little bit more than 40% – this is called the female activity rate. Do you know the female activity rate of labour force participation is in the UK? – 72%! Much more than in Mauritius!

There may be many reasons for that. One reason is that women find it more difficult in Mauritius to get work than men. They take about 50% more time to get employed than men, but there may be other reasons, and this must be studied, including working from home, because that is an asset, a human resource asset. And remember, often women are more educated than men and have better qualifications than men, and there is no reason, Mr Speaker, Sir, why such an investment in human resources should be staying for the majority at home, and not joining the labour force, Mr Speaker, Sir.

One last thing – they want us to build resilience to climate shocks that is a national priority because it is a fact that Mauritius remains extremely vulnerable to climate change.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have come to the end of my speech. For once I got it about right, the timing and so, I thank you for your attention. But the point is, Mr Speaker, Sir, above all this, is to try; each one of us putting our own effort to make of Mauritius a better country to live in, a more prosperous country, a fairer country and in short, a happier nation. Thank you very much.

An hon. Member: *Zafer bon!*

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Ramchurrun!

(3.15 p.m.)

Mr N. P. Ramchurrun (Third Member for Savanne & Black River): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is with immense pleasure and humility that I am addressing this august Assembly today on the Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill. Before I move to the crux of my intervention, let me know acknowledge the balanced intervention of hon. Duval, who, compared to the other Opposition members, did not fully indulge in a *naryen pa bon* budget.

Actually, hon. X. L. Duval's intervention was for me very critical where it should be and constructive. It was as well a sign of *lizie dou* in this *la bouche dou* budget.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, along with many of my hon. friends from this side of the House, it will be my fifth actually and our fifth budgetary speeches and the last of this mandate, but there will be another one for next year. It has been a journey, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we have learnt and been taught many things, especially, the ones who are on their first mandates like me.

However, one thing we have learnt is to feel the temperature of our constituents, be it from any political affiliation. Thus, we can therefore say that this journey is yet to be over and we will be here for the next five years, for the next Budget and under the leadership of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth and the hon. Dr. Padayachy as the Finance Minister.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to pay tribute to the hon. Prime Minister. In fact, this Budget fully reflects his personal philosophy of an inclusive and balanced social development of the economy. Through his significant personal contribution and indefatigable industry, that is without any fatigue, he has strived towards achieving a sound and balanced economy and a healthy, productive and optimistic population. Moreover, the hon. Minister of Finance and his team have done a remarkable job of transforming into reality the vision and personal philosophy of the Prime Minister.

Mr Speaker, Sir, after five years of managing the affairs of the country, this Budget has proven that the great people of Mauritius are wise enough to remember the difference and

approve of the good health of the country. Never ever, has Mauritius seen such a transformation over a period of just a few years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the newly presented Budget is a landmark in our nation's financial planning, integrating all strata of society and providing targeted relief to the less financially capable, students and the elderly. This outlines how the Budget aims to achieve these goals and why it deserves the attention and support of Parliamentary Members.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the blue economy, I welcome the series of measures announced by the hon. Minister of Finance. Unlike, the Leader of the Opposition, I was actually able to find the right pages and content from the Budget Speech, which referred to the blue economy, rather than just merely saying that the Budget did not have any measures on this sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my constituency has a large section of its population who are directly and indirectly dependent on the blue economy. Hence, as an island nation, fishing is part of our rich heritage and our government has always stood by the side of our fishers by being the first ever government to consider the sustenance, financial independence and the retirement of fishers as mentioned in the Budget Speech 2024-2025.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget has provided for a grant of Rs300,000 to fishers for the purchase of canotte as well as a grant of Rs6 million will be given to cooperatives, for the purchase of semi-industrial fishing boats. Moreover, a grant of Rs1 million will be provided to individual fishers for the purchase of semi-industrial fishing boats. Grants for the purchase of hooks and fishing materials have been increased from Rs2,500 to Rs3,500 and grants toward materials to construct fish traps from Rs5,000 to Rs7,500.

The budget also provides for a one-off grant of Rs50,000 for registered fishers for renewal of their outdoor motors. In my Constituency No. 14, the setting up of a modern fish market at Baie du Cap is being very welcomed by the local fishers and by the local inhabitants.

Moreover, to ensure the safety of fishers, Rs10 million has been earmarked for the placement of markers, buoys and the installation of a second layer of fish aggregating devices across the island – a clear use of technology in the Blue economy, which is most welcome.

Mr Speaker, Sir, two years ago, we introduced a lump sum for fishermen aged 65 and above, who returned their licences for the sum of Rs100,000 which will now be increased to Rs125,000. Same will apply for net fishers returning their fishing licences, where individuals will benefit Rs125,000 and cooperatives will benefit Rs250,000.

More importantly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the DBM Ltd. will extend its amnesty scheme to write off long outstanding loans of more than 20 years as of June 2025 and the loans of deceased fishermen, which is a huge relief for indebted fishermen and their families.

Finally, Mr Speaker Sir, as our Government has always done in the last five years, the Bad Weather Allowance to fishers will be increased from Rs650 to Rs800. Actually, in 2014 it was just Rs380 and now it is Rs800. Undoubtedly, my constituents have informed me that given the track record of our Prime Minister of our Government, they are expecting an allowance to go beyond the amount of Rs1000 in the next 5 years. A demonstration of our commitment to our blue economy, which is primarily composed of individual fishers and cooperatives and who deserve to be considered first.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these measures are expected to provide substantial relief and foster a more equitable society. By increasing support to the less financially capable, the budget will help to reduce poverty and improve living standards, enhance assistance for students to ensure better access to education and opportunities, driving a long-term economic growth, improve provisions for the elderly will ensure that they live with dignity and security reducing the strain on social services.

Mr Speaker Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Boolell should be indeed congratulated for his introductory intervention. He has indeed officially broken all the records as he is so far winning the '*naryen pa bon*' award. To be honest, Mr Speaker, Sir, from the Leader of Opposition, the first speech on the opposition side which, for me personally, I was sitting here but I did not get what was in the speech of the Leader of Opposition and I congratulate hon. Wochit, whom I understood what was his speech about. His intervention lacked the same credibility and trust which put away our population from this made-up opposition. How can one say that none of the measures being proposed by the budget will be helping one mere citizen from our country?

It is very much a question of whether the Opposition Members are reading the budget only to oppose it. Is it how they interpret their role as Members of Parliament? If so, then my honest observation of 5 years ago, during my first Budget Speech is unchanged, that is, the Opposition will always see things as *'naryen pas bon'*. Even if they did not have the political will to undertake the ground-breaking measures we launched, the least you should expect from political gentlemen of over 25 years of parliamentary experience is that they acknowledged at least one of the 585 lines within the Budget Speech was going to have a positive effect on the population.

However, some credit must be given to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, who was somewhat very close to his very famous 2007 Budget Speech when he coined a new term. Mr Speaker, Sir, let us gently remind the opposition benches, of a pearl of wisdom which was mentioned by the hon. Leader of Opposition in 2007 when he intervened on the then Budget Speech. I quote –

“It is not a question of who has the best economic guru, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. But we know that we can rely upon our Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Economic Development. We may call this policy *Sithanonomics*.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, after 14 years, unfortunately, the Labour Party is still unchanged. They are still reading from that dangerous *sithanonomics* textbook which actively promotes sound social policies in the form of *'rass dipain dan labous zanfana'*. Their textbook still teaches them that equality and fairness are introduced in the system when the whole population across both the rural and urban areas of Mauritius are both taxed through the NRPT, rather than abolishing the municipal tax to make it equal and fair. This is their type of budget where obviously *'labous* will be *amer'*.

However, one major credit must be attributed to the Labour Party leader, as he said himself in 2014 during a public meeting towards the leader of the MMM, that *'gro rekin bizin enn gro labwet'*. This time he made major savings on his *'gro lawret'* and only used *'laminn dipain'* to catch the leader of the MMM and his party.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not go on *'coffre-fort'*, there is a lot to say on *'coffre-fort'* again because for the Opposition Members *'zot fini gagne laminn dipain.'* They do not want the

'*coffre-fort*.' Today, the leader of the MMM and his party should be congratulated as they have finally made the *militant marche latet baise* by burdening them with the '*coffre-fort*' saga of the Labour Party leader.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to social care by addressing the root causes of poverty, improving educational access and enhancing support for the elderly, the current budget is expected to foster long-term economic stability and social cohesion. This shift promises to create a more resilient and equitable society. The budget demonstrates a profound commitment to the well-being of our elderly population, underscoring the Government's sense of responsibility towards them. By significantly increasing pension allowances, the budget ensures that our seniors can live with greater financial security, alleviating the stress of daily expenses.

Moreover, the substantial investment in healthcare services, including improved access to medical care directly addresses the health needs of the elderly, promoting longer and healthier lives. The inclusion of community programs designed to combat social isolation and enhance the quality of life further reflects a holistic approach to elderly care. These initiatives not only improve physical and mental well-being but also honour and respect the contributions of our seniors, reaffirming the Government's dedication to creating an inclusive and supportive society for all ages.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards young children, it is loud and clear for the population that what has been done for children, right from their birth, by this government is unprecedented. The government's budget unequivocally demonstrates its unwavering commitment to nurturing and educating our nation's children from the earliest stages of life through to adulthood. By allocating substantial funds for early childhood development programmes, including improved access to free preschool education, the budget ensures that even the youngest citizens receive the foundational support they need. Increased funding for primary and secondary education, coupled with initiatives for modernising school infrastructure guarantees that every child benefits from a robust and progressive learning environment.

Furthermore, the introduction of scholarships, grants, and interest-free student loans opens doors for higher education, making it accessible to all, regardless of financial background. These comprehensive measures underscore the Government's dedication to fostering a

supportive and inclusive educational journey for every child, laying the groundwork for a brighter future and showcasing a genuine, long-term commitment to the well-being and development of our youth.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a young Parliamentarian having been given the chance to serve our beloved island, I will seize this golden opportunity together with all my colleagues from this side of the House to congratulate our athletes and the Minister of Sports who have won gold and silver medals at the international level. Millions have been invested in some 250 athletes for the forthcoming Seychelles CJSOI in July 2025 and I thank the Minister of Finance for facilitating the opening of MUGA around the island to promote sports and mostly in my Constituency, where a MUGA will be installed at Bambous, a National Yoga Campaign at Tamarin and the upgrading of Germain Comarmond Stadium at Bambous.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as we all know, the Budget has made provision for the Mauritius Police Force for an increase of over 15% from Rs10.8 billion to the tune of Rs12.6 billion. Some 2000 Police Officers have been recruited and recruitment of some 1000 Police Officers will be done for this Financial Year. Mr Speaker, Sir, we all stand surprised by the argument of the hon. Leader of Opposition as he mentioned that no consideration was given to the Police Department in this Budget. Well, he needs to be reminded that the Labour Party did not recruit any Police Officers from 1995 to 2000 and no promotion at all. And in this mandate that we have been Government; 2019 up to now, up to 2000 police officers have been recruited and 4850 Police Officers have been promoted within this financial year, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The backdrop to the Budget was challenging. It is hard to remember the time in the history of Mauritius when there have been so many challenges in our economic, environmental, and social systems in such a short period of time. Individuals, families, businesses, and communities are feeling the impact of global economic and political turbulence, high inflation, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 emergency, and the impacts of climate change through more frequent and intense weather events.

This budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, portrays stability and continuity; exactly what the population is looking for. We are very much focused on doing the basics well with significant investment in education, health and housing at the same time. We are improving the resilience of

our island's critical infrastructure and investing in a more productive, higher-wage, lower-emissions economy including through research and technology. Mr Speaker, Sir, our investments in our people, our businesses, our communities, and our environment will guide.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to climate change. Climate change is a phenomenon that is impacting all countries around the world and Mauritius is no exception. This Government has made a robust provision in this budget for sound flood management. Investment of Rs1 billion has been dedicated to effective flood management and to pursue implementation of 132 drain projects at an amount of Rs3.5 billion in this budget, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Coming to the water crisis, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is worth noting as mentioned in the budget speech that climate change is not only about flash floods, but it is also about droughts causing stress in water supply. Mr Speaker, Sir, out of the Rs2.5 billion earmarked for the connection of water storage, and replacement of pipes throughout the island, I am happy that villages like Le Morne, La Gaulette, Rivière Noire, Chamouny and Chemin-Grenier will benefit from these facilities – replacement of pipes and connection of more water supply.

Coming to infrastructure in Constituency No. 14. Actually, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are continually investing in the construction of more drains, in infrastructure, upgrading extension of our roads and one of the major projects in the Constituency is the construction of the new link road connecting La Brasserie to Beaux Songes through Pierrefonds and Cascavelle.

Healthcare, Mr Speaker, Sir, is an issue in Constituency No. 14. With the financial support in this budget, I am happy to announce the upgrading of Tamarin Healthcare Centre and Case Noyale, Baie du Cap and that of Yves Cantin Hospital at Rivière Noire. The construction of a mediclinic in Chemin Grenier is as well envisaged and the construction of mediclinic is actually ongoing at Bambous.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Constituency No. 14 has delivered a number of projects and been provided additional funding for further projects to amounts which have never been seen previously. I would also like to heartily thank the Minister, hon. Hurreeram and the NDU staff, the RDOs and the CAB Officers who have initiated, monitored and implemented such projects in

the constituency and around the island. I am sure the staff have never seen so much work being undertaken in only five years and are looking forward to much more work in the next five years.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, in November 2019, our Government was entrusted with a renewed sacred mission by an overwhelming majority of Mauritians. We have only been able to steer back our country on the right track through firm and disciplined leadership and the blood and sweat of this Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, nobody can claim that this Government has a magic hand to solve all the issues of the country. However, over the last five years, even during the pandemic, after the pandemic, all the turmoil we had with the economy, the flash floods, the climate change effect, we have had visionary leadership who only cared about the country and its people and which has unflinchingly focused on delivering tangible results.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this budget will go down in history as one which has silenced the Opposition, ‘hmm’ ‘huh’, which has silenced the Opposition! Actually, they are in a state of disarray as they are desperately looking for imaginary arguments to try and pin down this budget. They may rest assured that their attempts are futile. Mr Speaker Sir, as the Opposition is running out of things to throw at us, let it be clear that hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth single-handedly silenced the critics of the other side of the House and opened the doors for our population to enjoy a new era of selfless, dedicated and focused leadership.

Mr Speaker Sir, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth together with the Minister of Finance, means business for each and every citizen of this country and for many more budgets to come. It is imperative that we save this opportunity to support this budget that promises to create a more inclusive and prosperous society. I urge all Parliamentary Members to carefully consider the benefits outlined and to support the adoption of this budget for the betterment of our nation.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Hon. Members: *Bravo! Bravo!*

Mr Speaker: I now call MP Ms Bérenger!

(3.46 p.m.)

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Je le dis d'emblée, je ne ferai pas de *lizie dou* comme mentionné par l'orateur avant moi. Je suis ici pour faire mon travail de députée de l'opposition et je le ferai entièrement parce que j'ai été élue pour.

Les années passent et avaient tendance à se ressembler, mais cette année, ce budget bat tous les records de l'irresponsabilité ! Ce budget est un budget inflationniste. Les prix n'ont cessé d'augmenter et continueront d'augmenter. *Statistics Mauritius* confirme dans son bulletin sur le *Consumer Price Index* en avril 2024 que depuis fin 2019 jusqu'à mars 2024, le *Consumer Price Index* est passé de 103,1 à 137,6. Même si le ministre parle de l'inflation globale qui en baisse, notamment à la section 19 du budget, il reconnaît que l'inflation continue. Il dit juste que le taux d'augmentation des prix n'est qu'un peu moindre que l'année dernière, mais avec une augmentation des prix de 33,4 % depuis fin 2019, peut-il vraiment se vanter ?

Ce budget est un budget qui continue d'hypothéquer l'avenir de nos enfants avec un niveau de dettes attendu de 561 milliards. Le ministre se dit fier que la dette publique relative au PIB ait diminué de 7,2 %, mais pourquoi ne donne-t-il pas le montant de la baisse de la dette publique par rapport au PIB en roupies ? Pourquoi compare-t-il la dette avec le PIB ? En prenant comme repère le PIB, le calcul est fossé. Tout le monde sait que désormais le PIB inclut le flux de devises qui entrent dans le pays à travers le secteur offshore. Il inclut l'argent que les investisseurs internationaux font transiter par Maurice, mais cet argent ne nous appartient pas. Donc, est-ce que ce n'est pas de la malhonnêteté intellectuelle que de venir comparer la dette avec le PIB aujourd'hui quand on sait que le chiffre du PIB a été gonflé.

Ce budget est un budget qui persiste dans la voie de la dévaluation de la roupie puisqu'il n'encourage pas la production locale et ne crée pas l'emploi. Tout le monde sait que plus nous importons, plus nous aurons besoin de devises. Il y a un manque de devises, donc, celle-ci s'achète plus cher, ce qui aggrave la dévaluation de la roupie. Nous importons 80 % de ce que nous consommons et comme l'a bien rappelé hier mon collègue Reza Uteem au ministère de l'Agro-industrie, entre décembre 2023 jusqu'à mars 2024, les prix des légumes ont augmenté de 54,8 % en trois mois. Si la montée des prix des légumes importés s'explique par la dévaluation de la roupie, le ministre peut-il nous dire comment il explique que les prix des légumes produits

localement ont eux aussi augmenté ? On aurait attendu qu'ils viennent nous dire ce qu'ils comptent faire pour freiner ces augmentations non justifiées.

Ce budget est un budget qui ne remédie pas aux problèmes de fond, qui ne propose aucune réforme structurelle ni nouveau pilier pour relancer l'économie et pourtant, qu'avions-nous pas entendu ces dernières années ? Étaient annoncés, années après ...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Sshhh !

Ms J. Bérenger : Merci à la personne qui a demandé un peu de silence ! Un petit peu de respect, c'est bienvenu parfois, mais je sais que cette majorité ne connaît pas trop la notion de respect !

Mrs Mayotte: Ah bon?

Ms J. Bérenger: Étaient annoncés, années après années, de nouveaux piliers supposés nous sauver, celui des industries vertes, de l'économie bleue, des *hubs* en tout genre, le biopharmaceutique, mais rien en réalité. Vous avez fait la population rêver. Et *ler gete kosmar pe kontinie* ! Avec certaines mesures dites environnementales, nous n'aurons bientôt plus assez de poissons pour pouvoir parler d'économie bleue. Les prix, y compris ceux des médicaments, continueront d'augmenter et nos jeunes continueront d'émigrer.

Je viens parler d'ailleurs de la trahison qu'est ce budget envers nos jeunes diplômés. Alors que le gouvernement se vante d'avoir haussé le revenu minimum garanti à R 20 000, de l'autre côté, il abaisse le seuil salarial pour obtenir un permis d'occupation à R 22 500 pour, dit-il, attirer les talents étrangers. De l'autre côté, il permet aussi aux étrangers avec dix ans d'expérience professionnelle d'obtenir le permis d'occupation et de travailler. Il permet aussi aux seniors retraités de travailler. Comment est-ce que nos jeunes diplômés sont supposés faire pour ensuite trouver leur place sur le marché de l'emploi ? Comment sont-ils supposés pouvoir rivaliser avec ces talents étrangers qui gagneront tout juste R 2 500 de plus que le revenu minimum garanti ? Pas étonnant que 75 % des jeunes préfèrent rester à l'étranger après leurs études.

Qu'il s'agisse de l'abaissement du seuil salarial pour l'obtention des permis d'occupation ou de la suppression des quotas dans les secteurs clés pour faciliter l'important de la main-d'œuvre étrangère bon marché, le gouvernement a en réalité déclaré la guerre à l'emploi et aux jeunes diplômés. L'augmentation du revenu minimum garanti n'est qu'une parade pour cacher ces décisions qui libéralisent encore davantage le marché du travail et qui amèneront un nivellement par le bas des salaires.

L'augmentation du revenu minimum garanti n'est qu'une parade pour cacher ces décisions qui libéralisent encore davantage le marché du travail et qui amèneront un nivellement par le bas des salaires et des conditions de travail.

Déjà, dans l'annexe du discours du budget de l'an dernier, à la section B. 1, figuraient toute une série de mesures pour faciliter l'accès à l'emploi pour les étrangers. Cette année, ce sont les secteurs de l'industrie manufacturière, bijouteries, le port franc, *ICT*, agriculture qui se voient enlever les quotas et obtenir des facilités pour l'importation des étrangers, dans les paragraphes 75 à 78. Au profit de qui ? Au profit des marchands de main-d'œuvre et des nantis. Je le disais déjà l'an dernier, ce gouvernement réadapte et remet d'actualité un modèle économique injuste que nos tribuns ont combattu. Un modèle injuste parce que basé sur la main-d'œuvre bon marché et l'exploitation des plus vulnérables. En passant, j'aimerais qu'il vienne nous dire si les employeurs des travailleurs étrangers contribueront au *PRGF*, au *Workfare Programme Fund*, au *National Savings Fund* et à la *CSG*.

Aujourd'hui, il ne faut pas s'étonner que nos meilleurs éléments quittent le pays pour aller contribuer à la croissance des économies et des entreprises étrangères. Est-ce que ce gouvernement a conscience des répercussions de ce phénomène sur le long terme ? Je ne pense pas. Il ne voit que le court terme. Il n'est intéressé qu'avec l'échéance électorale. L'échéance électorale répond à la politique, mais ne devrait pas devenir la pensée politique. C'est le plus grand signe d'échec de ce gouvernement – la perte de nos talents. La fuite en avant de la jeunesse mauricienne est la preuve incontestable du mal qui ronge ce pays. Et est-ce que cela inquiète le gouvernement ? Est-ce qu'il cherche une solution ? Est-ce qu'il crée des emplois ? Est-ce qu'il valorise notre main-d'œuvre ? Pas du tout ! Au contraire, il dévalorise la main-

d'œuvre locale en la mettant directement en concurrence avec les jeunes professionnels étrangers.

Avec la politique de ce gouvernement, les gens n'ont plus confiance en l'avenir et ce n'est pas moi qui le dis, c'est une étude de *The Capitalist* qui a annoncé en mai que nos jeunes sont les plus malheureux au monde. *E ankor pe demande kot mo'nn fote !* Ce gouvernement n'a même pas pris la peine de questionner les motivations des familles qui choisissent de quitter le pays, et pourtant, les richesses humaines de notre pays sont notre plus grand atout. Nous, au prochain gouvernement, nous créerons des emplois de qualité ; nous investirons dans la valorisation des compétences locales à travers la formation et l'innovation ; nous garantirons un développement économique durable, équitable et qui pourra rendre fier chaque Mauricien et chaque Mauricienne.

En parlant d'économie durable, si ce gouvernement voulait réellement une économie résiliente, il aurait d'abord commencé par considérer de réformer notre mode de comptabilité nationale. La Banque mondiale, elle-même, dit qu'il nous faut inclure des éléments de mesures qui permettent de mesurer justement comment est utilisé notre capital naturel pour savoir si nous pouvons continuer à l'utiliser comme nous le faisons. On ne peut continuer à penser que détruire nos écosystèmes naturels qui nous rendent des services et permettent cette fameuse croissance, qu'en faisant cela notre économie sera résiliente. La Banque mondiale, elle-même, dit que nous ne pouvons pas continuer comme cela, ce n'est pas soutenable. Chaque année, je reviens avec cette suggestion et j'ai posé la question au ministre pour savoir s'il compte utiliser la méthode de comptabilité proposée par les États-Unis, le *System of Environmental Economic Accounting* mais visiblement, il préfère rester avec le mode de comptabilité traditionnel pour mesurer la croissance. Pourtant, Maurice était le premier pays à aller dans cette direction en 2012. Un rapport financé par l'Union Européenne, la COI et la Banque mondiale avait été produit pour pouvoir intégrer cette méthodologie dans notre comptabilité locale. Mais, contre l'intérêt de tous, le MSM a choisi de l'ignorer. Pourtant, l'utilisation de ce système de comptabilité aurait obligé le gouvernement à intégrer l'environnement et le social dans toutes ses décisions et aurait évité que nous soyons aussi vulnérables aujourd'hui face aux conséquences du réchauffement climatique. *Aprè la mor latizann !* Le gouvernement vient maintenant avec l'annonce de 300

milliards pour faire face au réchauffement climatique. Ce qui m'amène aux habituelles incohérences du gouvernement sur la protection de l'environnement.

Ce budget prévoit la création d'un *Climate and Sustainability Fund* de 3.2 milliards jusqu'à 2030, mais qui était déjà annoncé fin 2020. Et il existe déjà un *National Environment and Climate Change Fund*, dont la plupart des fonds alloués chaque année sont alloués à des projets qui n'ont rien à voir avec notre résilience climatique. L'an dernier, sur 1,6 milliards alloués à ce fonds, 523 millions ont été alloués à des projets d'embellissement et de nettoyage qui n'ont donc rien à voir avec notre résilience climatique. Est-ce que cette fois ce sera différent ? Pas de détails cette année. Nous savons juste que sera mis en place un partenariat privé public à travers un comité pour décider comment seront alloués les fonds, et les parlementaires n'ont pas leur mot à dire dans le choix de ces dépenses.

Depuis 2021, j'ai demandé au Premier ministre de mettre en place un comité parlementaire pour l'environnement et le changement climatique afin d'inclure l'opposition dans les décisions concernant les dépenses des fonds liés au changement climatique. Mais comme ce gouvernement n'aime pas quand la démocratie fonctionne, il n'a rien fait et a ignoré. Un gouvernement, donc, qui aime s'entendre dire qu'il protège l'environnement, mais qui, en réalité, fait tout son contraire et cherche ensuite des solutions miracles pour réparer ses erreurs.

Un exemple, parmi d'autres, d'une de ses incohérences, il vient encore une fois faciliter les constructions à la section 146 et probablement sur les zones écologiquement sensibles, comme il a l'habitude de le faire, puisqu'il semble que les études environnementales seront bâclées. Malgré le contexte de crise écologique, les licences *EIA* continueront à être distribuées comme des petits pâtés aux compagnies qui voudront bien passer par l'étude de notaires du ministre de l'Environnement. Gratte mon dos et je gratterai le tiens, comme dit le proverbe latin.

Concernant l'érosion des plages et l'idée de génie de remettre d'actualité l'extraction de sable dans nos lagons, pourrait-on savoir quelles études ont été faites avant de venir de l'avant avec cette annonce ? Qu'elles soient rendues publiques si elles existent. Au cas contraire, une recherche toute simple montre que les études scientifiques affirment que l'extraction de sable du lagon pour réhabiliter les plages érodées va avoir des conséquences néfastes sur la faune et la flore marine, sur la dynamique des courants marins et va accélérer le problème de l'érosion. Le

ministre de l'Environnement de l'époque, mon collègue, Rajesh Bhagwan, avait pris en 2001 la décision difficile mais nécessaire de faire cesser cette pratique pour protéger notre lagon et le gagne-pain des pêcheurs. Aujourd'hui, avec ce gouvernement, nous reculons de 20 ans ! Et s'il fallait encore convaincre de cette absurdité, un océanographe, qui travaille d'ailleurs en collaboration avec le gouvernement sur plusieurs projets, le dit lui-même –

« Extraire le sable des zones du lagon [...] augmente l'érosion et détruit la capacité de régénération de ces lagons. Cela aura des effets catastrophiques sur l'environnement, accélérant les impacts négatifs du relèvement du niveau de la mer. »

Pour justifier cette démarche, le gouvernement prend l'exemple des Maldives mais, il ne dit pas qu'il y a eu contestation et même démission d'un cadre de l'*Environment Protection Agency* aux Maldives quand un permis *EIA* pour permettre l'extraction de sable a été accordé en dépit des mises en garde dans le rapport *EIA* lui-même. Le ministre de l'Environnement devrait en prendre de la graine. Ce n'est certainement pas ici qu'on verrait le ministre de l'Environnement démissionner ou même défendre l'intérêt de l'environnement. Il est trop occupé à défendre d'autres intérêts. S'il n'a pas daigné démissionner face à un cas flagrant de conflit d'intérêts, on oserait croire qu'il le ferait pour la biodiversité.

Cette mesure est d'ailleurs en contradiction totale avec l'ambition de repeupler et réhabiliter le lagon. Le gouvernement veut extraire le sable corallien, mais, en parallèle, il veut faire 250 fermes pour cultiver les coraux. Pyromane et pompier à la fois ! *Li mem met dife, li mem rod fer kroir li pou teign dife!* Aussi, faire des fermes de coraux sans s'attaquer au problème de la pollution qui rentre dans nos lagons, c'est un non-sens total. Tout est interconnecté, de la montagne jusqu'aux récifs. Tant que ce gouvernement ne comprendra pas que respecter l'interconnexion des écosystèmes est essentielle pour la gestion intégrée de la zone côtière, l'argent continuera à être jeté par la fenêtre et on ne pourra pas parler de développement durable.

La réhabilitation du littoral est, elle aussi, annoncée dans chaque budget, mais de l'autre côté, le gouvernement continue de permettre les constructions à moins de 100 m du *high water mark*, des constructions qui se font souvent sans étude environnementale au préalable puisqu'il

n'a pas amendé le seuil de 50 unités, des constructions qui se font sur les zones écologiquement sensibles, qui détruisent les dunes de sable et donc accélèrent l'érosion.

Quelle ironie quand on sait que de l'autre côté, aujourd'hui, il dit prétendre vouloir remédier au problème de l'érosion ! Par ailleurs, l'an dernier, était annoncé que 21 km de littoral endommagé seraient restaurés. Qu'est-ce qui a été fait en réalité ? Uniquement 1,6 km de Bambous Virieux à Anse Jonchée, 1,6 km sur 21 km annoncés l'an dernier.

Autre exemple d'incohérence et de manque de volonté. D'un côté, le gouvernement parle année après année de reforestation sans que l'on voit quoi que ce soit se concrétiser, mais de l'autre côté, il continue d'enlever les forêts pour divers projets comme à Chamarel, à La Vigie, à La Marie et j'en passe. L'an dernier, à la section 222, il était annoncé que 1 million d'arbres devait être planté. Quel bilan ? Zéro ! Toujours l'an dernier, était annoncée, la destruction risible du bâtiment Emmanuel Anquetil pour y planter une forêt endémique. À moins que ce gouvernement, expert de l'illusion, soit passé par là, mais il me semble bien que le bâtiment soit encore présent et qu'aucune forêt n'y ait été plantée.

Cette année, rebelote ! Le ministre annonce l'augmentation de la couverture forestière de 100 hectares par an, mais sans aucun bilan de ce qui a été planté pour l'an dernier. Les développements de plus de 5 arpents devront avoir 4 % d'arbres endémiques. 4 % ? Cela s'appelle des micro-plantations, M. le ministre, pas de la reforestation. Donc, de quelle reforestation le gouvernement est-il en train de parler ? Surtout quand, dans l'annexe du budget à la section C.27, on peut voir qu'il autorise maintenant discrètement la destruction d'arbres protégés.

Je vais changer d'environnement pour aller du côté de l'océan. Nous venons de célébrer samedi dernier la journée mondiale des océans. C'est connu, notre biodiversité marine est menacée d'effondrement et qu'est-ce que fait ce gouvernement ? Il autorise, à travers la section C.26 de l'annexe du budget, l'utilisation de filets de pêche de grande taille, *large scale driftnets* et des *demersal trawl nets*, des filets qui vont encore détruire la faune et la flore marine, la biodiversité, les écosystèmes marins. Ces filets vont ramasser toutes sortes d'animaux ; les tortues, les dauphins, les requins, les baleineaux, mais aussi les poissons en danger d'extinction.

Et nous savons que le thon albacore est en grand danger. Les filets de fond vont tout écraser sur leur passage. C'est quand même incroyable que ce gouvernement permette cette pratique alors que notre biodiversité marine menace de s'effondrer à cause de la pollution et du réchauffement climatique et que pourtant, c'est bien elle qui pourrait nous sauver de cette situation. Je ne comprends même pas que le ministre de l'Environnement peut laisser passer une telle absurdité, mais personne ne peut plus s'étonner puisque, comme je le disais, notre environnement ne semble pas l'intéresser. C'est son travail de notaire qui est plus important.

La part des énergies renouvelables, est-elle en déclin ? Plus personne ne peut s'étonner que l'environnement n'intéresse pas notre ministre concerné et plus personne ne s'étonne non plus d'entendre encore cette année à la section 204 (c) que 2,500 panneaux solaires seront installés sur les maisons, les toits des O.N.G., les institutions charitables et religieuses. 200 écoles devraient être équipées en panneaux solaires l'an dernier. Qu'est-ce qu'il en est ? Zéro ! Malgré tout, le gouvernement ambitionne toujours d'arriver à 37.7 % d'énergie renouvelable en 2025 dans le mixte électricité, excluant la biomasse, si je me fie aux discours du ministre Joe Lesjongard l'an dernier.

Mais quand on regarde les chiffres, en 2013, la part d'énergie renouvelable dans le mixte d'électricité était de 23,4 %. En 2013, 23,4 %. En 2022, c'est passé à 17,4 % et en 2023, on arrive à 15,6 %, selon les chiffres à la page 225 des *Estimates*. On est passé de 23,4 % en 2013 à 15,6 % en 2023. En neuf ans, nous avons reculé de 8 % et le ministre nous dit qu'on va arriver à une part d'énergie renouvelable de 37,7 % excluant la biomasse en 2025 ? Mais dans quel monde est-ce qu'il vit ? Où est-ce qu'il trouvera concrètement les 22,1 % supplémentaires en un an ? Nous voudrions que ce soit possible. Nous sommes 100 % en faveur des énergies renouvelables, mais au vu des chiffres, ce n'est pas réaliste et au vu des actions aussi, au vu des faits, au vu de la façon dont il gère les projets d'énergies renouvelables.

Pour rappel, COREXSOLAR est supposé fournir 70 MW d'énergie solaire sur le réseau. Nous avons tiré la sonnette d'alarme sur les irrégularités autour de l'octroi de ce contrat, mais le ministre a persisté ! Où ça nous a menés aujourd'hui ? Nulle part ! Plus d'un an est passé depuis la signature du contrat entre la CEB et cette compagnie et la compagnie n'a toujours pas de terrain pour faire son projet, aucun permis pour démarrer alors que le projet est supposé

commencer à opérer en février prochain. Au lieu de prendre des actions contre la compagnie, c'est contre les dénonciateurs que le ministre met des cas en cours. Le monde à l'envers ! Si le ministre nous avait écoutés et avait refait un appel d'offre en bonne et due forme, nous n'aurions pas perdu tout ce temps et 70 MW d'énergie solaire supplémentaire seraient disponibles.

Concernant le *Liquid Natural Gas (LNG)*, dans les *Estimates* de l'an dernier, à la page 235, dans ce qui établit la direction stratégique du ministère, il était prévu de mettre en place des *LNG Power Plants*. Cette année, disparue ! On n'entend plus parler, aucune mention ! Le député Adil Ameer Meea en tombe, tellement c'est extraordinaire que le gouvernement manque autant de planification et de vision ! Avec un tel recul de la part des énergies renouvelables dans le mixte électricité en 10 ans et avec une si mauvaise gestion, on peut dire que la politique du gouvernement concernant l'énergie a été un échec. Et s'il faut parler de l'engagement pris pour la décarbonisation du parc automobile, c'est la même chose. Dans le cadre des engagements pris à la COP26 de réduire de 40 % les émissions de gaz à effet de serre, le gouvernement a misé sur la décarbonisation du transport.

Dans le dernier budget, était annoncée l'acquisition de 200 bus électriques pour la CNT. Qu'est-ce qu'il en est ? Un bus électrique pour la CNT aujourd'hui. Un seul ! 163 bus de la CNT ont dépassé l'âge de 16 ans et chaque année, grâce à une dérogation de la NTA, ils peuvent toujours rouler et polluer. Encore une belle promesse non réalisée. Donc, il semblerait que les autorités soient en train de commander une cinquantaine de bus thermiques, pas électriques ! J'ai posé une question au ministre concerné le 11 avril dernier sur cette nouvelle acquisition de bus thermique et je suis toujours dans l'attente d'une réponse.

Échec de la politique concernant l'énergie, mais aussi échec de la politique de la gestion du plastique. Le 21 février 2021, le ministre de l'Environnement, l'honorable Ramano, a annoncé en conférence de presse que la commercialisation, la production et l'importation des bouteilles PET, dont 130 milliards sont produits au niveau local, seraient interdites à Maurice. Trois ans plus tard, non seulement, il n'en parle plus, mais il enlève la taxe. Oui, non seulement il n'en parle plus, mais il enlève la taxe à la section 240 (a), il enlève le *levy* sur les *PET bottles* ! Quelle ironie ! Budget après budget, on annonce des mesures sur le recyclage du plastique qui peut se recycler que trois fois en passant, mais de l'autre côté, la politique de la gestion du

plastique est un échec total. Vous vous souvenez encore de l'interdiction du plastique à usage unique qui avait été annoncée par le ministre en 2021, qui devait entrer en vigueur en janvier 2022 pour ensuite être repoussée en janvier 2023 et finalement carrément repoussée après les élections en février 2025 ? Une fuite en avant !

La Responsabilité Élargie du Producteur, c'est du réchauffé aussi ! La séparation des déchets à la source, pareille, est attendue depuis 2019. L'an dernier, 162 *segregation bins on public beaches* étaient annoncés et sont toujours attendus ! Donc, non seulement rien en 10 ans n'a été fait pour permettre la séparation des déchets à la source et soulager le site de Mare Chicose, surtout quand on sait que 60 % des déchets qui vont à Mare Chicose, ce sont des déchets verts qui auraient pu être utilisés pour les composts et les fertilisants. Donc, non seulement rien n'a été fait pour la séparation des déchets, mais pour compenser son manque de vision et de planification, le gouvernement vient encore avec ce qu'il croit être des solutions miracles.

Cela fait des années que des experts anticipent la saturation du site de Mare Chicose. 3 ans que le site de Mare Chicose est effectivement déjà saturé. 6 ans que le contrat de gestionnaire est terminé. Et que fait le gouvernement ? Il accorde un contrat de R 70 millions sous la procédure d'urgence au *joint-venture* Sotravic et Lottotech pour faire des nouveaux espaces vides à Mare Chicose. Voilà sa nouvelle solution miracle et, par magie, on n'entend plus parler de l'extension verticale qui était sa précédente solution miracle. Beaucoup de temps est perdu, mais la séparation des déchets à la source sera implémentée par le prochain gouvernement qui est de ce côté de la Chambre.

En résumé, des mesures réchauffées, pas implémentées et encore et toujours les incohérences concernant la protection de l'environnement alors que nous faisons face à une crise climatique. La jeunesse, c'est elle qui fera de plus en plus face aux effets du réchauffement climatique. La jeunesse comprend que c'est aussi son avenir qui est en train d'être hypothéqué aujourd'hui. Elle en tiendra certainement compte une fois dans l'isoloir pour donner son vote, et elle n'est pas la seule.

Les femmes aussi en tiendront compte. Les quelques mesures pour le bien-être des femmes illustrent à quel point ce gouvernement ne connaît pas la réalité des femmes, surtout les

plus vulnérables, aussi celles de la classe moyenne, de la classe des travailleurs. Pourquoi avoir attendu 2024 pour donner des serviettes hygiéniques et uniquement aux filles de grade 6 à 13 ?

Pour pouvoir changer leurs serviettes hygiéniques, encore faut-il qu'elles puissent le faire dans les conditions hygiéniques. Mais comment le faire quand on voit l'état des toilettes dans les collèges d'État et quand l'eau ne coule que parfois ? À l'école, Floréal SSS, dans la circonscription no. 16, non seulement les toilettes sont dans un état pitoyable, mais aussi les filles doivent changer leurs serviettes hygiéniques dans le noir puisque l'école est privée d'électricité depuis des mois. Elles doivent changer leurs serviettes hygiéniques dans le noir. Ce manque d'espace approprié pour changer les serviettes hygiéniques s'applique à beaucoup de femmes. Est-ce que ce gouvernement pense aux femmes laborieuses, aux femmes chauffeurs de bus qui n'ont pas d'endroit bien souvent pour changer leurs serviettes hygiéniques, pour se laver ? Le gouvernement, surtout le Premier ministre, avait dit –

« Mo enkouraze ban fam fer ban tibebe pu gagne ban resource humain. »

Donc, le gouvernement veut que les femmes mauriciennes fassent plus d'enfants, mais ne leur permet pas d'accoucher dans des conditions saines et respectueuses dans nos hôpitaux. Combien de femmes touchant le revenu minimal garanti m'ont partagé avoir pris des emprunts pour pouvoir accoucher dans une clinique de peur qu'elles-mêmes ou leurs bébés ne sortent pas vivants de l'hôpital. Et certains dans ce gouvernement veulent profiter de la misère des ces gens pour se faire de l'argent en construisant leur propre clinique privée au lieu d'améliorer les soins dans nos hôpitaux.

On dit aux femmes de faire des enfants, mais on ne leur procure pas de l'aide après l'accouchement. Le congé de paternité d'un mois était annoncé depuis 2020, mais la loi n'a jamais été modifiée et le ministre a le toupet de revenir avec cette annonce après quatre ans en faisant croire à une nouveauté. On dit aux femmes de faire plus d'enfants, mais le gouvernement ne leur dit pas comment elles arriveront à remplir le caddie. Il ne dit pas comment il va freiner l'augmentation des prix.

Le gouvernement veut que les femmes fassent plus d'enfants, mais ne permet pas à leurs enfants d'avoir des loisirs. Le Multipurpose Complexe Sportif de Glen Park, dans la

circonscription no. 16, est fermé depuis 2 ans et quand il ne l'est pas, il ferme à 15 heures ; à l'heure où les enfants rentrent de l'école et cherchent une activité saine à laquelle ils peuvent s'adonner. Le centre communautaire de Réunion est fermé depuis des années, les terrains de jeux sont inutilisables, *l'herbe pa koupe*, le terrain de foot mal éclairé, surtout ceux de Résidences d'Oiseaux et Mangalkan.

Le gouvernement dit aux femmes de faire des enfants, mais ne dit pas comment il va améliorer la qualité du système éducatif, non seulement la qualité de l'enseignement, mais aussi des infrastructures. Comme je disais, l'école de Floréal SSS est dans le noir depuis des mois et ensuite ce gouvernement vient parler de développement quand les écoles n'ont pas de l'électricité en 2024 ! Et au lieu d'améliorer nos écoles publiques, qu'est-ce que le gouvernement fait ? Il donne une déduction de R 60 000 de la taxe pour la scolarité dans les écoles privées.

Ici encore, comme pour la construction de nombreuses cliniques privées, que le gouvernement a systématiquement encouragée au lieu d'investir dans nos hôpitaux ; ici encore, est-ce que ce ne sera pas plus responsable d'investir avant tout dans le système éducatif public dans le but de l'améliorer ? Système éducatif qui n'est pas gratuit en passant, comme le prétend le ministre. Les frais d'administration s'élèvent autour de R 30 000 par année à l'université de Maurice et je ne parle même pas des frais d'examens.

Le gouvernement veut que les femmes fassent plus d'enfants, mais ne leur dit pas comment il va résoudre le problème de la drogue. Plus personne n'ose espérer que le MSM envisage de combattre les trafiquants de drogue quand on voit comment il les protège. Le dernier en date était le fameux Franklin, mais personne aussi n'oublie le *zenfan lakaz* qui avait importé de la drogue dans des bonbonnes de gaz pour l'hôpital. L'argent retrouvé dans la tractopelle qui n'est pas passée par le rayon X et contenant 95 kg d'héroïne. Les frères G. qui ont eu 14 millions de *loan*, le fameux Peroomal qui a dit que le Premier ministre finance l'importation de la drogue. Le rapport Rault et ensuite le rapport Lam Shang Leen ont clairement établi les liens entre les trafiquants de drogues et les membres du MSM.

Le gouvernement dit aux femmes de faire plus d'enfants...

Mr Speaker: Excuse me, can I interrupt you on that point – *le Premier ministre qui finance l'importation de la drogue...*

Ms J. Bérenger: Ce n'est pas moi qui le dit.

An hon. Member: *Enn rapor sa!*

Mr Speaker: But any report may say that. There is no proof of it. You can't. You withdraw that instantly and apologise for that!

Ms J. Bérenger: I withdraw.

Mr Speaker: And you apologise for that!

Ms J. Bérenger: I apologise.

Le gouvernement dit aux femmes de faire plus d'enfants, mais ne les aide pas à avoir un emploi stable. Le gouvernement dit aux femmes de faire plus d'enfants, mais ne leur garantit pas un salaire égal pour un travail égal dans le secteur privé. Le gouvernement dit aux femmes de faire plus d'enfants, mais fait la place pour les travailleurs étrangers. Quel travail auront leurs enfants quand le gouvernement libéralise à l'extrême le marché de l'emploi en faveur des travailleurs étrangers ? Le gouvernement dit aux femmes de faire plus d'enfants quand le taux de chômage risque d'augmenter face à la politique d'ouverture dangereuse et débridée aux travailleurs étrangers. Et qui dit augmentation du chômage, dit augmentation des fléaux et de la violence.

Le gouvernement dit aux femmes de faire plus d'enfants, mais combien ont tous les jours peur pour leur sécurité et ne peuvent quitter leur foyer conjugal par un manque de soutien financier et d'endroit où habiter. Ce n'est certainement pas R 5000 qui va les encourager, et Dieu sait quel parcours du combattant ce sera pour avoir accès à cet argent. Le gouvernement dit aux femmes de faire plus d'enfants, mais combien parmi celles aux faibles revenus attendent encore un logement depuis des années ? Combien habitent encore dans des maisons avec de l'amiante, une substance nocive pour la santé et l'environnement ? Henrietta, dans la circonscription no. 16, encore de nombreuses familles n'ont pas d'autre choix que de vivre dans leurs petites maisonnettes avec de l'amiante et des maisonnettes qui tombent en ruine. Pas d'autre choix,

surtout, que d'y vivre avec leurs enfants. Il y a quelques semaines, j'ai rendu visite à une jeune maman vivant dans une de ces maisonnettes avec un bébé d'un an ! Le gouvernement leur a fait toutes sortes de promesses et puis les a abandonnés. Et cette année, plus aucune mention des maisons avec de l'amiante dans le budget ! Combien les femmes sont désespérées de voir leurs maisons inondées à chaque grosse pluie et d'attendre depuis des années une maison de la NHDC ?

Le gouvernement dit aux femmes de faire plus des enfants, mais il met une dette de plus de R 470 000 sur la tête de chaque enfant à naître. Le gouvernement croit vraiment que ce sont dans ces conditions qu'elles voudront enfanter ?

Mais le gouvernement est complètement déconnecté de la réalité. Je le redis – le socialisme à la MSM n'est pas du socialisme du tout. La population en a assez d'entendre chaque année les mêmes refrains sur le barrage de Rivière des Anguilles, des drains à cout de milliards qui n'empêchent pas les inondations, sur l'eau 24/7, sur le remplacement interminable des vieux tuyaux, sur le nombre ronflant de construction des maisons annoncé depuis une éternité.

La population veut des vraies mesures qui puissent la soulager, que leurs conditions de vie soient améliorées. La population veut pouvoir remplir son caddie de supermarché sans devoir remettre des produits sur l'étagère au passage à la caisse. Elle veut un réajustement des salaires, un accès amélioré à Internet, une réforme de la *NLTA*, une baisse des prix sur l'essence et le diesel. Une vraie égalité des chances, un frein à la dépréciation de la roupie, un meilleur pouvoir d'achat, une réduction des prix. Ce sont ce genre de mesures que la population attendait et le prochain gouvernement qui est de ce côté qui va les lui apporter.

Je vous remercie. M. le président.

Mr Speaker: I know call hon. Ittoo!

(4.22 p.m.)

Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président. Beaucoup l'ont dit avant moi, nous sommes tous sans exception dans cette Chambre, des deux côtés de la Chambre à notre dernière intervention sur un budget de ce mandat. Une certitude, beaucoup, je dis bien, beaucoup ne seront pas là pour le prochain budget ! Je vous dis cela parce que j'aurais souhaité que pour le dernier oratoire, au moins pour le dernier, on aurait ressenti plus

d'honnêteté, de vérité venant de l'autre côté de la Chambre. Et mois de démagogie. Hélas, peine perdue !

M. le président, vous l'avez sûrement entendu, à la fin de leurs interventions, les députés de l'opposition consacrent un petit moment à leurs circonscriptions et à leurs très chers mandants et se vantent de défendre leurs intérêts bec et ongles. Cependant, pas de remerciement de leur part pour un revenu minimum garanti de R 20 000. Pas de remerciement au nom de leurs chers mandants parents pour une aide de 2000 et 2500 roupies par mois. M. le président, pas de remerciement aux noms de leurs mandants à la retraite qui toucheront désormais une pension de R 14 000 et bientôt, R 15 000, et j'en passe. Tout cela démontre à quel point leurs mandants leur sont vraiment si chers.

M. le président, ceux qui se disaient être les défenseurs des travailleurs, les défenseurs des vulnérables, les soi-disant champions de justice sociale, qui s'autoproclament être ceux qui marchent tête haute et mains propres, elles se sont rangées du côté de ceux qui n'ont pas hésité à retirer les subsides sur la *SC* et la *HSC*.

M. le président, ils n'ont pas hésité à se ranger à côté de ceux qui, pour économiser quelques sous, ont cru nécessaire d'arrêter la distribution de pain dans les écoles. Taxer les économies de nos aînés en même temps qu'introduire la haine à *NRPT* taxe, et la liste est longue, M. le président.

L'honorable David nous reproche d'ouvrir les tiroirs trop vieux parce que cela fait trop longtemps qu'ils n'ont pas été au pouvoir. Or, on n'a pas le droit de mettre cela sur le dos des nouveaux venus. Mais, M. le président, nous avons un devoir de mémoire à rappeler nos compatriotes du danger qui nous guette avec cette nouvelle opposition devant nous. Non, je me corrige ; ce n'est pas une nouvelle opposition. J'entends les membres de l'opposition utiliser le terme « réchauffé » assez souvent depuis des années maintenant.

M. le président, c'est la même opposition, tel un *Kentucky* réchauffé du Parti travailliste-*MMM* de 2014, mais version 2.0. Une même opposition avec les mêmes leaders toujours aussi dangereux et avec la même rhétorique et promesse frivole. M. le président, détenir le symbole du cœur n'est plus suffisant pour amener à croire que ceux qui portent ce symbole sont ceux qui défendent vraiment les plus vulnérables. Que ce soient ceux qui portent le symbole du cœur qui défendent mieux ceux qui peinent à joindre les deux bouts. Depuis des lustres, M. le président, ce

n'est plus le cas. Les défaites successives du MMM depuis 2005 à toutes les élections, mais qu'une preuve, et il y en a tant d'autres.

M. le président, dans chaque coin et recoin du pays, sous la varangue de la boutique du coin, dans les salons de coiffure, dans les réunions familiales, un seul écho : *banla mem pe revini*. C'est cela la vérité, n'en déplaise à l'honorable Bhagwan qui croyait faire fortune en vendant des casques anti-ros. C'est depuis la venue de notre gouvernement en 2014 qu'à travers chaque budget, nous avons démontré qui sont ceux qui ont un cœur et qui travaillent résolument à réduire les inégalités sociales, à apporter une vraie justice sociale tout en restant focalisé sur notre objectif de moderniser notre république et de consolider notre économie.

M. le président, c'est cela le gouvernement dirigé par l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth et nul autre. M. le président, l'orateur qui m'a précédé, l'honorable Ms Bérenger, veut faire croire à la Chambre que nous réintroduisons l'extraction de sable, comme ce fût le cas dans le passé. Loin de là, M. le président ! Le but de cette mesure est l'extraction d'une certaine quantité de sable pour la restauration de nos plages dégradées. Avec le changement climatique, la montée des eaux et d'autres calamités naturelles, cela se fait depuis des décennies sur les plus grandes plages du monde, entre autres, en Floride, et à la plage de Miami aux États-Unis. Je ne pense pas qu'il soit nécessaire que je rappelle à la Chambre l'importance de nos plages pour nous, pour nos compatriotes et pour notre économie.

M. le président, dans un contexte de tension géopolitique, de ralentissement de la croissance économique mondiale, dans un climat de perturbation majeure au niveau du fret, ce n'est pas une tâche facile pour n'importe quel ministre des Finances de préparer un tel budget. Et là, je dois féliciter l'honorable ministre, Dr. Padayachy et son équipe pour le gros travail abattu. Dans ce contexte difficile, notre ministre des Finances nous annonce une baisse de la dette publique à 71,1 %, une baisse du déficit budgétaire à 3,4 % et je ne vais pas répéter tous ces indicateurs économiques qui sont ouverts et déjà couverts par l'honorable Xavier Duval.

M. le président, nous savons tous l'importance d'avoir un climat de confiance, que ce soit un investisseur, le secteur privé ou les institutions financières, ils en dépendent beaucoup. Notre ministre des Finances a toujours œuvré pour maintenir ce climat de confiance au plus haut et, pour preuve, je me réfère au *PWC CEO Survey* qui nous indique que 83 % des CEO locaux sont confiants sur les perspectives économiques du pays.

Cela, M. le président, n'est qu'une indication et il y en a tant d'autres. S'il y a une chose sur laquelle nous sommes tous d'accord des deux côtés de la Chambre, c'est que notre République a en face d'elle des défis majeurs. Je viens de faire mention du contexte externe en dehors de notre contrôle, qui est une des causes majeures de l'augmentation des prix des produits à l'importation. Ajoutez à cela, le monde est devenu aujourd'hui un village global, permettant une mobilité accrue des ressources humaines ; *to work from home, work from abroad* est devenu une chose courante, et tout cela contribue à un manque de main-d'œuvre dans divers secteurs. Un train de vie moderne avec des hommes et des femmes qui ont des aspirations professionnelles encore plus grandes occasionne une baisse dans le nombre des naissances.

Une population vieillissante découlant d'une amélioration au niveau de notre prise en charge médicale, une jeunesse soif d'information, de connectivité, pleine d'inspiration économique, professionnelle et sportive, perte d'intérêt dans l'agriculture et l'élevage, changement climatique, une augmentation dans le nombre de cancers, M. le président, les défis sont bien là et réels. Ce budget de l'honorable Dr. Padayachy s'attaque à tous ces défis. Ce budget s'inscrit dans la continuité des budgets précédents, relever les défis qui nous guettent et faire sûr que pendant que le pays progresse et se modernise, personne n'est laissé de côté.

Un sentiment et une considération que le Parti travailliste n'a jamais éprouvés, et est aujourd'hui en alliance avec le MMM. M. le président, je dois le déplorer : une politisation à outrance de l'opposition de notre système d'éducation uniquement à des fins et pour des gains politiques, que je voudrais dénoncer avec force. Qu'avons-nous fait ? Qu'est-ce que ce gouvernement a fait durant son mandat ? Nous avons rendu l'accès à l'éducation pré-primaire et tertiaire complètement gratuit pour que chaque enfant de la République ait les mêmes chances.

Nous ne sommes pas arrêtés là, M. le président. Notre gouvernement s'est engagé à donner une nouvelle image à l'enseignement technique et vocationnel et à changer la perception du public afin que davantage d'étudiants s'inscrivent dans des formations offrant de bonnes perspectives de carrière à la Polytechnics Mauritius. Une seconde chance à tous ceux qui ne réussissent pas à traverser le cap de la SC ou à tous ceux qui aspirent à des postes de techniciens supérieurs diplômés dans les domaines tels que la technologie de l'information, des technologies émergentes comme la robotique, l'intelligence artificielle et le développement des jeux.

Tout cela à travers un enseignement technique de haute qualité. M. le président, aujourd'hui nous faisons encore plus : nous donnons une deuxième chance à tous ces enfants qui veulent absolument avoir leur *5 credit* à la SC ou compléter la HSC pour pouvoir aspirer à des degrés dans des universités de renom local et international. M. le président, jamais et je le redis jamais un gouvernement n'a autant fait pour les étudiants en un mandat. M. le président, le peuple mauricien a reconnu la vision de notre Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth et il l'a démontré ; oui, il a démontré cette confiance dans sa vision à chaque fois que l'occasion s'est présentée.

M. le président, laissez-moi vous dire, qu'il y a une différence entre un visionnaire et un marchand de rêve. Et oui, qui ne connaît pas le fameux « *mo pou sanz ou lavi dan 100 zour* » ? Le bluff, le subterfuge, est très prisé par ceux qui sont paniqués, désorientés et n'arrivent pas à vendre ce même produit de l'opposition. Oui, ce même produit de l'opposition, rejeté en forme de cocktail en 2014, vendu séparément en 2019 sans succès ; aujourd'hui, on nous revend le même cocktail de 2014, mais cette fois, avec de nouvelles épices.

M. le président, face à cette bande d'amateurs dépassés, fatigués, nous avons un Premier ministre qui, budget après budget, est resté fidèle à son engagement, fidèle à son contrat avec sa population, et je vais citer ce qu'a dit l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth en octobre 2019 –

« Nos réalisations, notre vision d'avenir, nos convictions pour construire une République de Maurice moderne, ambitieuse et forte sont les mêmes. Vous avez eu la preuve de notre capacité à répondre à vos aspirations et à vos exigences. Les propositions contenues dans ce manifeste électoral constituent ce nouveau pacte que nous voulons signer avec le peuple pour poursuivre le développement de notre République et façonner un avenir encore meilleur pour tous. Nous allons consolider et diversifier davantage notre économie en misant sur l'innovation et les technologies nouvelles et nous donnons la garantie d'un développement inclusif qui assurera une distribution équitable de la richesse nationale. »

Voyez-vous la différence, M. le président, un développement inclusif et l'assurance d'une distribution équitable de la richesse nationale. Dans ce gouvernement de Pravind Jugnauth, il n'y a pas de fausses promesses. Nous faisons ce que nous disons. M. le président, un *master plan* pour l'extension du réseau du métro dans les quatre coins de l'île, prévoyant R 300 milliards afin

de contrer les effets liés au changement climatique à travers une taxe de 2 % sur les bénéfices de compagnies avec un chiffre d'affaires dépassant les R 50 millions et aspirant à une économie de R 1 trillion, soit R 1000 milliards d'ici 2030, démontre clairement la vision ambitieuse de notre gouvernement responsable.

M. le président, en conclusion, j'ai écouté avec beaucoup d'attention tous les intervenants de l'opposition Parti travailliste et MMM depuis hier. Je dois le dire, j'ai noté une certaine conviction de la part des députés rouges ici et en dehors de l'hémicycle qui hurlent que c'est leur leader qui, d'ailleurs, est le nouveau leader de la dernière version de l'alliance de l'opposition parlementaire. Ils scandent que c'est leur leader que le pays a besoin de pour une meilleure performance économique, pour une île Maurice meilleure, pour sauver le pays. Oui, ils le disent haut et fort, nos amis travaillistes.

De l'autre côté de la Chambre, M. le président, leurs amis du MMM décortiquent le budget, nous font subir leur analyse *biased* pour la plupart, critiquent tout, à tort et à travers, fidèles à leur tradition. Cependant, M. le président, silence radio sur le nom du leader de l'alliance de l'opposition. Pas la moindre mention du nom de celui qui sera leur Premier ministre, que ce soit dans cette auguste Assemblée, dans les débats radiophoniques, dans les congrès politiques ! Zéro, M. le président ! Comment vous dirais-je : le cœur n'y est pas.

M. le président, personne au MMM n'a eu l'audace de venir nous dire que c'est Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, notre Premier ministre, qui sera la solution à tous les problèmes de ce pays. Vous me corrigerez, M. le président, si j'ai tort, peut-être en vérifiant *Hansard* ou les *recording*, mais j'en doute fort. J'avais oublié, M. le président, l'honorable Paul Bérenger, oui, lui seul cependant ne rate aucune occasion de faire mention de son *new best friend*, de son frère. M. le président, de ce côté de la Chambre, dans l'alliance gouvernementale, nous tous, chacun d'entre nous sans exception, nous n'avons aucun complexe, aucune crainte et aucun doute à clamer haut et fort que nous sommes fiers de faire partie d'un gouvernement dirigé par l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth et qu'ensemble avec lui, nous allons continuer à bâtir l'île Maurice de demain, une île Maurice moderne, inclusive, une île Maurice pour tous.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: At this stage, I suspend the Sitting for 30 minutes.

At 4.38 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.17 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! I now call MP Ms Anquetil!

Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Je vous remercie, M. le président. M. le président, avant d'entrer dans le vif du sujet, je souhaite apporter une réflexion sur le motto de ce budget : 'Demain est à nous.'

Cette affirmation exprime un certain optimisme face à l'avenir et la croyance que nos actions d'aujourd'hui façonnent le monde de demain. Sauf que le ministre des Finances s'est lourdement planté. Ce que ce budget construit aujourd'hui, c'est la dette publique de demain. Un acte irresponsable et irréflecti de la part de ce gouvernement. Notre demain se résume par le commencement de la ruine avec le fardeau d'une dette publique insoutenable.

M. le président, en effet, il s'agit d'un budget de fin de règne sans véritable souffle, sans avenir, sans vision, sans politique macroéconomique, sans de nouveaux secteurs, sans la relance économique et avec unique perspective de séduire les électeurs par des promesses électorales bidons. C'est du clientélisme à l'état pur ! Nous ne sommes pas des opposants systématiques. Nous nous opposons parce que nous ne sommes pas d'accord avec cette politique du clientélisme. Nous dénonçons avec force cette manière de faire qui est contraire à une démocratie.

Vendredi dernier, nous étions ici dans cette auguste Assemblée dans une ambiance sinistre devant un gouvernement plus affaibli que jamais. Le langage corporel de l'honorable Dr. Padayachy disait tout. Il était mal à l'aise par rapport à son propre discours. Cela fait dix ans. Cela fait dix ans que les ministres des Finances successifs du gouvernement MSM viennent nous saouler chaque année avec le fameux Rivière des Anguilles *Dam*. Soyons honnêtes, je suis certaine que cela doit aussi saouler le ministre de venir raconter la même chose chaque année tout en sachant que c'est du vent. On ne peut pas ressasser à l'infini la même rengaine année après année.

Idem, depuis 2015, chaque année, vous nous gonflez avec une distribution d'eau 24/7, mais c'est plutôt du 24 sec que le peuple a eu droit durant votre mandat ! Vous êtes, comme l'ont dit d'autres membres de ce côté de la Chambre, effectivement des vendeurs de rêve. Dans notre patois, vous êtes des *marchands siro* ! Si je devais vous attribuer une note, ce serait 'F' pour *fail* ! *Fanta tou kouler, pa zis oranz* !

(Interruptions)

En contraste, sous le régime Travailleiste, nous avons réalisé deux projets d'envergure concernant le stockage et la distribution de l'eau, notamment le Midlands *Dam* et le Bagatelle *Dam*. C'est la différence ...

(Interruptions)

...entre l'actuel régime moribond et un gouvernement responsable Travailleiste.

D'emblée, le cinquième et dernier budget du gouvernement sortant a cédé à la tentation de l'électoralisme. Il s'agit en effet d'un budget électoraliste et inflationniste. Je suis même tentée de dire : bienvenue au lancement de la campagne électorale du MSM !

M. le président, il nous reste à tout casser –10 semaines à ce Parlement. Ce gouvernement sortant est déjà en campagne électorale. Sans pudeur, il se sert des fonds publics et ne rate aucune occasion pour des inaugurations opportunistes...

Mr Speaker: Relevance to the debate!

Ms Anquetil: La stratégie de ce gouvernement sortant, c'est d'influencer l'opinion publique et de préparer le terrain pour les prochaines élections ; sauf que la population a déjà fait son choix pour le changement.

M. le président, ce budget est un désastre parce qu'un budget doit être bâti sur une base macro-économique solide. Les dépenses publiques et la dette suivent une trajectoire préoccupante. Pour garantir la viabilité économique à long terme, une approche équilibrée est nécessaire. Cela implique de maîtriser les dépenses, stimuler la croissance et réduire la dette tout en utilisant les ressources de manière équitable pour le bien-être de tous. Faute d'une base

macro-économique solide, nous avons assisté, comme les années précédentes, à un simulacre de budget avec des confettis çà et là. Pour faire simple, nous avons eu droit à un exercice de ‘*bajanomics*’ – *economics by counting bajia*, dans la confusion la plus totale.

Dr. Padayachy: *Vomie vend bajia ki al kokin kas met dan coffre ! Mwa mo prefer vend bajia !*

Mr Speaker: Excuse me...

Dr. Padayachy: *Moa mo pou aksepte mo vend bajia...*

Mr Speaker: Excuse me on both sides of the House! Would you please...

Dr. Padayachy: *...ki ale kokin kas met dan coffre!*

Mr Speaker: Would you please withdraw?

Ms Anquetil: I withdraw.

Mr Speaker: And apologise!

Ms Anquetil: I apologise and I withdraw.

Dr. Padayachy: *Vomie mo vend bajia...*

Mr Speaker: This is not the language!

Ms Anquetil: This is a fact!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: This is not the language of a parliamentarian to use!

Dr. Padayachy: *Mo enn vender bajia mo aksepte!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister! Hon. Minister, leave it to me!

This is not the language of a parliamentarian! This is not a civilised language! I will ask you to withdraw another word later on!

Ms Anquetil: C'est déjà fait !

Ce budget a eu droit à un accueil mitigé auprès de la population et le *feel-good factor* escompté de ce budget n'a pas eu lieu. D'ici un mois, les prix vont exploser dans les supermarchés et la population devra casquer encore une fois.

La vraie question que nous posons au gouvernement sortant est de savoir ce qu'il compte mettre en place pour préserver la classe moyenne et renforcer le pouvoir d'achat de tous les ménages. Le Premier ministre se targue que la prospérité de notre pays a augmenté depuis l'entrée en fonction de son gouvernement. La réalité derrière les chiffres est tout autre. Le gouvernement continue de choisir la voie du suicide économique selon la culture MSM, crée une illusion de bien-être grâce à toujours plus de dettes sans penser aux générations futures.

Après deux mandats consécutifs, bientôt 10 ans au pouvoir, le gouvernement MSM a instauré une culture de vivre à crédit dans le pays. Nous en sommes arrivés à un moment de notre histoire où les travailleurs doivent s'endetter pour pouvoir remplir leurs estomacs chaque jour. Aujourd'hui, le peuple souffre énormément du surendettement. Des milliers de familles mauriciennes, plombées de dettes, la tête entre les mains, regardent leur compte en banque se dégarnir chaque mois alors que passent les paiements de l'emprunt immobilier, du prêt pour la voiture et les dépenses des cartes de crédit.

Depuis 2014, l'argent sort plus vite de nos poches qu'il n'y entre. La plupart des familles savent que c'est une expérience difficile à vivre et tous les Mauriciens sont conscients que le surendettement fait vivre dans la peur. Quand vous vous levez le matin, vous avez une boule dans l'estomac, vous avez peur de recevoir une lettre, une mise en demeure, un rappel de paiement que vous n'avez pas réussi à payer à temps et, pire encore, des poursuites judiciaires ; vous avez peur quand vous voyez un numéro inconnu apparaître sur votre portable ; vous avez peur quand vous entendez...

Mr Speaker: What does this have to do with the Budget?

Ms Anquetil: Vous avez peur d'entendre un huissier...

Mr Speaker: What has this got to do with the Budget? Do you want me to stop you?

Ms Anquetil: J'explique la misère des autres.

Mr Speaker: No!

Ms Anquetil: J'explique la misère et la souffrance...

Mr Speaker: Don't play on feelings! Don't play on feelings!

Ms Anquetil: La misère des autres...

Mr Speaker: I hope you have read Erskine May!

Mr Ameer Meea: *De kote sa!*

Ms Anquetil: Yes, of course, I have read; years ago, I have read.

Mr Speaker: So, don't play too much on feelings. You put your facts and figures according to what has been said in the Budget and don't go outside the Budget!

An hon. Member: Rebut!

Ms Anquetil: I am not outside the Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: You are outside Budget and don't argue with me!

Ms Anquetil: Avec le fardeau du surendettement, on perd notre liberté et on survit avec des chaînes invisibles, surtout avec la peur au ventre. De 2005 à 2014, le dollar est resté stable à environ R 30. Depuis 2015, avec le gouvernement MSM, quand il a pris le pouvoir, notre roupie s'est dangereusement dévaluée et aujourd'hui, un dollar vaut environ R 48. Avec la dévaluation constante de notre roupie et l'inflation qui a suivi, les poches des consommateurs se sont vidées.

An hon. Member: 3 millions.

Ms Anquetil: Avec une roupie faible, les prix des commodités, des médicaments et des factures des services publics tels que l'eau et l'électricité ont grimpé en flèche. Avant 2014, avec seulement R 1000, on pouvait acheter plusieurs commissions comme du lait, de la farine, du riz, des conserves et des couches. Aujourd'hui, avec R 1000, on obtient seulement un sac de riz, un paquet de lait et, éventuellement, si elle est en promotion, une boîte de fromage. Le peuple s'est appauvri grâce à cette politique de dévaluation constante de la roupie.

Bien que le secteur des PME soit le principal pourvoyeur d'emplois à Maurice, sous ce gouvernement sortant, les PME ont été balkanisées. Ces PME qui constituent l'épine dorsale de notre économie n'ont pas reçu la considération qu'elles méritent pour pouvoir relancer notre économie sereinement. Malheureusement, on constate avec effroi que le parent pauvre de ce simulacre de budget reste les PME, alors qu'elles auraient dû être les catalyseurs de notre croissance et le moteur de la création de la richesse.

Cependant, l'Alliance PTr-MMM-ND, lorsque nous accéderons au pouvoir, nous présenterons une série de mesures ambitieuses : une stabilisation de la roupie pour contrer l'inflation croissante ; une relance économique visant à stimuler la création d'emplois ; un soutien aux entreprises et surtout les PME pour favoriser la prospérité économique ; une éradication de la culture de la corruption et de l'abus des fonds publics ; une promotion de la méritocratie ; la garantie des chances égales pour tous ; et l'assurance du bien-être de chaque mauricien et chaque mauricienne.

M. le président, le gouvernement ne peut plus fermer les yeux sur le problème de la violence domestique, d'autant plus que la situation est urgente. Les pressions internationales exigent une action immédiate, alors que les cas de violence conjugale et familiale ont plus que triplé dans notre pays. On parle pour l'année 2023 de 9519 cas de femmes battues et de 1856 cas d'hommes battus. C'est devenu un véritable fléau. Dans ce Budget 2024-2025, les mesures relatives aux violences ont occupé à peine deux minutes sur les deux heures et 30 minutes du discours budgétaire. De quoi rester sur notre faim ! Les initiatives qu'on attendait pour combattre la violence ne se sont pas concrétisées. Lancer une assistance financière unique, c'est-à-dire, un *one-off* de R 5000, relève du ridicule ! Inefficace et insultante, voire méprisante pour les victimes de violences domestiques. Que représente la somme de R 5000 pour une victime de violence,

surtout avec le coût de la vie et des enfants à charge ? Notre Alliance proposera des mesures plus efficaces pour faire justice aux victimes de violence domestique. La *Protection from Domestic Violence Act* se fait toujours attendre sous le gouvernement MSM. En 2019, la ministre actuelle s'était engagée à amender et à renforcer cette loi depuis bientôt cinq ans. Fidèle à ses habitudes, elle a été incapable d'honorer son engagement. Que voulez-vous ? Que voulez-vous qu'ils *kiltir bat bate rules !*

Mr Dhunoo: *Ramgoolam sa !*

Ms Anquetil: Pas un mot sur la réhabilitation des hommes déclarés coupables par la justice. La construction d'un nouvel abri pour les femmes victimes de violence domestique dans le Budget 2022-2023 a été jetée aux oubliettes.

Nos propositions telles que la construction d'hébergement d'urgence, l'instauration de programmes scolaires pour l'égalité des sexes dès le plus jeune âge, l'organisation de campagnes de sensibilisation tout au long de l'année et l'introduction d'un bracelet électronique à titre pilote ont été tout simplement rejetées. Le congé de maternité, la proposition de l'alliance Parti Travailleuse-MMM-ND de prolonger le congé de maternité à une année est une initiative louable et progressiste visant à encourager...

Mr Speaker: But this is not in the budget! What are you talking about?

Ms Anquetil: *Non!* This is in the...

Mr Speaker: What are you talking about? And you are reading!

Ms Anquetil: *Non!* This is in the budget!

Mr Speaker: And you are reading! You are reading! You know...

Ms Anquetil: This is in the Budget Speech!

Mr Speaker: No! It is the proposal of the Labour party! Show me the proposal of the Labour party in the budget!

Ms Anquetil: The Labour Party... I am not...

Mr Speaker: So, what are you talking about?

Ms Anquetil: I am just telling you that the...

Mr Speaker: Talk about what they have proposed! And you are reading! Can I ask you to stop reading, if you continue like this!

Ms Anquetil: But ask others to stop reading as well, please!

Mr Speaker: I can ask you to stop reading because you are going out of the budget! If you promise...

Ms Anquetil: *Non! Non! Sorry!*

Mr Speaker: *Ki non? Ki non ki ou p vin fer ?*

Ms Anquetil: Le traitement que je reçois doit être applicable pour tous les membres de l'Assemblée nationale, M. le président !

Mr Speaker: I can decide! I can decide! If you are not respecting the rule of debate, I can ask you to stop reading! You are not making a speech; you are reading!

An hon. Member: They read there!

Mr Speaker: You are reading! You decide! If you will be within the rules of debate,...

Ms Anquetil: I will stay within the rules!

Mr Speaker: Good! Good girl!

Ms Anquetil: En comparaison aux 16 semaines proposées par le gouvernement actuel, le MSM, cette politique montre une compréhension approfondie des besoins des familles modernes. Alors, je tiens à rappeler à cette Chambre que les droits des femmes pèsent lourd dans les votes et que les femmes en ont marre. Elles en ont marre de vos promesses creuses. Je lance un appel pressant à toutes les femmes : Ne vous découragez pas ! Restez solidaires ! Le changement arrive !

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Dr. Ramgoolam!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Ms Anquetil: Le nombre d'enfants victimes d'abus signalés à la *CDU* était de 5 729 en 2023 contre 5 448 en 2022. Avec la série de scandales sur la mauvaise gestion et les conditions dans lesquelles plusieurs abris pour enfants en difficulté fonctionnent, j'espérais voir une mesure forte sur la création d'un abri moderne offrant tout le confort nécessaire et un personnel qualifié ! Malheureusement, c'est une grande déception ! Les enfants, retirés de leur famille, devront encore attendre. Plusieurs cas que j'ai dénoncés à l'abri de l'Oiseau du Paradis n'ont pas été pris en compte dans ce budget, ce qui laisse la série des problèmes sans solution.

D'après une source sûre, je redis bien, d'après une source sûre, le ministère a organisé deux jours de rencontres avec les *Shelters Managers* à la veille du budget, prétendument pour fournir une plate-forme d'échange. *Après 5 an p fer rankont !* Après cinq ans, la ministre sort enfin de son sommeil ! À quoi bon maintenant, alors qu'elle est sur le départ ?

M. le président, le ministre, Dr. Padayachy a annoncé une augmentation de R 1 000 de la pension universelle à partir de janvier 2025. Si, je dis bien, si son gouvernement est toujours au pouvoir, ce qui ne sera très certainement pas le cas ! Il viendra dire à la population...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order !

Ms Anquetil: ... que le gâteau a été rétréci ? Par contre, avec certitude, je peux le dire haut et fort que le futur Premier ministre, le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam va honorer cette promesse du MSM en janvier 2025 !

Dans la version française du discours du budget 2024, au point 481 et 482 à la page 83, le ministre des Finances a le culot de dire que le gouvernement a tenu ses promesses. Faux ! Archi faux. Cependant, contrairement aux promesses du Premier ministre sur l'augmentation de la pension de vieillesse qui passerait à R 13 500 avec effet immédiat s'il obtient un deuxième mandat, c'était précisément le 1 octobre 2019 au centre de conférence à Pailles à l'occasion de la

Journée mondiale des personnes âgées. Que s'est-il passé exactement ? En réalité, la pension est passée à R 9 000 et elle est restée inchangée jusqu'à juin 2023.

Ce que l'honorable Dr. Padayachy ne dit pas, c'est la perte de R 4,500 par mois, par pensionnaire. Sur 13 mois, cela représente R 58,500 par an de 2020 à 2023, c'est un manque à gagner de R 221,000 par pensionnaire. Ce qui nous ramène à dire que de 2020 à 2024, le gouvernement MSM a empoché plus de 60 milliards sur le dos des pensionnaires ! Le ministre pense pouvoir nous faire oublier les bobards ? Eh bien non, on n'oublie pas ! Pire, nos seniors ont dû patienter cinq ans pour arriver à ce chiffre de R 13,500. Entre-temps, la roupie a perdu plus de 40 % de sa valeur, les 13 500 promises en octobre 2019 valent plus de R 19 000 en 2024. Une fois de plus, le *marsan siro* est passé par là.

Les centres récréatifs pour les aînés...

Mr Speaker: Please! That is exactly that word I didn't want you to use. I did not interrupt you at the beginning, but now you are continuing with it. What about if they call you '*marsan siro*'? What about if they call the Opposition '*marsan siro*'?

Ms Anquetil: Il a ...

Mr Speaker: No! Don't discuss! I am asking you!

Ms Anquetil: Okay.

Mr Speaker: What about? So, you apologise and you withdraw the word and never to use it again!

Ms Anquetil: Okay, I apologise!

Mr Speaker: This is in your best interest!

Ms Anquetil: Oui. J'ai été traitée de '*Manjulika*' dans cette Assemblée nationale par nul autre que la ministre de l'Égalité du genre ! Là, il n'y avait rien à dire ?

(Interruptions)

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: *Actrice sa!*

Mr Speaker: So, order! Order! Let me do my work!

An hon. Member: *Enn actrice sa!*

Mr Speaker: So, as a parliamentarian, whenever you have something to say to the Speaker, you raise a point of order. You should know your Standing Orders! You should know it!

Now, after I don't know how many months, you are telling me '*Manjulika*' or whatever it is!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Manjulika!

Mr Speaker: You should have a prompt reaction and bring a point of order in the Chamber!

Ms Anquetil: Okay, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr Speaker: So, be civilised! Don't use those words!

Ms Anquetil: No problem! Okay!

Avant de conclure, je souhaite dire quelques mots sur ma circonscription. Je suis très présente sur le terrain et bien évidemment sur les réseaux sociaux. Je dénonce systématiquement la grande dégradation de ma circonscription. Nous sommes les laissés-pour-compte. Nous déplorons l'indifférence du *PPS* de la circonscription, l'honorable Gilbert Bablee qui a dit, je cite

—

« Tann mwa bien, Vacoas pu vine enn Manhattan ! »

Alors qu'il est payé pour superviser les travaux dans la Circonscription No. 16, il est tout simplement absent ! Il ne semble pas concerné par les gros embouteillages dans le centre de Vacoas causés par le tram Express. Les terrains de foot, les jardins d'enfants, l'état des routes, les drains sont dans un état lamentable. Que pouvons-nous espérer de cette municipalité sachant

qu'ils sont une équipe illégitime aux commandes depuis 2020 suite aux maintes reports des élections municipales ?

Mr Speaker: Would you withdraw that word? This is done by law!

Ms Anquetil: Which one, please?

Mr Speaker: “*Illégitime*”! Withdraw and apologise!

Ms Anquetil: I withdraw and apologise.

Mr Speaker: Yes!

Ms Anquetil: Je tiens à cœur la cause des planteurs et je souhaite aujourd'hui relayer la voix d'un groupe de planteurs de la région de La Marie suite à la visite de l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed, leader de l'opposition d'alors, en ma présence. Depuis deux ans, ils demandent la construction d'un *track road* à Plaine Sophie, mais leur demande est restée lettre morte. Des officiers sont venus prendre des mesures. Puis, plus rien n'a suivi ! Ce *track road* aurait réduit les dommages au véhicule et le temps passé sur ces routes impraticables, mais cette promesse n'a pas été tenue.

M. le président, je conclus sur ces mots. Nous avons en face de nous un gouvernement qui essaie désespérément de s'accrocher au pouvoir. Il y aura manifestement peu de volontaires pour grimper à bord du Titanic du MSM. La multiplication des cadeaux ne servira pas à grand-chose. Écoutez bien – si les électeurs et électrices de Maurice, de Rodrigues, d'Agaléga et de St Brandon devaient se rendre aux urnes aujourd'hui, ils ne vous rééliront pas.

An hon. Member: *Enn leker dife sa!*

Ms Anquetil: Dans le journal, ‘Le Mauricien’, le ministre des Finances a dit, je cite –

« Chaque mauricien est une note de musique sur la partition de notre destiné. »

(Interruptions)

Question : l'honorable ministre aime-t-il la musique ou alors est-ce une tactique politique ? Pense-t-il peut-être déjà au requiem de Mozart pour le départ du MSM ?

Le pays reconnaît déjà le successeur de l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, qui n'est nul autre que le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam. L'État d'autocratie dont bénéficie actuellement le gouvernement ne durera pas longtemps. Le pays tout entier sera bientôt appelé aux urnes. L'heure du changement va bientôt sonner. Ce qui me ramène à penser à l'une des célèbres citations de William Shakespeare –

« *Beware the Ides of March* » de Jules César.

Pour terminer, un petit conseil, je me permets ...

Mr Speaker: No! Talk about budget; no advice nothing.

(Interruptions)

Ms Anquetil: Non, j'ai terminé...

Mr Speaker: No I have given you enough margins. Try to be reasonable. Your time is already over. Try to be reasonable.

(Interruptions)

Ms Anquetil: Pour terminer, un petit conseil aux ministres et députés de l'autre côté de la Chambre.

Mr Speaker: No advice to be given. Your turn is over.

Ms Anquetil: Ok. Ok. Retenez votre souffle ...

Mr Speaker: Your time is over. Now I call hon ...

Your time is over!

Ms Anquetil: La chute du gouvernement ...

Mr Speaker: No. Please, walk out from this Chamber!

(Interruptions)

Mr Ameer Meea: *Bravo Stéphanie! Bravo!*

Mr Speaker: Now, I will call hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah!

(5.44 p.m.)

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you very much for the opportunity that you are assigning me to bring my contribution. Having just heard the member of the Opposition who spoke right now before me, it sounds like she is really struggling and trying to convince her leader to secure a ticket for herself in the upcoming election.

(Interruptions)

Ms Anquetil: *C'est toi qui dois sécuriser ton ticket !*

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: *C'est elle qui est sur le point du départ de sa circonscription.* Mr Speaker, Sir ...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Manjulika!

Ms Anquetil: *C'est toi qui dois sécuriser ton ticket, pas moi !*

Mr Speaker: What?

(Interruptions)

Ms Anquetil: *On m'a traité de Manjulika!*

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please continue!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, it's a bit of a pity that she gets off to go home early because I would have loved to share with her the actual – apart from the fact that Manjulika is a very famous actress – the meaning of Manjulika which is from the Hindu origin, means a sweet, beautiful and likeable girl. So I don't know where she is coming from but, anyway!

Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you once again for allowing me to bring my contribution to the last budget of my mandate, and I will start by a very quick glossing over a few points that were raised by hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, earlier during her intervention. She actually started by saying that unlike other people – unfortunately, hon. Xavier-Luc Duval is not in the House – unlike other people, she is not here to make *lizie dou*. That's because the *lizie dou* she has already made it with her new leader. So, she does not have any more *lizie dou* to make over here. And I think she should learn from hon. Xavier-Luc Duval who, when he sees a good budget, he appreciates it, and we have seen that today – constructive criticism, room for improvement. What a fantastic deliberation put forward by hon. Xavier-Luc Duval!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Hein, pe defann Duval la! P defann Duval!*

Mr Speaker: What is happening there?

Mr Ameer Meea: *Pren li kado!*

Mr Speaker: Last warning, hon. Ameer Meea!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member was talking – I mean, she went on painting a very gloomy picture of the status of the Mauritian woman as a whole. She was deriding the measure put forward to encourage our women, our ladies, to have more babies in the future. I do not know where she got everything mixed up, but these are incentives so that we can address the issue of an ageing population.

Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, instead of very desperately trying to make it as if Mauritius is the only one that is suffering from a low fertility rate, in fact, she should make reference to some bigger democracies, European countries where the fertility rate is almost similar to that of Mauritius. So, instead of coming here and talking only about what she understands, she needs to go and consult her own party first of all. She was insinuating or telling us that there is a brain-drain and everybody is leaving, everybody *pe kit pei*. Ask yourself, she should ask herself, in fact, maybe she should ask her father. Hon. Ivan Collendavelloo, hon. Kavy Ramano, hon. Alan Ganoo, hon. Steven Obeegadoo, *la crème de la crème du MMM*. They are the ones who left your party, she needs to bring a bit of coherence to what she is purporting. She went as far as saying that the relationship between drug barons and my party – the MSM party, is quite clear.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, her leader, *pa kone komien leader ena la*, well, her father – let me put it like that – is bedfellows with *Nouveaux Démocrates* – the leader of that another party in that coalition. We have forgotten about the infamous Ms *cousine la – kuma ti apele? Plito mo pa dir so nom.*

So, you are linking the MSM Government with drug barons when you have a lawyer who is most likely going to be obtaining a ticket, Mr A. B., who we all remember seeing videos of *la main dans le sac, sipa pe trap sac sipa dan le sac.*

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, she should be very careful in what she comes here to say, not because there is parliamentary immunity that she is allowed to just spout out gibberish. Mr Speaker, Sir, about the infrastructure or lack thereof as she purports to our women and girls about the historic measure of providing sanitary pads to our young girls, she went on talking about the toilets in public schools. I have been there – *mwa mon frekent* public school – I did not have a problem. You went to a *lycée, ma chère.*

So, again, I invite her to think a little bit more before she comes to the House and just *pour la forme, bizin* intervene otherwise, I mean it is like that. So we will wish them good luck.

Ms J. Bérenger: Merci!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Coming to what the hon. Ms Anquetil who spoke and left; she did her job, her show, and left. She is claiming that the next Prime Minister of this Republic is none other than her leader, Navinchandra Ramgoolam. When women in this country correctly wake up, they have *la peur au ventre.* It is when Navinchandra Ramgoolam was in power that we women in this country were scared because we remember how Navinchandra Ramgoolam treated women, not just his woman, other people's women, other people's wives, *en général.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, she was dissing the exercise of budget so badly, claiming that the PTR was so responsible. PTR was so responsible that they shut the doors of this august Assembly to negotiate their future that they did not even hold the budget! So, Mr Speaker, Sir, ask hon. Ms Anquetil to invite her leader, her leader's brother – *mo mem mo nepli kone* who is the leader there – hon. Bérenger to ask Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam to request for an early trial in his *coffre-fort* case instead of applying delaying tactics.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will come to the essence of this budgetary debate and I will start by adding to the much-deserved congratulations and pay tribute to my colleague, hon. Dr. Padayachy – *pa Payadachy, si pa koi* – for the very bold and historic measures that he has announced, not just in this budget, but in successive budgets since 2020, in particular this one because it is the last one of our current mandate. Yes, I agree. Why in particular this one? Because, in fact, going back to what we have heard from the Members of the Opposition so far – I am sure there is more to come – , it is very apparent that this Budget has stolen the death knell of the opposition. The die is cast and they know it! The die is cast for their impending defeat.

There is not a shadow of a doubt that the population would have already chosen, and rightly so, who will form the next government and the reasons are so obvious. I will go into more detail later, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have chosen to cite the year 2020 as a baseline of my intervention, a year when we had all experienced the pandemic. My colleagues from the side of the Government have also chosen to remind the House and the population about the devastating effect of COVID-19, Mr Speaker, Sir. Remind them not because they might have forgotten, reminding them because in their intervention, they have been burying their heads in the sand as if they have been inhabiting some parallel universe when the COVID-19 pandemic had slashed across the global landscape and brought the entire world to its knees!

Hon. Juman was querying the Minister of Finance why did he not lower taxes on juice bottles and such and such commodities. Hon. Uteem, if I may recall, or some other Member of the Opposition, spoke about the pharmaceutical products. This is an Opposition, as I say, who is trying to obscure a very real crisis that the world went through. They are trying to obscure the facts, maybe for lack of better arguments. Mr Speaker, Sir, the management of COVID-19 by our country went on to be cited internationally as an example.

The Opposition has forgotten! It is okay, I am here to remind them. They have forgotten about the shocking images of hospitals of far more developed countries than ours. They have forgotten about the bodies piled up in the corridors of those hospitals. They have forgotten, about the crashing health systems of the most advanced economies, where they had to choose who to put on ventilators and who not to. They have forgotten about supermarket shelves devoid of basic commodities like cooking oil and baby formula. Have they really forgotten or they are just conveniently putting aside the gargantuan efforts carried out by this Government to procure and

secure vaccines and protective equipment at that time? That too, Mr Speaker, Sir, in a race of survival of the richest and the fastest where we saw an air crafts full of PPEs being re-routed right from the airport landing strips to the highest bidder. They have forgotten, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I highly doubt it! I think they are just utilising the pandemic, as they do with everything else, be it shelters, children or women; they are doing so just for political gains. In doing so, they are insulting the scores of nurses, health care workers, government officers, high-level committee members, essential service providers, who have toiled day and night for the safety of our citizens. They are insulting the personnel who airlifted and accompanied their own afflicted leader to India in a bid to save his life! Mr Speaker, Sir, *mo pa kone si zot inn pey bill? Non !*

Mr Speaker, Sir, the population will recall the *acharnement* of the Opposition on my colleague, Dr. Jagutpal. But this is the Minister of Health who is going to go down in history for having saved hundreds of lives! We should not just erase this unique experience with a simple scribble in our nation's history, but it is important to recall how our Prime Minister had to navigate an economy through such a crisis. Opposition with their usual *démagogies* of consent form, *pa fer vaksin*, contaminating public opinion, instilling fear will also go down in history Mr Speaker, Sir. They will go down history as an Opposition *de la plus mauvaise foi imaginable*.

At this juncture, it comes to mind; I recall hon. Dr. Padayachy's summary in the context in which he presented the 2020-2021 Budget, the very first one of this Government. I quote, Mr Speaker, Sir –

“I am presenting a National Budget at the time of unprecedented crisis. Without any doubt, one of the worst in modern history. Just a few months ago, no one would have imagined that we would be faced with such a calamity (...)”

I go on with the quote and I come directly to the point where he stated –

“As at today, the IMF is forecasting that the world's GDP, in its best case scenario, would contract by around 3% in 2020 (...). Latest forecasts point to GDP contraction of up to 11% this year, the worst GDP contraction ever for our country.”

11%, Mr Speaker, Sir! I will give a couple of seconds for that to sink in.

This is the precise context where it all started for this Government. Today, the IMF has this to say and this answers all the frivolous arguments being put forward by the Opposition.

This is a statement from the Executive Director for Mauritius: 2024 Article IV Consultation-Press Release, 28 May 2024, I quote –

“Mauritius has rebounded strongly from the pandemic on the back of buoyant tourism, social housing construction and financial services. Supportive policies have facilitated this strong recovery.”

Which part of this congratulatory extract is the Opposition misunderstanding? I wonder!

It took a matter of three and a half years, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have a young Minister of Finance; the head honcho of fiscal policy on our side has gone out there and redefined economic growth and social inclusiveness. Mr Speaker, Sir, to hon. Dr. Padayachy, I say bravo Minister of Finance, and do not pay any heed to these *prophètes de malheur*. It is their usual style!

This is an unparalleled testimony of political leadership that the country needed then, the country needs now and will definitely be requiring in the future to lead us *à bon port*. It will be positively insane to think of any alternative government, even if that is wishful thinking! Besides, nobody in Mauritius is going to forget *les frasques* of PTR-led regimes, Mr Speaker, Sir: rampant unemployment, émeute, ‘Macarena’ party, inflation, a widening chasm of inequality!

Mr Speaker, Sir, only a few days ago, we heard Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, in one of his press conferences, talking about some delusional transformative disruption. I do not know what disruption? Only he knows what he meant where. He intends to bring about and I will quote for a transliteration –

“*Enn de ban mesures phares, c’est la di-gi, di... di-gil, di-tilisation, digita... de la NLTA. NLTA mem apel sa, non ?*”

Mr Speaker, Sir, *heureusement que le ridicule ne tue pas*. The truth is, this is a person, a leader of the Opposition coalition who is putting forward one of the *mesures phares* but is unable to even relate to which institution this is going to be applied. *Il est complètement dépassé, M. le président*. Maybe we can suggest that there are alcohol tests performed before his press conferences. *Pas paret telmen korek* and what about this other *mesure phare* which hon. Ms Anquetil spoke about earlier for our women. I am referring to the announcement of yet other

“*kas pake*” proposals, that of 1-year maternity leave and menstrual leave which is prone to cause more controversy and prejudice to our girls and our women.

These proposals, Mr Speaker, Sir, were plucked out of thin air. They can only be coined as sheer claptrap. They have been haphazardly put together to gain political mileage by the opposition. Proposals were made without consultations, without any reflection on what impact it will have on gender discrimination to the point where the MMM spokesperson on women’s matters had to come forward and rectify the blunder of their dear leader stating that maybe the leader meant to say parental leave. I mean, come on! The leader, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, referred to this budget as a “*bidze kalamindas*”. *Bidze kalamindas*, i think he needs to have a look, maybe Dr. Aumeer can give a helping hand.

Peek into his brains, I think *so la tete ki rempli avek kalamindas*, this is the alternative that is being presented to the population. Mr Speaker, Sir, can you imagine? Can you imagine this is the alternative? It is cringe-worthy! Imagining such an alternative is cringeworthy. Mr Speaker, Sir, if our country has managed to move from where it was during the pandemic, to where it is within a period of three and a half years, it is mainly due to the political stability that exists within our Government and among the parties that constitute it. The different budgets have yielded successful results due to the stability and this leadership, whereas the Opposition coalition from the day of its conception *contre nature*, that coalition has already shown germs of turbulence before even the ship sets sail.

The ship *in tass dan dry docks! Avant mariaz latent fini kase!* The PMSD has been booted out by the MMM, the usual positioning of the MMM for more power and more control this is the talk of the town within that Coalition. We shall see. We shall see how much patience the Labour Party has *vis-à-vis* their new partner. *Enfin aster bhaiya, la frère*, brother *apres kan perdi eleksion, bhaiya pu vinn baya*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the stability factor is very important because I am talking about it being missing in the coalition Opposition because of the legendary antics of the MMM Leader. It is good to remember hon. P. Bérenger, *le leader du MMM; malheureusement l’honorable Bodha n’est pas là*. Because perhaps, he would have concurred with what I am saying; he himself, having fallen prey to the irresistible lure before he deserted this party, our party.

Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Paul Bérenger has created so many brotherly bonds in the past. The current opposition coalition, *tanto lantant, tanto lespoir* with newfound brothers, *kouzin-kouzinn*, fair enough. I wish them good luck but such coalitions, Mr Speaker, Sir, they hearken to the times when hon. Paul Bérenger, with his infamous *manz gato* episode. This MMM Leader, who, without batting an eye, betrayed Sir Aneerood Jugnauth; the same Sir Aneerood Jugnauth, who, being a man of his word, elevated hon. Bérenger to the status of Prime Minister, the first and the last time of his life.

Si enn géant, if a giant in politics like Sir Anerood Jugnauth was let down by hon. P. Bérenger, what have we not heard from hon. Bérenger following his consecutive defeat? Everyone is to be blamed, everybody is to be blamed; especially his current brother, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam but today, we are witnessing who is swallowing which *coule*. Well, Judgement day, Mr Speaker, Sir, is truly *derrière la porte cette fois-ci*. And like my hon. colleague, hon. Gobin said earlier, *ça fait pitié. M. le président, ça fait pitié to see* what state in which the party which brought on the first 60-0 in history is. The party has been brought to its knees by none other than its own Leader and maybe it's the right day, *le 11 juin aujourd'hui*, it's the right day for me to state that perhaps history will be repeating itself and we are going to be witnessing a landslide victory of 60-0 again!

Only, this time, Mr Speaker, Sir, instead of Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Prime Minister for the first time in 1982, it will be Pravind Jugnauth for a third time Prime Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Opposition is internally paralyzed. We have gone through tough situational contexts, events that have been beyond our control and we have to remember as well, on the internal front, ever since we won the elections in 2019, what have we not been put through? We have had to face legal charges for alleged fraudulent elections, systematically in nearly all constituencies Mr Speaker, Sir, reactive criticisms on the management of COVID-19; Medpoint case; Kistnen case and so on and so forth.

These were exacerbated by political rallies, intense press coverage, and unprecedented showmanship of those *avocats "perrons"*. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is against this backdrop; the backdrop of a very clear systematic strategy to "*met baton dan nous la roue*" in as much as could be done. We did not! Government did not deviate one iota from our commitment to and

actions for our people. I do not know if somebody has mentioned it before but the population has not forgotten the ridiculously famous *slogan* “100 zour nou pou sanz ou lavi”.

We are today having to deal with the same person who came up with this *slogan*, Mr Speaker, Sir, The contrast between the leader of that coalition and now his new-found and long-lost brother, *le frère devenu le président du club “koz koze”, du club “Minikums”, vende rev – 100 zour pou sanz ou lavi*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, that is what we have on one side; and then, there is us on this side of the House with our commitment and our action. Our actions speak for themselves while the opposition has deployed their desperate tactics, even while the legal charges followed their procedural course, we remain focused at the level of Government.

We remain determined to make the lives of our citizens better than they were before and the Government can boast of having a blazing trail of achievements, the pension at Rs14,000 and I heard hon. Ms Anquetil or hon. Ramgoolam himself who admitted saying that if, when they come into power, they are going to make good of making the pension at Rs15,000 next year. So, they align with the MSM’s philosophy. Congratulations to them.

On a le revenu minimum garanti de R 20 000; the Child Allowance. Mr Speaker, Sir, we are here scripting success stories that decades ago would have seemed unimaginable, and this comes from the population. The achievements of this Government speak for themselves, thanks to the Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. There is no denying it, he is a man of principle, he is a hard worker, he cares for the most vulnerable, he is a strong opponent to discrimination against the vulnerable, and he is a fervent proponent of modernity, Mr Speaker, Sir.

And on the other side of the House, once again we have a leader who is still entangled in *l’affaire de 3 million undeclared dollars*. He is still entangled in his *coffre-fort* riches, claiming, stating, that they are *per diem*. I mean, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are no words to describe, to define such *classe* like he likes to put it himself. His *classe*, philosophy is to enrich a few and to pauperise many. Mr Speaker, Sir, a country’s most precious resource is its human capital, its people. These empty slogans of *sanz lavi dan 20 zour, 10 zour, 100 zour* are perfect examples of politics of vote banks.

And, Mr Speaker, Sir, the population does not believe in that anymore. *Lepep nepli krwar sa* and let me share a little secret with you, with the Opposition, who can thank me later. Good governance, democracy, security – and here I do not only mean national security, which of course is of paramount importance – I mean human security, economic security, livelihood security, educational, health security, all that, as well as probity in public life. These are actual commitments that win votes because when you make promises to a population, especially a population that has widened access to quality education, that population is going to hold your feet to the fire to ensure you fulfil all those promises.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, if I actually go into enumerating the achievements of this Government, I will be short on time. I am sure my colleague ministers are going to be focusing on their own areas, and I will focus very quickly on my portfolio.

I am thankful to have been entrusted with important portfolios: those of children, women, gender, family wellness, community and these are the different nuclei of our nation. They are at the heart of our development agenda and it has been my mission to ensure that the load on too many women's shoulders be lightened, that the quality of care for our children be improved, and that the well-being of our children, families and communities be reckoned as solid foundations for a more inclusive and equitable society. Five years down the line, much has been achieved and that is thanks to the leadership of our Prime Minister with the support of the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, who, by the way, very often starts his budgetary interventions with measures focused on the advancement of our women and our girls.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our Government knows the importance, the critical role of our women, our girls to the progress of our society. We are not going to tolerate and we will never accept that our women are subject to discrimination and the example comes from the top itself where we have the High-Level Committee to eliminate gender-based violence, chaired by the hon. Prime Minister himself.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when we are talking about the High-Level Committee to eliminate gender-based violence chaired by Pravind Jugnauth, obviously what comes to mind is a comparison exercise. We know the *palmarès* of the famous ex-Prime Minister. We have a list. We can make a list of these misdemeanours. The list is as broad as it is long, not only for his

infamous *classe* which I made reference to, but also for his *galipettes*, his lack of respect for women! *Li kass kass madam ki pa pou li osi li kass kasse! Lev so lame lor madam!* Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, if the *roches* from Roches Noires could tell a story, those stories would come with a parental guidance rating number 18, Mr Speaker, Sir! *A lepok ti pe apel sa fim X!* Parental guidance 18 *apel sa aster*, PG 18.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a difference between *koze* and actions and we are here, we are enumerating the difference. There is a difference between *maja karo* and actions. Mr Speaker, Sir, the difference is very clear for the population to see. *Koz koze* is one thing, *aksion zero*. *Vinn dan parlman, zot deklar Zorro!* This is what the Opposition comes to do these days. I know there are upcoming elections and I know that the population is going to be called to choose the next Government but I put the question to the Opposition. Are you that deluded that you do not see that it is a foregone conclusion who is going to be the next Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius? Do you still have an iota of doubt in your head?

Mr Speaker, Sir, all the measures that have been enunciated in the budget for my Ministry are only consolidating the very solid base that we have set and we are working towards ameliorating. Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger earlier said that we are not doing anything. I think she has not read the measures for our women in the budget. There is the *Prime à l'emploi* for the unemployed women and we are not only lightening their loads over here, we are strengthening their backs. There is a grant of Rs3,000 to expected mothers; the introduction of Maternity Allowance of Rs2,000 per month; Maternity Leave increased. All this is to help more people on the path to parenthood and address the ageing population issue.

Hon. Ms Anquetil dismissed the Survivor Support Scheme Allowance of Rs5,000 to victims of domestic violence. She should go and recall the women who were taking back Rs1,500 at the end of the month. How was that economic empowerment, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is my last budget speech. I have to put on record the tremendous achievements made by our Prime Minister. He remains true to his word. He used to say *less so aksion koze* and at this juncture, I will, Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission very humbly quote my father, late hon. Premdutt Koonjoo. What he stated in his very last budget intervention all the way back in 2019 –

“Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, [Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, was hon. Joe Lesjongard in 2019] on this note, allow me to congratulate the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, once again, for the bold measures taken, and I must admit that I have seen a lot of changes in this young man. I have known him as a young boy and at that time he was quite timid but now he has become a furious man, a man who means business.

I know that time has made him, not only time, but circumstances also. He has met his difficulties, I must congratulate all those who supported him.”

And my late father goes on to say –

“I tell you one thing, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is in Bhojpuri, it is in Hindi and I hope...”

Mr Speaker: You should translate. You translate!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: I will translate –

“I hope people will understand.”

In fact, he translated himself.

“I hope people will understand. There is a saying, long time back, people used to say: *katori pe katora; beta baap se bhi gora...* Yes, and he said it sometime back that he is going to do better than his father.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, on that one I completely conquer with my late father because not only was he right, even late Sir Anerood Jugnauth in an interview, he said that his son Pravind is doing better than him. *Li dir ‘Pravind pe fer pli bien ki mwa’!* Late Sir Anerood Jugnauth would have been immensely proud of his son’s achievements.

And as I conclude my term, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to very quickly convey my thanks to all the constituents of my Constituency No. 7, to the Prime Minister for the trust that they bestowed upon me. I am filled with gratitude for their unwavering support, that of my colleagues, my partners, all the citizens, especially the women and the children of our Republic and as a parliamentarian who has sat in this august Assembly for almost five years, allow me to

convey my appreciation to you as well, Mr Speaker, Sir, for facilitating the debates in the House, in all fairness and within the parameters of Standing Orders. I know admittedly that this is an arduous task but you have shouldered it admirably well, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, thank you for that.

Hon. Prime Minister has managed to expand the thinking process of an entire nation. He is a leader who is steering our country on a path of high achievement. He has always been consistent in his sense of purpose. He is guided by fundamental principles, one of them being that wealth creation must always be accompanied by wealth distribution, equitable and sustainable wealth distribution.

In all humility, Mr Speaker, Sir, I can claim that my party, my Prime Minister, his Government are fulfilling a mission of making everyone a beneficiary of and an enthusiastic partner in our country's development. It is a noble venture and I hereby urge everyone to stay committed to this cause.

I will end, Mr Speaker, Sir, with a few words to the disgruntled and the dazed and very sparse Opposition. None of our budgets are election budgets. This budget is a budget for the future. It is a prelude to a stable future. It is a budget that allows us to raise our sights, to encourage one and all to do more and to do it better. It is a budget is for the victory of our country and who better to entrust this task than to Pravind Kumar Jugnauth? Who has proven his mettle time and again and will prove it again. *Jamais deux sans trois!* Wait for the hat trick; it is coming very soon!

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister has even gone beyond borders, impressing global leaders with his political sagacity, with his depth of comprehension of complex issues and when we reconvene, Mr Speaker, Sir, in a year's time, in this august Assembly, I will, quite smugly, remind the House, the Opposition, of this victory *parski nou mem pou revini! Nou mem ki p amen hat trick! Nou mem ki pou re-vinn prezant next budget!*

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to close my speech, and just before I do that, very quickly, allow me to draw an illustration, a picture of three faces, of pretty much what represents the vast proportion of our Republic.

1. The first face is that of the woman. She is the homemaker; she is the girl child; she is the sportswoman; she is a young student, the mother, the working woman.
2. The second face is that of the youth. He is vocal, ambitious; he is impatient; he is full of zest. They are all bursting with life!
3. The third is the face of the vulnerable ones, Mr Speaker, Sir, those who count on the Government for a little extra help, whether it is an increased pension, a subsidy, a scholarship.

And to each of them, on behalf of Government, on behalf of the Prime Minister, I promise you this –

- 1) To the woman, we are going to stand in solidarity with you; we are going to ensure your safety and your dignity. We are going to keep upholding and promoting your rights.
- 2) To the young citizens, we will keep bringing the right triggers to keep your enthusiasm and thirst for knowledge alive. We will never tire in our quest to provide you with a modern, a drug-free, and a promising future. Stay curious. We have your back.
- 3) To the vulnerable, Mr Speaker, Sir, the elderly, to the less fortunate, we will honour your resilience. We will always strive to bring more relief into your lives. We are grateful to the elderly, to the vulnerable and we thank you for your blessings.

The Republic has entrusted Pravind Jugnauth with a noble task and we are going to make good on our engagement.

I end, Mr Speaker, Sir, with an inspiring extract which I will translate –and I ask to forgive me, I am not very fluent in Tamil –from the great philosopher Thiruvalluvar, from the 2000-year old *Tirukkural* text, and it goes, I quote –

“Kodai Ali Sengol Kudi Ombal Nangum Udaiyanam Vendharkku Oli.”

It means: “Generous grants, compassion, righteous rule and assistance to the downtrodden are the hallmarks of a great leader”.

Demain est à nous. The future is bright. The future is orange. The future is ours and I can confidently say the best is yet to come. Under the guidance of Pravind Jugnauth, together with this population, we are going to continue to make history.

God bless the Republic of Mauritius! I thank you all for your attention.

Mr Speaker: I call hon. Minister Ramano!

(6.24 p.m.)

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): M. le président, le budget qui nous a été présenté pour l’année 2024-2025 confirme une stratégie, une idéologie...

Ms J. Bérenger: *Bizin demisione!*

An hon. Member: *...demisione!*

Mr Ramano: Lâche! Lâche!

Ms J. Bérenger: *Demisione!*

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Capon!

Mr Ramano: M. le président, le budget qui nous a été présenté pour l’année 2024-2025 confirme une stratégie, une idéologie ancrée dans le social. Le ton est donné à la page une –

« Investir dans la population, en réduisant les inégalités pour accroître la croissance et le développement. »

Le revenu mensuel moyen des ménages mauricien a augmenté de 51,1 % en 2017 et 2023 pour atteindre R 55 600. La proportion des ménages gagnant moins de R 25 000 par mois a

diminué de 43 % en 2017 à 19,6 % en 2023. Oui, M. le président, joindre le progrès social à la croissance économique a porté ses fruits.

M. le président, il est un fait aujourd'hui que la population est convaincue quant à la volonté, voire la conviction du gouvernement, que tout développement d'un pays, que la modernité d'un pays marche de pair avec un rehaussement de la qualité de vie de sa population.

M. le président, en passant par nos jeunes, nous avons rendu l'éducation entièrement gratuite du pré-primaire à l'université.

Tout travail mérite salaire. Le revenu minimum garanti passe de R 12 075 à R 15 000 par mois en juin 2023 puis à R 18 500 en janvier 2024 et à R 20 000 en juillet 2024, M. le président.

Afin de maintenir le prix du détail du riz, de la farine et du gaz ménager, cette année, encore une fois, R 4.4 milliards sous forme de subsides ont été versés.

M. le président, le budget l'a dit, assurer la dignité de nos aînés de R 10 000 en 2022 à R 11 000 en juin 2023 pour arriver à R 13 500 depuis avril 2024, aujourd'hui à R 14 000. M. le président, il va sans dire que, c'est un gouvernement socialiste avec un fort accent sur la croissance par la consommation.

M. le président, le présent budget fait la part belle à l'écologie, à la transition écologique. Je m'attellerai ici à souligner concrètement la politique du gouvernement et répondre aux détracteurs patentés du gouvernement.

M. le président, en matière environnementale, nous encourageons la collaboration des personnes de bonne volonté mais les députés de l'opposition, grassement payés, dédaignés du peuple et qui se sauvent devant leurs responsabilités quand il s'agit de participer aux débats sur la loi cadre de l'*Environment Bill* par exemple, n'ont aucune leçon à nous donner et osent, aujourd'hui, parler de *Parliamentary Committee* en matière environnementale.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Budget with all the measures presented by my colleague, the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the hon. Dr. Renganaden Padayachy emanates from a well thought strategy that puts Mauritians at the centre of all the actions that this Government has launched since 2019.

Financial resources are being allocated not solely to improving the conditions of the current generation but the interests of future generations and considerations on the sustainability of resources have been also duly taken on board.

The integration of environmental considerations across the Budget, ranging from environment and climate to the transport sector will lead to a coherent environmentally informed approach.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me here to congratulate the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, for having the courage to put forward such a host of innovative proposals which aims to address the development of our human capital and ensure the prosperity of our population.

Despite the challenges we have had to face from the COVID-19 pandemic entailing major disruptions in the supply chain and the huge societal impacts, we can today safely affirm that we have managed to build back better and we are looking ahead to ensure that we leave the next generation in a more prosperous condition.

Accordingly, this current budgetary appropriation exercise is no ordinary feat. It contains a host of innovative measures which will pave the way towards further modernising *la société mauricienne*, based on the solid foundations laid during this Government's mandate from 2019 to 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, *l'économie au service du bien commun* is the philosophy guiding this Budget 2024-2025, resonating well with the mandate of my Ministry, which explicitly addresses another common good, the environment! Backed by strong budgetary support, this Government's achievements on the environmental front have been nothing short of remarkable.

Since 2019, my Ministry has been able to frame and adopt a number of innovative policy measures and action plans, from the "Environment Master Plan 2020-2030 for the Republic of Mauritius", through a "Circular Economy Roadmap", to a host of other initiatives such as "Greening of the Public Sector", "Switch Africa Green", control of plastic pollution, and many more.

In short, this Government has spared no efforts towards shaping the environmental policy landscape of this country.

Measures addressing sustainable waste management, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, preparedness towards oil spill hazards, management of public beaches, coastal protection and rehabilitation measures, distribution of plants, bins and bin bags, backed with a solid dose of environmental awareness and sensitisation programmes have been mostly financed by this Government. We have also broken new grounds by developing and implementing the air and lagoon water quality indexing systems for Mauritius.

Earlier this year, this Government made history by adopting the Environment Act in the National Assembly. Today, with the Budget 2024-2025, another page is being written through a budget that addresses the societal and economic needs of the population while providing for measures to improve resilience against the triple planetary crises we face in terms of environmental pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as climate breakdown begins, countries are taking measures to reduce emissions. However, our planet is still heading for a scorching three-degree increase in global temperatures. Droughts, storms, fires and floods are pummelling countries and communities. The urgency to act was reiterated anew during the recent Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States, to which I led Mauritian delegation, held in Antigua and Barbuda, last month.

Delegates approved the outcome document, “Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS: A Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity”. It outlines concrete actions across 10 thematic areas: economic resilience; climate action and support, including finance; biodiversity action; ocean conservation; disaster risk reduction; safe and healthy societies; data; science and digitalisation; productive populations; and partnerships.

As a SIDS, Mauritius is already suffering the adverse impacts of climate change in terms of threats to people’s lives, livelihoods and damages to the environment and infrastructures. Climate change is further increasing the vulnerabilities of the small farmers, fishers and coastal communities with heavy socio-economic impacts. Achieving human wellbeing through

improved and sustained livelihoods is a major human development goal. Climate change and its associated stressors influence human development by disrupting livelihood systems, in particular, that of poor and vulnerable people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at present, only 2% of our island is under native forest (which is classified as having more than 50% of native plant coverage), with remaining native vegetation confined to marginal lands without agriculture. It also recognised that preservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, through nature-based solutions such as the protection and expansion of forests are important ways to remove carbon from the atmosphere and help create climate resilience.

Making our island greener through an ambitious tree planting campaign will contribute in our national effort to combat climate change. The budget measure to increase tree coverage by 100 hectares annually over the next decade is in line with the climate change adaptation measures to be implemented by 2030 as per the NDC of 2021.

Climate change has not only affected the country in terms of flash floods, but we are also witnessing prolonged periods of droughts, causing stress on our water supply. We cannot also remain blind to the impact of climate change on food security and the availability of food crops.

The investment in the flood management programmes, the compensation given to climate-inflicted planters, the further increase in our water storage capacity and improvement of our water distribution network are actions that will contribute to the Government's fight against climate change. As we know, climate change is also impacting the blue economy, causing erratic and lowered productivity to the fisheries sector. So, increasing the daily Bad Weather Allowance for fishers from Rs650 to Rs800 in the current budget will bring more climate justice to our fishermen community.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as for mitigation, a plethora of measures has been announced in the budget, giving us the means to meet our mitigation targets as stipulated in the NDC action plan and the National Climate Change Mitigation Strategy and Action Plan for the period 2021-2030.

I am very pleased by the bold measures that will accelerate the shift to renewables and move us rapidly towards a decarbonised Mauritius.

The measures announced in this budget bear testimony of a caring Government that is charting the way to a low-emission and climate-resilient country in line with the commitment we have taken at international level to fight climate change. By taking into consideration the worsening impacts of climate change, it is supporting the most vulnerable communities to address loss and damage caused by extreme events. The setting up of the Climate and Sustainability Fund, announced in this budget, will allow us to have access to predictable and sustainable finance to address the challenges that we are being faced with.

Companies making profit above Rs50 m. will be contributing 2 % of their profits to this Fund which will be used in the fight against climate change. The Fund will further be opened to donations from international organisations and individuals. Rs3.2 billion is being earmarked under this Fund for projects to address climate change.

There is currently a finance gap to address the environmental challenges we are facing and this cannot be bridged by public finance alone. The scaling up of private sector participation is, therefore, essential to safeguard our future.

The fact that the Climate and Sustainability Fund will be managed through a joint public-private committee, opens a new era of collaboration between the two parties. I am sure that this will further enhance cooperation between the two actors having utmost importance in the fight against climate change and ensure a sustainable future.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a small coastal state, Mauritius is facing inherent vulnerabilities associated with climate change, especially impacts on our beaches in terms of beach erosion and shoreline degradation.

The 6th Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report (2021) states with very high confidence that coasts will be exposed to increasing risks, including beach erosion, over coming decades due to climate change and sea-level rise. Despite the continuous efforts to enhance our adaptive capacity to cope with the impacts of climate change, this year has again witnessed more devastating and frequent episodes of extreme weather conditions.

Considering that our beaches are major assets for the tourism industry and leisure, my Ministry has a continuous programme to address coastal erosion. This programme is funded under the newly established Climate and Sustainability Fund.

Mr Speaker, Sir, site-specific coastal protection and rehabilitation works are being implemented using mixed approaches and taking into consideration the Ridge-to-Reef approach. Such approaches combine both hard and soft measures, offering a longer-lasting and sustainable protection of eroded coasts.

During the last five years, substantial resources have been injected for the rehabilitation of some 5 km of eroded beaches. The coastal protection works at Bois des Amourettes over a length of 450 m are ongoing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, sea level rise caused by climate change is accentuating beach erosion and damaging coastal infrastructure, including the loss of beachfront. The restoration of more than 26 km of shoreline and the rehabilitation of some 30 degraded sites across the island during the next five years shows this Government's commitment to the importance we are attaching to adaption to climate change.

Mr Speaker, Sir, corals and reef barriers are sand producers and the state of our beaches is highly dependent on the health of our corals. As a matter of fact, coral reefs act as natural breakwaters and can attenuate up to 90% of the incoming wave energy, thus protecting our shoreline from erosion during extreme weather conditions.

Due to an increase in sea surface temperature, between 2% to 60% of the remaining live coral cover has been lost in certain lagoons from 1991 to 2019. A decline in marine capture by 11% has also been observed.

Our NDC 2021 calls for the restoration of coral reefs and fisheries and marine ecosystem management and protection. It is in line that it has been announced the establishment of 250 coral farms in Belle Mare, Pointe aux Feuilles, Port Louis Harbour, Trou aux Biches and various other areas.

To maintain the scenic view and attraction of our beaches, sand replenishment is a common maintenance practice. Currently, sand is available from two land-based quarries.

This Budget has made provision for sand extraction for beach nourishment. I would like to dispel any doubts that this measure may have caused. This is not the same practice that existed previously as any extraction if effected, will be site-specific and through strict control and monitoring. We are aware that sand extraction requires a series of considerate measures to safeguard the environment.

It is thus proposed that a scientific study be conducted to identify suitable locations for sand extraction, considering factors such as sediment availability, extraction method and ecological sensitivity. It is worth noting that under the Climate Technology Centre Network (CTCN) of United Nations Environment Programme, a project on potential offshore sand banks/deposits in Mauritius was conducted in 2017.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the temporary nature of the accretion, an in-depth study would be needed before considering any sand removal for beach nourishment purposes. Here, I would like also to draw the attention of the House that Lagoon dredging and reprofiling of seabeds as well as offshore sand mining are scheduled undertakings requiring an EIA under the Environment Act 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Beach Authority, falling under the aegis of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, is responsible for the control and management of 134 and 12 public beaches in Mauritius and Rodrigues, respectively. The Beach Management Plan is being extended to additional Public Beaches, namely, Poste La Fayette and le Bouchon Public Beach for which bids have already been launched.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Beach Authority has launched a series of programmes concerning Sustainable Beach and Lagoon Clean Up Campaign and we have started with Flic en Flac public beach .

Mr Speaker, Sir, as part of our dedication to improving the visitor's experience, we are also looking forward to the construction of a panoramic viewpoint at La Prairie, for which the tender has already been launched.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as mentioned earlier, I am pleased to inform that, the Environment Act, which was adopted on the 14 May 2024, assented to by the President on the 24 May 2024, and gazetted on that same day, will come into force shortly.

Proper land-use planning and development is becoming increasingly complex due to challenges such as climate change, droughts, landslides and flash floods, the impacts of which have had dramatic consequences lately. Such challenges are prompting us to rethink our development control mechanisms. The Environment Act 2024 has seen the landmark re-introduction of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) after 22 years.

Under this Act, SEA will support proactive consideration of environmental and sustainable development objectives at the outset of plans and programmes in a plethora of sectors ranging from agriculture, fisheries, energy, transport, to real estate and property development schemes.

This year's budget has gone one step further. I am pleased to note that the morcellement or Property Development Scheme projects above 10 arpents and smart cities will now require a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

This indeed demonstrates Government's strong engagement for an enhanced protection and environmental safeguard of Mauritius for future generations, taking on board various challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation.

I would like to highlight two other important provisions in the Budget with regard to morcellement projects. Firstly, "no morcellement permit will be granted where there are 2 contiguous residential plots of land unless there is a minimum setback of 30 metres from proposed new settlements or existing settlements", and secondly, "any developer will be required to allocate at least 4 per cent of the total land area for the setting of a green forest".

These two commendable measures are in line with our ongoing efforts to safeguarding property and lives against flooding, which has been exacerbating year after year, as a result of climate change, and protecting and restoring our country's natural ecosystem.

Mr Speaker, Sir, new challenges call for innovative approaches in dealing with them. This is why my Ministry embarked on a consultative process in 2019 through "*les Assises de l'Environnement*" and we are pleased to announce that we are well established to proceed with a *transition écologique* that we are aiming to.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is along this line that my Ministry has embarked on the preparation of the Mauritius State of Environment and Outlook Report 2024 with the support and collaboration of UNEP since April 2024.

The assessment that will be presented in the Mauritius State of Environment and Outlook Report 2024 will highlight where good practices have been established, what are the barriers to policy implementation, where adverse trends are overwhelming natural resources and where damaging practices remain a continuing threat.

New themes such as the nexus between gender and environment, natural capital accounting, nature-based solutions, marine spatial planning, use of artificial intelligence in environmental assessment and deep sea minerals exploration, amongst others, will be introduced in this report.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget has come forward with a host of environmental issues, which include –

- Rs2.5 billion for the replacement of existing and construction of new water storage infrastructures;
- Rs1.3 billion for clean-up Mauritius programme, and
- Rs1 billion to a National Flood Management Programme for 132 drains, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the numbers speak for themselves. The scale of investments into the environment sector which I have enumerated is indeed impressive.

Ecological transition and sustainability are high on the agenda of our government and to this end, it is imperative that we shift from the traditional linear economy which has a ‘take, make, use, dispose’ model of consumption and production and adopt a circular economy approach, which lays emphasis more on reduce, reuse and recycling.

More than 10 million tonnes of solid wastes have already been landfilled since the start of operation in 1997 and in 2023, about 541,000 tonnes of solid wastes were landfilled.

Landfills have so far ensured an environmentally safe and sound management of solid wastes and for recycling to really take off; the shift should be from a linear “take-make-waste” approach to a circular one wherein any wastes that are generated are viewed as resources.

The “take-make-waste” reflex action has unfortunately been so anchored in our habits that we are observing an average annual increase of 2% in our waste generation over the last decade, around 96% of which is being landfilled.

At this rate, the amount of waste generated will be around 650,000 tonnes in 2030. In that regard, my Ministry has fixed itself a highly ambitious waste diversion target of 70% from landfilling by 2030. The composition of municipal solid wastes shows a good potential for material recovery in terms of composting or anaerobic digestion of organic wastes and recycling the dry fraction.

Organic fractions form the largest part of the waste generated by households. This usually ranges from 50% to 70% of the total waste volume. It is a valuable resource that can be turned into compost instead of going to the landfill.

In this context, my Ministry developed a New Solid Waste Strategy and Action Plan with the financial assistance of the *Agence Française de développement*. The new strategy focuses on recycling and resource recovery and aims at maximizing resource recovery and recycling in the short and medium term while tapping the energy potential of wastes in the long term.

In this context, my Ministry is in the process of procuring the services of developers for the setting up of two regional composting and sorting facilities on Public-Private Partnership (PPP) basis for a concession period of 25 years.

It is expected that, around 220,000 to 260,000 tonnes, that is, about 40% to 50% of our waste from landfilling in the short to medium term for composting of the organic fraction and recycling of the dry fractions, that is, paper, plastic, carton and metals.

The responsibility of the Private party under the PPP scheme will be to bring the funds and the expertise to design, build and operate the facilities against payment of a fee per ton of waste delivered.

On the other side, the responsibility of the Government shall be to ensure that acceptable waste is delivered to the facilities. There is thus a need to set up a value chain to enable the recovery of resources. Government will accordingly provide the householders with three bins for people to segregate their waste into the organic portion and dry recyclables portion and the residual waste. The content of the first two bins will be channelled to the Integrated Waste Processing Facilities whereas the content of the third bin will be destined to landfilling.

These installations provide for the processing of the organic portion of our waste into compost and recovery of the dry recyclables for re-injection into the economy. This budget has provided the necessary enabling measures for the setting up of these major projects. We are on our way to changing the landscape of waste management from disposal to maximum recovery through maximum resource utilisation. All these have been affected through transparent procedures and resisting vendors of expensive waste treatment technologies. We have opted for medium-cost technologies that are suited to our specific context.

Although infrastructures have a major role to play, the whole ecosystem is more than this. Bins will have to be provided to people for them to segregate their waste at source and it would be desirable that these bins themselves are made at least partly from recovered plastics. We are aware that selecting adequate and appropriate waste storage receptacles, collection and transportation equipment in terms of type and size would increase the collection efficiency of waste in terms of volume collected and cost of logistics.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has also commissioned a feasibility study on biogas plant for anaerobic digestion of organic wastes and consultations with stakeholders like the CEB and the University of Mauritius are ongoing.

Furthermore, the preparation of a waste management strategy for construction and demolition waste is in the pipeline with the assistance of the European Union. The Government spends about Rs350 m. annually on the operation and management of landfill and another Rs350 m. on operation of the five transfer stations and transportation of waste to the landfill.

With a view to reducing significantly nuisances from such facilities, this Government has decided to relocate two transfer stations, namely that of Roche Bois and La Brasserie.

Separation of waste in households is thus an essential step in this strategy as it offers the following benefits –

- Proper sorting of waste at source directly supports material recovery as this leads to the production of homogenous and less contaminated materials which is easier and less costly to recover.
- It enhances behaviour change in households towards waste prevention, recycling and also consumption patterns.

Hence, the provision made under the Climate and Sustainability Fund will allow us to ensure harmonisation in the types of bins to be provided to households and also define the frequency of collection. This will provide the IWPF with a continuous supply of clean material thus ensuring a good quality of compost and the sorting of uncontaminated recyclables.

We are conscious that effective communication is of paramount importance for the segregation to be successful. The implementation of successful awareness campaigns that promote proper environmental behaviour in the field of waste management is a challenge, particularly as it seeks to change the population's behaviours and habits.

We will thus tailor our awareness campaign to suit different stakeholder groups and their different behaviours and motivations. This will be achieved based on the following factors –

- Age;
- Type of accommodation;
- Gender;
- Language,
- Level of interest/participation in recycling and waste prevention.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the adoption of the New Solid Waste Management Strategy in August 2021 several projects, in line with the principles of circular economy, were initiated in a very short span of time and this budget further supports circularity in waste management. The main ones include –

- 1) The setting-up and operation of civic amenity centres, also called “*déchèterie*”. So far, three civic amenity centres have been constructed, namely at the Transfer

Stations of La Chaumière, La Laura in the eastern part of the island and Poudre d'Or.

A civic amenity centre is an infrastructure which accepts sorted and uncontaminated waste like paper, carton, metal, wood waste, construction and demolition waste, used tyres, used oil and some electronic wastes from households and Small and Medium Enterprises with a view to enhancing recycling. These sorted wastes are then given to recyclers. A fourth one is planned to be constructed at Rose Belle.

- 2) The commissioning of a feasibility study for the setting up of a recycling facility for end-of-life vehicles. Currently, the necessary regulations are being finalised by the Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail and the Solid Waste Management Division with a view to setting up an end-of-life vehicle recycling facility to recycle all abandoned vehicles and those vehicles declared as total loss.
- 3) The preparation of two Regulations based on Extended Producer Responsibility for the management of electrical and electronic wastes and post-consumer beverage PET containers.
- 4) The setting-up of two composting units, namely at Bras d'Eau and Vacoas for the composting of green wastes from parks and gardens. These have already been constructed.
- 5) Collection and exportation of used tyres for recycling purposes.
- 6) Distribution of 5,000 composter bins is in progress.

Mr Speaker, Sir, prior to April 2023, regulations pertaining to the management of solid and hazardous wastes were fragmented and dispersed under different legislative frameworks. There was an absence of a dedicated legislation in Mauritius to deal with solid and hazardous waste management holistically. The Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act 2023 has cured the above shortcomings and ensures the effective implementation of the several policies, strategies and action plans focusing on resource recovery and recycling, and will facilitate the shift from a linear approach into a circular economy model in the waste sector.

Indeed, with the enactment of Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act in April 2023, the foundation stone has been laid to transform our waste management into one in which recovery of material from our waste will be highly prominent.

The following Regulations that are being reviewed under this Act, as follows –

- i. Registration of recyclers and exporters Regulations,
- ii. Registration of Scavenging Contractor Regulations;
- iii. Waste Carrier License and Waste Management Facility Regulations;
- iv. Declaration and Environmentally Sound Management of Hazardous Wastes Regulations;
- v. Extended Producers Responsibility Regulations for Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE);
- vi. Extended Producers' Responsibility Regulations for Post-Consumer Beverage Containers;
- vii. Waste Segregations Regulations;
- viii. End of life Vehicles Regulations, and
- ix. Collection, Storage, treatment, Use and Disposal of waste Oil Regulations;

Mr Speaker, Sir, hazardous chemical waste is a complex waste stream and needs to be managed in a safe and sound manner in view of its high potential impacts on human health and the environment. The disposal of hazardous wastes generated in Mauritius has been a major concern over the last decades due to the lack of an appropriate infrastructure. This situation led to hazardous wastes being stockpiled at the generators' premises.

As a Small Island Developing State, we do not generate enough hazardous chemical wastes to set up a local treatment or recovery facility. It is in this context that we have, since 2017, an interim hazardous waste storage facility operational at La Chaumière. This facility has enabled hazardous wastes generated on the island to be analysed, collected, stored and promptly exported to licensed treatment and disposal facilities, thereby minimising the risks to the environment and public health. Since its operation in 2017, over 770 tonnes of hazardous wastes

have been collected from various premises while over 550 tonnes of these hazardous wastes have already been exported to licensed disposal/treatment/recovery facilities.

The importance of having such a facility was further demonstrated during the unfortunate episode of the MV Wakashio shipwreck on 06 August 2020. The Interim Hazardous Waste Storage Facility has enabled the safe receipt, handling and storage of around 2,714 tonnes of HFO-contaminated wastes resulting from the MV Wakashio oil spill. Without the facility, it would have not been possible to carry out all these operations in a safe, timely manner and without further compromising the environment.

My Ministry has also commissioned a feasibility study on biogas plant for anaerobic digestion of organic wastes and consultations with stakeholders like the CEB and the University of Mauritius are ongoing.

Furthermore, the preparation of a waste management strategy for construction and demolition waste is in pipeline with the assistance of European Union. The Government spends about Rs350 m. annually on the operation and management of landfill and another Rs350 m. on operation of the 5 transfer stations and transportation of waste to the landfill.

With a view to reducing significantly nuisances from such facilities, this Government has decided to relocate two transfer stations, namely that of Roche Bois and La Brasserie. Lands have been identified and this budget has made the necessary provisions to hire the services of consultants to design the new stations and to upgrade the existing ones to ensure that source-segregated waste collected by the local authorities is well managed and sent to the future waste composting and sorting facilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the Leader of Opposition that my Ministry has developed a roadmap and action plan for a Circular Economy in the Republic of Mauritius for the decade 2023-2033, as on a radio program last Friday, he stated that we need one. This is already here and was approved by Government since August 2023.

It comprises a series of 80 actions for Mauritius and 30 actions for Rodrigues to integrate circularity in the five priority focus areas, namely –

- (i) Agri-Food;

- (ii) Construction and Real Estate;
- (iii) Consumer Goods;
- (iv) Transport and Logistics and
- (v) Waste Management.

The roadmap will serve as a tool to bring about transformational change to not just address the existing resource constraints but will significantly contribute to the aspiration of building a carbon-neutral, climate-resilient and prosperous economy as well as meeting our targets of the Nationally Determined Contributions.

Transitioning to a circular economy model rests on the active collaboration of the public and private sectors. My Ministry has already embarked on the implementation of the roadmap through the setting up of the institutional framework. I am pleased to highlight that Circular Economy Platforms have been set up for the five priority focus areas as well as an additional one for the cross-cutting issues which include –

- i) Governance;
- ii) Public procurement;
- iii) Business Support;
- iv) Education and Awareness Raising, and
- v) Research and innovation and Greening of Fiscal policies and Financing.

The composition of these platforms comprises both the public and private sectors as well as academia and NGOs. These two platforms are co-chaired by the private sector. I am pleased also to note that Rs1 million have been allocated in this budget to further implement the roadmap to enhance the integration of circularity principles. Moving to a more circular approach will require transformational changes that require reviewing the whole of the production chains.

Businesses will thus be encouraged to adopt new and innovative business models that will favour using renewable resources, offer products as a service, promote the sharing of

resources through digital platforms, encourage repair for product lifecycle extension and promote resource recovery and making use of circular inputs. This will enable enterprises to benefit from reduced costs associated with material and waste management, creation of new revenue streams, green and circular job opportunities as well as broader economic growth. This clearly demonstrates that sustainability and profitability can go hand in hand.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will agree that circular economy is no longer a choice but a necessity for Mauritius to make sustainable use of resources and move towards a *transition écologique*. Towards this endeavour, my Ministry is reaching out to people to inculcate the principles of circular economy and to encourage the adoption of good practices such as repair, recycle, refurbish, repurpose and recover. To showcase circular economy in practice, my Ministry in collaboration with the Municipal Council of Quatre-Bornes organised a first ‘*La foire anti-gaspillage*’.

This event comprised various corners for repair, recycling, sale of recycled green products by SMEs and women entrepreneurs and donation of second-hand products for reuse. Mr Speaker, Sir, to reach out to more people, a sum of Rs1 million has been provided in this budget to replicate this exercise. Mr Speaker, Sir, with a shared vision for a cleaner, greener and resilient Mauritius, my Ministry is spearheading the implementation of the project “Greening of the Public Sector”. In fact, an action plan, a Green Charter and an Institutional Mechanism were approved in March last year. The implementation of this project and the adoption of the Green Charter by all Ministries and public organisations would enable us to improve our sustainability performance and reduce public expenditure while fostering a green culture and behaviour within public sector organisations.

To implement the Green Charter, my Ministry has set up its institutional mechanism. Green Cells have been set up in the Office of the President, in all Ministries and local authorities to implement the measures recommended in the action plan and the Green Charter within their respective departments and organisations. I am glad to announce that, my Ministry, being the lead agency for the lever Culture and Behaviour, has launched a logo and motto for the Greening of the Public Sector project to raise awareness and to foster a sense of ownership by public institutions.

Government will lead by example and review its day-to-day operations and services through the adoption of smart and best practices to pave its way towards ecological transition. My Ministry is undertaking a market survey on suppliers, producers of green sustainable products with a view to promote sustainable products through green procurement. A database would be created and posted on the website of my Ministry. Along the same line, this budget is providing funds, to the tune of Rs4 million for installation of rainwater harvesting systems in government buildings and organisations. We are confident that with the sum earmarked in this budget, we will further implement the action plan for the greening of public sector projects.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to chart the pathway towards a plastic-free island, my Ministry is in the process of hiring a team of consultants to develop a national roadmap. The roadmap will include an action plan to guide future policies and strategies to address plastic mismanagement and pollution, with recommendations for short, medium and long-term actions. Funding from the United Nations Environment Programme has been secured to the tune of USD 150,000 for this exercise. As the House may be aware, my Ministry has put a ban on several categories of single-use plastic products and plastic carry bags through the promulgation of the Environment Protection (Control of single-use plastic products) Regulations 2020 and the Environment Protection (Banning of Plastic Bags) Regulations 2020.

As regards biodegradable plastic bags and biodegradable single-use items, from January 2021 to 16 May 2024, 729 registration certificates have been issued by my Ministry to manufacturers and importers of biodegradable, compostable, exempt plastic bags and biodegradable single-use items. To ensure compliance with the two regulations on plastic, my Ministry conducts regular enforcement at the port, airport and points of sale. From January 2021 to 16 May 2024, 3,013 inspections have been carried out at outlets, stalls, markets, hypermarkets, food outlets and manufacturers.

Subsequently, 520 contraventions have been established. A total of 405,155 units of banned single-use plastic products and 194,042 units, 1263 roll-on and 57 kg of banned plastic bags have been seized. I wish to inform the House that with the promulgation of these two plastic-related Regulations, some 200 million single-use plastic products and some 400 million plastic bags have been avoided in our waste stream and our environment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the use of Polylactic Acid (PLA) materials as a biodegradable substitute for plastic is becoming more widely used in our local market, especially as replacement for beverage PET bottles.

My Ministry, through a Research Collaborative Agreement with the University of Mauritius in November 2022, undertook a research project on the assessment of the biodegradability of Polylactic Acid bottles.

The conclusion of this research study, released in April 2024, indicates that –

- (i) PLA bottles are biodegradable and compostable;
- (ii) does not generate microplastics, and
- (iii) is not harmful/toxic to our soil. The coming into operation shortly of an industrial compost plant will ensure faster degradation of the post-consumer Polylactic Acid bottles.

In this respect, in order to encourage the use of biodegradable beverage bottles such as PLA, which is plant-based, we welcome the removal of this PET excise duty of Rs2 specifically on such types of bottles as this incentivises the bottlers to make the shift. This measure is not going against our fight against single-use plastic bottles. In fact, we are using tools at our disposal to decrease the use of PET and encourage the industry to shift to an alternative which is more environmentally sound.

We recall that the United Nations Environmental Programme has been mandated to come up with a global treaty on plastic pollution. This international legally binding instrument is currently being crafted and would set out global goals and binding targets, together with action plans and consistent measurement. It would provide the framework needed to urgently solve this crisis. It is expected that an agreement will be reached by the end of 2024 on the various provisions of the treaty. We would certainly have to align ourselves with the obligations of such a treaty upon its ratification.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards vehicular smoke emissions, my Ministry is continuously implementing measures to reinforce the enforcement capabilities for environmental protection.

With a view to better control such emissions, my Ministry had successfully acquired fifteen portable smoke meters, from the budget earmarked in Financial Year 2020/2021. Since the start of enforcement in March 2022 up to February 2024, a total of 4,259 diesel-driven vehicles have been tested with the portable smoke meters.

Out of these 4,259 vehicles, 522 vehicles were found to be emitting smoke at an opacity between 50% - 70% and 463 vehicles were found to be emitting smoke at an opacity above 70%. Accordingly, in line with the relevant provisions of the Road Traffic Act, a total of 478 Fixed Penalties, 447 Prohibition Notices have been issued by the concerned Enforcing Authorities to whom the portable smoke meters were handed over.

Mr Speaker, Sir, focusing on the subject of air quality, I wish to inform the House that the Air Quality Index system launched in September 2022 by my Ministry continuously monitors the Ambient Air Quality in ten regions across the island. The Air Quality Index is disseminated to the public on a daily basis on MBC TV platform and Air Quality Index website as well as “*MoNatir*” mobile application. Besides raising public awareness, Air Quality Index is also a tool for vulnerable populations as it helps in minimising exposure to polluted air. Moreover, an Air Quality Index is a reliable means for Government in policy making.

Since the introduction of the Air Quality Index, Mauritius is continuously monitoring air quality and the Air Quality Index website makes our air quality visible to the world. Such that in the Air Quality Index World Air Quality Report 2023, Mauritius was ranked among the only seven countries to meet the World Health Organisation annual guidelines. Government priority for our water resources is to ensure sustainable management and their protection. To be able to do so, we need to constantly monitor our water resources, so vital for the well-being of our citizens.

This Government is investing in the best available technologies for online real-time monitoring of surface and groundwater to ensure that early detection and remedial action of any contamination spells that may occur. The project was initiated on a pilot basis at the Municipal Dyke of Pailles and will now be extended to six other river locations through the acquisition of 26 Internet of Things sensors for more efficient monitoring of water quality. A budget of Rs20 m. has been allocated for same in the budget.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in my speech last year, I had informed the House of several projects being undertaken by my Ministry following the oil spill of the MV Wakashio incident in August 2020. Today, I am pleased to inform the House that most of these projects have been completed. The National Oil Spill Contingency Plan has been updated and validated in November 2023. This plan, being a dynamic document, will be further tested and updated as appropriate every five years. In addition, under the '*Facilité D'Amorçage, de Préparation et de Suivi des Projets*' of '*Agence Française de Développement*', consultancy services for the enhancement of the oil spill response capacity of Mauritius and Rodrigues were secured.

The project, which started in July 2023 and ended in November 2023 culminated into the production of four reports namely –

- (i) An audit (gaps identification and recommendations) of all oil spill equipment available in Mauritius and Rodrigues;

Mr Speaker: Try to conclude!

Mr Ramano:

- (ii) An Oil Spill Waste Management Plan for Mauritius and Rodrigues;
- (iii) An Oil Spill Volunteer Coordination / Management Plan for Mauritius and Rodrigues;
- (iv) A framework for an environment, socio-economic impact assessment for Mauritius.

These reports will form part and further strengthen the updated National Oil Spill Contingency Plan 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the project for updating the coastal sensitivity map, tactical map and operational map using Geographical Information Systems tools from Pointe Aux Canoniers to Le Morne which started in February 2023 was completed in August 2023 as scheduled. We now have an updated set of data pertaining to the shoreline, biological, and socioeconomic resources for sound decision-making in case of an oil spill event. I wish to recall the House that this project benefited from the technical assistance of the Nairobi Convention Secretariat through UNEP.

Mr Speaker, Sir, last year, I also informed the House that my Ministry would procure oil spill combat equipment. By the end of this calendar year, all the equipment will be received, and officers of the National Coast Guard and Special Mobile Force will be trained on the proper use and storage of this equipment. The country will, therefore, be adequately equipped to deal with an oil spill up to Tier 2, that is, an oil spill of up to 100 metric tonnes. In case of a Tier 3 oil spill, regional and international assistance would need to be sought.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government allocated Rs5 m. in the 2023/2024 budget for monitoring the affected environmental systems and evaluating the effectiveness of remedial actions in the coastal areas impacted by the oil spill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Environmentally Sensitive Areas provide numerous ecosystem services and support many aquatic and terrestrial species of plants and animals. ESAs have a crucial role in the water cycle, in flood management and in climate change mitigation and adaptation. The ESA maps prepared under the 2019 Mainstreaming Biodiversity Project and for which discrepancies were observed would be ground-truthed and finalised. Funds to the tune of Rs3.3 m. have been provided in the Budget.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, this budget is maintaining the momentum for a '*transition écologique*'. It is with determination that this Government is ensuring a successful ecological transition and achieving the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

My Ministry will continue to align itself with relevant decisions taken at regional and international multilateral environmental agreements on sustainable development, climate change, green and circular economy to push the agenda forward in Mauritius to achieve the '*transition écologique*'.

I wish once again to thank the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Dr. Padayachy for their unflinching support in this endeavour. Our common vision is to leave behind an environmental legacy which is worthy of our children and grandchildren.

M. le président, c'est avec plaisir et honneur que j'ai le plaisir aussi d'informer à la Chambre que lors du match Maurice contre Eswatini, Maurice a remporté le match à Côte d'Or sur le score de deux buts à un. M. le président, en alliant cette bonne nouvelle avec cette

transition écologique, je tiens à remercier les membres pour leur attention et encore une fois, je souhaite féliciter l'honorable ministre, Dr. Padayachy.

Mr Speaker: MP Aumeer!

(7.22 p.m)

Dr. F. Aumeer: (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have listened to hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah's speech in which she pronounced the name of the former Prime Minister, Navin Ramgoolam more than 20 times compared to her own Prime Minister, only three times. Needless to say, she must be having some sleepless nights at the mere thought that Mr Navinchandra Ramgoolam could be the forthcoming Prime Minister. And, to coin it, she is thinking of a hat trick in football terms. In the Mauritian language, it's called *boule rond, la plaine kare*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the fifth budget I am privileged to address and bring about my contributions as an elected member of this Assembly. I can, in fact, summarise this budget as one financed by debt where benefits will definitely be short-lived.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is to note that while a forecast of a trillion rupees budget lies ahead by 2030, strikingly enough, there has been no comparison at all of our performance and figures with other countries of state of similar profile; let alone that all countries endured the phase of pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

For the purpose of good clinical financial governance, a comparison of our performance with that of emerging countries would have been very interesting. I would have provided us with the real state of our economy and how it is being managed. However, one example that came to mind was the imported CSG hailed as a breakthrough and modernisation of our pension system that was bought from France. Indeed, it works very well in France but when we compare the state of the coffers of the CSG in the country at the moment; it is just a fiasco since the coffers are empty and the refill is on its way with a 2% additional tax that will be levied on corporate companies.

The CSG, in its inception, fooled the people of this country where all the hard-earned savings of our population were siphoned from the National Pension Fund into the CSG fund and

to be told then in Parliament, and I can quote the hon. Minister of Finance; that there is no cash left. In fact, on 24 October 2023, he replied to a PQ where he said –

“Il ne reste donc rien par rapport au contribution de la CSG”.

A smack in the face of good governance of public funds!

Qu’est-ce qui s’est passé avec notre contribution du *National Pension Fund* ? Des mauvais placements à l’étranger vous dites? Eh bien, l’avenir nous dira!

Mr Speaker, Sir, shuffling figures beat the GDP. Public debts, public debt ratio, inflation rate, and growth rate are of interest to only policymakers and boardroom analysts. What matters most –

Est-ce que le mauricien lambda, dans son ensemble, va ressentir une bouffée d’air frais et puisse remplir son caddie à sa faim? Et bien, le sondage analyste nous a montré que 47 % des ménages ont résilié au suspens de certains de leurs dépenses et 63 % des ménages se concentrent difficilement à boucler leur budget mensuel.

Ce n’est pas moi qui lui dis. Hélas, ce budget n’a rien en avant pour améliorer notre pouvoir d’achat contre la hausse des frais, la dépréciation de la roupie et une taxe déguisée à travers une inflation grandissante. Le Weetabix coûte toujours très cher à R 133, le beurre nous vient toujours à R 119 et tous ce que nous consommons importés restent le même prix. Le *Consumer Price Index* montre une augmentation de 35 % depuis 2019 à ce jour et pour nous dire que le pouvoir d’achat s’est amélioré, c’est un rêve qu’on essaye de vendre.

M. le président, pas de baisse de prix, rien n’a été mentionné dans ce budget sur les produits de base. Fondamentalement, les prix augmenteront à nouveau brusquement, très bientôt, en raison de l’excès de liquidité dans le circuit monétaire et la spirale d’augmentation du coût du fret. Rien n’a été fait pour arrêter la dépréciation incontrôlable de la roupie ; ce que signifie que les consommateurs continueront à souffrir. La TVA est toujours la même. Une baisse du taux ou une extension des exonérations de TVA sur un plus large éventail de biens essentiels aurait pu aider les ménages et en particulier les familles vulnérables.

M. le président, ce budget a eu plusieurs adjectifs: « décousu, sale, aigre-doux, illusionniste, du réchauffé, électoraliste, illusionniste ». Au fait, ces mots sont très appréciés par le ministre Gobin dans son allocution, mais celui qui résume ces cadeaux à court terme en face d'inaction pour consolider la roupie et améliorer le pouvoir d'achat se hisse au parade des péjoratifs. Un budget barbe-à-papa ! Des effets qui vont fondre tels que nos '*kalamindas*' très rapidement malgré la hausse des subventions dans divers secteurs.

M. le président, l'heure du sursaut a sonné. Tout citoyen mauricien, quelque peu raisonnable, devrait se soucier de la dégradation des finances publiques qui se manifeste par le ratio de la dette au PIB à environ 70 % mais qui, selon certaines sources, réfutées par des cabinets d'économistes et des comptables nous disent le contraire. Certains même avancent le chiffre de 90 %. Imaginez-vous que chaque enfant qui va naître aura une dette d'environ R 476 000 sur sa tête et dire que cela va causer le *Baby-Boom Budget* de l'avenir, j'en doute. Je suis gynécologue quand même.

C'est cela l'héritage de ce gouvernement en partance à nos enfants. Comment réconcilier cette dette sur chaque nouveau-né en nous donnant à lui et à sa maman R 2000 chaque mois ? Ce constat n'est qu'un énième avatar de la gestion laxiste des deniers publics. Depuis 2017, on a assisté impassiblement à une accumulation de la dette publique, passant de R 288 milliards en 2017, à 298, 320, 381, 419, 435 les années consécutives pour aujourd'hui nous dire, c'est à R 501 milliards.

Le ministre Bholah que j'ai écouté très attentivement pendant son allocution, sans oublier que ce gouvernement a accumulé et a augmenté des dettes d'année en année et je dis cela en référence à sa bonne intention de calcul de bénéfices pour un enfant qui cumulera environ R 290 000 concernant les *allowances* qu'il aura sur 10 ans.

Mais si aujourd'hui la dette que porte un enfant est de R 460 000 avec la spirale de dettes, la façon dont la gestion des finances a été ces cinq dernières années, M. le ministre, c'est le malheur que vous êtes à la commande. Cet enfant, malgré que vous proposiez un budget intrigant; aura R 1 million de dettes sur sa tête. Inutile de dire qu'au cours de ces cinq dernières années, les discours budgétaires présentés à la nation ont été des budgets sans réelle cohérence stratégique, privilégiant les effets d'annonce aux réformes substantielles.

Effet d'annonce – la démolition du bâtiment Anquetil pour créer une mini forêt qui est toujours bien ancrée magistralement devant la municipalité de Port-Louis, notre bon vieux refrain, Rivière des Anguilles *dam* qui persiste et signe. L'enthousiasme des mini forêts à la hauteur de 4 % obligatoire dans des projets de morcellement est cette fois-ci annoncé et qui sait, ce sera peut-être de très petites forêts avec des cerfs pour le plaisir des papilles de certains.

M. le président, les problèmes de ce pays, l'économie d'un pays est bâtie non sur la gratuité et des promesses qui nous endettent davantage mais sur la production des biens et des services pour tous. Les mesures proposées ne s'attaquent pas aux racines des problèmes qui minent le développement de notre pays : la prolifération de la drogue et notre pays devenu un carrefour incontournable pour les gros barons de la drogue.

La dévaluation de notre roupie vis-à-vis les monnaies étrangères, presque 45 % vis-à-vis du dollar, à ce qu'elles étaient 10 ans de cela. Pour ceux qui ont des comptes d'épargne, sachez qu'au moins un tiers de vos économies ont déjà perdu leur valeur. Pire, chaque famille paie environ R 100,000 de taxes valeur ajoutée par an sur la totalité de ses dépenses quand on compare le panier des ménages à R 54,000 par mois. Donc, vous contribuez indirectement à l'impôt et c'est votre argent en termes de taxes à valeur ajoutée et on vous retourne un tiers de cette prestation sociale de ce que vous avez contribué, ce qu'on appelle un mirage économique.

Law and order, protection des retraités et des touristes, on a vu ce qui s'est passé à Terre Rouge, Rose-Hill, Plaine Verte. Rien pour les protéger davantage ! La maîtrise de l'endettement spiral depuis 2014 continue et il n'y a rien qui est fait pour arrêter cet endettement spiral.

Contrôle et efficacité des dépenses publiques, le rapport de l'audit nous dit tout. Un frein aux abus d'approvisionnement d'urgence. Nous avons vu ce qui s'est passé avec Molnupiravir. Avec le nombre croissant des morts suite aux accidents de la route, chaque jour, chaque week-end, on assiste impunément aux décès liés aux accidents. Pas de projection, comment pouvoir arrêter cette hécatombe que nous lisons semaine après semaine sur les journaux, dans tous les médias du pays.

La démocratie est toujours un état de notre fierté vivant après notre indépendance en 1968, ou assistons-nous à une autocratie dont le dernier pion a montré son nez n'est autre que la *Financial Crime Commission* qui commence déjà des enquêtes sur les opposants du régime.

L'exode des jeunes professionnels, pourquoi nos professionnels qui majoritairement sont dans la fourchette d'âge de 25 à 40 ans pensent à y aller ailleurs ? Pourquoi nos gradués ne peuvent aspirer des postes qui doivent les revenir ? Bien sûr, la rémunération est un facteur déterminant, mais le népotisme, le *noubanism*, le favoritisme, le manque d'opportunités sont parmi d'autres facteurs qui rongent notre société.

La main-d'œuvre étrangère, oui, quand il y a un manque réel dans un secteur et non plus lorsqu'on ne donne pas la chance aux Mauriciens qui en ont l'expertise, mais on leur offre un salaire inférieur et trop souvent victimes de leur appartenance politique. Il ne faut pas que nous, les Mauriciens, devenions ce qu'on appelle les *third class citizens* dans notre propre pays. Sinon, on assisterait à une pléiade d'étrangers se qualifiant de jeunes retraités. Pour ceux qui ont étudié en Europe et qui ont vécu en Europe, les retraités ne sont pas 60 ans.

La majorité des retraités aime la couler douce à Maurice à partir de l'âge de 40 ans, qui auront la possibilité de prendre un emploi automatiquement s'ils remplissent les critères de retraite. On assistera alors à des conseils d'administration, remplis d'expatriés retraités, donnant des ordres aux Mauriciens. Toutefois, des cas d'exception, où leur savoir-faire n'est pas disponible à Maurice doivent bien sûr être pris en considération. Automatiquement, avoir droit à un emploi rémunéré dans ces conditions de retraite, c'est dénigré l'identité mauricienne.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the increase in pensions, not only the Rs1,000 promising sufficient in the wake of price hike for basic food commodities and medicines, but the way of giving it, is also equal to sheer hypocrisy because this amount will be divided in two part payments. The first payment of Rs500 will be given as from this July, before the dissolution of the National Assembly. The second payment will be made in January next year after the elections, which the forthcoming government of Labour party will ensure that it is paid. This reminds me of how they promised to give Rs13,500 as pension during the 2019 campaign, but they waited till the very last year of the mandate to actually give it.

This Government has played with the sentiments of our elders with regard to pension. Let us not forget that we were also deprived of compensation during the first years of the current mandate in spite of the heavy depreciation of the rupee. From December 2019 up to March 2024, the rupee has depreciated by 23.5% against the euro and 26.8% against the dollar. There is no

need to be an expert in Economics or Accounting, just ask our elders, what is the worth value of their pension nowadays as compared to the time when their *pouvoir d'achat* was much higher with a lesser amount. *73% des personnes du pays pensent que les prix ont augmenté et sont plus élevés.*

M. le président, l'intelligence artificielle, le *buzz* du moment. Trois années depuis que toutes les universités de l'île et les institutions tertiaires ont été appelées à dispenser des cours à l'intelligence artificielle. Très bonne initiative afin que nos jeunes gradués puissent avoir et rivaliser avec les autres. Mais la triste histoire est qu'après trois années, il n'y a vraiment pas de perspective d'emploi ou de *career plan* pour eux. C'est la raison pour laquelle, pour la plupart, on assiste à un exode de cerveau dans différents secteurs.

Il ne faut pas oublier l'annonce d'un précédent budget, d'un projet d'immeuble de 50 étages à Côte d'Or pour accueillir des opérateurs dans le secteur de l'intelligence artificielle. Si positionner Maurice comme un acteur clé de cette révolution technologique est louable, mais la réalité est qu'on a privilégié les effets d'annonce aux réformes des fonds nécessaires pour préparer le pays aux défis de demain. Un projet mort-né !

M. le président, des urgences sur l'économie reconstituaient des réserves fiscales, le poids de la dette publique. Le rapport du FMI en mai a été clair. Plusieurs discussions ont eu lieu, plusieurs observations ont été faites. Malgré certaines bonnes notes quant à notre résilience économique et notre capacité de rebondir dans divers secteurs de l'économie, ce rapport a été quand même assez direct. Et je dirais même extrêmement direct quant à notre gestion fiscale en général, c'est-à-dire, la nécessité de consolider et gérer les réserves fiscales externes, mais de porter une attention particulière à la réduction de la dette publique. Ne pas faire un mirage sur les vrais chiffres de la dette publique, en épongeant sa juste valeur avec les 158 milliards imprimés qui équivalent à un total astronomique de 523 milliards déclarés et ces 158 milliards, un total de 680 milliards, chiffres qualifiés par le FMI comme *quasi-dead*.

205 milliards de dettes depuis 2019 chiffres astronomiques quand on jette un regard sur le montant de cette dette contractée par ce même gouvernement de 2014 à 2019 qui s'accumule à 65 milliards. Le FMI parle aussi de l'indépendance de la MIC. Tant qu'elles seront en actionnariat et en partenaire avec la banque centrale, sa crédibilité est entachée, car même ici, au

Parlement, des questions classées dans des activités financières et support compagnies ne sont pas autorisées. Le FMI est très loquace quant à la formule de la contribution sociale généralisée et demande qu'elle soit revue.

Le salaire et le pouvoir d'achat, un cocktail qui cumule entre la triste vérité des consommateurs et la dépréciation de notre roupie. Le peuple doit savoir quelle est la vraie balance entre le taux d'augmentation de ces salaires et la perte du pouvoir d'achat depuis 2019. De 2019 à 2024, l'augmentation des salaires était à environ 20 %, la perte de pouvoir d'achat est arrivée jusqu'à 34 %, je parle des références du *Statistics Mauritius* et de la dépréciation de notre roupie à la hauteur de 28 % du dollar. Au final, les consommateurs peinent encore à remplir leurs caddies, chose qu'ils avaient fait avec plus d'aisance en 2015 même avec un salaire inférieur comparé à aujourd'hui par leur pouvoir d'achat était beaucoup plus supérieur et le contrôle de prix était rigoureux.

M. le président, l'astuce du prix de la bonbonne à gaz, le grand argentier, l'illusionniste, je l'appelle, le prix était à R 180 le 19 avril 2022 et avait subi une augmentation de 33 % pour être vendu à R 240 le 7 juin 2024. Le ministre, la semaine dernière, nous annonce une baisse de R 50 pour le ramener à 190. Encore R 10 plus cher de ce qu'il était avant ! On prend ce peuple pour vraiment bête et à voir la jubilation vendredi dernier de l'autre côté de la Chambre, certains auraient pu même défoncer leurs tables tellement ils étaient contents à cause de cette bonbonne de gaz, R 10 encore plus cher de ce qu'il a été. Comme on le dirait en créole, *pren bef pou retourn dizef*. J'ai oublié peut-être ce R 10, c'est la guerre Ukraine-Russie qui la cause.

M. le président, fidèle à mes habitudes, je réserve cette partie de mon discours au ministère de la Santé. Comme je l'avais dit dans mon discours l'année dernière, le traitement du cancer chez les enfants et la prise en charge par le gouvernement est louable. Cette année, l'extension d'âge à 25 ans pour le traitement du cancer, la prestation allouée aux futures mamans, est un pas positif. Concernant la prise en charge du diagnostic du traitement du cancer à Maurice ou à l'étranger, la question pertinente est pourquoi jusqu'à 25 ans ? Pourquoi ce ciblage spécifique ?

Je vais parler, j'ai les références du rapport du cancer à Maurice, le dernier qui a été publié. Je m'explique – 959 nouveaux cas parmi les hommes, dont 47 seulement sont âgés de 25 ans ou moins, et prenant ce nouveau ciblage, on ne va avoir qu'environ 22 nouveaux cas pour

être totalement pris en charge et considérés acceptables pour tout traitement local et international. C'est bien. Donc, c'est seulement 5 % des cas qui affectent le cancer chez les hommes qui sont pris en charge totalement, que ce soit local ou international, avec toutes les facilités financières. La majorité des 95 % ne bénéficieront que du traitement local ou le *Overseas Treatment Scheme*.

Chez les femmes, 1,421 nouveaux cas, 51 cas de plus si on prend la fourchette de 25 ans qui a été mise en valeur. Officiellement, 33 de plus que lors du dernier budget ; seulement 3.6 % des cas de cancer chez la gent féminine ont ce bénéfice.

M. le président, il n'est pas surprenant que le cancer chez la femme, dont on a si bien écouté tous les avantages que ce gouvernement voudrait leur donner, est plus particulier à partir de l'âge de 35 à 40 ans – 90-94 %, peut-être, ont des cancers qui sont parfois même incurables. Ces femmes, à partir de 38 ans, ne devraient pas être ciblées en dehors de cette catégorie. La compassion et le traitement médical ne devraient pas être ciblés par âge, mais doivent être universels en termes de facilités pour tous les Mauriciens. Il ne faut pas que l'on fasse du ciblage que pour des effets d'annonce.

Durant son allocution le 9 mai 2024, le Premier ministre, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, avait affirmé que le *National Cancer Centre*, l'hôpital pour le traitement du cancer, est le plus avancé de l'océan Indien, avec des équipements de haute technologie ; technologie de pointe. Et en tant que professionnel de santé, j'en suis ravi, puisque je suis moi-même un sub-spécialiste en cancer chez les femmes. Je sais ce dont je parle. Je ne parle pas pour avoir de *political mileage*. Je parle pour aider cette population après l'âge de 40 ans, dont la majorité des cancers se situent dans cette *bracket*. Ce n'est pas en-dessous de 25 ans. Oui, il faut aider ces gens en dessous de 25 ans ; oui, il faut être compassionné avec les jeunes enfants, les bébés qui ont le cancer. Il faut avoir de la compassion. Mais écoutez bien, pour la majorité de notre population, le cancer se situe à partir de 35 à 40 ans.

Alors, je suis ravi qu'il y ait un centre de cette envergure, et j'espère qu'il y a du personnel hautement qualifié pour subvenir aux soins de tout Mauricien atteint du cancer. Alors, pour ces cas les plus rares, il faut de l'expertise d'outre-mer. Je suis d'opinion qu'il ne doit pas avoir de ciblage, car cela ne considérerait que 4 %. Bien sûr, tous les atteints du cancer doivent

bénéficiaire totalement de la prise en charge et non à faire la quête. Comme on le sait réellement, tout politicien le sait, des gens font la quête pour arrondir les frais au-dessus de ce *que l'Overseas Treatment Scheme* leur subventionne.

Un État-providence ne cible pas ces malades par leur âge, car ils sont tous égaux dans notre Constitution et bénéficient pleinement de l'État-providence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, shortage of manpower in the health industry – healthcare is not built on bricks-and-mortar, but we must invest in *ce qu'on appelle le capital humain*. As per the Budget measures, mediclinics and community centres are being built, but I have not seen any provision for recruitment of additional nursing staff to work under the newer health institutions. The issue of manpower and training has not been addressed at all. It is common knowledge that there is a scarcity in that field of nurses and specialised nursing staff in the country let alone, private health institutions that are much ruling all over the country – themselves relying on foreign staff with all the difficulties that some bring along.

The backbone of strong and reliable healthcare depends not only on well-trained nursing staff but also on the ratio of nurses to patients to provide a safe and reliable environment. The ratio of nursing staff to the number of patients at the moment is pretty fragile and this Budget has not done or come up with any incentives and measures to attract the school-leavers into such a noble profession.

Opportunities for further training in sub-specialised and specialised nursing care seem *être le parent pauvre de ce budget*. I wonder whether a human resource unit that will encompass the needs of all health services should be considered to contain and address the issue of scarcity of healthcare personnel in this country. Recruitment of medical specialists at page 35 annexed to Budget – B10 – strengthening hire services – Section A, the Minister will be allowed to recruit foreign specialists to exercise in public hospitals.

Being the voice of so many out, there are serious concerns regarding the lack of specialists and the absolute authority of the Ministry to recruit thereby overriding the role of the Public Service Commission, the Medical Council and the Senior Chief Executive. Therefore, the Minister can employ any specialist that makes a request or is given an offer without any checks

and balances by relevant authorities. Why, therefore, not have the creation of an Ombudsman to look and overlook this type of recruitment?

As a colleague, I hope he comes up with a clarification on this issue since; he knows like myself very much that there are a few bogus specialists around, that come from certain countries and try to make their way into our services. Sometimes, their standards of care are much lower than our bright, dedicated local medical officers. Fake certificates have existed. We all remember that fake pseudo certificates have caused problems in our parastatal bodies like the Cargo Handling Cooperation, and the Mauritius Meat Authority.

Mr Speaker: May I stop you there. I heard like bogus qualifications or bogus certificate.

Dr. Aumeer: Pseudo ...

Mr Speaker: Can you substantiate that? Because this is very serious what you are saying. You are a professional. You know it is serious.

Dr. Aumeer: I know it is serious but that was not ...

Mr Speaker: Can you substantiate it before I let it go in Parliament?

As the Speaker, I have to ask you the question – can you substantiate it? And if you can't, then in a very civilised manner, just apologise.

Dr. Aumeer: Let me rephrase it if that would be better.

Mr Speaker: My ruling is not to be negotiated. Whatever you said, if you can substantiate it, you go ahead. If you can't substantiate it, you withdraw it and you apologise! Or I just stop your speech there.

Dr. Aumeer: I apologise and I start again.

Mr Speaker: Because in Parliament, we cannot tolerate such speech.

Dr. Aumeer: Okay. We all remember...

Mr Speaker: No!

Dr. Aumeer: I apologise and I withdraw.

Mr Speaker: You withdraw the expression; all the words and you apologise!

Dr. Aumeer: Of course!

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much!

Dr. Aumeer: Apologies for the future as well. Let me remind the House of the circumstances of resignation that led to people who were employed and were the Director of the Cargo Handling Cooperation and the Mauritius Meat Authority. That should serve as a lesson when we are going to recruit foreign people or even local people and the KYC has to be done appropriately, so that we do not have the same KYC that was done and I have to remind the House of Pack & Blister.

Once again, particular attention should have been to further widen Post-Graduate Programme that only caters for anesthesia and radiology at present. The Budget should have accommodated a specialist training programme with accreditation from the University of Mauritius. We have enough well-trained high qualified doctors in Mauritius to do their training, especially in diabetes, hypertension, and general surgery considering the high percentage of patients with non-communicable diseases; it would be a win-win. Patients will be having their own local doctors, language won't be a barrier, it will be a friendly atmosphere, the incentive to do post graduate in this country will be there and doctors will stay around. We won't have a brain drain.

The payment of overtime has been discussed this morning in the previous Bill we debated. The failure to pay overtime on time and with so many delays as well as extra allowances to health service staff for the last few months is a total disregard and contempt to those workers who, without them, we would not have come out of the pandemic. Hailing them as front liners at one time during the pandemic and not respecting their efforts during the hours they were attending to the sick whilst they should have been at home with their families, irrespective that myself as a doctor and the Minister as a doctor; we stay at home, but we need that the backbone of our health service – the healthcare staff to be paid their overtime on time.

I make a plea to the hon. Minister of Finance to make allowance for payment for all the categories of workers, be it at the CEB, CWA, or the Police who have worked overtime and their dues are paid accordingly. I can assure all those concerns that a PTr alliance-led government would restore your dignity and no delay in tactics as to payment of overtime.

M. le président, le chouchou du budget, nos futures mamans, augmenter le congé de maternité de deux semaines et le congé de paternité aidera sûrement à l'arrivée d'un nouveau-né dans la famille. Il est à noter que les exigences d'un nouveau-né sont assez épuisantes et qu'il faut y prêter attention en particulier. La promotion de l'allaitement maternel, la difficulté de concilier sa vie professionnelle et conjugale, le *bonding*, le lien d'un nouveau-né avec sa mère, diverses études ont montré les difficultés de comportement des enfants pour ceux qui n'ont pas connu l'amour et le lien parental pendant les deux premières années de la vie.

La dure séparation d'une jeune maman avec son petit bébé de quelques mois pour retourner au travail et les difficultés d'avoir des crèches fiables dédiées aux nouveau-nés et surtout, à ceux qui sont nés prématurés, sont des contraintes inévitables. Éviter l'exigence physique pénible pour ceux qui ont des emplois manuels, plus de temps libre pour ceux qui ont accouché des bébés prématurés. Ces sont quelques-unes des raisons pour lesquelles un éventuel gouvernement Parti travailliste, MMM et les Nouveaux Démocrates sont allés beaucoup plus loin : l'ensemble d'un an de congé de maternité. Cela permettra également aux femmes qui travaillent de fonder une famille et de réintégrer le marché du travail une fois qu'elles seront physiquement, émotionnellement et moralement établies.

Distribution des serviettes hygiéniques : un petit commentaire sur cette mesure au numéro 456. Je dois rappeler à la Chambre que l'usage des serviettes hygiéniques commence dès l'âge de la puberté jusqu'à la périménopause pour la gent féminine. C'est un pas dans la bonne direction pour les filles du Grade 6 au Grade 13 qui en ont besoin. Encore une fois, un gouvernement de l'alliance Parti travailliste et ses alliés sont allés plus loin. On a pris l'engagement que toutes les filles ou femmes concernées par ce cycle menstruel et mensuel bénéficieront d'un *menstrual leave* particulièrement...

Mr Speaker: So, I just asked hon. Ms Anquetil to stop. You know whatever is in your programme, whatever are your promises, this does not concern this budget! Please, try to listen

and learn! This budget is in a book. You had a copy of the book. So, comment on that! You do not introduce new matters concerning x, y, z party. You understand that. Please, continue!

Dr. Aumeer: Pour ces jeunes filles qui ont trop souvent des douleurs et aussi des indisponibilités, nous sommes à l'écoute des préoccupations très sensibles de ces dames. Le prix exorbitant des médicaments, il n'y a pas une seule mesure dans ce budget pour alléger le fardeau des prix parfois exorbitants des médicaments, particulièrement sur les épaules de nos aînés et pensionnaires. Augmenter leur pension de vieillesse et ne laisser aucun ajustement de leur pouvoir d'achat en termes de médicaments est un manque total de respect envers ces gens. Les attentes du *regressive mark-up* n'ont pas été ressenties positivement. Il est impératif que le *parallel import* doive être libéré quid à froisser les garçons aux yeux bleus qui arpentent les couloirs de l'Hôtel du gouvernement et qui reçoivent 23 à 24 permis par an.

L'*Economic Development Board* doit absolument revoir sa copie concernant le parc pharmaceutique de Rose Belle et il faut attirer ces acteurs majeurs dans la fabrication des médicaments, car nous avons le potentiel, l'intelligence et la force humaine pour faire la fabrication des médicaments et développer un nouveau palier économique avec la production, mais aussi avec la commercialisation éventuelle sur le marché local et international. Cela permettrait d'avoir des médicaments à des prix abordables tout en permettant la création d'emploi.

M. le président, je vais terminer par ma circonscription numéro deux qui a été le théâtre des conséquences des pluies torrentielles le 15 janvier et le 21 avril 2024. L'accumulation des eaux dans divers endroits, le débordement sans précédent des ruisseaux, les drains bouchés, et le non-nettoyage des cours d'eau est le gros manquement, car la construction des murs de soutènement au Ruisseau du Pouce a marqué les esprits de chaque Mauricien.

Des vidéos montrant des voitures empilées les unes sur les autres et l'effondrement d'une maison ont fait le tour du monde. Je fais un appel au ministre des Finances et ses collègues pour faire *due diligence* de plusieurs familles de Tranquebar et La Butte, 11 au total, et quelques-unes de Vallée-Pitôt qui ont presque tout perdu et dont certaines, leurs maisons sont hautement à risque vu l'érosion de leur soubassement par le flot des eaux. Sans oublier qu'il y a eu deux lieux de culte ravagés complètement par l'eau boueuse, et pas de soutien du *central government*.

Il faut agir, car la prochaine plus torrentielle sera très catastrophique. Il faut regarder toutes ces 12 familles avec compassion et humanisme et leur apporter de l'aide en termes de relocation ou d'assistance financière. Quant à la compensation donnée aux trois familles à ce jour, je me réjouis de cette initiative et je garde espoir que les deux autres en bénéficieront de même.

Un petit mot concernant les tribulations des habitants de Plaine Lauzun et Bonnefin de Pailles qui ont toutes les peines du monde pour avoir accès au transport public, car il n'y a pas d'arrêt d'autobus et ils doivent traverser l'autoroute M1 pour avoir le transport en commun. Femmes enceintes, vous dites, enfants, bébés, personnes âgées ont besoin de votre intervention, et j'espère que le gouvernement aura une oreille attentive pour pouvoir ériger un arrêt d'autobus dans cette région.

Pour conclure, les Mauriciens méritent un projet de société rassemblé, porté par une nouvelle équipe de responsables politiques avec un mélange d'expérience et la fougue de la jeunesse qui comprenne les enjeux. Il est crucial que notre débat se concentre sur les vraies priorités : la maîtrise de l'endettement, l'amélioration et l'efficacité des dépenses publiques, la réduction des inégalités, et la construction d'une économie résiliente et durable.

“The test of a Government is not how popular it is with the powerful and the privileged few but how honestly and fairly it deals with the many who must depend on it.”

That was said by former President Jimmy Carter.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for one hour.

At 7.59 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.02 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode (Second Member Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, I must first and foremost say that I stand here today with great gratitude and pride, proud as we announce a number of measures that will not only benefit the population as a whole but also shape the future for so many young people. It is not to mention,

that each and every initiative is a reflection of the commitment of this Government to progress, welfare and sustainable development.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what is vision? Dreams can become a reality when one possesses a vision. Only visions allow us to transport dreams of greatness into the reality of achievement through human action. Our Prime Minister is a synonym of that vision and surely '*demain est à nous*'. Thank you Prime Minister and thank you also our Minister of Finance. I have a special note for hon. Farhad Aumeer – who stated his vision with his boisterous voice – let me tell him and to others in the Opposition – for that matter, vision without execution, is delusion.

Je sais à l'avance que l'honorable Dr. Farhad Aumeer, allait peindre tout en noir et que rien n'a été fait concernant la santé et encore plus dans ma circonscription. Il y a aussi le fameux l'honorable Eshan Juman qui se montre chaque fois sur tous les toits pour se délirer et on sait que ce délire s'est manifesté en une grande excitation, beaucoup d'extravagances. *Much ado about nothing*. Demain est à nous, M. le président. Pourquoi ?

The Budget 2024-25 is a continuation of the philosophy of our Prime Minister for building a prosperous future. The Opposition, like always, is making attempts to discredit the Government and development. It is pure demagogy. No, opposition members! No! There is a philosophy of continuing to support the population from young to old in the Government of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. Those who are against us are continuously trying to make the population trick into forgetting how this Government handled COVID-19.

In fact, we can rightly say that the past years have been the worst. We cannot forget the conflict between Russia and Ukraine which is still causing so many problems around the world and to which Mauritius is deeply affected. Come on, Opposition Members! This Government is a caring Government. In the face of all external complications and hurdles, we have a Government that continuously reviews the price of basic commodities; flour, rice and bread making same more accessible. The household gas price after the budget is Rs190; I am mentioning one only as the list is too long.

With such drastic and if I may say, bold measure, we are not only providing some relief to each and every family of the country but also showing unconditional support to them. We are also giving back for the trust they put in the hon. Prime Minister and his team. Billions of rupees

are allocated in terms of subsidies, all because the well-being of the population is the main focus for us. Coming to the health sector, this compassionate Government has provided a budget of Rs17.2 billion this year to the health sector. Again, it is pure demagoguery of the Opposition to deny how this sector is day by day being modernised.

E-health was in pilot phase at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital and as from November 2024, the E-health system will be rolled in all public health institutions around the island. We are making sure that every Mauritian has access to quality health care –

- increased support to cancer patients;
- reviewing age limit for foreign treatment;
- grants;
- paediatric cancer care, and
- pregnancy care.

Apart from *voyant toutes choses en noire*, I hope that family and relatives of the Opposition Members will benefit enormously from these measures in case of need. These are commendable measures as a healthy population is a happy population. Let me make a *parenthèse* here, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in my Constituency, the St. Francis Xavier Mediclinic will be inaugurated very soon and it will be of great help to the residents. I am thankful on behalf of my constituents. Thank you hon. Dr. Jagutpal, thank you my colleague Vice Prime Minister, hon. Dr. Husnoo.

Education, Mr Speaker, Sir, lies at the heart of a nation's progress. In this Government, we make it a mission to support our students. From simple initiatives to bigger ones in this year's budget, we once again prove that we are not leaving any stone unturned to improve the ever-changing education sector.

From deductions for students studying in private schools to free sanitary towels for schoolgirls, we are committed to ensuring that every child has access to quality education and the tools they need to succeed. Mr Speaker, Sir, in January, this Government implemented a major reform to make pre-primary education free and we cannot omit the free tertiary education implemented in 2019. Where in the world do children enjoy free education from pre-primary to tertiary level? We do not stop there only, Mr Speaker, Sir! This Government is giving students a

second chance to succeed for those not obtaining five credits, that is, full subsidy for SC and HSC examination fees.

Let me underline how the Opposition, with its theatrical attitude, tries once again but without success to fool the population. *Nanye pa bon pou zot* – talking and campaigning and more so, hon. Eshan Juman on the late delivery of books, a Misha, *c'est la manne du ciel pour monter sur le toit pour crier : Au feu! Au feu!* What will the Opposition criticise now that we have given a second chance to succeed for those not obtaining 5 credits? Education, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the cornerstone of our progress and prosperity; cornerstone of progress means that there must be a dose of competition. *Ki zot pann dir lor 5 credit issue.* Strengthening law and order, this Government Mr Speaker, Sir, is reaffirming its commitment in this domain.

Huge seizures of dangerous drugs amounting to Rs15.5 billion have been made and 25,615 persons arrested. How daring, Mr Speaker, Sir. This Government has a will to bring a crusade against drug trafficking, but again the Opposition has tried to make believe that we are protecting drug barons.

Moving on, Mr Speaker, Sir, addressing climate change and climate adaptation, we heard so much about its effects like rising sea levels, flash floods, unprecedented rainfall and extreme weather conditions. This Government is committed to taking bold actions. Circular economy is being promoted. This Government is introducing a corporate climate responsibility equivalent to 2% of the company's profit. The caring Government has an agenda to restore the country's natural ecosystem. Indeed, *nous avons payé tous les péchés du monde par cette démagogie de l'opposition. C'est nous qui sommes responsables du désastre du cyclone Belal.* It is nature and it wins and the effects of climate change. According to some, it is the Prime Minister who is at fault for climate change. What a joke, Mr Speaker, Sir! How some sections of the Press together with the Opposition shouted *la fin du monde.* It is unbelievable.

On one hand, we have all the *palabres* and blah blah blah while on the other the Government is striving towards a more sustainable future. We are investing in renewable energy and environmental conservation. From installation of solar panels on public buildings to the allocation of land for forests, we remain committed to protecting natural resources. *Sa ki apel travay! Faire bouger les choses.* Not to forget the Rs1 billion allocated to pursue the

implementation of 132 drain projects of a total value of Rs35 billion. Among the series of measures, we have retirement pension, the increase of the *revenue minimum* wage to Rs20,000, not to mention the blue economy related to fishing as part of our rich heritage and how this caring Government is easing the haphazard lives of fishermen. What an unprecedented comical gesture of Members of the Opposition. Perhaps the FMI or the United Nations are luring this present Government.

Now, the Opposition is not recognising prestigious institutions like FMI or the United Nations. According to the United Nations, the tourism industry in Mauritius has recovered at 94% – what a figure – of pre-pandemic level compared to the global average of 88%. This Government needs a clap, Mr Speaker, Sir. The country is attracting higher spenders and longer-staying tourists. How can it be? Is it a miracle? Many anti-patriots are downgrading our country vehemently at the international level. But, in contrast, we are attaining our objective in the tourism sector. *Bravo le DPM ! Avec autant de démagogies, l'opposition ne trouve mot à dire pourquoi et comment on fait tant pour attirer ces nombres conséquents de touristes.* DPM, I pray that our objectives for 2024 to reach 1.4 million tourist arrivals and 100 billion of tourists receipt be attained. *Inshallah!*

The Opposition found nothing again in last year's budget for introducing the Independence Scheme to provide a one-off grant of Rs20,000 to each citizen at the age of 18 years. *Cette opposition, ki zot pann dir pou kouyonn la zeness?* We will further...

Mr Speaker: Can you...

Mr Abbas Mamode: ...hear negative comments.

Mr Speaker: Excuse me! Can you withdraw that word '*kouyonn*'?

Mr Abbas Mamode: Okay, I withdraw.

Mr Speaker: Try to be more polite, hon. Member!

Mr Abbas Mamode: I withdraw!

Mr Speaker: And apologise also, I am sorry.

Mr Abbas Mamode: I apologise.

Mr Speaker: Thank you!

Mr Abbas Mamode: But the Opposition is fooling the youth.

Mr Speaker: Thank you!

Mr Abbas Mamode: This can be said, I suppose, Mr Speaker, Sir? We will further hear negative comments or perhaps they will be mute as this Government will provide a free monthly data package for all citizens aged 18 to 25 years of age to enable 80,000 youth to benefit from free internet.

Let me elaborate on my constituency. I reiterate the mediclinic which will be shortly inaugurated. Thank you, Minister of Health for promoting the motto 'Health is Wealth.' *Abitan nimerò 3 ki'inn gagne?* Renovated Dr. Idrice Goomany Municipal Hall, new municipal hall, new synthetic football ground, changing CWA water pipe both in Plaine Verte and Roche Bois, new road and drains, renovation of Mamade Elahee stadium, Kaya stadium and *gymnase* 1^{er} Février, new Area Health Centre to mention some. Due to the scourge like drugs, it is important to induce youngsters to practice sports. My *mandants* are eagerly awaiting the opening of the modern arena gym situated at the very centre of Plaine Verte. It is a *vrai bijou*. *Nous ne sommes finalement pas les laissés-pour-compte. Merci au ministre de la Jeunesse et des Sports, merci à la mairie de Port Louis et surtout, merci à l'honorable Dr. Husnoo, vice-Premier ministre.*

Those Opposition Members, our selfie Parliamentarians will always capture photos to show on social media. If I were to show how the situation is being remedied by Government MPs in my constituency, I would be sad for you. The list would be too long.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Juman, *il faut cesser avec cette habitude de peindre tout en noir ! Regardez la forêt et non pas les arbres*. Many projects have been realised. I can go far to say that this caring Government, mostly our Prime Minister is conscious of the problem of space for enabling Mauritians, in particular the most vulnerable, to have a roof on their heads. *Pa kass latet*, Opposition Members,

we have already found space for the construction of housing units for the people of my constituency!

Despite a bright future for hawkers, it is good to mention how this Government has catered for the hawkers with the Urban Terminal. I know there are some remedies to be brought along, but it is unkind of Opposition Members in Constituency No. 2 and Constituency No. 3 to exploit these hawkers of Plaine Verte and Vallée Pitôt.

My information due to political gain for the next election every now and then; they are calling at the Urban Terminal to take snaps and waiting for election to bring about the *soit-disant* suffering of these hawkers. *Ces quelques membres de l'opposition, exploitant ces marchands ambulants, existeraient-ils s'il n'y avait pas Facebook?* This government will always be alongside the hawkers. *Hier, en écoutant l'honorable Juman, il perçoit un gouvernement en fin de règne. Quel sarcasme! Fin de règne! Uhhmm ! Le mot 'digi', 'digi' explique tout; qui est en train de régner.*

In a nutshell, Mr Speaker, Sir, the only weapon of the Opposition is to focus on inflation and there is nothing concrete to boost the economy, purchasing power, etc. *La bouche dou* – this government has not waited for the next general elections to *fer la bouche dou*. Since long, despite COVID-19 and Ukraine war, there has always been a policy of *la bouche dou*. How can we make abstraction? *Ki maximum mauriciens dan bien* when we proceed to the malls? Even in my constituency, I invite all members *confondus des deux côtés de la Chambre* to be at Desforges Street every night to witness people queuing at food stalls.

Yes, I do accept, that in some corners there are downtrodden people but this government is helping them. The Budget is not news for them. Opposition members have invented the *la bouche dou* to eradicate the word '*continuité*'. *Le maître-mot de ce gouvernement est 'continuité'*. There is no doubt that more will be materialised. *Oui, demain est à nous et aussi le récent passé de tant de care* for the people.

Il est impératif de méditer sur ce passé non lointain. La pension de vieillesse était au compte-goutte. Il faut méditer sur le salaire minimum. Il faut aussi méditer sur la gratuité de l'enseignement préscolaire jusqu'au supérieur. *La bouche dou*, ce n'est pas aujourd'hui, c'est

bien avant. Est-ce que nous avons une opposition responsable – à chaque fois sur la même chanson ou plus exactement la même rengaine.

They are paid by the public funds. Mr Speaker, Sir, always asks them to tender apologies. If they cater for the people, how come they enjoy their walkout and accept their salaries? Hon. Yeung Sik Yuen will take the floor just after me. I hope he has not brought *chouchou* or *bringel*. There is no need, as in the budget, this Government has cared for food security and food sufficiency.

To conclude, I thank the Prime Minister for his vision and again, il faut continuer le progrès. Je dis bien, il faut continuer le progrès. Le succès n'est pas final. C'est le courage de continuité qui compte, comme disait Winston Churchill – 'Continuez, continuez, continuez !'

I am done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next orator would be hon. Yeung Sik Yuen but before I give you the floor, I am already warning you with regard to exhibits which you have a habit of showing.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Don't worry!

Mr Speaker: Although it is funny, it is not acceptable in Parliament. I rely on you.

(9.25 p.m)

Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands): M. le président, je commence. Ce budget 2024-2025 est le cinquième et dernier budget présenté par le ministre des Finances avant les prochaines élections. Je note à travers la presse écrite et parlée que les économistes restent complètement sur leur faim. C'est un budget purement électoraliste, sans aucune mesure de relance de l'économie. C'est un budget d'un gouvernement essoufflé et désespéré et qui pense duper la population à quelques semaines des élections. On note aussi quelques répétitions des mesures annoncées dans les budgets précédents car ces mêmes projets n'ont jamais été commencés. Par exemple, le projet pour le barrage de Rivières des Anguilles ; cinquième fois cité en cinq ans. La population attend toujours les projets annoncés dans le passé comme : de l'eau potable 24/7, fabrication des médicaments et l'usine de bicyclette à Maurice.

M. le président, le projet de 12 000 maisons qu'avait promis ce gouvernement en 2019 dont le nombre de maisons a été révisé à 8000 l'année dernière. Le ministre des Finances annonce maintenant que le gouvernement finira de construire les 8000 unités de logement d'ici juin 2025.

M. le président, c'est en budget de *copy and paste* de l'année dernière. Il n'y a que les chiffres qui changent. On ne voit rien contre la cherté de la vie, rien contre la dépréciation de la roupie, rien pour soulager les pauvres, rien concernant une baisse de prix de l'essence et du diesel, rien sur le combat de la drogue qui gagne davantage de terrain depuis que ce gouvernement est en place, rien comme mesure contre l'exode des jeunes qui quittent le pays, rien pour relancer l'économie et presque rien pour les PME à part des soutiens pour la participation aux foires et des plans de soutien à la digitalisation des entreprises.

M. le président, éliminer l'extrême pauvreté ; où est le plan Marshall contre la pauvreté qu'on nous a promis ce gouvernement ? Le plan Marshall ne peut pas être résolu seulement en augmentant les allocations. Il faut venir avec des mesures pour encadrer ces personnes qui sont au bas de l'échelle. Rien contre le gaspillage des fonds publics. On a été témoin du gaspillage de milliards de roupies ; gaspillées à cause des mauvaises gestions des fonds publics concernant les cas de BAI, Betamax, Patel Engineering, Pack and Blister, Molnupiravir entre autres.

M. le président, je me pose la question comment l'économie va créer de la richesse. La valeur de notre roupie s'est dépréciée. Notre roupie a perdu presque 50 % de sa valeur vis-à-vis le dollar américain. L'inflation à Maurice est devenue infernale.

M. le président, ce budget ne fait aucune mention d'un nouveau secteur pour relancer l'économie et revitaliser le secteur de l'emploi. Les PME qui représentent 44 % du marché de l'emploi à Maurice passent par des moments difficiles. Elles sont secouées par plusieurs coûts additionnels comme l'augmentation des salaires, l'inflation, le coût de l'essence et la dépréciation de la roupie, entre autres. De plus, leurs revenus baissent. Les PME sont inquiètes pour leur avenir qui devient de plus en plus dur et insoutenable.

M. le président, il faut aussi préserver notre image touristique et il ne faut pas oublier que ce secteur emploie environ 20 % de notre population. Le budget de la MTPA pour la promotion et le marketing de la destination est augmenté de 20 % pour atteindre 600 millions de roupies. Le

ministre des Finances a omis de prendre en compte l'Air Access. On n'a rien entendu sur Air Mauritius, rien sur l'amélioration du service d'Air Mauritius et surtout rien sur les retards et les annulations des vols des avions d'Air Mauritius tout récemment. L'image d'Air Mauritius prend un coup dur ces derniers temps.

M. le président, il faut absolument plus de transporteurs pour avoir une bonne croissance concernant le tourisme. J'espère que le gouvernement travaille sur ce dossier important pour pouvoir avoir une bonne croissance des arrivées touristiques et des revenus. J'espère aussi que le ministre du Tourisme pensera aux marchés émergents, et surtout au marché chinois, indien et arabe.

Beaucoup d'opérateurs économiques au niveau du tourisme m'ont demandé de faire entendre leur voix concernant le marché chinois, dont 100,000 touristes chinois visitaient la destination mauricienne avant la Covid. Aujourd'hui, il y a plus de vols directs depuis la République populaire de Chine. Les PME de ce secteur souffrent énormément et disent qu'il y a un manque de communication entre eux et le ministère.

M. le président, beaucoup de personnes s'attendaient à une baisse du prix de l'essence pour créer un *feel good factor* dans le pays, mais cela n'a pas été le cas. Nous sommes excessivement taxés à travers les produits pétroliers, au moins 50 % en forme de taxes. Le prix du baril au niveau mondial est à la baisse. M. le président, les prix des produits de base tels que le lait, le riz, le fromage et les médicaments augmentent tout au long de l'année, car la valeur de notre roupie se dévalue vis-à-vis des devises étrangères. Les consommateurs sont malheureusement impactés puisqu'on importe presque tous les produits alimentaires et non alimentaires. L'euro était à R 39.68 le 11 décembre 2014, et aujourd'hui, l'euro coûte R 51.14, soit une dépréciation de 29 % entre aujourd'hui et décembre 2014. Le dollar américain qui se vendait à R 32.06 le 11 décembre 2014 et aujourd'hui, le dollar américain coûte à R 46.47, soit presque 50 % plus cher qu'en 2014.

M. le président, R 2,000 d'aujourd'hui est l'équivalent de R 1,000 en 2014. Notre roupie a tellement déprécié. En d'autres mots, la pension de vieillesse de R 13,500 est l'équivalent de R 6,750 de 2014. Le revenu minimum qui sera à R 20,000 le mois prochain est l'équivalent de R 10,000 en ne se basant que sur la dépréciation de la roupie mauricienne. M. le président, en sus de ce souci, il y a un manque de devises étrangères. C'est devenu un casse-tête pour pouvoir

importer des produits depuis l'extérieur, car la plupart des produits importés sont payés en dollars américains. Vous pouvez aussi constater qu'il y a des travailleurs étrangers qui dorment dans la rue devant les succursales de changeurs de monnaie pour pouvoir envoyer l'argent à leurs proches.

M. le président, le ministre des Finances a complètement oublié la classe moyenne. L'inflation affectera davantage la vie des Mauriciens. Le coût de la vie continuera à augmenter drastiquement, malgré que le revenu minimum sera à R 20,000 et la pension de vieillesse sera révisée dès le mois prochain à R 14,000 et R 15,000 en janvier 2025. La vie des Mauriciens sera davantage amère quand on note qu'il n'y a rien comme mesure pour empêcher la dépréciation de la roupie.

M. le président, la population sera taxée davantage au niveau de la TVA. Plus les prix augmentent, plus le gouvernement aura plus de revenus à travers la TVA. Il y aura définitivement une baisse du pouvoir d'achat des Mauriciens. Des importations coûteront plus cher, non seulement à cause de la dépréciation de la roupie mauricienne, mais aussi à cause du coût du fret qui a drastiquement augmenté. Le prix du fret augmente à une vitesse vertigineuse. Pour affréter un conteneur de 20 pieds, aujourd'hui, depuis l'Asie, cela coûte 5,000 dollars américains contre 4,000 dollars américains le 30 mai 2024. Cela veut dire 11 jours de cela et 1,900 dollars en décembre 2023, cela veut dire que les aliments coûteront beaucoup plus cher. Des médicaments aussi coûteront beaucoup plus cher. C'est une réalité qui affecte le quotidien des Mauriciens.

L'effet d'arroser avec les R 3,000 de la CSG ne tiendra pas longtemps. Les gens vont le constater dans deux mois, voire trois mois ou plus. M. le président, le gros problème de l'inflation reste entier. Rien n'a été fait contre l'inflation.

M. le président, on note un *brain drain* à Maurice. On constate un peuple vieillissant. Les jeunes sont très inquiets en ce qui concerne leur avenir à Maurice. Ils quittent Maurice pour d'autres pays. Ceux qui étudient à l'étranger ne veulent plus retourner à Maurice, car ils ont peur de ce climat incertain. Le ministre des Finances annonce au paragraphe 64 que le taux de chômage est passé de 10,4 % au dernier trimestre de 2020 à 6,1 % au dernier trimestre de 2023. Mais le ministre a omis de nous dire combien de personnes ont quitté Maurice pour immigrer

dans d'autres pays et aussi combien de personnes ont quitté Maurice pour aller travailler sur les bateaux de croisière.

M. le président, les aînés sont aussi très déçus, car la compensation de R 500 n'est pas assez parce qu'il y a une grande hausse de prix sur les produits alimentaires et les prix des médicaments. M. le président, oui, nous sommes pour une augmentation des salaires, mais il faut absolument relancer l'économie pour créer la richesse. Il n'y a rien de concret pour soulager le peuple mauricien et surtout les plus pauvres.

M. le président, le pouvoir d'achat des Mauriciens a drastiquement baissé à cause de l'inflation. Les taux d'intérêt ont augmenté dernièrement. La situation est devenue dure pour la plupart des ménages et il y a un désespoir concernant les pauvres. Notre roupie mauricienne a perdu seulement 12 % de sa valeur de 2005 à 2014, mais sous ce gouvernement MSM, notre roupie a perdu presque 50 % de sa valeur entre 2014 et 2020. M. le président, le ministre des Finances a aussi oublié les *self-employed* comme les maçons, les menuisiers, entre autres. Ce sont des gens qui travaillent le matin pour pouvoir manger le soir.

M. le président, j'étais venu au Parlement avec les légumes deux ans de cela, pas pour taquiner les membres du gouvernement, mais pour les conscientiser que la vie est devenue très chère à Maurice.

Mr Speaker: Except that you don't have the right to do it!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Yes!

Mr Speaker: I can understand, but...

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: J'ai compris à travers plusieurs planteurs qu'il y avait 9,000 planteurs de légumes en 2014, et aujourd'hui, il ne reste que 900 planteurs. 90 % de ces 9,000 planteurs ont cessé d'opérer. Les planteurs ont du mal à produire, car leurs dépenses ont augmenté énormément et le prix des fertilisants a triplé. Ces planteurs prennent beaucoup de risques en sus du changement climatique. C'est une raison que les oignons rouges sont rares aujourd'hui.

An hon. Member: *Kotomili!*

Mr Speaker: Continue! You may continue! Disregard these petty comments! Disregard!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: *Batiara sa ! Batiara sa! Batiara sa!*

An hon. Member: *Ey! Ki apel batiara!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: *Kan li ti koze, monn ekoute mwa!*

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order! I have just heard the hon. Member on the other side utter the word ‘*batiara*’!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: M. le président, la dépréciation de la roupie mauricienne affecte le quotidien des Mauriciens...

Mr Speaker: Wait! No, who has said ‘*batiara*’?

An hon. Member: Sik Yuen!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Je cite quelques exemples concernant les prix pour les médicaments...

Mr Speaker: No, hon. Member! Let’s clear one thing. You were speaking, there were some noise and I told you to disregard it.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: I was listening, but they...

Mr Speaker: Yes, but it has been brought to my attention that you uttered the word ‘*batiara*.’

An hon. Member: He did! He did!

Mr Speaker: You are a nice gentleman, I know you personally. So, if you have done so...

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Please, ask them to stay quiet also; to listen!

Mr Speaker: Of course!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: So that they can...

Mr Speaker: Just... just...

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: ...redress the economy!

Mr Speaker: Of course, just withdraw...

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: I withdraw, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: You have withdrawn it. Okay.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: I withdraw.

Mr Speaker: So, hon. Members, one speaker is delivering his speech. So, you better keep quiet and contribute by keeping silent. Please!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: M. le président, cela fait mal. La dépréciation de la roupie mauricienne affecte les quotidiens des Mauriciens malheureusement. Laissez-moi citer quelques exemples, puisque je n'ai pas le droit de montrer les produits. Je cite quelques exemples concernant les prix pour les médicaments –

- En 2014, Gastrogel 500 ml : R 140. Aujourd'hui, en 2024 : R 302, 116 % en plus. 116 % d'augmentation !
- Sargenor ampoule : R 180. Aujourd'hui : R 475, 162 % d'augmentation.
- Eludril soin 200 ml : R 180. R 485 aujourd'hui, 169 % d'augmentation.

Cela c'est pour les médicaments.

An hon. Member: *Imodium ki pri ete?*

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: *Imodium mo pann amene!* Je cite aussi quelques exemples pour les produits alimentaires de base. Quelques produits seulement –

- Lait en poudre d'un kilo : R 168 en 2014. Aujourd'hui : R 258.50, 54 % en plus.
- Les gros pois, 500 grammes : R 22 en 2014. Aujourd'hui, en 2024 : R 49.75, soit 126 % en plus.
- Dholl petit pois, 500 grammes : R 12 en 2014. Aujourd'hui R 22.25, soit 85 % d'augmentation.

- Sardines en conserve à l'huile végétale, 175 grammes : R 14 en 2014. Aujourd'hui, en 2024 : R 25.95, soit 85 % en terme d'augmentation.
- Fromage Kraft, 250 grammes : R 62 en 2014. Aujourd'hui, en 2024, R 94.95, soit 53 % d'augmentation.
- L'huile Rani, un litre : R 42 en 2014. Aujourd'hui, l'huile Rani coûte R 72, soit 71 % d'augmentation.

M. le président, vous imaginez comment certaines personnes peinent à nourrir leur famille ?

M. le président, la solution immédiate serait d'enlever la TVA sur quelques produits de base comme les pâtes, les nouilles, les conserves de légumes. La deuxième solution serait d'encourager les imports parallèles pour pouvoir augmenter la compétition, surtout pour les médicaments. Le *maximum mark-up* est aujourd'hui dépassé.

M. le président, concernant la circonscription de Curepipe-Midlands, je constate que la ville et les trois villages ont beaucoup dégradé depuis 2015. Les lumières de cette ville lumière ne sont malheureusement souvent pas allumées. Cela prend parfois six mois ou plus pour que la mairie change les ampoules défectueuses. On m'a fait comprendre qu'il n'y a pas d'ampoules à la mairie de Curepipe.

(Interruptions)

On ne compte plus le nombre de nids de poule qui jonchent les rues de Curepipe. C'est devenu un calvaire pour les automobilistes. J'accueille avec plaisir les projets annoncés dans la circonscription et j'espère que ces projets vont être réalisés, car souvent ce sont des effets d'annonce. Il y avait une promesse pour la construction d'une piscine couverte et chauffante à Curepipe, dont le ministre Toussaint qui a été député lors de son ancien mandat, il avait fièrement annoncé lors de son discours du budget en 2017. Je cite ce que le ministre avait dit –

« La piscine sera une réalité. Quoi qu'on en puisse dire, la piscine, mes chers honorables membres sera une priorité... »

An hon. Member: *Ey pa koz kumsa!*

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: « La piscine sera là ! »

(Interruptions)

« Je donne la garanti aux habitants de Curepipe, de Midlands, de Dubreuil, de 16^{ème} Mille, que la piscine sera une réalité couverte et chauffée. »

M. le président, les Curepiens attendent toujours. *Labouzi rouz, finn fini !*

M. le président...

(Interruptions)

C'est un budget décevant car il n'y a aucune mesure pour la relance de l'économie et aucune mesure qui va créer la croissance sauf l'inflation et la dépréciation de la roupie.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Minister Callichurn but before you start, I would like to call the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated! Hon. Minister Callichurn!

(9.48 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training (Mr S. Callichurn): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, unfortunately you are in the Chair because I was going to address the Speaker, telling him that I am extremely disappointed tonight; disappointed because he ruled that hon. Yeung Sik Yuen unfortunately cannot bring his *chouchou* and *brinzel* to this House. Do you know why? Disappointed, because before coming to Parliament this morning, my wife told me to bring vegetables and *macaroni* as she had the intention to cook vegetables and *macaroni* tomorrow. Unfortunately, I would have bought these *chouchou* and *brinzel* from hon. Yeung Sik Yuen, but nevermind!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me first of all recognise the strategic proficiency of my colleague Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the hon. Dr. Renganaden Padayachy, for delivering once again, a budget that encompasses the linear philosophy of this Government.

A philosophy, which stems from the Vision 2030 that was spelt out in 2015 by the Father of the Economic Miracle, Sir Anerood Jugnauth to whom I pay tribute. Vision 2030 was, in a nutshell, a new development model elaborated to give a new impetus to the transformation of Mauritius. It aimed at jumpstarting a new phase of high growth with shared prosperity and enhanced quality of life, ultimately transforming Mauritius into an inclusive, high-income country.

Nine years later, here we are, Mauritius has made that giant leap into modernity and our citizens are benefitting from a substantially improved income. And guess what? We have delivered 6 years earlier than our initial projections. Since 2015, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Government of Mauritius, under the leadership of Pravind Jugnauth, our Prime Minister, has implemented several social measures aimed at improving the welfare of its citizens.

The journey from 2015 to 2024 has been marked by unprecedented achievements, and I am confident that with continued dedication and collaboration, we will achieve even greater milestones in the years to come.

The MSM Government, together with its allies, has been at the helm of this country for 9 years almost 10. A period during which it has witnessed a pandemic, an oil spill and surging commodity prices; events that are beyond our control. However, we managed to come out unscathed from such dire circumstances. This tells you the strength of our willpower. We managed to do it because we are achievers. We work relentlessly for our population. Even after an economic contraction of two years, we have succeeded in bouncing back.

M. le président, aujourd'hui, tous les indicateurs sont au vert –

- Le revenu moyen des ménages a connu un bond de 51 % entre 2017 et 2023.
- Le nombre de foyers touchant moins de R 25 000 par mois est passé de 43 % en 2017 à 19,6 % en 2023.
- Le PIB a atteint 651 milliards l'an dernier.
- Le flux de FDI a atteint 37 milliards de roupies, en progression de 3,5 milliards sur un an.
- Nos exportations ont atteint, 347 milliards de roupies.

- Le taux de chômage de 6.1 % est le plus bas qu'on ait connu en 25 ans.

Voilà autant de résultats d'une équipe qui travaille, d'un gouvernement sérieux qui concrétise ses projets et qui accomplit ce qu'il a promis. Ce dernier budget de notre mandat a été accueilli avec satisfaction par diverses sections de la population et par des syndicalistes chevronnés. Sauf, comme d'habitude, par les membres de l'opposition de l'autre côté de la Chambre.

Pour preuve, M. le président, M. Vinod Seegum, *All Civil Service Employees Federation*, parle « *d'un budget social sans précédent.* » Dewan Quedou, président de la *Mauritius Trade Union Congress*, affirme que « *ce budget fait l'unanimité, personne ne peut le critiquer.* »

C'est un budget qui a touché tous les segments de notre population, comme nous avons su le faire depuis 2015. La philosophie du gouvernement n'a jamais changé, elle a toujours été limpide et constante, redistribuant la richesse en accordant une attention particulière aux plus vulnérables.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the main criticism that I have observed coming from the Opposition, is supposedly that this Government has not done enough to curb the soaring cost of living due to rising imported inflation. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is apposite here to highlight that Mauritius is a net importer of its consumption commodities, as rightly mentioned by the previous orator, and it is without any doubt that we are exposed to external shocks.

The cost of living is a major problem, not only in Mauritius but also in other parts of the world. The COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East are the major factors behind the rising prices of freight, raw materials and commodities. In that perspective, our Government has always devoted a large chunk of its policies towards shielding the population from adverse effects. In fact, in that perspective, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have already mentioned that we have gone an extra mile year after year in supporting the purchasing power of our citizens.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the index that measures the rising cost of living is inflation. This Government whenever there has been a rise in the inflation rate has always come up with

adequate salary compensation to mitigate the rise in cost of living. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we started experiencing a high inflation rate since 2022. Let me here tell the House that from 2019 to 2024, the average inflation rate was 4.8%. Nevertheless, Government granted an average compensation of Rs679 per month, which is well above the inflation rate prevailing at that time

M. le président, par exemple, en 2023, malgré un taux d'inflation de 10.8 %, nous avons accordé R 1000 comme compensation par mois, et en 2024, avec un taux d'inflation à 6.6 %, le montant que nous avons accordé était de R 1500 à R 2000 par mois. Cela pour vous démontrer que nous avons toujours accordé une compensation salariale suffisamment adéquate pour contrecarrer les augmentations du cout du panier ménager.

Aujourd'hui, les membres du Parti travailliste veulent faire croire à la population qu'ils auraient fait mieux. M. le président, allons voir ce qu'ils avaient donné comme compensation quand le taux d'inflation était grim pant en 2008-2009, en pleine crise financière. En 2008, le taux d'inflation était à 8,8 %. Alors qu'il fallait tendre une main aux Mauriciens, car les prix des commodités étaient élevés, à cette époque, ils ne donnèrent que R 300 par mois comme compensation, qui ne représentait même pas la moitié du taux d'inflation. Maintenant, en 2007, alors que le taux d'inflation était de 10,7 %, les salariés n'avaient obtenu que R 300 mensuellement, c'est-à-dire même pas un tiers du taux d'inflation.

Aujourd'hui, on peut se demander ce qu'aurait fait un gouvernement travailliste dans le contexte économique que nous avons connu. Quel aurait été le sort de ces familles mauriciennes si le Parti travailliste était au pouvoir ? Un parti qui n'a jamais donné d'*income allowance* au moment de la crise financière de 2007-2008. Depuis le budget 2022-2023, nous accordons, additionnellement une allocation mensuelle directe de 1 000 roupies par mois à tous ceux dont le revenu brut ne dépasse pas 50 000 roupies.

L'année dernière, M. le président, le montant de la *CSG Income allowance* fut augmenté et passa à R 2000. Cette année, M. le président, ce gouvernement va encore plus loin. Désormais, cette *CSG Income Allowance* garantit un revenu additionnel de 1000 roupies chaque mois à quelque 350 000 salariés et travailleurs indépendants.

Ce montant de R 3000 est pour environ 110,000 employés et travailleurs indépendants percevant moins de R 20,000 par mois. De R 2500 pour environ 55,000 employés percevant au moins de R 25,000 et de R 2000 pour environ 50,000 employés qui touchent moins de R 30,000.

Si ça, M. le président, n'est pas de la compassion, il faut peut-être changer la définition de ce mot. La différence entre eux et nous, elle est toute simple. Si le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam promettait de changer la vie des Mauriciens en 100 jours, en se tapant l'estomac pour ne rien faire, notre gouvernement, par contre, lui l'a fait graduellement, mais concrètement, M. le président.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, apart from income allowances, this Government has also worked in the best interest of consumers by protecting their purchasing power and ensuring access to basic commodities. Under our Government, 33 commodities including baby products and school materials have been exempted from VAT since 2015 which undoubtedly led to a reduction in prices. Also, prior to May 2023, the prices of pharmaceutical products were controlled under a maximum mark-up mechanism with a cap of 35% and a special allowance of 2% for each imported consignment.

In order to allow consumers to benefit from affordable prices of medicines, in March 2023, when I was the Minister of Commerce, the regressive mark-up mechanism was introduced. Subsequently, a general fall of 4.6% in prices of most pharmaceutical products was noted as was mentioned by the current Minister of Commerce in her Private Notice Question earlier during the course of last month. The impact would have been greater if other factors affecting the prices of medicines were favourable. I here refer to the unavailability of active pharmaceutical remedies, the cost of production and pricing strategies of manufacturers, cost of freights which are contributing to maintain a higher price of medicine internationally.

The population will also remember that in July 2022, the maximum mark-up was introduced on different categories of products like cereal, pasta, baby food and nappies for children and adults in a view to keep all these products affordable. I also resisted numerous demands for an increase in the unit price of bread. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in this budget, not less than Rs4.9 billion have been devoted to subsidies so that basic products like rice, flour and domestic gas remain affordable.

Another example of our intervention with subsidies concerns the price of domestic gas. In 2022, without subsidy, the price for a cylinder of 12kg gas should have been Rs680. Ultimately, households were paying only Rs240 after Government subsidy. And now, with this budget, they will pay Rs190 for a 12kg gas cylinder.

M. le président, nous sommes aussi venus de l'avant avec des mesures comme l'application *MoPri*, un outil donnant la possibilité aux consommateurs de comparer les prix pratiqués dans divers points de vente. Je viens de vous démontrer, chiffres à l'appui, que c'est sans conteste, notre gouvernement qui a vraiment protégé le pouvoir d'achat des Mauriciens.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, without any doubt, the most significant policy of this Government has been the introduction of a National minimum wage. In 2018, I, as Minister of Labour in an MSM-led Government, under the able leadership of our Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, introduced a national minimum wage to ensure a basic standard of living for all the workers of this country. Let me remind hon. Dr. Aumeer, who was saying earlier that the youth are leaving, even hon. Yeung Sik Yuen mentioned, that the youth are leaving the country because of meagre salary practices in the private sector.

Under the Labour regime, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the minimum prescribed salary stood at Rs6,500 monthly. This is what we call meagre salary. This national minimum wage was a change in policy aimed at improving the living standards of low-income earners. The initial minimum wage was set at Rs8,500 per month. This led to a noticeable increase in salaries for workers in the lower wage brackets, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture and domestic work.

Today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the minimum wage stands at Rs16,500 which represents an increase of approximately 100% in only six 6 years. When the Labour Party was in power from 2005 to 2014, had they regularly reviewed the salary in the private sector, perhaps, those youth they mentioned earlier would have stayed and not left Mauritius to find employment elsewhere where higher salaries are being practiced. It is the Labour Party itself which is to be blamed and not us. At least we are correcting an injustice which was long overdue to the working class of this country.

Hon. Dr. Aumeer and hon. Ms Anquetil, *grands défenseurs de salaires inadéquats* – where were they when cleaners of this country were earning Rs1500 as salary? I did not hear their voices then. Today, these women cleaners and we are proud to say, are drawing Rs20,000 inclusive of CSG Allowance. We are proud.

M. le président, nous avons aujourd’hui plus de 110 000 travailleurs qui bénéficient du salaire minimum, désormais à R 16 500 depuis janvier 2024. Avec la *CSG Allowance*, aucun travailleur de notre République ne touchera moins de R 20 000 à partir de juillet cette année-ci. Le revenu minimum garanti est passé de R 12 075 en 2022 à R 20 000 cette année-ci. Une hausse cumulée de R 7 925 en deux ans seulement. M. le président, ce qui fait que dans une famille où deux personnes travaillent, ce sont R 40 000 qui seront à leur disposition à la fin du mois s’ils perçoivent un salaire minimum. A la fin de l’année, en décembre, avec le boni de fin d’année, ils toucheront au total pas moins de R 80 000. M. le président, jamais sous un autre gouvernement, les familles mauriciennes au bas de l’échelle ont perçu autant de revenus.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there have been post-budget comments on the wage relativity report. I take this opportunity to clear the air around the most important debated topic nowadays. Following the review of the national minimum wage in January 2024, there is a legitimate expectation arising out of the distortion in salary distribution. For example, workers such as a labourer, a surveillant, or a clerk and a worker reckoning different years of service are paid today the national minimum wage.

It is for this reason that I had made a provision in section 5 of the National Wage Consultative Council Act for wage relativity adjustment. We made regulations to adjust wage relativity in 2022 after the first review of the national minimum wage.

The House will surely appreciate that correcting wage relativity is a complex one as it cuts across different sectors and we have all together 17 sectors which are concerned by this exercise. For example, following the first review, it took two years to correct the anomaly created by the introduction of the minimum wage.

As regards wage relativity adjustment for 2024, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have appointed a consultant to work on the adjustment of wages and grading exercise following an amendment brought to section 91 of the Employment Relations Act in 2023.

The consultant has submitted his report to me in March this year. My Ministry has examined the report and is presently conducting a complementary survey in 22 employment sectors. We shall also shortly have further consultations with stakeholders as the amendment brought to section 91 (1)(a) of the Employment Relations Act provides for the review of pay and grading structure every 5 years. Hence, the current exercise of wage relativity will also take into account the determination of wages on an occupation basis which explains the delay in the process.

M. le président, depuis la lecture du budget vendredi dernier, comme à leur habitude, nos opposants osent critiquer notre approche. Ils se présentent comme les défenseurs de la classe moyenne maintenant, qui aurait été oubliée dans ce budget d'après eux. Leur nouveau leader de l'opposition, l'honorable Dr. Boolell, affirme que la classe moyenne est laissée pour compte. C'est tout à fait faux, M. le président, car au-delà des 110,000 bénéficiaires du salaire minimum, il y a dans ce pays une majorité d'employés et de travailleurs indépendants de la classe moyenne, 320,000 au total, qui percevront une *Income Allowance* de R 1 500 à R 2 000 comme je l'ai dit tout à l'heure-là.

Autres mesures qui bénéficient aussi à cette classe moyenne –

- Celle qui voit un individu touchant jusqu'à R 30,000 par mois exempté de l'*income tax*.
- Désormais, les parents qui ont des enfants scolarisés dans les écoles privées bénéficieront d'une exemption de R 60 000 par enfant sur leurs impôts.
- De plus, cette classe moyenne qui a des enfants âgés de 3 à 10 ans touchera une allocation de R 2 000 par mois comme *School Allowance*.

J'en profite pour rappeler à l'honorable Dr. Boolell, Leader de l'opposition qui, malheureusement, n'est pas présent ce soir, les taxes introduites par son collègue, le ministre des Finances d'alors, le fameux Dr. Rama Sithanen qui avait ciblé plus particulièrement la classe moyenne –

- Il me semble qu'il a déjà oublié l'introduction de *la National Residential Property Tax* ; une taxe sur tous ceux qui avaient épargné pour se payer une petite maison, M. le président.
- Autre mesure qui ciblait la classe moyenne, ce fut la double taxation sur l'épargne et les salaires.

Il a fallu que le MSM revienne au pouvoir pour enlever ces taxes abusives et redonner sa dignité à la classe moyenne.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to another segment of our population to which we have given back their dignity. I am talking about our senior citizens. As we all know, this Government has made significant changes to the pension system, including increasing the Basic Retirement Pension. This measure has benefited hundreds of thousands of our senior citizens, ensuring they have a more secure and dignified retirement.

The Basic Retirement Pension in Mauritius has seen several adjustments over the years to align with economic conditions, inflation and social policies. The consistent increase in the Basic Retirement Pension reflects our Government's focus on improving social security and providing better financial support for the elderly population. These adjustments have been crucial in helping senior citizens cope with the rising cost of living and ensuring their financial independence. In this last budget of our mandate, a measure taking effect as from 01 July – that is next month – the BRP will be increased to Rs14 000 for pensioners in the age bracket of 60-64 years old, which concerns around 82,700 senior citizens.

M. le président, rendez-vous compte qu'en décembre de cette année, une pensionnaire touchera R 28 000, inclus le boni. Maintenant, si un foyer compte deux pensionnaires, cela fera R 56 000 qu'ils percevront à la fin de cette année.

An hon. Member: *Kari Bouk !*

Mr Callichurn: Qu'est-ce que tu as dit ? *Kari bouk ? Dimann lopoziion komie bouk, mouton pou gagne ladan !* Et je laisse le soin à nos amis de l'opposition de calculer ce que certains d'entre eux toucheront à partir de janvier 2025 quand le montant de la BRP atteindra R 15 000.

M. le président, de R 3 623 en 2014 à R 14 000 en 2024, la pension a connu une hausse de l'ordre de R 10 377 en dix ans, ce qui vous fait 286 % d'augmentation. Du jamais vu, M. le président, du jamais vu ! Sous le régime Travailliste, ce montant de la pension n'avait connu que R 1 500 d'augmentation pour une période entre 2005 à 2014. Neufs en alors que nous en dix ans, 286 % d'augmentation équivalent à R 10 377. Nos aînés, qui ont tant travaillé pour le progrès de ce pays, ont mérité cette pension digne, une pension qui leur permet de demeurer indépendants. Une pension qui leur donne la capacité d'acheter des médicaments et des vitamines. Oui, les prix ont certes augmenté, mais je tiens ici à ouvrir une parenthèse concernant le prix des médicaments.

Je tiens à préciser que ces mêmes médicaments vendus dans le privé sont disponibles gratuitement dans nos hôpitaux, notamment en version générique, qui ont les effets similaires. Il est bon de souligner que pas moins de 731 produits pharmaceutiques sont disponibles gratuitement dans nos hôpitaux et dans le but d'améliorer les soins prodigués dans nos services de santé et afin de nous aligner sur les nouveaux protocoles de soins comme dans d'autres pays, de nouvelles molécules ont été introduites dans nos hôpitaux pour mieux soigner les diabétiques, les maladies cardio-vasculaires et aussi les personnes qui ont des troubles psychiatriques.

M. le président, concernant les congés maternité, permettez-moi de commenter la mesure de l'opposition concernant l'introduction d'un congé de maternité de 12 mois. Une mesure annoncée à la va-vite, sans aucune réflexion, ni d'étude approfondie, donc une mesure démagogique et purement électoraliste, ça oui !

Vous savez, on a interrogé les opérateurs et les travailleurs : il en ressort que beaucoup sont farouchement contre cette mesure. Il s'avère qu'un tel congé étendu mettrait en péril l'accès à l'emploi aux femmes et la sécurité d'emploi des femmes.

N'oublions pas que c'est notre gouvernement qui a donné, en premier, une plus grande considération aux femmes enceintes –

- 1) En 2015, moi-même, j'ai amendé la loi. Le congé maternité qui était alors de 12 semaines est passé à 14 semaines.

- 2) Le congé maternité payé est devenu obligatoire en 2019, indépendamment du temps de service de la maman.
- 3) De plus, les parents qui adoptent des enfants de moins de 12 mois ont aussi droit à un congé maternité payé de 14 semaines. C'était une première dans le pays.
- 4) À partir de juillet de cette année, le nombre de congé de maternité payé passera de 14 à 16 semaines et de 14 à 18 semaines en cas de naissance de jumeaux, de triplés ou même plus.
- 5) Ajouter à cela, le congé de paternité passera de 5 jours à 28 jours.

À savoir que nous allons introduire, M. le président, un garde-fou additionnel pour protéger les futurs parents contre les licenciements abusifs et contre toute forme de discrimination par rapport à leur chance de promotion.

Nous allons aussi accompagner les futures mamans avant et après l'accouchement en leur donnant un soutien financier mensuel.

Toutes ces mesures, M. le président, c'est du jamais vu dans l'histoire de ce pays !

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of our core responsibilities at the Ministry is the enhancement of employment services. We have established efficient job placement centres across the country, aimed at matching job seekers with suitable employment opportunities.

These centres provide career counselling, skills assessments, and job matching services, which have significantly reduced the time it takes for job seekers to find employment.

The measures we have implemented have yielded tangible results. I am proud today to announce that because of these measures, the unemployment rate has seen a consistent decline, from 7.9% in 2015 to 6.1% in 2024 (first quarter). We should not forget that after the first lockdown due to COVID-19, the unemployment rate was 12.2% in 2020. Some from the Opposition side were saying that there would be *100 000 chômeurs annoncés dans ce pays*. It is a fact that our various schemes introduced under the Economic Recovery Programme have

known resounding success, and thanks to the hon. Dr. Padayachy. Our youth represent the future of Mauritius, and we have implemented targeted measures to address youth unemployment.

Initiatives such as the Youth Employment Program (YEP) and the Graduate Training for Employment Scheme (GTES) have provided thousands of young Mauritians with the opportunity to gain valuable work experience and secure permanent employment.

Under the National Training and Reskilling Scheme (NTRS), some 5,000 unemployed people were reskilled. The NTRS has been providing individuals with training to facilitate a smooth transition into new occupations or sectors with prospects and opportunities.

Therefore, the decreasing trend in unemployment implies that there is a shortage of labour in certain sectors, not that the youth are leaving the country and going to work abroad. It is an undeniable fact that Mauritius has witnessed growth in various sectors of the economy and for it to sustain higher levels of growth, we will need more labour force.

Unfortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the demographic trend in Mauritius shows an ageing population and declining birth rate leading to labour shortage. Companies are encountering difficulties to operate. Operators have been complaining of shortage of skilled labour and their inability to import sufficient labour based on their requirements due to existing quota and ratio. My Ministry has been attentive to all these representations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that many developed countries rely much on migrant workers in various sectors which are skilled-labour intensive such as manufacturing, agriculture and jewellery sectors.

Mauritius is presently going through the same phase. These physically demanding jobs are becoming more and more unattractive to many Mauritians, and therefore, they are not willing to work in these sectors. Employers, therefore, have no choice but to recruit from foreign countries.

As enunciated in the Budget Speech 2024-2025 by my colleague, for our economy to sustain higher level of growth, Mauritius will continue to open up to foreign talent, and therefore, my Ministry is reviewing the current policies to give a boost to businesses.

Hence, quotas in sectors like manufacturing, jewellery, Freeport and ICT BPO are being removed to encourage more foreign skills in those sectors.

Previously, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, victuallers were relying solely on local labour to carry out their business. However, with the increase in their activities, it is only fair that victuallers be also allowed to recruit foreign labour to thrive economically.

Another sector which has a demand for more foreign labour is the motor vehicle repair and maintenance sector. Mauritius has witnessed a growth in the number of vehicles on our roads - if I am not mistaken, we have 600,000-700,000 vehicles currently on the road - it is, therefore, obvious that this sector is expanding and we have to cater for this sector as well.

My Ministry is also relaxing on the ratio requirement, that is, from the ratio of 1 foreigner to 2 locals to 3 foreigners to 1 local. Moreover, my Ministry is increasing the length of stay of foreign workers from 4 years to a maximum of 8 years across all sectors. Foreign workers in the manufacturing sector, export-oriented enterprises which are contributing significantly to the economic growth will be allowed, henceforth, to stay for a longer period, that is 10 years, compared to the current applicable duration of 8 years. Such measures will undoubtedly enable foreign workers to contribute to the expansion of the sectors and also for employers to retain experienced and skilled foreign workers.

Another sector in dire need of labour is the agricultural sector, for us to be able to produce more vegetables, to produce more *chouchou and brinzel*. Specific labour requirement in this sector is basically seasonal as it involves amongst others planting, harvesting and processing. Therefore, my Ministry is coming up with the Agricultural Workers (Labour Contractors) Regulations to provide more flexibility for recruitment and placement of workers in the agricultural sector.

Regarding the insurance of work permits, the existing legal provision to provide for insurance are same within 30 days, almost 90% of application for work permits are determined within the statutory delay. The delay for the remaining application is mainly due to incomplete information. My Ministry is trying hard to further reduce the timeframe for determination of application for work permits.

Some Members, in their interventions on the budget, have shown concern regarding the influx of migrant workers to the detriment of local workers with the measures I have just mentioned. Let me reassure these Members that my Ministry will maintain a ratio in specific sectors such as tourism, bus industry and medical so that local workers are given priority over migrant workers. My Ministry is also ensuring that migrant workers are fairly treated. The Special Migrant Unit of my Ministry carries out regular visits to workplaces to ensure that the terms and conditions of the contract of employment are complied with.

M. le président, nous finissons ce mandat avec le sentiment du devoir accompli. Cela n'aurait pas été possible sans la volonté du Premier ministre, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth. Il a été le maestro, le capitaine qui nous a permis de transformer le pays et d'améliorer d'une manière sans précédent la vie de nos citoyens. J'ai aussi une pensée spéciale pour les mandants de la circonscription numéro 5 qui m'ont toujours été d'une aide précieuse. Grâce à leur confiance et à leur loyauté sans faille, j'ai eu la force d'accomplir beaucoup de choses. Je promets d'être toujours à leurs côtés et de travailler pour leur bien-être.

Je terminerai par une citation d'Esther Duflo, prix Nobel d'économie en 2019, M. le président –

« Plus on aide les gens, plus ils sont aptes à sortir du seuil de pauvreté. »

Merci. J'en ai terminé. M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Dhaliah, please!

(10.34 p.m.)

Mr R. Dhaliah (Second Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Tonight, I stand before you with immense pride and optimism to bring my contribution to the commendable budgetary measures for the financial year 2024-2025.

This budget, crafted with the utmost diligence and foresight by the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, Dr. the hon. Renganaden Padayachy, sets a robust foundation for sustainable growth and social welfare in our beloved Mauritius. His deep

understanding of our economic landscape and his commitment to fiscal responsibility has resulted in a budget that is not only ambitious but also pragmatic and inclusive.

I must take this moment to express my deepest gratitude to our visionary Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Jugnauth. His unwavering leadership and strategic visions have been instrumental in guiding our nation towards prosperity. Under his stewardship, Mauritius has witnessed significant progress and this budget is a testament to his dedication to our country's development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, first and foremost, this budget aims to bolster our economy through strategic investments and reforms. The digitalisation of the National Land Transport Authority and the enhancement of the corporate and business registration departments, and e-filing facilities are monumental steps towards modernising our business environment.

These measures will streamline processes, reduce bureaucracy and foster an enabling environment for investment, trade and entrepreneurship. The introduction of a fast-track mechanism for issuing environmental impact assessment licenses will further facilitate business operations and attract foreign investment, enhancing our nation's competitiveness on the global stage.

En outre, la simplification du processus de délivrance des permis de construction et d'utilisation des terres offrira un soulagement nécessaire aux entreprises, réduisant les délais et encourageant le développement. Les autorités locales acceptant les paiements électroniques pour les services est une autre mesure avant-gardiste, alignée sur les meilleures pratiques mondiales et facilitant le fonctionnement efficace des entreprises. L'adoption d'un code de bonnes pratiques réglementaires garantira en outre que notre cadre réglementaire reste transparent, équitable et propice à la croissance économique.

The re-engineering of our tourism sector is another highlight of this budget. By introducing the Tourism Development Bill and streamlining the licensing framework for tourism-related activities, we are setting the stage for a vibrant and sustainable tourism industry. The focus on promoting environmental sustainability through measures such as the strategic environmental assessment for large projects and the creation of green forests in Morcèlement projects is

particularly commendable. These initiatives not only aim to preserve our natural heritage but also to enhance the appeal of Mauritius as a premium eco-tourism destination.

De plus, l'engagement du gouvernement en faveur de l'élevage de coraux et des programmes de surveillance environnementale holistique en collaboration avec l'université de Maurice et des O.N.G. garantira la protection et la préservation de nos écosystèmes marins et terrestres. Ces efforts positionneront Maurice comme leader du tourisme durable et de la conservation de l'environnement.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this budget places a significant emphasis on social welfare and health care, demonstrating our Government's commitment to the well-being of all citizens. The introduction of digital eyeglasses for low vision learners and the enhancement of support to training and apprenticeship programmes are steps that will ensure inclusive education and skills development for our youth. Additionally, the recruitment of foreign specialists in public hospitals and the development of a national strategy for adolescent's health reflect our dedication to providing high-quality healthcare services.

L'accent mis sur la santé mentale, en particulier chez les adolescents, est un aspect crucial de ce budget. En promouvant des modes de vie sains, de bonnes pratiques hygiéniques et en fournissant un soutien psychosocial complet, nous posons les bases d'une future génération plus saine et plus résiliente. Les contributions de la Fondation nationale pour l'inclusion sociale à divers programmes sociaux soulignent encore notre engagement à répondre aux besoins des plus vulnérables de notre société.

The initiatives to enhance the energy sector and port development underscore our commitment to infrastructure and environmental sustainability. By investing in renewable energy projects and improving the efficiency of our ports, we are not only driving economic growth but also ensuring a greener and more resilient future for Mauritius.

The measures to improve port development and efficiency such as hiring additional skilled crane operators and acquiring new equipment will significantly enhance our logistics capabilities and strengthen our position as a key maritime hub in the region.

M. le président, l'installation de 150 000 compteurs intelligents par le *Central Electricity Board* au cours des deux prochaines années témoigne de notre engagement en faveur de l'efficacité énergétique et de la modernisation.

La rationalisation des processus d'autorisation pour les projets d'énergies renouvelables et d'élaboration des directives sur l'efficacité énergétique et la conservation dans le secteur industriel et commercial, renfonceront encore nos efforts pour passer à des sources d'énergies plus propres et réduire notre empreinte carbone.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the measures to support artists through the establishment of an Artist Welfare Fund and the initiatives to combat drug trafficking and promote social work and welfare, are crucial in building a more inclusive society. These steps will provide much-needed support to the vulnerable population and ensure that no one is left behind. The creation of the National Council of Social Work to regulate and promote social work, education and practice, further demonstrates our commitment to social welfare.

The comprehensive approach to combatting drug trafficking through the formulation of the National Drug Control Master Plan 2024-2028, and the enhancement of rehabilitation programmes highlight our dedication to addressing this pressing issue. National campaigns on substance abuse and the involvement of community leaders will provide a multi-faceted approach to prevention and rehabilitation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the most noteworthy aspects of this Budget is the enhancement of pension measures which underscores our commitment to the well-being of our senior citizens and other vulnerable segments of our Republic. Many colleagues have already highlighted these and I won't be repeating them. Rather allow me to mention another example of this commitment. The amendments to the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act which include refunding the share of contributions to the heirs of officers who die while in service and the payment of a death gratuity to the surviving spouse or legal representative of a diseased pensioner – provide additional support to pensioners and their families.

Moreover, the Budget includes provisions for the refund of contributions to heirs of public officers who pass away while in service, effective from 01 January 2021. This measure ensures that the families of public servants are not left in financial distress during such

challenging times. The payment of death gratuities to the surviving spouses or legal representatives of the pensioners further demonstrates our government's commitment to supporting the families.

M. le président, dans le domaine de l'éducation, ce budget introduit des réformes significatives visant à améliorer la qualité et l'accessibilité de l'éducation pour tous les Mauriciens. L'élaboration d'une stratégie EdTech pour augmenter l'utilisation de la technologie dans les écoles est une initiative tournée vers l'avenir qui améliorera les résultats d'apprentissage et préparera mieux nos étudiants à l'ère numérique.

L'introduction d'un programme d'apprentissage de compétences de haut niveau pour les étudiants de premier cycle et l'organisation d'un prix national de l'apprentissage 2024 en collaboration avec le *Mauritius Institute of Training and Development*, le *Human Resource Development Council*, et *Business Mauritius* renforceront encore le programme des formations professionnelles. Ces initiatives garantiront que nos jeunes disposent des compétences nécessaires pour réussir sur le marché du travail moderne.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the health sector, the recruitment of foreign specialists to work in public hospitals is a crucial step towards addressing the shortage of medical professionals and ensuring that our healthcare system can provide high-quality services to all citizens. The development of a national strategy for adolescents' health focusing on enhancing psych-social skills, promoting healthy lifestyles, and preventing addictions and teenage pregnancies, is a comprehensive approach to safeguarding the health and well-being of our young population.

M. le président, dans le but de développer davantage l'économie sportive, une stratégie nationale pour le tourisme d'aventure sera élaborée afin de positionner Maurice comme une destination attrayante où le tourisme sportif est d'aventure. Cette initiative stimulera non-seulement le tourisme, mais encouragera également un mode de vie sain et actif parmi nos citoyens.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to further our commitment to environmental sustainability, the government will embark on several initiatives to improve environmental monitoring and promote sustainable practices. The acquisition of a liquid chromatograph with a triple quad system masks

spectrometer for monitoring pesticides in our aquifers and water table, the installation of Internet-of-Things sensors for real-time monitoring of water quality and the holistic environmental monitoring programme for the South East regions are critical steps towards protecting our environment

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to ensure the effective management of public finances, this Budget introduces several measures to strengthen scrutiny and accountability in the public sector. The establishment of a Standing Committee, within the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development to review shortcomings highlighted in the Report of the Director of Audit and ensure corrective actions are taken by accounting officers, is a significant step towards improving financial governance. The continuous monitoring of the implementation of Audit recommendations by the Internal Control Cadre and the Office of Public Sector Governance will further enhance transparency and accountability.

The preparation of the public financial management kit which consolidates all public financial management legislations, rules, procedures, and financial instructions will provide a comprehensive framework for managing public finances. This kit will include manuals on legal and institutional frameworks, warehousing operations, risk management, auditing and oversight, and circular economy principles.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, the Budget for 2024-2025 is a beacon of hope and progress for Mauritius. It encapsulates our collective aspirations for a prosperous, sustainable and inclusive future. As we present this final Budget of our mandate, it is a moment of reflection and pride. We have navigated numerous challenges and achieved remarkable progress. This Budget is a testament to our dedication, our vision and our unwavering commitment to the people of Mauritius.

It lays the foundation for continued growth and prosperity ensuring that our nation remains resilient and forward-looking. Over the past years, we have demonstrated resilience, innovation and a steadfast commitment to our nation's development. Our government has been a high-performing impactful force for transforming challenges into opportunities and setting the stage for a prosperous future.

This Budget is not just a financial plan; it is a bold statement of our enduring commitment to the people of Mauritius – a commitment to progress, inclusivity and sustainability. Let us continue to build on this strong foundation. Let us harness the momentum we have created and strive towards an even brighter future for our beloved nation. This budget is a call to action for all of us to work together with unity, determination and a shared vision of excellence. I urge all Members of this esteemed Assembly to support this budget and ensure its successful implementation. Let us move forward with unity and determination, building a brighter future for all Mauritians.

Long live the Republic of Mauritius.! Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Ramkaun, please!

Mr Ramkaun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move for the adjournment of the debate.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Wednesday 12 June 2024 at 11.30 a.m.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: No adjournment matter! Have a safe trip back home!

At 10.53 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Wednesday 12 June 2024 at 11.30 a.m.