M. le président, laissez-moi pour commencer dire que l’honorable Jhuboo a été très \textit{fair} dans ce débat et il a trouvé juste de dire qu’on ne peut comparer à ce stage puisque nous sommes seulement là en train de dire quels sont nos projets. Et, en temps et lieu, il pourra juger si nos projets vont finalement se concrétiser ou pas.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I stand before you today, before this House as a proud Member of a Government, a Government to which I belong and which has proved, right from the beginning of its mandate through its first Budget, that it means business.

I have to extend my congratulations to the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development and his team who have masterminded the whole enterprise.

The Finance Minister has indeed set the tone right by demonstrating its capacity to align the Budget on the Government Programme he presented to the nation for the period 2015 and 2019.

This House will recall paragraphs 6 and 7 of the Government Programme that runs thus –

“Government’s objective is to transform Mauritius into a truly forward looking, environmentally sustainable, economically vibrant and innovative country with modern infrastructure, global connectivity, high skills and technology.”

Again, para. 7 had this to say –

“Government will improve quality of life, accelerate social integration, strengthen democracy and ensure the independent functioning of institutions. The ultimate aim is to shape a second socio-economic miracle in the interest of one and all.”

And now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us cast an educated glance to the 4 main objectives of this Budget. The first reads thus –

“Steer the economy towards a path of high investment and high employment”

And the remaining 3 go thus –

• Secure long-term sustainable development for all
• Achieve greater equity and social justice for one and all, and
• Promote transparency and good governance in the management of public affairs.
Anyone would see the coherence between the two documents, indeed, the discourse has not changed.

In fact, the discourse has not changed an iota since the time of the political manifesto of “Alliance Lepep” that did emphasise the paramount necessity for –
- greater justice and socio-economic betterment;
- the creation and sharing of the national wealth;
- institutional credibility, and
- enhanced transparency, accountability and good governance in the conduct of Government affairs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have carefully scrutinised the Budget. A classic budget presentation merely indicates what measures will be and where the money will go for the year - in other words, the here and the now.

But this budget goes many steps further. It indicates a clear vision of the future that this Government wants to construct for the nation.

This is a vision that is not constricted by the carpe diem principle. The carpe diem principle which says –
“seize the day, trusting as little as possible in the future”.

No, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget does not rely on this philosophy. This Budget is instead solidly anchored in an article of faith, a vision for the future whose foundation is laid today.

And I see this vision built on 3 major areas of focus -
1. Infrastructural Environment;
2. Employment Generation, and
3. A People Centred Development.
Let us take the infrastructural environment. We have what we call the “Mega Projects” centred around a policy thrust aimed at the development of the country’s infrastructural environment for a more than decent future for all.

The smart cities, the transformation of the Port Louis harbour into a regional hub for bunkering, seafood, transhipment, cruise and petroleum, the restructuring of the IRS/RES – all spell out an approach that necessitates mammoth investments.

This would appear daunting, but when we keep the dividends in balance, the investment would definitely be worthwhile.

In fact, any investment that projects a country in the future is worth making, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

When we come to employment generation, the second area of focus, it is directly related to the first. This has to be with employment generation and, as a case in point, let us briefly concentrate on the new growth pole that has today secured international acceptance and recognition, namely, the Blue Ocean Economy. We know exactly how ground-breaking this is likely to be. This is what UNCTAD 2014 Report had to say about The Oceans Economy: opportunities and challenges for Small Island Developing States has to say about it, and I quote –

“The oceans economy offers significant development opportunities and also raises challenges for SIDS in sectors such as sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, renewable marine energy, marine bio-prospecting, maritime transport and marine and coastal tourism.”

The Abu Dhabi Declaration on the Blue Economy of January 2014, for its part, offered a framework to protect and enhance the value of marine and coastal systems through an integrated approach. Such is likely to be the growth of this new economy that a plea has been made for enhanced mechanisms for governance of the high seas to be set up while all parties – States, international agencies and donors – were called upon to work out means to support and facilitate the implementation of the Blue Economy in developing countries.

Thus, once the port infrastructure is properly kick-started, it will become a key contributor to the development of the ocean economy. The impact this will have on the SMEs and even the non-formal sector will be incredible.
And above all, this will call for a massive demand for a workforce for the relatively new types of jobs that will be created.

The National Ocean Council will thus have a heavy responsibility to shoulder in the process of coordination for the effective implantation of Ocean Economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that was only in relation to the Blue Economy. When we think about the other sectors the Budget looks at – the SMEs, the Agro-Industry, the manufacturing industry as well as Tourism, Financial Services and ICT, we realise the whole new set of job opportunities that will be created.

Employment prospects when realised and employment opportunities when presented become, in fact, the instrument for social integration, social peace and the base for human and societal development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to come to the third major pillar on which this Budget is premised. In the 2014 statement of its position on the post-2015 development agenda - the African Union Groups, Africa’s development priorities into 6 pillars, the third one in that list is the People-Centred Development. The House will remember that even before his Budget Speech, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development had been steadily stretching the importance he meant to attach to social uplift of the people of the Republic. No one can say that he has not lived up to his words.

We recall here paragraph 14 of the Government Programme which reads thus –

“A key consideration of Government during its mandate will be to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, promote social justice, economic empowerment and national unity and protect the elderly and vulnerable ones.”

The House will agree that both the NGOs and the community at large have been all praised in favour of the Marshall Plan against poverty.

Of special interest to them has been an appreciation of the concept of ‘parrainage’ for a list of pockets of poverty that exists in Mauritius. We are not here talking of the one-off CSR sponsorship or a strategy based on adhocracy. Rather, we are talking about a well-planned and well-implemented programme that looks at the overall development of a deprived region in a comprehensive manner.
As the Budget indicates, this takes on board these expected outcomes –

• Improved living conditions generally
• Raised level of employment
• Curb of social ills
• School attendance by children taken up, integral holistic development of these children
• The creation of sports and leisure facilities, and
• The improvement of the quality of life generally.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this together with Government’s commitment and a spate of other measures that go in the direction of improving the lot of the people, the provision of improved health care facilities, environmental betterment, new social security measures and so on will no doubt bring results. But, by no means, will Government abdicate from its responsibility towards the deprived. It will be good to remind Members of the Opposition that this Government is led by Sir Anerood Jugnauth, a Prime Minister who has the trust of the people, a Prime Minister who will not, at any cost, tolerate dilly dallying. This is our asset, our Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, and we will certainly work hard and manage to attain our goals.

With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now concentrate on the measures relating to my portfolio, that of Education. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the first annual report by J. P. Morgan Chase, the extremely renowned firm of huge financial assets, is reputed to have stated the following and I quote –

“The power of intellectual capital is the ability to breed ideas that ignite value.”

And, a few years back, the Deutsche Bank took out a big ad in the Wall Street Journal with the headline: ‘IDEAS ARE CAPITAL. THE REST IS JUST MONEY.’

This, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the world in which our youth are called upon to evolve. Education is now viewed as the creator of the intellectual capital and hence, logically - the economic capital. This places a major onus on education and training as the driver of socio-economic transformation.

I will now talk about the integral development of our learners and this has to start quite early, in fact, right from the pre-primary subsector and onwards. We need to move away from the kind of rote learning and didactic frontal teaching to- the-text that have characterised primary schooling so far. We are killing the creativity of our children. Nor are we successfully inculcating a system of values and right attitudes in them.
Competitiveness has become the catchphrase and leaves our children with no opportunity to demonstrate their multiple talents and non-academic achievements. And, these, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are instrumental in the promotion of self-esteem and self-confidence within them.

My Ministry accordingly intends to stress the inculcation and assimilation of the right values - civic and moral - as part of the curriculum. Further, we also want to allow the complete holistic development of our children by providing opportunities for them to develop their full potential. Arts, music, dance, drama need to be introduced in our schools from the very early stages, primary level, indeed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has a plural society and it is of crucial importance that our children learn to respect and accept others. This is why it is essential that they acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours which will enable them to develop a global culture of greater respect for human dignity. And it is now time to introduce human rights education in our schools. This will allow our children to grow with a high self-esteem and a notion of justice, freedom, equality and peace. We intend to roll human rights education at lower secondary level as from January 2016. I would like here to thank the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister’s Office for the support given to my Ministry for the introduction of human rights education in our schools.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the numerous cases of child abuse clearly underlines the urgent need to introduce sexuality education in our schools. And, thus, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the recent unfortunate case of a child in a primary school has reinforced my conviction in making sexuality education fundamental for all learners and, thus, with a view of protecting our children, of making them aware of the risk that they may face. I think this is extremely important and need to be taken on board very soon. We will need to talk with all stakeholders, get the support of the different stakeholders; the parents, the teachers, the different groups of schools, managers of schools to come up with the proper programme to ensure that our children are well protected.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now quickly talk about the nine year continuous basic schooling. For a decade or more people have been expressing their concern with regard to the CPE. What hasn’t been said about the corrosive power of the CPE? Agreed, it did serve a purpose at a time when the educational landscape was not dotted by high number of secondary schools. A l’époque, un examen qui aurait fait office de certification ainsi que de sélection comme passage obligatoire au cycle secondaire était de rigueur. Mais le CPE a aujourd’hui fait son temps.

It has also been the cause of a constant hand-wringing in all quarters – the parents, first, who see the debilitating effect it has on their children; the school next, that see the system encouraging rote learning and teaching to-the-text rather than developing the whole
The new Government will not batten down the hatches and wait for the storm of universal dissatisfaction to pass. Rather we will meet it headlong. We are within the next few weeks coming up with a carefully thought through programme for the implementation of the nine years of basic continuous education. Hon. Members on the Opposition side should rest assured that I intend to have a large-scale consultation with all stakeholders, including the hon. Members of the Opposition, prior to the implementation of the new system. For today, let it suffice for me to say that full-scale roll out of the nine year basic schooling is for soon.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if we all agree that every child should have a right to education, then we must bear in mind that this is true for every child and especially for those having special educational needs. The Special Education Needs Resource and Development Centre is welcome as it is an imperative to ensure that access to education is open to all.

Furthermore, four resource centres are being set up at Allée Brillant, Centre de Flacq, Rivière des Anguilles and Plaine Magnien. They will contribute to extend services offered to children with special needs, providing special therapies, paramedical and psychological support. Together with the precious help of the NGOs, we will ensure that these centres, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, give a new dimension to the life of these children. 

M. le président, mon ministère a la responsabilité d’un réservoir de jeunes avec un destin à façonner. Ces jeunes sont dans l’expectative d’un futur qui leur soit favorable, que ce soit au niveau autant professionnel que personnel.

However, the unfortunate fact is that, so far, this has not happened. Rather we have been losing our youth to frustration and dispiritedness. For the last few years, the mantra that had been driven into the youth psyche was that of becoming graduates – no matter what the cost. The Government, therefore, inherited a situation where youth employment and employability started to play second fiddle to the cheap politics of slow organising the nation. On n’a pas oublié encore le ministre Dr. Jeetah passant de porte en porte disant ‘one graduate per family’ and the like, without any guarantee of quality or any project for ensuring employment of these young graduates.

And, what has been the result? Thousands of students with degrees, some of which are not even recognised are still awaiting an opportunity to get a job. Obviously, we cannot leave these young people in the lurch, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This is why this Budget
gives the expectations of the young people a timely shot in the arm. They will now be given
the possibility of sharpening and updating their skills through bespoke ‘crash courses’ in
fields with high job prospects. These will be conducted in recognized Tertiary Educational
Institutions. It certainly takes a government with a heart to assume the responsibility of
covering the annual fees amounting to around Rs80,000 for every such student. We are
planning to have the service given to about 3,000 graduates without employment.

Et là, je voudrais faire ressortir que le membre de l’opposition, l’honorable Reza
Uteem, a raison de dire qu’il est important de bien encadrer les étudiants afin qu’ils
choisissent des filières appropriées pour assurer leur avenir. Le Human Resource
Development Council et le service de Careers Guidance devront tous deux déterminer les
filières porteuses et guider les jeunes d’une manière efficace.

M. le président, le secteur de l’enseignement supérieur a souffert des carences du
régime précédent. Que l’environnement pour l’enseignement supérieur à l’île Maurice ait
connu une évolution effrénée, pour ne pas dire anarchique, les quelques dernières années,
l’ont amplement démontré. Oui, M. le président, dans pratiquement tous les domaines, qu’il
s’agisse de l’enseignement médical supérieur ou le secteur des sciences pures, de
l’ingénierie ou des sciences sociales, le nombre croissant d’institutions d’études
supérieures, les contenus académiques et les rapports de ces institutions à leur
environnement ont rencontré des défis majeurs au cours de cette phase de croissance. Et
cette phase de croissance, qui a quelquefois été au détriment de la bonne gouvernance, n’a
hélas pas été sans heurts, et nous en faisons les frais aujourd’hui.

Ainsi, le régime précédent s’est permis de donner des orientations malencontreuses
aux étudiants ces dernières années, et la tâche nous est maintenant confiée, au nouveau
gouvernement, de veiller à ce qu’aucun étudiant ne soit laissé pour compte en cours de
route !

L’un des objectifs de la politique de mon ministère et du gouvernement est donc,
presentement, de rechercher l’approche optimale pour relever les défis que présente cet
environnement alité de l’enseignement supérieur.
Afin de traduire dans la réalité les axes de développement dans ce secteur, il est
question dans un premier temps –
• de relever le lien entre les efforts de recherche des institutions, et
• d’enquêter sur l’ensemble des questions d’optimisation de réglementation,
ad’assurance qualité, de financement et d’accréditation de l’enseignement
supérieur, avec un accent particulier sur leur agencement dans les arènes de
l’innovation et de la bonne gouvernance de tous nos organismes de formation.

Notre vision est donc d’abord sur la mise en place des systèmes de formation
académique –
• de bon standing;
• accessibles à la fois aux jeunes et aux adultes, et
• qui leur garantiront un emploi à la fin de leurs études, avec des diplômes reconnus académiquement et professionnellement.

M. le président, notre auguste Assemblée n’est pas sans savoir qu’un audit de notre système de l’enseignement supérieur a été effectué par la Quality Assurance Agency de l’Angleterre. Une première ébauche de ce rapport nous est déjà parvenue avant que les rédacteurs n’aillent de l’avant avec la phase finale. Mais d’ores et déjà on voit l’étendue du travail qui attend mon ministère. N’empêche! Mon Ministère est actuellement un pied d’œuvre pour repositionner le secteur afin qu’il puisse être une plate-forme fiable et crédible pour l’éducation et la formation.

Plus concrètement, on vient, comme annoncé dans ce présent budget, avec un projet de loi sur l’enseignement supérieur, qui est en cours de préparation. C’est ainsi que nous agencerons nos universités en termes d’accès, de disponibilité, de différentiation des prestations de formations, et les contenus de programmes afin d’assurer la qualité et la progression durable de ces formations sur le long terme.

Pour réaliser cette vision, mon Ministère et la Tertiary Education Commission, dont le fonctionnement sera revu, seront des plateformes de coordination et d’engagement approfondies, afin qu’ensemble et avec l’expérience nationale et internationale dans ces secteurs nous trouvions des solutions aux problèmes identifiés.

Puisque notre gouvernement souhaite faire de Maurice un centre de savoir, il nous faut nous assurer que l’éducation de qualité soit délivrée par toutes nos institutions et surtout de nous assurer également qu’il n’y ait point de dissonance entre l’offre académique et la reconnaissance professionnelle ultérieure de cette formation universitaire. S’il le faut, nous allons trancher, et trancher sur le vif.

La TEC est aujourd’hui appelée à être plus vigilante et à résilier toute accréditation accordée à des institutions d’études supérieures qui ne sauraient être en règle avec les normes de qualité et de pérennité.

M. le président, si on veut tabler chez une économie du savoir, il faut bien que nos institutions de l’enseignement supérieur fassent la part belle, d’une part, à la recherche, qui est la source même du savoir. Les services informatiques, la médecine, la biotechnologie et l’industrie marine sont autant de secteurs de recherche qui méritent une attention particulière de par l’aspect pratique qu’ils engendrent non seulement pour Maurice mais également pour la région.
D’autre part, je trouve dommage qu’un pays aussi multilingue que Maurice n’est pas encore misé sur le développement des capacités de nos jeunes dans le domaine de la traduction et de l’interprétariat, surtout quand on a comme ambition de faire de l’île Maurice une destination pour les conférences internationales.

J’ai bien l’intention d’y remédier en encourageant et l’Université de Maurice et le MGI à mettre en place des laboratoires linguistiques et multimédias, afin de donner un essor à ces nouveaux domaines de développement. C’est tout cela qui nous donnerait une longueur d’avance sur nos compétiteurs dans ces niches areas.

M. le président, vous comprendrez donc que l’enseignement supérieur et un secteur auquel je paie une attention particulière. Je suis déterminée à redonner ses lettres de noblesse au secteur de l’enseignement supérieur, afin que celui-ci soit fermement ancré et imbriqué dans la grande famille de l’éducation, et aussi à exercer efficacement son rôle de contribution à la croissance sociale et économique de notre pays.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has the responsibility to ensure that our young learners avail themselves of all curricular competencies for a smooth transition and progression from these different levels of education. Maintaining a strategic linkage between these subsectors is crucial, especially given the potential to propel secondary and technical/vocational students in the entrepreneurial hubs.

I also deem it vital to have an effective articulation between TVET and higher education.

Today’s global conversation resolves around the linkage between the world of education and human resource development and the dispersion of responsibilities related to human resource development. Education and human resource policies have then to be situated in the promotion of lifelong learning within a human resource development perspective. Our learners will have to develop great versatility.

This is especially so given that we have a wide range of learners who would be expected to go through a constant phase of de-skilling and re-skilling at different stages of their professional lives.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the new impetus in the world of TVET is today leading the country to step up and venture into new areas of training. Thus, as Mauritius positions itself to develop its ocean economy as well as the SME sector, the TVET and the human resource development subsectors will be called upon to play an increasingly important role as providers of skilled workers and technicians.

In particular, it is intended to put up an appropriate skills development system which will contribute to strengthen the human capital base of the country.
If there is one myth that is hard to eliminate from the minds of people - and only in Mauritius - it is that concerning the TVET sector. For a long time now, skills-based learning has been frowned upon as lower level at best, demeaning at worst.

There is a pressing need to revaloriser ce secteur. It is about time that people understand and appreciate the role of institutions providing technical and vocational education in genuine human resource development.

I am deeply appreciative that this Budget has stressed the significance to be attached to polytechnics. Modern-day polytechnics are no less in significance and scale that established universities. In fact, they provide for the filling of major positions for middle level professional and technical skills, skills that ultimately contribute to the empowerment and quasi-employment of work-ready graduates.

The polytechnics in Mauritius will work with both private and public sector players to successfully provide the necessary skilled manpower for the emerging sectors highlighted in this Budget as well as enhance national productivity.

It is also worth highlighting that my Ministry has already embarked, with the support of development partners (Agence Française de développement), on the formulation of a new National Skills Development Strategy for Mauritius over the short and medium term, in view of identifying and matching the skilled labour supply requirements for existing as well as the emerging sectors of the economy. It is worth noting that elsewhere in the world, young people favour entering the technical stream as the related salary package tends to be more attractive and sometimes the pay package is higher than for graduates from the academic stream.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the three parastatal organisations responsible for TVET subsector, and which fall under the aegis of my Ministry, namely the MQA, the HRDC, the MITD and the polytechnics, will be called upon to shoulder higher-order responsibilities in the near future, in the fulfilment of their strategic functions – that of regulatory body for the MQA, HR planning and orientation for the HRDC and that of training provider for the MITD.

Among other things, for example, the HRDC will need to spearhead and facilitate the implementation of training programmes, which are critical for the development of the new growth poles of the economy as well as provide all necessary support for such crosscutting projects as –

• the three Polytechnics under construction at Réduit, Montagne Blanche, and Pamplemousses, and

• the conversion programme for some 3,000 unemployed graduates whose training do not match market requirements.
Again, the HRDC will –

(i) be called upon to forge deeper linkages with the private sector and operating on a demand driven basis rather than the generic recommendations on skills gaps, and

(ii) concentrate on its role to stimulate a culture of training and lifelong learning at the individual, organisational, and national levels with a view to enhancing employability of the labour force and contributing to their enhance innovation and productivity, and

(iii) they will also be required to significantly improve the effectiveness of the current mechanism for administering, controlling and operating the National Training Fund such that we obtain value for money in the allocation of financial and levy grants.

In this regard, I wish to reassure the House that the provision has been made in the Finance Bill such that the Human Resource Development Act 2003 will be subsequently amended with a view to streamlining its institutional provisions.

We will also thereby ensure that the skills mismatch issue is addressed in a more effective manner and the trainer-employer synergy be promoted.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry will introduce a Chambre des Métiers Bill that will provide for the establishment and management of the Chambre. This Chambre des Métiers will give due recognition to the various professions, including the registration of people in the different trades, setting standards for training facilities and qualification in each stream. The main objective of the Chambre will be to encourage trades man to become true professionals through appropriate skills development. Enable small enterprises to have a platform for the promotion of the interest of tradesman and their trade in general and improve the status and safeguard the interests of tradesman and trades in general.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has already worked out a preliminary draft “Chambre des Métiers” Bill after discussions with the close collaborators of the public sector and the private sector. My Ministry will shortly initiate wide consultations with relevant stakeholders in Mauritius of this draft Bill prior to its finalisation.

We are also looking into models available in other countries and how the “Chambre des Métiers” has to be set up in Mauritius and how it could be adapted, taking into consideration the specificities and realities of our own labour market. In this regard, I am pleased to inform the House that representatives of my Ministry met a delegation from the “Chambre des métiers et de ‘artisanats” of Reunion Island last week in Mauritius to
explore collaborative ventures between the two islands. The ultimate aim is to instil a high
dose of professionalism in the ‘métiers of artisants’ and craftsmen in Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, John Fitzgerald Kennedy is known to have once said -

“When written in Chinese, the word ‘crisis’ is composed of two characters.
One represents danger and the other represents opportunity”.

As Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific
Research, I look upon these challenges in the education and training fields - and they are
many! as opportunities to bring about change and transformation.

The significance of knowledge as a critical input for modern economies has since
long been recognised. This implicitly places into focus the necessity to create conditions
for the establishment of what has been called the ‘Knowledge Triangle’, the linkage
between education, research and industry.

My endeavour will be, in fact, to work towards creating the enabling conditions for
the learners to live fulfilled life both as individuals and the intellectual capital “breeding
idea that would ignite value”.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.