Madam Speaker: Hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun!

The Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research (Mrs. L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Madam Speaker, I believe there is unanimity, both inside the House as well as outside among the population at large, that this Budget is a landmark one in that it has been able to identify critical issues and has been able to address them in an all-inclusive manner.

Let me congratulate the Minister of Finance and Economic Development for presenting a Budget that has secured the appreciation of the nation as a whole.

In an international economic context that is riddled with uncertainties, hon. Pravind Jugnauth has been daring enough to come up with a Budget that will significantly consolidate our social fabric and accelerate our move towards modernisation, and I am sure, Madam Speaker, the modernisation process underway will lead to rapid and robust economic growth in the future.

La relance économique, l’équité, le développement humain sont à la base même de ce budget présenté par le ministre des Finances et cela, Madame la présidente, ne peut se faire qu’à travers la participation de tout un chacun, l’accès à une éducation et formation de qualité, la création des emplois et surtout la justice sociale pour ceux se trouvant au bas de l’échelle. Il s’agissait de rétablir l’équilibre socio-économique d’une manière réfléchie, pragmatique, réaliste et surtout intelligente. Et c’est là, Madame la présidente, que se situe l’impact de ce budget qui jette les jalons voulus à travers ses 10 orientations stratégiques clairement détaillées. Le pari est réussi.

Madame la présidente, ce budget est le quatrième budget de l’honorable Pravind Jugnauth and on retrouve une constante. L’honorable Pravind Jugnauth a, à travers ces mesures dans ces budgets successifs, toujours mis l’accent sur l’équité, sur la nécessité de protéger ceux au bas de l’échelle et de les donner les moyens de gravir les échelons. Les manoeuvres pour combattre la pauvreté sont clairement démontrés par des mesures suivantes - Premièrement : permettre à ce que toutes familles figurant sur le Social Register of Mauritius de toucher les allocations jusqu’à un seuil maximal de R 9,500 pour une famille ayant trois enfants. Madame la présidente, personne à Maurice ne vivra dans la pauvreté absolue. This is, indeed, a major initiative, Madam Speaker, a laudable one, indeed. Cela coûtera à l’État un demi-milliard de roupies sur une période de deux ans à partir de décembre cette année-ci.

Le ministre des Finances ne s’est pas limité uniquement à soutenir les vulnérables financièrement, mais il vient aussi avec toute une panoplie de mesures, d’initiatives pour encourager ces familles de briser le cycle de la pauvreté et de gravir les échelons. A titre d’exemple, la construction des logements sociaux sur les trois années à venir, les fonds
d’un milliard de roupies pour la construction de 1,900 unités de logements sociaux sur 16 sites à travers l’île et cela sans oublier les mesures incitatives telles que l’extension du seuil d’éligibilité à des salaires de R 20,000 mensuellement pour acquérir un logement social.

L’honorable Vice-Premier ministre, Showkutally Soodhun, l’a si bien dit hier. La préoccupation de chaque mauricien demeure une éducation adéquate, un emploi pour pouvoir subvenir aux besoins de la famille et un toit. Le budget donne des moyens à chaque mauricien de réaliser ses projets.

Madame la présidente, le budget de Pravind Jugnauth le prouve. Notre ministre des Finances est un homme de cœur, qui démontre et courage et compassion.

Autres initiatives de notre ministre des Finances que nous devons louer sont les mesures prises pour nos enfants ayant des handicaps que ce soient en termes de pension à laquelle ils sont maintenant éligibles ou en termes des augmentations des grants-in-aid allouées au Special Education Needs and NGOs. J’en reviendrai plus tard, Madame la présidente.

C’est la première fois qu’autant d’efforts sont déployés dans ce secteur. Madame la présidente, il est clair que l’éducation jouera un rôle prépondérant pour réaliser plusieurs des stratégies majeures préconisées dans le budget. En effet, que ce soit au niveau de l’innovation tant recherchée ou de la numérisation ou encore et surtout la transformation et une amélioration dans la qualité de vie de ceux au bas de l’échelle économique, l’éducation devient un fil conducteur pour mener à bien cette mission. Et j’en suis heureuse ! Heureuse et fière de former partie d’un gouvernement qui a, dès le début, misé sur une vision saine de l’éducation, une vision qui s’articule autour de quatre piliers majeurs.

Madam Speaker, allow me to quickly spell out these -
• We want a system that guarantees that learners leaving our system, guarantees that they complete and hold their own against the best students in the world.
• We want an education and training system to be at the cost of evolution and to be so attractive as to enable the country to really emerge as a regional knowledge hub.
• We want an efficient, effective education and training system that can produce the skills and expertise to service those existing and emerging sectors of the economy. In short, to raise productivity for sustainable economic growth.
• And last, but certainly not least, we want to see our children emerging as socially and emotionally well-balanced individuals who would be able to operate as informed, empowered and responsible citizens who have the resilience to adapt to evolving environments.
Madam Speaker, to fulfill this vision, we must deal with some issues that have undermined the education system for quite some time now. We have to address the case of some of our children leaving schools, barely literate and numerate after six years of primary schooling. We must give its lettre de noblesse to the technical and vocational education and training and eliminate the stigma that has dogged it for too long. We must also ascertain that all our learners successfully complete the secondary schooling. They have to develop those softened foundational skills like problem solving, critical thinking, communication and collaborative work and such others that will stand them in good stead in their adult lives.

Madam Speaker, we all know that low standards of achievement are the root of unskilled labour and unemployment and rising inequality, and that is something our country can ill afford. I seize today’s platform, Madam Speaker, as an opportunity to make more explicit the educational reform and indicate how we intend to attain objectives set therein.

But, for us, let me situate the context, both internationally and nationally. We have to see the educational reform against a background of the sustainable development goals that the world committed itself to in September last at the UN.

Also, allow me to reiterate that the Nine-Year Schooling is an important component of the overall systemic reform programme and that the reform is a comprehensive one encompassing all subsectors right from preprimary through the post-secondary and higher education and training.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I need to open a parenthesis. I heard hon. Ramful proposing that the implementation of the Nine-Year Schooling Reform be postponed for a later date. I heard him and I was surprised. Haven’t we waited for long enough? I mean so many of my predecessor Ministers had thought to embark on the mise en œuvre of such a reform and then had to backpedal for a variety of reasons. There is no doubt that some of them were animated by the best of intentions. Some of them! Are we now to wait for longer?

Can the country afford such a wait? Can our children who are being robbed of their childhood afford to wait any longer? Do we not owe it to them to create conditions whereby they grow and develop in a healthy environment where competition exists, yes, but where it is not une course effrénée?

Madam Speaker, it is important to stress that we need our children to work hard, but we have to do away with the ferocious competition, the rat race, as some had called it in the past. No, Madam Speaker, we cannot wait any longer! The country cannot wait any longer!
Our children cannot wait any longer! We are certainly not treating our children as guinea pigs, hon. Ramful! Hon. Ramul has, on a number of occasions, stated that he supports educational reform, but he should know that this reform is a well-thought one.

We are, in fact, ensuring that our children, all of our children receive an inclusive and equitable quality education and this is far from being an experimentation. This reform has been well reflected upon. The Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education Reform will transform teaching and learning in the classroom and will inspire every child to succeed. Hon. Ramful stated that we are treating our children as guinea pigs. What the Labour Party did was an experiment on our children.

Instead of moving ahead after the reform was brought in the years 2000-2005 by the former MSM/MMM Government, they exacerbated the competition by introducing the ‘A +’. My hon. colleague has overlooked a fundamental aspect of the Nine-Year Schooling Reform. The transformation envisaged will provide all learners with a range of skills essential for ensuring both success in their future career and in their life. Nous le disons toujours il ne suffit guère de réussir dans la vie, il faut réussir sa vie.

I know that the hon. Member means well. I know, by his own assertion that he is in favour of the reform. But, somewhere along the line, he has possibly missed out on a number of things. Thus, I do not subscribe to the hon. Member’s averment that we are increasing pressure upon our children. Far from it! For too long, we have allowed the CPE to become a cut throat competitive examination. The CPE failures exist because of accumulated deficits in learning. This is what we are looking at and dealing with right from an early age, right from the pre-primary, in fact.

Madam Speaker, let me explain how. In the pre-primary sector we are introducing new pedagogies. We have programs like the digital awakening of our children in the preprimary sector. We have introduced the Learner Development Profile with a view to ensuring a smooth transition between pre-primary and primary school.

We want a level playing field to be there for all children and during the primary subsector. From Grade 1 itself early support and in time remedial education will be provided to close potential learning gaps.

In this context, I am grateful to the Minister of Finance and Economic Development for facilitating the recruitment of 75 Support Teachers for remedial education in the primary subsector, but also for the recruitment of 340 Trainee Educators for holistic development of our children.

Madam Speaker, teachers, we know, are the most important within school determinant of effective learning. We have already worked out a vast training programme for quality teaching. We are no
more going to rely on one-off and end of year assessments alone to define achievement level of our children. School-based assessments and the adoption of a modular approach of assessment for history, geography and science will be introduced in the system. The intention is precisely that of alleviating some of the pressure from the current regime of high stakes testing.

Madam Speaker, we are coming with the introduction of drama, music, arts, movement education to ensure the holistic development of our children. Let me state it loud and clear: any reform in education is a dynamic process. Education itself is a dynamic process and as the process is embarked upon there are inevitably new realities that crop up, new demands that have to be met and new challenges that will have to be faced and overcome. We can have the best-laid of all plans, but they are never carved in stone rather they must have inbuilt flexibility that will allow for unplanned elements to be taken on board.

The NYS (Nine Year Schooling) reform is so calibrated and it is absolutely out of question to postpone the reform. As the anonymous quote goes, Madam Speaker – “There is not enough darkness in all the world to put out the light of even one small candle”

In fact, it is high time that the reform be implemented and the time is now. Procrastination carries the germ of non-action. Sad to say, this is precisely what has happened in the past.

Something I definitely will avoid. Besides, we are already far gone in the implementation process. The policy document on NYS is now going public, budget allocation to the tune of Rs580 m. out of the Rs2 billion earmarked has already been made for the first year of implementation. Regulations have already been promulgated last year to provide for the introduction of the new PSAC assessment. The admission modalities to Grade 7 are known.

The annual programme for first PSAC assessment to be conducted in 2017 has equally been published and they were vetted last year. Amendments are being brought to the Education Act to provide a phased implementation of the Nine Year Schooling Project and the transitional arrangements including inter alia the provision of regional scholarships. Madam Speaker, we mean business.

The reform in education also places an emphasis upon learning environments that can become both exciting and a pleasant experience. Thanks to this Budget, to the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, for having provided the additional means to make that a reality through the development of 45 learning environments.
Madam Speaker, there is universal agreement that this Budget places a high premium on social benefits and social reach and reflects a deep-seated concern for the well-being of all. The eradication of absolute poverty has been the mantra of this Government. We have always believed that equity should be the driving force in all our ventures and, Madam Speaker, we have endeavoured in education and training to create the equity based conditions for improved learning outcomes.

As a case in point, my Ministry has launched the ZEP 2 initiative in 2015. Let me inform the House that this initiative develops intervention actions that are grounded in neuroscientific principle in the area of learning and brain development. This is done through the redesign of schools so that they can confront poverty related barriers to teaching and learning. Research has proved that stress has a negative impact on educational outcomes so, to counter that impact we should build de-stressing learning environments.

Madam Speaker, the following have been worked out as the pillars of the new ZEP 2 strategy and action has already started on these –

(i) the implementation of continuous professional development programmes for the staff;
(ii) creation of 45 learning environments to compensate for deficiencies of impoverished home environments;
(iii) setting up of resource centres to produce pedagogical tools for implementation of the brain based pedagogy;
(iv) implementation of the parental support programme through clubs des parents;
(v) the conduct of ongoing research to improve teaching.

Vous conviendrez, Madame la présidente, que ces actions cadrent parfaitement avec les objectifs d’une éducation inclusive. L’éducation reste la base de toute réussite et demeure la réponse à la pauvreté et à l’exclusion. Et pour une meilleure prise en charge d’autres mesures telles que l’augmentation du meal allowance de 50 pourcent aux enfants fréquentant les écoles ZEP ne peuvent qu’être saluées.

Madam Speaker, let me come to another very important equity driven measure in this Budget. The measures announced by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development regarding persons suffering from disabilities are unprecedented.

They leave no doubt in anybody’s mind as to the commitment of this Government to bring more light and hope in the lives of these people. I need hardly stress that already a number of actions have been taken by my Ministry to provide a barrier free access to students with disabilities. Schools have been fitted with ramps, all new secondary schools have already been provided with adapted toilet facilities for the disabled, links have been made between building blocks with facilities like
music room, library, science laboratory found on ground floor whenever necessary. Students with disabilities are released earlier than other students. Carers are provided in mainstream primary and secondary schools to help students with special educational needs.

We intend to further extend the above facilities to all our schools. Let me also confirm to the House that my Ministry will come up with a Strategic Paper on Special Education Needs. This will aim at inclusiveness and parity where access to available facilities and opportunities would be widespread hence, eliminating discrimination and stigmatization. As a case in point, my Ministry is operating more and more integrated units in primary schools across the island thereby avoiding these students the hardship of travelling long distances.

I do agree integrated units are not the ideal solution. We aim at mainstreaming a maximum number of children with disabilities. But there will always be extreme cases of severe disabilities that cannot be accommodated in the mainstream classes. On the other hand, we have mainstream students with physical handicaps, visual and other mild impairments in our secondary schools.

The SEN Resource Development Centres are operational at Ferney, Plaine des Papayes and Beau Bassin to offer one-stop shop services by professionals such as psychologists, therapists to students with special needs. Two new resource centres at Flacq and Rivière des Anguilles will become operational as from mid-August this year.

Furthermore, all these students are provided with transport facilities to and from the resource centres through the van attached to each centre.

I am pleased to inform the House that two new Resource Centres will be operationalised at Gujadhur Government School and Rivière des Anguilles Government School as from 16 August this year. Another two Resource Centres will be set up in Moka and Allée Brillant Government Schools during the financial year, so as to reach maximum children with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, it must be recognised that Special Education Needs (SEN) sector can only effectively develop through the active participation and fruitful collaboration of NGOs. Allow me to seize this opportunity to pay tribute to the great work being done by all the 42 NGOs currently running 54 SEN Schools.

This is why I am very, very thankful to the Minister of Finance who has been very sympathetic to our appeal and who has increased the amount of grant-in-aid to NGOs in the SEN sector by more than 50%, to Rs90 m. for the coming financial year. This measure can only boost the morale of all stakeholders to be more
motivated in their devotion to this noble cause. We will set up, at the Ministry, a Directorate for the Special Education Needs.

The amendments to the Education Act mentioned earlier, will make provision for the registration of the SEN Schools as well as for the payment of the grant-in-aid. I must also welcome the new measure whereby, with a view to providing high learning opportunities and encouraging access to tertiary education for students with disabilities, a special scholarship scheme is to be launched. Five students with disabilities will not only be offered a special scholarship to pursue tertiary education locally, but will also benefit from a monthly stipend of Rs5,000 each.

Madam Speaker, there are also a number of other measures that falls squarely within the ambit of equity in the field of education. I will not enumerate all of them, but here is one I need to highlight. This relates to the clear encouragement given to children from the vulnerable groups to persevere in their studies.

Conversely, the greater the educational opportunities provided, the stronger the likelihood of moving up the poverty trap and climbing the rungs of the social ladder. In this context, the provision of cash awards for those successfully completing the nine year schooling, SC and HSC is a clear signal sent by this Budget, that those who persevered, those who are committed to moving ahead in life, will be given the necessary lifeline to do so. I have always said it, intelligence, aptitudes and potential are not geographically restricted nor are they class-related. Lack of economic means should, therefore, be no restrictive or restraining factor. This has been the predominant principle at the heart of all the previous budgets presented by the Minister of Finance, a principle that has always motivated his actions and economic orientations.

Madam Speaker, let me now come to another challenge we face in Mauritius. As a Small Island Developing State, with relatively limited resources, we are condemned to focus on areas that will improve national productivity and accelerate the growth of the economy.

This is why I insisted earlier on all learners successfully completing secondary education, on the universalization of secondary education. In this context, the collaborative partnership of private providers of secondary education cannot be ignored. Obviously, the private secondary education sector will be called upon to evolve with the changes and transformations. Thus, additional resources have been provided to the PSSA to enable it to deal more effectively with the challenges in the private secondary education sector. The organisation is thus going to be empowered to conduct its own pedagogical inspection as well as career counselling, and provide psychological support to students.

Madam Speaker, I will now move on to the higher education and training sector. But before doing so, Madam Speaker, I cannot help but go back to what has happened, to the
blunders made by the previous Government; the blunders made by the previous Ministry of Tertiary Education, who was himself supposed to look at the interests of our students. We all know about the D.Y. Patil and EILM saga.

How many students have gone to the tertiary institution without a proper SC or HSC; some with no principal subjects at all? Today, they have in their hands degrees which have absolutely no value, degrees that will not allow them to get a job! When we think about it, it was done solely with the aim of filling up the coffers of those close to the Minister of Tertiary Education. It was meant to allow students in mass to enter their fake, bogus institutions, and this, Madam Speaker, was done at the expense of our Mauritian children. Parents coming from very poor families have taken loans, have gone through lots of difficulties to allow their children to go and get a degree; a degree that has got absolutely no value.

Madam Speaker, higher education and training sector is the lifeblood of the social and economic development of our country for years to come, and so it has a key role to play in the development of a competitive productive human resource. Madam Speaker, TVET today is universally recognised as being the answer to youth unemployment in the world today.

Paradoxically, it is often subjected to the stigma of being associated with low achievers of the education system. It is also perceived as being a dead end, with limited career and articulation possibilities. There is another irony involved here.

People’s mindset is such that they give precedence to university education over TVET programmes, despite the relatively higher employability that TVET represents. Government realises that we need to increase the attractiveness of TVET. We must provide opportunities for TVET trainees to be exposed to the latest technology and equipment to allow for better relevance, readiness and adaptability to the labour market.

Best practices already exist. We can already see what countries like Germany and Singapore have effectively done to train their youth for future employability and given TVET its pride of place. We, Madam Speaker, are not going to reinvent the wheel. I cannot help reflecting on the fact that it was our Rt. hon. Prime Minister who has, far back as the early 90s, made a strong case for technical and vocational education and training. He was farsighted enough to realise that the future for employability lay there although the term has yet not gained widespread currency. Such is the forward-looking capacity of great visionaries like our Rt. hon. Prime Minister, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to be the one who, guided by the Rt. hon. Prime Minister’s wisdom, has been given the mandate to realise this vision.
This is why I welcome the provision of over half a billion rupees for the TVET sector, including general upgrading of the MITD Training Centres, the purchase of new tools and equipment, the professional development of trainers as well as the setting up of a model training centre at Petit Bel Air to cater for the training in the southern region.

The training centre at Cote d’Or will also be upgraded and renovated into a model centre, which will offer a wider portfolio of programmes. We also propose to establish such model centres in other geographical zones in Rodrigues, and land has already been vested in my Ministry and procedures initiated for the implementation of the project.

Madam Speaker, in this context, allow me to inform the House that technical assistance has been sought from ITE of Singapore to build the capacity of MITD trainers through the design and development of training programmes, including training of trainer programmes. One benefit we already have in this sector is the collaboration of industry and the private sector. Despite of the mismatch issue, this is being addressed with review of courses for greater relevance as well as skill-based training programmes targeting the unemployed.

Madam Speaker, I must say that the GTES programme has been helpful. It has allowed collaboration to be established between the private sector and our Tertiary Education Institutions and we have come up with new programmes designed especially for different groups of students, and these students will have the privilege and will be favoured at the end of the course if they successfully complete it, to get a job in the institutions that have designed the programmes. Government has insisted that the GTES programme will go on as long as we have the guarantee that students selected, and who have successfully completed the programme, would get a job in the institutions that had selected them.

Madam Speaker, what I was saying is that, there is need for collaboration and that the mismatch issue, I hope, will be overcome. And we are having lots of consultations with the employers so that they collaborate further with our institutions. We have important plans for the TVET sector -
1. we intend to rebrand the TVET sector so as to make it more attractive to school leavers in pursuit of a career as highly skilled and highly paid workers in a globalized economy, and
2. very importantly, the creation of a Skills Development Authority is most welcome at this stage of our development. There is, today, a need to redefine the roles of the different organisations responsible for TVET to adapt it to the present situation and to make it more efficient and effective. The Skills Development Authority will be a regulatory body with a dual function: the responsibility for quality assurance for the whole sector and the awarding body in respect of the qualifications for TVET. It will further ensure that the qualifications delivered are clearly understood by one and all.
Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I will briefly also inform the House that three polytechnics will be operational at Réduit, Montagne Blanche, Pamplemouses and will run programmes in Middle Management, ICT and other ICT related fields at Réduit in Tourism and Hotel Management, including Cruise Tourism at Montagne Blanche and in healthcare for nurses, technicians and trained personnel in the medical field, especially in the maintenance of sophisticated medical equipment at Pamplemousses.

We are actively engaged in discussions with Australia, New Zealand and Singapore for vital inputs, programmatic and otherwise. Allow me to add the Waikato Institute of Technology from New Zealand will be fielding a scoping mission next week to evaluate and propose the scope of collaboration to be engaged in with our local polytechnics.

It is also important to keep in view that the main objectives behind polytechnics will be to provide work to ready diploma holders of high quality to spearhead the development of the country into a knowledge-based and skills driven economy.

One things is certain; tomorrow’s growth requires a fundamental rebalancing of our skills’ ecosystem if we want to participate in an intensely competitive and talent-based global economy. Skills are, indeed, the global currency of the 21st century.

Planning for the future is vital. Hence, my Ministry, in collaboration with the Human Resource Development Council, is coming up with a national Skills Development Strategy 2017-2022. The Strategy aims to get an ambitious trajectory for the next five years for skills development in Mauritius.

On the other hand, an Integrated Career Counselling System will be set up to bridge the information asymmetric between students and the industry for informed career choices.

Again, the HRDC will utilise intelligence and skills requirements to proactively address emerging skill gaps in new pose of development in tune with Vision 2030.

Madam Speaker, none of us present in this House can gainsay the importance of Tertiary education in the development and the generation, and dissemination of knowledge, aiming as we are, towards Mauritius becoming a major knowledge hub for the region.

However, there are some challenges that have to be faced and that necessitate robust regulatory framework. In this context, I am pleased to announce that I will be introducing the High Education Bill in the National Assembly by December this year. The legislation is in the process of being drafted. We have received the support of an expert, a legal drafter from the Commonwealth Secretariat who has also taken time to discuss with the Heads of different Tertiary Education Institutions.
Madam Speaker, let me share with you that the High Education Bill will focus, inter alia, on enhancing quality assurance; improving equity and fairness in the funding of the system; creating a climate conducive to research; improving the regulatory function of the sector and enhancing sector governance; optimising programmatic differentiations and diversity as applicable to both public and private sectors.

Madam Speaker, let me come to another vital element in today’s education and training set up. The Budget Speech resonates with a strong signal of how Mauritius and Mauritians students must leapfrog into modernism. Key Strategy 4 identifies the necessity for the country towards the fully-fledged digital society. I am really appreciative of the fact that the funds have now been provided for a series of projects that can make the job possible. Let me take just two of these.

In the first place, provision is being made for digital tablets and relevant education software to be made available to pupils of Grades 1 and 2 under the digital learning programmes. In some quarters, I hear people saying: “why are we giving tablets to children?” They are going to play with that. It is a toy.” No, Madam Speaker! We need to make people realise that a tablet can be a major tool for learning. What we intend to do, Madam Speaker, is to encourage our children to concentrate on their learning and to do the right thing with a tablet.

Madam Speaker, let me set the context right. We are living at a time when familiarity with ICT has become commonplace, a part of the learner’s survival kit. Practically everything is being digitised and our children are growing up in an environment where they already occupy the place as digital natives.

Madame la présidente, les enfants de deux à trois ans sont maintenant capables d’envoyer leurs photos aux grands-pères et grands-mères par E-mail. Ils sont capables d’aller sur Skype, de discuter.

We need to provide them with tools to allow them to evolve in this new technological era. So, ICT is growing into an inescapable tool for every child to access knowledge.

Besides, it is important to consider the fact that we are introducing modular approach and the Rt. hon. Minister is right. The world is evolving, we need to evolve to. And what is also important, and people have to realise it, we are now going to have a different type of assessment in Grades 5 and 6. We are coming with the modular assessment. We are thinking of having an assessment using technology and it is important to develop this familiarity with technology and it will certainly come in handy to all our pupils. Besides, it is also an equity issue. There are children who are favoured with a home environment,
instrumental and giving them a head-start in education. Unfortunately, not every child is so favoured and we need, thus, to balance the tilted stairs. The concerns for equity is thus at the heart of things. Let me allay another apprehension: schools will make provisions to store the tablets. They will not be carried home by the pupils. Rather, since they will contain the digital learning material, our pupils will not have to carry the heavy loads of printed material, as it is currently the case.

The heavy bag, Bent Back Syndrome will have to be a thing of the past.

As for the dedicated Faculty of Digital Technology and ICT Engineering by University of Mauritius, currently named as Faculty of Digital Technologies and Innovations, the value added dimension is obvious. Firstly, it is in alignment with the Government’s vision to make of Mauritius a regional ICT hub.

Secondly, it will help to attract more international students with the objective to make of University of Mauritius a nodal point for Tertiary IT Education in the region.

Thirdly, it will help train more IT graduates to better support the growth of ICT sector and adapt matter to the changing ICT Industry requirements. The creation of this faculty will certainly trigger high visibility of IT resources and activities available at the University of Mauritius and boost up opportunities for collaboration with stakeholders at both national and international levels.

Pour conclure, vous conviendrez que ce budget proposé par notre honorable minister des Finances démontre clairement le désir profond de placer la barre très haut, afin que la République atteigne des niveaux de développement plus élevés.

Et, ce même ministre nous a donnés les moyens de le faire. A titre d’exemple, la dotation budgétaire pour mon ministère a grimpé de R 14.8 milliards à R 16.1 milliards, un chiffre inédit.

Nous avons effectivement toutes les raisons d’être optimistes quand on considère les différentes mesures qui seront mises en chantier, le Plan Marshall, une meilleure prise en charge des enfants souffrant d’handicap, les allocations aux familles nécessiteuses, la baisse du prix du gaz ménager, des céréales, entre autres, et la révision des critères pour un logement décent, pour ne citer que quelques-uns.

Nous sommes, donc, animés par un espoir certain que la population sortira gagnante dans son ensemble. Le ‘feel good factor’ est bien présent et cela est grandement dû à notre grand argentier qui a présenté le quatrième budget de sa jeune carrière. Bravo à vous, M. le ministre !

Avec votre permission, Madame la présidente, je voudrai demander à mes collègues présents ici, au sein de cette auguste Assemblée, de mettre de côté nos différends et de
faire preuve de patriotisme pour faire avancer la cause du pays, surtout la cause de nos enfants. Je parle là de la réforme.

Dans le monde éducatif, nous avons certainement pris un peu de retard, il est grand temps qu’on arrive à le combler. Unissons nos efforts plutôt pour le plus grand bien de nos enfants. Nos enfants méritent amplement la conjugaison de nos efforts pour leur bien-être.

J’emprunterai pour terminer, Madame la présidente, les paroles de l’écrivain James Grover Thurber – «Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around us in awareness.”

Merci à vous, Madame la Présidente.

(3.15 p.m.)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea !