PUBLIC BILL  
Second Reading  
THE APPROPRIATION (2011) BILL  
(NO. XVII OF 2010)  


Question again proposed.

The Minister of Education and Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first of all congratulate my colleague, the vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development for the – what I can call - widely-acclaimed Budget he presented to this Assembly on Friday last.

This Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, is indeed a daring one which I can call well balanced and based on a programme and promises made during the electoral campaign.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we must not forget, however, the circumstances, both local and international, in which this Budget has been prepared and presented.

It is also important, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we remind ourselves of the most challenging issues that have kept shaking the world economy at the turn of the last century, which we qualified last time, when we took power under the able guidance of the Prime Minister, as a the triple shock in 2005/2006, with -

- the phasing out of the sugar protocol;
- the dismantling of the Multi-Fibre Agreement;
- the constantly rising price of fuel on the world market.

Le Leader de l’opposition vient nous dire que c’est un budget de continuité. J’espère qu’il n’a pas oublié que le budget est une affaire du gouvernement. Il s’agit, aujourd’hui, du gouvernement de l’Alliance de l’Avenir - le gouvernement Parti Travailliste, MSM et PMSD et le même Premier ministre. C’était le même Premier ministre depuis 2005, le Premier ministre va continuer le budget. Bien entendu, il y aura des nuances en fonction des circonstances du pays, puis, bien-sûr, l’approche du ministre des finances lui-même. We should not forget, Mr Speaker, Sir, the difficulties that were facing the country when the Prime Minister took power for the second time in 2005. And then, since 2006, another shock characterised by an unprecedented economic and financial turmoil hit the world and whose ripple effects are still, until today, undermining progress and development with, what I can call, a saw-tooth like evolution.
In such a fragile and global economic environmental context where risks still exist for a downturn at any time and where our hands are attached and where situation of countries like ours, being subject to vulnerabilities associated with the size, location and, more importantly, the inner workings of the economic system, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Opposition, through the speech of the Leader of the Opposition, is claiming that the 2011 Budget is, what I have read outside, “fade, décevant, mauvais” and that it lacks inspiration and imagination, as the Leader of the Opposition has tried to make us believe today.

Nothing, Mr Speaker, Sir, is further from the truth. In fact, it is, I must say, the comments of the Leader of the Opposition that are “fade et décevant”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we can proudly say that the nation has overwhelmingly accepted the first Budget of the Alliance de L’Avenir, as a Budget truly designed to foster the development of the standard of living and quality of life of all our fellow citizens, no matter what creed, religion or social class they belong to.

It is an ample proof, if proof is needed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this Government has “at heart” the well-being of the whole nation and that the Budget has been framed with this fundamental philosophy in mind.

J’ai entendu le contraire de la bouche du Leader de l’opposition. Il a essayé, dans un premier temps, de mettre le ministre des finances à contrepied contre l’ancien ministre des finances et puis contre le Premier ministre. C’est du beau jeu et dans un style théâtral. Ce matin même, j’ai entendu l’honorable Satish Boolell parler d’un acteur par famille. Je pense qu’il y a bien un acteur par famille dans l’opposition en ce moment.

(Interruptions)

Il y avait beaucoup de théâtre. Moi aussi, j’ai été longtemps dans cette Chambre. J’ai entendu le Leader de l’opposition répondre au discours du budget à plusieurs reprises, même à moi-même quand j’étais ministre des finances. Mais, pour la première fois, je vois que c’est un discours décousu, on a pris cut plusieurs fois, même pas paste – cut and throw – jeté à droite et à gauche. Il a l’habitude de prendre trois ou quatre items, de rentrer en profondeur dans ces items et d’essayer de faire la part de choses. Je dois dire qu’il y a eu quelques éléments positifs aussi.

Je ne peux pas faire de la démagogie comme les autres. Il y a eu certains éléments positifs qu’on va prendre en considération. Un budget est préparé, il y a des discussions qui continuent et le Finance Bill arrive. Parfois on doit voir comment on doit présenter le
Finance Bill, qu’est-ce qu’on va mettre dedans. Même après le Finance Bill, il y a des choses qu’on considère toujours.

On va voir les choses positives, mais seulement c’était un discours où on a pris un peu de tout, les projets mentionnés dans le budget, dans très peu de cas critiqué vraiment parce qu’il n’y avait pas de critiques possibles, mais plutôt attiré notre attention sur les écueils, c’est son devoir. Dans ce cas là, bien-sûr, on tiendra en considération ce qu’on doit faire.

Je viendrais sur certains points mentionnés par le Leader de l’opposition au cours de mon discours, en ce qui concerne l’éducation et la compensation salariale. Je dirais quelques mots ça et là. Mais je pense qu’il ne faut pas que je rentre dans ces détails, prendre point par point, ce que le Leader de l’opposition a dit pour les raisons que je viens de mentionner.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is clear that the 2011 Budget is not just an accounting exercise for it transcends figures and dwells in values, core values, that we all want to cherish for ourselves and for generations to come. In fact, this Budget steers the way to accomplish the Mauritian Dream.

No one can deny that the Minister of Finance has, in fact – I have been Minister of Finance myself - very skilfully and tactfully used the various fiscal tools available to him to chart the right course to propel Mauritius into a higher economic threshold.

The bold measures taken in this Budget to fight the social nuisances afflicting our youth, such as cigarette smoking, alcoholism and gambling, are clear and strong signals of this Government’s determination to improve the quality of life in the country.

Another area, Mr Speaker, Sir, where the Government has not hesitated to take the bull by the horns is in the field of environmental protection. We want to bequeath a clean Mauritius to our children and the future generation.

All this paradigm shift was clearly propounded, I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the electoral manifesto of the Alliance de L’Avenir for the last general election. Mr Speaker, Sir, there is nothing more sacred for a political alliance than to honour its promises to the nation. We promised change for the better and we have in this Budget respected our word. Two classical examples are the elimination of the NRPT, but the Leader of the Opposition has tried to make a play on this. In fact, it was approved by the previous Government. When we listen to the people and we are coming back to the people, we took the pledge that many people have not understood the bien-fondé of this tax. Il n’y avait pas beaucoup de revenus qui venaient de cette taxe. La décision a été prise, le ministre des finances avait fait son cheval de bataille pendant tout le temps qu’il était dans l’opposition, c’était
normal. Il n’y a rien de plus franc que cela et la preuve que ce gouvernement est un gouvernement qui dirige pour le peuple et avec le peuple.

The same thing is on tax on interest income. These are classical examples, I must say, where we have promised change and we have changed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we should also welcome the other innovative measures announced in the Budget and I will go quickly. There is the setting up of the Sovereign Wealth Fund.
Le Leader de l’opposition a parlé de ce Sovereign Wealth Fund. Je dois vous dire, sans entrer dans les détails, qu’il a essayé de nous comparer à des pays qui ne sont pas comparables.

Il parle de fonds par trillion dans certains pays bien avancés, mais nous, à Maurice, il nous faut aller d’après nos moyens. Donc, je pense que la population verra que c’est une chose avantgardiste et cela aura tout son intérêt.

There is also, Mr Speaker, Sir, the enlargement of the scope of activities for Category 1 Global Business Licence Companies; the greater use of economic diplomacy to open new markets through our embassies abroad. There is the question of promoting the Creative Industry as a full-fledged domestic industry. The conversion of the DBM – here also the Leader of the Opposition talked lengthily on that – into a Development Finance Agency to effectively support the SMEs sector. I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this is a very important and intelligent project. We all know that over the years there have been various criticisms levelled against the DBM in several quarters. Small planters, fishermen and SMEs have all complained against the poor service they were obtaining from that bank. And it was obvious, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the DBM could not compete with commercial banks in view of the fact that the DBM did not have the wide network of branches which commercial banks have throughout the island. Moreover, DBM does not possess the advanced technological banking system which commercial banks enjoy such as credit and debit chip cards as well as e-banking online facilities. So, they will never be able to compete with commercial banks.

Alors on a trouvé la meilleure façon de régler le problème. And in this Budget, we are proposing a complete reorganisation of the DBM into a Development Finance Agency and this Development Finance Agency will rather offer partial risk guarantees and other instruments to induce commercial banks and other financial institutions to lend to SMEs essentially. In addition, it will focus on providing support services and technical assistance to SMEs, micro enterprises and start-ups. It is exactly the same thing that was being mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition. Là on va voir la banque devenir beaucoup plus efficace. Elle va aider les petites et moyennes entreprises à faire ce qu’on n’a pas pu faire depuis bien longtemps.
The e-payment mechanism also, Mr Speaker, Sir, is one of the very important measures that have been mentioned in the Budget. There is the setting up of the National Agricultural Biotechnology Institute.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I was saying that there is the setting up of the National Agricultural Biotechnology Institute. All these important measures that have been mentioned are avant-gardistes pour le développement et la modernisation du pays. They have been mentioned in the Budget Speech of the hon. Minister of Finance.

There is also the study for the opening of a port at Mahebourg. I am sure that in the years to come, we’ll be bound to open that port there because of the saturation in Port Louis and we know that in Mauritius there is no other place except Port Louis and Mahebourg and Grand Port where you can open ports. There is no way of opening a port anywhere else. So, the study of the opening of a port at Mahebourg is indeed a laudable proposal.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have said earlier that this Budget is not only an accounting exercise. It sets out a road map outlining the future trajectory which our economy will have to follow. We cannot tax this Budget défaillant, décevant and uninspiring as we have been hearing in the quarters of the Opposition. It contains, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, reform programmes which will pave the way for our country to step in the modern era with confidence.

I prefer not to go into details with the points that have been raised by the Leader of the Opposition where he doesn’t seem to believe in the merger of the water authorities and this is a question of ‘comment on regarde le problème’. Si vous regardez le verre à moitié vide, bien sûr vous resterez là sur place sans rien faire.

There has been much thinking done around this et on ne peut plus continuer avec cet état de choses, cette façon où les autorités se passent la balle. When you ask this one, he says it is the other one; when you go to the other one, it is the other one et on tourne en rond. On n’arrive jamais à résoudre le problème. This question of merger of parastatal bodies must be looked at in a very optimistic way.

Concerning the delegation of powers within the public service, we have taken note of what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has said. But there is already delegation of powers by the PSC for many cases. So, this will be taken care of in the same line as what exists.
I have already mentioned the Sovereign Wealth Fund and the complete reorganisation of the DBM as being audacious measures to lead Mauritius on another path of its development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in line with our basic philosophy, this Budget has given a special attention to protect the vulnerable segments of the population and eradicate absolute poverty. The most far-reaching measure has been the one concerning the housing sector, especially the introduction of the five schemes. Certainly for years to come, this present Government, under the able leadership of our determined Prime Minister, will be remembered for its important contribution in this crucial sector, similarly as Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam is remembered for his tremendous contribution in the provision of free secondary education to all boys and girls of this country, in fact, free education altogether.

Another criticism that has been levelled against this Budget, not only by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, but by certain other quarters, concerns the salary compensation. And I would like to make an interesting point concerning the salary compensation. When we look at this issue, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it must be looked at in a global manner. Financial salary compensation must be added with other fiscal reliefs granted in the Budget to working families.

Il ne faut pas voir la compensation que la compensation. M. le président, les négociations tripartites, comme on les appelle, pour la compensation salariale ont de tout temps, eu lieu juste avant le budget. Quand on passait le budget au mois de juin, juste au début de juin, on avait les négociations tripartites. Cette année-ci, le ministre des finances a lu le discours du budget en décembre et deux ou trois semaines avant on avait les tripartites. Pourquoi ? Pour deux raisons principales. La première c’est que le ministre des finances a besoin de savoir quelle est l’enveloppe qui sera utilisée pour qu’il puisse l’inclure dans son budget. C’est normal, c’est logique. Mais la deuxième raison, et la plus importante, c’est que le ministre des finances prend cela en considération quand il décide sur les diverses mesures qu’il va préconiser pour le budget de l’Etat. Je vous mentionne une série d’autres mesures. Je vais aller vite pour ne pas prendre trop le temps de la Chambre et vous allez voir combien des familles gagnent par d’autres moyens et les moyens qui sont énoncés dans le budget.

« Extending the partial exemption of School Certificate and HSC fees »

Vous savez ce que le ministre des finances a fait en élargissant la base ? Plus de 19,000 familles vont bénéficier. 100%, c’est environ R 10,000 et 50% c’est environ R 5,000.

*With regard to higher housing subsidy,* on vient d’augmenter l’allocation pour la
dalle à R 65,000. Une famille qui va construire sa maison bénéficie de R 65,000. C’est la famille qui bénéficie.

**Concerning income tax deduction for children studying locally and abroad**, ce sont des revenus qui reviennent à la famille ou qui ne sortent pas de la famille. Donc, ce sont les familles qui en bénéficient.

- Maintaining free transport *pour tous les écoliers*. Il y a des enfants dans toutes les familles mauriciennes, et ce free transport est pour tout le monde, même ceux qui sont possédants. Quand les enfants voyagent en autobus, c’est gratuit. On sait que les familles dépensent entre R 400/R 500, R 1,200/R 1,300, et même jusqu’à R 1,400 par mois pour le transport des enfants pour aller à l’école.
- Maintaining the various subsidies on commodities, such as rice and flour, gaz ménager.
- Distribution of school bags, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Savez-vous ce qu’il y a dans ces school bags? On ne donne pas des cartables vides. il y a des chaussures pour les enfants, les uniforms, les livres, et un tas d’autres choses. Le complet coûte à l’État environ R 1,500. On a donné des dizaines de milliers de school bags. Est-ce que ce n’est pas les familles qui bénéficient de tout cela? Ce sont des mesures qui sont annoncées dans le budget ; soit des nouvelles mesures qui viennent, soit les mêmes mesures dont on augmente le plafond.
- Distribution of books and atlas freely in primary sector. Si on n’avait pas distribué, les familles n’auraient-elles pas dû aller trouver de l’argent de leurs revenus pour payer tout cela? There is distribution of books and laptops to the needy in the secondary school sector.
- Concerning casting of slabs, I have just mentioned that the ceiling has been raised to Rs65,000. Donc, tout cela doit être pris en considération, M. le président. Il ne suffit pas de voir la compensation salariale en tant que telle. Au contraire, les règlements disent que si l’inflation ne dépasse pas 5%, il n’y en a pas. Pourquoi a-t-on mis cela ? On aurait pu s’arrêter là. Malgré tout, le ministre des finances a eu du cœur, et il a décidé qu’il fallait quand même faire un beau geste, d’autant plus qu’il vient pour la première fois, sous la bannière de l’Alliance de l’Avenir, présenter son budget. Il faut que la population comprenne, et il ne faut pas faire de la démagogie avec des choses aussi simples que cela.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Budget in itself is a responsible Budget, paving the way for a modern approach to economic management, which is based on values. As Dr. Stephen Covey had rightly pointed out recently, there are three constants in life - change, principles and choice.

The vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has clearly stuck to his unwavering principles, through right choices in the face of change. I wish again to congratulate him for that. My firm belief, Mr
Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that such values should be fostered across all generations, through appropriate and quality education for all. This brings me to my sector, which is Education and Training.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I believe I should be justifiably proud that Education and Training is the recipient of the second largest budget in the 2011 budget presentation. Should we forget that we are here talking of an increase, at a time when developed countries such as the UK and the USA have planned to reduce spending on higher education, science and research? We cannot afford that, here in Mauritius! If anything, we have to continue increasing our spending on education if we want to drive progress in a substantial manner.

Can it be otherwise, when the global challenges confronted by countries today have made that the education and training system has become the linchpin for mobility in society, and also for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals? In fact, the global agenda is today placing a premium, and focusing on such landmarks as the development of linkages between education, higher education, vocational sector and the world of work. This has to be done throughout, with the harnessing of both ICT in education and existing knowledge, especially indigenous knowledge, for the development of the country as a whole. In fact, in view of the critical importance of knowledge as a factor of production, many less developed countries are exploring ways to harness it, and deepen its role and contribution to their development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, education systems worldwide are in a state of flux and are subject to reforms, focusing on the following four areas, namely -
- access;
- equity;
- relevance, and
- quality.

We, in Mauritius, while engaged in our reform agenda for the education and training system, are also adding a fifth dimension to it, upon which, I believe, our very survival as a Small Island Developing State depends - I am here referring to the Achievement concept.

Until and unless we factor in this dimension, the four other pillars would be incomplete and ultimately inadequate.

These five major pillars, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, constitute the very foundation for the various education reform projects and initiatives which have been highlighted in the Education and Human Resource Strategy Plan 2008-2020, and also enunciated in the Government Programme 2010-2015. This present Budget has given the Education sector
yet another challenge to overcome, that is, a dream to make happen for a quality education for all, and a human resource base to transform Mauritius into that intelligent island in the vanguard of the global progress and innovation and this, on the basis on which a true democratic, inclusive and modern society is built, a society with which the population as a whole can identify itself. This Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, envisions transforming Mauritius into an educational hub, in order to propel the economy on a modern development path.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, improving the quality of educational output remains indeed one of the highest priorities on the development agenda of my Ministry, as this is the key that would lead the country to high value-added growth, and increase its competitiveness on the global market. One of the key determinants of our country’s competitiveness is its ability to invest in the brain power of our human resource. The educational goal is thus to empower learners with 21st century skills, competencies and attitudes to operate in both the local and global environments.

It is imperative, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that all attempts be geared towards the elimination of wastage and inefficiency in the system at different levels. Only this will guarantee that we have the quality human resource eager to enter into post secondary and tertiary education. It is only thus and then, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we can fulfil the objective of ours of ensuring that every family has, at least, one graduate in its midst.

My Ministry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has, in the context of the implementation of the Strategy Plan 2008-2020, initiated action on a host of measures, covering different levels of education, and focusing inter alia on -

- consolidation of the human resource base;
- productivity upgrading;
- redefining the curricula;
- innovative pedagogical practices;
- triggering digital revolution of the education system;
- new modes of assessment for benchmarking;
- quality improvement, and
- expanded educational and work related opportunities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you will appreciate that these measures I have just mentioned can take firm root only when the very foundational stages of education are properly consolidated.

A lot of our innovations have accordingly been made to concentrate on the pre-primary, primary and secondary subsectors. As a matter of fact, innovative pedagogical programmes have been put in place to reduce the end-of-primary cycle failure rates, and to improve performance and quality standards at that level. Action has accordingly been sustained, as from 2008, to apply such innovative measures at an early stage, instead of
waiting for the end-of-the-cycle examinations to reveal learning deficits. The Leader of the Opposition touched on what was mentioned in the Budget, because we believe in it. Il faut qu’on sache que le ministre des finances ne peut pas venir donner tous les détails pour chaque phrase. Il ne finira jamais, déjà que son discours a duré plus de deux heures. Cela a été mentionné, parce qu’on y croit vraiment.

Alors il faut commencer par le début.

I must say that we should not wait; we should start at the early stages. A host of new innovative measures have been introduced namely -
(a) the splitting of the Primary cycle into three cycles of two years, and
(b) the diagnostic assessment to identify deficits and set the basis for remedy.
We have introduced the Remedial Education. We have started to introduce the Continuous Assessment System, the ZIIS (Zone of Inclusive and Integrated Strategy).
We have introduced the Enhancement Programme and continuous training of educators and capacity building.

All these, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are some of the means by which we intend to transform the entire primary cycle of the education sector. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would not take too much the time of the House in elaborating too lengthily on those measures.

Parce qu’il y en a tellement, M. le président, that with your permission, I would wish to table a document carrying the details of many points I have mentioned and I will continue to mention.

There is one domain, however, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that of private tuition, where I, as Minister entrusted with the responsibility for education, will not shy away. We may propose a whole gamut of measures, all well intentioned, but if we do not confront the issue of private tuition headlong, many of the actions will not yield the fruits expected. I believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that this deep-rooted phenomenon in our educational system and which has been lasting for years, has to be addressed holistically and in an integrated manner.
As a first step, we have already implemented this year the policy decision of not allowing private tuition on school premises to pupils of Std IV. We have successfully introduced the Enhancement Programme in the context of our policy review of private tuition.

The next step in driving forward this Agenda for ultimately phasing out private tuition relates to amendments of the Education Act. These amendments are currently being finalised at the Attorney General’s Office and I propose to circulate same to this august Assembly soon.
Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight here something that is novel in our system, but which also has far-reaching implications and I am speaking of the Enhancement Programme.

The received wisdom in our schools has always been that our children should turn out to be academically on top, but concern about their overall well-being has traditionally taken a back seat.

This is something that has to change, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and this is central to my concern as a Minister and I must say also as a Doctor. This Programme, I must say at the very outset, has won public approval, parental support and ownership by the entire school community.

It could not be otherwise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The Programme has created a real breakthrough, a real revolution in the Primary Sector. It throws talents and creativity into the limelight. This Programme has demonstrated that potential exists in all our learners, no matter what type of school they go to or which region they are found in.

Their latent talent has been given the opportunity to blossom, to be exposed to the public gaze. In the process, pupils have developed their own self-esteem, their ability to display leadership qualities, all directly resulting in personality growth and development. Given the major success of this programme, we must be deeply appreciative of the Minister of Finance recognition given in its long-term benefits and has provided funds for its extension to pupils of Standard III also as from January 2011.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the same line of thought and action, the holistic development of the students of secondary schools implies the provision of opportunities for them to better unleash their potential, develop their creativity and nurture innovation.

With this focus, new timetabling arrangements have been made involving the inclusion since January 2009, of four extra activity periods per week since January 2009.

This is working marvellously well and has created another revolution at the Secondary level, where Co and Extra Curricular activities have thus been given their rightful place and indeed a new impetus.

Educators of Secondary Schools are hence, now organising and encouraging participation of students in extra-curricular activities featuring on the school timetable. These encompass –
• healthy lifestyle;
• civic education;
sex education;
promotion of arts and culture, and
sustainable development (endemic garden, waste segregation, recycling of waste paper for example).

In addition, my Ministry has promoted efforts towards inculcating the notion of sustainability right from an early age through actions that lead to a green and embellished school environment. Tree planting is so simple but, at the same time, so crucial an activity. It is with the very inculcation of such notions that we can transform what appears to be so mundane an activity into one, that is, in fact, highly productive.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Budget has announced the setting up of a Creative Industry. This can only see the light of day when we start developing basic creative values in our children right from an early age, such that their potential, in fact, acts as a basis for the creation of economic value. The schools represent the right platform for driving such initiatives.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the best definitions of quality is fitness of purpose.

An education system has to ensure that its products not only eke out a profitable existence for themselves, but also that they become balanced social beings who collectively work towards the common weal, that is, the best citizens of the country.

This, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, places a heavy responsibility on the curriculum that has to be relevant and provide the sound base on which the future of learners is constructed.

I wish to inform the House that one of the strategic thrusts of the new educational reform initiated as from 2008 has been the complete review of the curriculum framework at all levels, pre-primary, primary and secondary. These reforms are all encompassing: innovative measures in the teaching and learning process have been highlighted. Assessment, evaluation and capacity-building are central to it and the new curriculum framework makes provision for the introduction of new subjects as well. The details regarding the array of curricular changes are given, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the document I will be circulating.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now address an issue that has become intrinsic to modernisation of all emerging economies. Nobody can deny that globalisation and rapid technological changes have made knowledge a critical determinant of competitiveness in the world economy.
The impact on education is clear. In fact, this has led to UNESCO giving a high priority to the use of ICT in Education, with a view to ensuring a more equitable and pluralistic development in education.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, experience worldwide indicates that ICT plays an important role in the transformation of education and training. I wish to repeat it. It can enhance educational reform by enabling both teachers and learners to move away from the traditional teacher-centred, task-oriented, memory-based education to a transformed teaching and learning environment, characterised by inclusive and integrated practices, so, that no child be left behind.

It is with this goal in mind, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that my Ministry has forcefully embarked on the digitalisation of the Education System as a whole. We have now made of that revolution a central pillar of the system by ensuring empowerment across the board.

The approach, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has been systemic -
- Provision of IT labs in all schools.
- Provision of broadband internet facilities.
- Improved communication processes through the EDUWEB with the school community which is a system of webcasting, and
- SMS to reach out to parents.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these are just a few of the digital transformations we have brought into our schools. We are now on the verge of embarking on two unprecedented revolutionary projects that will take us indubitably several rungs on the digital ladder. These are projects that are not simply going to be new milestones, but will also be trail blazers. One of them will position the country as a ‘plaque tournante’ for the African continent as a whole and the other will reengineer the operational process of the Ministry by strengthening the management and administrative capacity of the system. I am talking here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, essentially of the Sankore Project as well as the School Administration and Management System.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the information of hon. Members, details again of the various ICT initiatives - and they are numerous - are included in the document I am circulating.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is addressing the issue of indiscipline and violence holistically in partnership with key institutions namely the Police force, the CDU, la Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs, Probation Services, the Ministry of Youth & Sports with the support of all stakeholders including the parental and school community.
Central to our concern, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is ensuring the need to safeguard the interest of the child. The child has fundamental rights that are as much generally enshrined in our Constitution as these are captured in the several conventions that Mauritius has ratified.

The measures being implemented serve to both respect and protect the rights of the child and are based on a child-friendly approach.

Again, I have given details in the document circulated.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, assuring the social integration of the vulnerable through a set of affirmative measures is indeed the moral obligation of Government. And this has to start as early as possible by facilitating the inclusion of children with special and additional needs in the mainstream. Let me say in very clear terms, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that education has the responsibility of guaranteeing equity for all in the system. This is so by virtue of its being the key to societal transformation.

I will, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, take up two important components of this drive. First is the Special Education Needs. We did talk about that this morning in the course of a PQ that was put to me and to which I answered. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the measures are numerous, including having recourse to an intensive campaign to persuade and encourage parents to register their wards in the nearest primary schools and for subsequent admission to the appropriate school or institution. This has already started since January this year and we are keen on reaching out to those who had for long remained the unreached.

Obviously, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to rely on the active collaboration of NGOs involved in the Special Education Needs. Among other things, it is also important that the system provides for an early detection and diagnosis of disability as and when it manifests itself. Only then can early intervention actions in the form of relevant care and support be provided to the children in need. A Special Education Need Unit at the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority is therefore being created for this purpose, and the Special Education Need Unit of my Ministry is being further reinforced and closely monitored.

Of extreme necessity is the setting up of Special Education Need Resource and Development Centres. These strategically located centres will be properly equipped with specialised materials and also adequately staffed, so as to act as One-Stop-Shops where, inter alia, relevant services and support to Special Education Need children would be provided.
The collaboration of specialist NGOs on a principle of complementarity would be secured to drive further this initiative.

Second, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the House is fully aware, the Zones d’Éducation Prioritaires (ZEP) strategy which aims at combating social inequalities by providing equal opportunities to all primary school children of the country was introduced in 2003.

After seven years of the implementation of the project, it has been observed that progress has been slow, especially in certain schools. Reflections carried out by my Ministry have revealed several drawbacks, which contribute to such slow progress. These relate to *inter alia* -

- Stigma on the ZEP schools.
- Concentration of low performing pupils in such schools.
- Low community involvement – Parents do not participate in school activities despite various efforts.
- Headmasters have difficulties to cope with situations especially where parents are very difficult.
- Teachers are often discouraged and frustrated.
- The allowance paid does not necessarily attract the most dedicated teachers to ZEP schools.
- The vision set up for the ZEP strategy is not shared by all stakeholders.

So, the need for a revisiting of the ZEP strategy is therefore being strongly felt. In this connection, a rethinking process has started at the level of my Ministry with a view to ensuring that pupils attending ZEP schools are better supported and the stigma on such schools removed. I am open to not only proposals, but even advice from all stakeholders interested in the matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to that measure in the Budget about which there cannot be any controversy. I am referring here to the fundamental change to the Scholarship schemes which are until today, based on merit and merit only.

I, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, will be the last person to frown upon merit. But I also realize that there is not much that separates a laureate from his or her peer/fellow student coming immediately after. Is it then fair or again morally just to distinguish between laureates and non-laureates on the decimal differences in marks at exams organised during 2 or 3 hours after a preparation having lasted two years.

*(Interruptions)*

*Of course ! Il faut commencer, on commence, la main à la pâte, aidez nous !*
In fact, it is only fair and just that the rewards for hard work should be equitably distributed. I am especially referring here to the 38 new awards that have been recommended, of which 24 are to be reserved for brilliant deserving students coming from families with modest income.

So, I repeat, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a measure whose fall out can only be positive for we are thereby rewarding the efforts of many and not just a few. We are rewarding academic merit, but also placing due emphasis on and showing consideration for social merit and this fits in very well with the concept so properly spelt out in French namely – « Il ne suffit pas de réussir dans la vie, mais de réussir sa vie”.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, inclusion and integration will not serve much of a purpose if completion of schooling is handicapped because of non-affordability factors. This Budget recognises that it is the sacrosanct duty of Government to ensure that learners do complete their cycles of study.

In this regard, I can only welcome on behalf of the numerous parents the policy measure to alleviate their financial burden through an increased subsidisation of examination fees. And I was myself the first one to introduce the measure when I was Minister of Finance in 1997. Je ne peux pas être plus royaliste que le roi mais je me sens fier quand je vois cette mesure revenir. I must say that this will have a series of ripple effects.

The number of students so benefitting will, as I said earlier, be more than double to reach 19,000, and we know that many of these will have successfully completed their exams, will be seeking seats - and securing them - in the post-secondary sub-sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the increased pace of life in our modern society is taking toll on the ability of parents, especially mothers, to take employment opportunities and at the same time providing the necessary mother care that children would and do require.

We all know that women’s socio economic role should be enhanced. In this context, my Ministry is working towards the introduction of a new regulation under the ECCEA Act to address a long-standing issue regarding child minding services for children aged 3-5. In fact, I am talking of the possibility of re-opening or leaving pre-primary school open after 2.30 hours and 3.00 hours. Nous savons les difficultés que les parents ont ; si les parents travaillent, ils ne sont pas libres de venir chercher les enfants à 2.30 heures ou à 3.00 heures et beaucoup de dames refusent de travailler à cause des difficultés des enfants. So, this will go in the right direction.
This amendment would ultimately permit mothers, especially from poor families, to take up full time employment without the stress of going to recuperate their children when they finish work. Incidentally, I must say, this will also optimise the use of resources that had so far not been properly tapped. This is a good measure which goes in the right direction.

In addition, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the implementation of the “École des Parents” project will help establish the “Home-School” network and also serve as a means to better “educate” the parents and make them alive to the issues in society at large. Such ‘Écoles’ will, among other things, cement the tie with the schools, encourage greater parental involvement as well as help forge strong partnerships with vulnerable children and their parents through solidarity actions and home visits.

My Ministry will implement all these measures in close collaboration with stakeholders of the education sector including, of course, the parent community.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, although Mauritius is well on the way to achieving the EFA goals and reckons high levels of literacy, there is still a need to sustain efforts to benchmark the educational system against internationally prevailing norms. Mauritius has participated in some major regional and organisation-based assessments namely PASEC (Programme d’Analyse des Systemes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN) and SACMEQ (Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Quality).

Such assessments, while serving the purpose of establishing a comparative picture with other countries have nonetheless been limitative in nature, confined as they have been to the region. The time has come now for our system to benchmark itself against the very best that exists globally.

For the first time, Mauritius is participating in an international assessment study administered by OECD in some 80 countries. Taken every three years, it will benchmark knowledge and skills of 15 years old, an age at which students in most countries are nearing the end of compulsory schooling. Results will be available by the end of 2011, that is, next year.

PISA: it has already started and the results will be available next year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, innovative approaches have also been adopted for assessment within the system so as to enable benchmarking of performances at National level and to create new avenues for the student –
(i) **National Assessment at Form III –**

I am raising a question of National Assessment at Form III level which being implemented for the first time as from this year at evaluating the competencies acquired by students and identifying their weaknesses at the end of the lower secondary cycle - a crucial stage in the education of a secondary level student.

The project has been implemented on a pilot basis this year with the participation of 33 schools, in which phase only four subjects have been assessed: English, French, Mathematics and Computer Studies. Next year more schools will join in with an extended number of subjects before it is institutionalised at the national level as from 2012.

(ii) **Revisiting The Pre-Voc Policy -**

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is imperative to create new and expanded opportunities for pre-vocational students for their continued education and integration in the world of work.

In this context we are reviewing the Prevocational policy to make it adapted to the needs of the learner. Work has already started at the level of my Ministry to think anew the modalities underlying the whole prevocational education in the light of weaknesses that have been identified. It is also envisaged to have a nationally recognised examination conducted by the MES for pre-vocational students so that they may obtain a certificate as an alternative qualification to the CPE.

(iii) **Diplome d’Etudes en Langue Francaise (DELF) -**

We have also introduced the DELF in collaboration with the French Government in secondary schools, and which aims at assessing competencies in French, both oral and written; it is of particular interest to Form V and VI students planning to pursue studies in Francophone countries. This has replaced the examination which was existing. It is about one third the cost which is paid for these examinations and the certificate that is given stays for life whereas the other one had a limited duration.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have created expanded opportunities for access to learning as well as opening the gateway to creativity and artistic expression in line with the objectives of the HRKAD Fund set up last year. In addition, out of school, youth can now envisage new livelihood prospects through the Second Chance Programme while access to technology will become the norm for all.
The Fund has been set up timeously to fill a void that led to the restriction of opportunities to different categories of our human resources and to open up access to facilities otherwise non-existent for them.

From this Fund, scholarships are now being provided to students from low-income households following accredited programmes in recognised Higher Education Institutions in Mauritius and who face financial hardships (death or disability of parents). A substantial amount has already been disbursed under the Scholarships Scheme of the Fund. Equally, the Fund provides for the Ministry to act as a guarantor to facilitate access to bank loans for those whose families possess no fixed assets.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to that element of the Government Programme that has been on the lips of practically all stakeholders in education and in society at large. I am referring here to a seminal and ground breaking measure that this Government has committed itself to, namely the introduction of Mauritian Kreol and Bhojpuri as optional subjects in schools.

Let me say it in no uncertain terms that, right from the outset, I have been amongst the first who have stood firm in my conviction that we should not restrict the use of Kreol only as a support language and exclusively for the first three years of primary schooling as it has always been.

We have with the support of all stakeholders successfully organised a national forum for the introduction of Kréol Morisien at school and an Académie du Kréol Morisien has been set up to work out all modalities pertaining to this decision.

We have also progressed on the proposal to introduce Bhojpuri and a High Level Technical Committee led by the MGI is working towards its introduction in schools as an optional subject.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the policy of my Ministry to support an equitable, modern, high quality education system, is focused on investment for a revamped educational infrastructure.

This should meet the needs of the 21st century teaching and learning, including the practice of sports activities and promotion of a healthy lifestyle. This is why, this Government has been investing massively in the upgrading and rehabilitation of all educational infrastructures and the House must know that, over the last five years, some Rs2.6 billion have thus been spent on projects in primary and secondary schools. $2.6 milliards! Efforts are being sustained in that direction.
Efforts are being sustained in that direction. My Ministry has already embarked on the construction of some 11 pre-primary units including 4 in the underserved regions of Chamarel, Albion, Barkly and Belle Mare. This is in line with our drive to promote access across the country to quality pre-primary education for a good start in the educational lives of our children.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has since the beginning of 2010 embarked on the ambitious Primary School Renewal Project with a view to replacing old buildings that are in a deplorable state by new ones provided with all modern facilities, including facilities for handicapped children.

This certainly includes keeping in mind the interests of our learners suffering from disabilities, as I have just said - they, too, Mr Speaker, Sir need to have their access and movement in schools assured. Continued emphasis is also being laid on health and safety issues through the construction and upgrading of toilets in primary and secondary schools where the toilets are in a poor state. I am aware of that. *Cela date de longtemps.* I have given directives at the level of my ministry to do away with all these poor toilets as soon as possible.

Further, in the secondary school sub-sector, the provision of additional infrastructural facilities such as specialist rooms, science and computer laboratories and playgrounds. Gymnasia will also be provided in six secondary schools and this project will be extended in the future to all secondary schools which do not have one. Similarly, all the secondary schools which do not have football playgrounds or volleyball/basketball pitches will be provided with same. This will encourage the pursuit of extra-curricular activities as well as the promotion of sport and healthy activities for the school community.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, whilst engaged in the process, my Ministry is now adopting a new approach to infrastructural development through the construction of Green buildings with a view to promoting sustainable development.

Furthermore, to encourage energy saving, the installation of photovoltaic cells in 10 primary and secondary schools is in the pipeline. This project will be extended to all primary and secondary schools in the future.

Details on all projects which are completed this year and also, ongoing and future projects in primary and secondary schools are again given, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the
Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Technical and Vocational Education and Training plays indeed a very important role in the national social and economic development. This is clearly reiterated in the Government Programme 2010-2015 which aims at further consolidating equity, quality and relevance at all levels of the education and training system.

The importance of TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) in raising productivity and employability is universally recognised. Furthermore, most countries, developed as well as developing, are increasingly having recourse to TVET as an instrument to address the problem of poverty and exclusion.

In order to attain the objectives enunciated in the 2011 Budget, it is, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, of strategic importance that the skill level of the workforce be upgraded. At the same time, considerable investment in training will be required to produce the manpower required, especially in the emerging sectors identified for future economic growth. In this respect, various measures have been undertaken by my Ministry to revitalise TVET.

As you are aware, the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD) has been set up in November 2009 with a view to streamlining TVET and building greater synergy among the public providers of training. As a result, now the MITD is the key arm of my Ministry and of Government for the provision of TVET.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with a view to increasing access to training and to bringing training closer to the public at large, the MITD has recently set up new training centres in Port Louis (the Knowledge Based Training Centre), Carreau Esnouf and Bel Air.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the MITD is also planning, in line with Government Programme of further decentralising TVET, to set up training centres in regions (North, South East and West) which are presently not adequately catered for.

The MITD is also closely collaborating with the National Empowerment Foundation to provide training for the vulnerable groups. In the context of the Support for the Unemployed Retrenched Employees (SURE), the MITD is also expected to provide training for the retrenched workers in order to facilitate their redeployment in other sectors.

The MITD has also been diversifying the training programmes offered to include, *inter alia*, hairdressing, beauty therapy, aluminium openings, security services, butchery. New training programmes are proposed for cruise line personnel by the MITD *Ecole*
Hôtelière Sir Gaëtan Duval. Higher level training programmes at diploma levels are also being developed in automotive engineering, refrigeration and air conditioning, 3-D animation and renewable energy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is progressing at very high speed and is fast impacting all spheres of life, including the way in which teaching and learning take place. Whilst it is important to regularly review curriculum in TVET to ensure relevance to the needs of industry and provide for articulation with general education, it is equally important for the delivery of training to be enhanced through innovative technology and digitalisation.

In this context the MITD is planning to provide e-learning facilities in TVET. Furthermore, with the implementation of the Sankore Project will also cater for the TVET sector and a special attention will be given to the digitalisation of learning materials used in the sector.

The whole issue, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, of assessment and certification will be reformed and greater emphasis will be placed on competency-based assessment in line with best practices worldwide. This will contribute towards greater flexibility and quality in the provision of training.

In the context of the vocationalisation of education, there is also a proposal for reviewing the training programmes offered by the Lycée Polytechnique Sir Guy Forget with a view to introducing the Baccalauréat Professionnel (Bac Pro).

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the MITD has been closely collaborating with countries in the region for the development of TVET. In line with the Government Programme 2010-2015 of transforming Mauritius into a regional hub for TVET, the MITD is actively engaged in the development of a project aimed at the setting up of a regional Training of Trainers Centre to cater for the needs of technical instructors and managers of TVET from the Southern and Eastern African countries and neighbouring islands in the Indian Ocean. Initially a Business Plan will be developed to cater for the following sectors -
(a) Hospitality and Tourism
(b) Automation and Control Engineering
(c) Garment Design and Manufacturing
(d) Industrial Machine Maintenance.

Under the India-Africa Forum, Mauritius has also made a bid to host a Regional Training Centre in technical and vocational education.
Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, throughout the year 2010, my Ministry has left no stone unturned on the way towards having a competent skills base for Mauritius. The second edition of the National Human Resource Development Plan was launched in February of this year.

This document identifies the skills gaps in various sectors. Moreover it allows relevant training to be developed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, more than 45,000 employees have been trained through the National Training Fund in 2010, for which an amount of Rs160 m. was disbursed by the HRDC.

In order to increase access to training, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has also encouraged SMEs to benefit from training and capacity building. More than 1,000 people have been trained in conducting a proper Training Needs Analysis (TNA), through the support from European Union, under the 9th Decentralised Cooperation Programme. This has also contributed to empower over 100 local consultants to provide support to SMEs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with a view to responding to the needs of Modern Mauritius, the HRDC has embarked on a national campaign to sensitise the population on the 24/7 economic model. Mauritians are being encouraged to change their mindset in order to free themselves from the 9 to 4 gravity pull.

In order to sustain our economic growth, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we must be able to attract a fair share of the several millions of jobs that are being outsourced in the world. For this, we need be able to offer the service to the clients at a time they need it rather than at a time convenient to us.

Building on the achievements in 2010, we are pursuing the Government Programme 2010-2015 with renewed energy.

The Strategy of my Ministry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is to offer broadened and flexible career guidance service to all. We are going to call it the “Centre d’Orientation Académique et Professionnelle”. This will help our citizens to be better guided in their education, training and employment. Through the regular update of the National Human Resource Development Plan, relevant and updated information about education, training and work will be made available to one and all on a regular basis.

As effective and continuous workforce development plays a pivotal role in the
improvement of competitiveness and equity, we are planning, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, through, the Human Resource Development Council, to set up a One-Stop-Shop for HRD (Human Resource Development) for enterprises, in order to help them carry out activities for the empowerment of their employees. Services to be offered would include support to prepare Training Needs Analysis, Training Plan, Application for Training Grants, Staff Development Plan, and Talent Retention and Management Plan.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in a bid to motivate employers to invest in the development of their employees, a Skills Pledge Initiative and a National HRD Excellence Award will be launched by the Human Resource Development Council. We all know that if we want to have a productive workforce, we have to ensure that we are helping the employees to remain skilled and competent.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, human development is about putting people at the centre of development. It is about people realising their potential, increasing their choices, and enjoying the freedom to lead lives they value. I firmly believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that, despite political and economic uncertainty in the global recovery, Mauritius remains a fertile ground for high value and productive activities and investments.

In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I can say that my Ministry will spare no effort in realising this vision. By investing in education and training, we are investing in a secure and prosperous future for each and every Mauritian. In the field of education and training, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, much has been done; much still has to be done in the future. This Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has given us the means now, which we needed, to act and work to the expectation of the people.

With this new Budget presented by the hon. vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, under the guidance of the hon. Prime Minister and his illumined guidance, I wish Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the country and our people well.

Thank you.

Dr. Kasenally: Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Dr. A. Boolell rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.
ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 26 November at 3.30 p.m.

The vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr P. Jugnauth) rose and seconded.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.