

# **Budget 2021-2022**

## **Intervention of Hon Deepak Balgobin Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation**

### **National Assembly**

**Wednesday 16 June 2021**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**Monsieur le Président,**

Merci de me donner l'opportunité de m'adresser à cette auguste Assemblée sur le second Budget de ce Gouvernement.

D'emblée, je tiens à remercier et féliciter vivement mon collègue, l'Honorable Dr Renganaden Padayachy, le ministre des Finances, de la Planification et du Développement Économique pour avoir présenté un budget qui répond aux besoins urgents d'aujourd'hui et de bâtir à long terme, et ce malgré une crise sanitaire sans précédent, à laquelle le monde entier fait face, et qui n'a pas épargné Maurice.

Depuis maintenant plus d'une année notre Gouvernement a dû mobiliser des moyens et des ressources considérables non seulement pour contrer le virus, mais aussi pour soutenir les secteurs les plus touchés par la pandémie.

Ici, je tiens à remercier tous les front-liners pour leur persévérance et leur détermination.

Nous devons vaincre la COVID-19 et surmonter ses conséquences.

Nous allons nous en sortir. Nous le **ferons... "Mieux Ensemble"**.

Et avec les mesures annoncées par le ministre des finances, nous voyons cependant se dessiner le soleil à l'horizon.

## 2. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BUDGET 2021-2022

**Mr Speaker, Sir,**

This budget has provided for massive investments in ongoing projects and new economic and social initiatives. Government will invest some 63 billion rupees in priority projects over the next three years even in such a difficult time, which shows that this Government has its citizens close to his heart! These priority projects concern:

- 11.7 Billion rupees to the Land Drainage Authority to be able to have a better management of Flash Floods,
- 12 Billion rupees for the Construction of 12,000 Social Housing Unit, in addition, 1,285 social housing units will be completed in the upcoming financial year.
- 9.4 Billion rupees to improve water supply in the country.
- The creation of two new economic pillars, namely the Green Energy Industry and the Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Industry. This is on top of the initiatives to consolidate the existing economic pillars.
- And the list goes on and on...

This budget is proof that we are addressing issues in the country, proof of our commitment towards economic growth and proof that we are investing in the future even during a difficult time.

And this budget has been welcomed by the Business Community.

**Business Mauritius** stated in a communiqué dated 11th June 2021 : « *La stratégie annoncée par le ministre des Finances, Renganaden Padayachy, jette les bases pour une relance durable de l'économie et une refonte de nos principaux secteurs d'activité pour consolider notre résilience* ».

**Ernst and Young** in their Budget synopsis wrote: “*Minister Padayachy resisted the temptation to balance his Budget for the next fiscal year... This alone goes towards restoring confidence, critical to boosting investment and consumer spending*”.

**Price Water House Coopers** stated: “*With rising tax rates around the world, we commend the Minister for not adopting similar measures and relying on the buoyancy of the economy to boost collections*”.

For **Deloitte Mauritius**: “*The Finance Minister has presented a roadmap for taking the national economy out of the current fragile and unbalanced growth environment, towards long-term resilient growth based on investment and confidence revival, as well as a new economic architecture centered on renewable energy and green industry.*”

**Mr Speaker, Sir,**

Once again, I congratulate my friend Honourable Minister of Finance for thinking out of the box, *pour ne pas dire “En dehors du boîte” comme disait un certain ancien ministre de la santé!!*

So, I was saying, his vision for the future, by creating new sectors, like the Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Industry and the Green Energy Industry.

The Opposition is saying that these initiatives will not happen... But they need to know, that we are planting seeds today to be able to reap the fruits in the future.

This Government is showing determination in the creation of these new industries that will potentially create jobs and attract Foreign Direct Investments, because we believe in the potential of our economy, we believe in the potential of our youth, we believe in the potential of each and every citizen of this country.

### **3. MITCI ACHIEVEMENTS AND NEW PROJECTS**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir,**

As stated by the Minister of Finance during his budget speech, the ICT sector is one which has shown resilience despite the difficult situation with the Covid-19 pandemic. The sector has grown by 5.9 percent in 2020 and we will continue to ensure sustainability and growth of our economy.

And with the coming into operation avec METISS fiber optic submarine cable the coming a new submarine cable by Mauritius Telecom, this will

increase the resiliency of the country as regards to international connectivity and it will help the ICT sector to grow and become even more dynamic.

For us to contribute towards the ICT sector, we are thorough rethinking and reorganizing roles and responsibilities of institutions of my Ministry.

#### **4. REVAMPING OF INSTITUTIONS**

**Mr Speaker, Sir,**

We are coming with a complete re-engineering of the vital institutions of My Ministry for them to be more effective in contributing to the development of the country, sized to fit their new role in the current situation, and become more efficient.

This concerns namely the National Computer Board, the State Informatics Limited, the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council and the Mauritius Post Limited.

#### **NCB**

As mentioned in the previous budget, the process of restructuring the National Computer Board has already been initiated. This endeavour to restructure the NCB is a golden opportunity to come up with a state-of-the-art organisation which will address the demands of the public and private sector as a vehicle for promotion of ICTs and capacity building, responding also to the aspirations of our youth. Also, necessary

amendments will be accordingly brought to the National Computer Board Act to make it become more dynamic.

## **MRIC**

Since the proclamation of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Act 2019, the focus of the MRIC has shifted away from academic research towards applied research and innovation. In the “new normal” where Research, Development and Innovation - RDI - are key words and actions for economic, industrial and social development, there is dire need for the MRIC to affirm itself as the apex institution not only to coordinate, promote and advise on RDI but to be instrumental to lead, develop and implement these strategies through a number of actions and activities.

In the same vein, the Government has provided 125 million rupees to finance Research projects.

Therefore, there is an urgency in providing the MRIC with the most appropriate tools and mandate to vitalize national research and innovation. A set of amendments is proposed to the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council Act (2019) to place the Council in a steadfast and strong position to tackle the looming challenges.

## **SIL**

On the other hand, a restructure plan has been laid out for State Informatics Limited by my Ministry. The plan aims at retooling SIL to respond more effectively and efficiently to the new business environment,

delivering high-quality IT solutions to Government bodies and private sector organisations alike.

### **Mauritius Post Limited**

The Mauritius Post Limited has also been constantly engaged in revamping and adapting its services to better serve the population. The distribution of pension door-to-door during the confinement periods, was a challenge that they have brilliantly taken up. The Mauritius Post will have to reinvent and rethink its business model and venture into new niche markets such as e-Commerce.

## **5. MAURITIUS DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AGENCY**

**Mr Speaker, Sir,**

I am currently reviewing the very structure of my Ministry. The Mauritius Digital Transformation Agency is becoming a reality and in this endeavour, we are availing of the services of consultants of the e-Governance Academy of Estonia together with local expertise. This will become the Apex body for championing digitalization in the public service.

Departments like the Central Informatics Bureau, the Central Information Systems Division and the IT Security Unit will be brought together under the MDTA. The Government Online Centre which is the Data Centre for Government will also be taken under this umbrella.



The new NCB and the MDTA will champion the ICTs in the national economy and emerge as world class institutions aligned with the grand vision of Mauritius as a regional ICT hub.

## **6. MITCI AND NCB PROJECTS**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir,**

Let me share with the House, projects that my Ministry has completed as well as those that are currently being undertaken in the movement for a Digital Mauritius.

Connectivity and use of digital technologies are dynamic goals as we face the pandemic. With the swell of digitally enabled economic and social activity, COVID-19 has raised the stakes around digital access and engagement. And we are adapting ourselves.

## **CONTACTLESS PAYMENTS**

The digitalisation of our economy also passes through digitalisation of payments to the Government. As a matter of priority, the Registrar General Department, the NLTA and the Companies Division IT systems will be upgraded to integrate mobile and contactless payments.

## **MAUPASS**

Moreover, in December 2020, my Ministry launched the MAUPASS, which is a strong authentication platform for citizens. It ensures that citizens who

wish to interact online with the Government are authenticated. By using MAUPASS a citizen has only one password to remember.

This service will be crucial when we embark on the e-Health journey. Government is moving forward with the implementations of the e-health system which will usher in a new age of digitalisation for the Health sector.

With the e-Health system, as rightly mentioned by my very capable friend, Honourable Jagutpal, patients calling at hospitals will have a digital experience with doctors accessing their health records online. The treatments will be captured online.

This transformation will quicken the processing at hospitals in a green paperless environment. Needless to say that all these medical records will be secured using the latest technologies.

## **CERTIFICATE AUTHORITY**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir,**

Often, we have to sign documents, contracts, permits and so on. We have been used to doing so with pen and paper. However, as we transact more and more online, such actions like signing documents must be done online itself. For that purpose, Digital Certificates are used. To ensure wide adoption of digital certificates, my Ministry has come up with a Certification Authority. It will be operated by the National Computer Board and this initiative aims at making digital certificates available at affordable prices. Competition will do the rest.

## **CHATBOT**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir,**

Furthermore, my Ministry intends to implement a Chatbot. It is an Artificial Intelligence powered software that can simulate a text conversation with a user in pre-defined languages: English, French or Creole. The objective is to respond to citizen's queries. It will provide information by creating a one stop platform for all their needs related to information, troubleshooting, and guidance on various Government services. Thus, transforming their experience.

## **SMART PARKING**

To tackle parking issues effectively, my Ministry has initiated the Smart Parking project in Port-Louis, with a mobile application named "Smart Parking". The app will provide a means for drivers to make online payments for smart parking slots instead of using the traditional parking coupons.

## **MOKLOUD**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir,**

My Ministry has implemented a Digital Safe, known as MoKloud which is a solution that will soon be launched to allow citizens to access the digital version of public documents.

For example, their birth and marriage certificates using their computers, tablets and smartphones. The documents can also be verified by

institutions requesting for same and authorities are also able to verify the validity of the digital documents. This endeavour is in line with the digital transformation effort undertaken by this Government and its vision of a less paper environment.

As MoKloud develops, it is expected to cover documents like driving licences, academic and professional certificates, corporate and other statutory documents.

## **MNIC**

The Mauritius National Identity Card Scheme, introduced in Mauritius in 2013, has reached its end-of-life as it has been in operation for almost 9 years. It is now high time to revamp the whole system.

I wish to inform the House that the scheme originally comprised the following components:

- Central Population Database (CPD)
- Certification Authority (CA)
- Mauritius National Identity Card System (MNIS)
- Shared Infrastructure

It is therefore proposed to replace the current MNIC by a state-of-the-art technology with enhanced security features and which could be used to provide a wider spectrum of customized e-Services.

My Ministry, which will be the technical arm of this project, and the Civil Status Division have already started to work on the project and have indicated that it should be implemented by the year 2023.

## **HIGH SPEED CONNECTIVITY IN SCHOOLS**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir,**

Access to the Internet is critical to realizing futuristic projects and it has the potential to enhance educational quality in a variety of ways. In this view, the Government will be investing in the deployment of WIFI connectivity in 155 secondary schools in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

This project will allow our secondary students and teachers to interact on online learning platforms, the more so that the COVID-19 pandemic is urging a new normal in our learning and teaching habits. The budget for this project is earmarked under my Ministry.

## **MAURITIUS EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES COUNCIL BILL**

This Government has always believed in investing in new technologies. The Governmental Programme provides for building the economy of the future. And we creating a *sine-qua non* condition to take our country to greater heights of development.

Emerging technologies have their rightful place in the Industry 4.0. Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, Internet of Things, Cloud computing, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality and many more are fast taking center stage in shaping the ICT landscape over the world.

In this ever-changing digital environment, this Government is setting up the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council with the soon passage of the Bill in the National Assembly for the second reading.

The Council's objective will be to spearhead new tech projects employing emerging technologies in the short, medium and long terms. The main objective is to ensure that as a Government we are prepared to offer the best of services using the latest technologies across all sectors of our economy, to citizens and businesses.

## **MoRendezVous**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir,**

The digital revolution is substantially empowering us to either completely eliminate queuing or make it simply more efficient for our citizens. As such, my Ministry has set up an Electronic Queue Management System, powered by the MoRendezVous mobile app, at several sites including the Passport Immigration Office. Visitors can schedule appointments on the MoRendezVous app at a specific time. Therefore, they can plan their visit and not have to wait for a long time to be served. This service will be extended to other agencies in the near future.

## **CAPACITY BUILDING**

To realise the Government's vision in the digitalisation of our economy, we need resources capable of leading this process. In this connection, a Digital Industries Academy will be set up for the training of our youth in ICTs and emerging technologies, together with the Economic

Development Board, the HRDC with the assistance of my Ministry. A stipend of up to 15,000 rupees will be provided to trainees of the Academy. Government is expanding the criteria for benefiting from the training fund operated by HRDC by including digital transformation initiatives.

## **NCB PROJECTS**

**Mr Speaker, Sir,**

Pursuant to the objectives set out in our Three-Year Strategic Plan 2019-2022 of “*becoming a highly interconnected society with access to the knowledge required for an innovation-driven culture*”, the National Computer Board will be implementing several national inclusive programmes in view of leaving no Mauritian behind when it comes to digital literacy and skills.

## **NCB - ChILD**

This includes: The Children Innovative Learning and Design programme will introduce programmable devices and robotics to our youngsters in primary schools for the first time ever!

This unique opportunity for children to design and assemble a basic robot and subsequently programme it, will teach them, through play, the foundation of coding to complement other essential skills which are reading, writing and counting.

Incidentally, this programme will also foster their creativity and boost their interest in STEM subjects - Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics - which unfortunately are being less and less opted for by students at the risk of having job mismatches in the near future.

### **NCB - Digital Maker Programme**

As presented in the Government Programme 2020-2024 and I quote “*as our country enters the next phase of its development, Government will create an environment conducive to learning through modern digital technology*”, Unquote. We are introducing an ambitious afterschool ‘Digital Maker Programme’ along similar lines adopted by developed countries.

The programme will be a project-based learning approach to introduce emerging technologies to our youngsters during school holidays. The aim is to nurture a new generation of digital creators and makers by introducing simple-to-use and open-ended technologies. Competitions will be organised regionally and nationally to further garner the appeal of these ‘boot camps’.

### **NCB - Technoloji dan ou porté**

To establish the foundations for new skills required to drive our country forward in a new era and to empower Mauritians of all walks of life to fully benefit from the digital services and opportunities, this caring Government



will launch its flagship project aptly labeled 'Technoloji dan ou porté' to wide-ranging target groups through innovative delivery channels.

This national project will be tailored for persons with disabilities, housewives, senior citizens, unemployed persons and the socially excluded strata. The program will promote safe use of digital technologies for accessing information, communication, e-Governance services, acquiring job skills, online learning and financial services such as online banking and shopping.

#### **NCB - GOC/DATA CENTER/DC/DR**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir,**

The Government Online Centre (GOC), which is the Data Centre for Government, hosts many applications, systems and email services for Government officials, and is being run since May 2005.

With the increasing need for digitalisation, there is continuous demand for more hardware and software resources by Ministries and Departments.

Furthermore, for even more resilience in running multiple systems in a single location and given the need to align with international norms and standards, there is an urgency to upgrade the existing Data Centre to a more robust one, in terms of hardware and software resources.

In this context, my Ministry intends, in the medium term, to embark in a state-of-the-art Tier IV Data Centre which will be a modern, reliable, energy efficient, secure and fit-for-purpose Data Centre. It will provide high availability of Government services and have access to reliable capacity that meets the expected medium to long term Government Data Centre demand.

As the world grows more mature in the digital age, the reliance on virtual data and the need for reliable data centres becomes increasingly critical. Information is the single-most important commodity of the future, especially with regards to Government services.

Scalability, security, redundancies, network strength, and infrastructural superiority are essential in a Data Centre which caters for Government applications residing in a secure location, and under strict policies and guidelines.

In this context, since presently there is no Disaster Recovery site for the GOC, my Ministry will soon replicate the most critical systems at the GOC to a Tier IV Disaster Recovery Centre (DR).

The DR will allow the recovery of the most important systems in the event of a crash of the main data center, that is the GOC. The capacities of the DR will gradually be scaled to accommodate more systems.

## **CSCC BILL**

**Mr Speaker, Sir,**

Cybersecurity is one of our most important challenges. As our economy becomes increasingly digital, more sensitive information is vulnerable to malicious cyber activity which is unfortunately becoming more frequent and more potent. My Ministry is coming with the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Bill which will help strengthen cybersecurity in both the public and the private sectors and the digital ecosystem as a whole, and making sure companies and the public have the tools they need to protect themselves.

Additionally, a new National Cybersecurity Strategy covering the period 2021 to 2024 is under preparation. This strategy will work alongside the National Cyber Incident Response Plan, which was recently finalised as well as the consolidated Security Operations Centre set up at the Government Online Centre.

## **8. MRIC PROJECTS**

**Mr Speaker, Sir,**

By now, it is trite to say that innovation is key to navigating this 'new normal'. Indeed, how governments and its agencies incentivize and influence research and innovation can have major implications for the future as these are critical factors in injecting resilience into the economy and society.

In this regard, I am proud to highlight some of the many initiatives and achievements by the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council over the past year.

As I am addressing the House right now, Mauritius is making a first step into Space Science and Technology. The first Mauritian nanosatellite has recently been launched from Kennedy Space Centre in Florida and will be deployed in orbit next week. This is huge leap for Mauritius, who affirms with this event which augurs a new thrust to the country's socio-economic development and dawns a new era of innovation and sustainability.

This is a momentous achievement and reflects the vision of the Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, of a knowledge-based economy.

The deployment of MIR-SAT1 from the International Space Station is scheduled on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June and approximately one month after the nanosatellite we are expecting satellite photos of Mauritius and our region.

Who would believe that a small country like Mauritius will be the first SIDS country to be able to send a satellite to space and would be in the league of Space Faring country as defined by the NASA.

## MRIC - Way forward

**Mr Speaker, Sir,**

The year ahead of us presents even more pressing socioeconomic challenges and as a caring government which promotes inclusive development, we will more than ever need to harness the potential of innovation to support entrepreneurship and livelihoods, the emergence of new activity sectors and employment creation.

Against this background, the MRIC is coming up with a series of new potentially impactful initiatives. Let me give you some examples.

The MRIC is organising “*Les Assises de la Recherche et de L'innovation*” supported by a National Innovation Campaign to reach out to each and every citizen and organisation in the country. The aim is to set the foundations for the development of a National Masterplan /Roadmap for Technology, Research and Innovation.

Over and above all these initiatives, the MRIC has pertinently been addressing challenges faced during the pandemic. As such, the Council has awarded 70 projects, in Mauritius and Rodrigues, to improve the resilience of the economy in key sectors such as smart agriculture, emerging technologies, circular economy, social innovation and blue economy.

## **9. CIRCONSCRIPTIONS NO. 9 - FLACQ/BON ACCUEIL**

In the same line, development projects, intended to address the needs of inhabitants of my constituency, Flacq/Bon Accueil, are also being made. Under the COVID-19 FUND, a number of projects have been completed and some are under progress by the District Council of Flacq, such as:

- Resurfacing of roads
- Construction or upgrading of children's playgrounds
- Construction of shelters
- Resurfacing or construction of new soccer pitches
- Outdoor Gym equipment placed at family corners
- Construction of pétanque pitches
- Painting of Village Halls and Sub Halls
- Uplifting of gardens
- Upgrading of cemeteries

In addition, the District Council of Flacq has also completed not less than 12 resurfacing projects across the Constituency (St Julien Village, Lallmatie, Camp Ithier, Bon Accueil, Central Flacq, Queen Victoria, Poste de Flacq, Belvedere, Laventure, Flacq) in regards to construction of drainage and resurfacing works, for a total of 146 million rupees.

As far as road works is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, 14 resurfacing projects have been completed in the past year for a total amount of 17,7 million rupees. In addition, roads have been extended at Petite Retraite and Lallmatie for a total amount of 6,9 million rupees.

Here, I wish to thank my colleague, Honourable Bobby Hurreeram for his support in carrying out these projects, which have a great impact on the quality of life of the inhabitants of the constituency and similar developments are ongoing.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

**Mr Speaker, Sir,**

This Budget lays out a path to meet our greatest challenges, not just the year ahead but for decades to come.

This Government, led by our Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, is building on the progress we've made over the last years, to rebuild our economy and make it the strongest and most durable, continuously fighting together this global pandemic.

**Monsieur, le Président,**

Cette année a été dure et la bataille contre la pandémie n'est pas terminée. L'arrivée des vaccins nous permet maintenant d'envisager l'avenir avec un optimisme prudent. Avec ce budget, ce Gouvernement mobilise tous les moyens nécessaires pour vaincre cette crise sanitaire et ses conséquences sur notre économie.

Et comme l'a dit le philosophe Confucius, « *La plus grande gloire n'est pas de ne jamais tomber, mais de se relever à chaque chute* ».

**Mr Speaker, Sir,**

Today, we are inspired by the progress each and every citizen of this country is making, thanks to their grit and determination in the midst of a global pandemic.

This Budget is about looking forward.

Together, we will move forward to adapt, innovate, expand and reach out for new opportunities, work hard, and make our country safer and stronger than ever before.

**Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.**