

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

Republic of Mauritius

National Assembly

Budget 2022-2023

Monday, 13th June 2022

Monsieur le Président,

Je vous remercie de me donner l'occasion de m'exprimer sur le budget 2022-2023 de ce Gouvernement.

Face aux grands défis de notre temps, pensons à notre population dont l'avenir est le véritable enjeu de nos débats aujourd'hui.

Ce budget vise principalement - grâce à des mesures sociales - à préserver le pouvoir d'achat contre les effets de l'inflation, encourager et assurer notre sécurité alimentaire, créer plus d'emplois et de la prospérité pour les Mauriciens.

Il s'agit d'un budget axé sur le peuple, pour le peuple !

Ce sont des mesures exceptionnelles en ce moment de transformation mondiale vers une économie encore plus solide et prospère.

Je dis bravo à mon cher collègue et Grand Argentier, l'honorable Dr Renganaden Padayachy, pour avoir abattu cette immense tâche sous la férule de l'honorable Premier ministre, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth.

Il a su mobiliser les ressources nécessaires pour soutenir et soulager l'ensemble de nos citoyens, malgré toutes les difficultés que nous traversons.

Ce budget donne force à l'engagement que l'Honorable Premier ministre, formulait au début de notre mandat.

Celui d'investir dans l'humain !

Ceci dit, attelons-nous au travail pour construire l'île Maurice de demain et réaliser notre objectif économique.

Ce Gouvernement, dirigé par un Premier ministre déterminé et bien inspiré, est aujourd'hui plus fort que jamais.

Notre mission est historique, car elle est sans précédent, face à une pandémie qui perdure et la guerre russo-ukrainienne qui a déstabilisé l'ordre mondial.

Monsieur le Président,

Comme l'a si bien dit Nelson Mandela lors de son discours d'investiture le 10 Mai 1994, je le cite : *"We know it well, that none of us, acting alone can achieve success."*

Et devant chaque difficulté, au lieu de baisser les bras, nous sommes revenus à l'essentiel et nous y puiserons une énergie plus grande encore, vigoureuse et puissante.

Comme une équipe soudée, nous ne laisserons pas un seul instant tous ces aléas nous décourager. Loin de là.

Nous sommes dévoués en tant qu'élus et travaillons toujours dans l'intérêt de chaque citoyen de notre République.

Ce budget fait la part belle à toutes les classes confondues et démontre notre proximité permanente avec nos citoyens.

Nous sommes et serons toujours un Gouvernement à l'écoute, responsable et qui agit !

Monsieur le Président,

J'ai suivi certains débats budgétaires dans quelques pays, par exemple la Nouvelle Zélande, en passant par Singapour ou encore La Guyane et La Jamaïque, entre autres.

Tous les Gouvernements ainsi que les parties de l'Opposition dans tous ces pays-là reconnaissent que la réalité planétaire causée par la pandémie, ou pour certains, également la montée des prix des commodités liée à la guerre en Ukraine.

Mais il me semble que Maurice est le seul pays au monde où nous avons une Opposition qui nie cette réalité, ou fait semblant de ne rien comprendre.

Monsieur, le Président,

Ce Gouvernement est élu démocratiquement sur la base d'un programme bien défini. Et je le précise, démocratiquement, parce que toutes leurs pétitions électorales, à ce jour, ont été un fiasco total ! La cour a même qualifié certaines de leurs pétitions comme frivoles, vexatoires ou encore sans aucune base raisonnable.

Ce programme est notre guide et même dans ce contexte international difficile, ce Gouvernement a déjà réalisé les mesures phares que nous avons promises dans notre manifeste électoral 2019-2024 :

- Le rapport PRB a déjà été appliqué.
- Les manuels scolaires sont déjà gratuits jusqu'en Grade 9.
- La pension de vieillesse a triplé en quelques années.
- Le salaire minimum a atteint les Rs 11,075 aujourd'hui. Ce Gouvernement est le premier à venir établir un salaire minimum. On n'oubliera pas que sous le Gouvernement d'alors, certaines mères de famille touchaient uniquement Rs 1500.
- Abolition de la taxe municipale, et j'y reviendrai au cours de mon discours.
- La création de 10,000 emplois dans la fonction publique.

- L'aide pour les soins à l'étranger qui est passée à Rs 1M.
- La construction de logements sociaux est sans précédent et les 12,000 maisons promises seront complétées et livrées avant la fin de ce mandat.

Ce Gouvernement a démontré de par nos actions que notre manifeste n'était pas rempli de phrases creuses mais des intentions fermes que nous avons réalisées.

Et ce budget vient encore une fois prouver notre sérieux.

Il a été non seulement plébiscité par le peuple mais aussi accueilli favorablement par la communauté des affaires dans son ensemble.

Monsieur le Président, avec votre permission, laissez-moi vous citer quelques exemples.

"Le Budget répond dans l'ensemble aux priorités identifiées" - Business Mauritius.

"Nous accueillons favorablement les mesures de ciblage pour les plus vulnérables" - La Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Maurice.

"C'est un bilan positif, aligné à nos attentes et nos stratégies" - la MEXA.

"Un budget bon père de famille" - Ernst and Young.

"Nous accueillons positivement l'annonce d'un plan d'action pour consolider l'avenir du tourisme" - L'Association des Hôteliers et Restaurateurs de l'île Maurice (AHRIM)

"Il est intéressant de noter la mise sur pieds d'un Digital Industries Academy pour la formation des jeunes talents" - l'Outsourcing and Telecommunications Association of Mauritius (OTAM)

“Ce budget, tout en visant la transformation de l'économie, tente également de répondre à la préoccupation immédiate de la population”
- Deloitte.

Toutes ces opinions sont des opinions indépendantes et pas les nôtres, donc pas partisanses, Monsieur le Président.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BUDGET 2022-2023

Mr Speaker, Sir,

Reckoning the challenges facing our country, this Government has worked out a budget which propounds the remedial measures to effectively deal with them in the short and medium term, including immediate relief to the population.

These measures include the following:

- Rs 3 billion for food security, grants for planters, fishermen, breeders.
- Rs 15 billion for social measures.
- Rs 5 billion by the DBM to support SMEs.
- Rs 1 billion to be invested in water distribution projects.
- We are investing in the modernisation of our health system.
- Recruitment of more 8353 Public Officers.
- Rs 3.8 billion to pursue the National Flood Management Programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

This Government has at heart the aspirations of its citizens and has left no stone unturned to meet their demands and even beyond expectations.

One of them being the increase in pension benefits.

We recognise and value the immense contribution of our seniors and history will recall that there is only one Prime Minister who has taken bold measures to enhance their welfare, that is Honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE MINISTRY

Mr Speaker, Sir,

The ICT sector has been a very resilient economic sector as demonstrated by its robust growth rates even over the pandemic period in 2020 and 2021.

It has been growing at a rate hovering around 5 and 6.5% and has been constantly offering job opportunities to our youth. Today, more than 30 thousand persons are employed in the ICT sector.

Huge efforts have been made by the Government through my Ministry and we will continue to support this sector and consolidate the local ICT ecosystem.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

Allow me to inform the House that with regards to prices of broadband internet, Mauritius is among those countries where the price is well below the world average.

Further, with the coming into operation recently of the METISS cable and yet another submarine cable in 2023, the price of broadband internet will definitely become more competitive.

Concerning internet speed, the country is already fully fibered since 2017 and is presently already availing itself of 5G technology. This will no doubt help to boost further the ICT sector.

Technology is moving fast and so are we. Towards a smarter Mauritius!

This digital transformation implies the redesign of the tools and methods used in the machinery of Government and the public sector at large.

And my Ministry, is up to the challenge!

Digital Industries Academy

To satisfy the manpower needs of the IT sector, the tertiary sector works in close collaboration with the industry in designing relevant IT courses and the delivery thereof in sufficient quantity.

Given the resilience and growth of the sector, and fortunately so, the need for yet more qualified talents is continuously felt.

Some IT Firms do resort to provide specific specialised courses to their personnel as in any country and the Government will supplement these types of training through the provision of courses by the Digital Industries Academy which is expected to train around 1000 professionals in the forthcoming year, starting next month.

REFORM OF THE MINISTRY

Mr Speaker, Sir,

In this era of accelerated digitalisation, it has become more than imperative to re-imagine the institutional setup of my Ministry which dates back to the early 90's.

As I announced last year, the Central Informatics Bureau, the IT Security Unit, the Central Information Systems Division and the Government Online Centre will be re-structured under a new unit that will meet the demand for a more effective and efficient public delivery.

In this view, a team of consultants of the e-Governance Academy of Estonia has recently completed an assessment of the existing institutional setup of my Ministry and has made recommendations for the setting up of a Mauritius Digital Transformation Office which will be the lead organization for the implementation of major Government digital projects.

I can assure the House that this initiative is well on track.

Furthermore, as announced in the 2020 Budget speech, restructuring of the National Computer Board (NCB) is under way in line with recommendations made by a consultant.

The objective is to make the NCB become the lead organization responsible for the transformation of Mauritius into a world class digital economy by fostering required skills and making technology widely accessible to all. The legal framework governing the NCB will have to be completely reviewed given the new orientation of the organization and a new legislation will be presented in Parliament.

In the same line, 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 relevant to our realities.

The business model of the Mauritius Post Limited is also being reviewed by an external consultant and recommendations from the latter are expected by end June 2022 for a new cohesive strategy geared towards making the company more profitable whilst enhancing public service delivery.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

My Ministry has now set up the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council (METC) after the coming into force of the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Act 2021 in August last year. This new institution has as main responsibility to scrutinize our business environment and propose recommendations to push new and emerging technologies in our industry.

The METC plans to organise an international workshop on Artificial Intelligence in the next quarter to encourage the adoption of emerging technologies in the country.

Furthermore, following the adoption of the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act 2021, the Computer Emergency Response Team of Mauritius (CERT-MU) is now operational under my Ministry.

This crucial department serves as the national agency for coordinating cybersecurity response activities and promoting cybersecurity at national level.

With all our efforts, Mauritius is currently ranked first in Africa and 17th in the world on the Global Cybersecurity Index 2020 of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MINISTRY

Mr Speaker Sir,

In line with the digitalisation of Government Services to better satisfy the needs of all citizens and businesses, my Ministry is currently completing numerous projects.

GINS / High Speed Connectivity

A new Government INtranet System will now be able to serve more than 500 sites having high-speed connectivity to the Government Online Centre (GOC). I am pleased to inform the house that these sites will include deployment of High-Speed Connectivity in 160 secondary schools across Mauritius and Rodrigues. This long-awaited project is already being implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology.

MoKloud

Mr Speaker, Sir,

Who would have imagined that today, any citizen would be able to download their Birth Certificate online? We made that happen!

Through a digital safe every citizen will have access to the electronic format of their birth certificate, marriage certificate, digital vaccination pass and the certificate of electricity supply which acts as a proof of address.

The Certificate of Character and Digital Driving License will soon be available through the MoKloud Platform.

MITCI BUDGET MEASURES 2022-2023

Chatbot

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

In line with our strategy to transform public service delivery using new and emerging technologies, my Ministry is in the process of implementing an Intelligent Virtual Assistant, commonly referred to as an AI Chatbot solution, to be integrated to the national Government portal and the websites of Ministries/Departments.

The Chatbot will revolutionise the citizen's experience by responding to queries and will interact with citizens in *Kreol Morisien*, English and French.

Smart Parking / Payment of fines

Another flagship project that would enhance the quality of life of our motorists is the Smart Parking solution. It will enable drivers to buy and use e-Parking coupons through their smart phones, instead of the usual paper coupons.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

This Budget set out last week by the Minister of Finance, delivers a stronger economy and better living conditions for our people. It shows that this Government led by the Honourable Prime minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, has always been concerned with the well-being of his countrymen.

It was indeed a huge challenge for the Minister of Finance.

Within the inevitable post-pandemic limits of any Budget, Honourable Padayachy has made provisions to give continuous support to the population.

Most importantly, we are delivering our promises to our people, even in these unforeseen economic circumstances.

And with this Budget, this Government is looking forward, not backwards.

It sets the path for a future that will be full of change, full of new challenges and above all full of new opportunities for a stronger Mauritius!

This Budget has indeed dawned a new era in the lives of our people!

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.