

MINISTER'S STATEMENT –SPEECHES

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2017-2018) BILL 2017 (No. VII of 2017) (19/06/17) Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Appropriation (2017-2018) Bill 2017 (No. VII of 2017).

Question again proposed.

At this stage the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun!

(00.47)

The Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me start by answering to some of the queries of the two hon. Members who intervened before me.

I will start with hon. Baloomoody who seems to be very worried about the YEP trainees. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me reassure the hon. Member that the YEP trainees are not recruited to be on the establishment. They are, as the name implies, trainees who come for some experience. In fact, the intention of the YEP project is to give them the experience so that eventually they may be recruited by the private sector or public sector. As he mentioned himself, only one of them could get recruited through the PSC. Now, the PSC Regulations is not a thing that is linked to my Ministry. It is something that is overall and we have to abide by same.

However, it is important to note - and I raise a point earlier - that never ever were they given to understand that they would be given a special or a priority treatment.

However, I must say that many of the private primary schools will be recruiting holistic teachers and the fact that they have been trained, they will automatically have the privilege of being recruited by these private institutions. The hon. Member also mentioned the Polytechnics. I will come to that in the body of my intervention. I will give explanations to whatever he had queried.

Hon. Mrs Perraud made a long speech on the Education Sector. She started by saying that the amount that we are spending on the preschool sector is extremely low, that the amount that we are spending in the TVET sector is inadequate and she came up with percentages; 2% for the pre-primary sector and 3% of the budget is for the TVET sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we just draw the attention of the hon. Member that when we talked about the budget of the Education Sector, we are talking about Rs16.6 billion and when we talk about 2% of Rs16.6 billion, it comes to around Rs250 m.

When we talk about 3% of this amount, it comes to around Rs500 m. It is totally wrong to say that we do not pay attention to these two sectors. I will, while going through my speech, come on these specific points again.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member stated that nothing was going on well in the Education Sector, that teachers were unhappy, students were unhappy, the preschool puéricultrices were not happy, no one in the sector felt that it was going in the right direction.

The Tertiary Education Sector, she mentioned, has been given only Rs1.3 m. This is totally wrong, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! She should go back to the figures and check the value attributed to the Tertiary Education Sector. Only the University of Mauritius received around Rs650 m. So, coming to say that the amount allotted to the tertiary sector is Rs1.3 m., it is totally wrong. So, I will not talk about this any further. But as I go through my speech, I will come back to each and every sector that she has mentioned and I will show where she has been going wrong.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, much has been heard in this august Assembly on the 2017- 2018 Budget, depending obviously upon the party perspective from which it is used. It is true what we say depends on where we stand. The same Members sitting on this side a few months back, now sitting on the other side had totally different things to say.

However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is something that many may not have really grasped, although it is at the core of this Budget. I am referring here to the overall overarching title of the Budget, which is, 'Rising to the challenge of our ambitions.' This title is apt in more ways than one, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. For one thing, it reflects a characteristics hallmark of the Mauritius entity, a capacity to be ambitious on one side and for another our readiness to give ourselves the means to realise these ambitions. Because, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is where our strength lies, the ability to rise to the occasion and to prove wrong the prophets of doom. Who does not recall the pessimism that was highlighted by a Nobel Prize Winner, Margaret Mead? Who can forget the overcrowded barracoon tag latch on Mauritius? But, the resilience demonstrated by our population proved them all

wrong.

Similarly, we can and we will rise to the challenges of our ambition to make this country a lone star for the region. This Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, gives us the means to do precisely that. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget highlights five challenges facing the country as it sets itself firmly on the high-income economy transformation path. These five challenges relate to –

- (i) fostering higher growth for more and better jobs;
- (ii) investing massively in the infrastructure of the future;
- (iii) further improving the quality of life our people;
- (iv) ushering in a New Social Paradigm (inspirer une nouvelle vision d'une société juste et compatissante), and
- (v) consolidating macro-economic fundamentals, that is, consolider les piliers fondamentaux afin de s'assurer une base économique solide, M. le président.

Who can deny that education and training are one of the central pillars that will help face and overcome these challenges? Hence, the sustained emphasis this Government is placing on the implementation of the reform agenda embarked upon since 2015. This reform programme is articulated around a set of strategic planks. One of these planks is the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education Programme. Another strategic plank is the reform of the TVET sector and the third is the transformation of a higher education sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, last year when the budget was presented, the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development laid necessary provisions for the Nine-Year Schooling programme both for the recurrent and capital budget. As implementation is being effected on a phased basis, the House will note that provision has been made for successive financial years. Indeed, the funding has been spread over five years, donc, M. le président, pour ceux qui s'inquiétaient à propos du financement du Nine-Year Schooling, soyez rassuré les fonds sont bel et bien là.

This year is a watershed year; it is a turning point for our education reforms both for the primary as well as the secondary subsectors. This year, we have done away with the Certificate of Primary Education; we are introducing the Primary School Achievement Certificate, the PSAC as a new assessment at the end of Grade 6. We are now fully poised for the transition of all Grade 6 learners to Grade 7 in January 2018, which is yet another landmark.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will briefly highlight some major transformations that have been articulated and that are to be sustained in the context of the implementation of the education reform.

First, the pre-school subsector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Today, no one can deny the importance of the early years of education and no one denies it. Early childhood development is, in fact, a starting point which will lead to the Nine Years of continuous basic education reform. My Ministry is already investing in qualitative improvement of education in both the private and public pre-primary schools in Mauritius so that children get to be ready for primary school education.

Let me now give an answer to the hon. Member, Mrs Perraud. She has been saying that we have not been giving sufficient attention to the pre-primary sector. In this very Budget, the hon. Minister of Finance has made it a point to come up with a fund to go to 125 preprimary schools in the deprived areas.

If this is not a critic, what is then, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

(Interruptions)

Now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned that a budget of Rs350 m. goes to the preprimary sector.

Secondly, let me tell the hon. Member that from the moment we came into power, we have tried to bring up capacity building in the preprimary sector. The Authority has worked and is still working on a capacity building programme. We have ensured that children profiling is done at the preprimary sector so that when the child leaves the preprimary sector to enter the primary schools, the child comes with his learner profile so that the teacher in Grade 1 knows what type of student is in front of her. We have also come up with a School Readiness Programme, where the teacher, using a particular tool, determines whether the child has attained the standard for her to start the curriculum in the primary school.

It is important for people to know that a lot is being done for this sector and when we talk about the preprimary sector, we are doing a lot. And let me tell the hon. Member, she has been saying that we are lagging behind. In Mauritius, from 2015 onwards, we have been chosen as the ICQN Lead (Inter-Country Quality Node) for Africa by the ADEA and Mauritius is leading. We have just had a workshop two weeks back, where many African countries have turned to us to learn how we

have improved the preprimary sector and how we are heading in this particular sector.

So, coming to say and to make gratuitous statements that the preprimary sector is not being taken care of is totally wrong, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

And I would like to come back to this, and let me say that the Budget provides funds to give means to reduce the disparity between the preprimary schools and this specially holds good for 125 preprimary schools operating in deprived regions. The provision was served to build the capacity of the staff and to enhance the quality of teaching/learning environment. And this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is demonstrably equity in action and it is only proper that this starts right from the early stages of learning.

We all know that for every dollar spent in the preprimary sector, you will save up to 10 to 15 dollars later because you would not have to go for remediation, you will not have to provide psychological support and many other such services. The trend today is to provide a strong foundation at the level of the preprimary schools to ensure future learning by investing more in the preschool years and this is what we are doing, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Now, the second plank of the reform, the Early Support Programme. One of the most significant and far-reaching reforms is the introduction of the Early Support Programme for Grades 1 and 2 pupils. A key element for in-time remediation since the very start, this is the means of preventing the accumulation of learning deficits and ensuring retention while also cutting down on drop-outs in the long term.

M. le président, c'est un moyen puissant de diminuer le déficit d'apprentissage et de récupérer les enfants très tôt. On a si longtemps décrié le taux de décrochage scolaire très élevé à Maurice. Et cela, nous le savons tous, c'est dû à l'accumulation des déficits d'apprentissage et finalement menant au décrochage.

Let me share with the House that this Early Support programme has already started and is already yielding rich dividends.

Cette année, le budget permet le recrutement additionnel de 257 Support Teachers.

On ne lésine pas sur les moyens, le ministre des Finances, je dois lui dire un grand merci pour cela. Si cette réforme réussit, c'est parce que le Cabinet est en faveur

de cette réforme. Si cette réforme réussit, c'est parce que le gouvernement donne les moyens au ministère de l'Éducation pour réaliser cette réforme.

Et je crois là qu'il nous faut...

(Interruptions)

...remercier le Premier ministre et le gouvernement général pour le soutien qu'on a donné au ministère de l'Éducation pour que cela se réalise.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when we talk about the Early Support, we need to realise that it is useless to cry after the Grade 6 examinations come. We need to make sure that as many as possible children are kept on the rails and this from the very beginning. And I would like here to put on record the good work being done by the Support Teachers who were recruited last year. These young teachers have been trained and are working with our students using new techniques, des pédagogies novatrices to make sure that these students learn and feel happy being at school and this is being done. This is extremely important to catch them early, to make sure that they do not accumulate learning deficits. This is how we will allow them to succeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Third plank, holistic education, what makes the difference with the introduction of the NYCBE the Nine Years Continuous Basic Education, is the attention being paid not only to the cognitive development of learners but also the whole person, their integral development.

The goal is to have children emerging from the system not only as competent but also responsible citizens.

M. le président, l'éducation concerne tout le monde. Quel genre de personne nous allons rencontrer dans notre lieu de travail, la personne que nous côtoierons sur la route, notre voisin, quel genre de personne nous allons travailler avec. Tout cela dépend de l'éducation et c'est normal que tout le monde, toute la population s'intéresse à l'éducation.

The goal, I have told you, is to make of our children responsible citizens. The Budget gives us the human resources to just do that. I must thank the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development for having given us the means, thus the number of trainee primary teachers now moves to 660 as from this year's Budget. The number of holistic education will be boosted to 430 and the present cohort of support teachers now at 53 will move on to 257. If this is not translating intent into action, I wonder what it is!

Education holistique comprend l'éducation physique. With regard to the promotion of physical education, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the adage: 'Mens sana in corpore sano': 'A healthy mind in a healthy body' certainly holds good here.

Thus to promote the practice of sports activities, we have introduced the natation scolaire in 30 primary schools since January 2017 in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Mauritius Sports Council.

Now, that the Budget has made provision for four additional bassins d'apprentissage, one in each zone, the facilities would be extended to more students in the primary schools so as to make the teaching of swimming skills and water safety more accessible to learners. I must add, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that it is sad that whilst we live in an island entourée d'eau, entourée de l'océan, chaque année nous voyons beaucoup de jeunes perdre la vie bêtement tout simplement parce qu'ils ne savent pas nager. Et je pense que la natation scolaire c'est quelque chose de formidable qui permettrait à nos jeunes d'apprendre à nager mais qui les protégera aussi.

Let me inform the House that my Ministry is equal implementing the After-School Sports and Fitness programme, a well-structured programme launched on a pilot basis as from May this year and in collaboration once again with the Mauritius Sports Council and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. This programme covers some 1,850 Grade 4 pupils in 56 primary schools and 8 in Rodrigues. Obviously enough, the programme is immensely popular. It is accordingly being rolled out in more schools this year.

M. le président, cela devient encore plus important quand nous constatons, comme je l'ai dit, le nombre des jeunes qui perdent bêtement leur vie au bord de la mer, en temps d'inondations et autres.

Again with regard to holistic education, the development of eco-friendly mind-set and behaviour is fundamental. It is precisely for this reason that sustainable development initiatives are being implemented. The campaign 'Clean-Up Mauritius' is a major preoccupation of the Prime Minister himself and rightly so.

There is a necessity to sensitise our children and youth such that concern for sound environment is strongly embedded. As I have said earlier in this Assembly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, 181 primary schools and 63 secondary schools have already embarked on the 'Clean-Up Mauritius', and embellishment programme launched in March this year under the aegis of the PMO.

My Ministry has now given the means to extend this programme to all schools. As for the Eco-Schools Indian Ocean programme, 28 primary and 47 secondary schools in Mauritius and all the schools in Rodrigues are involved.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, la réforme enclenchée touche le cycle secondaire également et ce à partir de janvier 2018. Dans cette optique, mon ministère travaille pleinement à une mise en œuvre efficace de celle-ci. Et là pour répondre à l'honorable Baloomoody, je voudrai dire que les consultations ont déjà commencé.

Nous passons à la phase de l'implémentation. La formation des professeurs débute le mois prochain. Tout le travail se fait d'une façon systématique. L'honorable Baloomoody disait tout à l'heure que les consultations avaient débuté en décembre dernier mais ce n'est pas vrai. L'honorable Baloomoody a la mémoire courte. La première des consultations avait été faite en 2015 avec les membres de l'Assemblée et l'honorable membre était présent. Il y avait plusieurs autres consultations.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a number of changes regarding the secondary sector is in offing. Let's take them one by one. All the learners of Grade 6 will move to Grade 7 in regional secondary schools after the PSAC evaluation. All of them!

After three years, they will sit for the National Certificate in Education and at the end of Grade 9, they will have three options. Some would go to the academies; others will remain in their regional secondary schools to pursue their studies and some may even choose to go to vocational training centres. Now, when we talk about vocational training centres, it is under the MITD. They will get trained. The MITD is doing a wonderful job. I will later come to the figures because I was told that they were not popular. This is totally wrong. I will give the figures to the National Assembly after some time. Now, it is true some pupils would not attain the required standard at the PSAC level. These pupils would enter into a four-year extended stream. This stream will offer an adapted and flexible curriculum that best response to their new learning needs and their learning pace.

Every regional school will have an extended stream class that will not have more than 20 students. Why? So that we can give them more attention! So that we can follow them; provide them with the support required! So that they manage to pass their NCE.

Appropriate approaches have been devised to provide the students with a maximum chance of success including a foundation programme in the first year.

During that period, the students will be given appropriate help to regain self-confidence, to build up their self-esteem, to learn, to relate with others and increase their trust and belief in schooling and studies.

Rectors have already been asked to identify those teachers they consider more apt to work with these young adults. This is obviously where the prevocational teachers with their stocks of hands-on experience are better placed for a dedicated approach vis-à-vis these students. So, once again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me reassure hon. Members of the House, as I have done a number of times before, all prevocational teachers would be on board and will be working with their students in schools.

Let me stress, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the Extended Stream Programme is different from the prevocational educational in two ways. Firstly, it preaches inclusion and secondly, students will all be engaged in a programme that will ultimately lead to the National Certificate in Education which will be properly graded National Assessment. Le NCE sera conçu de la sorte à ce que tous les élèves ayant fait l'effort voulu auront la possibilité de passer et de réussir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, another innovation we are introducing as from next year is the Students Support Programme. This programme aims at giving students the opportunity to have free access to the best learning materials that will be online and easily retrievable on digital devices. Students will have the facility to learn at their own pace and place throughout the year after school hours. M. le président, c'est une façon qu'on leur donnera afin qu'ils puissent consolider les acquis de la journée. We must not forget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the use today are digital natives and they will easily pick up and learn through technology.

In a broad manner of speaking, this programme will bring tuition to the home of all the students. Allow me to inform the House that the MIE and the Open University are collaborating and tapping the expertise of the National Council of Educational Research and Training of India for this venture.

Let me, now come to the private providers of the secondary education. Again, to allay the apprehensions of hon. Baloomoody, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on several occasions I have made it a point both inside the House and outside it to allay the apprehensions of the management and staff of grant-aided Private Secondary Schools. No staff will lose his or her job. No schools will close down as a result of educational reform.

On the contrary, the right conditions are being created to support teaching and learning in the private secondary schools. Let me clarify, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The existing practice for pedagogical inspection and quality assurance to be carried out in State and private secondary schools are done by officers of my Ministry.

The PSEA will now be call upon to look into pedagogical inspection and quality assurance in teaching and learning being carried out in the private secondary schools. 16 new posts of quality assurance officers have been created on the establishment of the private secondary education authority. They will be operating under the national quality assurance framework of my Ministry. These posts will be filled within the next few months.

On the other hand, the PSEA will also be equipped with its own educational psychologists and educational social workers. Let me inform hon. Mrs Perraud that we presently have 23 psychologists and one head of the department at the Ministry. This is definitely not enough, but we have to do with our resources and these psychologists offer their services throughout the educational sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this will go a long way towards addressing the problem of indiscipline in schools, absenteeism and dropouts. All the reforms that I have been talking about so far are directly in line with the SDG 4. They stresses the need to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.

Two key words, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, quality and inclusiveness, and practically all strategic actions in the reform agenda are moving in that direction. In fact, the inclusion of learners with special education needs remains a priority for this Government.

Education is a matter of rights, and rights for all. To that effect and as stressed in the budget, we are working on the strategy document for SEN. In fact, the paper is almost ready.

We have a consultant who is presently working with us at the Ministry, the draft paper has been prepared and it will soon go to Cabinet.

Now, this strategy views inclusion education for every learner across the entire spectrum of abilities as a right and not a privilege. Equally, the infrastructure is being adapted for a barrier free, disability free, friendly environment in secondary schools for physically challenged learners as well as personnel and other stakeholders. We are also making sure the schools are retrofitted with ramps,

handrails and have links between building blocks as well as provided with adapted toilets.

I have to thank the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for having increased the budget for the grant-in-aid to Rs115.2 m. and this will go to the 42 NGOs running 54 SEN schools and this is over and above the integrated units that we have in our schools.

I must also thank the Prime Minister for having given this year five scholarships for students with disability to go for higher education, to go for the tertiary sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, j'aimerais bien, à ce stade, dire tout le bien que je pense de ces ONG qui travaillent d'arrache-pied afin de promouvoir l'environnement digne pour ces enfants qui leurs sont confiés. Afin de mieux les encadrer, promouvoir leur savoir-faire, nous venons de l'avant avec une autorité pour ce secteur.

The overarching aim of the authority will be to enhance learners life chances and opportunities for active participation in society and to build the inclusive society in which Mauritius ethically aligns itself. The authority will also be responsible for the formulation of norms, standards, regulations and monitoring of all SEN institutions. They will also take care of the training requirements.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, reforms in education alone are a huge undertaking. For the sake of brevity, I will just take up some other high points of the vaste chantier

we are engaged in. Rs590 m. will go for the upgrading of school infrastructure.

The digital transformation that was mentioned by the hon. Member, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has already become a reality in our schools.

I believe that right from the primary school level the appropriate technological tools need to be provided so that our pupils do not end up being just passive consumers of technology. We must not forget that we are dealing with digital natives. Accordingly, a huge procurement exercise is on for the provision of some 1,700 PCs for our primary and secondary schools.

The early digital learning project is a major breakthrough project to expose Grades I and II pupils to ICT. I would like, here, to thank the Indian Government for the grant provided for the purchase of these tablets. We are currently at the tendering stage, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. As for the digital content, it has already been prepared by the MIE and is ready for upload. We are accordingly welcoming the

provision of some Rs350 m. in the next budget for the extension of the project to Grade III students.

One of the objectives is to connect our schools and the school community on a single platform. In this context, Microsoft has provided us with the Office 365 platform to enable unlimited online collaboration among teachers, between students and teachers, between schools and between schools and the Ministry.

Another high point is, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the collaboration that we have with the Ministry of ICT. We are going to have an e-platform for collaboration again between schools and between teachers.

Another high point in this budget is the increased allowances to laureates. Our education system has always acknowledged and recognized those who invest a lot of efforts and shine at the national and often international scene.

It is a fact that the quantum of allowances provided to our laureates at both graduate and post graduate levels has not been revised for more than a decade. The last revision, in fact, took place in 2004. I would like here again to thank the Minister of Finance for having taken on board the suggestion of the Ministry to increase the allowances for those scholarship awardees both at national and international level.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the budget presented by the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance goes a long way to its highlighting the transformation of Mauritius into a high income country by 2023.

The knowledge economy is the foundation on which every nation seeks to build its progress in the 21st century. My ministry is, in fact, fully engaged in strengthening the foundation for the future economy by investing in both skills development and high education as a key to boosting growth.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, according to the Africa Competitiveness Report 2017 released in May by the World Economic Forum, skills remain an important barrier for development on the African continent. The report recognises that in view of growing shortage of technicians, engineers and other high skilled workers, there is a severe risk of skills gap increasing. This is where it becomes vital to invest in the TVET for productive employment and future employability. What does this mean for us in Mauritius? It means that we have to usher a change in mindset, a shift in attitude towards valorising technical education.

Scandinavian countries as well as Germany, Korea, Singapore have demonstrated how successful such endeavours have been. This is why the reform in the TVET sector is so wide ranging.

We are rebranding the sector, reviewing its curriculum, upgrading equipment as well as building capacity of trainers and this is why I have been telling hon. Mrs Perraud that she was wrong in what she was saying. We have already got the expertise from Singapore. We are reviewing the curriculum. We are spending on equipment. We are renovating our centres.

In this connection, the MITD has sought the assistance of Singapore's Institute of Technical Education Services, a principal provider of career and technical education and a key developer of national occupational skills certification standards.

On n'est pas en train de se croiser les bras, M. le président. Nous sommes en train de travailler. On ne fait pas de tam-tam chez nous. On travaille tranquillement et les résultats seront là.

I would like here to mention that revalorising also implies budgetary increases.

And again, I must thank the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for earmarking Rs310 m. for upgrading educational hardware and infrastructure in our training institutions namely, MITD and the projects that hon. Mrs Perraud was mentioning, l'Ecole Hôtelière Sir Gaëtan Duval, Sir Rampersad Neerunjun Training Centre, Le Chou Training Centre, all these are being done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Let me give you the project status for these projects. L'Ecole Hôtelière, an apex training provider in hospitality sector and given the rising demand for trained labour, it is imperative to undergo further expansion to the growing demand for trained labour in hospitality and tourism sector. And, let me tell the hon. Member that every year we receive students from Africa, Ghana, Burkina Faso and other countries coming to Mauritius for training at the MITD. Construction work is starting in July 2017 for Sir Rampersad Neerunjun Training Complex.

We have not forgotten Rodrigues, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the context of the implementation of the TVET reform, Le Chou Multipurpose Centre is being upgraded to enable introduction of high level courses pitched at National Certificate Level 4, increase enrolment capacity, provide for more conducive learning environment and for the introduction of new courses in Rodrigues. The estimated cost of construction will be Rs24.7 m.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to also underscore the need for Mauritius to engage in strategic partnership with renowned foreign training institutions. We have just signed la convention de partenariat between La Chambre de Métiers et de l'Artisanat de La Réunion and the MITD. We have also an active collaboration

with l'Académie de La Réunion for technical upgrading of MITD trainers, a programme that will run over two years.

Coming to the National Skills Development Programme launched in December 2016, let me tell the hon. Member that the 3,000 people she was talking about who had registered, in fact, of them only 1,500 registered and many of them had already got employment. Finally, only 800 came for the training of which many have completed and the others are still on training.

Let me state, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the National Skills Development Programme is building solid bridges between the world of work and the training providers in order to match skills needs of enterprises at the sectoral level. The direct participation of employers and workers together with training providers ensures the relevance of training.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the recommendations made by the experts from Singapore pertains to the elaboration of a National Manpower Plan to guide TVET efforts in support of Mauritius economic development. In this context, HRDC is working with l'Agence Française de Développement to develop a strategy for human resource development in Mauritius. The policy document will establish competencies, skills that Mauritius requires at present and in the future and the means and strategies to achieve it.

So, I must add that the Skills Development Authority will soon be set up. And the Skills Development Authority will have strategic policy objectives: the coordination and planning of the TVET sector, the identification of skills, sustainable financing mechanisms for TVET, regulation of skills development sector, improvement of partnership and coordination, amongst its stakeholders, that is, HRDC, MQA and the MITD.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the higher education sector. For the information of this august Assembly, the World Economic Forum released its Africa Competitiveness Report in May this year. The good news is that Mauritius figures at the top amongst the most competitive countries in terms of higher education and training in subSaharan Africa. It is followed by South Africa and Cape Verde.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for his interest and concern about the sector. Let me reassure the House that a number of measures are being taken in the domain of higher education where we also have 65 private TEI operators. Measure number one taken up by hon. Mrs Perraud, the Higher Education Bill, let me inform the House that the legislation has already been prepared and has been sent to the State Law Office for vetting

and will soon land on the table of the Cabinet. The proposed legislation has already been forwarded, as I have said, and it will bring up the setting up of the Quality Assurance Agency, the research fund distribution mechanism and many other issues.

Now, the second measure in the sector refers to research funds. Much has already been said about the ranking of public universities. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has been saying a number of times: 'This is the rank of the Mauritian universities', notwithstanding the fact that these universities especially the UTM was set up some 17 years back only. It is common knowledge that the improvement of a University ranking at the international level is usually dependent on two factors, quality of education and conduct of research.

Research especially leads to the improvement of both the level of the lecturers as well as their teaching methods. Again, we have to thank the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for having provided my Ministry with the means through the Research Fund to start promoting our portfolio of scientific research. Officers of my Ministry and those of TEC are already working on how best to operationalise this important Budget measure.

The Mauritius High Education Desk is also being set up. It is worth remembering, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that transforming Mauritius into an education hub rests on sound and even aggressive marketing campaigns to recruit international students. In this regard, a dynamic Mauritius High Education Desk will be set up to showcase the higher education landscape in Mauritius.

The hon. Member was just mentioning that she was surprised that hon. Oree had mentioned meeting, foreign students in Mauritius. It would appear that the hon. Member does not really know what is happening in the tertiary sector.

(Interruptions)

You mentioned foreign students, you were wondering where they come from, etc.

So, this is what I have to say. The medical colleges are filled with foreign students coming from South Africa and from India. In the tertiary institutions at Médine which is not a public university granted, in l'Université des Mascareignes, in UTM, you have students coming from abroad and getting into these institutions. Obviously, when she talks about the declining number of students entering the tertiary sector, I would ask her to just have a look at the demographic trend as well.

The number of students leaving the tertiary education sector last year, the number of students leaving this year, and the number that will be leaving next year would also be declining. We have only 12,000 students who have entered the primary sector this year in Grade I. So, obviously, there is a declining population, so this trend will be reflected in the number of students leaving or entering institutions, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

So, far from losing its attractiveness, our tertiary education sector is, in fact, drawing and attracting more students. The Mauritius High Desk that I was talking about will also disseminate information and provide the advice to those local and international students on high education opportunities in Mauritius. I must also say that we would need to ensure that information given on Mauritius on Air Mauritius, for example, should include information about our tertiary education sector. Mauritius is poised to becoming an educational hub, regional or even international one.

We must not forget that people send their children to us for studies for various reasons; the intercultural experience that you have in Mauritius cannot be found anywhere else in the world. Mauritius is known to be a safe haven, isn't it? The safety also attracts students to Mauritius and, on top of that, you will find that, most of the British Universities coming to open their doors in Mauritius, are also trying to tap the students from the African continent. We all know that every year there are African students entering the tertiary education sector. And we can definitely tap on this clientele.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what is also interesting is that we have been discussing with foreign universities to see how best we can collaborate. We have been discussing with Australian universities, with the university from Reunion island to see whether we can move on to having shared modules, where modules offered by the University of Mauritius and those by the University of Reunion could be recognised and could be accepted by the two different institutions. We are making the first steps towards trans-border recognition of qualifications. And this is something wonderful that we can do in terms of research possibilities jointly with Reunion Island, with the Seychelles in terms of papers that can be written, research on linguistic domain. So, lots of things can be done together with the foreign universities and we are moving in this direction. We are talking about multi-campus.

Certain universities get their students moving from one campus to the other to provide exposure to these students. This is what we also can do.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the polytechnics. I have heard Members of the Opposition stating that the Director of Audit had mentioned that

there is wastage at the level of the polytechnics. What they do not know is that the polytechnics were, in fact, - as mentioned by an hon. Member - brand new campuses that were initially meant to be rented to foreign institutions coming to Mauritius by the former Government, by the former regime.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are dealing with the needs of this country. We all know that this country requires middle management, high level technicians for the Vision 2030, for the implementation of the economic pillars and this is the reason why these campuses have been converted into polytechnics.

With regard to these buildings one of them was ready towards the end of 2015 and the other two were completed by April 2016. We did not sit back and rest. We have been working with foreign institutions; we have been developing the curricular. In a few weeks' time, we shall be starting courses in nursing, along with MIH at the polytechnics in Pamplémousses. For the ICT, I will come to it. I will tell you what we are doing. So, do not think that we did not do our work.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the concept of polytechnics, it seems is still not clear in the minds of many people. So, let me take it from scratch. One of the complaints of industry for a number of years has been that graduates coming on the labour market do not have the skills that the industry requires for immediate employability, despite the graduates having an appreciable level of education. We are now working with industry for the development of the curriculum to ensure the relevance of the courses.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, within the next two years, polytechnics will produce highly skilled middle management-level professional staff. And these polytechnics graduates will be ready for immediate employment; they will be meeting exactly the needs of industry. This is the modus operandi of our polytechnic education which is called upon to help Mauritius bridge skill mismatch gap, and gear Mauritius and its economy towards new heights in the near future.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have opted for some of the best collaborative international partners of repute from Canada, New Zealand for the fields of Tourism and ICT.

On the other hand, we are forging ahead, as I have said earlier, with the Ministry of Health in the nursing field.

Other technicians for the medical sector will also be trained. Courses related to green energy, engineering related fields and new and emerging sectors in tourism sector are also being pursued. Additionally, and as announced in the Budget, courses related to robotics, big data and the internet of things will soon be

launched at the Reduit Campus. We are already actively seeking international partners of high repute to help in the conduct of these courses.

We are also envisaging having co-awards. Finally, polytechnics will also be a pathway for students who would have followed MITD run programmes so that they can move to higher education and higher national diplomas. I must say that the polytechnics will welcome students having completed their SC and HSC as well. We are also carrying out tracer studies to ensure that the training provided is adequate and we are also identifying the areas which need to be done.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there was a PNQ on the UTM and they were complaining that the infrastructures are not proper. Now, the UTM has started operating in the year 2000.

From the year 2000 to year 2014, no one saw that there was anything missing or lacking at the UTM. But, as soon as we came, we starting bringing about changes, and again, you will note that we have been à l'écoute. The best education or marketing or research will all fail if the students are not happy in their learning environment. In this regard, this Budget shows that Government is attentive to the needs and demands of our children. The decision to provide a special infrastructure fund to revamp the infrastructure of our public-tertiary education institutions starting with UTM is more than loadable. We are aware that no student will enjoy studying in an inadequate and less than suitable surroundings. I have met personally the students and I have noted that whatever they were asking was légitime. And in a matter of weeks, we settle this problem.

Obviously, we gave the boost that was required and we ensured that the students got what they needed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is pledging that we will, over the next few years, upgrade the infrastructure of public TEIs in keeping with the international ambition of the country. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to consider that in the tertiary sector, coawarding, collaboration with other institutions should be the word of the day.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for bringing up the issue of career guidance and career education. This allows me to set the record right. Just because it has not been mentioned in the budget, it does not mean that it plays second fiddle in the hierarchy of Government actions.

We are fully aware of the need for the youth to be better informed about current and future labour market needs, to be aware of the ecosystem within which they will make career choices at various stages of their life. Work is already on for the

development of an integrated career counselling system. This will widen access to career awareness, career education, career information and career management services.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we must not forget that students today are being trained for careers, for jobs that have not yet been created. So, we need to make sure that they get the proper counselling. That is why we are talking about the reforms. We want the students to adapt to the evolving world. ICT enabled instruments will also be used to deliver this information in a far more reachable, flexible and cost-effective manner. The services of a UK based consultancy firm have been enlisted to the attempt and the consultants are working on a strategy to set up contextually relevant career counselling.

M. le président, bien que ce budget ne soit pas axé uniquement sur l'éducation et la formation, il y a d'autres mesures qui valent bien leur pesant d'or et je faillirai à ma tâche si je n'ouvrais pas une parenthèse ici pour en parler même brièvement.

M. le président, le Premier ministre et ministre des Finances, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth nous a offert un budget qui nous prépare pour un avenir rempli de grandes possibilités. Sa vision est claire: une meilleure qualité de vie pour le peuple, une nouvelle société basée sur l'équité, une économie stable et florissante tournée vers la modernité. J'ai suivi attentivement les interventions des membres de l'Opposition. Je ne parlerais pas que de ceux qui ont parlé aujourd'hui, mais je parle en général. C'est décevant de constater qu'ils n'ont guère saisi la portée même des mesures annoncées. Prenons quelques exemples!

The negative income tax, l'impôt négatif sur le revenu est une mesure qui promeut l'effort. Celui qui fait l'effort, celui qui travaille et qui perçoit un salaire faible bénéficiera du soutien du gouvernement. Les salariés percevant un salaire mensuel de moins de R 10,000 obtiendront une subvention de l'État allant jusqu'à R 12,000 l'an dépendant de leur salaire et cela si le revenu total du foyer ne dépasse R 30,000.

Selon nos projections, ce sont quelques 150,000 personnes qui devront en bénéficier.

M. le président, il s'agit là d'un outil extraordinaire qui désormais nous permettra de mieux lutter contre la pauvreté, de réduire le chômage et d'augmenter le pouvoir d'achat des milliers de travailleurs à Maurice, qui puisaient les incitations à l'effort et à l'emploi et à la productivité sont plus que jamais maintenues.

L'introduction du negative income tax demeure une mesure que je qualifie sans hésitation d'historique et de pragmatique.

Deuxièmement, l'exemption fiscale chez les employés de maison. On le sait tous, la plupart de ces personnes travaillant principalement pour des particuliers ne recevaient pas de fiche de paye. Désormais, avec cette incitation, les employeurs seront encouragés à enregistrer leurs employés de maison ce qui représentera un win-win situation avec l'exemption de la taxe de l'employeur et la possibilité d'une pension à l'employé à la retraite.

M. le président, on parle là des milliers d'employés de maison que ce gouvernement est en train de permettre d'intégrer le système formel. Déjà la classe syndicale à Maurice se réjouit d'une telle mesure. Je prendrai toute une liste, le maintien des subsides sur le gaz ménager, la baisse du prix de la farine, les logements sociaux, le recrutement des personnes dans le secteur public. M. le président, le gouvernement dans son élan à combattre la pauvreté à travers le pays depuis 2015 fait de nouveau cette année ci, provision dans le budget de nombreuses mesures pour doter les familles en difficulté d'un toit décent. Pour le logement social, un montant de R 6.8 milliards y est prévu. Il serait bon de faire ressortir que depuis 2015, plus d'un millier de maisons étaient construites et qu'actuellement 1,248 maisons sont en voie d'être complétées. La situation de plus de 250 squatters a été régularisée et le gouvernement se penche en ce moment sur le cas de 140 squatters et une somme de R 225 millions est prévue à cet effet.

M. le président, dans notre démarche vers une meilleure distribution de richesses, le Premier ministre et ministre des Finances est venu avec un Solidarity Levy qui aidera les plus vulnérables. Pour la première fois, une personne avec quatre ou plus de dépendants à sa charge aura son income threshold pour la taxe amener à R 550,000. La liste des mesures que contient le budget affectant positivement la vie quotidienne de chaque citoyen est bien trop longue, et je m'arrête ici.

Si l'opposition semble sceptique, la population, elle, se rend compte que ces mesures sont très louables. M. le président, l'attitude de l'Opposition reste triste, décevante et navrante. Ce qui dise que rien n'est bon, insulte l'intelligence des gens. Le syndrome comme dirait mon camarade, l'honorable Sinatambou, 'narien pas bon' semble les toucher énormément. Je leur demanderai : mettez-y un frein !

Prenez un peu d' hauteur ! Car il y va de votre image et de votre crédibilité même. Comment peut-on venir sans relâche brosseur un tableau pessimiste et caractérisé par une morbidité aussi extrême ?

M. le président, c'est inacceptable ! Certains membres de cette Chambre sont même allés jusqu'à prédire que le Metro Express will kill people on roads. On est même allé jusqu'à exprimer le souhait qu'il y ait des riots, émeutes dans le pays.

On n'a même incité à la violence, M. le président. Dans cette auguste Assemblée, j'ai entendu des déclarations gratuites et ahurissantes. À titre d'exemple, certains n'ont cessé de marteler: jeunesse en perdition, génération perdue, ONG, un pitié, parmi d'autres.

M. le président, de par le langage tenu par plusieurs membres de l'Opposition, c'est clair, il semblerait qu'il souhaite qu'il arrive malheur au pays. On parle du chômage. On parle : 'Qu'est-ce que le gouvernement a fait pour la création de l'emploi ?' Et là je voudrais dire. Tout à l'heure, l'honorable Baloomoody me demandait : 'Qu'est-ce qui est arrivé aux personnes qui touchaient R 1,500 par mois?' Laissez-moi le rappeler que l'honorable Lutchmeenaraidoo était venu avec une mesure. Ces gens-là touchent déjà de l'argent et si je ne me trompe, dans les environs de R 8,500 par mois.

Deuxièmement, vous avez mentionné qu'ils sont des employés du ministère de l'Éducation, ce n'est pas le cas. Ce sont des employés de la PTA que le ministère de l'Éducation est en train de travailler maintenant pour trouver une formule pour les aider.

(Interruptions)

On arrivera avec une solution, mais ce ne sont pas des employés du ministère. Il faut le dire.

Maintenant, parlant de recrutement, le nombre de personnes qui ont été recrutées depuis que nous sommes au pouvoir par le secteur public est énorme. J'ai dit bien énorme parce qu'en comparaison avec ce qui s'est passé pendant les 10 dernières années, il n'y a pas eu de recrutement. Laissez-moi donner des chiffres. Parce que semble-t-il, vous faites beaucoup de recherches, laissez-moi vous donner des chiffres. Si je ne parle que de mon ministère, nous avons l'année dernière recruté 347 Secondary School Educators et dans ce budget nous avons prévu 210 autres. L'année dernière, nous avons recruté dans le secteur primaire 591 Trainee Teachers et dans ce budget nous avons prévu 477 autres. Si je prends la liste de General Workers, l'année dernière nous avons recruté dans les environs de 300 et 220 cette année nous allons procéder au recrutement d'à peu près 300 autres. Je parle que de mon ministère. Je ne parle pas des autres ministères.

Déjà là nous voyons un montant extraordinaire. Laissez-moi vous dire qu'est-ce qui s'est passé dans l'ancien régime? Le nombre de Secondary School Educators recrutés pendant 10 ans, 101. The number of primary school educators recruited, 112. Et vous là ! Et on vient nous dire qu'on ne fait pas de recrutement.

Je ne vais pas reprendre les chiffres. Il y a plein de chiffres, si vous allez continuer à suivre vous allez voir il y a plein de personnes que nous avons recrutées dans le secteur depuis notre arrivée.

M. le président, venons maintenant à Agaléga, M. le président le projet d'une piste d'atterrissage à Agaléga vise un développement futur de notre territoire. Si ce gouvernement est allé aussi loin dans sa démarche en vue de maintenir sa souveraineté sur l'île Chagos c'est que nous tenons à tout prix à sauvegarder notre territoire dont Agaléga.

L'honorable Bodha vient d'expliquer toutes les démarches entreprises par le Mentor Minister. Aujourd'hui venir trouver des dessins sombres et des ulterior motives aux intentions indiennes c'est vraiment aller très loin. L'honorable Bodha vient de le dire, quand nous parlons de Agaléga nous sommes en train de penser au développement touristique que peut proposer cette île. D'ailleurs si je ne me trompe il y a quelques années de cela on en parlait déjà entre 2000 et 2005. Ce que nous faisons nous autres c'est que nous passons à l'action, nous ne gardons pas des projets en l'air. Et là avec l'aide de l'Inde nous allons sûrement réussir. Je demanderai aux membres de l'opposition de bien suivre l'exemple de l'ancien Leader de l'Opposition, l'honorable Paul Bérenger, qui lui s'est félicité de la démarche indienne.

La population, M. le président, a des attentes, le gouvernement en est conscient et agit en conséquent. Sombrier dans la démesure, faire de la surenchère et de la démagogie sont à éviter à tout prix et ne vous font guère honneur. La population vous juge, n'oubliez pas elle vous regarde.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me come back to the education and training portfolio once again. I believe it was Victor Hugo who said and I quote – "Il n'est rien au monde d'aussi puissant qu'une idée dont l'heure est venue"

In Mauritius, education and training have come to occupy a centre stage in the psyche of the population. The people want to see societal transformations and they know it is education and training system that can give an accelerative thrust and translate intent into reality. People also want to see a system that is at once inclusive and equitable. People equally expect to see youth being prepared for jobs that exist today and jobs that are called upon to emerge tomorrow.

I have endeavoured to demonstrate how my Ministry is doing all that and more. I will now seize the opportunity to express my warm gratitude and thankfulness to the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for giving me and my Ministry the means to serve the children and learners of this country. The various measures enunciated in the Budget demonstrate his concern for the well-being of the nation, his determination to blaze new economic trails and his commitment to fulfil the

vision of the Republic. I must congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for this endeavour. This Government and this nation are all with him and all the way.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have no lessons to learn from people who have themselves gone out of their way to put their hands in the coffers of this country, and to spend it and waste it shamelessly. So let me end by once again quoting Victor Hugo – “No force on earth can stop an idea whose time has come”

Thank you for your attention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.