

Budget 2008/2009

Honourable E. Sinatambou, Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications

I would, therefore, like to start by tackling what I consider to be three monumental fallacies which have been emitted on the other side of the House. The first fallacy is about this side of the House allegedly continuing the work that they had started. The second fallacy is the nonsensical remarks we have heard about an alleged poverty bluff and the third one concerns this apparent abolition of subsidies on gas, rice and flour.

Let me start with the first one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, *“pour continuer le travail que nous avons commencé”*, disent-ils.

Premièrement, ceux-là ignorent la situation extrêmement douloureuse dans laquelle ils ont laissé ce pays lorsqu'ils ont été bottés hors du pouvoir: la zone franche en chute libre avec une croissance négative de plus de 12% en 2005, 25,000 pertes d'emplois dans le textile, une main d'œuvre réduite de 91,000 employés à 67,000, la fuite des investisseurs Hong Kongais. Indeed, we could not continue this type of work.

(Mr. Sinatambou): Des indicateurs économiques monstrueusement au rouge, M. le Président! Nos dettes publiques qui excédaient les R 118 milliards en 2005, une croissance économique de seulement 2,2% en 2005 comparé à 9,3% en 2000, un tourisme en recul, avec une croissance du secteur touristique qui avait dégringolé de 13,6% en l'an 2000 à 2,4% seulement en 2004. Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, we could not continue this type of work that they had started.

Un sommet des petits Etats insulaires, où ils ont donné R 700 millions de *duty-free* en cadeau à leurs petits copains..

(Interruptions)

Plus de R 700 millions de *duty-free* en terme de limousines et de cabriolets, gratuitement à leurs petits copains. Nous ne pouvions continuer ce genre de travail. M. le Président, le genre de travail que nous avons débuté concerne, entre autres, le rapport du *Pay Research Bureau*. Les recommandations du *Pay Research Bureau* qui ont été appliquées *in toto* par le gouvernement de l'alliance sociale, une augmentation moyenne de 36,9% comparée à celle de 21,4% en 2003.

Une application du rapport du PRB qui coûte R 5,2 milliards, c'est-à-dire, 2% du *PIB*, comparée à leur R 2,3 milliards seulement en 2003. Un paiement qui se fait en une seule tranche, en dépit du montant conséquent; un gouvernement qui n'augmente pas la *TVA* pour financer le paiement du *PRB*; un paiement qui touche 83,000 employés et 23,000 retraités. C'est la première fois, M. le Président que le *PRB* est payé en une seule tranche, et cela à la demande du Premier Ministre comme l'a fait ressortir le Ministre des Finances dans son discours du budget.

Indeed, we could not continue the type of work that has started, because they had demolished the economy of this country. If we just look at the Rs118 billion worth of debt – I recall having said in the debate of last year's Budget how our yearly interest was actually going to be Rs12 billion and how for the preceding year it had been Rs9 billion. This is the type of work that they started and, indeed, it is good that this country got rid of them, and I am convinced that this budget is actually a budget which is the right follow-up to the first two budgets whereby we are now encouraging growth.

M. le Président, nous ne sommes pas comme eux. Nous avons pris des mesures concrètes pour lutter contre la pauvreté extrême et c'est ce qui m'amènera à dénoncer le deuxième argument fallacieux de l'Opposition. Je me permettrai tout d'abord de rappeler à l'Assemblée Nationale que nous avons proposé un fonds d'un milliard de roupies pour lutter contre l'extrême pauvreté. Un deuxième fonds d'un milliard de roupies pour démocratiser la formation; un troisième fonds d'un milliard pour financer la sécurité alimentaire et un quatrième fonds d'un milliard pour financer l'énergie renouvelable, par opposition à eux qui ne faisaient que détruire l'économie de notre pays.

Let me now come, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, to the second fallacy, whereby they are claiming that we are lying when we are speaking about absolute poverty as described by the Hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development of this country. From the figures issued on the 31st October 2007 by the Central Statistical Office, we were told earlier before this House that the number of poor households, as at that day, had reached the figure of 26,900. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the reason for which we can prove that this argument is a fallacy, when they allege that we are actually lying when we are saying that we are looking after some 7157 families in absolute poverty, is because they have failed, either to inform themselves or to inform the whole of the population what is meant by absolute poverty.

The UN definition of poverty is of people earning one dollar a day, that is, in poor countries, in the least developed countries in the world. The definition of poverty for higher income countries is fixed at two dollars a day.

(Interruptions)

Yes, Sir! The definition given by the World Bank for poverty in richer countries is 50% of the median income. When you look at this definition which applies to richer countries, you will have 8% of the Mauritian population in it, which reflects the figure of 26900 of the CSO for 2006/2007.

As regards the poverty figure of two dollars a day, it would be less than 1% of Mauritians who would fall under it. As regards the definition of poverty of the United Nations applying to LDCs which is one dollar a day, there will be no one in this country who would fall under it. However, what this Government has done is to define absolute poverty and we have taken the figure of those earning Rs100 a day, which is when we reach this figure in excess of 7000 families. Let us not come and try to confuse the population! Because, unfortunately, this is what the Opposition tends to do too often, confusing people and we have to stop this dirty game. And, indeed, the same applies to the third fallacy which I want to address

which is that they allege that this Government has actually abolished subsidies on gas, rice and flour, *et que c'est l'usager qui le fait à travers la STC*.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, every single commodity which is imported by the STC and, eventually sold on the market, has either a loss or a profit element in it. After the financial year ends you make a sum total of whatever sales you have done and there will be a surplus or profit – at least when we are in power. When they are in power, it is losses, and massive losses. Since the State Trading Corporation will make a profit, that profit will normally go to Government as dividends. Government has chosen not to take the profit and to use it as a mechanism to cross-subsidize flour, rice and cooking gas. What is this nonsense that we have heard that the subsidy has been abolished? I am convinced, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, that ...

(Interruptions)

No, I am quite sure the Hon. lady has not understood. If the Hon. lady is still insisting, then I am sure she has not understood; otherwise, it is quite clear....

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr. Sinatambou: Otherwise, it is quite clear that anyone who is reasonable and honest will agree that it is simply three fallacies which have been uncovered and disclosed to this country.

There is a fourth element, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, which I believe should be addressed coming from the other side of the House. It has been heard, firstly, that they have calculated, they have been dividing the figures for a number of days to say that it is about Rs6 more per day that pensioners will be getting when given a 9% full compensation BRP. They have calculated, divided and reached the figure of 50 cents per day when they speak of the increase in income support. What we would like to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that regarding the basic

retirement pension, the payment which is made is more than what inflation is for this year that is a figure of 9%.

As regards the payment made as income support, indeed, it has been increased from Rs85 to Rs100 per day or Rs40 to Rs100 per day for food aid recipients, depending on the circumstances. But what is the point per month, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir? Those same people who indebted this country to the tune of Rs1 billion per month...

(Interruptions)

We are paying the interest that they burdened this country with! The debt servicing cost us Rs12 billion last year!

(Interruptions)

They fail to realise! They did nothing of any type of increase of that kind when they were in power. It is easy for them to talk; they did nothing when they were in power.

I am quite sure that if the people compare, this country will see where the truth lies. Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would submit to this House that the Hon. Prime Minister has given to the nation and to this august Assembly what I consider to be an unprecedented demonstration of his inherent capability and of that of his Government to overcome the economic challenges of our time, and this in the face of the serious threats not only to the world economy but also to our own country as characterised by soaring oil prices and food insecurity. And it is against those odds, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the Hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development has presented a budget which brings comfort and relief not only to the vulnerable groups but also, I am convinced, to the whole population while, at the same time, proposing a series of bold and innovative measures aimed at reinforcing the economic foundation of our society.

Our sacrosanct democratic traditions indeed demand that the Opposition be heard and this is what this august Assembly has been witnessing tonight. However, even if our opponents are given all the latitude required for them to express their views, I wish to place on record the sheer obsession of some of them who seem to continue to distort the truth, who seem to continue to magnify improbabilities.

(Interruptions)

And those who, unfortunately, abuse the privilege of this House by simply distorting facts and figures. That is the problem very often in this National Assembly. If some people distort facts and figures, if some people keep tainting the truth, how will we...

(Interruptions)

That's exactly what has to be avoided because the people of this country need to be able to understand, comprehend what is happening. The point we are making is that this type of approach whereby we go into actual fallacies, trying to make them appear like truth, cannot help democracy. True it is that democracy demands that everyone be heard, but it must be serious, it must be seen ...

(Interruptions)

Not at all! I am speaking the truth, Sir. Maybe, unfortunately, for you, but I am.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I heartily join all those who before me have congratulated the Hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development. I believe that the measures taken under the guidance of the Hon. Prime Minister and announced in the Budget have been the stroke of a maestro and those who know me know that I do not use those types of words in vain.

(Interruptions)

I am not reading actually. Don't worry! These are just data.

I am convinced, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, that this budget is actually a landmark in the history of this country because I am convinced that it will be remembered by future generations. It supports and sustains our ongoing efforts to actually make a better Mauritius and to restructure our economy. It is a budget to ensure that our citizens actually take advantage of and benefit from growth and manage the impact of globalisation.

Just to take a few examples, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to enumerate a few of the measures which have struck me as being those measures which will make that this budget can be seen as having been the stroke of a maestro. If we look at the figures on Foreign Direct Investment, whatever will have been heard, even if people could not actually manage to see that the truth lies on this side of the House, I believe that the figures concerning Foreign Direct Investment are more than illustrative of how the economic measures taken by this Government are actually unprecedented in terms of embettering the economic affairs of this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, my understanding from the figures is that following the bold measures to reform our economy since the coming into office of this Government, private investors from foreign lands have collectively invested into Mauritius Rs20 billion and that is over a span of time of 3 years. And my understanding is that when compared to existing figures, this outstanding Foreign Direct Investment figure is equal to the Foreign Direct Investment of the previous 20 years. And they have got the gut of speaking of bluff on this side of the House! They have got the audacity of speaking of *maquillage*! They should see what they have done. As a matter of fact...

(Interruptions)

It does not matter. We are telling you that the Foreign Direct Investment in the 3 years that we have been in office is actually equivalent to the sum total of 20 years of FDI of this country, and, in fact, we should be applauded for that. What is

happening is that it is those figures which today should forbid those people on that side of the House from actually daring to criticise.

As a matter of fact, I just recall because after all we are all brothers and sisters. Matthew Chapter 7 Verses 3 to 5 states: why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother: let me remove the speck from your eye and look the plank is in your own eye. And what is the final verse of this chapter? It says: hypocrite, first remove the plank from your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. This is what this is about. Of biblical reminiscences is the hypocrisy of those on the other side of the House who dare speak of bluff when we have such type of self-revealing figures to explain the feat of this Government. I like this expression used by the Hon. Member: *la poudre aux yeux*. That's their trade mark, *jeter de la poudre aux yeux*. That's the trade mark of the Opposition in my respectful submission to this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, I think you are going too far now. I have given you enough latitude to quote. I think you have to come to more terrestrial affairs.

Mr. Sinatambou: Of course!

(Interruptions)

This is also very down to earth, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir. As has been said by the Hon. Deputy Prime Minister, our reforms have successfully taken GDP growth from a 2% and declining trend to a rising growth. I do entirely subscribe to the value proposition that this Budget is a robust one, which is going to bring resilience to our economy when we are forecasting a growth rate of 6.2%, up from 5.5% into 7% in 2007-2008.

After mentioning foreign direct investment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, we will have to realise and remember that total private investment as a percentage of GDP has risen from 15% in 2005 to reach 20% in 2007, and is expected to go

higher in 2008, its highest level ever at 21%. For the third consecutive year, both the Budget deficit and debt to GDP ratios will fall.

I would like here to mention something, which may not have struck the Members on the other side of the House, and I don't understand why. Even private analysts have actually stated that subsidies on cooking gas, flour and rice have been on the increase, up to Rs700 m. to Rs1.3 billion for a year. Whether it is called cross subsidy or not, we explained to those on the other side of the House how this is, in fact, subsidy. Therefore, we don't understand how they can be harping about no subsidy on these items, when even independent analysts are, in fact, criticising that it is too high. Isn't that ironical, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir? Financial and taxation analysts who don't actually share the philosophy of this Government are saying that we are subsidising cooking gas, flour and rice too much by increasing the subsidy up to Rs700 m. to Rs1.3 billion in a year. And they say that we have abolished subsidy! You can see why this very wrong approach at attempting to confuse the people of this country must be brought to light, must be criticised and must be condemned. I hope that, for doing that, they stay over there in opposition for another seven years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thought that if one wanted to actually see clearly how they mismanaged and how we are managing properly, maybe it would be best for me to take my own sector. Indeed, Sir, if you look at the sector which falls under my responsibility, that is, the ICT sector, one will see that the prophets of doom on the other side of the House can only be silenced, and that, in fact, a new era of economic regeneration, progress and prosperity is the only truth to be reckoned with. When I say that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is because I am convinced that history will remember the zeal and courage mustered by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development who, despite all criticisms – I was waiting for a smile on his face –, actually turned out to be right. He turned out to be very right and, indeed, he has managed to put into reverse gear the economic and social decline of this country since we took office in July 2005. Indeed, it has been a painful effort at start. It has been a painful

effort for one and all at start, but I believe we are emerging stronger. Over all, no one could actually disagree that we have become more competitive. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to press on with our restructuring and not fear change at all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I was just saying how the best way to actually prove, beyond any doubt, that they actually mismanaged and that we are managing in the way that it should, is by reference to the subject matter falling under my responsibility. For that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind you, very briefly how, during the debates of the 2007-2008 Budget, I had actually highlighted the strategies and actions which were being undertaken to make of ICT the fifth pillar of our economy and, this, through the formulation and eventual implementation of a national ICT strategic plan. There, I recall how fallacies were being written that it would never happen, it was too late, etc. My intervention had focused on a number of priority policy measures and projects, which would gradually transform the country into this regional ICT hub, as well as transform the lives of our citizens.

I am quite happy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the qualitative and quantitative progression which I shall be highlighting in the course of the next few minutes speak volume in terms of our achievements. This has been possible through the measures taken by this Government, and from the multi-pronged approach of the national ICT strategy plan, which is the linchpin and vector for the sustainable development of the ICT sector in this country. What is the result? When I was not in politics, I used to hear about White Paper, Green Paper, Blue Paper, strategy, Blueprint, and then the big word is 'strategy'. So, I was adamant that, if we had a strategy for the ICT sector, it should be something which has a lifetime; something which has time lines, budget lines, concrete, palpable projects, objectives and outcomes. I am quite happy that the strategy for the ICT sector has been used as a reference point for the programme based budgeting, which we have been innovating under this Government. But, what is the strategy? The strategy gives us for five years, from 2007 to 2011, no less than 124 projects; each of them

with a time line and a budget line. Those 124 projects are for the five-year time span of the strategy. But, we have made sure that we actually have the first 57 projects to be initiated in 2007-2008, the next 48 projects in 2008-2009, and the last 19 projects in 2009-2010, leaving the last two years for the implementation, completion and finalisation of those projects.

And what am I happy to announce to this House today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir? I am happy to announce to this House that for the 57 projects due to be initiated in 2007/2008, 56 have been initiated, only one could not and in a way I am happy we could not because only God is about perfection. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is what I say about this side. What about that side? This is the second National ICT Strategic Plan that this country has known in its history. The first one was called the National IT Strategic Plan 1998 to 2005. We were in office from 1998 to 2000, they were in office from 2000 to 2005. The Strategic Plan of 1998 to 2005 had 8 building blocks known as the SHOCKING Framework. SHOCKING because the acronym was derived from the first letter of each of the 8 building blocks. S stands for standards, H for human resources, O for organisation incentives, C for computerisation of the Civil Service, K for key drivers, I for IT industry, N for national applications and G for global vision.

(Interruptions)

SHOCKING! It was meant to shock because we had initiated the IT Ministry and we needed a strategic plan to pave the way forward, to chart the road ahead. Pursuant to this 1998 Strategic Plan four action plans were actually elaborated and finalised. Do you know what they did? They implemented nothing in those four action plans during the five years they were in office and they have the gut of coming before us and say that we are bluffing. In fact, I wonder whether it is one plank they have in the eye or whether it is a plank in each eye in view of the way in which that they actually manipulate facts and figures. It is a rhetorical question. No answer is required, Sir!

Second element, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, would you believe it that it is for the first time in Mauritian history that we have a national ICT policy in this country. It is the first time that an ICT policy has been elaborated and approved to realise the vision of Government in the making of an information based economy and of an information society in our country. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, nine broad areas of intervention have been identified in this national ICT policy to achieve our vision and objectives. 'Our' not 'mine'! This is not the royal singular. 'Our' means the government, under the leadership of the Prime Minister and under the financial supervision of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development. And those nine broad areas of intervention are about strengthening legal, institutional and regulatory frameworks, developing ICT infrastructure, enhancing productivity and efficiency across economic sectors and SMEs, ICT in education, developing a culture of cyber security, accelerating e-government, harnessing ICT for social development, ICT leadership in the region and boosting of ICT experts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, when you look at the ICT policy and ICT Strategic Plan, not only is it the first time in the history of this country that we have a national ICT policy document, but it is also true to say that Mauritius is the first country in Africa to have together a national ICT policy and a national ICT strategy. This is to show the difference between them and us and how the people of this country must actually look with a lot of suspicion at any of the criticisms they would hear about this Budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is another point which I would like to raise, a point which is very important, especially, when one considers that ICT is actually an engine of growth. ICT is actually one of those media which would actually push this country ahead and this is the issue of information security. Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the critical issues of international relevance today, which has to be addressed by every single Government of the world is information security. I think everyone will agree that there is today a global concern for information security and that no country and no Government is

actually fully protected from cyber attacks. Here, I will take the liberty to share with all the Members of this House something very serious which happened not later than last month when we were the target, when Mauritius was the target of a cyber attack when a perpetrator attempted to bring down all the services which are offered round the clock, through the Government on-line centre. And how did the perpetrator actually proceed? He proceeded by downloading two very large files of about 40 Megabytes, but he was downloading them ten times per second and he was doing that from the website of the Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit. So, he just used his PC, went on a site of Government where services are offered 24 hrs by 7 and started downloading the two big files ten times per second. Of course, no server delivering those types of services can actually handle such an abnormally large number of requests, and this could only result in the failure of the portal since it was clear that the perpetrator was using an automated device to download those heavy files ten times every second. We managed to circumvent this attack through measures taken by the IT Security professionals who work at the Government on-line centre in consultation with other stakeholders in the IT security arena. Of course, the matter is now being investigated by the Police, and even if the Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act of 2003 provides for hefty punishments - because imprisonment can be up to 20 years and fines up to Rs200,000 - the problem is not the corrective action, the problem is how to prevent such attacks from taking place. And in terms of information security, last year we did announce that we would have a computer emergency response team to be set up. And, I am very happy that we launched a computer emergency response team for Mauritius, otherwise known as CERT-MU on 15 May. But what needs to be known, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that this essential initiative is geared towards addressing information security at a national level and improving computer security readiness in the country; and what I think is good to be known by the country is that the CERT-MU is the third computer emergency response team in the African region and is being implemented in three phases which is why we thank the Hon. Deputy Prime Minister for having made sure that he increased the capital expenditure budget of the Ministry of

Information Technology and Telecommunications by more than 60%. What also needs to be known, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that, in line with recommendations from the Geneva Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, there is, today, an urgency to prepare strategies to address issues of security and trust in the information society, as was also announced in the debates on the Budget Speech last year. However, what has happened since then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that this country now has a National Information Security Strategy whose objective, whose gist is to combat all threats to information security. What the country should know is that Mauritius is the first country on the African continent to have developed a National Information Security Strategy. That's the difference, Sir, between them and us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the other area on which I would like to address this House today concerns E-Government. As part of the Government's mandate for change, my Ministry has been requested to spearhead the Government's efforts in ICT and, in particular, to usher an era of E-Government for the benefit of all our citizens. We are using E-Government to actually ensure that through ICT we promote more efficient and effective Government, that we are able to render Government services more accessible, that we allow the greater public more access to information, in short, making Government more accessible to citizens. There is something very important to remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir. ICT must not be seen only as an industry. ICT is in particular an enabler and, as such, we need to recognise that for the country to benefit from E-Government, we have to reinvigorate further our efforts and make more prominent use of new technology towards achieving our goals. What I would like to say, Sir, is that it is very easy to speak of computerisation of the public services, but one knows that this is no easy task, especially when one is actually entrusted with the task of making it happen. I am very happy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, to announce that this Government has been able to implement a number of very important E-Government projects among which are the cardiac centre computerisation and the blood transfusion service information system, to name but a couple. Why I am saying this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, is because there have been a number of sad

cases. I recall of, at least, one case where all the operations concerning blood transfusion were actually being done manually and, as a consequence, we could not save the life of a lady who had just given birth to a baby girl. It was so tragic that, because all the operations were actually being done manually, more time had been spent to actually process the operation of ensuring blood being transfused when, in fact, if done in a computerised manner, a life would have been saved.

Many more projects are currently being implemented or planned for 2008/2009 among which the Immigration and Border Control System, the Digital Recording System for the National Assembly and a Crime Occurrence Tracking System. However, the reason for me to take the time of the House to go into this is not just to share my views that I am convinced that all these efforts will contribute towards sustaining if not improving our E-Government readiness but, in fact, it is because I would like to share with this House that I am convinced that in 2008 our country should climb the world rankings when we look at the services being currently developed and the Electronic Identification Card system project that my Ministry is pushing ahead. The Electronic Identification Card based on smart card technology will replace the old national identity plastic cards. This project will start in 2008/2009 and span over four years and provide to each of us a very secure and multi-purpose identity card. What only remains to be said on the issue of E-Government is that Mauritius currently ranks second in Africa, behind South Africa according to the United Nations E-Government Readiness Index of 2007. We are second after South Africa, but one must keep in mind that the ICT budget for South Africa in 2007, the year under reference, stood at 15 billion South African rands while our national ICT budget in 2007 was less than 1% of the South African ICT budget. That's again to show, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the difference between their *maquillage*, their bluff and what we are actually doing concretely at the level of Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, another feature of ICT which demonstrates beyond any doubt that it is the opposition which is about bluff and blablabla is the issue of E-Services. Last year when I intervened on the Budget 2007-2008, Mr.

Deputy Speaker, Sir, I stated that over 40 e-Services were currently being finalised and would be operational shortly. I am pleased to inform the House that, in fact, 48 e-services have been developed and launched. When I look at the performance of the previous Government in the field of e-Services, I can only hope that they themselves will feel guilty for what they did. In five years of their mandate, they came up with a shameful five e-Services while we developed 48 in one year. Their five e-Services were applications for lump sums by retiring civil servants, applications for scholarships for tertiary studies, application for vacant jobs at the Public Service Commission, applications for work permits by foreigners and applications for learners' driving licences. I would unduly be taking the time of the House if I were to list the 48 e-Services launched during the current financial year, but suffice it, maybe, to say that people sitting in the comfort of their house can now apply for appointments for vehicle examinations at the National Transport Authority at the click of a mouse. Better still, planters can hire tractors to have their land derocked and ploughed from the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool online. Even cases of child abuse and ill-treatment can be reported online thus ensuring anonymity of the report. In my speech last year, I also announced that 25 additional e-Services would be available by the end of this financial year. We have almost doubled this figure and we are hoping to finalise 45 e-Services before the end of June 2008. We are thankful to the Deputy Prime Minister in allowing us to actually fulfil the commitment of this Government to delivering citizen centric services round the clock 24 x 7 thereby ensuring that Government services are actually delivered at the citizens' convenience. We believe in dedicating ourselves to remain abreast of new and innovative means of providing service and to seize each opportunity which comes along the way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, after comparing their lamentable five e-services to the 48 e-services of last year and the 25 announced for this year which have jumped to 45 without mentioning those of next year, the issue of optical fibre demonstrates clearly once again how, whatever they will be saying before the press, to hide their incompetence if not their negligence, in fact, the truth when you look at the facts

and figures is that they only deserve to be in Opposition. They do not deserve to be in Government and for quite some time.

(Interruptions)

I am quite sure the Hon. Lady would say yes to me.

The Deputy Speaker: OK, please address the Chair!

Mr. Sinatambou: Maybe they could be asked to stop interrupting Sir. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, my colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development has, in his budget speech, referred to proposals from the Indian Ocean Commission and COMESA to develop an inter island high speed cable connection that would link up to other cable projects. Indeed it is largely at the initiative and insistence of my Ministry that an inter-island connectivity network project, the SEGANET project, is currently being undertaken under the regional ICT support programme of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and implemented by the Indian Ocean Commission. This project is building consensus among governments and stakeholders in this area to ensure that international broadband access becomes a reality as soon as possible for the islands of the region.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform the House that the Indian Ocean Commission is presently finalising a memorandum of understanding to be signed by Member countries for the setting up of SEGANET and to which development partners are looking forward as they have expressed keen interest to fund the implementation of the project. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is estimated that the cost of this interconnectivity cable would range from 140 USD m. to 300 USD m. and that integrating the network as part of the East African submarine cable (EASSy) project would entail an additional cost in excess of a hundred million dollars.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to recognise that ICTs have opened up new windows of opportunities for African countries as tools that can accelerate

their economic growth and development and, in that respect, Mauritius is one of the signatories of the Kigali protocol on the establishment of a submarine optical fibre optic system along the east coast of Africa, an initiative known as UHURUNET which is a submarine cable which will go around the African continent to connect to Europe, the Middle East and India. This cable will collectively be owned by 120 African telecommunication companies and is expected to be operational by the first quarter of 2010.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, just the number of qualitative and quantitative elements I have given show ineluctably that the progression in the ICT sector has actually been prompted by the guidance and leadership of the Prime Minister and by the economic supervision and maestrosip of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development. But I need to quote just two quick figures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, of which the first is the employment figures of the sector. The Deputy Prime Minister was saying, in his speech, how as at April 2007, the number of employed people had more doubled from less than 4,000 under the previous Government to reach 8,000 by April 2007. Let me add to this. We have now reached more than 10,000 people employed in the sector in 2008. Furthermore, the expert projection that we have indicate that we should reach the figure of 29,000 in 2011 at the end of the National ICT Strategic Plan. The second very important figure which I would take is the clearly verifiable fact that the number of companies in the industry has been increasing annually during the three years of this Government being in office by 25%, 25% every year during 3 successive years with a continuing trend which is expected to last for the coming few years. So much therefore for what they didn't do and what we have been doing.

Maybe, however, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the one feature which I believe would be most illustrative of their gross negligence and incompetence, of their omissions in any event is what we did regarding the decrease in telecommunications costs. Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is this Government that has brought drastic reductions in telecommunication charges to say the least.

Even when it was happening worldwide you didn't do it, so, I don't think you have the right to speak on that issue. In line with the declared objective of this Government, we have witnessed in the last financial year a decrease in local call charges by an average of 27% and that of international charges by an average of 19.8%. Broadband Internet charges have been brought down by an average of 26% and 24.2% for wholesale and retail charges respectively in the last financial year. This year we have brought a revolution in the interconnection usage charges. As a matter of fact, there had been a massive reduction in the Interconnection Usage Charges applicable in this country, a reduction which has had cascading effects in reducing, just as an example, telephone charges by 72% of fixed telephony between Mauritius and Rodrigues. Mobile to fixed telephone charges have dropped by another 20% while international telephone charges have decreased by an average of 33% for the major destinations. As a matter of fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the first time in Mauritius the tariff for IDD has gone down below the R4 level. Indeed MTML is currently offering tariffs of Rs3.60 per minute for calls to the United States, to Canada and to China. This tariff constitutes a reduction by 88% in the price of international calls compared to what it was four years ago. This is testimony of sound Government policy in creating the enabling environment to liberalise the telecommunication sectors by allowing players like MTML to operate at arm's length with the historical telecom operator, Mauritius Telecom. It should be remembered, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, that five years ago, there existed a single operator reigning in the field of telephony whereas today, as ILDs, we have seven operators which are fiercely competing in the market. We have also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, furthered our efforts in lowering the cost of international bandwidth, what is known as IPLC – the International Private Lease Circuits. Last year, I mentioned a reduction of 52% of the price of IPLC, for what is known as an E1 full circuit between Mauritius and France over the then past 18 months. I am pleased to announce to this House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, that there has been a further decrease of 20% in international bandwidth in this current financial year, thus placing Mauritius as one of the most competitive countries of Africa in so far as IPLC prices are concerned. The

ultimate winner, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the population at large who will henceforth make a yearly saving of, at least, Rs110 m. on telecommunication.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the last feature of ICT that I would like to share with this House to show beyond doubt the difference between them and us is what I will call a budget comparative. What I meant by a budget comparative is what I said to my collaborators: please, look at the expenditure that they got every year, starting in 2001 and give me from 2001-2002 to this year what has been the amount of capital expenditure the Ministry got and how much it spent. I can't think of a fairer way of trying to see what they did and what we did. From their capital budget, they used less than 43% of the Budget in 2001-2002; less than 57% of their Budget in 2002-2003. So, 42.88% in 2001-2002; 56.23% in 2002-2003. The best they could reach was in the year 2003-2004 where they used 73% of their Budget. And in 2004-2005, they only used 51% of their Budget. Every single year ...

(Interruptions)

Just hear the fallacy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir! They are given a budget, they don't spend it, they say they were being economical. Just hear that! The same people who blundered by indebting this country by more than Rs 30 million per day, every day of a five-year mandate. They were economical in spending in ICT. Can you believe that nonsense? Compare what we did. In 2005-2006, all the money was spent with this Government. In 2006-2007 we could not spend all, the figures say 99.93%. In 2007-2008, I am told the actual expenditure, at this stage, is expected to be 96.4%. I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, that these ...

(Interruptions)

Don't you even acknowledge what we have done!

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I cannot but pay tribute to the unprecedented achievements of this Government under the leadership of the Hon. Prime Minister

as echoed by the Budget Speech presented by the Hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am fully confident that all the conditions are more than ever present for the achievements of our goals in the ICT sector. For the first time in African history a country has in hand a fully comprehensive national ICT plan and a national ICT policy which not only constitutes a road map that paves the way ahead but also provides a total number of 124 projects to be implemented over a five-year period with their timeline and their budget line.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the saying goes that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Obviously, the succulence of the pudding can best be appreciated by experts other than the baker or his or her family. Let us, therefore, examine what some experts other than those who have prepared the Budget have had to say about it. The people I am going to quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, are people who are no friend of ours as far as I know, who are not people who sympathise or who vote the Social Alliance. The first one that I am going to quote is Pricewaterhousecoopers. I quote the country leader saying that it is evident that the real efforts of the past three years are delivering results with economic growth rates of 5.5% and private investment at 21% of GDP. I would also like to quote another analyst, Mr. Pierre Dinan who said, I was surprised so to read: *Nous sommes sur la bonne voie.*

(Interruptions)

Yes, because he is not used to being tender with or sympathetic to our economic measures. And what this gentleman had to say is as follows:—

“Ce budget contient la continuation de la réforme qui est maintenant bien enclenchée et qu’il faut poursuivre.»

(Interruptions)

Of course, they have to be complexed! Look at their failures, at their omissions! They have to be complexed! What is most enlightening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir,

is when one of the financial analysts, one of the economists most respected in this country was asked: *Quel est le manquement principal de ce budget?* The reply was: *je ne crois pas qu'il y en ait.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I believe that congratulations are the order of the night - I won't say of the day. In fact, I believe that congratulations should be the order of a whole year because not only has the vision of our Prime Minister for a better Mauritius been proven right by the measures taken so ably and well by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development. Not only have our ambitions to strengthen the economic foundation of our country been recognised by those who are of good intentions, who have the goodwill and who want to see the truth where it lies, but the country has seen and will continue to see in the coming years. May I also recognise wholeheartedly, together with all my other colleagues who have spoken before me and who will be speaking after me, the unfaltering efforts of Dr. the Hon. Rama Sithanen, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development for translating this vision into reality.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir.