

Second Reading

THE PRESIDENT'S EMOLUMENTS AND PENSION (AMENDMENT) BILL (NO. XII OF 2013)

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ALLOWANCES

(AMENDMENT) BILL (NO. XIII OF 2013).

Order for Second Reading read.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I beg to move that the President's Emoluments and Pension (Amendment) Bill and the National Assembly Allowances (Amendment) Bill be read together a second time.

The President's Emoluments and Pension (Amendment) Bill provides for a review of the emoluments payable to the President and the Vice-President in the wake of the last general salary review in the public sector.

The proposed new salaries and allowances to be paid to the President and Vice-President have been recommended by the Pay Research Bureau, after taking into account the recent adjustments made in the public sector pay.

Similarly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the second Bill, i.e the National Assembly Allowances (Amendment) Bill provides for a review of the allowances payable to Ministers and other Members of the National Assembly, as well as Mr Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of Committees, amongst others, from the last general salary review exercise carried out by the Pay Research Bureau, as has always been the practice.

Mr Speaker, Sir, last October, the Pay Research Bureau submitted its Report on the Review of Pay and Grading Structures and conditions of service for the whole of the Public Sector. The Government approved the Report *in toto*, and in spite of the difficult international economic environment, payment was effected in full.

The House will also recall that, following representations made by some Trade Unions, particularly regarding the widening salary gap between the lower and upper echelons in the Public Sector, the Government decided to set up an Errors, Omissions and Anomalies Committee under the chairmanship of Mr Dev Manraj. And, as the House is aware, the

Anomalies Committee has already completed its assignment and submitted its Report, which has equally been approved by the Government. The Errors, Omissions and Anomalies Committee Report have been welcomed by the Public Sector employees, especially those at the lower echelons as well as the Trade Unions.

I should add, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the implementation of the recommendations contained in the 2013 PRB Report would have cost Government initially Rs4.6 billion and further to that the Anomalies Committee Report, an additional cost of Rs1.4 billion has been incurred, which means the average annual cost will now be Rs6 billion.

In the wake of the recent general salary review exercise, the PRB has also made recommendations for a review of the allowances payable to Ministers and Members of the National Assembly. The proposed revised allowances, which are payable on an annual basis, are set out in the Schedule to the Bill.

In the same context, the allowances payable to local councillors have also been adjusted.

The revised allowances will be payable with effect from 01 January 2013.

The parity between the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chief Justice and between Ministers and the Secretary to Cabinet has been maintained. The quantum of the allowance payable to the Vice-Prime Ministers was the same as that of a Minister. Their allowance has now been reviewed as in the Schedule. In general, the average increase in parliamentary pay is of the same order as for senior civil service.

However, I would like to emphasize Mr Speaker, Sir, that even with the present increase, the salaries of Ministers and Members of the National Assembly still lag way behind many Chief Executives in the private sector and even State-owned enterprises. As a matter of fact, the pension being paid to some retired Chief Executive Officers in the private sector is still much higher than the new salaries of the Prime Minister and Ministers. One just has to look at the audited annual report of some private companies to have an idea of the remuneration of Chief Executives.

In regard to the allowances payable to the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Commissioners and other Members of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, I would just like to mention that the Pay Research Bureau has made similar recommendations for a review thereof. However, in order to implement these recommendations, the First Schedule to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (Allowances and Privileges) Act will have to be amended. This will be done, through Regulations, by the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment, as provided for under Section 5 of the Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been questions raised about the timing of the review of the allowances payable to Parliamentarians. The House will recall that in my reply to the Private Notice Question of 19 November 2012, I informed the House that there would be no payment of the increase in the allowances of the President, Ministers and Members of the National Assembly until the Manraj Report was published and implemented. The then hon. Leader of the Opposition was also of the opinion that the review of pay allowances be deferred until the publication of the Manraj Report.

Questions have also been raised in certain quarters as to the reasons why payment of the revised allowances of Ministers and other Members of the National Assembly is being effected in full, while public sector employees are being paid their salary increases in stages.

This is a matter of confusion for some, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me clarify this matter. As the House is aware, the Errors, Omissions and Anomalies Committee, chaired by Mr Manraj, had to operate under a set of parameters, one of which was “the capacity of the Government to pay”. It is because of this criterion that the Manraj Committee proposed that the payment of the, let me stress - additional salary increase - granted by the Committee, over and above the salary increase recommended by the 2013 PRB Report, be phased over three calendar years. Let me quote the relevant part of the Manraj Report -

“Government finances, although not alarming are by no means comfortable due to the global economic situation. However, lack of financial resources cannot be cited as a justifiable reason to deny public sector employees their due. Nevertheless, it is but critical and imperative that the cost of implementing this Report be kept within the capacity of Government to pay.”

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Manraj Committee proposed that payment of the additional, I stress additional salary increase recommended in its Report be effected in three stages: first stage as from 01 July 2013, the second one as from 01 January 2014 and the last one as from 01 January 2015.

The Committee also recommended that the additional increase for the period 01 January 2013 to 30 June 2013 be granted in the form of leave again because of the capacity to pay. However, as the House is aware, Government has decided otherwise, so that the increase for period 01 January 2013 to 30 June of this year should be paid in cash and not in the form of leave. The House will surely recall that for the 2003 PRB Report, payment had been effected at a discounted rate for the period 01 July 2003 to 30 June 2004 and the shortfall was converted into days off. The salary recommendations of the 2003 PRB Report were implemented in full only on 01 July 2004.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to Ministers and Members of the National Assembly, as I have stated earlier, their allowances are reviewed in the wake of the periodic salary revision carried out by the PRB and this has been so since 1987. Accordingly, the PRB had made recommendations in respect of Ministers and MPs in October last, in the wake of its general salary review that is it was done in 2013. I should add that while the salaries of Ministers have been increased by 32.4%, those of Members of Parliament have been increased by 36.8%.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must emphasize that it was the additional increase granted in the Manraj Report that has been staged. I emphasize this three times because some people are saying why are we differentiating? We are not differentiating. In fact, it is the additional increase that has been staged. Ministers and MPs have not been granted any additional increase over and above what the PRB had recommended last October. In fact, the terms of reference of the Manraj's Committee did not include the review of the allowances of Ministers and MPs. Consequently, the question of staging the payment of their allowances, which do not contain any additional increase as is the case for public officers, simply does not arise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Ministers and other Members of the National Assembly, including the Members of the Opposition, have a vital role to play in our democracy. Parliamentary duties are becoming more and more demanding and challenging. If we want to attract the best and brightest to join politics and devote themselves to the service of the nation at the highest level, then we must also be ready to offer at least a remuneration package that is decent and fair.

With these words I commend these two Bills to the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, true it is that the remuneration package of Ministers and other Members of the House should be the subject of review at regular intervals. Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, in our country, we know that after every major salary review undertaken by the PRB, it has been the practice to review the salaries, the allowances of Ministers and Parliamentarians, and other officials like Mayors, etc.

Today, by way of the new Schedule to the Act, which is repealing and replacing the old Schedule, the salaries of the different incumbents are being reviewed, starting with the

salaries of the Prime Minister, going through the DPM, the Vice-Prime Minister, the other incumbents, down to the Members of Parliament, to the backbenchers.

Sir, we should, in fact, have no quarrel that Ministers, that other Parliamentarians who have to discharge their responsibilities be granted an increase after five years. The exercise is carried out every five years. It is certainly a very complex exercise. But, for the particular *conjuncture* in which we are in today, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to make two remarks.

Cette loi proposant, donc, la révision des salaires des parlementaires, incluant évidemment celles des ministres, du Premier ministre et les autres ministres, M. le président, recommande des révisions, des augmentations dans une moyenne de 30% ; de 25% pour le Premier ministre, 32% pour les ministres, et 26% pour les députés, d'après mes calculs.

M. le président, le peuple s'interroge aujourd'hui. Comment une telle majoration peut avoir lieu pour les ministres, alors que le pays connaît des moments difficiles sur le plan économique ? That is to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have heard it, since the proposals have become public during the weekend, how the population is finding it. We know that the population is finding it extremely difficult to make both ends meet today. So, the question that people are asking outside is: is it appropriate to serve Ministers so much huge increases? *Mais pire encore, M. le président, cette augmentation intervient dans un contexte très précis dans notre pays.*

I was reading the last debates we had in this House *cinq ans de cela, en 2008*. Hon. Bérenger was the Leader of the Opposition, and he was replying to the hon. Prime Minister. I have gone through the debates of 2003, 2008, concerning the increase of allowances of Parliamentarians, Mr Speaker, Sir. *J'ai réalisé comment, en ce moment, le pays traverse une période assez spéciale.* This is why I did not see any remarks made by the then hon. Leader of the Opposition, which will be the remarks I am bound to make right now. *L'honorable Premier ministre, en 2008, expliquait comment son gouvernement avait bien travaillé, avait discharge the ministerial responsibilities, et justifiait les augmentations à l'époque. Il n'y avait aucun commentaire de la part du then Leader de l'opposition.*

Mais, aujourd'hui, M. le président, cette révision salariale pour les ministres intervient dans un moment, malheureusement, où nous savons tous que l'incompétence de certains membres du gouvernement a été systématiquement décriée. C'est là où le bât blesse ; c'est là

où le peuple ne veut pas digérer ou accepter une hausse salariale aussi massive que cela pour les ministres.

We know, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not the Opposition that is making the argument. Hon. Reza Issack went at war for long, long weeks against *l'incompétence* of some of our Ministers. He was supported by hon. Assirvaden, by hon. Ms Deepalsing. He was denounced, *c'est vrai*, by hon. Dr. Abdullah Hossen, and the Minister of Environment, hon. Virahsawmy, joined in to support hon. Dr. Abdullah Hossen. What I mean to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Reza Issack courageously denounced, therefore, for some long weeks, as I said, the incompetence of certain Ministers. *Donc, de notre côté, dans l'opposition, nous assistons avec un malin plaisir ce carambolage à la Travailliste.* Be that as it may, Mr Speaker, Sir, the increase in favour of Ministers comes at a time when the morale of the nation is very low, when a feeling of gloom and despair overwhelms our population in view of the poor and efficient level at which the administration of public affairs is taking place in this country. The people, therefore, are asking the question.

Today, *je répète, M. le président, c'est un contexte précis. Cette augmentation, cette révision salariale est intervenue à ce moment précis où les membres du gouvernement sont eux-mêmes en train de crier*, shouting on roof tops, underlying, highlighting cette question d'incompétence. Therefore, the question that the people are right asking is: are we, therefore, rewarding *l'incompétence de certains ministres* ? *Pour eux, la hausse des salaires n'est pas justifiée pour certains de la majorité gouvernementale qui, semaine après semaine, malheureusement, étale cette incompétence.* That is why I can understand the disapproval by many quarters, Mr Speaker, Sir, of this proposed increase as regards certain of our Ministers.

Je lisais, M. le président, pendant le weekend, l'éditorial d'un éditorialiste qui disait avec raison que ce n'était pas une question de quelques roupies de plus. Il disait –

“Ce ne sont pas les montants en jeu qui doivent susciter le débat. Y a-t-il vraiment quelque chose de scandaleux à ce que le Premier ministre touche R 282,000 (...).”

Il faisait le point, et je le cite –

“Ce qu'il convient de dénoncer, en fait, c'est le manque de compétences au sein du Conseil des ministres.”

M. le président, I am quoting from the editorial. *Il disait que nous sommes un mauvais élève – l'île Maurice – parce que, en vérité, nos gouvernants n'arrivent pas à incentivising the*

people to act in a certain way. *Donc, voilà la question principale, aujourd'hui, qui doit être au cœur de ce débat, où le gouvernement vient proposer certaines augmentations salariales pour la classe politique, M. le président.*

Mais, ajouté à cela, what we find deplorable on this side of the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the PRB has once again *récidivé*, repeated the same mistake as regards backbenchers, *les députés*, the Members of Parliament. Let me explain myself, Mr Speaker, Sir. Unlike the case of civil servants where the Salary Commissioner, Mr Manraj, has been able to reduce *l'éventail entre les grands salariés et les petits salariés*, where *le fossé* has been reduced, in the case of Parliamentarians, we note sadly that *l'éventail s'est élargi en terme absolu, M. le président. L'éventail entre les ministres et les backbenchers s'est creusé davantage* and I think that it is an injustice which, unfortunately, has been made to perpetuate. Backbenchers and Members of Parliament, as we know, have to bear the burden of providing for their Constituencies, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The demand and the pressure on MPs today are more acute and greater than ever before, Mr Speaker, Sir. We all live in the Republic of Mauritius and we are very aware of all our political traditions, habits, political culture - helping a football club, *telle société, tel lieu de culte*, this religious festival, etc, etc, Mr Speaker, Sir. Many of our MPs have no second job. They do not exercise any profession. In other words, the backbenchers were earnestly hoping, Mr Speaker, Sir, for some relief and wishing that the injustice which was created in 2008 be cured.

Mais la question fondamentale qu'on se pose, M. le président, quand nous regardons la grille et les propositions aux backbenchers est celle-ci: Does this not deter young professionals, the best brains of our country to be attracted to serve their country as MPs; and does not that mean, Mr Speaker, Sir, that it is only young people of rich origin - who can rely on financial support from their kin, from their parents - who will engage in politics, because in spite of the unattractive package of MPs they can rely on other sources, in spite of the meager packages offered to MPS. Mr Speaker, Sir, the point I am making is that this disparity, this *fossé*, this relativity between backbencher MPs and Ministers has been made to perpetuate unfortunately.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would end up perhaps by saying two things. Firstly, every time the PRB is made public, the employees in the private sector express their dissatisfaction. We know that workers in the private sector are granted salary compensation every year and we

know how insufficient that is, Mr Speaker, Sir. What is the solution therefore? I have in the recent past myself, in October last year, asked a Parliamentary Question to the hon. Minister of Labour on whether consideration should be given to the advisability of legislating for the provision of Remuneration Orders mandatorily every five years, that the Remuneration Orders should be reviewed by the NRB every five years in an imperative and mandatory manner, Mr Speaker, Sir, as it is the case in the public sector. Now, in the public sector it is less than five years; from what I understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, the next PRB will be in January 2016.

To this Parliamentary Question which I asked, the Minister, hon. Mohamed replied, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the law will have to be amended and so on. But, it is in fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, a matter of urgency that we revisit the law and we see to it that employees of the private sector should also, as the case in the public sector, have their salary reviewed every five years.

This is what the hon. Minister said –

“Although there is presently no legislation governing the review of Remuneration Orders every five years, it is the practice of the NRB to review sectors which have not been reviewed for more than five years.”

And he said –

“The Remuneration Orders are referred to the NRB in a phased manner and my Ministry has *depuis* 2010 up to date....”

C'est-à-dire up to 2012.

“...referred nine Remuneration Orders to the NRB for review.”

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not think the hon. Minister should be so much proud of what he was offering as answer to the House because in the span of two years, only nine Remuneration Orders have been referred to the NRB.

But, more shockingly, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me tell you one thing, I am sure the House will be shocked to learn that there are sectors in the private sector where, for ages, wages of employees in different sectors have not been reviewed and have not undergone any change. I can give you a few examples, Mr Speaker, Sir. In the EPZ sector, no review and no increase

has taken place with regard to the employers since 1984! In the salt industry, no review has taken place since 1983! *Dans le domaine de la presse*, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is since 1996; for security guards, it is since 1986; for private secondary schools, it is since 1984, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, this is the appalling situation in which employees of the private sector find themselves. Government must address this problem so that the employees of private sector in our country, our citizens should also obtain the same treatment as the public servants obtain in the case of the PRB.

The last point that I wish to make, Mr Speaker, Sir, concerns precisely the question of the PRB. I have listened to the hon. Prime Minister commenting on the situation, clarifying the situation now because there was so much confusion about this payment *in toto*, on whether the payment was going to be done *in toto* or not. The hon. Prime Minister has clarified the situation now.

In the case of the PRB, Mr Speaker, Sir, we must all recall that the **Aujayeb Report was approved by this very Cabinet, by the Prime Minister and his Cabinet. It was after the outcry of the civil servants in this country, *la levée de boucliers* of the trade union federations that Mr Manraj was appointed and he came up with different proposals. But, from what I have heard from the hon. Prime Minister justifying, Mr Speaker, Sir, why the increase will be staged in the case of public officers, – the additional increase as he has just explained to us – I must tell him that there will be a lot of disappointment among the civil servants and the trade unions.** Because the hon. Prime Minister, himself, said after a Cabinet meeting that the additional salary increase will be paid at one go *in toto*. He, himself, created that hope for the civil servants of this country, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Today, the hon. Prime Minister has clarified the situation and has justified why the additional increase will be staged in the case of the public officers, that is, in July 2013, January 2014 and January 2015. This will be a great disappointment for the unions, trade unions and federations, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me tell the hon. Prime Minister that it is only if the increase is paid *in toto* that the civil servants will obtain 20% to 22% increase. I am sure that the hon. Prime Minister is aware of that. I repeat that it is only if the salary increase is paid *in toto* that the amount will come to 20% to 22% increase, if not, staged as you are proposing, it will amount to only 10% to 12%. So, get ready *pour affronter la colère des fonctionnaires dans les jours qui viennent*.

So, this is all I had to say, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are three main points which I have made, Mr Speaker, Sir. *Malheureusement, dans le contexte où nous vivons et dans lequel notre pays est en train de traverser, M. le président, the buzzword est l'incompétence. Malheureusement!* And the hon. Prime Minister has chosen the wrong moment to come and impose salary increase of Ministers on the head of the population.

Deuxièmement, pour les backbenchers, malheureusement la situation n'a pas changé. Au contraire, l'injustice s'est perpétuée – l'injustice créée en 2008, M. le président. Et troisièmement, ce que je voulais dire, c'est bien dommage pour les fonctionnaires that Government has refused to pay them *in toto* and that will create a lot of frustration in this country. So, I say to the hon. Prime Minister and Government: beware the Ides of June.

Merci, M. le président.

(5.23 p.m.)

Mr C. Fakeemeeah (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Praises be to Almighty and peace be upon all of us and the whole population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I pause for a minute because it is of utmost importance that we commend and call to recognition the courageous stand of the hon. Prime Minister when he announced this morning his courage to ask his Attorney General to step down. I recall it was my request through a question, but this was not an easy decision for our Prime Minister, but it is certainly a wise decision.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not find any link with what the hon. Prime Minister announced or said this morning in respect of the present Bill.

(Interruptions)

Silence! I will invite the hon. Member to comment on the Bill.

Mr Fakeemeeah: I understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, but it touched me so much that I...

(Interruptions)

Wise man takes wise decision for the interest of the country.

Returning back to the issue of today, this House ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No interruptions! Let us listen to the hon. Member, please! Proceed, hon. Member!

Mr Fakeemeeah: They have to know that I am not traditional like them. I have to voice the truth.

(Interruptions)

This House is being called to vote the President's Emoluments and Pension (Amendment) Bill and the National Assembly Allowances (Amendment) Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the objects of these Bills are to provide for an increase in the emoluments payable to the President and the Vice-President, to the Ministers and other Members of the National Assembly in the wake of the salary review recommended by the PRB in its report of 2013. All those concerned by these two pieces of legislation are not supernatural human beings. They certainly do not live in a vacuum, but in a tiny small country with no natural resources except the courage of its people, who keep on sweating and toiling to shape a bit more the future of this rainbow nation. One has to understand and to be more humble.

If those two Bills are to be adopted in their actual form, I can only fear the worse for the sons and daughters of this land. Who on earth can imagine the magnitude of those big increases for the President and Vice-President, the hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Vice-Prime Ministers and the Ministers and say that this is correct? No! One cannot do this. *En son âme et conscience, c'est impossible!* Because the figures circulated are just insults to the sufferings of those 123,000 Mauritians living in extreme poverty in this country. These mega salaries are crushing a bit more each day *la classe moyenne qui n'arrive plus à rembourser ses dettes* against this backdrop we are being asked to vote for a pay increase. No, Mr Speaker, Sir! We cannot tolerate such thing in our august Assembly. Since Friday last, there has been an outcry in our country. I need not emphasise how Government, in its sole wisdom, decided to couple these Bills and a 50% increase of television licence fee. But, for this, I will come over later.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I call the attention of our Leaders, please, and I pray that this go be internalised. Mr Speaker, Sir, in Tunisia, all started because some people at the head of the country refused to listen to the cry of the voices of the road. Then, it went on to Egypt and to Libya. Now, it is in Syria and Turkey. I thought that this would be an eye-opener for some people in this House. But since they remain in their ivory tower, they cannot sense the frustration of the nation, *mais ils préfèrent continuer à vivre dans leur bulle*.

Closer to us, Mr Speaker, Sir, only this month Kenyan legislators, Africans like us, have agreed to lower salaries. A Government commission said on Wednesday: after weeks of debating and demanding higher pay, which sparked off public outcry and protests, the Salaries and Remuneration Commission said that they have agreed with Parliament that its Members will get around USD75,000 and not around USD120,000, a yearly salary that legislators of the previous Parliament earned. The legislators will also get - in Kenya, I mean - a one-off \$59,000 car grant to buy a vehicle of their choice and can claim mileage also under the Local Automobile Association rates. Average income, as we know in Kenya, is US\$1,800 a year, which has fueled rage over the legislators' salaries.

One would recall that as soon as I got elected as leader of the FSM, one of my main actions was to ask - certainly the hon. Prime Minister will recall - him a salary reduction of 30% and today we are facing a demand for an increase of 30%. As a pledge, I have since day one, in this august Assembly, devoted all my income towards the poor, the needy and the downtrodden. Today, we have to reduce lavish pay and privileges for Ministers. We have to bridge the gap between MPs and Ministers since MPs are more often present in their Constituencies than Ministers.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Soodhun!

Mr Fakeemeeah: In an exam, Mr Speaker, Sir, you need to score marks to pass and better marks to get credits. It is a known fact that 40% is the minimum pass rate while 50% is the credit rate. On Saturday last, L'Express newspaper published an appreciation of hon. Ministers' work. Can you imagine, Mr Speaker, Sir, that only one Minister - hon. Arvin Boolell who is absent now - score a credit. This is not surprising as he represents the future of the Labour Party. It is my opinion that he is, actually, the current Prime Minister waiting.

(Interruptions)

It is my opinion! But all the others have miserably failed to achieve, at least, a 40% score with the exception of - what is written on the publication – the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance. I also mention that I appreciate our two Ministers, hon. Sayed-Hossen and hon. Bachoo who are working hard, I have to say it. I need not talk of others. I will not mention others who have miserably failed, but then again, do those low-performing Ministers deserve a pay increase, Mr Speaker, Sir? Shouldn't we put that claim before the population, whose money we will use to pay, and let them decide by way of referendum? Who has to fear or to lose? Let's see what is happening elsewhere! In France for example, President Hollande has taken a 30% pay cut, his Prime Minister did the same. In Italy, MPs have gone through two pay cuts; 10% in 2006 and in 2011 also after being one of the countries having the highest salaries for MPs. In Spain too, there have been salary reductions. Let us take the case of Germany, a country which has been doing well in the economic front. The last salary increase for MPs dated back to 2009 with only an additional amount of 4.4%. My questions, therefore, to this august Assembly: are we not living above our means? Please contemplate ourselves and analyse ourselves for the sake of the country. Is it the right time to propose such indecent and grossly exaggerated salary increase for Ministers? Today, in all other parts of the world the fight is against poverty. The fight against poverty is the rule of the day. Even Pope Francois has asked his priest to live in a much more simple way to attend the needy. He has made the fight against poverty his priority in his first speech as Head of State of the Vatican while addressing the Diplomatic Corps. Only on this item the Labour Party - I appeal to the hon. Prime Minister to listen to it with his heart - will be judged if he is really putting people first or incompetency first *car le pays va mal, de mal en pis et cette augmentation va exacerber la situation sociale déjà tendue.*

I urge, as a Member of this House, the hon. Prime Minister to understand the suffering of our people. Please retain for one more year for the sake of God, for the sake of our new Republic. *Nous n'avons rien à perdre, bien au contraire le peuple appréciera.*

Merci, M. le président.

(5.35 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me try to respond to these, maybe I could call them criticisms, but let me just respond one by one. First of all, let us not forget, I will also appeal to the hon. Member and to the hon. Members of this House, as if everybody has

forgotten in what economic context we are giving the PRB report. In other countries, they are reducing salaries, they are kicking people out of jobs or they are maintaining a fixed salary, there's no increase. In a country like Singapore this has happened, Mr Speaker, Sir. In this country, we have been able to do this because all international organizations, all the leaders, be it the IMF or the World Bank, they have all praised Mauritius for our economic performance in a very difficult economic situation. I again appeal generally that people know what is happening in the world. We would not have been able to pay any increase if our performance was no good and the economy did not allow it. We cannot take money out of thin air and give it to people. That is not possible, firstly.

Second thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, at the same time you see in the papers, in the Opposition there is general debate that we need to get better people in organisations, better politicians, more able, not incompetent ones and etc. But we all know the wine that you drink at the end of day depends on the vineyard. If you're going to attract people who cannot do anything, who have not achieved any success and think that if they come into Parliament, at least, they will get something, then you will get that result. We must decide what we want. I appeal to my friends, the journalists: decide what you want! If you want to attract the best and the brightest, then you have to motivate them to come, otherwise, they are not interested. Do you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, how many people have told me during the last election, I suppose the same problem happens to the other parties that they would have liked to serve, but they are not prepared to come and serve for the pay that they get and for the criticism and the life that they are going to lead. You have to decide what you want. If you want to continue with this, then we continue with this, but that is what we have to reflect, we have to have a full debate on what we want to achieve. I think so.

Thirdly, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are talking about incompetence of Ministers. And who gives the mark, my God, *La Sentinelle*! If *La Sentinelle* was influential, the Labour Party would have never been in power.

(Interruptions)

Never! On the contrary, I am happy when I see *La Sentinelle* says this because this does not work that way.

(Interruptions)

Never! No. Journalists decide to give marks, since when? And since we're talking of competence, do you know how many false news? I wish people would know. I was just trying to get this. Let me see if I have it.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Do you know in the media? Let us ask the media! What do the top journalists, Editor-in-Chief and all this get? Go and see! In the name of transparency, let us publish what the CEO's and the Editor-in-Chief get. Let us publish! You will see, some Rs3.6 m., others more - let us see annually – more than the Prime Minister, what we are talking about. And I don't run a gossip column, I run a country. But let me say, Mr Speaker, Sir, you must decide whether you want to attract the brightest and the best, otherwise, okay we'll do with what we have.

The other thing I want to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think hon. Leader of the Opposition, probably, is partly right what he has said about the gap. In fact, let's not forget one thing, when you are a Minister in the Government you cannot work outside. You cannot take any job, whereas if you are a backbencher you can. And some of the backbenchers of the Opposition themselves...

(Interruptions)

Some of them! Ask hon. Reza Uteem how much he gets outside!

I know. I have an idea, anyway. So, let us...

(Interruptions)

Yes. You work and I applaud you for this. You work. You have to work, but this is not true for Ministers. They cannot do another job. The other thing you must note; in fact, the report has tried to minimise the gap. But, the gap was big. Not from today, from 1987 it is going on like this. The Ministers...

(Interruptions)

You got the percentage wrong; Ministers have been increased by 32.4%, but MPs have been increased by 36.8%. You mentioned 26% because they start from a lower level, but the gap

is decreasing, in other words. If you wanted to keep the gap in absolute terms, you would have had to give an increase of 94%. Then, what my hon. friend would have said: 94% to MPs! You would not have agreed. So, that is why we are trying to correct.

But, let me say something else, Mr Speaker, Sir. Since hon. Fakeemeeah mentioned about, he did, in fact say this, I am not saying he did not say it, but everybody seems to have forgotten that after the 2005 elections when we came to power, then the economic situation was terrible. We know this. What the economic situation was and what did we do? All of us accepted a decrease in salary. We accepted a reduction in salary. I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, in all frankness, I regret it. You know why? We accepted an important decrease in salary, within one week everybody had forgotten what we had done. So, why should we? That is what I asked, but we did accept on the first in 2005. So, we look at what things are getting.

Let me say another thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say it because I don't know why, I can't remember in 1993 whether the MMM was still in the Government. I think they were at that time. You know in 1993, Mr Speaker, Sir, believe it or not, the increase in salary for the Prime Minister in 1993 for the PRB Report was 92%. 92%! And we know what the situation was: 92%, for the Deputy Prime Minister it was 75%.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Silence!

The Prime Minister: For the Ministers it was 60%, for the PPS it was 60.7% and for Members of Parliament, 65%. Let me tell you, GDP growth was 4.9%.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Silence! Some order!

The Prime Minister: Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition, as well. Even today, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is getting, let me say, 30.4% increase. He is not saying that. And, let us not forget, if they were that competent why the hell were they booted out in 1995! Why the hell!

(Interruptions)

What? People are unreasonable! No... let us not forget!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please, I want some order! Now, it is getting too much!

The Prime Minister: Do you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, let us compare like with like. You know, I don't want to pinpoint, but in some of the private sectors, believe it or not, you will be surprised, some CEOs or Chairmen, do you know, Mr Speaker, Sir - I am sure some of them will not be surprised because they know quite well, because they are friendly with them - some people are getting Rs40 m. annually. Would you believe it? But, that is the case. We are in the same country and people are getting that kind of money outside. So, you must remember what we are doing.

My friend, hon. Fakeemeeah, mentioned Kenya. Let me tell you, in spite of this - it is true what you are saying, obviously he has followed this very well, it is true - in Kenya, I am not talking about the President, the Prime Minister of Kenya actually gets, after all this review, Rs7.3 m. annually compared to us, about Rs3 m. This is the difference. I don't want to compare with other countries. If you come, I have the comparison, it would be terrible, but there is no need. In Singapore, it is Rs51 m. for the Prime Minister annually. So, we must decide what we want, Mr Speaker, Sir, and as I said, let me also just say that the strength of democratic institution will depend on the quality of the people that we attract to serve, be it in the political arena or elsewhere. This is why we have to attract people to come and you know the reason why people are not coming.

Let me also say, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned this NRB whether they could do the same for the private sector. We are, in fact, looking at all this - I must say it to the House - we are also looking at whether we should have a minimum wage, but we are looking at this and this is something that we are considering and we will consider because I think he is right to say that they can do once and then they are not forced by law to do anything. But whether we can actually, also we have to be careful that we don't actually put so many regulations that they cannot pay and then, they get all sorts of difficulties after that, but that is what I think the main things that were said, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am trying to see if there is anything else I have missed. I think that is more or less it. I could say a lot of other things, but I think I have addressed the issues that have been debated here.

Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Bills read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The following Bills were considered and agreed to -

(a) The President's Emoluments and Pension (Amendment) Bill (No. XII of 2013)

(b) The National Assembly Allowances (Amendment) Bill (No. XIII of 2013)

On the Assembly resuming with Mr Speaker in the Chair, Mr Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the following Bills were read the third time and passed -

(a) The President's Emoluments and Pension (Amendment) Bill (No. XII of 2013)

(b) The National Assembly Allowances (Amendment) Bill (No. XIII of 2013)