



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 05 MAY 2020

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(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity
Hon. Ivan Leslie Collendavelloo, GCSK, SC	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities
Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology
Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management
Hon. Alan Ganoo	Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail
Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy	Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
Hon. Nandcoomar Bodha, GCSK	Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
Hon. Louis Steven Obeegadoo	Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning
Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, GCSK	Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
Hon. Soomilduth Bholah	Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives
Hon. Kavydass Ramano	Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
Hon. Mahen Kumar Seeruttun	Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance
Hon. Georges Pierre Lesjongard	Minister of Tourism
Hon. Maneesh Gobin	Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security
Hon. Yogida Sawmynaden	Minister of Commerce and Consumer

	Protection
Hon. Jean Christophe Stephan Toussaint	Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation
Hon. Mahendranuth Sharma Hurreeram	Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development
Hon. Darsanand Balgobin	Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn	Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training
Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo	Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage
Hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal	Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms

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Mr Speaker	Hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, GOSK
Deputy Speaker	Hon. Mohammud Zahid Nazurally
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Sanjit Kumar Nuckcheddy
Clerk of the National Assembly	Lotun, Mrs Bibi Safeena
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 10 of 2020

Sitting of Tuesday 05 May 2020

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis, at 11.30 a.m.

The National Anthem was played

ANNOUNCEMENT**COVID-19 PANDEMIC - NATIONAL ASSEMBLY - POSTPONEMENT
RENOVATION WORKS**

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, at the Sitting of Friday 20 March 2020, on motion made and seconded, the House resolved to meet on Friday 03 April 2020.

However, on 31 March 2020, the Honourable Minister of Health and Wellness made a Curfew Order under regulation 14(1) of the Prevention and Mitigation of Infectious Disease (Coronavirus) for the purpose of preventing the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the light thereof and in view of the serious challenges posed by the holding of an Assembly sitting in that context in relation to the health and safety of all those concerned herewith, that is, Honourable Members, officers of the National Assembly and other authorised persons attending the parliamentary precincts or the Chamber for the purpose of the good conduct of the business of the House and for administrative purposes, the Sitting of the Assembly of Friday 03 April 2020 was postponed.

In the meantime, major renovation works have been undertaken in the Chamber to accommodate Honourable Members and officers serving in the Chamber in a new configuration that allows physical distancing. Moreover, various other health and safety measures have also been undertaken.

All the measures taken and guidelines in relation thereto have been embodied in a protocol prescribed by my good self, pursuant to Standing Order 77 of the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly (1995) which are required to be strictly adhered to.

However, I hasten to add that the new configuration will be workable only with the precondition that Honourable Members participate in the proceedings of the House from a sitting position and by wearing the face masks at all times.

In order to enable this possibility today, it is imperative that Standing Orders 25(2) and 39(2) be suspended insofar as Honourable Members being required to rise to address the Chair for the purposes of asking Parliamentary Questions and participating in debates are concerned.

I shall, therefore, invite the Honourable Leader of the House, the Honourable Prime Minister, to present the motion accordingly, in terms of Standing Orders 17(3) and 29(1).

Kindly do so from a sitting position, Leader of the House.

MOTIONS**S.O. 17(3) & S.O. 29(1)**

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg under Standing Order 17(3) to take the time of the House for urgent business.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, having obtained your permission, I beg to move under Standing Order 29(1) to present a motion without notice.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 25(2) & S.O. 39(2)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to request Honourable Members to take the floor from a sitting position as per the new seating arrangements that have been necessary to ensure distancing of Honourable Members amid the Covid-19 pandemic, I beg to move that Standing Orders 25(2) and 39(2) be suspended for today's sitting insofar as Honourable Members being required to rise to address the Chair for the purposes of asking Parliamentary Questions and participating in debates are concerned.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Papers have been laid on the Table.

A. Office of the President

The Public Service Commission (Amendment) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 48 of 2020) (In Original)

B. Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

(a) The Civil Aviation (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 62 of 2020)

(b) The Ports (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 76 of 2020)

C. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

(a) The Excise (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 64 of 2020)

(b) The Customs Tariff (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 65 of 2020)

(c) The Value Added Tax (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 2) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 66 of 2020)

(d) The Finance and Audit (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 70 of 2020)

(e) The Finance and Audit (COVID-19 Solidarity Fund) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 71 of 2020)

(f) The Companies (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 82 of 2020)

(g) The Insolvency (Administration) (Equal Treatment to Classes of Creditors) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 83 of 2020)

(h) The Finance and Audit (COVID-19 Projects Development Fund) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 84 of 2020)

- (i) The Finance and Audit (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 2) Regulations 2020.
(Government Notice No. 85 of 2020)
- (j) The Annual Report of the Board of Investment for period 01 July 2017 to 14 January 2018.
- (k) The Annual Report of the Mauritius Ex-Services Trust Fund (MESTF) for the year ending 30 June 2018.

D. Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity

- (a) The Social Aid (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 5) Regulations 2020.
(Government Notice No. 46 of 2020) (In Original)
- (b) The Social Aid (Amendment) (No. 6) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 47 of 2020) (In Original)
- (c) The National Pensions (Pension Points) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.
(Government Notice No. 50 of 2020) (In Original)
- (d) The National Pensions (Amendment of Schedules) Regulations 2020.
(Government Notice No. 51 of 2020) (In Original)
- (e) The National Pensions (Contributory Benefits) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.
(Government Notice No. 52 of 2020) (In Original)
- (f) The National Pensions (Collection of Contributions) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 53 of 2020) (In Original)
- (g) The National Pensions (Increase in Pensions) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.
(Government Notice No. 54 of 2020) (In Original)
- (h) The National Pensions (Non-Contributory Benefits) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 55 of 2020) (In Original)
- (i) The Unemployment Hardship Relief (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 5) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 56 of 2020) (In Original)

E. Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change

- (a) The Environment Protection (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2020.
(Government Notice No. 61 of 2020)

- (b) The Environment Protection (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 75 of 2020)

F. Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance

- (a) The Financial Services (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 63 of 2020)
- (b) The Financial Services (Consolidated Licensing and Fees) (Amendment No. 1) Rules 2020. (Government Notice No. 73 of 2020)
- (c) The Financial Services (Family Office) Rules 2020. (Government Notice No. 74 of 2020)

G. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 7) Regulations. (Government Notice No. 49 of 2020) (In Original)
- (b) The Consumer Protection (Consumer Goods) (Maximum Mark-Up) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 59 of 2020)
- (c) The Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 60 of 2020)
- (d) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 68 of 2020)
- (e) The Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 2) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 69 of 2020)
- (f) The Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 71a of 2020)
- (g) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 72 of 2020)
- (h) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 8) Regulations. (Government Notice No. 77 of 2020)

- (i) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 9) Regulations. (Government Notice No. 78 of 2020)
- (j) The Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 3) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 79 of 2020)
- (k) The Consumer Protection (Consumer Goods) (Maximum Mark-Up) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 80 of 2020)

H. Ministry of Health and Wellness

- (a) The Prevention and Mitigation of Infectious Disease (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 58 of 2020)
- (b) The Prevention and Mitigation of Infectious Disease (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 67 of 2020)
- (c) The Prevention and Mitigation of Infectious Disease (Coronavirus) (Amendment No.2) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 81 of 2020)
- (d) The Prevention and Mitigation of Infectious Disease (Coronavirus) (Amendment No.3) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 86 of 2020)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**COVID-19 PANDEMIC - SECOND WAVE RISKS, ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT & ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES RESUMPTION**

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the proposed easing of confinement restrictions with effect from 15 May 2020, he will state if necessary measures are being taken to -

- (a) control the risks of a second wave of Covid-19 infections, including by strengthening our health care preparedness and capabilities;
- (b) extend additional and temporary financial support to household most affected by the lockdown of economic activities throughout the easing up phase, and
- (c) ensure that all rules and guidelines are put in place in relation to the proposed phased resumption of economic activities after consultations with businesses, trade unions and the civil society.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with a sense of relief that I answer this Private Notice Question as facts and figures testify that our nation has till now successfully managed to weather the storm caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As I announced in my Statement to the House on 20 March 2020, the Government has been acting with much foresight in the management of Covid-19 crisis and had already taken a number of preventive measures as from 07 January 2020.

As the House is aware, as soon as the first case of Covid-19 was detected on 18 March 2020 in Mauritius, a sanitary confinement was imposed as from 20 March 2020. A Curfew Order was issued on 22 March 2020, which was subsequently extended on three occasions as it was considered necessary and expedient for the purposes of preventing the spread of coronavirus and to protect the health of the population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a confinement is an important and powerful component of control of the outbreak of infectious diseases. The timely and effective implementation of this powerful measure, as part of a comprehensive package of public health response and containment measures, has contributed significantly to contain the spread of the disease in our country. As a matter of fact, for the last eight consecutive days, there have been no new reported cases of Covid-19 in Mauritius. Moreover, we have presently only three active cases.

Mr Speaker, Sir, imposing or lifting a lockdown are measures which are directly related to public health. Any decision in relation thereto should, therefore, be based on scientific evidence and guidelines.

In regard to the Government's Strategy and Action Plan for easing some of the curfew restrictions which were announced on Friday last, I must say that it is a plan that has been carefully thought out, based on scientific advice and is precisely geared towards preventing a resurgence of the epidemic.

In fact, at its meeting held on 10 April 2020, Cabinet agreed to the setting up of a National Steering Committee, under my Chair, to develop a post-curfew strategy and an action plan for a phased resumption of economic and other activities. The Committee was composed of several senior Ministers and officials.

In addition, four Sub-committees were set up to make appropriate recommendations to the National Steering Committee.

The Government's Strategy and Action Plan hinges around one central concern, that is, the continued protection of public health, which remains its topmost priority. Government intends, by all means, to avoid the risk of a possible resurgence with a second wave of Covid-19 infection. Any such resurgence would not only jeopardise the gains achieved so far in terms of containment of the disease but will also put a heavy strain on our health services and the economy in general. Hence, the decision of Government for a phased approach for the resumption of economic and other activities.

The main features of the Government's strategy to prevent a second wave include the following -

- (i) all secondary, primary and pre-primary schools in Mauritius to resume in August 2020 in a phased and staggered manner;
- (ii) wearing of masks and observing social distancing in all public places;
- (iii) ban on all public gatherings;
- (iv) cinema halls, markets, malls and casinos to remain closed;
- (v) access to horse racing and public beaches will not be allowed;
- (vi) maintaining present restrictions on passenger flights and cruise ships;
- (vii) shielding our elderly and vulnerable people;

- (viii) a phased resumption of activities in the public and private sectors under strict sanitary rules, and
- (ix) encouraging work from home and flexible working hours, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to strengthening our health care preparedness and capabilities, the Government has already taken a number of measures in terms of procurement of essential medical supplies and equipment and implementation of a number of protocols, and training of staff. Moreover, the Government is envisaging the introduction of the following new legislation to enhance our preparedness and response to infectious diseases

-

- (i) a Covid-19 Bill;
- (ii) a new Quarantine Bill to replace the present one which dates back to 1954; and
- (iii) a new Public Health Act to replace the present one which dates back to 1925.

Moreover, in line with our strategy to enhance our preparedness, we have increased our testing capacity to face any resurgence. Private Health Institutions have also been approached in case of workload saturation at our Central Health Laboratory.

Our Health Services are already prepared to face any resurgence of the epidemic. Accordingly, in pursuance of our strategy, we are doing the following -

- (i) we are increasing our testing capacity of PCR tests;
- (ii) we are carrying out Rapid Antigen tests to know the dynamic of the epidemy;
- (iii) contact tracing by well-trained teams is being maintained;
- (iv) five Covid Testing Centres in the five regional hospitals are being set up;
- (v) treatment of patients at ENT Hospitals – 20 in the ICUs and if need be at Souillac Hospital – 10 ICUs as well as in other hospitals and a total of 60 ICUs and 300 beds are available for other Covid patients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the Question, Government has set up the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme to provide direct support of Rs5,100 per month to all those who are in business, or a tradesperson operating in the informal sector, for example a mason, a cabinet maker, a plumber, a hairdresser and so on. An artist also is entitled to join the Assistance Scheme.

I am informed that in respect of the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, the Mauritius Revenue Authority has, as at 04 May 2020 -

- (i) received 253,102 applications;
- (ii) approved 189,476 applications;
- (iii) paid for the period 16 March 2020 to 15 April 2020 to 177,714 self-employed, representing a disbursement of Rs906 m.; and
- (iv) for the period 16 April 2020 to 30 April 2020, an amount of Rs2,550 has been paid to 138,670 self-employed, representing disbursement of Rs354 m.

Moreover, a Wage Assistance Scheme has also been set up to provide financial support to employees of the private sector to ensure that they have a salary at the end of the month.

- (i) 15,787 applications from enterprises have been received for the month of March 2020, out of which 14,271 have been approved.
- (ii) An amount of Rs1.6 billion has been paid for 15 days of the month of March 2020 in respect of 246,374 employees working in 12,668 enterprises.
- (iii) For the month of April 2020, 13,286 applications were received, of which 12,380 have been approved. An amount of Rs2.8 billion has been paid in respect of 208,887 employees.

With regard to household loans, the Bank of Mauritius has requested Commercial Banks to provide a moratorium of six months on capital repayment of household loans.

The Bank of Mauritius will bear the interest payable by households earning less than Rs50,000 per month for the period 01 April 2020 to 30 June 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a caring Government, we have extended both the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme and the Wage Assistance Scheme for the month of April 2020, and same will be extended for the month of May 2020.

As regard future months, a decision will be taken, depending on the evolution of the pandemic, to extend the financial support to vulnerable groups through the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (c) of the Question, I am informed that Business Mauritius will implement a protocol on Post-Curfew Work Arrangement which has been cleared with the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

As regards the Public Sector, the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms has issued a comprehensive circular to all Ministries and Departments providing guidance for the phased resumption of activities, including sanitary rules to be followed at the workplace.

The public has also been invited to make suggestions on COVID related matters on the Besafe Moris platform.

I must say that we have all along been adopting a consultative approach with all stakeholders, including Business Mauritius, MCCI, MEXA, AHRIM, Trade Unions and others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the social and economic disruption of this crisis will be deep, broad and long-lasting. It is in our hands to limit the damage and to establish the foundations for a strong rebound afterwards.

I am confident that together, as a united and resolute nation, we shall rise to this daunting challenge.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much. It is a long-winded reply given by the Prime Minister, but the naked truth is different when you talk to the common man in the street. Can I ask him whether he had consultation with all stakeholders, including Non-Governmental Organisations and why did he refuse to invite leaders of political parties to have a full-fledged consultation?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have said, we have had as wide consultations as possible. One must imagine in what situation we have been and what we have been facing. It is a situation which is unprecedented and, therefore, we have been in touch with as many partners of the economic and social sectors as possible.

Now, with regard to the Opposition, I have thought it fit to be in communication with the Leader of the Opposition on several occasions, and I have been informing the Leader of the Opposition of a number of actions that we have taken. I have also been listening to certain observations and remarks and criticisms by the Leader of the Opposition and, therefore, we have reached a situation now where we are meeting in this very august

Assembly in order, of course, to answer to questions from the Opposition also. So, I do not see how we have failed in our duty to consult, as I said, as much as possible, including the hon. Leader of the Opposition as well who represents the Opposition.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, ...

Mr Speaker: Can you wear your mask, hon. Leader of the Opposition?

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: It can make...

(Interruptions)

Sorry! With all due respect, it can make breathing difficult.

(Interruptions)

I agree with you, but you have to understand.

(Interruptions)

Can I ask the Prime Minister whether effective leadership, like the one being led by the President of South Africa, means wide consensus after consultation with all stakeholders? Because if the public is not won over, irrespective of what Government does, the policy will be one of failure. People want the truth, nothing but the truth and trust. If you don't have the trust of the public, then you are in the doldrums.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been following what has been done in other countries. Of course, I do not pretend to know everything that has been done in other countries, including South Africa and, therefore, I shall refrain from commenting on what has been done there. And since the hon. Leader of the Opposition is mentioning South Africa as an example, I hope he also looks at what has happened for example, in Singapore. This is a country we refer to on so many occasions, saying that we need to follow their example, and so on. So, on what has been done by other countries, I repeat I am not going to comment, but I can say, as I have replied in my answer, that the policy, the measures that we have adopted as a Government have been, first of all, quick to react, bold decisions, in fact, courageous decisions, which have led us to where we are today in terms of only three active cases. I must say I am very sorry that we have had 10 deaths and, in fact, I seize this opportunity to express my condolences to all those families and friends who have been aggrieved by those deaths. But there have also been so many cases of people who got the virus and who are now

out of the treatment centres, and of some people who are now also out of the Intensive Care Unit. So, we must look at facts and figures, what we have been able to achieve so far. And what I am saying is that we should not, because of that, relax, and we should not say that everything has been done now and, therefore, we can go back to life as it used to be before the Covid-19. We have to be cautious, and I am happy that the question of the hon. Leader of the Opposition starts with ‘control the risks of a second wave of Covid-19’, implying also that we have done well for the first wave, well done, well managed. I take it like that. So, let us together face this challenge, and we shall do everything that is possible not to have a resurgence of this virus.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind the hon. Prime Minister when I put the question on 03 February and I issued a note of caution that Government has to tread cautiously and err on the principle of caution. What did I say? Whether we had enough personal protective equipment; whether we had enough tests; whether surveillance and monitoring were being conducted as it should be at the point of entry. And what was the answer from our friends sitting on the Government bench? Laughter! But laughter is not the best medicine because, for far too long, there has been complacency and poor management. And had they paid heed to what we have said, things would have been different in respect of mortality and morbidity.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, complacency and poor management have led us to excellent results?

(Interruptions)

I leave it to the people, and for the people to appreciate.

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member is not the Leader of the Opposition! Let the Leader of the Opposition...

Mr Speaker: No crosstalking please! Question and answer!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say how incorrect the hon. Leader of the Opposition has been when he is asserting that we have been short, I took note, of personal protective equipment, tests, surveillance, and monitoring that we did not do. Not at all! In fact, we had sufficient equipment at that time. In the meantime, we have ordered sufficient equipment to face the future also. I must say - I must have the figure somewhere - up to date, we have already, I believe, airlifted about more than 300 tonnes of sanitary equipment and

medical items to Mauritius and there are others also coming because we have been planning in the future in case there is a worst case scenario. So, in case of PPEs, in case of testing, you know what the international media have said recently, for example, BBC which has been saying that we are amongst the first topmost countries in Africa for having done so many tests per capita. So, all this, in fact, has brought us to a situation where we are succeeding. But, again, let me say a word of caution; a word of caution because it is not yet over. We have to keep on. We are fighting a war; we are fighting a war against an invisible enemy. That makes it even more difficult. So, let us not be playing politics on this issue and let us join hands together in order to fight this virus.

Dr. Boolell: Since the Prime Minister is so keen to take everybody onboard, can I ask him why is it that the National Disaster Risk Reduction Committee has not been taken onboard, knowing perfectly well that we have to deal with a disaster? There is a national emergency and I would like to know why is it that the services of the National Disaster Risk Reduction Committee have not been taken onboard?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have all the time involved the Commissioner of Police, a DCP also in our meetings, in everyday meeting that we hold and also in other meetings. For example, with regard to the Steering Committee, the Commissioner of Police, the DCP are members of that Committee - who else - I think we can imagine who will indeed bring their expertise in terms of how to go about to fight this virus.

Now, let me say one thing also to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Yes, there is this Disaster Management Committee, but this has always been geared towards dealing with cases of natural disasters like cyclones, floodings, and so on. Here, we are faced with a virus, a pandemic and, therefore, the Commissioner of Police is a member of the Committee and I do not see why we now need get all the other members to be present in that Committee.

Dr. Boolell: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, in view of the seriousness of the matter and we are all very keen to see to it that there is no resurgence of this pandemic of the coronavirus, whether there will be a risk assessment being conducted by all companies to ensure the safe return of staff to site of employment?

The Prime Minister: We have a protocol for resumption of economic activities and this has been worked out together with the Ministry of Health, together with WHO, and we are also being advised by eminent persons so that this protocol now has to be put in place and people have to follow this protocol. I mean the most important thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, is what

we are doing here today itself in this august Assembly - physical distancing, wearing of masks, and taking all precautions in order not to be contaminated. And, of course, depending on which sectors we refer to, there are going to be specific conditions that will be put in place.

Dr. Boolell: Can I then ask the Prime Minister whether, in respect to the action plan and the roadmap in relation to protocol, to date line, to indicators and to option, he can lay copies of these plans on the Table of the Assembly for everybody to see?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have mentioned. I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition...

Dr. Boolell: To lay it on the Table of the Assembly.

The Prime Minister: You want it to be laid, but look at what ... Did you hear...

(Interruptions)

No, what I am saying, I am serious.

(Interruptions)

No, I was not making a joke. I was saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have mentioned that there are Bills that are being prepared and that will be laid in this august Assembly. Can you imagine we have a Quarantine Act, a Public Health Act that dates back - I will not repeat what I have said in my answer? These have to be reviewed. There is a new Covid Bill coming. So, apart from all the measures that we have already taken now, there are other measures that will be contained in those Bills and then we have to see that we make measures enforceable. Wearing of masks is one example. I do not have to go into all the details. So, this has to be enacted. So, I will ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition also to be patient because, in the very near future, we shall be coming with those Bills.

Dr. Boolell: One last question before I allow others to comment. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether the decision to go for partial lifting of the lockdown was carried out as a result of advice tendered by the special advisers on scientific matters and whether a metric called R0 was taken onboard to assess the rate of infection?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, I think that maybe the Leader of the Opposition is confused. We are not lifting the curfew.

(Interruptions)

It is not even partial. What we have done, we are extending the curfew, but we will allow a number of activities to be carried out. We have, of course, taken into consideration first and foremost health issues. I have said the priority for this Government is to protect the health of the nation. So, health, first and foremost and, of course, we also look at the situation, how it has evolved and we also, of course, take into consideration economic matters because people have to be able to work in order to earn a living. The economy has to get back on track, but we are doing it in a phased manner so that we make sure that, as much as possible, we put our people at the least risk to be infected.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, has the hon. Prime Minister been made aware that pensioners are yet to obtain their pension, that when it comes to those working in the formal and informal sectors, there has been no disbursement of the money that they are entitled to and there is undue delay at the level of MRA in respect of applications that have to be processed, notwithstanding that there is no clarity in respect of those running small businesses working from their own places? That is why I say to the hon. Prime Minister, there is no need to announce a lot of measures but when it comes to implementation we are neither here nor there. Can I impress upon the hon. Prime Minister to see to it that all these issues are addressed in a forceful and meaningful manner?

The Prime Minister: First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have done something which is exceptional and for which, in fact, I have had many, many comments and messages from pensioners to say how they appreciate, apart from those whose pension money is normally credited to the bank. Those who normally come to Post Offices to queue up and collect their pension money, this time, Government has organised, together with the help of the Police, of course, the Post Office, Social Security, that pensions are delivered at home. They are being paid at home.

(Interruptions)

It is not only pension for the old age; it is also for social security and for the ex-Servicemen pension that they get. I answer all the questions that have been put. The informal sector, well, again, this is the first time that we are putting in place a system whereby we are supporting financially, we are extending direct financial support to the informal sector. Therefore, of course, maybe I can admit that there can be some delay, but the Leader of the Opposition cannot say that there is no clarity. There are eligibility criteria which have been widely ventilated. People know who are eligible and who are not eligible. The Leader of the

Opposition is talking about informal sector. Let me remind him that during the financial crisis and economic downturn in 2008, the Labour/PMSD Government came with two Stimulus Packages, and there was ...

(Interruptions)

Where was the informal sector?

(Interruptions)

The informal sector was completely forgotten. Not one person in the informal sector had been financially assisted. Now, he is querying what we are doing, how much money - I have mentioned - we are paying, when we are supporting the informal sector?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition, one last question!

Dr. Boolell: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, if he is caring, to raise the threshold of money allocated to those people and to increase it to minimum level?

The Prime Minister: Well, as I say, in 2008, he did not give one cent! Now, when we are giving, he is asking to raise it.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bérenger!

Mr Bérenger: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think we all agree that *déconfinement* must take place *par étape et par secteur*, but I would like to put one point before the hon. Prime Minister, that is, *res lakaz obligatoire*. This is very heavy on the freedom, on the health of *les citoyens en général*. Next door, Seychelles, if I may refer to Seychelles, they introduced *res lakaz obligatoire* on 08 April and it was raised yesterday because in the meantime, there have been no new cases.

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr Bérenger: Now, my question is: if we keep *res lakaz obligatoire* until 01 June, although we hope there is no new case in the meantime, does the hon. Prime Minister feel it acceptable that we would have kept *res lakaz obligatoire* for five weeks?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think some people still do not realise how serious and how dangerous this Covid-19 is. The most effective way of fighting Covid-19 is a lockdown. The most effective! The most effective way of fighting it is *res lakaz*. And it does not apply only to Mauritius; it applies to the whole world! I think, by *res lakaz*, we have

even been able to be informed about what is happening elsewhere! Now, does the hon. Member think it is a pleasure for me as Prime Minister, for this Government to lockdown initially and to tell people ‘be cautious, you have to stay at home’? Because the danger is that, since it is a virus, we cannot see it, we do not know who is infected, and we can easily catch it. Therefore, there is a balance. On the balance, there is on one hand, the health of the population, everybody’s health, on the other hand, of course, the inconvenience it will entail to everybody by staying at home, by not going to work, by not earning a salary, and so on. So, we have to weigh and, on that weighing machine, of course, the health of the people for us, as a Government - I do not know for others - outweighs everything else. That is why we have to sacrifice. We have, unfortunately, for a period of time, what we are saying, five weeks to *res lakaz*, I agree, but we have all witnessed how our children, for example, have been at home and staying at home and some of us even living in very confined places also. But, unfortunately, this measure was necessary. Now, what we are doing, we are allowing *comme on dit, petit à petit*, a number of activities to be carried out and because this is the advice that has been given to us, and I see that it is also being practised in so many countries, those, for example, who need to remain at home for the time being are people who are below the age of 18, as we have suggested. We have also suggested that people who are above the age of 60, especially those who are already not enjoying a very good health, are the most vulnerable and they should be taking even more precaution. So, there is sensitisation campaign that they should not be going out unless, of course, it is necessary, unless they have to go to work, whereby they will get a permit to attend their place of work. But, otherwise, I do not agree that we should have lifted this sanitary curfew and allowed many more people to circulate. This is the danger. This is what Singapore has done, not only Singapore, some other countries also. They started well, they reached a point where the figures were so much indicative of an improvement in the situation that they started to relax suddenly and then there was resurgence, and this is what we do not want to happen in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker: Time is over by eight minutes! Prime Minister’s Question Time! Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/10, in regard to the special travel derogation permits to families with special needs, will be replied by Dr. the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, and also that PQ B/3 has been withdrawn. Hon. Richard Duval!

MAHEBOURG VILLAGE - DRUGS ADDICTS

(No. B/1) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications,

Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Mahebourg Village, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases of drugs addicts creating havoc thereat during the implementation of the Curfew Order, indicating the –

- (a) measures taken in relation thereto, and
- (b) number of arrests effected in connection therewith.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that there have been no reported cases of drug addicts creating havoc in Mahebourg Village during the implementation of the Curfew Order.

However, during the curfew period, the ADSU has been mandated to, amongst others –

- (i) assist other Divisions of the Mauritius Police Force to ensure compliance with the conditions of the sanitary curfew;
- (ii) conduct patrols for the prevention of larcenies and other illegal activities;
- (iii) carry out targeted crackdown operations for the prevention and detection of illegal activities related to drugs; and
- (iv) keep watch on suspicious individuals who are likely to cause trouble in public places or break into private and public premises.

In this respect, a Tactical Operations Room has been set up at the ADSU Headquarters, under the supervision of an Assistant Superintendent of Police/Superintendent of Police to monitor the operations of ADSU teams on field and to attend to any emergency or important reported matter. This service is operational on a daily basis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, although there have been no reported cases of drug addicts creating havoc, ADSU proceeded with the arrest of seven persons in connection with drug dealing offences thereat.

Mr R. Duval: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that around 40 to 50 drug addicts are usually gathered there and create trouble to the inhabitants?

The Prime Minister: They are gathered where?

Mr R. Duval: In Flamands Street.

The Prime Minister: Flamands Street?

Mr R. Duval: Yes, the same street.

The Prime Minister: Well, I am informed that those drug addicts normally gather at a place called Colony Street, and also in the yard of Mahebourg Police Station, to have their methadone. These are the two places where they gather.

Mr R. Duval: Will the hon. Prime Minister request the Commissioner of Police to provide additional patrol in Flamands Street?

The Prime Minister: Flamands Street, of course, I shall. I am not aware about Flamands Street, but I shall ask the Commissioner of Police to try to get information as to whether anything has happened in Flamands Street.

WORKPLACE ACCESS PERMIT - ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

(No. B/2) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Workplace Access Permit, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) number thereof issued since 19 March 2020 to date;
- (b) eligibility criteria for the issue thereof, and
- (c) actions taken by the Police Force to ensure the execution of the Curfew Order.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the identification of the first three cases of COVID-19 in Mauritius on 18 March 2020, I addressed the nation on 19 March 2020 and announced, amongst others, the decision to impose a sanitary confinement for the Republic of Mauritius to be effective as from 06.00 hours in the morning on Friday 20 March 2020. The aim was to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus disease.

Subsequently, on 22 March 2020, with a view to enforcing the decision, a first Curfew Order made by the Minister of Health and Wellness under regulation 14(1) of the Prevention and Mitigation of Infectious Disease (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 was issued.

The Curfew Order, *inter alia*, provided that no person shall remain outdoors as from 20.00 hours on 23 March 2020, with the exception of the following classes of persons, for the purpose of leaving their place of residence for their place of work and back –

- (a) such judicial officers in respect of such minimum judicial services as the Chief Justice deems essential, and such employees of the public sector, including

Ministries and Government departments, public enterprises and statutory bodies, providing essential services to the public as may be designated by the Head of the public bodies concerned, and

(b) employees of the private sector providing strictly essential minimum services.

Mr Speaker, Sir, due to the increase in the number of positive COVID-19 cases, a second Order was issued on 31 March 2020 to extend the curfew period up to 15 April 2020. The curfew period was subsequently extended for a third time up to 04 May 2020 by way of a new Curfew Order issued on 12 April 2020. A fourth Order has been issued on 04 May 2020 further extending the curfew period up to 01 June 2020.

The Curfew Orders issued also provided for the Commissioner of Police to issue permits to persons on such terms and conditions as he may impose, where he is satisfied that the presence of such persons at their place of work is essential for the provision of minimum services.

The objective of issuing the permits was to enable employees attend their respective sites of work to perform essential economic activities to ensure that the population at large obtains the minimum services and basic necessities such as food, utilities and medical service, to enable them to sustain their living during the confinement period.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that 7,492 permits have been issued during the period 22 March to 04 May 2020, thus allowing 182,595 persons of both the public and private sectors to move to their respective place of work and back home. It is to be noted that several organisations were granted permits to enable them to maintain service on a shift/roster basis.

I must also point out that this figure does not include some 26,000 employees of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, Police Department, Prisons Department, who, in view of the specific nature of their duties, have been exempted from the requirements of a permit to be able to attend their respective sites of work as from 20 March 2020.

Moreover, during the initial period of sanitary curfew, that is, pending the issue of the first Curfew Order, some 3,600 persons, including Ministers, Heads and senior staff of Ministries/Departments, employees of Air Mauritius, Airports of Mauritius, ATOL, MRA Customs and the Mauritius Ports Authority were allowed to attend their respective place of work from 20 March to 22 March 2020 without any permit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to ensuring a continuous supply of vegetables, meat and dairy products, on 26 March 2020, after consultation with the Commissioner of Police, the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security issued a Communiqué authorising planters to use their Farmer's cards issued by the Small Farmers Welfare Fund and breeders to use their Business Registration Card for the sole purpose of attending their respective plantations and farms during the curfew period. Some 8,000 planters and breeders were thus exempted from the need to apply for a permit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 26 April 2020, an amendment was made to the Prevention and Mitigation of Infectious Disease (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 by way of GN 81 of 2020 to provide for the following persons to be exempted from a permit –

- (a) a person who has to avail himself of medical treatment, or procure essential supplies, food stuff, medicine or any other item essential for his or his family's subsistence or livelihood;
- (b) a Judge or Magistrate for the purpose of attending Court;
- (c) a barrister or an attorney whose services have been retained by a person to attend a Police Station, place of detention or Court;
- (d) a medical practitioner for the purpose of attending a hospital, private medical institution or patient in need of urgent medical care, and
- (e) a pharmacist for the purpose of attending his place of work.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that in light of consultations held, it was decided that a minimum number of employees of both the public and private sectors will, subject to such conditions as the Commissioner of Police may impose, be issued with a permit to remain outdoors for the sole purpose of leaving their place of residence to their place of work and back. I am accordingly tabling a copy of the relevant Government Notice No. 515 of 2020 as well as the list of approved sectors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the criteria used to determine the eligibility of applications are as follows –

- (i) whether the applicant falls under the priority sectors listed on the Application Form;
- (ii) whether the activities to be carried out are necessary for the provision of basic commodities and services to contribute to ease the hardship of the population;

- (iii) whether the service to be provided involves the movement or grouping of large number of persons at a same place;
- (iv) applicants should be registered with the relevant authority or should possess their relevant trade licence, and
- (v) inability of employees to work from home.

Applications not falling under the approved sectors were also considered on a case to case basis, depending on the area of activities and justification provided in the Application Form, for example, firms providing support or technical intervention or maintenance services to banks, hospitals and so on.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that a permit is issued by the Commissioner of Police only where he is satisfied that the employer meets all the criteria for the grant thereof.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to add that, following the extension of the Curfew Order up to 01 June 2020, permits would be issued to allow additional economic activities to take place as from 15 May 2020 as follows –

- (a) hardware stores;
- (b) Metro and taxis with limited number of passengers;
- (c) motorcyclists without passenger (except if it is the child or the spouse)
- (d) restaurants and fast food for takeaway, drive thru and home delivery only;
- (e) hairdressers, fish sellers, meat sellers, plumbers, electricians and so on;
- (f) babysitters, fishermen; and
- (g) additional officers of the public sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the application process, I am informed that on 22 March 2020, a communiqué was issued by the Office of the Commissioner of Police inviting employers belonging to the approved sectors to make an application to the Commissioner of Police for the issue of the permit in relation to their employees, while also reminding them that permits shall only be issued where the Commissioner of Police is satisfied that the presence of an employee at his place of work is essential to the provision of minimum services in view of the fact that such a permit is an exception to the general rule of restriction of the movement of persons.

Moreover, the Application Form provides for the employer to sign an Undertaking with a view to certifying that the activities indicated therein are essential to the functioning of his organisation and that he shall comply with all guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Wellness on COVID-19. I am tabling a copy of the Application Form which incorporates the conditions attached to the grant of the permit to applicant.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (c) of the question, I am informed that the Police Department has since the coming into force of the Curfew Order, taken several measures such as Police presence round-the-clock around the island, road blocks and vehicles check points, adopting a zero tolerance and booking of contraveners, amongst others. To this effect, I am informed that some 14,831 persons have been booked for Breach of Curfew Order as at 04 May 2020.

I am tabling a detailed list of the measures taken by Police to enforce the Curfew Order.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the COVID-19 pandemic indeed represents an unprecedented challenge for our country. In this extremely difficult time, I would like to commend the exceptional and dedicated works being done by our front-liners, that is, the staff of the Ministry of Health and Wellness and those of the Police Department who, despite a few unfortunate incidents, have been able to maintain law and order across the country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also like to extend my gratitude to the staff of all other organisations who are contributing significantly to fight the spread of the Coronavirus among the population. I would, therefore, reiterate my earlier request to the nation to join hands with us so as to face this daunting situation.

On the same occasion, I would like to express my sympathy to the bereaved families and close relatives of the ten persons who passed away due to the Coronavirus disease.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. May I? It is the first time that we are sitting after seven months. May I ask you to impress upon the Ministers and the Prime Minister to reply concisely so that we are able also to ask the questions that we have been dying to ask for the last seven months, Mr Speaker, Sir?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: *Ale get to kestion kouma to poser!*

Mr Speaker: Supplementary questions! Hon. Richard Duval!

The Prime Minister: You put part (a), part (b) and part (c) in your question and then you want me to reply concisely!

Mr R. Duval: Can the hon. Prime Minister tell the House why some people who applied for the Work Place Access Permits since mid-April are still waiting?

The Prime Minister: Well, if you have the cases, please let me know, because you just query why people are waiting.

(Interruptions)

Well, I am answering his question. You are replying in his place.

Mr Speaker: Supplementary question! Have you finished hon. Member? Hon. Xavier-Luc Duval!

Mr X. L. Duval: Can I ask the Prime Minister whether, like most countries, we should not give these Work Access Permits not on a case to case basis, which allows for many, many permutations and *get figir, etc.*, we should not deliver these Work Access Permits, as in most countries, by type of activity? Now, I happen to know of a restaurant not far from my house which has had no reply to his request for Work Access Permit for the last three weeks...

(Interruptions)

...to deliver food, whereas others have. So, I would like, very nicely, to ask the Prime Minister whether it would not be much fairer for the nation, in these very difficult times for all of us, to have it on a level playing field by type of activity for the Work Access Permit.

The Prime Minister: First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member does not follow what the Government's decisions are. He is mentioning restaurant. First of all, restaurants are not allowed, up till now, to open.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let the Prime Minister answer!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Restaurants!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Allow the Prime Minister to answer!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: And I have mentioned that we shall, of course, allow restaurants to prepare food for home delivery only, for takeaway, drive-in and home delivery. I do not know in what world they are living; they think restaurants can operate and you can accommodate clients.

(Interruptions)

So, ...

(Interruptions)

I have not finished!

(Interruptions)

Yes, but the hon. Member has asked a question!

Mr Speaker: No question and answer! Listen to the answer first!

The Prime Minister: Let me assure the hon. Member that granting the permit is not by way of *get figir*. There have been so many permits given. Do you think we have *get figir* and we have given those permits? The people apply, there is a Committee that scrutinises all these applications and, of course, those who are entitled, those who are eligible will be granted their permit. There is nothing like going according to political affiliation or *get figir* or *get* whatever it is. The criterion is clear. Now, why do we also say on a case to case basis? Because there can be instances. We do not pretend that we have thought about everything; that we have been able to lay down the criteria for everybody. There can be instances where there is a meritorious case and, of course, the Committee looks at it. We, politicians, do not sit on that Committee. There are officers who sit on that Committee and then they will, of course, recommend, and a permit will be given accordingly.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bérenger!

Mr Bérenger: A few days ago, the hon. Minister of Finance said two things. One, that the self-employed assistance will be granted for 15 days until 15 May because they will be allowed to work as from that date. I am not saying I agree with that, but this was said and, in the same breath, the Minister of Finance said that 160,000 people have been granted money from the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme. Can I ask, therefore, that these 160,000 self-employed will be granted work access permits?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, those who have not been able to work and who are qualified according to the criteria that have been laid down and who make the application in due form, they will of course, be eligible, but those who are working are, of course, not entitled to get this assistance. It is as simple as that!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Hon. Prime Minister, can we have a list of the applicants whose applications have been approved on a case to case basis?

The Prime Minister: Well, I need to seek advice as to whether I can communicate the list of names. I believe the hon. Leader of the Opposition is asking for the names and other details about applicants. I need to seek advice before answering this question.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Armance!

Mr Armance: Thank you. I just refer to the so many unattended requests and there has not been any return email, not even one acknowledgment email saying that there is request for a receipt. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is going to ensure that he can set up a help desk, an information desk at the level of his Ministry to assist the people who are going to apply for the new WAP?

The Prime Minister: There is no need for me to set up a desk at my Ministry, Mr Speaker, Sir. There is a mechanism that has been put in place, and sensitisation has been done. The people have to apply. They have to apply to MRA. I cannot now change the system unless there is a reason for that. As I have said, if there are cases, tell us, let us know! Look, I can undertake one thing. I am sure my colleague, the Minister of Finance also will look into it. If there is a case which you feel is genuine and deserving and the application has been turned down, we can refer it to the Committee to have a look into it. But tell us! If you make a general statement, how can I reply?

Mr Speaker: This question has sufficiently been canvassed. We move to the next question. Hon. Assirvaden!

ICTA - MR K. J. - BOARD MEMBER

(No. B/3) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Mr K. J., Board Member of the Information and Communication Technologies Authority, he will state if he

proposes to request the latter to step down pending the determination of the alleged case of breach of the Information and Communication Technologies Act and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

WOOTON - POLICE VAN - ACCIDENT

(No. B/4) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the accident which occurred at Wooton, on 26 November 2019 in which a Police Officer was involved, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the inquiry carried out thereinto, indicating the administrative and/or legal actions, if any, taken against the said Police Officer?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish first of all to present my sympathy to the bereaved family.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 26 November 2019, at 10.30 hours a road accident occurred at Wooton, during which a Police Van, driven by Police Officer D. hit two pump attendants, namely Mr R.G. and Mr A.D.L. who were on duty at the Indian Oil Filling Station located thereat. Both were injured and one of the victims, Mr R.G., passed away on 28 November 2019.

I am further informed that an investigation into the case was carried by the CID Central Division and on 28 November 2019, the Police Officer D. was arrested. A provisional charge of 'Involuntary Homicide by Imprudence' was lodged against him before the Magistrate of the District Court of Curepipe, on 29 November 2019. He was remanded to Police cell and was released on bail on 02 December 2019 after furnishing a surety of Rs30,000.

On 30 January 2020, after investigation, the case was sent for advice to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), who referred back the case to the CID Central Division for further enquiry on 14 February 2020.

In addition, on 29 November 2019, the Police Officer was transferred from Eau Coulee Police Station to Curepipe Police Station and on 18 December 2019, from Curepipe Police Station to Special Support Unit.

The enquiry is ongoing and on completion, the advice of DPP will be sought anew.

Mr Assirvaden: Nous voyons, M. le président, dans la vidéo de Top FM que tout a été fait pour que les deux policiers quittent la station d'essence dans une voiture privée. Je voudrais savoir du Premier ministre qui est l'homme en noir dans la vidéo. Est-ce un policier? A-t-il été arrêté pour complot, vu qu'il a interféré dans l'accident?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the matter has been investigated and is still under investigation by the Police. How can I now ask for case file and see what has happened and then give any information publicly? This cannot be done.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, dans ce malheureux accident, malheureusement il y a eu un mort. Vu que les deux policiers se sont enfuis dans une voiture privée, qui est très visible sur la vidéo - je suis sûr que le Premier ministre est au courant de ça - le Premier ministre peut-il dire à la Chambre si la voiture utilisée pour ce délit de fuite a été saisie et le propriétaire de la voiture arrêté?

The Prime Minister: Well, again the hon. Member is asking questions about the case itself. I cannot answer. In fact, I am precluded from giving any information with regard to an ongoing case which is being investigated.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, je suis vraiment triste de voir que les parents, dont le père, celui qui fait rouler la cuisine, est décédé depuis déjà cinq à six mois et pas de transparence dans cette enquête. Les deux policiers ont quitté les lieux sans autorisation de la police alors que nous savons très bien que, lors d'un accident, les conducteurs sont obligés de rester sur le lieu de l'accident. Est-ce que le Premier ministre peut dire à la Chambre si les deux policiers ont été soumis à un alcootest, si non pourquoi, et si oui quand?

The Prime Minister: Well, I cannot reply. I do not know the ins and outs of the case, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: So, let us move to the next question. Hon. Bhagwan!

ICTA - BOARD - COMPOSITION

(No. B/5) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Board of the Information and Communication Technologies Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the -

- (a) composition thereof, indicating in respect of the Chairperson and Members thereof, the -
 - (i) date of appointment;
 - (ii) qualifications held, and
 - (iii) terms and conditions of appointment, and
- (b) number of meetings held by the Board as presently constituted, indicating the date of the last meeting and names of the members who attended same.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the present composition of the Board of the Information and Communication Technologies Authority is as follows -

- (i) Me Dick Ng Sui Wa, Chairperson;
- (ii) Mr Om Kumar Dabidin, Secretary for Home Affairs, Representative of the Prime Minister's Office;
- (iii) Mr Veersingh Boodhna, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Representative of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development;
- (iv) Ms Sandrine Valère, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation;
- (v) Mr Luchmyparsad Aujayeb, Assistant Solicitor General, Representative of the Attorney General's Office;
- (vi) Mr Oomaduth Jadoo; and
- (vii) Mr Mahendranath Sumputh.

The Chairperson and members were appointed on 11 February 2020 except for Ms Sandrine Valère, Permanent Secretary, who, on 16 March 2020, replaced Mr Chettandeo Bhugun who was designated representative of the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation on 11 February 2020.

Mr Tushyadev Jadunundun was also appointed as member of the Board on 11 February 2020, but he submitted his resignation on 20 April 2020.

In regard to parts (a) (ii) and (iii) of the question, I am tabling the requested information.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority that only one meeting of the Board has been held, and this was on 26 February 2020. It was attended by all the members who formed part of the Board constituted on 11 February 2020, except the representative of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

I am also informed that a second Board meeting scheduled for 26 March 2020 could not be held due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan!

Mr Bhagwan: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, from what has happened recently - we have witnessed the saga of Mr Jadunundun, an MSM activist - can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House that in view of the very important role this ICTA has to do, whether Government will consider the possibility to stop appointing political appointees, especially agents? Me Dick Ng Sui Wa is a well-known agent of the MSM, politically motivated; Mr Jadunundun, recently, until he submitted his resignation; whether Government will consider the possibility of reviewing the composition of the Board and appoint independent persons as Chairman and Board members.

The Prime Minister: Well, we have not appointed MSM supporters or members on the Board of the ICTA.

Mr Speaker: Any supplementary?

Hon. Members, I am suspending the sitting for one hour and fifteen minutes.

At 12.58 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming 2.19 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Honourable Members, the Table has been advised that PQ No. B/56 in regard to the employment of women amid the Covid-19 pandemic will be replied by the Honourable Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training.

Further PQ Nos. B/30, B/52, B/53, B/58 and B/61 have been withdrawn.

Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

STC - RICE & FLOUR - STOCKS

(No. B/12) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in

regard to rice and flour, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the stocks thereof presently available, indicating when the next shipments thereof are scheduled.

Mr Sawmynaden: Mr Speaker, Sir, as per information gathered by the State Trading Corporation, the stock of Long Grain White Rice (Ration rice) as at 30 April 2020 was 3,370 Metric Tons (MT), representing 48 days of stock. It is estimated to last around mid-June 2020 based on a normal sale trend of 70 MT per day.

Four shipments from Pakistan, representing a total of 2,600 MT of rice, are expected in Mauritius by the end of May 2020.

After the fourth shipment around end of May 2020, and taking into consideration the sales for that month, the STC would have a stock of around 3,623 MT which is estimated to last for 52 days, that is, until around 20 July 2020.

For Basmati rice, as at 30 April 2020, the STC had a stock of 5,936 packets of 5kg, that is, 29.68 MT which is expected to last up to end of May 2020. Two consignments of 75 MT in 20kg packets and 175 MT in 5kg packets have been sailed from Pakistan in April 2020 and are expected in Mauritius around 07 and 14 May 2020 respectively. This stock of 250 MT of basmati rice would last until about August/September 2020.

As regards wheat flour, the stock of the STC as at 30 April 2020 was 3,708 MT which represents around 11 days of consumption. *Les Moulins de la Concorde (LMLC)* has 1,200 MT of wheat flour in its stock and 40,500 MT of wheat grains in its grain silos, which represents 3½ months of wheat flour consumption. *Les Moulins de la Concorde* expects to receive additional stocks of 31,500 MT of wheat grains by early July 2020.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Could the hon. Minister clarify what are measures that the Ministry or the STC is taking to ensure that there are no out-of-stock situations for rice and flour behind the supply of the STC?

Mr Sawmynaden: As mentioned in my reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, all the precautionary measures have been undertaken. The STC normally imports rice from Pakistan and India, two suppliers from Pakistan and two suppliers from India. When there was a lockdown in India and that trucks could not get to the Port, we then automatically turn to our supplier in Pakistan so that it could supply us the balance that could not be exported from India. Right now, the situation is easing down in India, so the supply of rice will come back to normal, but, as I mentioned in my reply, all the stocks that we have will last until end of July 2020 or

September 2020. As regard to flour, we have 3½ months of stocks of flour.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: From the hon. Minister's reply, we understand that there are sufficient stocks available at the STC. Can he enlighten the House on what measures are being taken so that supermarkets and retailers are able to get delivery of the rice and flour, and hence, it reaches out to consumers in view of the lockdown being extended?

Mr Sawmynaden: Actually, I should point out, Mr Speaker, Sir, that only Long Grain White Rice is imported and distributed by the STC whereas for Basmati rice it is an open market and we have lots of importers in Mauritius who import Basmati rice and they are the ones who import, pack and distribute to supermarkets. So, it is up to their suppliers and their distributors, but at the level of the STC we have no issue in terms of stocks. During the period of curfew, whatever supermarkets needed, Long Grain White Rice and Basmati rice, the STC did supply to them.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Yeung Sik Yuen!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that there is enough stock. However, at the small retailers, we don't find the ration rice, Long Grain White Rice. I think it is a question of distribution. Is the hon. Minister willing to look into the matter?

Mr Sawmynaden: Actually, the matter has already been looked into. When the sanitary curfew started, there was a slow in the distribution, but as from last week everything is back to normal. So, all the small shops are being supplied as well.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - SMES - MEASURES & SCHEMES

(No. B/13) **Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether in regard to the small and medium enterprises, he will state the immediate measures taken and schemes set up at the level of his Ministry to help those which are on the verge of insolvency amid the Covid-19 lockdown, indicating the additional measures and schemes being envisaged with a view to preserving employment.

Mr Bholah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the exceptional circumstances created by Covid-19 and resulting business uncertainties are impacting heavily on the very survival of SMEs.

Given the vital importance of SMEs to the Mauritian economy in terms of value and wealth creation namely 40% and employment at 55%, measures have been urgently put in place by Government and my Ministry to ensure the perenniality of SMEs.

I wish to inform the House that a series of measures are being implemented to ensure survival of industries, especially SMEs.

A COVID-19 “*Plan de Soutien*” Cell has been set up at the level of the DBM and comprises the State Investment Corporation Limited (SIC), Investment Support Programme Limited (ISP), SME Equity Fund Ltd (SEF) and SME Mauritius to provide support to eligible enterprises.

Six such financial schemes are being made available.

1. Leasing Equipment Modernisation Scheme (LEMS I)

Enterprises with annual turnover up to Rs50 m. will benefit from a reduced interest rate of 2.5% per annum instead of the previous rate of 3.9% per annum for the first six months.

2. SME Factoring Scheme

Enterprises with annual turnover up to Rs50 m. will benefit from a reduced interest rate of 2% instead of 3.9% under the SME Factoring Scheme for the first six months.

3. Corporate Guarantees to banks

ISP Ltd will issue corporate guarantee to commercial banks to enable them to grant loans to companies affected by COVID-19, on a case to case basis.

4. Equity Financing (quasi-equity)

The SME Equity Fund Ltd will reduce its minimum return dividend rate requirement on equity/quasi-equity financing from 6% to 3% up to 31 December 2020.

5. Revolving Credit Fund

A Revolving Credit Fund of Rs200 m. has been established at the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd to help companies with turnover of up to Rs10 m. to ease cash flow difficulties up to Rs1 m. with repayment over 3 years. Interest will not be payable if loan is repaid within 9 months.

6. Enterprise Modernisation Scheme (EMS)

Enterprises with annual turnover of up to Rs10 m. will benefit from a reduced interest rate of 1.75% instead of 3.5% on loans up to 31 December 2020 and a grant of 15% on the loan amount up to a maximum of Rs150,000.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition, SME Mauritius has announced five schemes in March 2020 in order to ensure the sustainability of SMEs, namely –

- (a) the Internal Capability Development Scheme to improve the efficiency of the value chain of small businesses and their responsiveness to customer requirements as well as market dynamics in any sector of economic activity;
- (b) the Technology and Innovation Scheme to encourage SMEs to continuously invest in technology and automated production capabilities and create technology based integrated and sustainable SMEs;
- (c) the SME Marketing Support Scheme which aims at supporting SMEs in improving their market accessibility and competitiveness in both local and export markets and respond to more stringent requirements of diverse customer bases;
- (d) the Inclusiveness and Integration Scheme to encourage SMEs to favour inclusiveness, interlinkages and networking as well as collaborate and synergise for mutual benefit, which is a necessary pre-condition for the establishment of clusters in different key sectors, and
- (e) the SME Utility Connection Assistance Scheme which aims at supporting SMEs to connect their places of activity to mains of utility suppliers (CEB or CWA). The Scheme would assist SMEs to benefit from alleviation of upfront costs, ease entry and improve chances of SME survival.

Mr Speaker, Sir, given the pressure that SMEs are facing with regard to their cash flow and the uncertainty surrounding re-start of business and in order to avert any undue panic and laying-off of workers, Government has introduced the Wage Assistance Scheme through the MRA to help employers, including SMEs, with their wage bill for the duration of the lockdown.

In addition, we have to commend the Bank of Mauritius for -

1. having introduced the Special Relief Amount of Rs5 billion through commercial banks;
2. having helped by reducing the Cash Reserve Ratio from 9% to 8%, and

3. having put on hold the Guideline on Credit Impairment Measurement and Income Recognition, which was effective since January 2020.

Finally, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am confident that all the measures I have enumerated will go a long way in alleviating the dire financial situation, SMEs and business in general are currently facing.

I wish to comfort the House that Government will leave no stone unturned during this difficult and challenging time, and will take further measures that are deemed appropriate to share the burden of SMEs and business in general.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Given that SMEs produce primarily for the local market which is under constant threat from imports, what measures has the Ministry taken to protect local industries from such competition?

Mr Bholah: Well, it is true that SMEs are faced with cut-throat competition with imported products. We have no choice than to sensitise the population to consume locally manufactured goods. My Ministry is working on a national campaign in that respect.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Reza Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I know from the hon. Minister aside from the amount announced by the hon. Minister of Finance as has been set aside for COVID-19 assistance, what is the aggregate amount earmarked by the Ministry for the various schemes that he has just highlighted? What is the aggregate amount highlighted to meet these schemes and what is the expected number of beneficiaries being given that the hon. Prime Minister this morning said that there were more than 200,000 self-employed who applied for Self-employed Assistance Scheme?

Mr Bholah: Well, I don't have the exact amount, but, anyway, SME Mauritius services only those SMEs that are registered at their institution only. In order for other SMEs to benefit from whatever scheme that is put in place, they have to first and foremost come and register themselves as SMEs.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: The hon. Minister mentioned about the eligibility criteria to benefit from the different schemes. Can he elaborate further on this?

Mr Bholah: Well, this will be on a case to case basis and depending on the institution that is going to offer the loan, etc.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Xavier-Luc Duval!

Mr X. L. Duval: Being given that most of these schemes were announced on 16 March, may I ask the hon. Minister how much funds have actually been disbursed now, two months later and how many enterprises have benefitted and I am talking about SMEs, what is the actual take up and approval and disbursement of funds for all the schemes that you have announced, two months after they have been announced?

Mr Bholah: Well, we have not been able to collect these information given that the different financial institutions are working ...

Mr Speaker: No, but you can come with a substantive question, hon. Duval.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bholah: Given that the different financial institutions are working with a reduced staff, but we will get this information sooner or later.

Mr X. L. Duval: I take it nothing has been disbursed so far.

Mr Bholah: I have not said that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: You should be aware.

Mr Speaker: Don't argue! Your question should be a substantive question. Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister in case right now we are in a difficult situation with COVID-19 many SMEs suffer from lack of professional input in their day-to-day operations which in fact negatively on a sustainability, what measures has the Ministry taken to address this issue?

Mr Bholah: Well, it is true that SMEs are confined only to what they know, their savoir-faire and thereby relegating the other issues just like marketing, administration, finance, accounting, etc.

Mr Speaker: The question has sufficiently been canvassed. We move on to the next. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

ONIONS & POTATOES – STOCK

(No. B/14) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether in regard to potatoes and onions, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Agricultural Marketing Board, information as to the stock thereof presently available, indicating when the next shipments thereof are scheduled.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker Sir, with your permission, I wish to reply to PQ B/14, B/18 and B/73 together as they relate to the same subject matter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue of the supply of potatoes, onions and garlic by the Agricultural Marketing Board (AMB) to the general public has for the past few weeks been the subject of quite some debate.

I wish to assure the House that, during the confinement period, no stone has been left unturned by my Ministry to ensure continuous and sustained supply of potatoes, onions and garlic to the population.

However, following the announcement of confinement, concerns were raised from some quarters as to the unavailability or shortage of these commodities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the period 23 to 26 March, which was the beginning of the total confinement, that period had its inherent constraints. The sale of onions and potatoes during that period had initially declined due to the closure of market fairs and supermarkets. Consequently, dealers could not make normal deliveries to their respective retailers. Normal supply, however, resumed as from 27 March.

Notwithstanding the fact that normal delivery resumed, a few unscrupulous dealers resorted to hoarding and profiteering hence the hue and cry in the general population. Immediate action was, therefore, taken with the collaboration of the Consumer Affairs Unit of the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection as well as the Police.

I wish to remind the House that, with a view to protecting consumers and the population in general, the Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act 1998 and the Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) Regulations 1998 were amended with effect from 23 March 2020 to fix the maximum retail price of onions and potatoes at Rs40 per kg.

Following the said price control regulation, some 20 contraventions have been established until date specifically concerning potatoes and onions. Other contraventions were also established in relation to other products.

With a view to ensuring continuous, sustained and adequate supply of these commodities, the AMB decided to enlarge its distribution network by including hypermarkets/supermarkets, retail shops as well as online home delivery platforms. I am informed that currently there is abundant supply such that dealers are selling these commodities below the fixed price. I am informed that potatoes and onions are these days even being sold at around Rs17 or Rs18 a pound.

Moreover, AMB resorted to direct supply to hospitals and other public institutions. Furthermore, Mr Speaker, to obviate the problem of accessibility, AMB ensured free distribution of 5.5 tons of potatoes and onions and 2 tons of garlic to charitable institutions on two occasions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during normal time, the weekly consumption is around 400 tons' potatoes and 300 tons' onions.

During the confinement, the weekly supply of potatoes and onions were as follows -

Onions

- a) Week 30th March to 3rd April: only 200 tons
- b) Week 6th to 10th April: 367 tons
- c) Week 13th to 17th April: 479 tons
- d) Week 20th to 24th April: 544 tons

Potatoes

- a) Week 30th March to 3rd April: 275 tons
- b) Week 6th to 10th April: 423 tons
- c) Week 13th to 17th April: 538 tons
- d) Week 20th to 24th April: 697 tons

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to assure the House that, at no point in time, there was a shortage of potatoes, onions or garlic. However, during the initial days of the confinement

period, people, in some regions, had difficulty to buy these foodstuffs since the usual selling points were closed or distribution channels were disturbed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, well before the confinement, the AMB had already planned to import potatoes and onions to consolidate its strategic stock pending the local harvest season which starts as from mid-July. In the same context, private importers were also allocated quotas to import potatoes and onions.

During the confinement period, the AMB received 3,163 tons of potatoes from Egypt and India and 2,212 tons of onions from Holland, South Africa and India. In addition, some 2,742 tons of potatoes and 1,260 tons of onions are expected around the 12th June.

Local cultivation of potatoes has already started and the harvest is expected as from mid-July. The present stock and incoming consignments for AMB as well as private importers will be more than sufficient until the start of the local harvest. However, as far as onions are concerned, additional consignments will be ordered until the beginning of the local harvest season, i.e., August of this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the consignment period has been an opportunity for my Ministry to rethink the whole established processes and practices. Thus, the AMB has re-engineered its processes based on new paradigms such as new supply system, new criteria for registration, direct supply to hypermarkets and supermarkets as well as retail shops and online home delivery platforms. With the opening of the AMB retail outlets across the island in the coming days which is expected on or about the 15th of May, further re-engineered processes will be adopted such as cashless system with a view to ensuring better service to the population. AMB will also be prospecting supplies via the Ministry through direct negotiations with friendly countries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling a list of buyers of potatoes and onions, with a detailed list of some 615 names.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Can the hon. Minister elucidate further on the private importers who have applied to import onions and potatoes?

Mr Gobin: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are about 34 of them and I will be compiling the exact names and dates of expected consignment and then tabling at a later stage.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the hon. Minister inform this House whether it is an established practice at the Agricultural Marketing Board to make deliveries of onions, potatoes and garlic during the night, during the confinement period? Is it an established practice?

Mr Gobin: No, it is not an established practice. Delivery is done, Mr Speaker, Sir, at normal times during confinement. However, AMB has been working almost round the clock especially delivering at late hours to institutions - I do not want to name the institutions, but whether it is hospitals, charitable institutions or other institutions because there was an increase in demand from all over the island.

Mr Speaker, the House will appreciate that all the retail outlets were closed. Other small retailers could not have access so all the demands were being channelled to the main headquarters in Moka. This is why the opening hours had to be stretched.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Since Covid-19 is creating an unprecedented situation in Mauritius, can the Minister further elaborate on what the Ministry has decided to do to further avoid shortage of any kind of product - onion, potatoes. In case such pandemic comes again, what has the Ministry taken as measures or as lessons?

Mr Gobin: I reiterate, Mr Speaker, Sir, at no time, we had a shortage of supply. We had some problems with the distribution channels. We had issues because the local bazaars, etc. were closed and lorries could not deliver in faraway regions in certain areas of Mauritius. It was only a question of distribution channel. However, this begs the question until when shall we be importing products in this country.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary, hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Will the hon. Minister of Agro-Industry state the number of acres of land that have been released and put under potato cultivation and the number of acres allocated to small planters?

Mr Gobin: I will need, unfortunately, a substantive question for that, but part of it will be replied in the next coming questions.

Mr Speaker: The question has been sufficiently canvassed, we move on to the next question. Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

CURFEW ORDER – BREACH – CERTIFICATE OF CHARACTER

(No. B/15) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to offences committed for breach of the Curfew Order, he will state if same will appear on the certificate of character of the offenders and, if so, indicate if same will be reviewed.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to PQ B/15, under the Certificate of Character Act, as it presently stands, offences amounting to crimes or misdemeanours should, in principle, appear in a person's Certificate of Character.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Curfew Orders which have been published during the Covid-19 pandemic indeed contain a provision which reads as follows, and I quote –

“Any person who fails to comply with this notice shall commit an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs500 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, the offence, therefore, is classified as a misdemeanour. In the present state of the law where offences amount to a misdemeanour, and where no Probation Order is made in favour of the person convicted, the said offence would appear in the certificate.

Insofar as the question of leniency is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, this will be a matter for the Court to determine at the time of sentencing, depending on all the circumstances on a case to case basis.

As to the question whether Government intends to review the situation, the answer is: yes, Government intends to come forward with legislation to strengthen and provide for harsher penalties.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Would the hon. Minister inform us about the number of Curfew Order breach which have been registered?

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, there are quite a number and this will be at the level of the Commissioner of Police. I don't have the exact figure.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Will the Curfew Order breach be revised in the coming Bill?

Mr Gobin: I reiterate, yes, it will be and Government has the intention to come forward with harsher penalties for those who breach Curfew Orders. I seize this opportunity to explain why Mr Speaker, Sir. It is because a breach of Curfew Order represents a direct danger to the health and perhaps life of other citizens.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Xavier-Luc Duval!

HOSPITALS – DEATH – MARCH & APRIL 2018, 2019 & 2020

(No. B/16) Mr X. L. Duval (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness, whether, in regard to the number of deaths which have occurred in the public hospitals, he will state the number thereof in the months of March and April for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020 respectively, indicating the causes thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in March 2018, there were 495 deaths; 478 deaths in 2019 and 452 deaths in 2020. That is, the number of deaths has been decreasing.

For April, the number of deaths was 455 in 2018, 473 in 2019 and 369 in 2020. Here again, we note that the number of deaths is taking a downward trend.

The total number of deaths for March 2018, 2019 and 2020 was 1,425, whereas for April 2018, 2019, and 2020 it was 1,293.

The House will, therefore, note that the number of deaths has gone down.

With your permission, I am tabling the detailed information sought.

Dr. Aumeer: Can I ask the hon. Minister of Health whether he can confirm the number of deaths related to respiratory disease as per the international classification of disease ICD-10 with respect to the figures that have been given and also whether the Minister can give further details as to the number of deaths related to non-respiratory disease within the last three years as per figures tabled?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just gave the details of deaths related to respiratory system for the last three years. In 2018, it was 48; 2019: 51; 2020: 63. That was for the month of March. Now, for the month of April, diseases from the respiratory system were as follows: 2018: 54; 2019: 62 and 2020: 43. These are the number of deaths. The hon. Member will know that the Death Certificate is being given by the doctors treating those patients and those are how they write on the Death Certificate. So, these are the factual figures that I am giving the hon. Member.

Dr. Aumeer: Will the hon. Minister see to it that the Death Certificate, particularly during this pandemic have clear causes as per the 99 sub classification of respiratory disease ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Supplementary question!

Dr. Aumeer: I am trying to ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Clarification! Go ahead!

Dr. Aumeer: Will the hon. Minister see to it from the junior doctors that the Death Certificates, particularly during this pandemic period, have clear causes because the ICD-10 classification of respiratory disease have 99 sub diseases and so this may, unfortunately, have caused that the figures be shown to be less as the number 43 for the period during the pandemic?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member being also a doctor has the knowledge that especially somebody suffering from a disease and when we are in a pandemic, this is a progressive disease. And in that disease, if the doctor, at that time, suspected that this patient is suffering from Covid-19, our doctors are competent, surely they are going to do the test. Now, after the patient has died, there has been nobody in the family or close contact who has suffered the Covid-19 disease, so, it is clear that whatever be the death on the respiratory system, we should have come up with doing contact tracing and having cases where there have been deaths in the family and this has not been the case.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Quirin!

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. Par rapport au Covid-19, nous avons eu ...

Mr Speaker: Supplementary question!

Mr Quirin: Oui, absolument! Nous avons eu 10 décès à Maurice pour 332 cas qui ont été détectés. Donc, à la réunion, pour un plus grand nombre de cas, plus de 400, il n'y a eu jusqu'à présent aucun décès. Le ministre qui est lui-même médecin, peut-il donner à la Chambre des explications plausibles par rapport à cet état de choses ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Surely. Mr Speaker, Sir, the patients who have died for Covid-19 are patients who have suffered multiple comorbidities. In other words, they had additional

problems, they had cardiovascular problems, they were obese. I am not going to give any detail of any patient specifically, but there were a lot of comorbidities which have contributed to the death of these patients.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Xavier-Luc Duval!

MASS UNEMPLOYMENT - PREVENTION - MEASURES

(No. B/17) **Mr X.L. Duval (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the enterprises presently encountering economic difficulties, he will state the measures Government proposes to take to prevent mass unemployment after the lifting of the Curfew Order.

Dr. Padayachy: Monsieur le Président, En prélude, et avant de revenir sur chacune d'entre elles, permettez-moi d'énumérer les mesures prises par le gouvernement depuis le début de la crise afin d'éviter des vagues de licenciements massifs tout en soutenant notre capacité de production.

Ces mesures, révélatrices de notre engagement indéfectible auprès de la population mauricienne, sont les suivantes -

- (i) le Programme de soutien de la Banque de Maurice ;
- (ii) le Plan de Soutien aux entreprises ;
- (iii) le *Wage Assistance Scheme* pour les employés, et enfin
- (iv) le *Self Employed Assistance Scheme* pour les indépendants.

En premier lieu, en ce qui concerne le Programme de soutien de la Banque de Maurice, ce dernier a introduit une aide exceptionnelle sous forme de prêts disponibles par le truchement des banques commerciales. Cette mesure, dont l'enveloppe s'élève à quelques 5 milliards de roupies, permet déjà de répondre aux besoins de trésorerie et de fonds de roulement des opérateurs économiques qui sont impactés par le Covid-19.

Deuxièmement, dès le 10 mars 2020, le Comité de politique monétaire a décidé d'abaisser une première fois son taux directeur de 3,35% à 2,85%, puis une seconde fois, le 16 avril 2020, de 2,85% à 1,85%. Cette action historique, en cumulé, représente une baisse de 150 points de base du taux directeur. Cela, concrètement, permet de soutenir le crédit,

l'investissement et la consommation, variables indispensables pour maintenir et créer de l'emploi.

Par ailleurs, la Banque de Maurice a réduit le taux de réserve de liquidités applicable aux banques commerciales de 9 à 8%. Le montant dégagé grâce à cette réduction permettra aux banques commerciales d'accorder des facilités de crédit supplémentaires à hauteur de R 4,3 milliards aux entreprises touchées par les conséquences économiques du Covid-19.

Dans le but de relâcher la tension pesant sur les acteurs économiques du pays, la Banque de Maurice a également assoupli ses directives pour permettre aux banques commerciales d'accorder un moratoire de six mois sur le remboursement du capital pour les prêts préexistants et ayant été contractés par des entreprises *a fortiori* touchées par le Covid-19.

En sus, la Banque de Maurice a demandé aux banques commerciales d'accorder aux ménages un moratoire de six mois sur le remboursement du capital des prêts. Dans un effort historique et concerté, la Banque de Maurice s'est engagée à prendre en charge les intérêts dus par les ménages pour la période allant du 1er avril au 30 juin 2020. Cette mesure forte permettra ainsi de protéger le pouvoir d'achat des ménages et de soutenir les dépenses de consommation, clé de voute de la reprise économique.

La Banque de Maurice a en outre mis à disposition une ligne de crédit spéciale en devises étrangères d'un montant de 300 millions de dollars américains, équivalent à R 12 milliards, pour soutenir les opérateurs ayant des besoins en devises étrangères.

Pour ce qui est des entreprises dépendantes de l'importation, la Banque de Maurice a mis en place un accord de swap de change entre le dollar et la roupie avec les banques commerciales pour un montant de 100 millions de dollars. Cet accord permettra à des entreprises axées sur l'importation de pouvoir bénéficier d'un soutien face à leurs besoins en devises étrangères.

Enfin, je souhaite souligner que la Banque de Maurice, en plus de ces actions, a rappelé qu'en fonction de l'évolution de la situation économique et financière du pays, elle prendrait des mesures additionnelles si la situation l'exigeait.

Deuxièmement, en ce qui concerne le Plan de soutien aux entreprises, le gouvernement a proposé un ensemble de mesures complémentaires, dont je rappellerai ici brièvement la teneur :

- (a) Pour encourager les banques commerciales à prêter aux entreprises rencontrant des difficultés économiques, la *State Investment Corporation* leur accorde les garanties suivantes :
- (i) pour les opérateurs économiques dont le chiffre d'affaires est inférieur ou égal à R 50 millions (c'est-à-dire les PME), la *State Investment Corporation* fournit une garantie de 60% des facilités de crédit, et
 - (ii) pour les opérateurs économiques ayant un chiffre d'affaires supérieur au seuil de 50 millions de roupies, la garantie de l'entreprise par la *State Investment Corporation* est de 50% des facilités de crédit.
- (b) A cela s'ajoute la possibilité pour les entreprises dont le chiffre d'affaires annuel ne dépasse pas les R 10 millions et qui ne peuvent obtenir de financement auprès des banques commerciales de se rapprocher de la *Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd* qui va mettre à leur disposition un fonds de roulement à hauteur de R 1 million par entreprise. Au global, c'est une somme d'un milliard de roupies qui a été prévue à cet effet.
- (c) Enfin, la *State Investment Corporation Ltd* et le *SME Equity Fund Ltd* fournissent un financement par actions aux entreprises afin d'améliorer leur ratio d'endettement et, de ce fait, leur accès aux facilités de prêt.

Troisièmement, je souhaiterais succinctement revenir sur une mesure qui concerne un grand nombre de nos concitoyens : le *Wage Assistance Scheme*. Ce système, dont l'acception mauricienne est l'une des plus larges au monde, permet aux salariés des entreprises ayant subi les effets néfastes de la pandémie de Covid-19 et des restrictions liées au confinement de bénéficier d'une aide directe de l'Etat. Cela permet de protéger l'emploi tout en s'assurant que les salariés résidant à Maurice reçoivent un revenu à la fin du mois.

A cet égard, pour le mois de mars 2020, un montant équivalent à 15 jours de salaire de base a été versé à tous les employés percevant un salaire de base mensuel allant jusqu'à R 50,000, avec un plafond de R 12,500. Pour le mois d'avril 2020, un montant équivalent à un mois de salaire de base a été versé à tous les employés percevant un salaire de base mensuel allant jusqu'à R 50,000, avec un plafond de R 25,000.

M. le président, sous l'appellation du *Self Employed Assistance Scheme*, le gouvernement a rapidement lancé un programme d'aide aux indépendants pour les soutenir dans cette période difficile.

En conclusion de ces détails qui j'en suis convaincu soulignent la portée de l'action gouvernementale face à la crise qui se joue actuellement, je souhaite insister sur le fait que notre stratégie s'est construite sur une base pragmatique et cohérente.

Nous sommes tournés, et nous le resterons, vers le développement économique et social du pays. Toutes les mesures susmentionnées contribueront à prévenir les licenciements et le chômage de masse mais aussi à préserver la capacité de production de notre économie pour amorcer la reprise.

Enfin, je mesure les attentes qui en découlent, sachez que le gouvernement travaille d'arrache-pied à l'établissement d'un Plan de relance de l'investissement et de l'économie, en consultation avec toutes les parties prenantes avec lesquelles nous nous sommes engagés dans un dialogue ouvert et constructif.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Xavier-Luc Duval!

Mr X. L. Duval: May I ask the hon. Minister, with regard to the Government Wage Assistance Scheme, you are right it is extremely generous, whether it is not too generous with respect to sectors which have been extremely profitable in the past and probably still are, talking about the banks, the offshore and such other companies, the insurance companies, etc., whether the support given to these companies should not be stopped and that money redistributed to the informal sector?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je tiens à rappeler à l'honorable Xavier-Luc Duval dans quel moment on avait pris cette décision. On était dans une situation d'urgence de couvre-feu sanitaire, et on n'avait pas beaucoup de temps pour élaborer un mécanisme compliqué de contrôle avec la *MRA*. Mais, je tiens à le rassurer, à notre niveau, au ministère des Finances, nous travaillons sur un mécanisme pour récupérer, et on l'a annoncé, l'argent qu'on a distribué à certaines entreprises qui sont profitables. Donc, on l'a déjà annoncé...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let the hon. Minister answer the question!

Dr. Padayachy: On l'a annoncé, c'est ma réponse à cette question.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, last Friday on MBC, the hon. Minister of Finance stated that 100,000 people will lose their jobs. We were very chocked with this statement. Therefore, can I ask the hon. Minister how did he arrive at this figure? Is there any report, any study or was it just a guess?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, au ministère des Finances, on n'a pas l'habitude d'utiliser le mot '*guess*'. On travaille sur des rapports. Il y a des rapports sont faits au niveau du ministère des Finances. C'était un rapport et je l'avais précisé à la MBC. C'était un rapport préparé par le ministère des Finances avec la Banque de Maurice et l'*Economic Development Board* où il y avait une prévision si, et là, je dis bien si à l'époque où on a commencé avec la pandémie, c'était sous trois scénarios et on pouvait atteindre les 100,000 chômeurs, et c'est bien ce que j'avais dit.

Je disais qu'on pouvait arriver jusqu'à 100,000 chômeurs à la fin de l'année si rien n'est fait. C'est pour cela qu'on travaille actuellement sur un plan massif de relance de l'économie et de l'investissement pour éviter le licenciement de masse et atteindre un niveau record de chômage.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Xavier-Luc Duval!

Mr X. L. Duval : May I ask the hon. Minister, given that we are going to come out of the curfew period probably at the end of this month or maybe before, but a number of sectors including the travel industry, the tourism sector will continue to suffer huge losses; whether a type of Government Wage Assistance Scheme...

Mr Speaker: Supplementary question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to explain what I am saying. Don't you want me to explain that I am talking about the tourism sector?

Mr Speaker: Ask your question, please!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am asking the hon. Minister whether for these sectors, the type of Government Wage Assistance Scheme will be continued in some form or another?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, comme je l'ai expliqué il y a pas si longtemps, actuellement nous travaillons avec toutes les parties prenantes, peu importe les secteurs d'activité, tous les secteurs d'activité vont être touchés par le Covid-19. Donc, nous travaillons avec tout le monde pour trouver les bonnes mesures, des mesures efficaces et efficientes. C'est de l'argent public, nous ne sommes pas là pour distribuer de l'argent public. Nous sommes là pour utiliser l'argent public de manière efficace et efficiente pour qu'on évite le licenciement de masse. Donc, on travaille, que ce soit avec le secteur touristique, le secteur manufacturier, le secteur de la construction et tous les autres secteurs pour trouver une réponse adéquate aux problèmes de Covid-19.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mohamed!

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wanted to ask the hon. Minister the following. He has said that at the moment that they decided those measures, they did not have much time to go for a particular targeting. How much time did he really need to understand that he was wrong to distribute taxpayers' money to companies that have been making profits, that have declared dividends, and he is aware personally? How long did he need to realise that he was wrong and what is he going to personally do to redress that wrong that he is responsible for and that Government is collectively guilty of?

Mr Speaker: Is that a supplementary question?

Mr Mohamed: That is, yes.

Mr Speaker: It is more than a substantive question. It is more than two questions.

(Interruptions)

No crosstalking!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, une des prérogatives du ministère des Finances, en particulier du ministre des Finances, c'est de taxer. Et malheureusement je crois que l'honorable...

(Interruptions)

Vous pouvez me laisser parler ?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Who put the question?

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: Tu peux apprendre la bonne manière au moins une fois dans ta vie ? Tu peux apprendre la bonne manière ?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister!

(Interruptions)

Let me move to the next question! Next question, hon. Lobine!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a Point of Order again. The hon. Minister replied for 10 minutes and you have given us only a few minutes in terms of supplementary question!

Mr Speaker: But he has no question!

Mr X. L. Duval: We have distinguished Members of Parliament...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Xavier-Luc Duval, he has no question!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: There are so many supplementary questions! I have only had two!

Mr Speaker: You want another supplementary question?

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, Sir!

Mr Speaker: Raise your hand. That is all!

Mr X. L. Duval: I have!

Mr Speaker: He is the mover of the question, he has the priority!

Mr X. L. Duval: Thank you very much. I am happy to hear that. I wanted to ask the hon. Minister - I am asking my question very calmly - with respect to the Workfare Programme, he stated in this House there is something about Rs400m. available, if his likely or scenario of 100,000 unemployed is concerned, this Workfare Programme would be highly insufficient; has he now provided for more money in some form or other to be paid into the Workfare Programme?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, concernant le *Workfare Programme*, si jamais ce fond est déficitaire, nous avons le *Consolidated Fund*, nous allons prendre l'argent dans le *Consolidated Fund* pour mettre dans le *Workfare Programme* parce que c'est la loi. C'est tout simplement la loi. Nous allons procéder et suivre la loi. La loi dit quand il y a des chômeurs on doit payer et que l'argent va sortir du *Workfare Programme* et que si jamais le fond dans le *Workfare Programme* est déficitaire, nous allons prendre l'argent dans le *Consolidated Fund*.

Mr Speaker: This question has sufficiently been canvassed. We move to the next question. Hon. Lobine!

AGRICULTURAL MARKETING BOARD - COMPLAINTS

(No. B/18) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to onions and potatoes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Agricultural Marketing Board, information as to if inquiries are being carried out into complaints of shortages thereof on the local market during the Covid-19 lockdown, indicating –

- (a) The quantities thereof sold by the Board during the Curfew Order, and
- (b) The list of the bulk buyers thereof.

(Vide reply to PQ B/14)

EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE - FOREIGN FISHING VESSELS - ILLEGAL OPERATION ILLEGALLY

(No. B/19) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to our Exclusive Economic Zone, he will state the number of reported cases of foreign fishing vessels operating illegally therein during the Covid-19 lockdown, indicating the actions taken in relation thereto, if any.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that during the Covid-19 lockdown which started on 20 March 2020, there have not been any reported cases of foreign fishing vessels operating illegally in our Exclusive Economic Zone.

During the lockdown period, there were 11 foreign fishing vessels operating in our Exclusive Economic Zone under a Mauritian licence issued by my Ministry. Their movements were monitored through the Vessel Monitoring System of the Albion Fisheries Research Centre of my Ministry.

Additionally, I wish to inform the House that any type of fishing vessel present in our EEZ is monitored on a 24/7 basis by the National Coast Guard Operations Room through the Coastal Surveillance Radar System, the Vessel Monitoring System and the Automatic Identification System. Moreover, during the same period, 14 foreign flag fishing vessels operating outside the EEZ of Mauritius and which were not holders of Mauritian Fishing Licences called at Port Louis for transshipment and related activities.

I am also informed that during the confinement period, the National Coast Guard has carried out 44 surveillance sorties covering our Exclusive Economic Zone of which 28 were airborne using the Dornier and 16 were seaborne using different patrol vessels, including the Barracuda. There has been no reported case of illegal fishing in our EEZ from these 44 surveillance sorties.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have also to inform the House that on 21 April of this year, I had a meeting with the representatives of the Mauritian Bank Fishing Operators who are all allowed to operate during the lockdown and I stress upon them the need to combat forcefully illegal fishing in our Exclusive Economic Zone. I requested for their support and assistance in this endeavour.

At the level of my Ministry, a communication network system through satellite phones has also been set up to tackle illegal fishing. Any Mauritian Bank Fishing Vessel who suspects illegal fishing activities occurring in our EEZ is urged to report the matter through this communication system to my Ministry.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Armance!

COVID-19 SOLIDARITY FUND - DISBURSEMENT

(No. B/20) **Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Covid-19 Solidarity Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the quantum of funds collected as at to date –

- (a) indicating the –
 - (i) quantum of funds disbursed, and
 - (ii) criteria for disbursements, and
- (b) table copy of the details of disbursements effected.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le Président, de prime abord, je souhaiterais rappeler que le Covid-19 Solidarity Fund a été établi en vertu du Finance and Audit (Covid-19 Solidarity Fund) Regulations 2020.

Les principaux objectifs du Fonds sont –

- (i) D'une part, de contribuer au financement de projets, programmes et régimes liés à la crise sanitaire du COVID-19 et à d'autres questions de santé publique connexes, et
- (ii) D'autre part, d'apporter un soutien financier aux individus résidant sur le sol mauricien et aux organisations locales durement touchés par le virus Covid-19.

Comme cela a été communiqué très rapidement après la création du Covid-19 Solidarity Fund, un comité de gestion a été mis en place pour gérer et administrer le dit-Fonds, afin d'assurer une allocation efficace des ressources.

Le comité de gestion a ainsi établi des critères précis, clairs et transparents pour –

- (i) l'appel aux demandes d'aide ;
- (ii) l'appréciation des demandes sur la base d'une évaluation des besoins et des capacités, et enfin
- (iii) l'approbation des programmes, des projets et du soutien direct octroyés à travers le Fonds.

Je tiens également à préciser que le comité de gestion a finalisé son cadre et ses lignes directrices de fonctionnement, qui comprennent –

- (a) les principes directeurs;
- (b) la définition des bénéficiaires;
- (c) les domaines d'intervention;
- (d) le mécanisme de mise en œuvre, et
- (e) les modalités d'application.

M. le président, grâce à un élan de solidarité national et avec l'appui de nos partenaires internationaux, le montant des fonds collectés au 04 mai 2020 est de Rs125,617,392.

Et dedans, je tiens à remercier qu'il y a de nombreuses institutions publiques aussi qui ont contribué et en dernier, nous avons eu la contribution de R 10 millions de la part du *CEB*. Soyez assurés que nous continuerons à communiquer avec assiduité sur le montant des fonds collectés ainsi que sur leurs utilisations. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Armance: It was my question.

Mr Speaker: But you have to raise your hand, if you have any supplementary, raise your hand.

Mr Armance: It is my question. I think...

Mr Speaker: But you have to show interest, hon. Member, that's it. I don't know if you have any supplementary.

Mr Armance: Okay!

Mr Speaker: If you wish to take the floor, please.

Mr Armance: I have listened carefully to the answer of the Minister and part (b) of my question is the quantum of disbursements. I haven't heard anything about the disbursements. How much money has been disbursed so far? And I put my hand again.

Dr. Padayachy: Le comité de gestion s'est réuni pour la sixième fois le vendredi 01 mai 2020 pour examiner plusieurs projets. Nous reviendrons dessus en temps et lieu, parce qu'ils n'ont pas encore déboursé le moindre sous.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Now you...

Dr. Padayachy: Voilà, j'ai répondu.

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je viens de répondre comme quoi on n'a pas encore déboursé parce qu'il y a un comité qui travaille dessus sous la présidence de Raj Makoond et c'est à eux de faire les déboursements.

Mr Armance: Mr Speaker, I would like to know from the hon. Minister again, in the NCSR Fund there are millions and billions of rupees sleeping there, does he intend to use this money to contribute to the COVID-19 Fund? And to come back to the workfare program that

was stated earlier, is he willing to use this money to support the workfare programme as well?

Dr. Padayachy: Dans le fonds *CSR*, le *CSR Foundation* l'argent qui est dessus est et sera utilisé pour des programmes identifiés. Donc, nous ne pouvons pas y aller et prendre l'argent comme cela. Il faut qu'il y ait une étude pour voir l'impact que cela va avoir sur le tissu des ondes organisations caritatives. Donc, nous ne pouvons pas du jour au lendemain y aller et prendre l'argent qu'il y a dans ce fonds.

Mr Armance: In the framework and guidelines, it is mentioned that he is going to support individuals. May I know from the hon. Minister who he classified as individual and what criteria are going to have to be classified as an individual?

Dr. Padayachy: Je reviens dessus, M. le président, il y a un comité technique qui travaille sur ce fonds sous la présidence de M. Raj Makoond avec plusieurs représentants dessus et c'est à eux de définir et ils vont définir, et c'est sur le site web du *MOFED*. Donc, je reviendrais dessus, s'il y a des définitions à avoir, j'emmènerais les définitions lors de la prochaine séance.

(Interruptions)

Mr Armance: Question last one!

Mr Speaker: Before the last one, I'll allow hon. Uteem.

Mr Armance: Okay, I am fine!

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, the mission of the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund is to alleviate suffering during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, if this is the mission, may I know from the hon. Minister why is it that any beneficiary who has obtained funds under the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme is not eligible when we all know that the Rs170 per day, which is being offered to these self-employed who are among the poorest people of this country, is certainly not sufficient for them to live and maintain a family?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, l'honorable Reza Uteem mélange les deux. D'un côté on a le *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* et cela ne fait pas partie de la question posée. On parle du COVID-19 et je viens de dire le COVID-19, et il y a un comité technique qui travaille sur les déboursements des fonds, et dans ce fonds je viens de le dire il y a que R 126 millions. Concernant le *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme*, cela a coûté près d'un milliard de

roupies, et cela concernait plus de 160,000 personnes. Donc, cela n'a rien avoir, ce sont deux choses complètement différentes.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Armance: Yes, I have noted that there is a Fund Managing Committee as mentioned by the Minister with Mr Makoond as the Chairperson. I go back in his own framework at section 5.2 which mentions that there may be sub-committees. Is the hon. Minister prepared for a matter of transparency to include Members...

Mr Speaker: Is that a supplementary question, hon. Member?

Mr Armance: It is. Is he prepared for a matter of transparency to include Members of the Opposition in sub-committees for the...

Mr Speaker: Is that a supplementary question?

Mr Armance: Yes it is.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'aimerais revenir à la dernière partie de ma réponse. J'avais dit : soyez assurés, Monsieur, que nous continuerons à communiquer avec assiduité et je lis bien sur le montant des fonds récoltés ainsi que sur leurs utilisations et ainsi que d'autre chose. D'accord! Merci.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Armance!

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - FOOD PACKS & FUNDS DISBURSED

(No. B/21) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the distribution of food packs of essential commodities amid the Covid-19 lockdown, she will state the –

- (a) quantum of funds disbursed in connection therewith;
- (b) eligibility criteria therefor;
- (c) actions taken in regard to vulnerable families, and
- (d) actions that will be taken, if any, to support the vulnerable families post-lockdown.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the world is going through an unprecedented sanitary crisis. As a responsible Government, we have taken prompt and urgent

actions for the well-being and protection of our population. One of these actions has been the provision of food packs to households registered under the Social Register of Mauritius and to elderly persons and persons with disabilities benefiting from a carer's allowance during the curfew period as shops were closed. As regards the quantum of funds disbursed, I am informed by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development that an amount of Rs43,861,790 has been disbursed for the purchase of 42,385 food packs to be distributed to 7,924 households registered on the SRM and 22,390 beneficiaries of carer's allowance.

As far as SRM beneficiaries are concerned, food packs were delivered at their residence. The distribution exercise started on 28 March 2020 and was carried out by representatives of my Ministry, the National Empowerment Foundation, Local Authorities, Non-Governmental Organisation and volunteers. As at Thursday 29 April 2020, 7,900 households across the island have been provided with a total of 17,936 food packs. With regard to elderly persons and persons with disabilities benefitting from a carer's allowance, 37 social security offices across the island were open during the period 29 March 2020 to 21 April 2020 for the distribution of food packs. The distribution was made in alphabetical order and beneficiaries were contacted to inform them of the date and time to collect their food packs. As at 30 April 2020, 19,779 beneficiaries of carer's allowance have received their food packs.

I would also like to draw the attention of the House that on 26 March 2020, basic items such as rice, flour, vegetables and eggs were distributed to 27 charitable institutions and 44 private licensed home. Basic food items were again distributed to the 27 charitable institutions on 30 March 2020.

As regards part (d) of the question, it is to be noted that the distribution of food packs was undertaken due to the closure of shops, supermarkets and hypermarkets. Given that shops, supermarkets and hypermarkets are now open, these beneficiaries can have access to their basic necessities. I also wish to mention that SRM beneficiaries are entitled to financial assistance in the form of a subsistence allowance. As for beneficiaries of the carer's allowance, they do benefit from either a basic retirement pension or an invalid basic pension.

Mr Armance: Thank you. I just want to go, I refer to part (a) of my question regarding the funds disbursed. How does the hon. Minister reconcile that the funds available at her Ministry are about millions and billions of rupees and yet she came to the House saying

that she spent Rs43 m. only to help the vulnerable persons in this crisis situation? Is this correct what she said?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, I am sorry to say that your information is not accurate at all. It all depends on the number of beneficiaries under the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM) and the number of beneficiaries benefitting from the Carer's Allowance. So, it all depends on the number of beneficiaries.

Mr Armance: Can the hon. Minister please confirm to the House the number of beneficiaries registered under the Social Register of Mauritius and the number that have received the food packs?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, it seems that the hon. Member has not listened carefully. I have already mentioned in my answer that under the SRM we have distributed to 7,900 beneficiaries. Sorry?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let the hon. Minister answer! You did not listen. Let the hon. Minister answer! You had a question.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, the number of beneficiaries registered is 7,924.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mohamed!

Mr Mohamed: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether she could tell us who are those who have obtained the contracts to make the food packs, whether she could table a list of all the companies or traders who were paid in order to prepare those food packs?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Sure! I have a table here. I can table it. So, Pick and Buy, Winners; we have Dream Price, Super U, Jumbo Riche Terre, Lolo Hypermarket. I am tabling the list.

Mr Speaker: A last supplementary!

Mr Armance: I would like to find out from the hon. Minister about the support given to the informal sector that are not on the SRM list, the ones receiving Rs2,550 - from your friend sitting in front of you. Can you the hon. Minister tell us what actions she is going to take at the level of her Ministry to support the informal sector?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, as I have mentioned, priority has been given to beneficiaries of the SRM who are below the poverty line and to beneficiaries of Carer's Allowance because they are the most vulnerable groups. I think you should appreciate that a lot has been done for the vulnerable groups. I must say that I am satisfied we have achieved so much. Let me reassure the hon. Member that we have done our best because it was a very difficult time and one of our priorities has been, of course, the wellbeing and protection of the most vulnerable of our society. As has been mentioned by our Prime Minister this morning, there are a lot of measures. I must say, a successful approach has been taken by the Government to take care of the needy.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS – PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

(No. B/22) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to personal protective equipment, he will state the number thereof available at his Ministry on the first day of the implementation of the Curfew Order.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in regard to personal protective equipment, the following were available as from the first day of implementation of the Curfew Order, that is, on 23 March 2020 -

Surgical Masks (disposable masks)	651,000
Specialised Masks, including N95/FFP2	33,750
Gowns	12,300
Face Shields	500
Goggles	1,399
Disposable Gloves	9,650,000

Mr Abbas Mamode: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether, at this moment in time, there was a request from other departments, for example, Airport/ Seaport to have the personal protective equipment from his Ministry?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, there were requests from other departments and we have supplied according to the needs that they will be having because during the curfew period, the activities have reduced, so we supplied in small quantities.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Can the hon. Minister inform the House and the nation as a whole whether, up to now, he is satisfied that we have enough personal protective equipment to cater for the curfew period which will be ending in June?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as has been pointed earlier by the hon. Prime Minister in the Private Notice Question, once the Curfew Order was implemented, the hon. Prime Minister has been conducting High-Level Committees daily and during these High-Level Committees, all these issues have been addressed. As the hon. Prime Minister announced, more than 300 tonnes of equipment, including medicine, have reached Mauritius, so we can cater for all equipment for the next three months safely.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Can the hon. Minister confirm to the House whether he is satisfied with the quality, the standard of the personal protective equipment available in Mauritius?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, the different equipment that we have purchased, we have had them checked by the authorities over there and once the equipment reach Mauritius, we have them checked by the different authorities to make sure that whatever equipment we have procured, can be used by the staff of the Ministry.

Dr. Boolell: Is the hon. Minister aware that despite assurances given by the hon. Prime Minister, there are still many people in essential services who are yet to get the personal protective equipment? I can name, for example, people who are garbage collectors, people from the coastguard and many other essential services.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have entertained requests from the different Ministries. So far, we have the requests from the different Ministries, Local Government and others. We made provision to supply them.

Mr Speaker: Next Question, hon. Abbas Mamode!

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS OVERSEAS - MAURITIAN CITIZENS - ACCESS

(No. B/23) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and

International Trade whether, in regard to our diplomatic missions overseas, he will state if Mauritian citizens have access thereto amid the Covid-19 lockdown implemented in the different countries where they are located, indicating the services offered thereto.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will answer this question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that all our Missions are accessible to any Mauritian abroad. They provide consular services which include the following: renewal of Mauritian passports, issue of travel documents, attestation of civil status documents and a whole array of assistance services to Mauritian nationals in various situations.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, all our diplomatic missions, Consulates and Honorary Consulates have been requested to give utmost priority to the situation of Mauritian nationals in their countries of accreditation working in tandem with the Ministry.

At the same time, we established emergency instruments to initiate and maintain contacts with Mauritian nationals, either directly or through our diplomatic missions, and to respond to their concerns. These include, at the Ministry -

- (i) the creation of a local hotline number [181] and an international Hotline number [+230 4052576]; a service available on a 7/7 day basis;
- (ii) a dedicated email address [emergencymfa@govmu.org], for an easy and rapid submission of concerns and requests;
- (iii) the crisis cell which had been set up for the repatriation of Mauritian nationals from China, that is, in Wuhan, and consolidated thereafter;
- (iv) the setting up of special desk to respond to all emerging consular and other issues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these instruments have allowed my Ministry and our diplomatic missions to stay in touch with Mauritian nationals *via* telephone, email, hotlines and WhatsApp as well as any other means accessible to them. Since January 2020 till date, the special emergency mail alone received and replied to some 4,500 emails, whilst the hotline allowed our crisis team to attend to more than 3,000 calls till now.

The information, compiled through the database regarding Mauritian nationals who are stranded or in distress, is relayed to our Mission overseas for follow up.

In parallel, our diplomatic service consisting of 19 Embassies/High Commissions, 2 Consulates and 58 Honorary Consulates overseas are reaching out to our Mauritian nationals in distress. They have been dispensing all possible services to our nationals abroad, in the countries in which they are present and in those to which the Missions are accredited.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these services include, *inter alia* -

- (i) registration of our citizens abroad and setting up of a database in view of organising an orderly repatriation as soon as the international situation so permits;
- (ii) liaising with authorities of the host country for the extension of visas with regard to stranded Mauritians who have overstayed because of lockdowns;
- (iii) provision of information to those stranded on measures being taken by Government to assist them, including conveying information about the special loan facility initiated by Government at banks ;
- (iv) intervention with various Governments and private stakeholders to facilitate accommodation, for example, by negotiating rates with hotels and calling on their understanding for the difficulties faced by our nationals;
- (v) liaising with local authorities, including the Police, in view of assisting our nationals who face special difficulties;
- (vi) liaising with authorities in the host country for obtaining necessary flight and landing clearances as and when possible for the repatriation of our nationals;
- (vii) liaising, as and when flights are being arranged, with airlines, local authorities, transport and airports for the orderly repatriation of our nationals;
- (viii) making necessary arrangements to facilitate COVID-19 testing for those stranded, wherever possible, such a test being a prime condition for eligibility to return back to Mauritius;
- (ix) facilitating the issue of travel documents for those whose passports have expired;
- (x) providing in some cases, either directly or in liaison with charitable institutions or well-wishers, basic requirements such as food and transportation facilities;
- (xi) assisting those in a special medical condition to procure their medicines and ensuring continuity of their care;
- (xii) counselling and comforting our nationals who are in a situation of anxiety and distress;

- (xiii) maintaining contact with the relevant cruise liners to ensure the welfare and safety of our Mauritian nationals both crew members as per their work contract and passengers, and
- (xiv) ensuring logistic arrangements through freight forwarders, and arranging for customs and other relevant clearances in respect of airlifting or shipments of unprecedented volumes of cargo of medical equipment, the greatest bulk of which has been procured by the Government.

My colleague, Mr Speaker, Sir, just mentioned about 300 tonnes of medical supplies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I call on the House to be alive to the exceptionally disruptive circumstances in which our Missions have been operating. These include lockdown, nation-wide confinement, mobility restrictions, flight restrictions, closure of airports and airspace, cancellation of domestic and connecting flights.

Yet despite these constraints, all our diplomatic Missions, with limited staff and resources, have been responding as diligently as possible to our nationals. They have been delivering to the best of their abilities on the task of assisting our citizens who are stranded or in distress. In many cases, they have done all to respond to the exigencies of the situation.

Just to give you one example, Mr Speaker, Sir, one of our nationals, on medical treatment in India, on support of Government to the tune of 2 million Indian Rupees exceeded the cost of treatment by 3 million Indian Rupees. The cost of the treatment in fact was 5 million. Thanks to the forceful intervention of our High Commission, the hospital agreed to waive the excess amount. I am happy to report that she is expected to return to Mauritius on a repatriation flight which is being envisaged in a few days.

I am also pleased to report to the House that some of our Missions (in Beijing, Paris, New Delhi, Johannesburg) have been prime facilitators for the shipment of critical medical supplies to Mauritius. They have been involved at all stages of the delivery chain. And I also must acknowledge that our Honorary Consulates abroad are also assisting to the extent possible in the constraining conditions of the lockdowns.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our priority at the level of the Ministry and our diplomatic missions is the repatriation of our nationals stranded abroad. Currently, there are around 2000 stranded Mauritians in across 75 countries as remote as Trinidad and Tobago, Siberia, Uruguay, Peru, Congo, Sudan and Uzbekistan; as well as in Europe, India and Madagascar. The Mauritians are found stranded in 25 African countries, 20 European countries, 20 Asian countries and 10

countries in Australasia and the Americas. The figures are likely to increase with the extension of the lockdown and closure of university campuses in many of the countries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, over and above this, there are 1670 Mauritian crew members working for 21 Cruise companies on 122 cruise ships harboured in 41 Ports around the world. The bulk of the Mauritians work for the Royal Caribbean, Mediterranean Shipping Corporation and Celebrity Cruise.

It must be emphasised that repatriation exercise depends on the recommendations of the Ministry of Health taking into account Quarantine and treatment capacity here in Mauritius and as sanctioned by the national committee on COVID.

Criteria applied for the repatriation of stranded Mauritian nationals -

- a valid return ticket;
- patients and accompanying relatives/carers;
- elderly persons above 60;
- families and toddlers, and
- students and Mauritians in distress.
- Moreover, the passengers should have a PCR test not exceeding five days at the time of embarkation, confirming that he/she is COVID-19 free.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Shakeel Mohamed!

Mr Mohamed: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are many people who are stranded as the hon. Minister puts it in many other jurisdictions. I will not cover all of them. Suffice it to just take an example. 39 of them are in a hotel in Rome called Hotel Ih Roma Z3. I see the Minister nodding. So, obviously, he knows what I am talking about, which is a good start. So, 39 of them have been tested negative and they are clients of a cruise company, not workers, clients of a cruise company and that cruise company has communicated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister's Office, the Department of Civil Aviation, they only require...

Mr Speaker: Put the question!

Mr Mohamed: They only require the permission of the Government to bring those passengers to Mauritius at their cost and they are all negative. They are still waiting for an answer. When does the hon. Minister believe they could obtain an answer for patients who

have been tested twice and found to be negative twice and the Government would not have to pay a penny to bring them here? When will they get the answer?

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, it contains a group of Mauritians, 46, who are on the Costa Luminosa and when they landed in Marseille, 6 were tested positive and the others were put in the Quarantine. After the Quarantine, 6 others were declared positive. 1 has passed away among the 6. Yes, 1 has passed away and we have been talking to the family. They are now in a hotel. They have been tested negative. We have our Embassy in Paris which has been following them on a daily basis. The test was done on 07. Am I right? The test has been done on 07, Mr Speaker, Sir and we didn't have an answer until the end of this month. There was a flight leaving Paris some time back. We wanted them to board that flight. We didn't have any report of the test which was done on 07 April. Now, I understand each one is a tragedy and I think they have been around for some time now.

Anyway, we have the National Committee and we are seeing on a batch to batch basis the possibility of repatriating our nationals. So, we will consider that group. A lot would depend on availability of flights, availability of the passengers and we will consider that group because that group has been around for some time now because they were in Marseille, they were in Savone, they were in Rome and now they are stranded there. I am fully aware of this. This is a priority but a lot will depend on availability of flights from Rome to Paris and from Paris to Mauritius. The group in fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, at one time we wanted to airlift them from Rome, but there were no flights between Rome and Dubai. That was the last we tried to do something for that group.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now that the pressure has reduced considerably on our Quarantine services and Air Mauritius planes are grounded, so we have facilities there, can I ask the hon. Minister whether there is a well thought out plan to fly back those 2000 or so people within a time frame and, if so, whether he will be able to table that plan because when people contact our consulate services overseas, they are not able to give clear answers to those people who are already stressed and stranded overseas?

Mr Bodha: There is a lot of uncertainty. Airports are closed; some borders are closed; we don't know when we can have flights, so the only possibility are repatriation flights which we have been organising and this can be done only in a stall manner according to the Quarantine facilities and the treatment facilities in the country. I think the answer

today here has been that we cannot have a second surge and we should do everything that we maintain what we have been able to do. So, we are bringing in. We have a flight from Mumbai and Delhi coming at the end of this week. A few days back we brought some Mauritians from Paris, some came from Johannesburg. So, we will do it in a staggered manner in such a way that we do not put an undue pressure on the health system in Mauritius, but let us hope that things get better. Here, we are in better control of the disease in Mauritius. Things get better in the other countries and then we will do all that we can to bring them back. I can totally understand because we have been having emails and calls every day. That is why we have set a criteria that those who went for medical treatment, those who went with the elderly, those who went on pilgrimage to give them the top priority. That is why we have also come with a loan facility, a very soft loan, so that they can spend that amount of money should they have any issue as regards to the accommodation.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary question. Hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether his Ministry - in Mauritius - received complaints from our Mauritians abroad especially those on medical treatment in India? The hotline of our diplomatic mission in India, nobody is answering the call. I made a test myself concerning India and KL Malaysia where nobody is picking up the phone. So, can the Minister inform the House what are the arrangements made for those who have undergone medical operations in India, are stuck in India and cannot come back to Mauritius. The bills, you know, in hospital in India, so...

Mr Speaker: Are you giving the answer to the question?

Mr Abbas Mamode: No, I am not giving the answer. I am saying that the bills of the people in the hospitals in India are raising day by day. What are the measures the Government will take to repatriate our citizens in those situations?

Mr Bodha: There are many questions. As regards to KL, I will check whether we have any issue, but I would like to say that Malaysia was one of the first countries to lock down and to close the borders. We managed to bring some students from Malaysia via Dubai. The problem was when Dubai was closed so we could not do much.

As regards to India, we are very close to all those who are there. For example, the High Commission is organising the test for all of them in Mumbai and in Delhi because it is not easy to do so. They have organised to see to it that the tests are done with the help of a NGO in Mauritius. It costs 6000 Indian rupees.

As regards to Mauritians who have gone on treatment, some are in Chennai. In fact, they are those who have been sent by the Ministry of Health to Chennai; we have about 25. That is another priority. We will work on that. We are very conscious of it and we have been talking to the health authorities in Chennai to see to it that they have the proper medical care up and until we find a solution.

The solution we have found for India so far is to have a flight from Mauritius to Delhi, Delhi to Mumbai and back. Maybe later we can organise a flight which will go to Chennai and Mumbai and back. There is also the possibility of repatriation of Indian nationals in Mauritius by the Indian Government. So, we are working on all these issues, Mr Speaker Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Assirvaden!

PETROLEUM PRODUCTS - RETAIL PRICES

(No. B/24) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the importation of petroleum products, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Petroleum Pricing Committee, information as to the -

- (a) basis of the calculation of the tax components thereof to determine the retail prices thereof;
- (b) revenue derived from each tax and how same has been utilised since June 2019 to date, and
- (c) quantum of the surplus money accumulated by the State Trading Corporation since July 2019 to date.

Mr Sawmynaden: Mr Speaker, Sir, the retail prices of Mogas (L'Essence) and Gas Oil (Diesel) are computed in accordance with the Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) Regulations 2011 and, with your permission, I am tabling a copy of the price structure for Mogas and Gas Oil which is the basis on which the Petroleum Pricing Committee (PPC) recommends the retail prices.

As regards to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the revenue derived from each tax/contribution in the price structure since June 2019 to date is as follows -

- Rs3.6 billion as Excise Duty payable to the Mauritius Revenue Authority;

- Rs758.2 million as contribution to the Road Development Authority, which also includes contribution to Bus Companies Recovery Account payable to the Road Development Authority and the Accountant General respectively;
- Rs172.8 million as contribution to Rodrigues Transportation and Storage payable to the Rodrigues Subsidy Management Fund;
- Rs249.3 million as contribution to the Construction of Storage Facilities for Petroleum Products used for the funding of storage facilities for petroleum products;
- Rs905.4 million as contribution to Subsidy on LPG, Flour and Rice by the STC itself;
- Rs1.96 billion as Value Added Tax (VAT) payable to the Mauritius Revenue Authority.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 04 April 2020, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new item, namely Contribution to the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund has been introduced in the price structure of Mogas and Gas Oil. This amount will be collected by STC as from the new consignment in May 2020 and will be payable to the Managing Committee of the Fund.

Once the funds are remitted to the different organisations, it falls under the control and management of their respective boards.

Concerning part (c) of the question, I am informed that, as at end April 2020, the Price Stabilisation Account showed an estimated balance of Rs69.8 million for Gas Oil and a negative balance of Rs41.9 for Mogas.

Mr Assirvaden: Vu que l'essence et le diesel sont deux intrants majeurs dans le coût des taximen, des autobus, des opérateurs, etc. l'honorable ministre ne pense-t-il pas qu'une baisse du prix à la pompe en ce temps de COVID et de crise, soulagera énormément les opérateurs dans ce temps de crise?

Mr Sawmynaden: M. le président, laissez-moi informer la Chambre que pendant le *sanitary curfew*, *no much petrol, gas or diesel has been sold*. So, there is already a decline in the revenue and all the petrol stations et les fournisseurs eux-mêmes sont en train de se plaindre qu'ils n'ont plus de revenue. Concernant la fixation des prix, c'est au *Petroleum Pricing Committee* qui est une entité complètement indépendante qui se réunit et évalue toute la situation et fixe le prix du pétrole.

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président. Can the Minister inform the House whether any monies have been transferred from the STC to the Consolidated Fund since June 2019, if so, how much?

Mr Sawmynaden: Which Consolidated Fund? Actually, I have already mentioned all the funds that the STC transfers or contributes as I mentioned - to the Road Development Authority, to Rodrigues, to the construction of storage facilities and contribution to the subsidy. All those that I have listed are in the list. I do not know any other fund that the hon. Member is talking about.

Mr Ameer Meea: Can the hon. Minister state to the House till when the new tax on petroleum products will be applicable?

Mr Sawmynaden: As I mentioned in my reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are talking of the new consignment in May 2020.

(Interruptions)

This one we will decide. We have not even started, the hon. Member is talking about finishing.

Mr Speaker: You ask for a supplementary question and finally, you are making comments. Hon. Duval!

Mr Ameer Meea: ... he didn't even give an answer!

Mr X. L. Duval: May I ask the hon. Minister, with relation to subsidy on rice, flour and gas, how much presently has been accumulated by the State Trading Corporation in excess of subsidies actually paid on these items? The hon. Minister will see there is a separate account in the STC for that.

Mr Sawmynaden: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the only figure that I have. I do not know about any account that the hon. Member is talking about. It is Rs905.4 million as contribution to subsidy on LPG, flour and rice.

Mr X. L. Duval: What is the amount paid? I am asking for the accumulated amount. Hundreds of millions of rupees accumulated at the STC.

Mr Sawmynaden: If the hon. Member would come with a substantive question then I am going to give the answer to that.

Mr Speaker: You are a seasoned politician, you know the answer.

(Interruptions)

Mr Sawmynaden: Of course!

CEB - ELECTRICITY TARIFFS

(No. B/25) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Central Electricity Board, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to -

- (a) if consideration will be given for a lowering of the electricity tariffs following the recent collapse of the oil/coal prices worldwide, and
- (b) the assumptions used for the preparation of the Capital and Recurrent Budgets thereof for the years 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, the recent fall in fossil fuel prices is occurring in exceptional circumstances, in the context of a pandemic and the resulting unprecedented global financial crisis as well as other circumstances. There is a high level of uncertainty worldwide about how events will unfold in the coming years.

In present situation, it is to be noted that concurrently the fall in oil prices, the exchange rates of the US dollar has appreciated significantly while during the lockdown, the CEB has to cope with the drop in revenue due to a 35% fall in demand. Oil and coal prices are highly volatile commodities.

The electricity tariff cannot be increased or decreased based on each and every fluctuation.

It is worthwhile to recall that between 2006 and 2010, the electricity tariff was increased on four occasions, totalling over 60% of increase over a period of four years.

The CEB will continue to monitor the price evolution and will take decisions with the highest level of prudence in the interest of the population and the country.

In brief, the CEB is not envisaging an across the board reduction of tariff on the basis of the exceptional recent events.

My policy and that of the Government is to ensure affordable access to electricity to the poorest and most vulnerable members of the population. And this has been achieved by the following measures –

- (i) There has been no increase in electricity tariff since 2015;
- (ii) In December 2015, electricity tariff under the Social Tariff 110A was reduced by 31%. About 64,000 consumers now benefit from this reduced tariff;
- (iii) Following directives issued on 31 March, the CEB reduced the Social Tariff 110A by a further 20% as from 01 April 2020 to alleviate the financial difficulties faced by poorer families during the Covid-19 lockdown. The new tariff is Rs1.74 for the first 25 kilowatt as compared to the normal tariff of Rs3.16 per kilowatt, Rs2.43 instead of Rs4.38 for the next 25 kilowatt and Rs2.62 per kilowatt as compared to Rs4.74 per kilowatt. The monthly minimum charge has been reduced from Rs31 to Rs25;
- (iv) In total, there has been a tariff reduction of about 51% since 2015 for about 64,000 low income and vulnerable households;
- (v) The CEB has also lowered the tariff by 10% for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as from 01 April 2020. This applies to the very small and modest commercial activities;
- (vi) In furtherance of the same policy, CEB has installed 1000 solar panels on houses of families in the Social Register without any cost to the households. These families will benefit from 50 KW of electricity free of charge each month over a period of 20 years. The aim is to install 10,000 kits by 2024, and
- (vii) About 500 kits have been installed for SMEs with substantial reduction in their monthly electricity bill. This would be increased to 2000. Similar projects are to be implemented for religious bodies, charitable organisations and NGOs.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the CEB that the assumptions it has used for its budget are no longer valid after Covid-19 events.

It is currently reviewing its three-year forecast and budgets in the light of the recent trade and financial developments. It will also consider reports and data provided by all financial institutions.

Mr Assirvaden: Je remercie le ministre pour la réponse. M. le président, les deux mesures annoncées par le gouvernement, surtout par le Premier ministre concernant le tarif

110A, 65,000 consommateurs et le tarif pour les 18,000 SMEs, les deux, M. le président, ne coûtent que R 80 millions au CEB alors que le *Deputy Prime Minister* compare ce qui s'est passé en 2004, 2005, 2006 et aujourd'hui, le prix de pétrole a chuté drastiquement au niveau mondial. Ce qui fait que nous parlons ici d'un *windfall gain* pour décembre à la hauteur de R 3 milliards. La baisse annoncée par le Premier ministre ne concerne que 83,000 consommateurs.

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: Put your question, please!

Mr Assirvaden: Est-ce que le *Deputy Prime Minister* peut dire à la Chambre pourquoi les 373,000 autres consommateurs, foyers à revenus moyens, des *ti-dimounes* ne peuvent pas bénéficier d'un soulagement, donc d'une baisse dans cette pandémie ?

The Deputy Prime Minister: There are several questions. Let me start with the first one, what the hon. Member calls the drastic fall in the price of oil. It is true, because of Covid-19, because of other circumstances, US/China relation, lack of demand, there has been a drastic fall. In fact, when you look at the prices of West Texas International (WTI), the prices were even negative. Brent price also fell dramatically. But see what happened if one looks at yesterday's prices, WTI has gone up to 20 dollars, Brent crude is now almost 27 dollars. Nobody can predict what will happen tomorrow. This is not a hedging game, this is not a game where you can play yoyo with the future of this country. So, we are not going to change our policy, the policy which is constant. I replied to that question. We had a very interesting debate on 20 September 2015 between the then Leader of the Opposition and Government and myself on this issue. So, these matters have been settled since 2015. I don't want to go and enter into that debate again. It is settled policy; it has been accepted by one and all. We are going to alleviate the poor. I am not going to take money from the poor to give to the rich.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Assirvaden: J'ai une question supplémentaire, s'il vous plait. M. le président, l'*assumptions* que j'ai demandé et qui n'a pas été déposée puisque le *Deputy Prime Minister*, le CEB considère que c'est obsolète en date du 04 octobre, signée de M. Makoon. Le HFO, l'huile lourde à 448 dollars métriques tonnes en Octobre, la prévision du CEB. Aujourd'hui, le prix en métrique tonne est 148 dollars. Donc, 300 dollars de différence, ce qui fait que c'est un *windfall gain* pour le gouvernement, pour le CEB. Vu cette crise que nous traversons

actuellement, est-ce que le *Deputy Prime Minister* peut prendre l'engagement dans cette Chambre - l'effet que les milliards se perdent un peu partout dans nos banques – que cet argent du CEB, les trois milliards que moi, j'arrive à mes comptes, ne servira pas à financer les projets des turbines à gaz si cher à l'honorable Deputy Prime Minister?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

COVID-19 - FUNERALS - PROTOCOL

(No. B/26) Ms N. Ramyad (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state the measures taken by the Sanitary Services Unit to undertake and perform the funeral rites of persons who pass away as a result thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has developed a protocol for the funeral of persons passing away as a result of COVID-19 as from 25 March 2020. The protocol is comprehensive based on WHO recommendation and has also made provision for religious rituals. The protocol consists of removal of dead body from the isolation area, handling of dead bodies in mortuary, autopsies, transportation to cremation or burial ground and also make provision for religious rituals.

I am tabling a copy of the protocol.

Ms Ramyad: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether a one-stop administrative facilities has been put in place for the relatives of the deceased to get all the documents needed to perform the funeral rites like the death certificates, etc, at the hospital itself or do they have to move around to get all the related documents?

Dr. Jagutpal: Concerning patients who have passed away with Covid-19, there are so many patients where the relatives were in treatment centres. So, for those patients, the health authorities, the sanitary authorities have taken the task of doing all the procedures to the burial ground, to the funeral ground and for others the relatives have undertaken all the procedures. All the procedures are being done as usual for all patients that have passed away.

Ms Ramyad: Can the hon. Minister confirm if all officers involved in undertaking and driving the deceased to the cremation ground or given proper protective equipment, did they do the Covid-19 test?

Dr. Jagutpal: So, all officers who will be involved in carrying the dead bodies, all will have been given personal protective equipment, as it has been established by the protocol.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Can the hon. Minister state if these funeral rites are in full compliance with guidelines established by the World Health Organisation with respect to different communities.

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes. As it has been established by the World Health Organisation recommendation, we have been implementing the same for the persons who have passed away with Covid-19.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

WAGE ASSISTANCE SCHEME - BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/27) Ms N. Ramyad (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Wage Assistance Scheme, he will state the eligibility criteria for employers to benefit thereunder.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, suite à l'accélération de la pandémie du Covid-19 à travers le monde, un couvre-feu sanitaire a été instauré dans le pays à partir du 20 mars 2020.

Afin de contenir les risques de pertes d'emploi pendant cette période durant laquelle de nombreux employés se sont, techniquement, retrouvés au chômage, le gouvernement a rapidement introduit le *Wage Assistance Scheme*. A titre de comparaison, en France plus de la moitié des salariés est au chômage technique, et aux Etats-Unis, ce sont plus de 15% des salariés qui sont contraints (contre 3,5% avant la crise).

Dans le cadre de ce programme sans précédent, les salariés des entreprises ayant subi les effets néfastes de la pandémie Covid-19 et des restrictions induites ont bénéficié d'une assistance de l'Etat.

Pour rappel, le régime est applicable aux employés travaillant à temps plein ou à temps partiel.

En termes de *modus operandi*, sachez que la grande majorité des entreprises a été invitée à verser, en amont, les salaires des employés et uniquement, dans un second temps, à

demander un remboursement auprès de la *MRA* comme prévu par le *Wage Assistance Scheme*. En ce qui concerne les entreprises confrontées à des problèmes de trésorerie, elles ont été prioritaires dans l'obtention de cette aide financière du gouvernement.

M. le président, permettez-moi de revenir sur les conditions, et par ricochet, les exemptions liées au *Wage Assistance Scheme*.

Un employeur est exclu *de facto* du régime –

- (a) s'il a bénéficié de fonds au titre du régime et n'a pas rémunéré ses employés pour les mois de mars et/ou avril 2020; ou
- (b) s'il a licencié ne serait-ce qu'un seul employé pendant la période de couvre-feu *lockdown*.

Lorsqu'un employeur a été exclu du régime, la *MRA* est alors en capacité d'agir rapidement afin de récupérer les fonds versés à cet employeur dans le cadre du régime.

En outre, le gouvernement a décidé d'étendre le programme d'aide salariale pour couvrir, pendant la période de couvre-feu sanitaire, les institutions caritatives et religieuses, les trusts caritatifs ainsi que les fondations caritatives qui emploient des travailleurs. Merci.

Ms Ramyad: Can the hon. Minister state the number of beneficiaries who have satisfied the conditions and how many of the applications are rejected due to non-compliance to the regulations?

Dr. Padayachy: Jusqu'à présent, M. le président, il y a plus de 12,000 entreprises qui ont bénéficié de ce régime, que je répète qu'on a mis en place pour éviter une casse sociale dans le pays, comme nous avons vu à travers le monde. Donc, nous avons 12,000 entreprises et cela concerne plus de 240,000 employés ?

Ms Ramyad: Can the hon. Minister state the number SMEs which have benefitted from the scheme?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je n'ai malheureusement pas l'information sur les PME, j'ai sur toutes les entreprises au niveau global. Je vais rechercher l'information.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Ms Ramyad: May I ask one question?

Mr Uteem: May I know from the...

Ms Ramyad: Suppose if a company does...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: She is the mover of the question!

(Interruptions)

... question!

(Interruptions)

You don't shout to me!

(Interruptions)

You can't shout to me!

(Interruptions)

Go ahead with your question!

Ms Ramyad: If a company did not apply for the first month or the first two months, can it...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Did you say something towards me?

Mr Bérenger: I am saying that we should not...

Mr Speaker: No, I heard something else. If you have the courage, repeat it!

(Interruptions)

Repeat it!

Mr Bérenger: Repeat it; as a *malélevé!*

Mr Speaker: You!

Mr Bérenger: Oui!

Mr Speaker: I order you out!

(Interruptions)

I order you out!

Mr Bérenger: *Mille fois Maya. Mille fois Maya. Dire Maya revini. Malélevé!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I order you out!

(Interruptions)

I order you out! Serjeant-at-arms!

At this stage, all Members of the Opposition left the Chamber.

Ms Ramyad: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I?

Mr Speaker: Please, go ahead!

Ms Ramyad: If a company did not apply for the first month or the first two months, can it avail or apply for the month of May for Wage Assistance Scheme, it may be that due to the extension which is making it unable to cope to the new situation?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, bien sûr qu'il pourra faire une application si besoin est. Et je tiens à préciser que nous, au ministère des Finances, nous travaillons sur la mise en place pour le paiement du *Wage Assistance Scheme* pour le mois de mai. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Ms Ramyad!

LA MARIE ELDERLY CENTRE

(No. B/30) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas and Floréal) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the La Marie Elderly Centre, she will state if her Ministry proposes to open same and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

SC & HSC 2020 - ACTION PLAN

(No. B/32) Ms N. Ramyad (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the Cambridge School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate 2020, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, information as to if –

- (a) a request for the rescheduling thereof has been addressed to the Local Examinations Syndicate of the University of Cambridge and, if so, indicate where matters stand, and

- (b) an Action Plan has been set up for the 2020 cohort of students who will be sitting therefor and, if so, give details thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, globally a large majority of countries have witnessed nationwide close down of schools, resulting in alternative timings being identified for assessments at different levels. The closure of schools and the subsequent postponement of examinations is now an international reality. Cambridge Assessment International Education is responsible for the conduct of O Level Examinations in over 50 countries while AS and A Levels are taken in over 130 countries.

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, most of these countries have taken the decision to close schools, resulting in loss of school days and this in turn has implications for assessment and examinations. On 03 March of this year, Cambridge has informed of its decision not to hold its international examinations in May-June 2020 series in any country. We are given to understand that Cambridge is not yet in a position to receive entries of October-November 2020 exams as in an update of 20 April 2020, Cambridge has stated that it will confirm the dates when school candidates can be entered for the November 2020 series as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as you are aware, schools will resume on 03 August 2020 and there will be need to make up for the lost days due to the confinement for students to catch up with their studies. Also students will be required to adequately complete the syllabus for the different subjects to be taken at SC and HSC levels. In view of the above, it should be ensured that sufficient time and space are provided for students to develop their preparedness and to complete their syllabi such that they may take the international examinations in the best possible conditions. The school calendar as well as the assessment calendar will accordingly have to be adjusted, that is, it will be from the period August 2020 up to February/March 2021.

In this context, discussions are already ongoing with Cambridge Assessment International Education regarding the rescheduling of SC/HSC examinations. Such examinations will have to be taken next year for the 2020 SC/HSC cohort of students after the end of the newly adjusted calendar.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have to announce that the Table has been advised that PQ Nos. B/35, B/36, B/47, B/48, B/49, B/50 and B/51 have been withdrawn.

Go ahead!

Mr Nuckcheddy: With regard to those candidates who had already paid for the May/June A Level and O Level exams, can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister please inform what are the procedures that are going to be set-up for the refund of these fees?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Examination Syndicate will be liaising with the students and we will let them know at what time the refund will be done, most probably after the confinement period.

Mr Speaker: Question Time is almost over, in a few second! Clerk, go ahead!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that all the business on today's Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(4.19 p.m.)

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

COVID-19 - CONTAINMENT & PROGRESSIVE REOPENING OF THE ECONOMY

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a statement to make on the containment of COVID-19 and the progressive reopening of the economy. Since the statement is quite long, I shall request the indulgence of Hon. Members to bear with me.

The House will recall that when we last met on Friday 20 March 2020, I made a statement in which I explained the Government's preparedness plan and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the measures we were implementing to prevent the entry and spread of the coronavirus in the Republic of Mauritius.

In my statement, I did emphasise the fact that, since early January, with much foresight, the Government had been acting proactively in addressing the emerging and serious threat posed by the spread of the Coronavirus from the city of Wuhan in China. I can

now say with reasonable satisfaction that Government had prudently and responsibly taken the right decisions at the right time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since then, as we are all aware, the Coronavirus has continued its inexorable spread across the globe and has been wreaking havoc in its path, stunning some countries and overwhelming their health authorities by the sheer scale of its impact and the resulting death toll. And there is as yet no proven antidote or vaccine to eliminate this invisible enemy, which COVID-19 is. The pandemic is testing the world's best scientific and medical brains as well as the limits of human resistance and resilience, and human adaptability. Indeed, the impact of the pandemic on the global economy has also been on an unprecedented scale. In fact, it is qualified as being worse than the 2008 financial crisis, and even greater than the "Great Depression" of the 1930s.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as Mauritius is concerned, when we last met on Friday 20 March, I informed that we had 12 cases of COVID-19. The situation worsened rapidly and the number of daily new infections started to rise and reached a peak on Thursday 09 April with 41 reported cases of new infections. In view thereof, and equally taking into account the deteriorating situation at the international level, Government, and our health authorities, stepped up our vigilance and have been working tirelessly and relentlessly to contain the spread of the disease. As a matter of fact, Government took some very bold and necessary measures in order to stop the spread of the virus. These measures include the following –

- (i) the timely implementation of quarantine measures and designation of new quarantine facilities - in fact, with the arrival of more passengers, mainly Mauritians coming back to the country, 20 hotels were turned into quarantine centres in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and *AHRIM*;
- (ii) posting of medical and non-medical staff from the Ministry of Health and Wellness to all quarantine centres;
- (iii) regular disinfection of quarantine centres until end of use and handing over;
- (iv) extending all the necessary resources to the health authorities to wage the war against the COVID-19;
- (v) extension of the total ban on travellers to enter the territory of Mauritius;
- (vi) suspension of all flights to Rodrigues so as to keep the Island free from COVID-19;

- (vii) preventive measures were also taken to protect the island of Agalega;
- (viii) making of the Prevention and Mitigation of Infectious Disease (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 to deal specifically with the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (ix) issue of first Curfew Order on 23 March 2020 by the Minister of Health and Wellness to break the circuit of transmission of the virus;
- (x) concurrent closing of all trading premises as an additional measure to prevent the spread of the virus;
- (xi) extension of the Curfew Order on three occasions, as the situation so warranted;
- (xii) maintaining strict control and monitoring at port level, including systematic checks for all cruise ship passengers entering the Mauritian territory while applying entry restrictions that were ongoing for various countries and parts of the world;
- (xiii) urgent procurement of medical supplies, protective equipment such as ventilators, test kits, swabs, PCR reagents, amongst others. In fact, we arranged for Air Mauritius to airlift more than 340 tonnes of such medical supplies and materials from China;
- (xiv) procurement of additional drugs and protective equipment such as surgical and N-95 masks, Personal Protective Equipment, goggles, gloves, and other essential requirements;
- (xv) screening of health workers, Police Officers, Prison Officers, prisoners, foreign workers, and staff and inmates of homes and shelters;
- (xvi) launching of sample community screening campaign for COVID-19 using Rapid Antigen Tests, directed towards front liners;
- (xvii) ongoing training of Health staff in collaboration with the World Health Organisation;
- (xviii) establishing protocol for treatment of COVID-19 patients using chloroquine and other drugs and plasma pheresis in severe cases using blood donation from cured patients;

- (xix) creation of a hotline 8924 for all matters related to COVID-19 and health issues;
- (xx) undertaking massive education and sensitisation campaign in the media on preventive and hygiene measures, including the creation of a dedicated web page and mobile app;
- (xxi) putting into place a home visit system for urgent cases necessitating medical intervention, and
- (xxii) putting into place a triage system in all Regional Hospitals in order to direct patients with COVID-19 like symptoms to flu/fever clinics, thus limiting contact with other patients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government has all along been very sensitive to the adverse human rights impacts of the drastic economic downturn, and of the disease itself, particularly on the most vulnerable families. In order to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and of the containment measures on the population and reduce their hardship, the Government came up with a host of measures which included –

- (i) distribution of basic food items to shelters, homes, charitable institutions and to families who are on the Social Register of Mauritius;
- (ii) allowing people to go out during the curfew to avail themselves of urgent medical treatment, essential supplies, foodstuff and medical and other items essential for their subsistence of livelihood;
- (iii) introduction of COVID-19 Wage Support Scheme to provide financial support to employees becoming technically unemployed on a temporary basis - the Scheme covers the travel and tourism sectors, export oriented enterprises, ICT/BPO, SMEs and in other formal sectors of the economy, including charitable institutions;
- (iv) introduction of Self-employed Assistance Scheme for those in the informal sector;
- (v) opening of supermarkets, hypermarkets and retail shops, with shopping allowed in alphabetical order and subject to strict sanitary conditions;
- (vi) an online platform for purchase of limited goods from authorised supermarkets;

- (vii) setting up of the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund to finance projects and programmes related to COVID-19 and to provide financial support to persons and organisations affected by COVID-19;
- (viii) setting up of the COVID-19 Projects Development Fund to finance, *inter alia*, projects specified in the Public Sector Investment Programme;
- (ix) introduction of price control on hand sanitizers, respirators, masks and on certain identified essential food items and sanitary products;
- (x) ensuring adequate supply of basic commodities like potatoes and onions by the Agricultural Marketing Board;
- (xi) use of distance and online media for schooling purposes;
- (xii) payment of child allowance to all families on the Social Register of Mauritius;
- (xiii) arrangements for carers looking after elderly and persons with disabilities to also provide them with amenities, including food items and medicines;
- (xiv) payment of basic pensions at their place of residence – these are usually paid through Post Offices, and
- (xv) creating a hotline for victims of domestic violence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have also been maintaining all essential services, through the issue of Work Access Permits, so as to ensure safety and security and reduce hardship during the curfew period. However, appropriate instructions were issued to all public sector organisations to implement the recommended preventive measures so as to protect the health of all employees at the workplace, as recommended by the International Labour Organisation. Similar measures were implemented in the private sector as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, much has been said in various quarters on the repatriation of our compatriots from abroad during the curfew period. Let me state in no uncertain terms that the Government has all along been very sensitive to the plight of all our compatriots who were stranded abroad and has acted accordingly. In fact, Mauritius was one of the first countries to have repatriated its citizens from Wuhan on Sunday 02 February 2020 with the assistance of the Chinese and French authorities. The Government also provided its assistance and support to all our nationals residing in China who had expressed their willingness to return to Mauritius by Thursday 20 February 2020. We managed to repatriate 35 other Mauritians who were stranded following the spread of COVID-19 in other parts of China. Let me stress on

the fact that we took those measures before Wednesday 11 March 2020, that is, before WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic. Soon after, our Diplomatic Missions were heavily solicited by more than 1700 Mauritians worldwide.

After the issue of Curfew Order and closing of air space in Mauritius, we also managed to repatriate 935 Mauritians within four days from United Kingdom, France, Turkey, Australia, UAE, South Africa, India and Reunion Island before the closing down of air space in those countries. 11 Mauritians were also repatriated from Maldives on Saturday 11 April 2020, and another 29 from Paris on Sunday 26 April 2020.

At the moment, the Government is doing its very best to provide necessary support to the 3,000 or so Mauritians who are currently abroad and who wish to return to Mauritius. These Mauritians are either on tourist visits, medical treatment, students, business, pilgrimage or working on cruise ships. Many of them are, in fact, crew members working on cruise ships harboured in 41 Ports around the world. The Government has continuously been engaged in direct consultations with the cruise companies to ensure the safety, welfare and good health of our citizens.

The Government is pursuing its efforts for the orderly and phased return of Mauritian nationals in the face of numerous challenges arising in the context of the escalating crisis situation and the international and internal flight restrictions and lockdown measures prevailing in those countries.

The following criteria will apply for establishing priority for repatriation –

- (a) patients and one accompanying relative or carer;
- (b) elderly persons above 60, and
- (c) families with toddlers.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade is currently coordinating the return of stranded Mauritians from other countries. As a matter of fact, a flight from Johannesburg brought back 77 Mauritians on Thursday 30 April 2020 and a second flight is planned for Friday 08/Saturday 09 May 2020 with 150 stranded Mauritians from Mumbai and Delhi.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like also to emphasise the fact that the Government has all along been managing the crisis in a very transparent manner. We have been holding daily briefings to keep the population informed on the evolution of the COVID-19 situation both at

national and international levels. We have also been subjecting ourselves to media scrutiny through direct questions and answers from the Press. However, at some point in time, access to members of the Press to our daily briefings became risky and we consequently decided, in the interest of one and all, to shift the Questions and Answers session on a virtual platform. Moreover, I have personally been addressing the nation on specific occasions to update them on the major Government decisions regarding the containment of COVID-19.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the figures we have been obtaining lately about new cases of infections indicate that COVID-19 is well under control in our country. I must say that this is largely thanks to the commitment, dedication, courage and professionalism of all our front liners, including first and foremost our doctors, nurses and other health care workers, Police Officers, employees in other essential services and all those who have been helping to keep the country going in these difficult times. They have been dedicating themselves heart and soul at the service of the nation in these testing and trying times. I would like to pay tribute to all our heroes who led the fight against COVID-19 on the front to save our compatriots. They truly deserve all our admiration. We owe to all of them a huge debt of gratitude and we shall remain forever indebted to them.

Unfortunately, we lost 10 of our compatriots in the battle. I would like to express our deepest condolences to the bereaved families. I also convey my wishes for a prompt recovery to our compatriots who are still afflicted by the disease.

On behalf of my Government, I would also like to express our deep appreciation for the cooperation, understanding and discipline of the large majority of the population during the curfew period. It is also thanks to their sense of discipline that we have been able to curb the spread of the virus in the country.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to thank all persons, organisations and partner countries for their valuable assistance and donations extended to Mauritius in its battle against the COVID-19.

Mr Speaker, Sir, although, we may not be out of the woods yet, we have through the relentless efforts of one and all, succeeded in curbing the progress of the disease to an extent that we consider it safe enough to ease the restrictions to some extent and move for a progressive reopening of economic and other activities. The strategy and action plan for the reopening, which the Government announced on Friday last, hinges around one central

concern of Government, and that is the continued protection of public health, which remains our topmost priority.

We have to avoid, by all means, the risk of any setback with a resurgence of the disease that would squander the gains achieved through the confinement and also to avoid heavy strain on our health services and the economy in general.

The country must, therefore, remain on high alert and continue to strictly observe social distancing and sanitary guidelines. It is only through discipline that we can continue to keep the enemy at bay. We must also bear in mind that this is not the responsibility of Government alone. Every single one of us has a role to play. This is what is unique about this battle. We can fight it and break the cycle if we come together. Together we will win, and together we will successfully adapt to the New World Order, from the economic and other related angles that will emerge post-COVID-19.

I know it may at times be painful to stay indoors for a long time, away from friends and families. But it is for their sake as well. And then, we have no alternatives. We all know what is at stake. When it comes to the safety and security of our people, we cannot afford to take any risk. We will stop at nothing to save lives. This is the reason why Government has opted for a cautious approach and extended the curfew period with the progressive reopening of economic and other activities. I am convinced that the Mauritian patriotic spirit will prevail and we will ultimately defeat COVID-19.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our nation has fought and won many other battles before. Like our forefathers who lifted themselves up from their bootstraps, boldly faced so many adversities and strongly resisted the whips and the scorns of their times, neither retreating nor surrendering from their relentless efforts in togetherness and solidarity to protect and save lives, the Government shall, in the national interest, neither retreat nor surrender from the measures we have taken to protect and safeguard the health of the population and to save lives, which are in these trying times our topmost priority.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me conclude by quoting Mr Benjamin Disraeli, and I quote -

“The care of the public health is the first duty of the Statesman.”

Thank you.

(Applause)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Diolle!

MOTION

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS – MOTION OF THANKS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the following motion of the Fourth Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes (Mrs M. A. T. Diolle).

“That an Address be presented to the President of the Republic of Mauritius in the following terms –

“We, the Members of the Mauritius National Assembly, here assembled, beg leave to offer our thanks to the President of the Republic of Mauritius for the Presentation of the Government Programme 2020-2024 on the occasion of the Opening of the First Session of the Seventh National Assembly.””

Question again proposed.

(4.41 p.m.)

Mrs M. A. T. Diolle (Fourth Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Mr Speaker, Sir, today I am summing up the debates on the motion standing in my name. I do so in exceptional circumstances.

Normalement, je parle du Covid-19, mais il est vrai que quand je vois l'attitude de l'Opposition, ça me chagrine en tant que jeune parlementaire. Il y a eu beaucoup d'insistance pour que nous, les membres du gouvernement, de la majorité parlementaires et les membres du gouvernement ne fassent pas de politique ou d'attaque basse. Mais il est triste qu'après tant de demandes pour la réouverture du Parlement, aussi facilement, les parlementaires de l'Opposition se lèvent et s'en vont sans vraiment comprendre quelquefois la portée de ce genre d'action. Cela signifie simplement, M. le président, qu'à un moment de crise, parce que nous sommes en période de crise, que très peu de parlementaires comprennent leur responsabilité vis-à-vis de la population.

M. le président, je reviens à mon discours. On 03 February, I moved the motion standing in my name. It was my first speech before you. As from 18 March, we took stock of the ravage which this novel virus was inflicting on us. The word 'confinement' became part of our daily vocabulary.

Mr Speaker, Sir, you decided that we could not meet. Stay home was the order of the day. Today, we meet again, in renewed surroundings. I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, and all those who are behind this new and comfortable design. This has been done in record time.

These new sitting arrangements illustrate how even our Parliament have had to adapt itself to this new unprecedented situation. Thanks to the proactive measures of the Mauritian Government, our country has been able to contain one of the biggest threats that humanity has known during this new century. We, nevertheless remain alert and vigilant. We will keep on working towards eliminating this invisible enemy.

Since the beginning of a confinement, we have learnt how to live without flights connections. We have learnt how to stay at home. We have learnt to eat differently. We have learnt self-discipline. Even Court Hearings are being done from home. But we have also been moved by the hard work, selflessness of front liners, who, on a daily basis, make huge sacrifices for our survival and wellbeing. They have been on the battle field and deserve all our gratitude.

Dr. Bruno Cheong is a symbol. He died during the battle. He reminds me of Dr. Idrice Goomany who, at the end of the 19th century, was fighting Smallpox to save the lives of his fellow countrymen. I wish, in the name of a whole nation, to thank all those front-liners for everything they have done and keep doing for our survival and well-being.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when I say that our country has done very well so far, it does not mean that we can go back to business as usual. We were able to contain the virus, but we are not safe from its terrible consequences. This is why we agreed to conclude the debates prematurely. Understandably, a consensus has been reached between both sides of the House to change our focus in view of a tremendous impact of this pandemic on the world at large, including Mauritius. This is why, today, it is very hard to understand the attitude of the Opposition. It is with regret that I will not be able to listen to the speeches of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and other Senior Members of the House.

However, we will now need to focus on social development, protection of our cultural identities and heritage and a sustainable utilisation of our natural resources. In the end, it is the quality of life of our population that matters.

All those who took part in the debates focussed on those cardinal points. We agree on the fundamentals, but we do not agree on how to get there. Our democracy will get us through as well as the resilience of the population.

The Government Programme clearly sets a strong message while aiming towards a knowledge based high-income economy; it also sets an agenda to look beyond the simple metric of economic growth. Nowadays, opinion leaders and leaders around the world are calling for this change. We have already planned for it, prior to COVID-19 crisis and the new generations are likely to be the privileged witness of this change.

The Government Programme caters for the rising expectation of the youth, the concerns of the working population and the situation of the elderly. It aims at improving the economic status of women who faces a relatively higher unemployment rate. It emphasises an equal distribution of wealth, responds directly to poverty-related issues and addresses the shortages of skills in our economy, among others. The current crisis has exacerbated the demand for such policies and, therefore, it cannot be denied that the Government Programme has become more relevant than before. The Programme also aims at upgrading infrastructure, including public transportation and the Port, modernising public services to create a conducive environment for new economic opportunities.

Following the crisis, some of our traditional sectors will take more time than the others to recover. There is an urgency for setting up the parameters for the emergence of new sectors. At the same time, this Programme creates the necessary synergies for new sources of growth through modernising and adoption of new technologies towards high value added in all economic sectors. And developing activities related to artificial intelligence, blockchain technologies and financial technologies, commonly known as Fintech.

Finally, it seeks to open ventures for new economic sectors such as the ocean-based industries. Emphasis is laid on the sustainable utilisation of resources with minimal ecological risk, for example, one key measure is clean energy development through renewable energy.

Mr Speaker, our greatest asset to overcome any crisis is our people. It is our people that have been the pillar of growth and development throughout the harshest crisis our country has known. It is, therefore, not a coincidence that the Government Programme prioritises productivity through education and skill development and to improving labour market mobility with the National Skills Development Strategy which aims at addressing development needs for the next 5 years with a special focus on new fled start-ups.

Mr Speaker, Sir, young people of our republic have to know that this crisis is an opportunity for them to thrive. They have to be the young; they have to be the brave, and they

have to be the powerful. This crisis can be an opportunity to grab and Government has catered for their growth and involvement in its Programme. As youth is an integral part of its vision of Mauritius, thrive together with the innovative digitalised public services, creation of an e-Mauritius, proposed investment and promotion in cutting edge technologies, including artificial intelligence, robotics, blockchain and internet of things. Together, Mr Speaker, Sir, we will pave the way towards the fourth industrial revolution which will be key to revive the economy in the post-COVID-19.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to social measures, over the years, Government transfers and support have been key to help the needy, elderly and the vulnerable groups. The decision to increase old-age pension, Basic Widow's Pension and Basic Invalidity Pension to Rs9,000 has allowed many vulnerable individuals to absorb the shocks triggered by the current sanitary crisis. The current pandemic bears witness to the support of Government under the humane leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and other Cabinet Members towards the people and their commitment to protect each and every citizen in the country.

To mention only but a few measures since many of them were mentioned earlier by the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister himself –

- the support of 50% of minimum wage to the informal sector;
- special relief for enterprises;
- Development Bank of Mauritius to provide loans of Rs1 m. to enterprise with a profit net up to Rs10 m., and
- exemption of municipal fees for some 13,000 market stall holders.

Government even went to the extent of going directly to individuals with the delivery of 45,000 food packs and pensions to vulnerable families registered through the SRM at the Ministry of Social Security. This would not have been possible without the personal input of a Minister of Social Security and the help of NGOs, volunteers willing to reach out to the most vulnerable. We have to thank them and be forever grateful that there are still people out there who care enough to just help during hard times. These new and immediate measures had to be adopted to allow our people to adapt to the current situation, sustain their livelihoods and promote jobs retention.

The other side of the coin is that these new measures directly affected public funds with an unplanned disbursement of nearly Rs5 billion. We also have to plan for the next

month, knowing that economies around the world will definitely be severely impacted by the global crisis. The IMF makes a reference of 3% contraction in the global growth, which directly affects sectors such as tourism, aviation and logistics, currently employing 49 billion people around the world. The Mauritian economy will definitely be impacted with the tourism sector, contributing to 23% of our GDP. It is to be expected, according to the Minister of Finance, that by the end of this year, economic growth will be negatively impacted and a contraction of 7% to 11% is to be expected.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the current crisis will slow down the implementation of the Government Programme, but it cannot stop it. It will not stop it.

Si vous me permettez, avant de terminer, je pense qu'il faut passer un message aux femmes et aux jeunes de ma génération, les milléniaux et toutes les générations qui nous suivent. Nous vivons un moment de notre histoire qui sera déterminant pour les années à venir où beaucoup de premières seront possibles. La situation est telle que nous avons pu affronter ce choc parce que le gouvernement et de nombreux politiciens se sont laissés guider et porter par des valeurs humanistes pendant toute cette période. La santé et la vie de notre population sont passées avant l'économie et le profit. Il n'y a, si je ne me trompe, aucun pays qui a pris en charge totalement leurs compatriotes qui ont souffert du Covid-19. Aucun mauricien n'a été mis à l'écart et tous ont eu et continueront à avoir une chance égale aux soins face à cette pandémie.

Pendant les semaines qui se sont écoulées, nous avons observé un retour à la sphère privée où le confinement oblige les foyers à se renfermer sur eux-mêmes. Pendant des décennies, cette sphère a été celle de la femme et elle a toujours un grand rôle à jouer dans le domaine de la famille et du privé. Les femmes de ce pays luttent pour préserver les valeurs d'humanisme. A travers l'histoire et de par le monde, quand les crises atteignent certains pays, que le quotidien bascule, et que la loi du plus fort prend le dessus, ce sont les femmes et les jeunes filles qui en souffrent le plus.

M. le président, la période de confinement a été un drame pour certaines d'être nous avec 158 cas de violence domestique rapportés en un mois. J'ai connu un cas qui n'a pas été rapporté immédiatement pendant la période de confinement. J'ai dû insister, M. le président, pour que la victime aille rapporter son agresseur. Je ne peux imaginer le nombre de cas qui n'ont pas été rapportés. C'est pour cela que je pense que nous, les femmes et les jeunes de la République de Maurice, devons profiter de ce bouleversement pour instiller dans nos familles

les valeurs qui nous sont nécessaires pour une société plus humaine, égalitaire et juste. Profitons de ce moment de l'histoire pour instiller les valeurs qui porteront notre société à un plus grand degré d'humanisme et de non-violence. Nous donnons l'assurance à la population que ce gouvernement sortira notre pays de cet abîme.

Je demande aux jeunes et aux femmes ainsi qu'à tous les mauriciens de bonne volonté d'être notre force et notre moteur. Nous croyons en vous et c'est ensemble que nous réussirons. Merci.

With these words, I commend the motion to the House.

The motion of the hon. Fourth Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes (Mrs M. A. T. Diolle) was, on question put, agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Wednesday 13 May 2020 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

At 4.58 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Wednesday 13 May 2020 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - AUTISTIC CHILDREN - SPECIAL TRAVEL

DEROGATION PERMITS

(No. B/10) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to families with special needs, in particular, with autistic children, he will state if consideration will be given for the issue of special travel derogation permits thereto amid the Covid-19 lockdown.

Reply (The Minister of Health and Wellness): I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the application for Work Access Permit (WAP) during the COVID-19 Curfew Order in respect of carers who have to attend to persons with special needs, including families or parents of autistic children.

In fact, the Curfew Order made under Regulation 14(1) of the Prevention and Mitigation of Infectious Disease (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 does not apply to a person who has to avail himself of medical treatment, or procure essential supplies, foodstuff, medicine or any other item essential for him or his family's subsistence or livelihood. Therefore, the family of an autistic child or child with special needs does not require any Work Access Permit to secure medical treatment or procure essential items. However, for other purposes, they have to apply for the WAP as carers.

In this regard, I am informed that as at 30 April 2020, all applications received from carers have been approved. These also include applications from carers of old and bedridden persons and those with problems of mobility.

In fact, my Ministry is in presence of a request from the Director of "*Autisme Maurice*" to allow autistic children and their parents to go out daily as they face more stress in a confined environment at home. Children suffering from autistic disorder are highly vulnerable and their behaviours are unpredictable.

Due consideration is being given to the request depending on the evolution of COVID-19.

HATCH STREET, PORT LOUIS – LAND ACQUISITION

(No. B/28) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to Hatch Street in Port Louis, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to if compulsory acquisition of land will be undertaken at the level of the Islamic Cultural Centre to facilitate vehicular access in and out thereat.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that the plot of land in the vicinity of the Islamic Cultural Centre at Hatch Street, Port Louis, is privately owned. According to records, the City Council of Port Louis prosecuted the late owner, one Mr A.C.R. in 1965 (Cause No 1285/65) before the District Court of Port Louis for obstruction of the road by constructing a toilet block over there and the case was dismissed in April 1966 as the charge could not be proved in the absence of evidence.

Representations were made by one Mr C.B., one of the heirs of late A.C.R. to the Truth and Justice Commission to the effect that the Council was contemplating to extend Hatch Street up to a road which abuts the Islamic Cultural Centre. The Commission, which based

itself on the Court Judgement of 1966, decided that the Council should abide to the judgement.

In October 2011, one Mr I.J. of La Paix Street also wrote to the Ombudsman on the issue. The Ombudsman was informed of the stand of the Council in relation to the Court Judgement of 1966 and the onus to prove that the road was public rests on those who made the representations and to have recourse to a civil action with such material evidence to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the said litigious part is public if they so feel aggrieved.

In August 2015, a Building and Land Use Permit was issued to one Mr M.R.S., for the construction of a boundary wall, based on title deed TV 513/73 of 26 May 1947 following an affidavit of prescription. No road crossing the property of the latter has been mentioned in the deed.

I am also informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that a division in kind dated 03 March 1981 was effected before the Master and Registrar of the Supreme Court and according to the title deed TV 1619/26, this part is deemed to be private.

In view of all the above mentioned decisions and the Court Judgement, no decision has been taken by the Council concerning the compulsory acquisition of land at Hatch Street.

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE ‘139’ – SERVICES & SUPPORT

(No. B/29) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether in regard to the National Domestic Violence Hotline ‘139’, she will state the –

- (a) number of calls received and attended to over the period November 2016 to date, and
- (b) services/support offered.

Reply: In regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that for the period November 2016 to April 2020, a total of 27,525 calls have been received on Domestic Violence Hotline 139, out of which 10,488 pertained to domestic violence cases and were attended to accordingly.

Concerning part (b) of the question, the following services/support are provided to all victims of domestic violence, namely –

- (i) Immediate intervention and assistance in a holistic manner on a 24/7 basis through the Integrated Support Centre which is operational since 08 March 2019.

- (ii) Assessment of the case history and present problem (nature of problem, date and time of incident, frequency of violence, whether matter is reported to the Police and/or appropriate medical assistance sought.
- (iii) First-hand counselling in terms of reassuring the callers, ensuring their safety, and providing further explanation about the services offered to victims of domestic violence (family counselling service, psychological support and free legal advice and representation at Court in accordance with the Protection from Domestic Violence Act).
- (iv) Victims are also apprised of every step of the intervention process and made aware of available shelter services.

Follow-up is maintained in terms of the following –

- (a) Internal referral, that is, immediate referral to our six Family Support Bureaux through the Domestic Violence Information System.
- (b) External referral to various stakeholders, for example, Police Family Protection Units, Police Stations, Ministry of Health & Wellness, amongst others.
- (c) Site visits by Family Welfare and Protection Officers.
- (d) Monitoring of cases on DOVIS to capture all actions taken.

GLEN PARK - LA CROISÉE DIOLLE - TRAFFIC CONGESTION

(No. B/31) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether in regard to La Croisée Diolle, in Glen Park, he will state if his Ministry proposes to look into the traffic congestion problem occurring thereat during peak times.

Reply: There is indeed traffic congestion both during morning and afternoon rush hours along Vacoas-La Marie Road [B64] between La Croisée Diolle up to its junction with Henrietta Branch at Road Glen Park, Vacoas. This is due to a high traffic volume along that classified road which spans over a distance of about 800 metres. The road is the main route for traffic from the southern area of Vacoas, namely La Marie, Henrietta and Glen Park to reach the core circulation travelling to the towns and mainly Port Louis and *vice versa*. This typical scenario culminates to the general situation where the main road is ‘overloaded’ resulting in concentrated jamming.

This classified B64 Road is located in a very densely built-up area with mixed residential and predominantly commercial buildings. The mainstream traffic flow is interrupted with at grade level crossings, pedestrian signalised crossings, on-spot bus stops and inconsiderate on-street parking of vehicles all along the road. Conversely, most of the commercial businesses do not have dedicated service bays to cater for loading and unloading activities.

On top of that, drivers along B64 Road have to opt for right turning movements onto the lateral roads. This hampers traffic flow along this particular road worsening further the current situation as there is inadequate safe gap in traffic for right turning movements. This often results in long queues and delays.

The Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit of my Ministry has already implemented several measures to help improve the mainstream traffic flow. These measures are –

- painting of yellow lines to prevent on-street parking;
- provision of a yellow box at junction Vacoas-La Marie Road [B64] with John Kennedy Street [B65] to ensure that the T-junction is always kept clear for right turnings movements, and
- relocation of bus stops.

To further improve traffic flow along Vacoas-La Marie Road [B64], the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit has recommended a number of corrective measures, such as the review of the traffic flow along minor roads in the region of Glen Park concurrently with the conversion of part of De Vergues Street into a one-way road. This will cater for a direct link for traffic from La Marie and Henrietta so as to directly link to Hollyrood and ultimately proceed to either Beaux Songes or La Caverne. Ultimately, this traffic will bypass Diolle Junction, thereby relieving the traffic loading at that particular locus. This measure can be implemented soon and it is hoped that there is no protest from the local inhabitants.

Secondly, the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit has equally recommended the provision of bus lay-bys to ensure that the mainstream traffic is not interrupted when buses will alight and board passengers. Lay-bys can be positioned at different locations along the Vacoas-La Marie Road [B64]. These bus lay-bys sites have already been identified for which land will have to be acquired.

A third proposal by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit to reduce traffic congestion is the ‘conversion of Diolle Junction into a signalised one, coupled with a dedicated right turning lane and a left filter lane’. Else, they have suggested the provision of a ‘roundabout’ at that particular locus. In that respect, a land survey has already been carried out. Traffic modelling analysis will be undertaken following which the best option with the improved level of service will be retained.

Fourthly, Police will be requested to significantly increase their presence in that area as there are several cases of on-street parking on the yellow lines along the B64 Road.

The Road Development Authority has completed since January 2019 the new link road of 1.5 km from Glen Park to Robinson, Curepipe. This allows travelling from Glen Park, Henrietta and La Marie towards Curepipe, thereby alleviating traffic on the B64 Road. Consideration is being given to extend the road to the centre of Curepipe through the Driving Test Centre, Les Casernes. The Road Development Authority is embarking on a new link road from La Marie Road/La Brasserie Road to join the Phoenix-Beaux Songes Link Road at Bassin. This will enhance and improve connectivity and movements of traffic in that area. The project is expected to start in July 2020. Furthermore, RDA is considering a bypass from Reunion/La Vanille to La Brasserie. A preliminary study will be undertaken following a site visit which was effected sometime back.

SELF-EMPLOYED ASSISTANCE SCHEME - FUNDS DISBURSED

(No. B/33) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether in regard to the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the number of applications received thereunder, indicating the number thereof having been approved and the quantum of funds disbursed as at to date.

Reply: Au regard du *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* et faisant suite à un travail minutieux de compilation des données effectué par la *MRA*, je peux communiquer, dans la plus grande transparence, les chiffres suivants.

Au 4 mai 2020, nous avons reçu 253,102 demandes, sur lesquelles 189,476 ont été approuvées ;

En termes de coût engendré sur la période allant du 16 mars 2020 au 15 avril 2020, un montant de R 5,100 a été versé à 177,714 indépendants. Cela représente donc pour l’Etat un déboursement de R 906 millions.

Successivement, il a été versé, pour la période du 16 avril 2020 au 30 avril 2020, un montant de R 2,550 à 138,670 indépendants, soit un décaissement de R 354 millions. Les autres bénéficiaires recevront sous peu leurs allocations.

Au total au 4 mai 2020, le coût de cette mesure exceptionnelle mise en place par le gouvernement pour soutenir les travailleurs indépendants s'élève, sur la période du 15 mars au 30 avril 2020, à R 1,26 milliard.

**SUPER CASH BACK GOLD POLICIES & BRAMER ASSET
MANAGEMENT LTD - INVESTORS**

(No. B/34) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether in regard to the investors in the Super Cash Back Gold policies of the former BAI Co. (Mtius) Ltd and the Bramer Asset Management Ltd who have not been repaid in full, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Property Fund Ltd., information as to –

- (a) the number thereof, indicating the
 - (i) aggregate value owed thereto, and
 - (ii) reasons for non-payment, and
- (b) if consideration will be given for the repayment in full thereof.

Reply: Government has taken hold measures to protect our society from a looming disaster and has avoided a systemic crash of our whole financial system. In the aftermath of the BAI Group debacle, series of actions were taken to protect the investors and policyholders of the Ex-BAI Group. In the same wake, the National Property Fund Ltd (NPFL) was incorporated on 05 May 2015 to look into the repayment of the Super Cash Back Gold (SCBG) policyholders and the Bramer Asset Management Ltd (BAML) investors.

I am informed by the NPFL that, as per the final settlement agreement in July 2017, most of the policyholders and investors have been repaid in full, representing 99.63% .

I am further advised by the NPFL that to date, the company has disbursed Rs17,058,308,670 to repay 16,533 SCBG policyholders, 3,775 BAML investors and 113 entities. The total amount outstanding to be disbursed is Rs245,062,109, representing payment to the 55 individual SCBG policyholders and the 18 individual BAML investors who have not turned up to complete the necessary formalities. The payment to one policyholder and two investors who have completed their formalities will be effected after the exercise regarding the disposal of the immovable properties will be completed.

I wish to point out that the NPFL has already started the process of disposing its assets in terms of immovable properties for the repayment of the outstanding amount.

All the way through, as a caring and responsible Government, we have protected the interest of our country and our people who have put money from their VRS, lump sums and everything they have saved during their working life in the former BAI. We have successfully resolved this crisis which could have resulted in a national tragedy.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that 1 1,535 SCBG policyholders, that is, 70% of all the policyholders have already been fully repaid a total amount of Rs4,243,945,350.

8,773 policyholders and investors who have signed the final settlement agreement have, in fact, been fully paid an amount of Rs12,475,738,670.

Moreover, 113 registered entities out of a total of 132 entities, which were initially not eligible for repayment, were paid in full as per the final settlement agreement for a total amount Rs298,031,690.

If the hon. Member is referring to any amount outside the final settlement agreement, I wish to further inform the House that there are several cases relating to the matter which are pending before the Court and is, therefore, *sub judice*. Besides, giving any information thereon is likely to prejudice the cases on which a judicial decision is pending.

STUDENTS - DIGITALLY-DISPENSED COURSES

(No. B/35) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the students hailing from vulnerable backgrounds and who cannot avail of digitally-dispensed courses amid the Covid-19 lockdown, she will state the measures being taken or that will be taken to ensure that they are not unfairly penalised.

(Withdrawn)

NATIONAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION - POSTPONEMENT

(No. B/36) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the National Certificate of Education, she will state if consideration will be given for the postponement thereof in order to ensure that the students eligible to sit therefor are not unfairly penalised amid the Covid-19 lockdown in view of the disparity in the level of preparedness thereof.

(Withdrawn)

BUS TRANSPORT SERVICE – SAFETY MEASURES

(No. B/38) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the public transport sector, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to the measures taken or being envisaged to ensure the safety of the workers and of the commuters thereof against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reply: As soon as the sanitary curfew was announced on 19 March 2020 to take effect on 20 March 2020, my Ministry in collaboration with the National Land Transport Authority (NLTA), has ensured that a reduced but continued bus transport service is provided based on a re-adapted schedule. Light rail service was, however, provided up to 22 March 2020 only.

Special appeals were made by the NLTA for social distancing protocols to be observed onboard buses in line with guidelines from the Ministry of Health and Wellness. The NLTA officially also directed bus operators to provide the necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) like masks and gloves, and hand sanitizers, to their crews, and to ensure regular cleaning and disinfection of buses that were being deployed.

Considering the threat the pandemic poses to the land transport and light rail sectors with regard to ensuring business continuity, a comprehensive plan has been developed by Government in the context of the gradual resumption of economic and other activities.

Several measures have been and are being taken to ensure the safety of both workers and commuters to avoid exposure to or infection by the COVID-19.

The wearing of masks and physical distancing will have to be observed in all public vehicles and at bus stops/shelters and at bus/light rail stations. Bus operators will also be requested to put in place appropriate measures to conspicuously demarcate seats which should not be occupied by passengers, by use of tapes/stickers or otherwise. Furthermore, operators will be urged to continue providing their crews with PPE (masks and gloves).

As regards general precautionary measures, all operational staff in public vehicles and passengers will have to follow basic rules of personal hygiene such as regular hand washing and sanitization; sneezing and coughing into the elbow; and using disposable paper towels.

Essential functions within the transport sector will also be dissected to avoid further spread of the pandemic. For e.g. Customer service staff (stand regulators and light rail staff) might only be available in information booths or desks with sufficient distance to passengers. The need for ticket inspection will also be reconsidered in view of the high risk element inherent in the job.

Where possible, side rear door boarding in buses would temporarily replace the front door access of buses to protect the driver. The first rows of seats on buses or areas immediately around the driver would also be blocked off, where possible.

Furthermore, all holders of public service vehicles will be requested to ensure rigorous cleaning and regular disinfection of buses and Light Rail Vehicles (LRVs). Additionally, operators will have to put in place hand sanitization facilities in buses and LRVs both for the bus/Light Rail crew and for passengers.

Following request from my Ministry, the Ministry of Local Government has, in fact, arranged for the cleaning and disinfection of bus shelters and bus stations by Local Authorities. On its part, the NLTA has requested the private promoters concerned to ensure regular cleaning and disinfection of the smart bus shelters.

Bus operators and Metro Express Ltd (MEL) have been advised to avail of onboard screens and audio systems to sensitize the public accordingly. The display of Information bulletins or notices at conspicuous locations like bus/light rail stations and bus shelters has also been encouraged for that matter.

In regard to the Metro Express Ltd, these measures will be extended to the general infrastructure such as elevator buttons, stairs handrails, door handles, benches, holding bars, seats, floors, automatic ticket dispensers (buttons and touchscreen), ticket card readers, etc.

MEL will make necessary arrangement for the thermal screening of its light rail crews. Bus operators will be requested to make similar arrangements and to avoid the use of air-conditioning in buses.

An appeal will be made to passengers to tender the exact amount of the bus fare while those commuting onboard the Metro Express will be advised to favour the use of the ME cards.

As the House is aware, remote working is also being privileged for all areas of activities that could be carried out without the physical presence of the staff within organisation premises so as to restrict demand for public transport.

Besides the above measures, travel restrictions will also be implemented. As such, only holders of a valid Work Access Permit will be allowed to travel during peak hours, that is, between 06h00 and 10h00 in the morning and from 14h30 to 19h00 in the afternoon.

The timetable for services along the different routes will be extended by one hour. People not holding a Work Access Permit will be allowed to travel during the off-peak hours only. For example, an adult passenger who has to travel for medical treatment or supply for basic food stuffs. Senior Citizens will, therefore, travel on specific days based on an

alphabetical order of their surname during off-peak hours. This category of passengers, disabled persons and persons aged below 18 years will be advised to refrain from travelling for their own safety, unless they have valid reasons (like a medical reason) to do so.

Last but not least, my Ministry is having consultations with the Ministry of Health and Wellness for prioritising the testing of bus crews and other employees of the bus industry who may be considered to be at risk of being infected, in due course.

ANTI-INFLUENZA VACCINATION EXERCISE 2020

(No. B/39) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the anti-influenza vaccination exercise 2020, he will state the number of vaccinations carried out, indicating the –

- (a) areas where same have been carried out and when, and
- (b) expected completion date thereof.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that the anti-influenza vaccination exercise started on 06 April 2020 in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity and the Mauritius Police Force. As at 04 May 2020, 108,312 persons have been vaccinated and 315 localities are concerned. The vaccination exercise is expected to be completed by 12 May 2020.

I am placing in the Library of the National Assembly the list of localities which have been covered and which will be covered.

INVALID'S BASIC PENSION & CARER'S ALLOWANCE - MEDICAL BOARD MEETINGS - RESCHEDULING

(No. B/43) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the Medical Board Meetings which have been cancelled in respect of the Invalidity Pension and Carer's Allowance amid the Covid-19 lockdown, she will state if due diligence will be exercised for the rescheduling thereof.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that all the Medical Boards in respect of Invalid's Basic Pension and Carer's Allowance had to be postponed following the Covid-19 lockdown and will be rescheduled in the months of June and July 2020.

My Ministry has already initiated action for the rescheduling of Medical Boards to examine applications for Invalid's Basic Pension (including both new applications and renewals), as well as applications for Carer's Allowance (including both new applications and renewals).

Priority will be given to new applications for Invalid's Basic Pension and Carer's Allowance. As for the renewal cases, for the time being, beneficiaries will continue to benefit from the allowance on a month to month basis until they are medically boarded.

ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS - ACTIVITIES - RESUMPTION

(No. B/46) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the academic institutions, she will state when the reopening and resumption of the activities thereof are being envisaged.

Reply: Conscious of the need to ensure the security and well-being of students as well as to mitigate the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, schools have had to be closed down throughout the world and in Mauritius.

In Mauritius particularly, we have adopted, without any hesitation, a zero-risk approach following the first reported cases of COVID-19. This has been part of the All-Government multi-sector response actions.

Following the closure of educational institutions on 19 March 2020, my Ministry has taken a series of measures to ensure continuity of education through the conduct of open and distance learning-based programmes for the benefit of our students.

The re-opening of schools and resumption of studies should be well-planned, taking into consideration the safety and well-being of not only the learners but also of the school personnel as a whole. Health, sanitary and other conditions form part of a well-established protocol that will have to be adhered to. A plan has already been worked out in this connection. As the House is aware, it has been announced that pre-primary schools will resume on 22 June 2020, while primary and secondary schools will resume on 01 July 2020 with proper health and sanitary precautions.

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - COMMODITIES - PRICE CONTROL

(No. B/47) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the

basic commodities, he will state the measures taken to protect the rights of the consumers in relation to the control of the prices and supplies thereof amid the Covid-19 lockdown.

(Withdrawn)

FRUITS & VEGETABLES - LOCAL PRODUCTION

(No. B/48) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to fruits and vegetables, he will state if an Action Plan is being envisaged for the increase of the local production thereof amid the Covid-19 lockdown.

(Withdrawn)

MARJOLAIN BRIDGE, CITÉ LA CURE - WIDENING

(No. B/49) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed widening of the Marjolain Bridge in Cité La Cure by the National Development Unit, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

VULNERABLE ECONOMIC GROUPS - DATABASE

(No. B/50) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the fight against poverty and vulnerability, he will state if consideration will be given for the database of vulnerable economic groups generated through the implementation of the Wage Assistance Scheme and the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme to be used as an effective tool therefor through the implementation of a centralised financing system for an optimum use of the financial resources.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE - SPECIAL TEMPORARY LICENCE

(No. B/51) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to owners of pleasure crafts, he will state if consideration will be given for the issue thereto of a special temporary licence to allow them fish in our Exclusive Economic Zone to earn a living amid the economic crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

**COVID-19 REVERSE TRANSCRIPTASE POLYMERASE CHAIN
REACTION (RT-PCR) TEST**

(No. B/52) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Covid-19 Reverse Transcriptase Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) Test, he will state –

- (a) when same was first carried out in Mauritius, and
- (b) the number thereof carried out as at to date, indicating the number thereof which have given –
 - (i) positive results;
 - (ii) negative results, indicating the number of false negative, if any, and the percentage of negative samples sent to laboratories accredited by the World Health Organisation to confirm the sensitivity of the tests carried out in Mauritius and the outcome thereof, and
 - (iii) inconclusive results, if any.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 VACCINE

(No. B/53) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the eventual availability of a Covid-19 vaccine on the international market as being announced, he will state the level of preparedness of Government for the acquisition thereof at the earliest possible in terms of commitment of funds, contacts with laboratories and pharmaceutical companies presently heavily involved in the development and manufacturing thereof.

(Withdrawn)

SPORTS ACTIVITIES - ACTION PLAN

(No. B/54) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the relaunching of sports activities after the curfew period, he will state if his Ministry has set up an Action Plan to assist federations for the organisation thereof and, if so, give details thereof,

including the sanitary measures to be taken to ensure the safety of the athletes and of members of the public, indicating the –

- (a) sports activities that would be relaunched, and
- (b) stadia, clubs and gymnasiums concerned therewith and, if not, why not.

Reply: The Ministry has set up a Technical Committee that is working on an Action Plan.

COVID-19 - SOCIAL REGISTER OF MAURITIUS - FOOD PACKS

(No. B/55) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the Social Register of Mauritius, she will state the number of persons registered thereunder for the years 2018 and 2019 and since 01 January 2020 to date, indicating –

- (a) when same was last updated, and
- (b) number of food packs delivered to the persons registered thereunder following the complete Covid-19 lockdown, indicating the expenditure incurred in relation thereto.

Reply: I am informed that, for the year 2018, 1,198 eligible households were registered on the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM). For the year 2019, 765 eligible households were registered on the SRM. Since 01 January 2020 to date, 246 applicants had been registered.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the Social Register of Mauritius was last updated on 13 March 2020.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that 7,900 households across the island had been provided with a total of 17,936 food packs.

With regard to the budget allocated, I am informed by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development that an amount of Rs43,861,790 has been disbursed.

CURFEW PERIOD - ARTISANAL FISHERS - COMPENSATION

(No. B/57) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the artisanal fishers, he will state the quantum of the compensation paid thereto during the curfew period amid the Covid-19 pandemic, indicating the number thereof concerned therewith.

Reply: The Curfew Order as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic became effective on 20 March 2020. The strict confinement measures have also been made applicable to the fisher community and consequently they have not been allowed to go out at sea for fishing.

In a bid to provide financial assistance to the artisanal fishers, Government has agreed to grant an exceptional financial compensation of Rs5,100 to each registered fisher.

This exceptional compensation was paid for the months of March and April 2020 on 09 April and 27 April 2020 respectively, through direct credit into the individual bank accounts of each registered artisanal fisher.

I wish to inform the House that this compensation should not be linked to the Bad Weather Allowance. The fishers have been provided with the financial compensation of Rs5,100 on an exceptional basis and the quantum has been aligned with the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme.

Out of 1894 registered artisanal fishers, 1810 registered artisanal fishers have benefitted from this special compensation, amounting to a total sum of Rs18,462,000 for the months of March and April 2020.

The 84 remaining registered artisanal fishers were not paid this exceptional compensation as they were in breach of the conditions on their fisherman registration card and had not stamped their fisherman registration cards over the last six months.

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT – ECONOMIC MEASURES

(No. B/58) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the economy, he will –

- (a) give a breakdown of the percentage contraction forecast thereof, sector-wise, and
- (b) state the economic measures he proposes to take to increase the Gross Domestic Product.

(Withdrawn)

BANK OF MAURITIUS - RESERVE FUND - BREAKDOWN

(No. B/60) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to

the Rs18 billion obtained from the Reserve Fund of the Bank of Mauritius in November 2019, he will give a breakdown of the use made thereof.

Reply: Je dépose une déclaration fournissant les informations demandées par l'honorable Parlementaire.

ONIONS & POTATOES - STOCKS

(No. B/61) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to onions and potatoes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Agricultural Marketing Board, information as to –

- (a) the stocks available for April 2020, indicating the quantities thereof delivered to registered dealers individually, indicating –
 - (i) their names and place of business, and
 - (ii) the names and place of business of those registered after 31 March 2020 and the quantities delivered thereto individually, and
- (b) if any inquiry has been initiated into the complaints of shortages thereof on the market and excessive prices charged during the lockdown.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - TOURISM SECTOR

(No. B/62) Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the tourism sector, he will state if, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, consideration will be given for –

- (a) a waiver of the annual fees payable on the renewal of the Tourist Enterprise Licences, Tourist Accommodation Licences and Pleasure Craft Licences for a period of at least one year, as from now, and
- (b) the setting up of support schemes to ensure the survival thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Tourism Authority that there are currently 2,040 economic operators holding a Tourism Enterprise licence, 1,040 a Tourism Accommodation Certificate and 1,220 a Pleasure Craft Licence for commercial purposes. There are also 107 hotels which are licensed by the Tourism Authority.

The Government is fully conscious that the Tourism sector is among the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are also aware that it will take some time for the economic activities in the sector to be back to normal. We are, therefore, examining some measures, including those in relation to payment of fees for the renewal of the licences, which may be included in the forthcoming Coronavirus (Emergency Measures) Miscellaneous Provisions Bill.

As regards part (b) of the question, as the House is aware, Government has already put in place some schemes to support the economic sectors, including the Tourism sector, to incentivise job retention, sustain the self-employed, and protect the most vulnerable groups. These schemes include the COVID-19 Wage Assistance Scheme, the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme and the Loan Support Scheme.

Moreover, the House may wish to note that my Ministry has set up a Joint Working Group, comprising public and private sectors stakeholders, to brainstorm via video conferencing and propose a recovery Action Plan to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Travel and Tourism Sector. The work of this Joint Working Group is ongoing.

WAGE ASSISTANCE SCHEME - APPLICATIONS APPROVED - COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

(No. B/63) Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Wage Assistance Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the number of applications received thereunder, indicating the number of –

- (a) applications approved and in respect of which funds have been disbursed, and
- (b) complaints received in respect of rejected applications.

Reply: En ce qui concerne le *Wage Assistance Scheme*, j'ai été informé qu'au 4 mai 2020, la *MRA* a reçu 15,787 demandes pour le mois de mars 2020, dont 14,271 ont été approuvées.

À ce jour et pour cette période de référence, un montant de R 1,6 milliard a été versé à 246,374 employés travaillant dans quelques 12,668 entreprises.

La *MRA* a, en marge de ces dossiers déjà clos, reçu des requêtes concernant des demandes non payées. Ainsi, au regard des données qui ont été portées à ma connaissance par

la *MRA*, pour la période du 17 mars au 31 mars 2020, le paiement n'a encore pas été effectué dans 3,119 cas.

Dans 838 de ces cas, les paiements ont déjà été approuvés mais n'ont pas encore été crédités en raison de problèmes liés aux détails bancaires fournis.

Les 2,281 cas restants au 4 mai sont toujours en cours de traitement car les informations requises n'ont pas encore été fournies par les employeurs. Cette étape est pourtant nécessaire pour que la *MRA* puisse vérifier l'exactitude du montant demandé par les employeurs.

La *MRA* examine ces demandes au cas par cas et procédera au paiement en conséquence.

Par ailleurs, pour le mois d'avril 2020, 13,798 demandes ont été reçues, dont 13,266 ont d'ores et déjà été approuvées.

Au 4 mai 2020, 513 dossiers sont encore en cours de traitement, et dans quelques 373 cas approuvés, aucun paiement n'a pu être effectué en raison de problèmes liés aux coordonnées bancaires.

Un montant de R 2,8 milliards a déjà été décaissé par la *MRA* au 4 mai 2020 pour le mois d'avril 2020 au bénéfice de 208,887 employés évoluant dans 12,380 entreprises.

ONLINE COURSES - STUDENTS - ACCESS

(No. B/64) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the students who possess neither a television set nor a digital tablet and internet access facilities, she will state the measures taken by her Ministry to ensure that the said students are not penalized inasmuch as they are unable to benefit from the courses currently broadcast on the channels of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation during the lockdown.

Reply: It is now common knowledge that, in the face of COVID-19, most education systems around the world are facing an unprecedented challenge. This concerns ensuring educational continuity in the wake of massive school closures. Broadcast and online learning have been a major alternative delivery modality to minimize the effect of the disruption to students' learning.

However, most of these countries are also concerned about the inequity issues that arise since there is no universal access of all learners, especially from vulnerable groups, to digital learning facilities.

I wish to inform the House that, in Mauritius, whilst reckoning with the fact that a large number of students are being exposed to television and online educational programmes, there are, unfortunately, a number of households who are neither connected to the electricity network nor have access to broadband internet facilities.

Conscious of the need to take onboard this category of our citizens, discussions had been held with the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity. My Ministry has been informed that, out of the 7,707 households on the Social Register Mauritius (SRM), some 4,306 of these are already connected to broadband internet. Some 8,342 students from those households hence benefit from internet facilities. The remaining 3,401 households, comprising 4,055 children are not yet connected to broadband internet facilities. (Due to reasons beyond our control - No application made to MT, residence in remote areas with no connectivity, household on illegal land occupation).

According to the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, 2,572 students, including 105 tertiary students, are to be provided with digital devices.

We have been informed that the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity has already requested the MoFEPD for necessary funding support. (2,572 tablets)

For its part, my Ministry will ensure that the concerned students do not lag behind their peers due to the constraints to their learning that I have just referred to.

My Ministry is, therefore, taking the following measures -

- (a) Firstly, on school resumption, Educators will work out catch-up and remedial classes;
- (b) Secondly, the timing of the national assessments and international examinations will be adjusted to ensure that students are given sufficient school time to prepare for these, and
- (c) Thirdly, discussions are being held with Mauritius Telecom for the provision of free internet at home to students from needy families.

Let me reassure the hon. Members, Mr Speaker, Sir, that no child from vulnerable backgrounds will be unfairly penalized as far as teaching/learning is concerned. Every effort will be made to guarantee that sufficient time is given at school level for those children to catch up on any educational programmes broadcast or conducted online which they have missed during the current lockdown.

**COVID-19 CONFINEMENT - DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES &
CHILDREN ILL-TREATMENT**

(No. B/65) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to ill-treatment of children and domestic violence, she will state the number of known cases thereof perpetrated during the lockdown, indicating how same are being dealt with by her Ministry.

Reply: Regarding ill-treatment of children, which were perpetrated during confinement, I am informed that, from 20 March to 30 April 2020, a total of 345 cases were reported to the six Child Protection Services. Consequently, 25 children were removed and sent to places of safety upon issue of Emergency Protection Orders by various district Magistrates via e-mails and telephone conversations.

All the 345 cases were attended on a 24/7 basis through a protocol of close collaboration chartered out specially for Covid-19 confinement with the various stakeholders notably the Police, the *Brigade Pour La Protection Des Mineurs*, the Medical Personnel of the five Regional Hospitals, the Courts Personnel, especially the District Magistrates, the NGO and NCC-run shelters.

The various services delivered by the Child Protection Services of my Ministry include –

- (i) Active listening, whether it be through phone calls or face to face with children and parents within their immediate home environment, at Police Stations, and hospitals.
- (ii) First-hand counselling and psychological support to victims and their parents.
- (iii) Police and legal assistance.
- (iv) Conveyance to hospitals for medical support and treatment.
- (v) Identification and placement for sheltering services.
- (vi) Support for lessening of trauma and rehabilitation.

There is an established mechanism at the level of my Ministry, which ensures effective case management through sustained follow-up until termination of the case.

I am tabling the number of cases attended to by my Ministry during the confinement period.

Domestic Violence

In regard to domestic violence cases, since confinement and up to 30 April 2020, 244 cases have been reported to my Ministry on Hotline 139.

A more robust protocol was adopted to ensure prompt intervention in cases of domestic violence. This protocol includes the following measures –

- (i) From 08 45 hrs to 16 00 hrs, all cases of domestic violence reported on the hotline 139 are referred to a team of Family Welfare and Protection Officers, working from home under the immediate supervision of Coordinators. As regards interventions by these officers, I refer the hon. Member of the House to my reply to PQ B/29.
- (ii) After office hours, a team of Family Welfare and Protection Officers are on call according to the six respective catchment areas.
- (iii) Update on all cases reported are channelled to the respective coordinator who thereafter forwards the information to the Head of Family Welfare and Protection Unit of my Ministry to ensure proper case management.

Collaboration with the Police Department

- During confinement, in view of providing enhanced assistance to victims of domestic violence and to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their acts, the collaboration of the Police through the Police Stations and the Police Family Protection Unit has also been enlisted. Consequently, Police interventions were made in almost all cases and comprised home visits, patrols and warning to perpetrators.

Shelter to accommodate women victims of domestic violence and their children

- During confinement, two NGOs provided accommodation to victims of domestic violence.

I also wish to inform the House that all front line officers of my Ministry who are responding to cases during the confinement period have been provided with appropriate facilities, including Work Access Permits and personal protective equipment in accordance with established protocol to ensure smooth delivery of this essential service.

FACE MASKS - PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

(No. B/66) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to face masks and personal protective equipment, he will state if consideration will be given for the setting up by his Ministry of a scheme to assist local manufacturing companies and Small and Medium Enterprises to produce same for domestic use and export amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reply: In the wake of Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a pressing need for face masks and personal protective equipment in the country, particularly when many countries worldwide had already banned or limited the export of such protective equipment.

To respond to this demand and in their concern to protect the population, some textile manufacturers in collaboration with MEXA, have embarked in the production of face masks and personal protective equipment geared for the use of our non-medical front-liners and the public, in general.

With a view to supporting our local industry, Government has already come up with a host of measures to support SMEs as well as large enterprises, such as Wage Assistance Scheme, Special Relief Fund of Rs5 billion, extension of Freight Rebate Scheme, a Reduced Interest Rate for the acquisition of equipment under Leasing Equipment and Modernisation Scheme (LEMS) and relief in the payment of rent.

These support measures have no doubt helped our local enterprises, irrespective of size, to stay in business and have enabled some textile enterprises to diversify into the manufacture of face masks and personal protective equipment for the local market.

I am informed that many international clients have already shown interest for these products and that local operators have already initiated action for the testing and certification of the face masks in France, for export purposes.

Prior to Covid-19 pandemic, there has not been any local manufacturing firm in the field of face masks and personal protective equipment and as such no local facility, including the Mauritius Standards Bureau (MSB), has been developed to perform testing and certification of such items.

I wish to point out that I am personally chairing a Standing Committee with the Private Sector Associations to assess the situation in the manufacturing sector in the wake of Covid-19 and to initiate relevant actions to resume manufacturing activities at the earliest, while adhering to all prevailing sanitary measures.

I wish to reassure the House that my Ministry will continue to provide its unflinching support to the economic operators in their endeavour to produce face masks and personal protective equipment.

WAGE ASSISTANCE SCHEME - FUNDS DISBURSED

(No. B/67) Mr M. E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Wage Assistance Scheme, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the number of enterprises having benefitted thereunder as at to date, indicating the quantum of funds disbursed, and
- (b) state if consideration will be given for an extension of the application thereof to the vulnerable sectors pending the application of economic measures for financial year 2020-2021.

Reply: En ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question ayant attiré au nombre de bénéficiaires du *Wage Assistance Scheme* et à son coût relatif, j'ai déjà communiqué les chiffres correspondants dans ma réponse à la question B/62.

Par rapport à la partie (b) de la question, l'extension du *Wage Assistance Scheme* sera examinée en fonction de l'évolution de la pandémie du COVID-19 et de son impact sur nos secteurs d'activité. Nous communiquerons bien entendu la décision prise quand cela sera à propos.

SELF EMPLOYED ASSISTANCE SCHEME - BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/68) Mr M. E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Self Employed Assistance Scheme, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the number of self-employed
 - (i) having benefitted thereunder, and
 - (ii) whose applications have been rejected, and
- (b) state if consideration will be given for an extension of the application thereof to self-employed persons of the tourism, aviation and other vulnerable sectors?

Reply: Pour ce qui relève de la partie (a)(i) de la question, j'ai déjà communiqué les chiffres correspondants dans ma réponse à la question B/33.

En ce qui concerne la partie (a)(ii) de la question, au 4 mai 2020, en dehors des demandes effectuées, il y a eu 11,755 demandes comportant des erreurs de compte bancaire et 54,726 demandes qui ont échoué au test des critères d'éligibilité.

Quant à la partie (b) de la question, l'extension de ce régime d'aide exceptionnelle sera, ultérieurement et si besoin est, examinée à la lumière de plusieurs facteurs qui recourent notamment l'évolution de la pandémie du COVID-19 et son impact dans le temps sur l'économie mauricienne.

**SCHOOLS & NURSERIES - WAGE ASSISTANCE SCHEME - MARCH &
APRIL 2020**

(No. B/69) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the schools and nurseries benefitting from assistance under the Wage Assistance Scheme for the months of March and April 2020, he will state if the said schools and nurseries are entitled to charge school fees for the said months and, if so, indicate if consideration will be given for the granting of financial assistance to families whose income levels have been affected amid the Covid-19 lockdown.

Reply: L'aide financière au titre du *Wage Assistance Scheme* est payable à toute entité dont les employés perçoivent un salaire mensuel égal ou inférieur à R 50,000. Les employés des écoles et des crèches privées peuvent donc bénéficier de cette aide financière du gouvernement dans le cadre du régime.

Le paiement des frais de scolarités auprès de ces établissements, est une obligation contractuelle entre d'une part, les écoles et les crèches et d'autre part, les parents. Ces obligations restent inchangées, que les employés de ces établissements bénéficient ou pas du *Wage Assistance Scheme*.

En ce qui concerne la question de l'octroi d'une aide financière aux familles dont le niveau de revenu a été affecté par le couvre-feu sanitaire, je tiens à informer le Parlement que c'est précisément pour cette raison que le gouvernement a mis en œuvre deux régimes d'aide au profit des salariés et des indépendants.

**NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORY - AIR QUALITY
MONITORING**

(No. B/70) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to air pollution, he will state if the level thereof in Mauritius during the curfew period has been assessed and, if so, indicate –

- (a) same, and
- (b) how it compares with the level thereof over the same period in 2019.

Reply: The National Environmental Laboratory (NEL) of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change is mandated to monitor ambient air quality to ensure compliance with prescribed environmental standards. Assessing air quality on a continuous basis is important since air pollution may result in a variety of health effects. The health problems associated with air quality depends on various factors, among which is the concentration of certain parameters and the duration of exposure.

The NEL presently has a fixed ambient air quality monitoring network, comprising of three fixed ambient air quality monitoring stations, to monitor the air quality on a continuous basis. Two urban background stations are located at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Port Louis and on the premises of the Mauritius Meteorological Services in Vacoas. There is also a third station located along the road side, opposite the Rose Hill Police Station.

The parameters which are monitored in Port Louis and Vacoas are namely Particulate Matter of size less than 10 microns, commonly known as PM-10 as well as ozone. The third station, on the other hand, monitors PM-10, Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂), Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) and Carbon Monoxide (CO). These pollutants are usually emitted by vehicles.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the fixed ambient air quality monitoring network was operational on a continuous basis during the curfew period, except for the station located at Vacoas, which is currently under maintenance.

With regard to part (b) of the question, for the region of Port Louis, the average daily concentration of PM-10 recorded during the curfew period, that is, from 20 March 2020 until 30 April 2020, compared to the same period in 2019 was almost similar. The comparative figures are tabulated as follows –

Fixed Ambient Air Monitoring Station				
Port Louis				
	20 March to 30 April 2019	20 March to 30 April 2020 (curfew period)	% variation	Mauritian Ambient Air Standards Limits
Average daily concentration of PM-10 (ug/m³)	18.57	18.87	+1.62	100

For the roadside monitoring station located at Rose Hill, the average daily concentration of PM-10 and Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) showed a decrease of 52% and 78.5 % respectively during the curfew period when compared to figures recorded in the same period in 2019.

On the other hand, for Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂), it has been observed that there was a decrease of 19.8 % in the hourly average concentration levels during the curfew period while for Carbon Monoxide (CO), a 19.1 % increase was observed in the hourly average concentration levels during the curfew when compared to figures recorded in the same period in 2019. The comparative figures for parameters recorded by the fixed ambient air monitoring station at Rose Hill are illustrated below.

	Fixed Ambient Air Monitoring Station			
	Rose Hill			
	20 March to 30 April 2019	20 March to 30 April 2020 (curfew period)	% variation	Mauritian Ambient Air Standards Limits
Average daily concentration of PM-10 (ug/m³)	34.05	16.34	-52.0	100
Average daily concentration of NO₂ (ug/m³)	11.69	2.51	-78.5	200
Average hourly concentration of SO₂ (ug/m³)	6.47	5.19	-19.8	350
Average hourly concentration of CO (ug/m³)	267.77	318.90	+19.1	25,000

It is to be noted that all measurements recorded in the three regions, in 2019 and during the curfew period, were nonetheless in compliance with the Environment Protection (Standards for Air) Regulations 1998.

BUILDING & LAND USE PERMITS - ONLINE PAYMENT

(No. B/71) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management

whether, in regard to the Building and Land Use Permits, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal and District Councils, information as to the –

- (a) measures taken to allow online payment in respect of new applications therefor, and
- (b) where matters stand regarding the pending applications submitted prior to the implementation of the Curfew Order.

Reply: I am informed by the Local Authorities that the National Electronic Licensing System (NELS) for Building and Land Use Permit (BLUP) applications, which is in operation since January 2019, provides for both online applications and online payment facilities on a 24/7 basis.

The NELS platform has been set up by the Economic Development Board (EDB) and serves as a single point of entry for BLUP applications, payment and processing. It also provides that payment be effected for both the Processing Fee and Building and Land Use Permit Fee by means of credit card or through internet banking.

Concerning part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Local Authorities that applications received prior to the Curfew Order have been processed and worked out by the skeletal staff of the Local Authorities. The recommendations would be referred to the Permits and Business Monitoring Committee (PBMC), as soon as the activities of the Local Authorities would resume.

I am also informed that applications requiring site visits were not processed as visits could not have been effected nor notices were issued during the curfew period. However, for those applications which did not require any site visit, I am further informed by Pamplemousses District Council that a virtual Permits and Business Monitoring Committees (PBMC) was held through SKYPE on 10 April 2020 whereby pending applications submitted prior to the implementation of the Curfew Order were processed.

SCAVENGERS - COVID-19 TEST & PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

(No. B/72) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the scavengers, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal and District Councils, information as to if they are –

- (a) being Covid-19 tested, and
- (b) issued with appropriate personal protective equipment and, if so, indicate –
 - (i) when same were issued thereto, and

(ii) the type thereof.

Reply: From the outset, I wish to inform the House that the Municipal and District Councils have been providing essential scavenging services with revised schedules to ensure cleanliness and waste removal island-wide during the confinement/curfew period as a result of the Covid-19. After having applied for and issued with work access permits for the employees deployed in the scavenging departments, the Local Authorities have been collecting only household wastes once weekly, and the inhabitants were advised that green and bulky wastes would be collected after the curfew period.

In such circumstances, the employees in the scavenging departments have been in the frontline. With a view to minimising exposure to the risk of Covid-19, the employees concerned have been provided with additional protective equipment on top the normal personal protective equipment which is usually issued to them annually.

In regard to part (a) of the question, I have to inform the House that my Ministry as well as the Local Authorities have requested the Ministry of Health and Wellness to make necessary arrangements to carry out relevant tests for Covid-19 on the employees concerned. In this respect, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, which is already carrying out the Covid-19 tests on front liners, has responded favourably. To this effect, it has established together with the Local Authorities a programme of tests on the employees who were involved in scavenging services during the curfew period.

I wish to add that the programme has started on 01 May 2020 with mass Covid-19 tests. As at 04 May 2020, a total of 649 tests had been carried out for employees of Moka District Council, Vacoas/Phoenix Municipal Council and Curepipe Municipal Council. The exercise will continue for other Local Authorities as per an established plan.

With respect to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Local Authorities that employees working in the scavenging departments are provided annually with necessary personal protective equipment for their safety and health in view of the very nature of their works which involve certain elements of exposure to risks, in line with the Occupational Safety and Health (Personal Protective Equipment) Regulations 2012. Such equipment comprises boots, gloves and reflective jackets issued annually and also raincoats which are issued every two years. The dates or period when the equipment are issued vary from one Local Authority to another, and similarly the type also varies depending on the procurement exercises by the different Municipal and District Councils.

As a result of the exceptional circumstances of Covid-19, the Local Authorities had also provided supplementary protective equipment to the employees, such as face masks and

disposable gloves. The face masks were issued before the employees were deployed on the ground during the curfew period while disposable gloves were issued only if required, given the fact that they have already been provided normal rubber gloves. In view of shortage of face masks on the local market, the Local Authorities had to procure whatever type was available, such as surgical masks for single use or re-useable ones. Moreover, hand sanitizer is also being provided by the Local Authorities to their employees.

AMB - POTATOES, ONIONS & GARLIC - SUPPLY

(No. B/73) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to potatoes, onions and garlic, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Agricultural Marketing Board –

- (a) information as to if the supply thereof by the Board has been decreased since 01 March 2020 to date and, if so, indicate the reasons therefor
- (b) a list of buyers thereof since 01 March 2020 to date, indicating the quantities thereof delivered, and
- (c) if there has been an increase in the prices thereof.

(Vide Reply to PQ B/14)

HOMES FOR THE ELDERLY - COVID-19 TESTS

(No. A/4) Mr X. L. Duval (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Homes for the Elderly, he will state the percentage of the residents thereof who have been Covid-19 tested, indicating –

- (a) when, and
- (b) the outcome thereof.

Reply: The Ministry of Health and Wellness has undertaken 519 PCR Tests on staff in 71 homes and one positive case was detected in one home and the rest were negative.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, has undertaken a Rapid Covid-19 testing exercise for inmates from 27 April to 04 May 2020 in all these institutions.

As at date, 1,943 residents of 69 institutions have been tested through Antigens Rapid testing. A further 23 residents of one Private Licensed Home have undergone the PCR Test.

A total of 99.6 % of the residents have been tested.

All the inmates, including those who have undergone the Antigen Rapid Test have been tested negative.

SOUILLAC & ENT HOSPITALS - COVID-19 PATIENTS

(No. A/5) Mr X. L. Duval (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Covid-19 patients, he will state the number thereof who have been placed under ventilation at the Souillac and ENT Hospitals, respectively, indicating the number thereof who –

- (a) have been cured;
- (b) have passed away, and
- (c) are still under ventilation as at to date.

Reply: As at 05 May 2020, 316 patients have been cured of Covid-19 and 10 patients have passed away. There is no patient on ventilation as at date.

I am informed that, at Souillac Hospital, there were four patients who were on ventilator and all of them passed away.

As regards ENT Hospital, four patients were on ventilator, out of whom two have passed away and two have been extubated and are now stable.

Over and above this, two patients at ENT Hospital who were in a critical stage were not put on ventilation because of proper patient management. They were put on high flow oxygen therapy; they have progressed satisfactorily and were discharged.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC – TESTING

(No. A/6) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state if his Ministry will consider providing testing therefor to all Mauritian citizens and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

Reply: The prevalence of the pandemic currently does not warrant testing of all Mauritians at this stage because it is very low. What is more imperative is that we continue the detecting exercise, isolate suspected cases, continue contact tracing and put emphasis on preventive measures. In addition, we have already undertaken 19,233 PCR Tests and 26,275 Rapid Antigen Tests.

ENT HOSPITAL, VACOAS MARKET FAIR & TOWN CENTRE - DISINFECTION

(No. A/7) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the ENT Hospital, the market fair and

the town centre at Vacoas and immediate perimeter thereof, he will state if consideration will be given for the disinfection thereof as a safety measure against Covid-19.

Reply: As you all know, COVID-19 is transmitted by droplets and by contact.

The distance of transmission of the virus cannot exceed 1 to 2 metres which, in itself, does not represent a real threat to the market fair, the town centre of Vacoas and the immediate perimeter of the ENT Hospital, as such.

That said, there is no risk of contamination of the immediate environment of the ENT Hospital.

SELF-EMPLOYED ASSISTANCE SCHEME – APPLICATIONS & ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

(No. A/8) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the –

- (a) number of applications –
 - (i) received,
 - (ii) processed, and
 - (iii) approved and funds disbursed thereunder,
- (b) eligibility criteria and verification methods applied, and
- (c) redress contemplated, if any, in respect of those who have not been able to apply online out of lack of digital access.

Reply: In respect of the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, the Mauritius Revenue Authority (MRA) has as at 04 May 2020 –

- (a) (i) received 253,102 applications;
- (ii) processed 244,202 applications;
- (iii) approved 189,476 applications, out of which 177,714 applicants, have been paid Rs5,100 in respect of the period 16 March 2020 to 15 April 2020, representing total funds disbursed of Rs906 m.,
- (b) The eligibility criteria set by Government are as follows -

- (i) a self-employed individual who is in business, or a tradesperson operating in the informal sector, e.g. a mason, a cabinet maker, a plumber, a hairdresser and an artist is entitled to join the assistance scheme provided he is a Mauritian national above 18 years of age and who has been in business for the last 3 months.
- (ii) the following individuals are not eligible to the assistance –
- an individual who is an employee, whether full-time or part-time;
 - a person who is eligible to receive basic retirement pension;
 - an individual who receives monthly social benefits;
 - an individual pursuing higher studies on a full-time basis;
 - a person who is a dependent spouse;
 - a person who was unemployed at the beginning of March 2020;
 - an individual who forms part of a household having total monthly income (including passive income, e.g. rent, dividends, interests or profits) exceeding Rs50,000;
 - an individual who is in a business where he earns only passive income, e.g. rent; or
 - a fisherman.

The MRA has verified applications received on the basis of information already available in its database.

- (c) The MRA is operating a hotline to guide those persons who are having difficulty in making the online application.

RODRIGUES ISLAND - SELF-EMPLOYED ASSISTANCE SCHEME

(No. A/9) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the

Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to if it is applicable in the Rodrigues Island, and, if not, why not.

Reply: The Self-Employed Assistance Scheme is applicable in the Island of Rodrigues.

WIDOW'S PENSION – RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE – 1987-1991

(No. A/10) **Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the widows who contracted religious marriage between 1987 and 1991, she will state where matters stand as to the pending issue of them being entitled to the Widow's Pension.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that, following an amendment made to the Social Aid Regulations of 1984 in 2014, widows who contracted religious marriages between 13 November 1987 and 22 December 1990 became entitled to a surviving partner allowance equivalent to the rate of the Basic Widow's Pension.

ROSE HILL-STANLEY – CWA – PIPES LAYING WORKS

(No. A/11) **Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the state of the roads in the region of Rose Hill-Stanley, following pipe laying works carried out by the Central Water Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to the –

- (a) name of the contractor;
- (b) start and completion dates of works carried out, and
- (c) when full re-instatement of the said roads will be effected as per the terms and conditions of the contract.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that works for the replacement of 27 kms of pipes in the region of Rose Hill and adjoining areas are being carried out under two contracts.

The contractor for both contracts is Best Construct Co Ltd, as approved by the Central Procurement Board.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that works started on 11 October 2017 and the initial completion date was April 2019. This date was later revised to May 2020 due to delays resulting from concurrent infrastructure works related to the metro, clearances for traffic diversions, interruption of works during religious festivals and elections, among others.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed that the full width re-instatement of roads was scheduled to be completed by end June 2020.

However, since 20 March 2020, all works have stopped during the national confinement. The completion date will be rescheduled as soon as authority to resume works on site is obtained.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 19 – 24/7 WATER SUPPLY

(No. A/12) Mr D. Nagalingun (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the supply of water in Constituency No. 19, Stanley and Rose Hill, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to –

- (a) when water will be made available 24/7 to the inhabitants of the said constituency;
- (b) number of complaints registered on the hotline in relation thereto, and
- (c) number of water tanks hired to supply water, indicating the expenditure incurred in relation thereto.

Reply: I am informed by the Central Water Authority that water supply is on the basis of District Water Supply Zones and not constituencies.

Stanley and Rose Hill form part of the MAV Lower Water Supply Zone and is supplied with potable water from –

- (i) La Marie Water Treatment Plant, via Candos and Stanley Reservoirs;
- (ii) three Boreholes found in the region of Bassin, and
- (iii) the Bagatelle Water Treatment Plant via Rose Hill Reservoir.

The total daily water production for the region is 45,000 cubic metres.

With regard to part (a), following the operation of the Bagatelle Water Treatment Plant in September 2019, the hours of supply for the regions of Rose Hill Centre, Stanley, Trèfles and Plaisance is now on a 24-hour basis.

I am informed by the CWA that pipe laying of 1.4 km along Avenue Belle Rose, Quatre Bornes is expected to be completed by end of August 2020, after which Vandermeersch, Boundary, Labourdonnais, Roches Brunes and Camp Levieux will also receive 24-hour supply.

With regard to part (b), I am informed by the CWA that the hotline registers on average up to 10 complaints daily which are normally attended on the same day.

With regard to part (c), the CWA has five water tanks for MAV Lower section, out of which two are dedicated to Stanley Rose Hill.

It has hired only one private tanker, as and when required. The payment is based on contractual rates of Rs35 per km for distance covered by the water tankers from their respective base to CWA filling point and back, Rs650 per hour for water tankers of capacity up to 10 m³ and Rs1,000 per hour for water tankers of capacity of 11 to 35 m³.

GRA - HORSE RACING - 2020 SEASON

(No. A/13) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to horse racing, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to if it is in presence of a request from the Mauritius Turf Club to allow the start of the 2020 Season and, if so, indicate the decision taken in relation thereto.

Reply: PQ A/13 and PQ A/29 are being replied together as they relate to the same subject matter.

I am informed by the Gambling Regulatory Authority (GRA) that, on 08 April 2020, the Mauritius Turf Club (MTC) has submitted a request seeking authorisation to organise horse race meetings in camera.

I am further informed by the GRA that no decision has yet been taken as the request is still under consideration. Any decision regarding the holding of race meetings “à huis clos” will, first and foremost, take into consideration the health, safety and security of the population. Such decision to hold race meetings will, therefore, be considered at a later stage, depending on the evolution of the situation.

CLEAR OCEAN HOTEL & RESORT LTD - STATE LAND LEASE

(No. A/14) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning whether, in regard to the hotel project of Clear Ocean Hotel and Resort Ltd. of Pelangi/South Africa, he will state the extent of State land and *Pas Géométriques* leased to the promoter thereof, indicating the –

- (a) date of signature of the lease, and
- (b) rent payable therefor.

Reply:

- (a) By virtue of a lease agreement signed on 15 August 2017 and registered as per TB201709/000046, the then Ministry of Housing and Lands leased 30 *arpents* 32 ¹/₁₀ perches of land at St Felix to Clear Ocean Hotel and Resort Ltd. Of the leased area, 16 *arpents* 64 perches form part of *Pas Géométriques* and the remaining is State land.
- (b) The rent payable was Rs17,781,556 per annum.

NLTA – MOTOR VEHICLES – REGISTRATION

(No. A/15) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to motor vehicles, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to if consideration will be given for the taking of measures to expedite the registration process thereof, including, by –

- (a) merging the transactions required to be carried out at the Registrar General's Department and the National Land Transport Authority in a single place, and
- (b) providing online registration/payment facilities, indicating if all insurance companies are connected to the platform and, if not, why not.

Reply: The NLTA is working on the Road Traffic Amendment Bill in order to streamline procedures for the registration and the transfer of ownership of motor vehicles. Consultative meetings are being held with the Registrar General's Department on this One Stop Shop project since the beginning of last year.

The implementation of the project would also rest on legislative amendments to be brought at the level of the Registrar Department.

The project would require that the NLTA shares the platform of the Registrar Department so that it can operate as a One Stop Shop by taking over the responsibilities for the payment of Registration Duty from the Registrar General's Department.

According to information obtained from the Registration General's Department –

- (i) the latter would consider the possibility of providing a view access to its registration system to the National Land Transport Authority (NLTA) to help the registration process, and

- (ii) the Online One Stop Shop platform that would regroup the NLTA, Registrar General's Department and the Customs Department under is still being studied at its level.

With regard to part (b) of the question, there is currently no online platform for registration/payment facilities at the NLTA. However, an online platform for the benefit of all citizens exists at the level of the Registrar General's Department for the registration of a motor vehicle.

CANAL ANGLAIS - UPGRADING

(No. A/16) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed upgrading of the Canal Anglais by the National Development Unit, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: The National Development Unit (NDU) has a project for the Upgrading of Canal Anglais which involves, among others –

- (i) geotechnical investigations;
- (ii) extension of the canal by approximately 200 m.;
- (iii) reconstruction of part of the canal;
- (iv) repairs/upgrading along the whole canal;
- (v) refurbishment of all existing steel footbridges;
- (vi) installation of new fencing, and
- (vii) general cleaning of the canal.

In view of the complexity of the project, the NDU had appointed a Consultant in July 2019 to carry out a study and come up with proposals to mitigate the problem of flooding thereat. The consultant has submitted the Detailed Design Report in January 2020 and the draft bidding documents in March 2020.

The draft bidding documents are being finalised and the bids are expected to be launched by the beginning of June 2020.

The implementation of the project has been delayed due to the lockdown in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

SELF-EMPLOYED ASSISTANCE SCHEME – APPLICATIONS

(No. A/17) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the –

- (a) number of applications received thereunder, indicating the number of applications approved and in respect of which a financial support of Rs5,100/application has been disbursed over the period 16 March to 15 April 2020, and
- (b) redress available to
 - (i) *bona fide* applicants who had made online application but have not benefitted thereunder, and
 - (ii) those who could not register due to lack of digital access.

Reply: In respect of the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, the Mauritius Revenue Authority (MRA) has as at 04 May 2020 –

- (a)
 - (i) received 253,102 applications;
 - (ii) approved 189,476 applications, out of which 177,714 applicants have been paid Rs5,100 in respect of the period 16 March 2020 to 15 April 2020, representing total funds disbursed of Rs906 m.
- (b)
 - (i) First, there is a hotline which has been set up by the MRA to assist and guide *bona fide* applicants.
Second, an applicant who has made a mistake in giving the date he or she has started his/her business may amend the application made.
Third, an applicant who does not have a Bank Account may still make an application. However, he or she will have to open a Bank Account at the earliest and, thereafter, revert to his/her application form and insert his/her bank details.
Fourth, an applicant who has inserted the Bank Account Number of another person, and gets the message that the account has been used more than once, may amend his/her application, online, to insert a Bank Account which is in his/her own name.
 - (ii) The MRA is operating a hotline to guide those persons who are having difficulty in making the online application.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - CULTURAL SECTOR - SUPPORT SCHEMES

(No. A/18) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the artists and individuals involved in artistic and cultural activities, he will state if consideration will be given for the implementation of a support scheme to grant financial assistance thereto for loss of earnings due to impossibility of organising concerts, festivals or public cultural events in the forthcoming months amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reply: The unprecedented shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically affected the global economy including the creative sector.

Bold measures such as border closure and ban on public gathering, though difficult, were necessary to protect the health and safety of the citizens. These measures have impacted and are expected to continue to impacting for some time on our artists, creators and performers.

However, to mitigate the adverse impact of the crisis, Government has during the months of March and April given support to employees, including artists of the creative industry and persons employed in the sector through the Wage Assistance Scheme. Artists in the informal sector, mainly those who operate as freelancers, have been supported under the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme (SEAS).

To ensure that the local cultural sector becomes more sustainable, a paradigm shift is required in the way Arts and Culture are promoted, offered and consumed.

Both the demand and supply sides of the artistic and cultural sector will have to be re-engineered to adapt to the changing environment and exigencies of the population.

In that context, my Ministry is currently working on a Post Covid-19 Action Plan for the Creative Industry and the Cultural Heritage Sectors with a view to mitigating the effects of this crisis and revamping these sectors whilst taking into consideration the difficulties faced by individuals engaged in these sectors.

MEDICAL WASTE - DISPOSAL

(No. A/19) Mr. F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to medical waste, he will state how the millions of masks and gloves used by the general public will be collected and disposed of.

Reply: A distinction should be made between masks and gloves utilised as personal protective equipment by medical and paramedical personnel in the medical and health care institutions and those used by the general public.

Masks and gloves used in hospitals and quarantine centres are treated as medical waste and are disposed of by the Ministry of Health and Wellness, whereas masks and gloves used by the general public are not considered as medical waste by the Ministry of Health and Wellness as they are not generated from health institutions.

The Municipal and District Councils are mandated to collect household waste, including masks and gloves used by the public, placed in bins for disposal through the transfer stations and eventually to the Mare Chicose landfill.

Refuse collectors are being provided with necessary personal protective equipment by the respective Local Authorities and have been instructed to handle all waste with utmost precaution. Specifically, used masks and gloves are disposed directly in waste bins together with other household waste. In many cases, sensitive waste like used masks and gloves are sealed in appropriate bags and disposed of in the waste bins.

Despite the fact that the public is already sensitised to the effect that used masks and gloves should be securely placed in waste bins and not be discarded haphazardly in public places, such sensitisation campaign will be reinforced to further sensitise the public on the proper method of disposal of used masks and gloves in sealed paper or appropriate bags.

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - MASA - MEMBERS - FINANCIAL SUPPORT

(No. A/20) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the artists registered with the Mauritius Society of Authors, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the MASA, information as to the number thereof who have benefitted from financial assistance during the Covid-19 lockdown as at to date, indicating the quantum thereof disbursed.

Reply: I am informed by the Mauritius Society of Authors (MASA) that it has provided financial support of Rs5,000 to its members in early May 2020, through the Provident and Social Welfare Fund of MASA, established under section 45 of the Copyright (Amendment) Act 2017. A second disbursement of Rs5,000 is expected to be effected by end of May 2020.

367 full-fledged members are eligible for the above financial support and a total amount of Rs690,000 has been disbursed as at date.

Furthermore, artists employed in the creative sector have benefitted from the COVID-19 Wage Assistance Scheme and freelance artists from the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme put in place by Government as a measure to mitigate the effects of the lockdown on income.

COVID-19 - REGISTERED PROFESSIONAL FISHERS - FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

(No. A/21) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the registered professional fishers, he will state the number thereof who have benefitted from financial assistance during the Covid-19 lockdown as at to date, indicating the quantum thereof disbursed.

Reply: I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Member that there is no such profession as ‘registered professional fishers’. In fact, under Section 11 of the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act, fishermen are registered as ‘artisanal fishermen’, ‘bank fishermen’ or ‘trainee bank fishermen’.

A total number of 1,810 registered artisanal fishers benefitted from a financial assistance amounting to Rs23,064,750 during the lockdown period which started on 19 March 2020 and ended on 14 May 2020 for registered artisanal fishers as they were allowed to resume their fishing activities as from 15 May 2020.

Indeed, for the period 15 May to 31 May, eligible fishers were paid their Bad Weather Allowance.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - REPORTED CASES

(No. A/22) Ms K. Foo Kune (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to domestic violence, she will state the number of reported cases thereof since the implementation of the Curfew Order, indicating the –

- (a) number of reported cases thereof during the same period last year;
- (b) number of reported cases requiring Police interventions, and
- (c) measures taken in respect of each reported case.

Reply: I am informed that since confinement up to 30 April 2020, 244 domestic violence cases have been reported to my Ministry, out of which 92 were cases of physical assault, 82 were verbal abuse and the others were related to harassment, threat, damage to property, amongst others. Furthermore, 201 domestic violence cases have also been reported directly to the Police Stations.

It is to be noted that cases reported during confinement at the level of the Police Stations and Police Family Protection Units are being compiled.

For the same period in 2019, 640 and 370 domestic violence cases were reported to my Ministry and the Police Department respectively.

Police assistance was requested in all cases reported to my Ministry, mainly in terms of patrol, warning, arrest and to accompany victims to hospital.

All reported cases have been attended by officers of my Ministry through intervention and comprise, *inter alia* -

- assessment of cases;
- referral of cases to Police Stations;
- referral of cases to psychologists for support;
- accompanying victims in respective Police Stations/Police Family Protection Units for application for Protection Order;
- referral of victims for accommodation in shelters, and
- timely follow-up made by phone with victims of domestic violence.

ANTI-INFLUENZA VACCINATION - ELIGIBILITY

(No. A/23) Ms K. Foo Kune (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the influenza vaccination campaign, he will state the number of vulnerable citizens eligible thereunder according to the Social Security Register district-wise and been vaccinated as at to date, indicating the number thereof who are –

- (a) aged 60 years and above;
- (b) disabled children, and
- (c) residents of charitable institutions.

Reply: According to information received from the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, according to their Social Security Register, the following persons are eligible for anti-influenza vaccination –

- (i) elderly persons aged 60 years and above;
- (ii) elderly persons with severe disabilities in receipt of monthly domiciliary;
- (iii) bedridden or children with severe disabilities aged 0-18 years in receipt of monthly domiciliary visit;

- (iv) children with disabilities attending specialised schools;
- (v) children with muscular dystrophy, and
- (vi) inmates of charitable institutions and private licensed homes.

(a) The number of vaccinations carried out by the Ministry of Health and Wellness is shown in the table below –

S. N.	District	No. of Senior Citizens per district	No. of vaccines effected per district
1.	Moka	10,540	7,378
2.	Flacq	23,993	15,160
3.	Plaines Wilhems	80,746	13,589
4.	Black River	11,559	6,855
5.	Port Louis	26,267	10,654
6.	Savanne	12,888	10,072
7.	Grand Port	18,271	9,313
8.	Pamplemousses	22,529	9,799
9.	Rivière du Rempart	18,789	10,493
Total		225,582	93,313

Moreover, there are 7,000 elderly persons in receipt of monthly domiciliary visits, out of whom 4,774 persons have been vaccinated at home by the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity. The exercise will be completed by mid-May 2020.

(b) As regards disabled children, there are three categories, namely bedridden or children with severe disabilities aged 0-18 years in receipt of monthly domiciliary visit, children with disabilities attending specialised schools and children with muscular dystrophy as follows –

S.N.	Disabled children	Number of disabled children eligible for vaccination	Number of vaccinations
1.	Bedridden or children with severe disabilities aged 0-18 years	45	31 as at date The rest will be vaccinated by mid-May.
2.	Children with disabilities attending specialised schools	3,000	In view of the Covid-19 situation, consideration is being given to vaccinate some 3,000 children with disabilities attending special needs organisations at their residence. Necessary arrangements are being made accordingly and this exercise is expected to be completed by 15 May 2020.
3.	Children with muscular dystrophy	20	The 20 children with muscular dystrophy will be vaccinated at their domicile. This exercise will be completed by mid-May 2020.
	Total	3,065	31

(c) There are 1,974 residents of 27 Charitable Institutions and 44 Private Licensed Homes who are eligible for vaccination. A total of 1,832 inmates have been vaccinated from 21 Charitable Institutions and 44 Private Licensed Homes over the island. The remaining 142 inmates of the six remaining Charitable Institutions will be catered for by the end of this week.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - TEST KITS - PURCHASE ORDERS

(No. A/24) Mr M. E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, he will –

- (a) give a breakdown of the purchase orders effected for test kits, including the date, the number ordered and country of origin thereof, and
- (b) state the number of persons tested therefor as at to date.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, as at 04 May 2020, eight purchase orders for test kits were effected as follows –

Test kits procured as at Monday 04 May 2020					
S.N.	Description	Quantity	Date of Order	Date of Delivery	Country of Origin
1.	Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Test	113,000	3,000 on 13 March 2020	24 March 2020	USA/ Europe
			10,000 on 19 March 2020	Partly delivered on 30 March and the rest on 18 April 2020.	
			100,000 on 24 March 2020	Delivery of certain items in two installments on 18 and 29 April 2020. Delivery of remaining items will be delivered within two weeks.	
2.	5X Magmax-96 Viral Kit (2 parts) (for PCR test)	130	05 April 2020	123 units delivered in installments on 18 and 29 April 2020 and the remaining 7 kits will be delivered within two weeks	Amsterdam
	Magnetic Stand-96 1 stand (for PCR test)	40		20 units delivered on 18 April and remaining 20 on 29 April 2020	
3.	Rapid Antigen Test	212,500	12,500 on 24 March 2020	12,500 on 23 April 2020	South Korea
			50,000 on 26 March 2020	86,750 received on 23 April 2020.	
			150,000 on 06 April 2020	Remaining quantity is expected by 15 May 2020, subject to availability of flight.	
4.	Rapid Antibody Test	5,000	24 March 2020	950 on 27 March 2020	South Korea
				3,800 on 23 April 2020	
				Awaiting flight availability to deliver	

Test kits procured as at Monday 04 May 2020					
S.N.	Description	Quantity	Date of Order	Date of Delivery	Country of Origin
				the remaining 250.	

As for part (b) of the question, as at Monday 04 May 2020 –

- 15,430 persons were tested by the PCR method;
- 26,275 persons were tested through the Rapid Antigen Test, and
- 702 persons were tested through the Rapid Antibody Test.

METRO EXPRESS PROJECT - PHASE II - IMPLEMENTATION

(No. A/26) Ms Joanna Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the Metro Express Project, he will state if Phase II thereof will be implemented as per the original plans in the light of the difficult economic forecasts in respect of the forthcoming months made by various national and international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund amongst others.

Reply: Phase I of the Metro Express Project comprising 13 kms from Port Louis to Rose Hill has been completed and the Light Rail Transit System is operational since January 2020. It has received a popular response and acceptance and has been successfully adopted by commuters.

Phase II, from Rose Hill to Curepipe of some 13 kms is planned to be completed by 2021. The works started concurrently with Phase I in terms of surveys, designs, procurement, amongst others. Much progress has already been achieved for Phase II at more than 10 locations from Rose Hill to Quatre Bornes, at Trianon, from Phoenix to Vacoas and from Floreal to Curepipe.

In terms of procurement, 16 LRVs out of the 18 LRVs have already been delivered in Mauritius. All track materials, systems and electrical overhead masts for Phase II have been delivered. Remaining materials have been ordered and are due for delivery.

The Metro Express Project is being implemented under a G to G Agreement with the Government of India. A financial package was granted for this specific project under specific conditions and an agreement was signed between the Metro Express Ltd and the EXIM Bank. Moreover, there are penalties for late disbursement or/and withdrawal of the loan.

The Metro Express will generate long-term benefits to the country both by decongesting the Curepipe-Port Louis corridor and bringing along infrastructural, environmental and sustainable developments. The Metro Express project is an investment into the future in terms not only economic growth but also in terms of sustainability as it brings along other developments along the alignment, which is the case worldwide of such integrated and sustainable transportation projects.

Phase II of the project has reached an advanced stage with respect to the construction of the infrastructures and any termination or suspension at this stage will have adverse serious consequences ranging from financial penalties, reputational damage, loss of revenue, diplomatic implications, economic damage and loss of growth opportunities much needed post COVID-19.

Works on site have temporarily been stopped during the lockdown period. The contractor has prepared the health and safety protocols with all the necessary and precautionary measures. Works will resume on the different sites as soon as all clearances, including Work Access Permits are obtained.

ZEP SCHOOLS - MEALS

(No. A/28) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the provision of daily meals to pupils attending the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire* schools, she will state if consideration will be given for the granting of the budgetary allocation thereof to the pupils on a weekly basis during the closure of the schools.

Reply: The provision of daily meals to pupils attending *ZEP* primary schools is part of the Supplementary School Feeding project implemented by the Ministry.

Currently, under this Project, pupils of *ZEP* schools are offered, every day, at school a meal. It is to be highlighted that, as part of a pilot project, a hot meal is being served to pupils of Bois des Amourettes GS since January 2020.

Following a bidding exercise, caterers are selected for the provision of meals in these schools.

Funds have been appropriated in the budget of my Ministry for the implementation of the project.

As such, a budgetary allocation to the pupils during closure of schools does not fall within the parameters of the project.

The project will resume in July 2020.

GRA - IN CAMERA - HORSE RACING

(No. A/29) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to horse racing, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to if it has approved the request of the Mauritius Turf Club to allowing same “à huis clos” and, if so, indicate the terms and conditions attached thereto.

(Vide Reply to PQ A/13)

PUBLIC BUSES AND LIGHT RAIL VEHICLES - SANITIZATION & DISINFECTION

(No. A/30) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to public transport, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority and the Metro Express Ltd., information as to if they have issued contracts for the sanitization and disinfection of public buses and Light Rail Vehicles, as recommended by the World Health Organisation and, if so, indicate -

- (a) if bids were launched prior to the award of the contracts
- (b) the terms and conditions of the contracts, and
- (c) contract values thereof.

Reply: In its capacity as Regulator of land and light rail transport, the National Land Transport Authority (NLTA) is ensuring necessary communication with bus operators and the light rail operator with regard to measures to be taken in respect of sanitisation and disinfection of public buses and light rail vehicles in line with recommendations of the World Health Organisation.

However, the onus is on the bus operators and the light rail operator to ensure the sanitisation and disinfection of public buses and of the light rail vehicles and to procure such services and award such contracts, as may be necessary.

As far as the Metro Express Ltd (MEL) is concerned, following a competitive bidding exercise, Alpha Facilities Group was awarded a 12-month cleaning services contract on 04 December 2019, for the total amount of MUR 8,512,181.00 inclusive of VAT, payable monthly in equal amount.

The Scope of works of the Contractor consists of general cleaning services for Light Rail Vehicles (LRVs), depot buildings, train stations, tracks, and yard maintenance, the office buildings and the train stations for the Richelieu Depot and Phase 1 corridor, which is from Victoria Station to Rose Hill Station.

Since the positive COVID-19 cases were confirmed in Mauritius on 19 March 2020, Alpha Facilities Group has been providing extensive cleaning, regular disinfection and deep cleaning of all facilities/infrastructure, within the existing contract.

The NTC had recourse to emergency procurement to avail itself of the services of Alpha Cleaning Limited on 21 March 2020. As from 22 March 2020, all buses being put into operation daily are being disinfected daily after use by Alpha Cleaning Limited. The cost is of Rs450, excluding VAT, per bus per day.

EBENE – NEW STATE-OF-THE-ART NATIONAL HEALTH LABORATORY SERVICES CENTRE

(No. A/31) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a new laboratory by his Ministry in Ebene, he will state where matters stand and when same is scheduled to become fully operational.

Reply: As announced in the Government Programme, Government intends to set up a new state-of-the-art National Health Laboratory Services Centre.

Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd was requested to identify a plot of land for the project.

As soon as the land identified will be made available to the Ministry, the Consultant, Hospital Services Consultancy Corporation (India) Ltd, will be requested to expedite the finalisation of the design and launch bids.

MOTOR VEHICLE LICENCE - ONLINE PAYMENT SYSTEM

(No. A/32) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to

the Motor Vehicle Licence Online Payment System, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to –

- (a) the number of online payments effected since the implementation thereof to date, and
- (b) if all insurance companies are connected thereto.

Reply: According to the National Land Transport Authority, 525 transactions have been registered on the online platform for the Renewal of Motor Vehicle Licence since its coming into operation in November 2018 up to 29 April 2020.

The system currently applies to private vehicles only. The NLTA is working on the second phase of the project which will cater for all other classes of vehicles, including taxis.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the following eight insurance companies are currently connected to the system –

- SICOM Insurance;
- Mauritius Union;
- Jubilee Insurance;
- GFA Insurance;
- Swan General Ltd;
- Quantum Insurance;
- Eagle Insurance
- Phoenix Insurance Ltd.

The remaining insurance companies are not yet connected to the system on reason of the incompatibility of their IT infrastructure. However, they have reassured that arrangements are underway to upgrade their IT systems so that they can connect to the platform.