



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 21 JULY 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. Louis Steven Obeegadoo	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism
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. 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 Energy and Public Utilities
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

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

Mr Speaker	Hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, GOSK
Deputy Speaker	Hon. Mohammud Zahid Nazurally
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Sanjit Kumar Nuckcheddy
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 26 of 2020

Sitting of Tuesday 21 July 2020

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Office of the Speaker

The Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements of the Independent Commission Against Corruption for the year ended 30 June 2019.

B. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

Certificate of Urgency in respect of the following Bills (In Original):

- (i) The Real Estate Agent Authority Bill (No XI of 2020) and;
- (ii) The Supplementary Appropriation (2018-2019) Bill (No. XII of 2020).

C. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

- (a) Estimates of Supplementary Expenditure (2018-2019) of 2020.
- (b) The Annual Report of the Civil Service Family Protection Scheme Board for the year ended 30 June 2019.

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

The Environment Protection (Control of Single Use Plastic Products) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 156 of 2020)

E. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Consumer Goods) (Maximum Mark-Up) (Amendment No. 5) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 155 of 2020)
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 17) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 158 of 2020)

F. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training

The Workers' Rights (Extension of Time during COVID-19 Period) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 157 of 2020)

G. Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage

The Financial Statements of the Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund for the year ended 30 June 2018.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, before I put the question, I consider it improper that you should be in the Chair. Debates will resume soon on the motion of no confidence, it is unbecoming of you and I consider it that you are not fit, under the circumstances, to chair the proceedings of today's debates.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Carry on with the question, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

LOCKDOWN PERIOD - DRUGS & MEDICAL EQUIPMENT - EMERGENCY PROCUREMENT

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 emergency procurement of drugs and medical equipment during the lockdown period, he will state the total number of such exercises carried out, indicating –

- (a) the involvement of the High-Level Committee on COVID-19, chaired by his good self, therein, if any, and
- (b) whether, for the sake of transparency, he proposes to initiate an inquiry in the Ministries and organisations involved therein and in relation thereto.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for giving me the opportunity, through this Private Notice Question, to set the records straight on many issues pertaining to COVID-19 which have been unnecessarily blown out of proportion by certain hon. Members of the Opposition and in the media.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a responsible Government, it was our duty to ensure that measures were in place to face the unprecedented challenge of an invisible enemy that has turned the world topsy-turvy and put a halt to our normal way of life.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind the House that the World Health Organisation declared the outbreak of a Public Health Emergency of international concern, that is, COVID-19, on 30 January 2020. Subsequently, on 11 March 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic.

An assessment by the WHO of the risks for Mauritius was that for a population of 1.265 million inhabitants, the risk of exposure was 0.461 with mild infections of 87,424, slightly over 1,000 with severe infection and over 22,000 hospital admissions and 837 deaths.

In the face of such a projected, unprecedented and alarming situation, we could not remain inactive, but we had to be expediently proactive. A High-Level Committee on COVID-19 was set up under my Chair on 31 January 2020 to take stock of the projected situation and chalk out the way forward.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a first in-depth assessment of the situation that was prevailing across the world was made and it was observed that panic buying of essential medicines and equipment was the order of the day.

At the same time, the Ministry of Health and Wellness carried out an assessment of the existing stock of medicines, equipment and resources available both in the public and private sectors and of our immediate and future requirements.

In view of the extreme urgency to procure our needs, we had no alternative than to have recourse to emergency procurement as provided for under section 21 of the Public Procurement Act and further borne out by Directive 44 from the Procurement Policy Office. The objective of the Emergency Procurement Process, as pertinently stipulated by the PPO directive, was to, I quote –

“Safeguard life, quality of life or environment”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a matter of very deep regret that, despite all efforts by our medical team, we could not save the lives of 10 of our fellow citizens. But today we have been able to steer away from the grim predictions of WHO, and what was happening worldwide had instilled fear and apprehension in the mind of the whole Mauritian population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the light of the requirement worked out by the Ministry of Health and Wellness to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, it was clear that the Ministry, being already stretched to the maximum in terms of resources, would need assistance from other Ministries and Departments.

There was a need to act promptly and effectively as the world demand was far greater than the supply of medicines and equipment. Thus, major manufacturers and suppliers from different countries were not able to satisfy the high demand. Small Island States like Mauritius were particularly vulnerable in that situation of panic buying and tarmac buying.

From 23 March 2020 to 30 April 2020, the State Trading Corporation carried out 18 procurement exercises by way of emergency procurement under section 21 of the Public

Procurement Act, and Directive 44 of the Procurement Policy Office, from six bidders for a total value of Rs1,040,519,412.00, using STC's own funds.

The Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection, on its part, carried out four emergency procurement for the Ministry of Health and Wellness for a total amount of Rs95,341,250.00 with funds made available by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

With regard to the Ministry of Health and Wellness, it undertook 66 emergency procurement exercises as from 23 March 2020 as follows -

- (i) 8 emergency procurement exercises for pharmaceutical products;
- (ii) 51 emergency procurement exercises for protective equipment; and
- (iii) 7 emergency procurement exercises for laboratory reagents and products.

The technical bids received from the suppliers were examined by a Technical Committee and contracts were awarded. I am informed that some of the items have been delivered whereas others are yet to be delivered.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, the High Level Committee on COVID-19 was set up to very closely monitor our preparedness for and response to the pandemic and take strategic decisions to ensure that appropriate and timely action was being taken to procure medical supplies and equipment to contain the spread of the disease in our territory.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to remind the House, it was under the stewardship of the High Level COVID Committee that many bold and decisive measures were taken, including -

- (i) 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) extension of the total ban on travellers to enter the territory of Mauritius;
- (iv) suspension of all flights to Rodrigues so as to keep the island free from COVID-19;
- (v) taking preventive measures to also protect the island of Agalega;
- (vi) making of the Prevention and Mitigation of Infectious Disease (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 to deal specifically with the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (vii) concurrent closing of all trading premises as an additional measure to prevent the spread of the virus;

- (viii) 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;
- (ix) ensuring 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 mainly from China;
- (x) ensuring procurement of additional drugs and protective equipment such as surgical and N-95 masks, Personal Protective Equipment, goggles, gloves, and other essential requirements;
- (xi) carrying out contact-tracing in the community following detection of COVID-19 cases;
- (xii) targeted screening campaign for COVID-19 using Rapid Antigen Tests;
- (xiii) creation of a Hotline 8924 for all matters related to COVID-19 and health issues;
- (xiv) undertaking massive education and sensitisation campaigns in the media on preventive and hygiene measures, including the creation of a dedicated web page and mobile app;
- (xv) putting into place a home visit system for urgent cases necessitating medical intervention;
- (xvi) putting into place a triage system in all Regional Hospitals in order to direct patients with COVID-19 ...

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. I have asked a specific question and the questions are there to be replied to. If the hon. Prime Minister wants to make a statement, there is Statement time and he can do so. But not to waste the time of the House with replies which are not relevant to the question.

The Prime Minister: I am not wasting the time of the House, I am replying to your question.

Mr Speaker: Carry on!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Let me repeat -

- (xv) putting into place a home visit system for urgent cases necessitating medical intervention;
- (xvi) 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;
- (xvii) distributing basic food items to shelters, homes, charitable institutions and to families who are on the Social Register of Mauritius;
- (xviii) introducing COVID-19 Wage Support Scheme to provide financial support to employees becoming technically unemployed on a temporary basis;
- (xix) setting up of the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund to finance projects and programmes in relation to COVID-19 and to providing...

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like you to give a ruling on the point which I have raised.

Mr Speaker: I already asked the Prime Minister to continue.

The Prime Minister:

... financial support to persons and organisations affected by COVID-19;

- (xx) arranging for carers looking after elderly and persons with disabilities also to be provided with amenities, including food items and medicines; and
- (xxi) effecting payment of basic pensions at place of residence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I do not propose to initiate any inquiry in Ministries and organisations involved in the procurement exercise. I wish to reiterate that the emergency procurement of medical supplies has been done in accordance with section 21 of the Public Procurement Act and Directive 44 of the Policy Procurement Office.

It is now in the public domain that the Independent Commission Against Corruption has initiated an inquiry into the issue of procurement of medicines and equipment during the COVID-19 period.

Given that ICAC is presently investigating into the matter and by virtue of section 81 (3) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, no further information can be disclosed on this matter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our timely actions and decisions saved lives and shielded our country from the chaotic situation that was predicted by the World Health Organisation. We

succeeded as a nation because we rose up to the challenge through bold and effective political leadership, inventiveness, remarkable discipline, resilience and national solidarity. We delivered against all odds and despite a despicable campaign of misinformation and disinformation led and fuelled by some people in the Opposition and the media.

That is what the majority of the people retain. Our fellow citizens know that this Government suppressed the transmission of COVID-19 and saved them from disaster on the health front. Today, Mauritius is COVID safe and that is what matters most. It is an achievement that is acknowledged and acclaimed internationally.

It is unfortunate that the Opposition continues to play cheap politics on a matter of national urgency. I leave them to their unpatriotic behaviour. As Prime Minister, I have been on the forefront on a 24/7 basis to do whatever is possible, within our means, to protect our fellow citizens, reduce their hardships and save lives. For me, that is sacred and it goes in line with my political commitment to dedicate myself to the service of the nation.

Thank you.

An hon. Member: *Gros poumon!*

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, the Prime Minister will go down in history as the best Prime Minister with the best cover-up. That's what he is; that's what it is all about. Cover-up! This is conspiracy to defraud. That's what it is all about and if Prime Minister is willing to answer question, I hope he will answer those questions which I am going to put to him.

Mr Speaker: Supplementary question! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, decorum and supplementary question!

Dr. Boolell: And I will refer to the Procurement Policy Office in respect of proceedings relating to the emergency procurement that has to be recorded. Can I ask the Prime Minister, if he has nothing to hide, to table all the proceedings recorded in relation to these emergency procurement exercise?

The Prime Minister: Well, first of all, Mr Speaker, Sir,...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet on this side!

The Prime Minister: ... the Leader of the Opposition is talking about cover-up. I have nothing to cover up, but we can see the cover-up in the Opposition itself. The time will come when we shall see what kind of cover-up is happening in the Opposition.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No conversation! Leader of the Opposition, decorum! You called questions! No conversation!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been numerous PNQs, PQs to which the Minister of Health has already answered, has given details, and there have been numerous Press Conferences at which all information has been given to the public, and now that ICAC is investigating, all the information which is already in the public domain is available at ICAC. So, let ICAC do its inquiry.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the nation will take note that the Prime Minister has refused to table all the proceedings recorded in relation to that emergency procurement exercise. Can I ask him, under the same Directive issued by the Procurement Policy Office, in respect of 44, where –

“Accounting Officers shall keep proper records with respect to the decision to resort to emergency procurement.”

Can I ask him, if he has nothing to be afraid of, to table...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet on this side!

Dr. Boolell: ...the decision to resort to emergency procurements? This is very important. If you want information in the name of transparency and accountability, can Prime Minister table this information?

The Prime Minister: I am not afraid of anything, Mr Speaker, Sir, and least of all of this kind of Opposition.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members!

The Prime Minister: The hon. Leader of the Opposition is asking for Minutes and for decisions which have been taken. ICAC has already seized documents, and it is inquiring into the matter. So, I do not think there is any necessity for tabling anything else.

Dr. Boolell: I will ask the Prime Minister again. Is there a protocol for the procurement of drugs and medical equipment in times of disaster and emergency, and if so, will he table a copy of the protocol?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, my information is that everything has been done according to law.

Dr. Boolell: So, if everything has been done according to law, why are you afraid to table those relevant documents on the Table of the Assembly?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: One minute, Leader of the Opposition. You don't have any right to shout there! Continue, Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: Yes. Now, can I ask the Prime Minister whether the Spanish company Pack & Blister came to know about our emergency procurement and won orders, giving rise to payment in excess of Rs500 m.? How did they come to know of our emergency procurement and how is it that they won payments in excess of Rs500 m.? Was it manna that fell from heaven or that information was relayed to them? So, I would like to hear that from the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, we have to thank this company because at the time when they ...

(Interruptions)

Yes, we have to thank the company for having...

Mr Speaker: Continue!

The Prime Minister: ...responded and supplied us with equipment.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! Order!

The Prime Minister: At that time, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was a situation wherein you could place an order that the manufacturers, the different companies, and the suppliers were not able to supply what you order. In fact, the Opposition Members, themselves, at that time, were saying: "Are you prepared"? They put questions in this very House, PNQs, PQs, querying that this Government - well, I think, it is good that I quote what they were saying at that time, just to remind them because they forget what they say.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: The hon. Leader of the Opposition said...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: He said, and I quote –

“Can I come now to the hon. Minister of Health. When a patient is admitted, do we have reagent to check the virus? *Niet!* No reagent is available (...)”

Niet! At that time, he asked –

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Show decorum!

The Prime Minister:

“Can he see to it that they have the N95 protective mask, that they have protective dress and wear, (...)”

Even dress, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Show decorum, hon. Members!

The Prime Minister: And he said himself, and I quote –

“The reagent is not available. This Government is putting at risk the health status of the people of the Republic of Mauritius, and I will say it again, this Government has failed to live up to the expectation of the nation.”

He continued. Again, later on, he asked the Minister of Health, and I quote –

“Can I ask him, and I hope that he understands the gravity of the situation; can I impress upon the Prime Minister (...)”

He was impressing on the Prime Minister, and I quote –

“(..) that under the circumstances, we have to prepare for the worst and hope for the best, and I would like to know whether, in the Action Plan, all considerations are

taken onboard, first of all, in respect of stockpiling of medicines and relevant equipment.”

He has forgotten. Let me remind him again –

“Can I ask him whether Government has taken onboard the worst-case scenario, where there is the risk that - if there is a worst-case scenario, as I say, we have to prepare for the worst and hope for the best - where 80% (...)”

Listen to that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

“(...) where 80% of the population can be infected, with a mortality rate of 2%?”

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: I quote again -

“Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether adequate resources have been disbursed to ensure that our Regional Hospitals or General Hospitals are equipped to deal with the problem?”

This is what they were saying at that time. Now, can you imagine ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Can you imagine, Mr Speaker, Sir, if we were in a situation where we were not able to procure medication and equipment and all the supplies that were required in this country to face the COVID-19? Do you know what the Opposition would have said today? Then, they would have said: “Why didn’t you buy emergency procurement? Why didn’t you stockpile medication?” This is what they would have said. This is what I call cheap politics and it is a shame, it is a shame on this Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please! Order on both sides of the House! Order on both sides of the House!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I inform all of them sitting on Government’s bench what the Prime Minister has done? He has given a licence in relation to conspiracy to defraud. That’s what he has done and he is guilty of it.

Mr Speaker: Now, this is imputing motives. Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Boolell: That's what he has done.

The Prime Minister: If you have the courage ...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: Conspiracy to defraud!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! Order! Order on both sides of the House, here! This is imputing motives. Reframe your question and carry on.

Dr. Boolell: I say it again; it's conspiracy to defraud. That is what it is all about.

Mr Speaker: I say this is imputing motives! This is the second warning. Either you withdraw it! Withdraw this!

An hon. Member: *Met li dehors!*

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Prime Minister, if there is honesty of purpose...

Mr Speaker: No, I asked you to withdraw because you repeat it.

Dr. Boolell: I will say it again; there is conspiracy to defraud. That's what it is all about.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Dr. Boolell: There is conspiracy to defraud...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order from both sides of the House!

Dr. Boolell: That's what it is all about.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order here!

(Interruptions)

Order! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I warn you...

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker...

Mr Speaker: ...when you speak, show decorum! Show parliamentary democracy, not disorder!

(Interruptions)

Withdraw it!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a right to say that this amounts...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Withdraw!

Mr Speaker: You have to withdraw it.

Dr. Boolell: I withdraw in the protest because I have said the truth.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. Carry on!

Dr. Boolell: The truth hurts. Mr Speaker, Sir, with respect to purchase from Pack & Blister, can we have the exchange of correspondence? In the spirit of transparency and accountability, can he table those documents? And can I ask him whether Pack & Blister is on the database list of the Ministry of Health in relation to reliable suppliers? Is it on that list?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say, again, that at that time, when we looked at what was happening in the world, there were companies and there were major countries. It is good that we situate the context. In France, for example, they had ordered masks, a plane load of Chinese masks destined...

(Interruptions)

...destined for France...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition! You don't have the right to do that! Show decorum to the House! Let the hon. Prime Minister reply to your question!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: But he is not answering the question!

Mr Speaker: Show decorum!

The Prime Minister: So, I am saying a plane load of Chinese-made masks destined for France were brought up right on the tarmac. Also the Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau stated, and I quote –

“We need to make sure that equipment that is destined for Canada gets to and stays in Canada.”

The Health Minister of Brazil said, and I quote –

“Attempts by Brasilia to purchase protection gear, such as gloves and masks from China, had fallen through”.

Turkey had banned exports of protecting gears. The stock destined to Italian and Belgian markets never arrived, and shipment up to six million masks bound for Germany mysteriously disappeared while passing through East Africa.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, in that context, at that time, there was what we call ‘panic buying around the world’. And, therefore, it was of utmost importance that we see to it that we have adequate supplies of medication and equipment to face and to cope with this COVID-19. And I can say, from the information that we gathered, there were a number of companies that were not able to supply to us and, therefore, that is why, in such cases, the law also provides for emergency procurement. And finally, let me say one thing. *Si le Leader de l’Opposition n’est pas un poltron, qu’il répète à l’extérieur de cette Chambre ce qu’il vient de dire ici. Si vous n’êtes pas un poltron...*

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: Of course, there has been! Shut your mouth! I can see Blisters cropping on the face of the Prime Minister by telling nothing, and what he says is not true at all. Let me ask the Prime Minister is this the reason why those reliable suppliers were side-lined to give opportunities to rogue traders who did not even have a licence to import? Are these reliable importers? Can he answer those questions? Giving contract to a company which does not have an after sale service in this country?

Mr Speaker: You already made your point.

Dr. Boolell: You are not the one to tell me.

The Prime Minister: We will see...

Mr Speaker: Listen! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, whenever I put order in the House, you cannot repeat things after my speech. You are the one who said we have to have decorum. Start with you! Lead by example! Continue Prime Minister!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, he is talking about rogue companies. We shall see. We shall see what will happen in the future concerning this qualification of rogue companies. But anyway, he does not speak about Biocom Ltd, a company whose Chairman is Mr Sayed-Hossen.

(Interruptions)

The Directors are all Sayed-Hossen, and they have supplied the Ministry of Health, and they have been paid millions of rupees. This, he does not say, he does not talk about that. He does not talk about Kamal Trading Company Ltd.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: I do not want to say...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

The Prime Minister: I do not want to mention the names of the Directors because they are so well acquainted to the hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Declare kuyon!*

The Prime Minister: So, why I mentioned these two cases? I have nothing against those two companies nor against anyone of the Directors. What I am saying is, at that time, there has been no *copinage*, there has been no *triage*. We have bought equipment from those companies and those suppliers who were able to supply and who had, in fact, given us the guarantee that they would deliver. This is what we did, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary question!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, we know that money has been disbursed upfront without commissioning of equipment, and I would like to know why that money was disbursed by STC. I would like the Prime Minister to say it, whether there was a letter or a fax given by

Dr. Joomaye to the Senior Chief Executive of the Ministry of Health, Mr Bhugun, who submitted that request to Mr Ragen, and then he impressed upon STC to make the disbursement, knowing that there was no equipment available despite commissioning of equipment, but money was effected. So, I would like the Prime Minister to say so. And if he is keen, in the name of transparency and accountability, I will invite him to set up this Commission of Inquiry with wide terms of reference. If he is keen to ensure that there is no *copinage*, that there is no conflict of interest, that there is no conspiracy to defraud, I invite him, if he has the courage, if he is a man of principle, to set up this Commission of Inquiry, and I dare him to do so!

The Prime Minister: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, what is it that the Leader of the Opposition now wants? In his PNQ, he said “initiate an inquiry in the Ministries and organisations”.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please, hon. Leader of the Opposition! Control yourself!

The Prime Minister: So, the question mentions “initiate an inquiry in the Ministries and organisations”. Now, he is talking about a Commission of Inquiry, and on top of that...

(Interruptions)

... Members of his party have already gone to ICAC to make a declaration and, supposedly, they have already communicated proof thereto. So, we shall see. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, what I can say is, so far - I can speak up as at today - all the orders that were placed with different companies and for all the supplies that came to Mauritius, we have a Technical Committee, we have technical people who have inspected those orders to see to it that they conform with the specifications and with acceptable standards and, so far, we have not had any problem. As I said in my reply, there are other equipment that are still being awaited. Of course, we are making sure that those equipment conform to the required specifications and that we do not end up in a situation where what happened, for example, in the UK, where they had ordered ventilators and when the ventilators came, they were defective. So, we have, of course, to see to it that this does not happen to Mauritius, and we have taken all necessary precautions to see to it that we get good equipment.

Mr Speaker: Time is over by five minutes! Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/300 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare. PQ B/302 has been withdrawn.

Hon. Nagalingum!

ROSE HILL, TREFLES & PLAISANCE - DRUG PROLIFERATION

(No. B/285) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Trèfles and Plaisance, in Rose Hill, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an increase of drug proliferation thereat has been observed and, if so, indicate the measures taken in relation thereto.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the regions of Trèfles and Plaisance are located in the outskirts of the town of Rose Hill and comprise mainly residential areas with a population of around 9,000 and 7,500 respectively. The regions fall within the policing jurisdiction of Stanley Police.

For the past decades, cannabis, heroin, subutex and psychotropic substances have been the four most abused drugs in the country. However, over the past years, there has been an emergence of synthetic drugs, particularly synthetic cannabinoids, among drug users. This situation also prevails in the regions of Trèfles and Plaisance.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since January 2015 up to 16 July 2020, 232 cases of drugs have been detected in the regions of Trèfles and Plaisance, leading to the arrest of 236 persons compared to 317 cases from 2009 to 2014.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a result of the intensified actions by the Police in the fight against drugs, a decrease of about 27% has been observed in drug cases detected in the regions concerned. The measures taken by the Police are as follows -

- (a) ADSU and other units of the Force have intensified their operations in the relentless fight against the proliferation of drugs by conducting targeted intelligence-led crackdown operations;
- (b) Sensitisation campaigns are being carried out jointly by ADSU Education Cell, Crime Prevention Unit and local Police on the ill-effects of drugs and its legal implications;
- (c) Constant interactions with members of the socio-cultural groups have raised awareness, particularly amongst youngsters and on the repercussion of drugs;

- (d) The recent record drug seizures has considerably influenced the supply and availability of drugs on the local market;
- (e) Safe City Project has been introduced and is contributing in a marked manner in the prevention and detection of crimes and illicit activities, including drugs. Eleven Intelligence Video Surveillance (IVS) cameras have been installed at different sites in these regions;
- (f) Road Blocks and Vehicle Check Points are being carried out daily at odd hours by SMF, SSU and ERS personnel in the regions of Trèfles and Plaisance whereby suspicious persons and drivers of vehicles are being questioned and systematically checked, and
- (g) Additional resources in terms of vehicles and manpower have been provided to ADSU to increase their operational effectiveness. ADSU personnel have also been provided with tailor-made training and sophisticated equipment to enhance their operational capabilities.

The fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking remains one of this Government's priorities in its endeavour to promote a safer and healthier society. To this end, the Police are being provided with additional resources and support with a view to combating the drug scourge.

Mr Speaker, Sir, over and above the measures taken by the Police, the collaboration of all other stakeholders is imperative to make Mauritius a drug free island. In this regard, the Harm Reduction Unit of the Ministry of Health and Wellness carries out Drug Prevention Programme, Needle Exchange Programme, Methadone Substitution Therapy (MST) and runs Addiction Units in the five regional hospitals. Concerning the region of Rose Hill, as at June 2020, there were 463 beneficiaries for MST, that is, an increase of around 10% since end of 2018, that is, 417 beneficiaries. This is a significant harm reduction measure in order to curb dependence on opiates like heroine.

Similarly, the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology has put in place several preventive measures in schools, which include the following –

- (i) Setting up of a Health and Wellness Directorate to look into the Drug Use Prevention in schools, among other roles and responsibilities;
- (ii) Revisiting the School Health Clubs to better address health issues;

- (iii) Anti-Drug Education in Curriculum;
- (iv) A structured, extensive prevention programme at the level of educational institutions conducted with the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the assistance of ADSU, the *Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs* and NGOs to address the drug problem as well as share information;
- (v) Protocol on Substance Abuse in Schools, and
- (vi) Drug Use Prevention Programme “Get Connected” in Secondary Schools.

In addition to these measures, a number of programmes are run by the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation to empower youth and equip them with skills and attitudes to face current life challenges, one of which is resisting peer pressure to indulge in substance abuse. A number of activities have been organised in 2019 in the Trèfles and Rose Hill regions through the Trèfles Youth Centre, which comprise, amongst others -

- (i) activities focusing on drug abuse and related issues, including talks on drug prevention for around 75 young people in March by the ADSU and workshops on prevention of addictive behaviour among youth in September, and
- (ii) a number of community oriented programmes to promote the social connectedness of young people, which is recognised as a protective factor against drug prevention and other social evils, such as community-based programmes, family seminars and *Jeux Inter-Quartiers*.

Furthermore, since end of June 2020, the National Drug Secretariat has, in collaboration with the MBC, launched a National Media Campaign against drug abuse. The campaign comprises a series of short video clips, dedicated thematic programmes, dossiers, live and interactive radio talks on the services provided by the different stakeholders as well as measures taken to combat the drug scourge.

Mr Nagalingum: I have listened carefully to the hon. Prime Minister, but we have witnessed during the last few months, especially during the lockdown period, the way the drug traffickers have changed the incoming of synthetic drugs, which is easily made by people who have a basic knowledge of chemistry, which is cheap and deliver on a door to door basis. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister what is being done in the light of these new developments in this sector?

The Prime Minister: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have replied extensively. There are operations that have been carried out by ADSU based, of course, and first of all, on intelligence gathered, and also on monitoring the movements of some people who are suspected of being involved in the drug trafficking business. Other institutions and Ministries concerned play their part. I do not want to repeat these measures because there are, in fact, lots of measures that have been taken by the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, and the Ministry of Health and Wellness as well.

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have also seen that many Police raids have failed because the drug traffickers seem to have information on the timing of the raids. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he would see with the Commissioner of Police to do a sort of reshuffling of the ADSU team?

The Prime Minister: I have also heard from different quarters what the hon. Member is saying, and I have, in fact, had letters from some inhabitants also making the same complaint, that they have been giving information to Police and there has been either no action or that there are some people who are accomplice of those traffickers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what I do is, whenever I have information, whenever there are people who write to me on the matter, I take it seriously because, as I have kept saying, it is one of the priorities of Government to carry on with the relentless fight against drug trafficking, and I have always conveyed to both the Commissioner of Police and to the Head of ADSU such information. I also appeal to Members and to the public, in case there is any information, credible, of course, which they would wish to convey to me, they can always address their communication to me, and I shall ensure that it is taken seriously. I must also say that, in the past, there had been operations that had been conducted by ADSU. Unfortunately, for some reason or another, it seems that some people were already aware that ADSU Officers would be coming to their place and to their region. And, unfortunately - I am not talking about Trèfles and Plaisance - I am talking about some cases where there has even been complicity of people in the neighbourhood to prevent ADSU Officers from doing also their job. So, yes, we need to join hands, and I am open to any reliable and credible information that is conveyed to me. I can undertake that I shall do the needful.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to know from the hon. Prime Minister, with the emergence of synthetic drugs, has there been any amendment that has been made to the Dangerous Drugs Act to include those substances?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, there has been. In fact, this is one very serious problem with regard to synthetic drugs because we know that there are different chemicals that they put together in order to develop new types of drugs. On 08 October 2013, we had passed Regulations under section 60(2) (b) of the Dangerous Drugs Act, whereby synthetic cannabinoids and their derivatives have been included in Part II of the First Schedule of the Act. The laws have been further amended again, on 11 September 2015, to include, amongst other drugs, synthetic cathinones, their chemical diversities and derivatives in Part II of the First Schedule of the Dangerous Drugs Act. And the Dangerous Drugs Act has also been further amended on 01 June 2019 to include other types of synthetic cannabinoid, synthetic cathinones and synthetic opioids, amongst others.

The synthetic cannabinoids are often laced – this is what I have been informed – into herbal products and sold under different appellations. But, of course, under the law, we do not put the name or the appellations. We have to put the chemicals that are forbidden, and that falls under the Dangerous Drugs Act.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary, hon. X.L. Duval!

Mr X.L. Duval: I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that there are now more Police Officers attached to the VIPSU than attached to the ADSU, and whether he does not think that it is a wrong allocation of human resources and the wrong priorities for the country.

The Prime Minister: I have to check. I do not think there are more Officers attached to VIPSU than to ADSU. But, anyway, we should also realise that there is a purpose for having VIPSU Officers. This has not existed as from now. It is a Unit that has been meeting its different objectives for so many years now. Let me inform the hon. Member that we have also increased the personnel throughout the years; and over time, we have provided more Officers to both ADSU and to the Police. We have also increased the resources available in terms of vehicles, in terms of equipment. So, this has been done; and we can always compare. I do not want to go into the details. In fact, I do not want to compare what was obtained in the previous Government with what we are doing now. But I do realise that it is a very serious problem, and I can say that this Government is determined to fight the drug traffickers

and we have given results, but we need to carry on further with our relentless battle against drug traffickers.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order!

Mr Speaker: Yes, what is your point of order?

Mr Bhagwan: The Prime Minister, although this is a serious question, has nearly taken 16 minutes...

Mr Speaker: No, this is not a point of order!

Mr Bhagwan: Ah, according to you, it is not a point of order...

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: ... when it suits the purpose of the Prime Minister.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Osman Mahomed: No. B/286!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: But you ask questions, you do not want me to reply?

(Interruptions)

No! I have to reply!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! No point to be made! Next question! Reply please!

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC - MASKS - COMPULSORY WEARING

(No. B/286) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) 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 policing operations, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the impact of the compulsory wearing of masks in public amid the Coronavirus Pandemic on the efficiency of the cameras of the Safe City Project in relation thereto.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the wake of the outbreak of the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19), by virtue of the relevant Regulations, members of the public were called upon to observe sanitary measures, including the wearing of protective masks for the purpose of preventing the spread of the disease and the resurgence of the pandemic, namely –

- (a) Wearing of protective masks whilst being at any bus stop, bus shelter, bus station or taxi stand and in bus - Regulation 4 of the Road Traffic (COVID-19 Sanitary Measures) Regulations 2020 dated 16 May 2020 refers;
- (b) Wearing of protective masks whilst being on light rail premises or light rail commuter facility and onboard light rail vehicle - Regulation 4 of the Light Rail (COVID-19 Sanitary Measures) Regulations 2020 dated 16 May 2020 refers, and
- (c) Wearing of protective mask over nose and mouth in any place other than ordinary place of residence - Regulation 4 of the Prevention of Resurgence and Further spread of Epidemic Disease (COVID-19) Regulations 2020 dated 17 May 2020 refers.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the wearing of face masks has not *per se* impacted on the effectiveness of policing operations as the Safe City Cameras are being used for the prevention and detection of crimes based on live information on the ground, management of traffic and prompt response to public requests and emergencies.

However, it may partially impact on the identification of suspects regarding facial recognition. Nevertheless, the footages are still useful during Police investigation as besides facial identification, there are other features and details which can be retrieved that can assist the Police in identifying the suspects though they are wearing protective face masks.

Mr Speaker, Sir, identification evidence is not obtained exclusively by facial recognition. If such evidence is of a poor quality, the Police have recourse to other modes of identification through -

- (i) victims and witnesses;
- (ii) samples that are taken to be analysed;
- (iii) fingerprints and footprints identification;
- (iv) use of tracker dog;
- (v) photo electronically fit, and
- (vi) Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA).

The Safe City Cameras are equipped with necessary attributes which can provide adequate information for the identification of suspects even if they are wearing protective masks. These attributes include the high definition footages, infrared and Pan, Tilt, Zoom (PTZ) cameras.

With the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, Mauritius like other countries in the world is faced with an unprecedented situation and it was vital and expedient to take appropriate sanitary measures to protect the population from this invisible enemy. Therefore, wearing of protective masks to protect the population from the disease is vital, while the Safe City Camera is a must to ensure public safety and security.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. In his reply, the hon. Prime Minister has stated that it will partly impact. In reply to my Parliamentary Question B/523 of 2019, the then Rt. hon. Minister Mentor had explained that facial recognition, which is an integral part of the Safe City Project, is a biometric software application capable of identifying an individual by comparing and analysing patterns based on his or her facial contours. Now, what will happen if someone commits a crime? He is wearing a mask; he is wearing sun glasses, a hat and a thick jacket. How will the very purpose of this project be met in that case?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, *il faut faire face à l'évidence. Si quelqu'un est en train de tout faire pour ne pas être identifié*, in terms of *camouflage*, putting hat, wearing glasses and everything, obviously, it is going to be very difficult at first sight to be able to identify that person, but that does not mean to say that we cannot use cameras for purposes of identification. As I have replied, this will always be helpful for the Police because there are other features that they look at. I do not want to give more details about it because, obviously, it is a matter for Police, during the course of the enquiry that they conduct, to be able to come to suspects. They are helpful, and they will help Police in the course of this enquiry. I do not know what the hon. Member is proposing then. What do we do? We have to admit. There is an issue with regard to identification, but, as I said, it is a partial problem, but we can make use of information gathered in the course of enquiry.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Has the hon. Prime Minister been communicated with any report or study with regard to the efficiency of the face recognition technology being used in the Safe City Project? Because in the UK, for example, when the project was first started, in 98% of cases, as per a report prepared for the Metropolitan Police,

they got it wrong with regard to identification. Has there been such a report initiated in Mauritius to see to it that this system is working perfectly well in Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say that I am not aware of any report. I believe if there was a report, it would have been communicated to me as I am replying to this question, but I do not also want to say that there is no report. So, I need to check from the Police if there has been either a report or survey or what has been done in order to assess how effective and how useful those cameras have been with regard to identification.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, thank you. In reply to PQ B/385 of 15 May 2018 of hon. Ramano, who was then Opposition MP, the Rt. hon. Minister Mentor had stated roughly that the project will be implemented on an operating lease basis over a period of 20 years and the cost implication, as per contractual terms, are in US dollars, Rs18 m. for the first seven years and Rs24 m. for the next following years, amounting to about Rs800 m. per year. Being given the impact there will be on the project, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether discussions could be held between the Mauritius Police Force, Mauritius Telecom and Huawei to revisit the project? Because we are spending so much money and the objective is only partly met at this stage.

The Prime Minister: First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot confirm the figures that have been mentioned by the hon. Member because the question is not about the financial aspects of the Safe City Project, but, anyway, the fact now is that with this unprecedented situation that we are living in today, where we have had to pass regulations to make it compulsory for people to wear masks, that cannot be a reason why we need now to revisit the contract, because sometimes there are certain situations that can arise that, of course, we do not foresee or there are certain situations that even if we can foresee them, we cannot attribute responsibility and make the contractor responsible for them. This is a personal opinion. Of course, we can always look at it and check, but I do not think that this is one reason why we need now to revisit the terms and conditions of the contract.

Mr Speaker: I am advised that PQ No. B/296 has been withdrawn.

FOREIGNERS – MAURITIAN PASSPORT

(No. B/287) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) 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 scheme to offer the opportunity to foreigners to obtain a Mauritian passport provided they make a non-refundable contribution of USD 1 million to the Mauritius Sovereign Fund, as announced in the Budget Speech 2018-2019, he will state where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I wish to point out that the hon. Member has, in his question, incorrectly quoted the amount of contribution mentioned in the Budget Speech 2018-2019 regarding the proposed scheme to obtain a Mauritian Passport. He has referred the amount to be USD 1 million instead of USD 500,000.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as Minister also responsible for the portfolio of Finance, I announced in my Budget Speech 2018-2019, amongst others, that with a view to further opening up our economy and country to the rest of the world, the Economic Development Board would manage two schemes to attract High Net Worth individuals, who satisfy defined criteria and after due diligence, namely, and I quote -

“The first scheme will offer foreigners the opportunity to obtain Mauritian citizenship provided they make a non-refundable contribution of USD 1 million to a Mauritius Sovereign Fund. For their spouse and dependents, they will have to make an additional contribution of USD 100,000 per member of family.

The second scheme will offer the opportunity to obtain a Mauritian passport provided they make a contribution of USD 500,000 to the Mauritius Sovereign Fund. For their spouse and dependents, they will have to make an additional contribution of USD 50,000 per passport.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that in my summing-up speech on 25 June 2018 in the context of the 2018-2019 Budget exercise, I did mention that the schemes will have to be implemented with care, well-thought guidelines, strictly defined eligibility criteria, proper due diligence, whilst also ensuring that the schemes do not undermine the social fabrics of our society. I also stated that the implementation of the said schemes will, in the first instance, require the drafting and enactment of new legislations.

Both schemes have so far not been implemented.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, in the 2020-2021 Budget Speech, a new strategy has been announced with a view to opening our economy and country to the world using a four-pronged approach as follows -

- (i) to provide more certainty to existing investors and their families who chose to relocate to Mauritius despite the COVID-19 situation and take business risks;
- (ii) to retain successful investors and professionals and encourage them to further invest in the country as well as to boost the economy;
- (iii) to attract new talents and investment to Mauritius, and
- (iv) to encourage non-citizens who have already acquired property in Mauritius to contribute to the economy by exempting them from the requirement to apply for a work permit or an Occupation Permit to work in Mauritius.

In this regard, Mr Speaker, Sir, the following measures, amongst others, will be implemented -

- a) The validity period of an Occupation Permit and Residence Permit in respect of a retired non-citizen will be increased from 3 years to 10 years;
- b) Occupation Permits for Investors and Self-Employed and Residence Permits as retired non-citizen, which are valid as of 01 September 2020, will be extended from 3 years to 10 years;
- c) The validity period of a Permanent Residence Permit will be extended from 10 years to 20 years;
- d) The minimum investment criteria to be eligible for a Permanent Residence Permit for Investors will be reviewed from USD 500,000 to USD 375,000, and
- e) The minimum purchase price for non-citizens to acquire an immovable property under the Integrated Resort Scheme, Real Estate Scheme, Invest Hotel Scheme, Property Development Scheme or Smart City Scheme will be reviewed from USD 500,000 to USD 375,000.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the relevant legislations are being reviewed, through the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, in order to give effect to the above measures.

The Economic Development Board, which will be responsible for the implementation of the measures, would subsequently carry out an assessment of the situation, in the light of which a decision would be taken regarding the two measures announced in the 2018-2019 Budget Speech.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: I thank the hon. Prime Minister. I refer to the reply that he made to hon. Uteem in April 2019, PQ B/225, where exactly he mentioned that the Government was looking at the drafting and enactment of two legislations: the Mauritius Sovereign Fund Bill and the Mauritius National Investment Authority Bill. Is that my understanding now that with the new strategy, as in the new Bill that is coming forward, 2019/2020, regarding the incentives to professionals and investors, that the Government's proposal to bring such Bills is no longer on the agenda of the Government as it was proposed before and that the new strategy is superseding the proposal that was presented to us in the 2018/2019 Budget Speech?

The Prime Minister: I have replied, Mr Speaker, Sir, to say that there is going to be an assessment of those measures that have now been announced in the Budget Speech, and that in the light of these measures, ongoing assessment is being carried out by the EDB, and the EDB will surely, in accordance with our instructions, look at those measures and make recommendations. As I have said, no final decision has been taken so far. A decision will be taken in the light of the EDB assessment.

Mr Speaker: Time is over by five minutes! I am advised that PQ B/288 has been withdrawn. Hon. Nagalingum!

STANLEY, ROSE HILL - ROADS - REINSTATEMENT

(No. B/304) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the drains, footpaths and resurfacing works of roads in Stanley, in Rose Hill, in connection with pipe laying works, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the -

- (a) names of the contractors, and
- (b) expected completion date thereof.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Central Water Authority is responsible for the award of contracts for pipe laying works. I am informed by the CWA that the pipe replacement contracts comprise a component for the reinstatement of roads where excavation works are carried out. The contracts in general, do not provide for reinstatement or construction of drains and footpaths.

I am further informed by the CWA that the authority has not awarded any contract for pipe replacement specifically in Stanley. However, there are currently two ongoing contracts for pipe replacement works in Rose Hill, namely –

- (i) replacement of pipelines in Rose Hill, Zone 1 which is bounded by Hugnin Street, Boundary road up to St Patrick Church, Duncan Taylor Street, Inkerman Street, Maurice Curé Street, Prince of Wales Street and Labourdonnais Street together with all laterals, and
- (ii) replacement pipelines in Rose Hill - Zone II which spreads from Pere Laval Street, Reverend Lebrun Street, Hugnin Street, Vandermeersch and Inkerman Street along with all laterals.

As per information provided by the CWA, the two contracts provide for the resurfacing of about 25 km of roads within the project area. As at date, permanent resurfacing of roads has been completed over a total stretch of about 1 km namely, 354 meters along Soopramanien Street, 381 metres along Dhanjee Street and 364 metres along Gladstone Street.

Further, I am informed by the CWA that the two contracts have been awarded to Best Construct Co. Ltd and expected now to be completed by December 2020.

I am, however, also informed that the CWA convened the contractor to a meeting on 20 July 2020 to discuss, *inter alia*, the status of road reinstatement works within the project areas of Rose Hill. I am advised that, it has been agreed during the meeting that, in order to ensure the proper reinstatement of roads and avoid the settlement of the reinstatement works, the contractor will carry out the reinstatement of the trenches only. The final full width resurfacing of the roads will, thereafter, be entrusted to the NDU or RDA contractors depending on the classification of the roads.

Moreover, I am also informed by the CWA that during a meeting with the Mayor and Councillors of the Municipality of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill on 17 July 2020, it has been agreed that the later will utilise the bank guarantee of Rs2 m. provided by the CWA to carry out patching works based on the complaints received by the local authority.

Mr Nagalingum: I would ask the hon. Minister to inform the House of particulars of the contract between CWA and the contractor for the pipe works in the region he just mentioned, when was the contract signed, when was the work supposed to end, was the contractor bound to repair the roads where works were done and in what limit of time?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the two contracts that I have mentioned in my reply: the first contract, that is, CWA/C2016/211 concerns the replacement of 12 kilometres of CWA pipelines in Rose Hill, in the regions which I have mentioned in my reply.

The contract No. 2 which is Contract CWA/216/212 concerns the replacement of 15 kilometres of CWA pipelines in Rose Hill again, in the region which I have mentioned. The two contracts were awarded. The Letter of Acceptance was issued on 05 September 2017 for both contracts. The date of commencement was on 11 October 2017. The contractor took possession of the site on the same day and the scheduled completion date was on 04 April 2019 and there was a revised contractual completion date, for contract No. 1 on 16 October 2019 and on 13 November 2019.

Mr Nagalingum: I listened to the hon. Minister well. Two and a half years, work has proceeded in the region of Rose Hill. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister must be aware of the dramatic consequences of this problem. It is causing much damage to vehicles of local inhabitants and those who drive through these roads, especially old vehicles. This requires additional expenses for those citizens who are in dire situation, especially after COVID-19 confinement. Every day this is being on radio, on newspapers, social media, protests are being expressed everywhere. So, I personally received dozens of complaints every day from the inhabitants. Can the hon. Minister assure the House that he will look personally into this so that the contractor, the NDU, the Municipality of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill can do the necessary to start work immediately for the resurfacing of these roads which are impracticable?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is for this reason that the then Deputy Prime Minister, during the month of January, chaired a meeting and informed the contractor with regard to the delay for the execution of the works. The new updated completion date was then finalised. Unfortunately, we entered the lockdown period and works had to be stopped onsite, although there were delays prior to that meeting. A new date was fixed after the lockdown period was terminated. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is for this reason that in my main reply, I said there was a meeting which was scheduled between the contractor and the CWA on 20 July. And during that meeting, with regard to reinstatement works, it had been decided that resurfacing of the roads now will be entrusted to the NDU and the RDA so that we accelerate the resurfacing of the roads. With regard to unclassified roads which do not fall under the

purview of the NDU and the RDA, I have stated that the Municipality of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill will undergo patching works in the meantime.

Mr Speaker: Next Question!

ROSE HILL - PLACE CARDINAL MARGÉOT - URBAN TERMINAL

(No. B/305) **Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill)** asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the implementation of the Urban Terminal at Place Cardinal Margéot, in Rose Hill, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the advent of the Metro Express Project which is one of the most ambitious and complex infrastructure projects being implemented in the country as modernised and revolutionised the public transport sector.

The setting up of modern urban terminals in the four towns and the capital city of Port Louis, which are serviced by the light rail, is in line with the spirit of modernisation. The urban terminals to be constructed in Port Louis at Victoria and Immigration in Rose Hill, Quatre Bornes, Vacoas and Curepipe aim to upgrade public transport facilities and provide a new service experience to users.

The urban terminals will be integrated complexes that will connect the light rail stations and provide for bus alighting and boarding facilities along with space for taxis. They will also house commercial spaces, green areas, stallholders and officers. The urban terminals will rejuvenate the towns and city centres and boost economic activities in these regions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that my colleague, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management is, since December 2019, chairing an Inter-Ministerial Committee to closely monitor the implementation of the six urban terminal projects, including Rose Hill Urban Terminal along with various stakeholders.

I am also informed that technical meetings are being held to fine-tune all requirements for the project and following finalisation of same, the request for proposal will be launched at the earliest.

Mr Nagalingum: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he has visited the site and seen the present state of Atrium building which is a danger, not only for the people going there, but for those taking the bus and Metro Express? In a reply by the former Minister, hon. Bodha, he stated that there has been an investigation some time back, maybe time has come

to do another investigation because then he can have recourse to a pulling down order. Can I know from the hon. Minister if investigation has been completed and, if, yes, what action is being envisaged as regards the pulling down order?

Mr Ganoo: I have visited the site, Mr Speaker, Sir. The question asked with regard to the implementation of the Urban Terminal at Place Margéot, and if the hon. Member comes with a substantive question with regard to the pulling down order and the issue he has just raised, I would certainly give him the necessary reply.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Armance!

Mr Armance: Thank you. I have listened properly to the answer of the hon. Minister. At no point in time, he mentioned about parking facility in the implementation of the urban terminal. I would like to find out from him, in regard to the implementation of the urban terminal, whether there has been any feasibility study regarding parking facilities and, if so, what has been the output and the ratio regarding the number of parking that would be allowed in urban terminal? Thank you.

Mr Ganoo: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, presently, there are technical meetings which are addressing and fine-tuning all the requirements for the urban terminal project, and when the matter will be finalised, the request for proposal will be launched. I must assure the hon. Member that with regard to the requirements of taxi operators and also of the NLTA with regard to the bus stand, all these issues are being looked into by the technical meeting. In fact, the other question of the hon. Member pertains to the taxi facilities that will be given to the taxi operators and I will in a few minutes answer the question about the requirements of the taxi operators.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Nagalingum: Yes, my last question, Mr Speaker, Sir, relates to the urban terminal. There is a particular case which the former Minister, hon. Bodha, said he was going to look into the matter regarding Mrs E.H. and nothing has been done since. Can the hon. Minister state where matter stands? It has been since the beginning of the project that this case has been reported.

Mr Ganoo: I know of this case, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, the lady came to solicit a meeting with me and she explained to me the difficulties which she has encountered. The matter is still being looked into and hopefully, we will find a solution in due time.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the sitting for one and a half hours.

At 1.01 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.34 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nagalingum!

ROSE HILL - TAXI STANDS

(No. B/306) **Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill)** asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the taxis operating in Rose Hill, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to the arrangements made therefor following the coming into operation of the Metro Express, indicating the number thereof which can operate thereat and the number of taxi stands provided therefor.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Land Transport Authority that 244 taxis have been licensed to operate from Rose Hill as follows -

1. 15 having their base of operation at Rose Hill market taxi stand;
2. 103 from Place Margéot taxi stand, and
3. 126 from the suburbs of the town.

I am further informed that the taxi stands at Rose Hill market and Place Margéot consist of 6 and 22 slots respectively.

Following the coming into operation of the Metro Express on 22 December 2019, the Rose Hill market taxi stand formerly located at Dunken Taylor Street has been relocated to Raoul Duval Street which consists of 6 slots.

In the context of construction works pertaining to the light rail station, 10 slots had to be relocated from Place Margéot taxi stand to the converted paid parking zone, in the vicinity of the bus station close to Place Margéot. The rest are still based at Place Margéot.

As per the requirement of the NLTA, 20 slots for taxis would have to be provided in the New Rose Hill Urban Terminal, a dozen of which might be located on the first level of the Urban Terminal and I am made to understand that the taxi operators licenced to operate from Place Margéot were consulted and they raised no objection to the proposal.

Mr Nagalingum: Can I know from the hon. Minister when the taxi stands, which the Minister just mentioned, will be ready because this region is very congested and people are getting very frustrated so that they can move around in the market place? Can we know when the work will start?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, presently there are 20 slots at Place Margéot. 12 taxis are operating at Place Margéot and 10 others are on the converted parking zone.

But, as I said earlier on also, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the context of the Urban Terminal, discussions are being held to finalise the request for proposal for this project and the representative of taxi operators based at Place Margéot taxi stand, they were informed of the proposal for some taxi slots to be provided on the ground level and the remaining on the first floor of the Terminal. So, pending the start of the work and the construction of the Urban Terminal, these arrangements have been made and have been agreed upon.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/364 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Gender Equality & Family Welfare; B/381 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports & Recreation; PQ Nos. B/338, B/339, B/340, B/342, B/343, B/344, B/345, B/359, B/360, B/361, B/362, B/363, B/367, B/368, B/374, B/375, B/376, B/377, B/378 and B/379 have been withdrawn.

Next question, hon. Osman Mahomed!

SUGAR CANE FIELDS – COAL ASH DISPOSAL

(No. B/307) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the current disposal of coal ash in sugar cane fields to the tune of 100 ton per hectare, he will state if any process for the inertness of the coal ash is being ensured prior thereto and, if so, indicate the institutions and laboratories responsible for the testing thereof.

Mr Ramano: M. le président, dans ma réponse à la question parlementaire B/103 du 09 juin 2020, j'ai informé l'Assemblée nationale que, suite aux recommandations du rapport du Comité consultatif technique sur la gestion des cendres de charbon, des *IPPs* ont été invités à éliminer les cendres de charbon selon deux recommandations principales, à savoir -

- (a) les cendres de charbon devraient être éliminées sur les terres consacrées à la canne à sucre à un taux ne dépassant pas les 100 tonnes par hectare, et

- (b) une distance de recul d'au moins 200 mètres doit être respectée entre les sites de stockage et d'utilisation des cendres de charbon et les puits et plans d'eau.

Des visites de contrôle des sites ont été effectuées par des officiers de la Division de la gestion des déchets solides de mon ministère chez tous les producteurs indépendants d'électricité depuis 2013, et il a été constaté que l'élimination des cendres de charbon est effectuée conformément aux recommandations du rapport du comité consultatif technique. La même chose a été confirmée lors des dernières visites des sites effectués les 01 et 02 juillet 2020.

En outre, en mai 2013, le ministère des collectivités locales à l'époque a demandé aux producteurs indépendants d'électricité de réaliser des tests de lixiviation pour évaluer la présence de métaux lourds dans les cendres de charbon afin de démontrer que les métaux lourds ne polluent pas les eaux souterraines par lixiviation.

Tous les résultats des tests obtenus jusqu'à présent des producteurs indépendants d'électricité indiquent que les quantités de métaux lourds détectées sont inférieures aux limites maximales fixées par l'Agence américaine pour la protection de l'environnement pour l'épandage des boues sur les terres agricoles.

Les résultats des tests qui ont été fournis par les producteurs indépendants d'électricité à mon ministère ont été réalisés par, je cite -

- (i) SOCOR Analyse Environnementale (France) pour -
 - (a) Omnicane Thermal Energy Operations Ltd, La Baraque;
 - (b) Omnicane Thermal Energy Operations Ltd, St Aubin, et
 - (c) Terragen Ltd, Belle Vue Harel;

Et deuxième résultat des tests proviennent du -

- (ii) Mauritius Standards Bureau pour Alteo Energy Ltd, Flacq.

Le laboratoire national de l'environnement de mon ministère a également effectué des tests sur des échantillons de cendres de charbon en 2003 et 2007. Les métaux testés étaient le plomb, le nickel, le cadmium, le chrome, le cuivre, le zinc, le mercure et le fer.

M. le président, en l'absence d'une norme mauricienne sur la qualité des cendres de charbon pour l'élimination sur terre, les limites de l'Agence américaine de protection de l'environnement pour l'épandage des boues résiduelles sur les terres agricoles ont été

utilisées. Il a été constaté que les niveaux de mercure, de zinc, de nickel, de cuivre, de cadmium et de plomb dans les cendres de charbon étaient bien inférieurs aux limites fixées par l'Agence américaine pour la protection de l'environnement.

Le Laboratoire national de l'environnement a effectué des tests de lixiviation sur les cendres de charbon en 2009. Les niveaux de métaux lourds dans les lixiviats ont été comparés à la note d'orientation réglementaire 2 sur les "critères provisoires d'acceptation des déchets" (RGN2), *Assessment of the Leaching Risk to the Environment from the use of Pulverised Fuel Ash (PFA)*, United Kingdom Quality Ash Association, 2003. Il a été constaté que le niveau de baryum, de chrome, de cuivre, de cadmium, de plomb, de zinc et de mercure se situait dans les limites stipulées dans les RGN2.

Le Laboratoire national de l'environnement a effectué un autre test de lixiviation en 2013. Les métaux testés se sont révélés conformes à la norme BS 6920:2000-*Materials in Contact with Drinking Water, Mauritian Drinking Water Standards and Regulatory Guidance Note 2 on Interim Waste Acceptance Criteria* (RGN2).

En outre, M. le président, le laboratoire national de l'environnement de mon ministère entreprend actuellement une étude approfondie sur une période de quatre ans à partir de 2019 afin d'évaluer l'impact à long terme de l'élimination des cendres de charbon sur la qualité des eaux souterraines dans les plaines du nord, Aquifère V.

Le projet bénéficie d'une collaboration technique avec l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique. Les échantillons d'eau souterraine provenant de forages dans les plaines du nord ont été collectés et envoyés pour analyse au Geotop, Centre de recherche sur la dynamique du système Terre au Québec, Canada. Les métaux suivants ont été analysés: vanadium, manganèse, cobalt, nickel etc.

Les résultats préliminaires ont indiqué que ces métaux ne pouvaient être détectés dans aucun des échantillons d'eau souterraine analysés jusqu'à présent.

M. le président, je tiens à préciser que mon ministère continuera à effectuer des visites sur place dans les différents *IPPs* pour s'assurer du respect des recommandations du rapport du comité technique consultatif et continuera également à surveiller la qualité des échantillons d'eau souterraine provenant des forages pour s'assurer que l'élimination des cendres de charbon dans les champs de canne à sucre ne pollue pas la qualité des eaux souterraines.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. I have listened to the reply from the hon. Minister and I noticed that he has mentioned 4 years: 2003, 2007, 2009 and 2013 and a test being done currently, preliminarily results for which are available from the International Atomic Energy Agency. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether in between 2014 and 2020, no test have been performed on the dangerous metal content there is in the ash, the metals that he has just mentioned himself because not only does the disposal in sugarcane field impact on aquifers but it impacts surely on the cane itself because when the cane grow, it will absorb all the heavy metals. Can I ask the hon. Minister to confirm to the House that between 2014 and 2020, no diligent test was done for heavy metal on the coal ash?

Mr Ramano: Les dates, les années mentionnées sont les mêmes, donc 2003, 2007, 2013. Et là, comme je l'ai dit dans ma réponse, M. le président, le Laboratoire National de l'Environnement entreprend actuellement une étude sur une période de quatre ans, donc cela se fait à partir de 2019.

Mr Speaker: Hon. David!

Mr David: Merci, M. le président. L'une des solutions alternatives à l'épandage et à l'enfouissement des cendres de charbon dans les champs agricoles est la valorisation de ces cendres, notamment leur utilisation comme additif au ciment. L'une de nos entreprises sucrières avait, il y a quelques années, réfléchi à cette solution. Est-ce que le ministre peut indiquer si ce projet a été mis en place et si cette pratique peut être généralisée pour une gestion plus éco-responsable des cendres de charbon?

Mr Ramano: M. le président, effectivement nous avons quelques entreprises qui ont signifié leurs intentions pour considérer *the ashes*, les cendres comme additif pour la production de ciment. Je n'ai pas ces réponses précisément aujourd'hui, maintenant, M. le président. Si l'honorable membre vient de l'avant avec *a substantive question*, je me ferai un plaisir de lui répondre.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

Mr Osman Mahomed: In signing PPAs with the IPPs, the onus of safe disposal of ash squarely falls on to the IPPs. They have their responsibility but if we don't supervise, anything can happen. Can I ask the hon. Minister, why is it that between 2014 to date, 2020, for the period of 6 years, no tests have been performed on dangerous metal content of coal ash, the more so Mauritius is a signatory of the Minamata Convention on Mercury content?

Mr Ramano: M. le président, effectivement, je confirme les dates qui ont été avancées, les années qui ont été avancées. Effectivement, les tests qui ont été entrepris par les *IPPs*, ce sont les tests effectués par l'analyse environnementale de France, *Mauritius Standard Bureau*. Donc, je confirme les dates. Effectivement, en ce qui concerne les dates, nous, à notre niveau, au niveau du Laboratoire National de l'Environnement, nous sommes en train de faire le nécessaire à partir de 2019 pour que chaque quatre ans nous puissions avoir des réponses.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary question!

Mr Osman Mahomed: The IPPs have got their own responsibility but the onus of doing the spot check and the tests squarely falls on the Ministry. Why wasn't it done? Is there any reason for this?

Mr Ramano: M. le président, les réponses qui m'ont été fournies, ce sont les réponses qui ont été fournies par le ministère de l'Environnement, le *National Laboratory* et aussi au niveau du *CEB*. Donc, les réponses que j'ai fournies sont des réponses que je viens de mentionner, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Next Question!

POST COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - NO FIXED PLACE OF ABODE PERSONS

(No. B/308) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to persons having no fixed place of abode, she will state if any survey thereof has been carried out post COVID-19 lockdown and, if so, indicate the –

- (a) outcome thereof, and
- (b) measures taken in relation thereto, if any.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to Parliamentary Questions B/308 and B/355 together as they are related to the same subject matter.

First and foremost, I wish to highlight that our Government identifies people having no fixed place of abode as a priority group. I wish to further inform the House that at the request of my Ministry, during the COVID-19 lockdown period, two surveys were carried out by the Police Department in April and May 2020.

The survey revealed that there is a total of 150 persons having no fixed place of abode across the island. Out of the 150 persons having no fixed place of abode, PCR tests were carried out on 86 of them in April 2020.

In addition to the above, it is to be noted that the National Social Inclusion Foundation, falling under the aegis of my Ministry provides financial assistance to 3 NGOs, namely: *Association Pour Personnes en Larmes*, also known as APPEL, Caritas, and *Association Père Laval des Sans Abris* to look after persons without a fixed place of abode.

A survey conducted by my Ministry post COVID-19 pandemic, revealed that 13 persons are accommodated at APPEL, 66 are provided with food and a night shelter by Caritas and 12 are catered for by *Association Père Laval des Sans Abris*.

It is also worth noting that out of the 150 persons having no fixed place of abode, 16 are currently benefiting from basic pensions while 12 are benefiting from social aid. As regards the visit of doctors to persons having no fixed place of abode, I wish to inform the House that APPEL already provides medical screening facilities to its inmates.

As for others, if they require medical care, they may go to the nearest dispensary or hospital for any health issue. In case, they show symptoms of flu, they may go to the Flu Clinics set up across the island for appropriate treatment.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. The pattern was not quite clear from the hon. Minister's reply, but there has been a proliferation of people with no fixed place of abode. I have documents, I am going to table for your own eyes, hon. Minister, because of sensitive information. Can I ask the hon. Minister what is the Ministry doing? The number of seats that she has just mentioned is very low as compared to the number of people with no fixed place of abode in the country, and with the harsh weather condition right now elsewhere in the country, whether the Ministry has a plan to cater for these people? Because things are getting quite rough from what I can see for my own constituency.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: First of all, let me say that for the reply I have given, I have based myself on information received from the Police. So, now you are saying that the figures are not correct. This is the information I have been provided with. As I have mentioned to you, my Ministry has written to the Police; information has been submitted to me. So, I have the list, I can table it. So, these are the figures which have been provided; this is one. Second, APPEL has a capacity of 20. We have presently only 13 beneficiaries. So, there is free space. So, if any person, without a fixed place of abode, wants to go to APPEL,

he will be welcome. I must also mention, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we are working on a new project to accommodate more persons at APPEL Centre. So, on the first floor, there is available space and a project is under consideration.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Hon. Minister, I am made to understand by your reply. Does the Ministry have inspectors or people working on the field to see to it the real number of people sleeping on pavement and outside in this particular season we are living right now in Mauritius? First of all, we have COVID-19, now the weather. So, do you have a department? Do you have inspectors on field working to have real figures, and what is the Ministry's plan?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Yes, as I have mentioned in my reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, Government identifies people having no fixed place of abode as a priority group. We are giving all assistance, as I have said. You must understand also that these people are characterised as difficult to reach. So, being given that they keep on moving from one place to another, this afternoon they might be at one particular place and then when you go there, they are not there, but my Ministry do send officers to give support and help to this category of people. So, they are our concern. There is a new project which is coming but, at the same time, we need to understand that they are very difficult to reach.

Mr Speaker: I am advised by the Table that PQ B/308 and B/355 are being replied together. B/355 instead of B/356.

Hon. Osman Mohamed!

Mr Osman Mohamed: The hon. Minister has mentioned that she gets her figures from the Commissioner of Police. The letter that I am going to table for her attention, I am going to just read the first paragraph for you and I am not going to mention the location. There are around 30 *sans domicile fixe* roaming around this area for the last three months. So, from almost nothing in that particular area, it has come to 30. So, I would request the hon. Minister to maybe recheck with the Commissioner of Police because he must have received the letter in the meantime for an updated figure being given that the officers of the Ministry are not doing what they are supposed to do.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: It is not correct to say that the Ministry is not doing. We are doing more than...

(Interruptions)

Non, ce n'est pas ça du tout. I have mentioned in my reply that we have 150 persons without fixed place of abode across the island. If you want more details, I can give you. So, we have 108 in Port Louis. You have mentioned something without giving the specific details where the 30 persons are found. The remaining 42 are across the island. So, as I have said, we are working on a new project. We do provide funding to NGOs to look after persons without a fixed place of abode. There are no barriers with regard to medical health. So, they are being provided with medical treatment, if need be, and they are not being deprived of their basic pensions, they can get their pensions. So, we are doing all our best to look after persons without fixed place of abode.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Osman Mahomed!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I have one last question? I think it is important.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

SAUDI ARABIA - MOSQUES & FISHER COMMUNITY - FUNDS

(No. B/309) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the funds donated by Saudi Arabia purportedly for the refurbishment of mosques and for the fisher community, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that following negotiations held last year between Ambassador Soodhun, Ambassador of Mauritius to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Authorities, the Royal Court of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia agreed to donate USD 6 million to support the refurbishment of mosques in Mauritius. The funds will be disbursed to an official Government entity to be granted later to socio-religious groups of mosques. Accordingly, Government proposes to set up a foundation with the Islamic Cultural Centre as the founder to ensure sound management and oversight on the use of these funds. Meanwhile, a meeting was held under the Chair of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development to coordinate the matter. They are also working closely with the Waqf Board and all registered mosques. A draft charter of the proposed foundation and a copy of the draft Memorandum of Understanding duly vetted by the legal adviser of the ICC have been forwarded to the Saudi Authorities for

consideration. However, the Saudi Authorities have on 10 July 2020, requested that a fresh translated version of the documents in Arabic language be submitted and this is being done.

As regards donation of funds to the fisher community, I am informed that on 08 July 2020, the Cabinet of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia authorised the Saudi Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture to engage discussion with the Mauritian side and to conclude a Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation in the field of fisheries between the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Government of Mauritius. I have this morning received, in fact, a draft Memorandum of Understanding from the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which has been transmitted to my colleague, the Minister of Ocean Economy for appropriate action and if everything goes well, the Memorandum of Understanding will be presented to Cabinet and can be signed between the two countries.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Reza Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister has just mentioned that there is going to be a foundation set up to administer these Rs200 m., \$6 million that is going to be donated to mosques. May I know from the hon. Minister whether any thought has been given as to who will be sitting on the Council of that foundation?

Mr Bodha: In fact, the foundation has not yet been set up. Government is proposing to create the foundation with the Islamic Cultural Centre as the main nucleus.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Osman Mahomed!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. So, \$6 million would be about Rs240 m. as at date and hon. Soodhun at the material time had announced Rs70 m. for the fishers; that was in September 2019. So, adjusted for fluctuation in currency, this will be a higher figure, I presume. But what he said at the material time, it is '*mo fine amener*', I am going to table for you, '*mo fine amene*' so much money. Is the money in Mauritius right now or not?

Mr Bodha: I think there are procedures and we are going by the procedures because the Saudi Authorities requested, first of all, that we have a Memorandum of Understanding which is signed at the Government level and then, you will have the disbursement of fund. I think it will be done at the level of the Ministry of Finance.

Mr Speaker: One last supplementary question!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, thank you. May we have an indication of the time frame of disbursement of this facility to the mosques and to the fishers?

Mr Bodha: In fact, things should have moved faster, but because of the COVID-19, as regard to the fishers, the Memorandum of Understanding is here, it will be submitted to Cabinet in the weeks to come. As regards the main Memorandum of Understanding, we are sending the Arabic version very soon.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Dr. Aumeer!

HOTELS - QUARANTINE CENTRES

(No. B/310) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the hotels used as Quarantine Centres since the COVID-19 Pandemic outbreak, he will state the procurement method used for the selection thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that no procurement method has been resorted to in the selection of hotels to be used as Quarantine Centres. With nationwide confinement measures effective as from 20 March 2020, all incoming passengers were quarantined. Mauritius was among the first countries to quarantine passengers in relation to COVID-19. Prior to 19 March 2020, already 902 passengers were quarantined.

Consultations were made between the Ministry of Tourism and AHRIM and the *Association des Hôtels de Charme*, which were requested to invite their members to favourably consider request to use their hotels as Quarantine Centres. As a result, 19 hotels agreed to put their premises at our disposal to be used as quarantine facilities.

Some hotels were reluctant because they were not in a position in that particular time to give them a clear and definite time frame specifying how long their premises would be used as Quarantine Centres. On 19 March 2020, 106 incoming passengers were quarantined. On 21 March 2020: 341 passengers; on 22 March 2020: 762 passengers; and 50 passengers on 23 March 2020, with a total number of passengers quarantined escalating to 2,056 as at 23 March 2020.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. I note in your answer that you said there was no procurement method, which shows once again, unfortunately, complete opacity as to the provision of services by hotels.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet!

Dr. Aumeer: However, can the hon. Minister inform the House which private hotels are still being used as Quarantine Centres, as we talk today, and whether self-isolation at home is being allowed for the very exceptional few?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the first part of the question was whether any procurement exercise has been done. I believe the hon. Member would remember that when the nationwide confinement was put in, we should know how many passengers have been reaching Mauritius and, in that short span of time, how it was difficult for the Ministry of Health to get accommodation. We should not forget, we have already taken all the public facilities available and it was not the time to make passengers wait at the airport. It was the time to facilitate those passengers. We first had to see whether these passengers were carrier of the virus. It was because of those decisions at that time that we have been able to quarantine them at the particular time that made how many passengers have been detected with COVID-19 positive. So, at that time, the Ministry of Health had, as objective, to prevent the spread of the virus and that's what has been done.

The second part of the question was about what are the hotels that are already in use. I'll just mention the names: Ambre Hotel Mauritius, Casuarina Resorts, Gold Beach, Gold Crest, Champ de Mars, Manisa Hotel, Récif Attitude, Solana Beach, Veranda Grand' Baie.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House as to the names of hotels which have incurred damages and the claims made by them?

Dr. Jagutpal: According to the Ministry of Tourism, the room rate for one resident per day is Rs1,400 excluding other services, and for the catering, breakfast, lunch and dinner plus three bottles of water, it is Rs800 to Rs875 which is being claimed daily by the hotels. The payments are made by the MTPA after recommendations and approval of the Technical Committee chaired by the Director of the MTPA.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer, a last supplementary!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister did not reply as to whether self-isolation at home is being allowed at the moment for the very few.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, no self-isolation at home is being allowed, except for crews who are working in Air Mauritius. In the reply to last week's questions, I have already

given the details of how crew members of Air Companies are self-isolating; otherwise, no self-isolation is being entertained, especially when there is a clear and defined protocol.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Dr. Aumeer!

**NATIONAL EMPOWERMENT FOUNDATION - SOCIAL HOUSING UNITS -
CONSTRUCTION**

(No. B/311) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the proposed construction of 12,000 residential houses over three years, as announced in the Budget Speech 2020-2021, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number thereof projected for construction during this financial year, indicating the –

- (a) regions identified therefor and number thereof per region, and
- (b) number of houses that would be made available to those who live in the most precarious conditions under the National Empowerment Fund list.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Budget Speech delivered on 04 June 2020, Government announced the construction of 12,000 residential units over the next three financial years, that is, up to June 2023. It would be premature at this stage to provide any precise answer to part (a) of this question, given that my Ministry is currently working on the detailed mapping of demand for social housing units disaggregated in terms of locality and income, including demand from the poorest families registered with the National Empowerment Foundation.

Moreover, for the first time, families earning a monthly income of Rs30,000 to Rs60,000 are being invited to indicate their interest for a housing unit to be built by the State. In parallel, my Ministry is assessing the suitability of uncommitted State land for the construction of Social Housing Units.

As regards part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that according to present Social Housing Policy, 10% of houses constructed by the NHDC Ltd are reserved for the National Empowerment Foundation to be allocated to its beneficiaries. It is expected that the same arrangement will hold for the 12,000 residential housing units announced.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. I note in your answer, which was quite short, that any target in terms of figure for the first year of implementation of this project and where construction will start, because there is a great expectation as to a very, if I can say so, popular measure that you have announced in the Budget. Expectations are high and people from all quarters of society, especially those coming from low society and the middle income, are expecting to know when this will happen.

Mr Speaker: Question! Question!

Dr. Aumeer: So, the question is, in terms of figure, what is the number of houses you expect to have and when will construction start?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Well, I am very happy, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this proposal of Government is popular with the Opposition and I thank the hon. Member for the strong expression of support. Now, he is right, this is an unprecedented measure. We are aiming to achieve something never achieved before at any time in the history of independent Mauritius. Precisely, because it is so ambitious, precisely because there is such a great expectation from the public, we need to plan carefully and start as soon as possible to respond to the demand, and that is precisely what we propose to do.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, construction of social housing has been a total failure under the aegis of the Ministry of Housing and Lands for a number of years now. I do not think there is a debate on it; the figures can prove it since 2010 up to now. Therefore, can I ask the hon. Minister, are we keeping the same concept, that is, the Ministry through NHDC is constructing the houses or will it be a partnership with the private sector?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Let me first address the remark made by the Speaker. To speak of total failure may or may not be correct. In fact, what we do know is that, ever since the 1960s, the growth in demand for social housing has consistently outpaced the supply from one Government to another, irrespective of political parties. So, the truth is, that, today, we have a significant unmet demand and, as I said, this is not a matter on which we should be delving in party politics, we should look at the real issue, which is a national issue, and see how we can best rise to the challenge. That is precisely the reason why this Government has decided to prioritise social housing in the last Budget, and we shall try our utmost to respond to the expectations and demand of our people.

Now, as regards the actual formula, as I said, we are precisely working on this issue. Earlier, today, I had a meeting with my colleague, the Minister of Finance. I share the concerns of the hon. Member, we should not repeat mistakes of the past, but we should learn from the past to make sure we get it right this time. Thank you.

Mr Uteem: May I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether the Ministry intends to continue the practice of allocating houses to only applicants residing in defined catchment area, which is highly discriminatory to people who live in Port Louis?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am not sure what to make of the question of the hon. gentleman. What has happened in the past is that the NHDC registers applicants as per their place of residence. So, it is assumed, for instance, that an inhabitant of Port Louis would like to obtain a social housing unit in his locality of actual residence. Now, we have to move fast. I would have liked all applicants to be asked anew where they wish to reside as opposed to where they presently reside. That would make sense in terms of planning, in terms of employment, productivity, transport and so on. Now, I hope we will have time to do this. As the hon. Member heard earlier, there are the Members in the House who are impatient that we should get started. So, we will do whatever it takes to respond adequately to demand and to move forward fast. But let me assure the hon. Member that I have received a lot of representations on this side of the House and I have received representations from the hon. Member himself, as to the need to address the demand in all areas in all constituencies, and constituency No. 2, which elected the hon. Member is a particular problematic, in that it is a small constituency with very little land available, but we will definitely ensure that inhabitants of each constituency are catered for within the 12,000 new units announced.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ. B/364, B/365, B/366, B/383, B/384 and B/385 have been withdrawn. Next question, hon. Dr. Aumeer!

COVID-19 SOLIDARITY FUND - REPATRIATION FLIGHTS - AIR FARES

(No. B/312) Dr F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the Mauritian nationals stranded abroad amid the COVID-19 Pandemic, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number thereof awaiting repatriation, indicating –

- (a) the prices of single air fares on the repatriation flights being operated by the national carrier;

- (b) aggregate extra cost incurred by the carrier in respect of passengers holding return tickets, and
- (c) if consideration will be given for needy stranded Mauritian nationals to benefit under the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund for the payment of the surcharge cost.

Mr Bodha: With your permission, I will answer this question, Mr Speaker, Sir. I wish to inform the House that following the outbreak of the COVID-19, which resulted in closure of borders, airspace, nationwide lockdown and cancellation of connecting flights, some 6,350 Mauritians found themselves stranded in almost 92 countries, as remote as Trinidad and Tobago, Slovenia, Sudan, India and Madagascar.

Government has been able, so far, with the assistance of our Embassies and High Commissions Foreign Sanitary Officials, airlines and other stakeholders to repatriate around 4,000 Mauritians by the end of this month, from countries such as USA, Canada, Malaysia, Dubai, Europe, Australia, India, Tanzania, Zambia, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as at date, there are still 2,318 stranded Mauritians who have registered with our overseas missions and are awaiting repatriation. However, this number is likely to increase further with a second wave of COVID-19 in several countries and the desire from Mauritians in those countries to return back home. Moreover, many overseas Mauritian students are now facing accommodation problems, as most universities have shifted to online coaching and are encouraging international students to return to their home countries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, repatriation is an ongoing process and my Ministry has drawn up a Repatriation Plan to ensure a smooth, timely and orderly repatriation of our stranded Nationals on the basis of the following criteria –

- Medical patients
- Elderly
- Families with toddlers and minors
- Students and other distressed Mauritian citizens

According to our Repatriation Plan, around 5,500 Mauritian citizens will be repatriated by the end of August 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the price of the air ticket varies from destination to destination and has increased due to inflight social

distancing measures, which have reduced the aircraft carrying capacity to almost 50%. Accordingly, airlines are compelled to sell tickets mostly of high and mid-price ranges.

The pricing of a particular route also depends on –

- (i) the potential cargo revenue that can be expected on the flight;
- (ii) the possibility to uplift passengers on their outbound leg from Mauritius;
- (iii) the number of Mauritian passengers to be repatriated, depending on the quarantine capacity in Mauritius, and
- (iv) the operating cost of the flight to and from any particular destination.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to information obtained from Air Mauritius, the one-way prices that are being applied for repatriation of Mauritian Nationals from the following destinations are as follows -

From Paris, it is Rs35,100;

From London, it is Rs39,500;

From Madagascar, it is Rs14,600;

From Reunion Island, it is Rs11,400;

From Mumbai, it is Rs20,500;

From Rodrigues, it is Rs5,100;

From Johannesburg, it is Rs20,750, and

From Kuala Lumpur, it was Rs47,500.

The House may wish to note that the one-way fare, which I just mentioned, applied to those passengers who did not hold an Air Mauritius ticket.

Concerning part (b) of the question, I am informed that passengers holding a valid Air Mauritius return ticket have been revalidated at no cost. The only exception to this has been the Kuala Lumpur/Mauritius repatriation flight on 17 July 2020 - which was also a concern for some of the hon. colleagues of the House - where the passengers have been charged an additional amount in order to mitigate the cash cost of the special flight. The average cost per passenger turned out to be higher due to no passenger uplift from Mauritius, no cargo from Mauritius and low cargo revenue generated from Kuala Lumpur. I am also informed that Air Mauritius has granted all passengers with an extra luggage of 23 kgs free of charge.

With reference to part (c) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the payments of the surcharge cost cannot be entertained by the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund as such expenses do not fall within the objectives of the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund Regulations 2020.

Mauritian citizens facing financial difficulty may, however, avail themselves of the soft loan scheme of Rs50,000 at a preferential interest rate operated by the State Bank of Mauritius and the Mauritius Commercial Bank to finance their tickets or to meet any other related surcharge costs.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. The cost of PCR Test abroad is pretty expensive, considering the additional expenses that all those who have been stranded abroad and are struggling to meet ends. This being a requirement by our Government, which needs to be uploaded, before any resident boards the repatriation flight, will the Government look into supporting this extra financial burden, as the financing of these stranded Mauritians is very limited and, in some cases, despite the loan facility that has been given to them after three months of unexpected expenses over there?

Mr Bodha: PCR tests are not only expensive, but also very difficult in many countries. In fact, we request PCR tests within five days before the flight is taken and, in some cases, with the health authorities' agreement, we have been able to say that we can have a PCR test of 7 days. I understand that this is not an easy task, but we have asked, in fact, our embassies and missions abroad to organise to see to it that this can be done in bulk and that we can have a fair cost to the PCR tests.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Shakeel Mohamed!

Mr Mohamed: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I just wanted to ask the hon. Minister why is it that his Government with him as though also involved and the hon. Prime Minister, has shown an outright discrimination vis-à-vis foreign residents in Mauritius as opposed to Mauritian citizens because those foreign residents concerned in the same scenario have been away from their families for many months, have been away from their tax residence which is Mauritius for many months, you have also obtained approval from the Government of Mauritius as I read here in a document which I tabled...

Mr Speaker: Question, hon. Member!

Mr Mohamed: This is putting the background and I read in the document which I tabled last week which is a letter from the Mauritian High Commission, Pretoria, 17 June 2020, that's an example, I mean, there are other nationalities also involved and in that document I read that the High Commission wishes to confirm that the Government of Mauritius has already conveyed its approval in this respect ...

Mr Speaker: You are making a statement when you speak. Bring your question!

Mr Mohamed: I know it is embarrassing to the Government, however...

Mr Speaker: You have a question? It is a supplementary question?

Mr Mohamed: So, the question is...

Mr Speaker: This is the time for supplementary questions.

Mr Mohamed: I put the question then. In spite of this averment in this letter, in spite of Government's approval, why does the Government treat foreign residents, who are taxed residents in this country, with so much discriminatory approach? Why is that?

Mr Bodha: Now, this document was not last week, it was some time back.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No conversation! Let the Minister reply!

Mr Bodha: I am asking what the hon. Member would have said if we were giving the residents the priority and they will say we are giving residents the priority at the expense of our Mauritian nationals. No! I think we have to be fair. We said that we will go by the distress of the Mauritian nationals. Now, we have limited capacity in the quarantine centres. I must say that we have moped up about more than two thirds of the Mauritians who were stranded somewhere. Now, we have....

(Interruptions)

No...

Mr Speaker: No conversation! Let the Minister reply!

Mr Bodha: We had the first wave where those who were stranded because we took a decision to lock down the country and you had the lock down of borders in the places where they were. You had a second wave of people, about 2,000 who were stranded on ships. Now, we have third category, those who don't have tickets and who want to return home. We

can understand this, if you are in South Africa, India or elsewhere. So, we have a third category and now we have already brought in 4,000. In August, we are planning 1,500. So, we will have moped up, but I understand the distress and we have raised this issue as far as residents are concerned.

As far as the residents are concerned who are in business, we have also allowed the possibility, together with the advice from the Ministry of Employment that they put up a case and the Ministry of Employment if they say that they have to come to Mauritius to open their companies or to do a number of things they have been allowed. So, we are bringing also some expert, some businesses and we are ready to consider business people, who are residents in Mauritius, who have to come back home because of the economic revival.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Quirin!

DRUG ADDICTS – TREATMENT & REHABILITATION

(No. B/313) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts, he will state the policy of his Ministry in relation thereto.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, Government has set up a High Level Drug and HIV Council under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office to, *inter alia* –

- (a) propose, formulate, review and validate national policies on drugs and HIV;
- (b) make recommendations as appropriate and provide guidelines on issues related to drugs and HIV to the National Drugs Secretariat and the National AIDS Secretariat respectively, and
- (c) coordinate and monitor the national drugs and HIV response by overseeing the implementation of National Drug Control Master Plan 2019-2023 and the National Action Plan for HIV and AIDS 2017-2021.

Under the National Drug Control Master Plan, Government has expressed its strong commitment and determination to adjust the drug control comprehensively, efficiently and in a balanced manner. Government is not indifferent to men and women who have been suffering from drug consumption and drug trafficking. The adverse impact of illicit cultivation, trafficking production and abuse of drugs on the island is profound. Hence, we have developed an integrated approach that will address all drug-related issues. The National

Drug Control Master Plan 2019-2023 is the national roadmap with one vision to ensure that Mauritius is safe and healthier with effective policies for drug control.

My Ministry has had recourse to different measures such as –

- (i) the Methadone Maintenance Therapy;
- (ii) the Suboxone/Naltrexone Therapy;
- (iii) the Detoxification Programme using Codeine in collaboration with NGOs;
- (iv) the residential treatment of people using drugs in general, including synthetic drugs abuse at Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre;
- (v) People Who Use Drugs (PWUDs) who are HIV positive and Hepatitis C positive are also being offered treatment at one-stop-shop set up at Bouloux Methadone Day Care Centre at Cassis, Port Louis.

I am further informed that –

- five Addiction Units have been set up at Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital, Long Mountain Hospital, Flacq Hospital, Mahebourg Hospital and Victoria Hospital. A multi-disciplinary team provides psychosocial support, pharmacotherapy, follow-up services with a view to rehabilitating the drug addicts, and
- two Residential Treatment and Rehabilitation Wards are also operational at Mahebourg Hospital for adults above 23 years and at Nenuphar Ward, Long Mountain for young people below the age of 23.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to revamp our services and to ensure continuity of care and proper follow-up, three dedicated Psychiatrists have been assigned exclusive responsibility for drug treatment and rehabilitation. For this purpose, the island has been divided into three zones and each zone is headed by one Psychiatrist and comprising a multi-disciplinary team of doctors, psychologists, nurses, social workers and NGOs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, furthermore, with a view to reducing stigma and discrimination towards drug users and, at the same time, increasing accessibility of Methadone Maintenance Therapy Services, my Ministry has adopted a policy of decentralisation of our Methadone dispensing sites to the primary healthcare institutions since 2018. In this respect, 9

distribution centres have been moved to Area Health Centres, Community Health Care Centres and Mediclinics.

I wish to point out that my Ministry also offers treatment services to prison inmates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry works in close collaboration with NGOs for our rehabilitation programme. These NGOs are benefiting from grants under the National CSR Foundation.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Quirin!

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. Le ministre, dans sa réponse, a fait référence à des unités d'addictologie qui sont disponibles dans certains hôpitaux justement pour le traitement des usagers de drogues. Peut-on savoir du ministre, à part les psychiatres dont il a fait référence, en ce qui concerne le personnel qui est affecté à ces unités d'addictologie, peut-on savoir si ce personnel est formé et a l'expertise voulu pour s'occuper du traitement et de la réhabilitation des usagers de drogue ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the principal personnel in charge of the different hospitals are the Psychiatrists. They are well formed. The social workers also are helping the Psychiatrists in the psychosocial domain. Now, those social workers they are well trained to deal with the psychosocial issues and at the same time the Psychologists. So, what I mean to say, we have professionals who are dealing with those who have attended those clinics and I am sure that from the time that they are doing the job, there has been no issues related to their competencies. Now, at the same time, the Ministry of Health offers them training. There are training sessions conducted by the Ministry of Health to continuously empower the different personnel working in the Addictology Unit.

Mr Ittoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister mentioned treatment and rehabilitation centres run by NGOs. Can the hon. Minister, please, share the list of these centres and, secondly, list of the sites covered by the Ministry of Health regarding the Needle Exchange Programme?

Dr. Jagutpal: The NGOs that are collaborating with the Ministry of Health against drug are *Centre Solidarité pour une Nouvelle Vie; Chrysalis Centre, Groupe Renaissance Mahebourg; Centre d'Accueil de Terre Rouge; Groupe A de Cassis; Dr. Idriss Goomany Treatment Centre; Aides, Infos, Liberté, Espoir et Solidarité ; Centre Frère René Guilmain ; Sangram Sewa Sadan ; Tan Nou la Voix ; Help the Addiction Centre*. I am sorry, the second part of the question.

Mr Ittoo: Concerning the Needle Exchange Programme, the list of sites covered by the Ministry of Health.

Dr. Jagutpal: The Needle Exchange Programme was set up in 2006 and is run by the Ministry of Health and the NGO – *Collectif Urgence Toxida*. The MOH runs 37 sites and the NGO CUT covers 11 sites through the island. The NGO CUT is given a monthly allowance for the payment of allowances to social workers involved in the Needle Exchange Programme. So, there are different caravans that cover the different sites of various regions. So, it is a long list of more than 30 regions being covered by the different caravans for the Needle Exchange Programme.

Mr Lobine: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister, as at date, what is the input of his Ministry with regard to the setting up of a National Drug Policy Commission, as recommended by the report of the Drug Commission that was deposited in July 2018?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, after that there has been a Technical Committee working on how to implement the different recommendations of the Commission. So far, the Pharmacy Unit has already implemented how to control the import of psychotropic medication in the island and this part has been done. Now, the Pharmacy Unit, again, is working on how to control prescriptions. So, these prescriptions will be under control. This is the part of the job that has already been done.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Quirin, last supplementary!

Mr Quirin: M. le président, le dernier rapport de l'observatoire des drogues date de 2017/2018 si ma mémoire ne me fait pas défaut. De ce fait, l'honorable ministre ne pense-t-il pas qu'il est grand temps qu'un nouveau rapport soit rendu public dans la mesure où de nouvelles drogues font régulièrement leur apparition dans ce commerce de la mort ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, this National Drug Observatory was set up in 2015. Now, we are having a report yearly. Last year, we have the report of 2018. Now, we are expecting that this year we will get the report of 2019. So, this is a yearly report that will be published by the end of the year expectedly.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC – ARTISTS PERFORMING IN HOTELS –
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

(No. B/314) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the artists performing in hotels, he will state the measures taken by his Ministry to extend financial assistance thereto amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, on 15 May 2020, Government agreed to the implementation of a Post-COVID-19 Action Plan 2020 by my Ministry for the creative and heritage sectors. The objective of the Action Plan is to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to stimulate artistic, creative and the cultural heritage industries. This Action Plan caters for the immediate needs of different players in the artistic field and 13 schemes have been put in place including one for artist performing in hotels.

As for the scheme relevant to artists performing in the hotels, weekly performances will be organised where artists will be given the opportunity to perform. Their performances will be broadcasted on national TV and will be uploaded on virtual platforms. Each programme will be of a duration of 30 to 45 minutes approximately.

For a one-man show, the artist will receive a cachet of Rs10,000 and for performances by one to four persons, a cachet of Rs20,000 will be paid and for performances by more than four persons, a maximum of Rs40,000 will be paid to the group. A call for application for artists performing in hotels was launched by my Ministry on 05 June 2020, with the closing date being 19 June 2020 which was further extended to 03 July 2020. 114 applications have been received and a selection panel has been set up by my Ministry to assess the applications received. A sum of Rs1.3 m. has been earmarked in the Post-COVID-19 Action Plan for the implementation of this particular scheme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition, I wish to highlight that artists, including those performing in hotels, benefited from the Wage Assistance Scheme for those who are employed and the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme for those who are on a freelance basis. The Government has, on 17 July 2020 agreed to extend these assistance schemes to workers and self-employed individuals in the tourism sector for the month of July 2020. Artists performing in hotels will thus benefit from these two schemes.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, l'honorable ministre, dans sa réponse, a justement fait référence à son plan d'action qui, je l'admets, comporte certaines mesures intéressantes.

Mais ce que je constate aussi c'est que tout est encore au stade de projet alors que tous les secteurs économiques du pays sont ouverts. Le ministre, dans sa réponse, a aussi ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr Quirin: ...fait référence à l'implémentation de son plan d'action qui devrait se faire sur une période de six mois. Donc, de ce fait, l'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire quels sont les critères de sélection en ce qui concerne le projet de concerts en ligne et combien d'artistes qui travaillent avec les hôtels seront concernés par ce projet de concerts en ligne ?

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, this question was specific to artists performing in hotels. I will invite the hon. Member to come with a substantive question regarding the Action Plan.

Mr Quirin: Ma question justement concerne les artistes d'hôtel qui seront impliqués, qui vont participer dans le concert en ligne.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, just to clarify one point. The Action Plan contains 13 measures and one of the measures refers to artists - well, the correct labelling is other performances which concerns artists performing in hotels. The one that the hon. Member is referring to is virtual concerts which concern other artists, not those performing in hotels. So, that is a different measure, a different scheme.

Mr Quirin: Donc, l'honorable ministre voudrait dire que ceux qui travaillent dans les hôtels ne sont pas concernés par ce projet de concerts en ligne ?

Mr Teeluck: There are 13 measures. Measure no. 1 concerns artists and relates to virtual concerts. Measure No. 2 - Other Performances was designed to cater for artists performing in hotels. So, they are two different measures. Of course, both measures will be captured by way of recording and broadcasted. The *modus operandi* will be similar, but there are two different schemes, of course.

Mr Quirin: Est-ce que l'honorable ministre a été informé que beaucoup d'artistes qui travaillent dans les hôtels n'ont toujours pas reçu le *Self-Employed Allowance* pour le mois de juin ? Est-ce qu'il est au courant ?

Mr Teeluck: Unfortunately, that question relates to the Ministry of Finance.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Quirin!

Mr Quirin: M. le président, j'ai une dernière question supplémentaire, avec votre permission.

Mr Speaker: This morning, I had the remark 16 minutes. Today, now, this afternoon

...

Mr Quirin: J'ai une question importante. Vite fait.

Mr Speaker: You have another question, go ahead!

SOCIAL REGISTER OF MAURITIUS – CHILDREN – TABLETS

(No. B/315) 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 proposed provision of 2,570 tablets to children of grade 10 to 13 of families on the Social Register of Mauritius, as announced in the Budget Speech 2020-2021, she will state where matters stand.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that Government had on 08 May 2020, decided to arrange for the procurement of 2,572 tablets to children in Grade 10 to 13 of eligible families under the Social Register of Mauritius.

I am informed by the National Empowerment Foundation that tenders for the procurement of the 2,572 tablets were launched on 27 May 2020 and the closing date for the submission of bids was 10 June 2020. The evaluation exercise was completed on 16 June 2020, and as advised by the Central Informatics Bureau of the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation a sample of the tablet has been requested in the Letter of Intent issued to the successful bidder on 23 June 2020.

I am further informed by the National Empowerment Foundation that the sample was submitted by the bidder on 13 July 2020 and was found not to be in accordance with the technical specifications as submitted in the bids document. The National Empowerment Foundation is now seeking clarification from the bidder.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Quirin!

Mr Quirin: M. le président, on se souvient tous de l'épisode des tablettes pour les étudiants du secondaire et le scandale de la compagnie DCL. De ce fait, l'honorable ministre peut-elle nous dire quelles sont les mesures qui ont été prises dans les *tender documents* pour

s'assurer que les enfants issus de ces familles sur le Registre social de Maurice ne soient pas eux aussi victimes d'entrepreneurs peu scrupuleux?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: A good question. That's why I must point out that specifications of the tablets were based on the recommendations of the Ministry of Education and also the Central Informatics Bureau of the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, comme le temps passe vite, peut-on savoir quelle est la date prévue pour la distribution de ces tablettes?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, it is very difficult now, at this moment, to give a specific date. As I have mentioned, we all realise that I am bound to abide by the procurement procedures and we all know that procurement exercise takes time. In addition, I must say that this exercise is being carried out during a very difficult period, COVID-19 pandemic. So, international frontiers are closed and all consignments are now being delayed. So, I am following these particular measures very closely and we do hope that needful will be done within a short period of time.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Quirin: M. le president, *one last*, vite, vite. Peut-on savoir de l'honorable ministre, à ce jour, combien de familles sur le Registre social de Maurice sont déjà connectées avec le réseau Wifi?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, I will ask the hon. Member to come with a specific question. I do not want to give an inappropriate answer. So, please, I will ask you to come with a specific question.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Quirin!

TOKYO OLYMPIC GAMES 2021 - ATHLETES - FUNDS

(No. B/316) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the provision of Rs5 million for the preparation of athletes for participation in the Tokyo Olympic Games 2021, as announced in the Budget Speech 2020-2021, he will give a breakdown of how same will be disbursed.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, as the House is aware, the Tokyo Olympics have been rescheduled for 23 July to 08 August 2021. Accordingly, my Ministry is doing the necessary to support the preparation of our athletes who potentially can still qualify for the games.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the amount of Rs5 m. budgeted for Financial Year 2020-2021, an estimate has been worked out. I am tabling same.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also wish to point out that besides the budgeted Rs5 m., my Ministry funds national sports federations to support their annual programme which includes high performance athletes. For this financial year, an amount of Rs50 m. has been earmarked.

I wish to avail of this opportunity to congratulate our boxer, Mr Richarno Collin, who has already secured his qualification for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Quirin!

Mr Quirin: M. le président, doit-on déduire qu'à ce jour, il n'y a que Richarno Collin qui a obtenu sa qualification pour les jeux de Tokyo?

Mr Toussaint: Oui.

Mr Quirin: Peut-on savoir aussi, M. le président, s'il y a d'autres sportifs qui ont été invités par leur fédération internationale, et dans quelle discipline?

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, so far, we have invitation places in athletics, judo, swimming and table tennis

Mr Quirin: Peut-on savoir aussi, M. le président, quels sont critères utilisés pour l'allocation de ces fonds ? Et peut-on aussi savoir quand ces sommes seront déboursées?

Mr Toussaint: Je viens de déposer les documents, M. le président, par rapport à comment nous allons utiliser les R 5 millions pour la préparation des athlètes. Les fonds seront déboursés au fur et à mesure que les fédérations fassent leur demande.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Quirin: L'honorable ministre peut-il nous préciser des R 5 millions, quel est le montant qui sera alloué au handisports?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, au fur et au mesure, comme je l'ai dit, s'il y a des demandes, donc, il n'y a pas une somme spécifique pour telle et telle discipline. Comme la fédération fait sa demande, nous allons, bien sûr, faire le nécessaire. Donc, si au niveau du

handisport, il y a une demande de fonds, nous allons les aider, bien sûr, pour mieux préparer leurs athlètes.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Ms Foo Kune!

COVID-19 TESTS KITS - DISPOSAL

(No. B/317) Ms K. Foo Kune (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the used COVID-19 tests kits, he will state the protocol established by his Ministry, if any, for the disposal thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that used COVID-19 test kits and associated waste generated during COVID-19 testing are disposed, based on the guidelines provided by the Central Health Laboratory which are in accordance with those of the WHO and good microbiological practice and procedure.

There exists two types of waste that are generated in relation to COVID-19, namely, clinical waste which consists partly of human or animal tissue, blood, body fluids, excretions, drugs or any other pharmaceutical products like swab, dressings, syringes, needles or any sharp instrument considered as waste and which may prove hazardous to any person coming in contact with it unless rendered safe.

Two, the communal waste consisting of cotton, swabs, paper, etc.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the waste disposal process, I am informed that there is a segregation of waste according to whether they are communal or clinical. Needles and sharps are separated from cotton and swabs. All potentially infectious waste are inactivated with sodium hypochlorite at working concentration of 1%.

Used COVID-19 test kits and associated waste once inactivated are placed in yellow containers or yellow polythene bags with their tops appropriately secured and sealed. The waste containers are marked with the international biohazard symbol. The waste is then kept in a dedicated storage prior to disposal. The disposal of waste is done by means of incineration at the Brown Sequad Hospital.

As for the disposal of waste of sharp category derived from the use of COVID-19 test kits, they are placed in specific plastic sharp safety boxes that are punctured and leak proof and design so that no items can be removed. These sharp safety boxes are sealed and disposed of when three-quarters full once more through the incineration at Brown Sequad Hospital.

Mr Speaker: Ms Foo Kune!

Ms Foo Kune: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Some used COVID-19 test kits in yellow infectious healthcare waste bags from the Ministry of Health were found on a private property on 05 July of this year. Those represented serious sanitary risk constituting a potential source of COVID-19 contamination. I am tabling photos of the yellow bags of the Ministry of Health which were found with used COVID-19 test on a private property. Can the hon. Minister tell us whether an internal investigation has been carried out to determine how such hazardous waste ended up on a private property, and who are the persons responsible for such fault?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that on Saturday 02 May 2020, officers of my Ministry carried out rapid antigen test, screening activity for COVID-19 at S & S Agricultural Construction situated at Ecroignard. The abovementioned company provided transport for conveying of staff and equipment. I am further informed that upon completion of the screening activity, the company supervisor was requested by an officer of my Ministry to drop the generated waste at Flacq Hospital for disposal. The latter however refused because of risk of infection and instead proposed to incinerate the generated waste on the site itself, where incineration facilities are available.

On 06 July 2020, a complaint was made on a private radio to the effect that yellow bags containing Covid-19 test kits were found in the backyard of a person residing near the abovementioned company.

On 07 July 2020, an officer from my Ministry went to enquire with the person who made the complaint to the private radio. The officer of my Ministry was informed that someone from S & S Agricultural Construction already collected the waste bag. I am informed that the officer from my Ministry then proceeded to meet with the company supervisor whom informed the latter that he had already incinerated the waste bag. At the same time, there is an enquiry going on and the officer responsible will be determining the outcome of the enquiry. Appropriate sanction will be taken.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister list the details of the procedures for the disposal of waste in connection with the Covid-19 test kits, please?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the steps for the disposal of waste -

- it is the segregation of waste, separated according to the type. Needle sharps are separated from cotton swabs;
- inactivation of potentially infectious waste;
- packaging of waste;
- storage of waste prior to disposal, and
- final disposal of waste by incineration.

So, I have a long list of procedures.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Ms Foo Kune: Is the Minister aware that after the Police investigation you mentioned before, the infectious bags were disposed of by the neighbouring foreign workers who acknowledge to have burnt the used Covid-19 tests themselves afterwards? Is that a normal doing?

Dr. Jagutpal: I have already informed this in my answer that the officer of my Ministry has proceeded to meet with the supervisor of the company who informed the latter that the waste has already been incinerated.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Ms Foo Kune!

E-HEALTH PROJECT

(No. B/318) Ms K. Foo Kune (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the e-Health Project, he will state the -

- (a) health institutions where same is being implemented;
- (b) percentage of work completed, and
- (c) amount of funds disbursed therefor as at to date, giving a breakdown thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the e-Health project comprises three major components, namely -

- (i) Healthcare Institutions;
- (ii) Central Health Laboratory (CHL), and
- (iii) Warehouse/Central Stores Division (CSD).

The project was designed to be implemented in two phases -

- (i) Phase I of the project was linked with all the specialised hospitals, regional hospitals, Medclinics, the Community Health Hospitals and the Central Supplies Division.
- (ii) The second phase of the project consists of connecting the primary health care centres with the regional hospitals. Data collected at all levels will be captured on a centralised data centre through a Central Health Information System.

I wish to inform the House that Hospital Services Consultancy Corporation (HSCC) (India) was appointed as Consultant for the e-Health project. The consultant launched bids on 25 October 2019 in India and the closing date was 25 January 2020. However, on 05 June 2020, HSCC has informed that none of the bids received were technically responsive.

Being given that no responsive bid has been received, a steering committee co-chaired by the Permanent Secretaries of my Ministry and the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation has been set up to come up with appropriate recommendations of the e-Health Project. A technical committee set up under the steering committee is looking anew into the requirements of the project and will review the tender documents accordingly.

As I have stated, the Central Health Laboratory is the major component of the e-Health project. I wish to inform the House that the CHL is already implementing a Laboratory Information Management System which presently connects the five COVID-19 Testing Centres to the Central Laboratory Services.

Moreover, the LIMS, which will be an integral part of the e-Health is being extended to regional hospitals. Funds to the tune of Rs36 m. has been earmarked under the e-Health project for the extension of the LIMS.

Mr Speaker Sir, my Ministry is also using an Electronic Inventory Management Software (E-IMS), at the Central Supplies Division, Plaine Lauzun since January 2020. The aim of the system is to have a real-time management tool through a Computerised Inventory Stock Management System. Bar code scanners are used together with modern system of classification, codification and Common Procurement Vocabulary (CPV) for a harmonised system.

With regard to part (c) of the question, no fund has been disbursed so far. A provision of Rs62 m. has been made in my Ministry's vote for the Financial Year 2020-2021 for the e-Health Project.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Foo Kune!

Ms Foo Kune: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The e-Health Project has been announced since many years. Even in the Budget 2018-2019, there was an amount earmarked of Rs100 m. Can the hon. Minister tell us when is the estimated completion of the e-Health?

Dr. Jagutpal: Sorry, what was it? The estimated?

Ms Foo Kune: Completion.

Dr. Jagutpal: I have just mentioned in my answer again that this project has been initiated for long, but, at the same time, when the project was given to the HSCC Consultant to work out the bids, unfortunately, we did not have anybody who has been responsive to the criteria laid down. Now, we are working on it again. I believe that it's going to take some more time depending upon the reports that will be available by the two Ministries, especially the Ministry of IT also is involved into that project and, hopefully, if all that has been worked out, we will surely come up with this project.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister please inform the House briefly, on the tendering procedures that were adopted for the e-Health Project?

Dr. Jagutpal: The tendering procedure for development and execution of the e-Health system, it's after a prequalification exercise for the e-Health project the funding agency submitted a list of shortlisted potential bidders to the Consultant, HSCC. The invitation of tender was subsequently submitted to the shortlisted potential bidders on 25 October 2019 with the closing date of 25 November, which was finally extended to January.

After the closing of the bids, HSCC informed that two responsive bids were received. Those are the two companies: EIT Services, India and Telecommunication Consultants, India. On 05 June, HSCC informed that none of the bidders again were found to be technically responsive.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/331, B/332, B/333 & B/371 have been withdrawn.

Hon. Ms Foo Kune, next question!

TOURISM SECTOR - WAGE ASSISTANCE SCHEME

(No. B/319) Ms K. Foo Kune (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Wage Assistance Scheme, he will state the amount of funds disbursed to employers in the tourism sector in June 2020.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, le gouvernement a étendu le *Wage Assistance Scheme*, pour le mois de juin 2020, aux salariés du secteur du tourisme et à ceux dont les locaux ou les activités commerciales ont dû rester fermés même après la levée du couvre-feu.

Dans le cadre de ce programme, un travailleur percevant moins de R 50,000 en juin 2020 reçoit une allocation mensuelle équivalente à son salaire de base, plafonnée à R 25,000.

J'ai été informé par la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* qu'au 20 juillet 2020, un montant de R 442,9 millions a été versé pour le mois de juin 2020 à 30,323 employés travaillant dans 571 entreprises du secteur du tourisme.

Par ailleurs, il a été décidé que le *Wage Assistance Scheme* soit étendu pour le mois de juillet 2020 et ce jusqu'à la réouverture des frontières. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Foo Kune!

Ms Foo Kune: Can the hon. Minister tell the House if the Wage Assistance Scheme will be extended for the month of August?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je viens de le dire qu'il a été décidé que ce sera étendu pour le mois de juillet 2020 et ce jusqu'à la réouverture des frontières.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Reza Uteem!

Mr Uteem: May I know from the hon. Minister who decides what forms part of the tourism sector because I have received representation from many restaurants and hawkers

that their application for Wage Assistance Scheme have been turned down by the MRA. So, who defines what is tourism sector?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, il y a des critères qui ont été prédéfinis auprès du *Tourism Authority*, de la *MTPA*, de l'*AHRIM* et aussi avec *Business Mauritius* pour essayer de déterminer quelles sont les entreprises qui sont touchées par cette crise qui vont bénéficier de cette aide. Donc, il y a des critères qui ont été prédéfinis et qui sont disponibles sur le site de la *MRA*.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Quirin!

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. M. le président, j'ai en ma possession un récent communiqué du ministère des Finances qui fait état que le *Wage Assistance Scheme* et aussi le *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* seront maintenus pour le secteur du tourisme, comme le ministre lui-même l'a affirmé, jusqu'à l'ouverture des frontières. En ce qui concerne justement le *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme*, je reprends la même question que j'avais posé à l'honorable ministre de la Culture, est-ce que l'honorable ministre des Finances est au courant qu'il y a un certain nombre d'artistes qui travaillent dans les hôtels et qui n'ont toujours pas reçu, à ce jour, l'allocation du *Self-Employed Assistance pour le mois de juin 2020* ?

Mr Speaker: So, you have drawn my attention that this is the question you already put.

Mr Quirin: No, no. The Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage told me to ask the hon. Minister of Finance. So, that's why I am asking him.

Mr Speaker: I don't know if the hon. Minister has an answer to that.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, la question était sur le *Wage Assistance Scheme* et non pas sur le *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme*. Je n'ai pas les informations sur le *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme*. Je vais compiler les données et les déposer à la Chambre.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Mrs Tour!

POST CURFEW PERIOD - LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL CLUB INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY MAURITIUS – TRAINING

(No. B/320) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Liverpool Football Club International Academy Mauritius, he will, for the

benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the date on which training thereat resumed post curfew period, indicating the number of trainers.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Liverpool Football Club International Academy Mauritius that further to the lifting of the sanitary curfew, training has resumed on 22 June 2020. I am further informed to that date, 22 trainers are employed by the Academy.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Tour!

Mrs Tour: Can the hon. Minister advise how many girls formed part of the Liverpool Football Club International Academy Mauritius and are there any women trainers?

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have in all 272 trainees in different categories of age, we have 19 girls as trainees in total and we have one lady as coach.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Mrs Tour!

MONTAGNE LONGUE - SOCIAL HOUSING UNITS - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/321) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the construction of social housing units in Montagne Longue, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Housing Development Company Ltd., information as to the expected completion and delivery dates thereof.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the National Housing Development Company Ltd. has recently completed the construction of 66 housing units at Montagne Longue. The allocation exercise is presently being carried out by the company and I have been informed that the houses are expected to be delivered to the beneficiaries by September 2020, subject to all administrative and legal procedures being completed.

Mr Speaker: Do you have a supplementary?

Mrs Tour: Yes. Can the hon. Minister define the criteria set for the allocation of those social housing units in Montagne Longue?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: If my friend has a supplementary; he will have to address his question to the Speaker.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as to the criteria for allocation, if you will bear with me, I understand that the eligibility criteria are as follows –

- The applicant must not be the owner of a house or of a residential plot of land;
- He should not hold a lease, having regard to a plot of State land;
- He should not have been granted any Government sponsored loan by the MHC Ltd.;
- He must not have benefited from grant for casting of roof slab or received financial assistance from Government for the purchase of construction material;
- I understand, moreover that the monthly basic household income of an applicant should range between Rs6,200 and Rs60,000, and
- Then there are specific conditions such as a deposit of 10% and so on.

I don't know whether the hon. Lady has anything specific in mind.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister advise if provision has been made for the maintenance of the compound of the NHDC houses post-delivery?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Well, at this point in time, I understand the usual protocol would apply, that is, the actual unit would be under the responsibility of the owner occupier unless there are structural problems for which there are legal provisions. As for the common grounds, usually this is the syndic under supervision of the NHDC, but I hasten to state, Mr Speaker, Sir, maintenance of NHDC housing has been a headache for decades now and we do have to address this issue and I do intend to revisit the whole matter and would welcome suggestions from the hon. Lady if she has any.

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

Dr. Gungapersad: I would kindly request the hon. Minister, since he has a lot to address in that case.

Mr Speaker: No comments, please! Go ahead, put your question!

Dr. Gungapersad: There is a problem concerning the ceiling. Sometimes when the incumbent starts contributing, he is still in the first category between Rs6,200 to Rs10,000 but by the time, his turn comes, that person is no longer eligible because he has got increment in his salary and so on, because of Rs500 sometimes.

Mr Speaker: Put your question, supplementary question!

Dr. Gungapersad: So, if he can address that?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't think the hon. Member is referring to Montagne Longue where the ceiling of an apartment has probably just been completed. But if it is a general issue, I am sure he can approach me with any concern of his and I will try to assist.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

METRO EXPRESS PROJECT, PHASE II – MONITORING COMMITTEE

(No. B/322) **Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to Phase II of the Metro Express Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Monitoring Committee set up in relation thereto, information as to the number of meetings held, if any, with the inhabitants of Sivananda Avenue and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the number thereof who attended same, and
- (b) if minutes of meetings were taken.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Metro Express Project is a highly complex national undertaking that involves numerous stakeholders and interfaces. Nevertheless, Phase I of the project has been successfully completed as scheduled from Port Louis to Rose Hill and is currently operational.

Works on Phase II of the project which will complete the 26 kilometre rail alignment with a total of 19 stations are underway. I chair a Monitoring Committee to oversee the implementation of the project with all stakeholders in order to ensure that critical issues encountered are resolved expeditiously and are successfully dealt with.

A collaborative approach is thus in place with the involvement and commitment of relevant stakeholders such as the Police, Road Development Authority, Traffic Management

and Road Safety Unit, then the Ministry of MNI, the Municipalities and my Ministry, the Valuation Department and the NLTA, amongst others.

In addition, I am also co-chairing with hon. Bodha, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, specific meetings at the level of the Municipal Councils of Curepipe and Vacoas in the presence of Mayors, my colleague Ministers, other PPS to look into issues such as land acquisition, utility diversion, access issues, encroachment for each region. Further the Mayors are also holding weekly meetings at the level of the Municipalities to follow up on issues raised. In fact, with regard to the cases of private land acquisition, separate meetings are being held with the residents.

So, various technical meetings are held in the presence of representatives from Metro Express, Larsen & Toubro, RITES Ltd, Ministry of Housing and TMRSU and RDA and the Municipal Council of Curepipe and other stakeholders to find the best possible technical solutions and the way forward. Different options are being discussed and are being finalised with regard to the 20 plots having access issues and 10 cases of retaining wall.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, as I just said, a multi-stakeholder team comprising of the different authorities, conducts stakeholder management and door-to-door communication exercises with the residents of Sivananda Avenue in relation to various land issues and forthcoming works thereat. This is an on-going process and these exercises are being conducted since several months with the above named stakeholders. In total, the team has met about 50 families residing along Vacoas to Curepipe Metro corridor and sensitised them on the upcoming works, its associated diversions responded to each of their queries and worries, among others. Necessary information has been imparted and engagements with inhabitants of Sivananda Avenue are on-going and being undertaken collaboratively by the abovementioned stakeholders. With regard to cases of private land acquisition, as I said, separate meetings have been held and about 30 stakeholders, Mr Speaker, Sir, such as Patisserie Suisse, Novelty Cinema, Les Maquettes, Pet Lovers, together with multiple shop tenants, pharmacies, businesses, among others, along the Vacoas/Curepipe Metro corridor have already been approached by the team and briefed with requested information duly communicated to them.

In addition, public relation exercises have also been carried out by the Contractor Larsen & Toubro since November 2019, to inform and sensitise the local residents about the works and diversions and what alternative routes they should use to access their respective

houses. Around 2,500 sensitisation flyers have been prepared and distributed to the inhabitants in Curepipe so far by Larsen & Toubro Ltd. Extensive communication has also been done through different channels, namely on the MBC and on the Facebook page of Metro Express Ltd and social media.

Furthermore, engagement with the local inhabitants through the Municipal Council of Curepipe has also been carried out prior to start of any diversion or works.

In addition, an information desk has been set up by L&T Ltd at Curepipe near the junction of Sivananda Avenue and Phoenix Plaisance Road and also at the Municipal Council of Curepipe to enable residents and the public in general to be informed and be provided with answers to any query with regard to the works being carried out.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that whenever PR exercises are conducted by the team, these are registered in a database wherein the names and issues are recorded for further actions at the level of the different meetings. As for notes of meeting, these are taken whenever official meetings are conducted with the inhabitants of the Municipal Council of Curepipe. All the above, Sir, to show that we are moving ahead with this national project in a collaborative way taking on-board all the stakeholders inputs.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Bérenger!

Ms J. Bérenger: Merci. J'aimerais faire parvenir au ministre une liste répertoriant 92 habitants de l'avenue Sivananda qui sont directement impactés par l'implémentation de la phase 2 du Metro Express et qui sont pourtant toujours angoissés, dans le flou, dû au manque de communication. Etant donné que leur quotidien est en train d'être chamboulé et que la perspective de ne pas savoir où passera le tram exactement ou d'avoir un bout de leur maison qui sera détruite est une source de stress majeure pour eux. Es-ce que le ministre peut nous donner la garantie que ces habitants seront consultés et informés comme il se doit? Merci.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I inform the hon. Member that on this side of the House, not only me as Minister of Land Transport, but all the other MPs, PPS, the Ministers who have been elected in these two constituencies are equally concerned with this situation, and as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a difficult process. In fact, there are 55 encroachments on State land along Sivananda Avenue. There are 39 other plots which have to be acquired, but all this process is being done, as I just said, Mr Speaker, Sir, collaboratively and also imparting, sensitising the inhabitants, the residents about every measure or decision that is being taken. Structures have had to be removed in the cases of encroachment and all these

have been done with consent of the residents, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are technical solutions which have had to be provided. We have also proposed the technical solutions to the residents where they have been encroaching on State land. In case of acquisition, the Valuation Officers proposed the necessary compensation, even in case of disagreement on the part of the residents, discussions are being held in order to come to a solution. So, everything that needs to be done as smoothly as possible is being done, Mr Speaker, Sir. The residents of the area have to be assured that Government is very aware that this is a very difficult process and we have taken all precautions in terms of meeting regularly, in terms of liaising with the residents, in terms of proposing solutions, in terms of gathering as many technicians as possible around the same table with the inhabitants to find the solution in any case, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Supplementary question to hon. Ms Anquetil!

Ms Anquetil: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister confirm as to whether all the inhabitants of Swami Vivekananda Avenue who are affected by the Light Railway have consented to the compulsory acquisition, and whether the compensation has been paid thereof?

Mr Ganoo: The hon. Member should know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that before compulsory acquisition is resorted to, there is a series of processes which have to be respected according to the Land Acquisition Act and the officers of the Ministry of Housing and Lands who are expert in that matter, who have been doing that for years, Mr Speaker, Sir, have, of course, scrupulously respected all the procedures and then, comes the time for the transcription of the land which is done. Now, in case, the resident is not agreeable to the quantum that is being proposed to him, Mr Speaker, Sir, he has the right to go before the Board of Assessment. He has even the right to take an interim payment, Mr Speaker, Sir, pending the matter be solved, the quantum be agreed before the Board of Assessment. So, all the procedures are being respected, I can assure the hon. Member.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary question!

Ms J. Bérenger: Merci. Est-ce qu'on pourrait savoir du ministre quand est-ce que les procédures de *land compulsory acquisition* ont commencé pour les habitants de l'avenue Sivananda, s'il vous plait?

Mr Ganoo: Well, I do not have the exact date, Mr Speaker, Sir, but, as I said, I can assure the hon. Member again that the plots which have had to be acquired along that stretch,

the process has started with regard to those plots of land and respecting all the procedures which are prescribed by the Land Acquisition Act.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Deputy 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.

Mr Ganoo rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ B/323, B/324 have been withdrawn at a late stage.

(4.22 p.m.)

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded the following Bills were read a first time -

(i) The Real Estate Agent Authority Bill (No. XI of 2020)

(ii) The Supplementary Appropriation (2018-2019) Bill (No. XII of 2020)

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Supplementary Appropriation (2017-2018) (No. 2) Bill (No. VI of 2020) was read the third time and passed.

Second Reading

THE FINANCE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL (NO. VII OF 2020).

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. VII of 2020).

Question again proposed.

Mr J. F. François (First Member for Rodrigues): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as our Republic transits to a new normal in a situation of global economic model failures, people anxieties, institutions weakening, it is reasonable that Government National Budget, through the various priority measures and people's needs, is reinventing for a better and smarter future.

The hon. Minister of Finance, in a progressive redesign national Budget, is amending a composite of 70 pieces of legislations through the Finance Miscellaneous Bill 2020-2021, for the implementation of measures announced in the Budget Speech 2020-2021 and for matters connected, consequential or incidental thereto.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in this Finance Miscellaneous Bill, there are many interesting measures, to support the Banking and Financial Services, Corporate Governance, Income Tax, Value Added Tax, Public Procurement, Investment Promotion, Environmental Protection, COVID-19 Pandemic impact on employment, food security, amongst others, that are being appropriated.

In this difficult moment, mingled with the world new normal, our patriotic stand is a must for our Republic in a collective vision, action and balance to look ahead confidently with trust and accountability.

Last week, the House debated on the proposed amendments to the AML-CFT Act and, what matters most, is the interest of our Republic above all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, we are timely debating the Finance Miscellaneous Bill. I believe we are gradually redressing the situation to meet our national and international objectives. The legislations are important and I support their intents.

The strong commitment of our Republic, in a collective vision and action, as we witnessed, last week towards the AML-CFT Bill, is the right signal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now, I will briefly focus on just a few clauses of the Bill, to add my voice to the debate.

Coming more specifically, clause 21 of the Bill provides for a number of amendments to the Financial Services Act, amongst others, with a new definition for money lenders and a new section on licensing.

In the new clause 30 C, sub-clause (1)(c) of the Financial Services Act - Duties of Auditors, it is stipulated, and I quote –

“Where in the course of his audit, an auditor of a licensee of the Commission becomes aware of any matter which gives the auditor reasonable grounds to believe that...”

Very important!

“... a financial crime has been, is being or is likely to be committed; the auditor shall report such matter in writing to the Commission”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the proposed amendments, will allow to take measures to obtain timely information to prevent and address financial fraud, crime and suspicious transactions, in relation to money lenders and in the non-banking financial services.

It is a fact that, there are too much moneyed interests out there, which, at times, cause many to lose their fundamental societal objectives and responsibilities. Our Republic must continue its commitment towards preventing and reducing any situations of abuse and fraud.

The power of money should not increase our chance towards failures, bad reputations at international level and disbalancing our society, and not only that, but more also, leading to political system failures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in clause 11 of the Bill, there is provision for the Construction Industry Development Board Act to be amended to increase the value of contract, which a contractor is allowed to undertake.

I hope that the amendments, to increase the contract value, particularly for the lower grade contractor (to raise Grade F from Rs35 m. up to Rs50 m., Grade G from Rs15 m. to Rs20 m. and Grade H from Rs7.5 m. to Rs10 m.), will boost them to participate in more procurement exercise, and in the same breadth, supporting employment.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is, what will be the bearing of a Systematic Evaluation by CIDB, let us say, in the next 12 months or so, mainly for those lower grade contractors. May there be or will there be any possible downgrading during reassessment?

Mr Speaker, Sir, when I discussed with low grade contractors in Rodrigues, there is a strong request for procurement to review certain criteria for more opportunities, fair treatments and flexibilities at local level. An assessment of their concerns will give a clear indication of the weaknesses in the system requiring urgent remedial actions.

They face the problem of lack of adequate qualified resources as requested by procurement.

In certain cases, I observed, that the requirements for qualified staff are far too high for the nature and complexity of project, which at times discriminate them.

Surely, notwithstanding, that there must be quality assurance, timely delivery and control for projects implementation, the Procurement Policy Office must initiate action at local level, so that restricted biddings process for minor projects could be reserved for locals only. And, secondly, there must be official recognition of local qualified persons with genuine evidence with more than, let us say 15, 20 or 25 years of working experience or for those holding diplomas in Civil Engineering to be qualified as technical persons at local level in Rodrigues. A local database should be created for same.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another aspect of the Bill, that I would like to contribute to, is clause 12, Cooperatives Act amended to insert a new section, 79A, Cancellation of lease of State land from an Agricultural Cooperative Society that has failed to develop or left in an abandoned State agricultural land within a period of 2 years or so.

This is in accordance with section 6 of the State Lands Act, as per clause 62 (a) of the Bill. I believe that this cancellation process should not only concern the 170 *arpents* abandoned out of the 605 *arpents* by cooperative societies, as stated by hon. Bholah, but should also be applied to any abandoned or not developed State agricultural leased lands.

Mr Speaker, Sir, COVID-19 Pandemic has stressed the inherent fragility of our food systems and triggering food insecurity. The anxiety that our country could fall short of food at any time remains of great concern to us all.

Our local slogan drives it well –

“Pas compte lor manzer ki sorti de hors, compte lor manzer ki sorti dan nou la terre.”

This should be achieved by occupying, exploiting, regenerating and restoring each portion of agricultural lands through sustainable cultivation for more productivity to create a resilient food system aiming at self-sufficiency and moving towards food sovereignty for our Republic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the new era of post-COVID-19, our Future is Digital.

The Budget Speech 2020-2021 - at paragraph 362(c) - makes provision for investments by the Mauritius Investment Corporation Ltd (MIC) to assist companies to gear towards a smart and innovative-driven future Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in that regard, at Clause 16 of the Bill, the Economic Development Board Act 2017, is amended to make provision to insert a new definition for “*Smart and Innovative Mauritius Development certificate*” and “*Scheme*”, as specified in the Second Schedule.

The amendment proposed is, undoubtedly, in line with the new trend of the Digital Age and the Digital Transformation of our Republic, as detailed at paragraph B5 of the Annex to the Budget.

It is also in line, with the use of innovative technology, smart agriculture, transforming the public sector through the transformation scheme to encourage innovative companies and start-ups to develop applications, issuance of E-Commerce Certificate, use of E-Licensing System at local Government as per clause 35, E-Tax Account and E-Invoicing System at Clause 70, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to quote an article, titled “The Missing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)”, that is, to “Ensure that the Digital Age Supports People, Our Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships”, published in the International Press Service – News Agency dated 6th July 2020, where it is strongly argued that SDGs failed to address the governance of one of the most powerful forces defining humanity’s future: the Digital Age.

There is actually an influential lobbying for the Missing SDG to be adopted as a new SDG18.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to seize this opportunity, in line with Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), to plead again, let’s follow the international trend; that our Parliament must imperatively set up a Parliamentary SDG Committee, especially in this situation of COVID-19 Urgency, Climate Change Urgency and as the world is failing to achieve the 2030 SDG Agenda.

IPU recent call, last week, during a Virtual Parliamentary Forum at the United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), towards Parliaments and Parliamentarian worldwide, is to forge consensus to put SDG back on track. Certainly, this will require at local level a New SDG RESET, a new comprehensive Plan and Reform for our Republic. We must not be lagging!

This is fundamental for the years ahead of us for more sustainability and more specifically for the next Budget exercise, as our new normal is to be more and more people-centred economy and technology driven.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at Clause 18 of the Bill, the Environment Protection Act is amended to allow that an aggrieved person to appeal against the decision of the Minister of Environment with regard to an EIA.

At Clause 17, the Land Use Appeal Tribunal Act is also amended to set a time frame for the Tribunal. This is correct, but I find it deem fit that the Court Act, should be amended as well to create a more inclusive Land and Environmental Court as a one Court System.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at Clause 51, the Plant Protection Act is amended to provide for the setting up of a Biosecurity Technical Committee to regularise, specially the import of plant or plant material, which presents a high risk for the introduction or spread of pests. This will allow the Officers of the Ministry of Agriculture to have more comprehensive enforcement authority to deal with the import of plants, in order to prevent human-wildlife conflicts and to increase public safety.

In this COVID-19 situation, an increased vigilance is essential with regard not only to bio-security measures, but also to phytosanitary. Our Republic should avoid the occurrence of any outbreaks like the Food and Mouth Diseases or the Fall Army-Worms.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to put on record that the Rodrigues FMD experience is contributing to SADC countries to learn from us, as Dr. Mrs Samoisy, Veterinary at the Regional Assembly has been nominated by the University of Pretoria in collaboration with the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), to act as resource person for an online training course on Foot and Mouth Disease - Commodity based trade for SADC countries.

I seize this opportunity to congratulate both Dr. Mr Samoisy and Dr. Mrs Samoisy for the excellent job accomplished during the FMD outbreaks in 2016.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my last point is about clause 73 - Savings for the repealed Mauritius Ex-Services Trust Fund Act for the “ex-servicemen”, who deserved our respect and to be truly cherished dearly and not only during Remembrance Day or Poppy Day Appeal, as they are our World War II heroes.

Clause 73 provides for the payment of pensions to ex-servicemen to be effected by the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity and for the *Association Espoir des Anciens Combattants de l’île Rodrigues*. It will be effected by the Commission for Social Security of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

Mr Speaker Sir, last week, I was discussing with a 91-year old *ancien combattant de Rodrigues*, Mr Sandragassin Anthony, who proudly served in the British Royal Pioneer Corps between 1939 and 1945 in Israel/Palestine. He reminded me of the rich history of their electrifying World War 2 missions.

Mr Anthony, one of the last Rodriguan living archive of World War 2, has requested me, to plead on their behalf, for Government to review or to re-evaluate, in line with the increased cost of living, their ex-serviceman pension, funeral grant to an ex-serviceman or to his widow and access to medicine as ex-serviceman, especially for those who domiciled in Rodrigues, being given that there is no private hospital or clinic in Rodrigues.

I will also propose that for all late ex-servicemen in Rodrigues, who passed away, let's say as from year 2000 or so, to have an inscription on their grave with their names, branch or regiment served during World War 2. This is a legacy of our history.

Additionally, I will propose that for the few ex-servicemen who are still alive, that a programme be initiated to include them to go to school to share their experience with our children as part of our history, not to talk about the ills of war but about what made them a '*combatant*', as our new normal societal change, today requires a new generation of "*jeune citoyen combattant*". That's for our Republic. A new generation of "*jeune citoyen combattant*".

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, I won't be long, with the spirits and proudness of "*un jeune combattant*", that would be my contribution and I thank you for your kind attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Bérenger!

(4.45 p.m.)

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président. Merci de me permettre d'intervenir ce soir sur ce projet de loi. Permettez-moi de partager mon inquiétude quant aux pouvoirs accrus qui sont en train d'être accordés à Landscape à travers le *Finance Bill 2020*.

Petit à petit, les langues se délient et les scandales qui se cachaient au sein de cette institution commencent à se faire connaître et c'est pourtant à cette même institution que le gouvernement est en train de vouloir donner plus de pouvoirs. Nous sommes en droit de nous poser des questions surtout au vu des dernières révélations ou quand on voit comment certains projets sont en train d'être gérés.

M. le président, il ne suffit pas que l'on donne à un projet un titre ronflant ou qu'il soit développé dans la circonscription du Premier ministre, pour qu'il ne devienne pas un autre éléphant blanc. Lors de mon discours sur le budget, je demandais à savoir si des études de faisabilité avaient été faites au préalable concernant le *Côte d'Or Data Technology Park*. La raison de ce questionnement était précisément parce que la technopole de Rose Belle avait été développée sans étude de faisabilité et l'on connaît les résultats. Un éléphant blanc de R 300 millions qui continue à coûter très cher en maintenance et c'est l'argent des contribuables qui est gaspillé. Et voilà que devant l'inquiétude des citoyens, la responsable de *Landscape* annonçait fin juin que des études de faisabilité seront effectuées pour le *Côte d'Or Data Technology Park* mais après l'appel d'offres. Le gouvernement choisit donc de ne pas tirer les leçons du passé et de refaire encore une fois les choses à l'envers. Mais la question est : dans quel intérêt peut-on vouloir refaire la même erreur pour pouvoir développer un projet aussi couteux sans avoir la garantie qu'il sera économiquement viable ? Certainement pas dans l'intérêt des contribuables !

Le fait de se lancer tête baissée dans un projet d'une telle envergure ne rassure pas quand on sait les allégations qui pèsent sur cette institution depuis quelques temps et pendant que l'intérêt économique national de ce projet reste à être prouvé, le tort à l'environnement élu certains. Le *Master Plan* est en cours de réalisation et *Landscape* ne vient certainement pas enlever la canne pour, par exemple, assurer notre sécurité alimentaire à travers l'agriculture vivrière mais pour y mettre ni plus ni moins que du béton.

Aux noms des contribuables, je demande au gouvernement de ne pas refaire la même erreur et de s'assurer de la viabilité de ce projet avant de l'implémenter. Et à côté de cela, est-ce que *Landscape* a les compétences requises pour évaluer les permis de conversions ? Est-ce que de par le nouveau rôle qui lui sera attribué, les autorités locales, le ministère de l'agro-agriculture ou celui des terres et du logement ne seront plus consultés ? Comment est-ce que *Landscape* aidera concrètement les petits planteurs dans leur demande de conversion ? Nous attendons à ce que le gouvernement vienne nous éclairer sur ces points.

M. le président, le secteur de la construction avait été présenté dans le discours du budget comme étant le poumon de la relance économique. Pendant que l'île Maurice se paye de la publicité aux frais des contribuables dans *The Economist* pour se déclarer *Coronavirus zone-free*, l'île de la Dominique fait réellement la une en devenant le premier *hurricane-proof and climate resilient country in the world* afin de se protéger des super cyclones qui vont augmenter en puissance destructrice et en nombre avec le réchauffement climatique. La

Dominique a choisi de construire des infrastructures et une économie qui puissent résister aux cyclones en ayant pour objectif ultime de devenir une île biologique conjuguant l'écotourisme, l'agrotourisme, le tourisme de santé, la pratique d'un commerce éthique et équitable qui n'exige pas une consommation excessive des ressources naturelles du pays. Le pays a été récompensé par la certification *Green Globe 21* et cela en fait une destination touristique attrayante. La Dominique a, par ailleurs, été classée par le magazine *The Economist* comme le pays à plus forte croissance du PIB par rapport à l'année précédente, soit 8.8%. Nos dirigeants devraient prendre note car rien de tout ça n'est malheureusement prévu ici. Bien au contraire, pour encourager donc les constructions, le gouvernement prévoyait d'amender l'*Environment and Land Use Appeal Tribunal Act* en catimini pour restreindre ceux qui auraient le droit de faire appel des décisions du ministère de l'Environnement concernant les *EIAs*. Le gouvernement cherchait visiblement à empêcher les citoyens engagés dans la préservation de notre environnement et de notre littoral, d'utiliser la voie légale pour adresser leur contestation.

Au final, nous remarquons que le gouvernement a fait marche arrière sur ce point mais cela reste quand même difficile de faire appel de la décision de donner un permis EIA qu'à 21 jours pour soumettre tous les documents pour contester une décision représente un délai très court et constitue en soi une atteinte aux droits de tout citoyen de pouvoir faire appel.

Le gouvernement n'est donc pas allé de l'avant avec l'amendement au *Environment and Land Use Appeal Tribunal Act* qui était prévu mais il fallait qu'il trouve un autre moyen pour faciliter, entre autres, les 34 projets de construction pour un avertissement de R 62 milliards comme annoncé dans le discours du Budget. Et c'est là où j'aimerais attirer l'attention sur un point particulier du *Finance Bill* qui n'était pas annoncé dans le budget.

Le droit de faire appel auprès du Tribunal de l'Environnement et de l'aménagement du territoire, contre un *building permit* est établi à la sous-section 14 de la section 117 du *Local Government Act* qui dit –

“Any person aggrieved by a decision of a Municipal City Council, Municipal Town Council or District Council under subsections (7)(b), (8)(b) or (12) may, within 21 days of receipt of the notification, appeal to the Environment and Land Use Appeal Tribunal established under section 3 (1) of the Environment and Land Use Appeal Tribunal Act.”

Et la section 35 du *Finance Bill* dit –

“*Person aggrieved*” means a person whose application for an Outline Planning Permission or a Building and Land Use Permit has not been approved by a Municipal City Council, Municipal Town Council or District Council.”

Cet amendement a attiré mon attention sur le fait que seuls les promoteurs de construction qui n’auraient pas obtenu leur *building and land use permit*, peuvent faire appel et non des riverains ou des citoyens qui se sentiraient *aggrieved* par une construction. Quelle garantie le gouvernement donnera-t-il pour rassurer les citoyens qui se sentent *aggrieved* par un projet ou une éventuelle décision administrative ? Est-ce que les *public notifications* seront toujours obligatoires lors de l’application pour un *building and land use permit*? Quelle est l’utilité de ces *public notifications* si le public lui-même ne peut pas contester ces applications ?

Est-ce que les plaintes de ces citoyens seront réellement entendues lorsqu’ils contesteront un permis de construction auprès des autorités locales car ils ne pourront pas le faire auprès du tribunal de l’environnement. Tout citoyen, M. le président, doit pouvoir saisir les tribunaux pour contester une décision administrative qui l’affecte et cette amendement au *Local Government Act* ne prend en considération ni l’impact social, ni l’impact environnemental que peuvent avoir certains projets et qui doivent pouvoir être contestés par les citoyens si besoin est.

Prenons d’abord l’aspect environnemental. Pour rappel, la section 2 de l’*Environment Protection Act* dit –

“*Every person in Mauritius shall use his best endeavours to preserve and enhance the quality of life by caring responsibly for the natural environment of Mauritius.*”

Et à défaut d’avoir un organisme indépendant qui serait chargé de s’assurer de la protection de l’environnement, comme nous l’avons proposé dans le manifeste électoral du MMM lors de la dernière campagne électorale, ce sont les citoyens qui doivent assumer ce rôle de chiens de garde. Le ministre de l’environnement appelle lui-même souvent les Mauriciens à devenir des éco-citoyens mais j’aimerais qu’il nous dise comment devenir des éco-citoyens si le droit à agir pour protéger l’environnement est diminué. Encore une fois, malheureusement, M. le président, les paroles sont en contradiction avec les actions.

M. le président, comme le ministre de l’environnement l’a souligné lui-même dans son discours, il existe une liste des projets qui requiert un permis EIA, plus précisément le

Fifth Schedule de l'*Environment Protection Act* et parmi eux figure, par exemple, le *Housing Project and Apartments above 50 units within one kilometer of high-water mark*. Ce qui fait que les projets ne dépassant pas les 50 unités et qui ne sont pas dans le *one kilometre of high-water mark* ne sont pas soumis à l'obligation d'un *EIA*. Bien évidemment, nous le savons, éviter les procédures de permis *EIA*, permet d'éviter les éventuelles contestations du public et c'est ainsi que nous avons pu voir émerger, comme par hasard, des projets de villas de luxe sur la zone côtière ne dépassant pas les cinquante villas ou appartements et qui ont donc été construits sans permis *EIA*.

Je ne pointerai du doigt personne en particulier, mais nous avons vu des personnes aller demander directement des *building permits* aux autorités locales sans passer par le ministère de l'environnement et sans avoir obtenu, au préalable, un permis *EIA* alors même que ces projets sont souvent construits dans des zones comprenant nombre de *wetland*, des drains naturels et viennent menacer des éco- systèmes qui sont essentiels à la bonne santé des plages, de nos coraux, de nos lagons et qui permettent de lutter contre l'érosion côtière accélérée de nos côtes.

Que le ministre de l'Environnement lui-même a regretté dans son discours. Et alors même que l'*Environment Protection Act* dit clairement qu'un permis *EIA* est obligatoire pour tout projet se faisant *in environmentally sensitive areas such as water catchment areas, water logged areas, wetlands, mountains, slopes and islets*. Donc, dans ce genre de cas, faute de pouvoir contester l'*EIA* quand il n'existe pas, l'autre recours qui resterait aux citoyens serait de contester le permis de construction du projet. Or, cela n'est pas possible car ce droit est réservé aux promoteurs qui n'ont pas obtenu leur permis de construction.

M. le président, si le ministre de l'environnement est vraiment sincère dans sa volonté de protéger notre patrimoine écologique, j'aimerais lui demander de faire en sorte que ce type de projet que je viens décrire et qui échappe à la loi et à l'obligation d'être soumis à un *EIA*, soit inclus dans les *undertakings requiring an EIA or a Preliminary Environment Report*. Car ce qui est important, M. le président, n'est pas le nombre d'unités. Qu'il s'agisse de 45,50, ou même 60 unités ce n'est pas important. Ce qui est vraiment important, c'est que le projet ne vienne pas dégrader davantage notre patrimoine écologique. Le ministre a le pouvoir de demander à ce qu'un projet qui ne se trouve pas sur la liste soit soumis à un *EIA* ou à un *Preliminary Environment Report*. Donc, s'il est vraiment sincère, je suis sûre qu'il utilisera les prérogatives qui lui sont allouées par la loi pour que davantage des projets soient soumis à des *EIAs* et puissent ainsi être contestés devant le tribunal de l'environnement si besoin est.

Maintenant, en ce qui concerne l'aspect social, pareillement qu'il s'agisse de la construction des salles de fête, des casinos en plein quartier résidentiel ou à côté des écoles, les membres du public n'ont pas le droit de se considérer comme des *aggrieved persons*. Dans le cas du *bad neighbourhood*, un habitant, un voisin qui se sentirait *aggrieved* n'aurait d'autres choix que d'aller en Cour suprême alors même que l'*Environment and Land Use Appeal Tribunal* avait été créé pour éviter trop de formalité et l'on sait combien les procédures peuvent être longues et couteuses en Cour suprême et donc, pas facilement accessible à tous. Et c'est comme cela, par exemple, que des habitants de ma circonscription, ne pouvant pas contester le projet de construction d'une salle de mariage en plein milieu résidentiel, devant le tribunal de l'environnement, ils n'ont pas pu le faire non plus devant la Cour Suprême parce que cela impliquerait une procédure trop lourde.

Par ailleurs, le *locus standi* était déjà restreint et les citoyens devaient démontrer comment une décision administrative les affectent pour pouvoir la contester. Le gouvernement aurait pu choisir de ne pas le restreindre davantage et de prendre plutôt exemple sur l'Inde. En Inde, avec le *public action*, n'importe quel citoyen ou organisation peut contester une décision administrative qui a un intérêt public, ce qui est beaucoup plus sain. L'Inde est prise en exemple par les membres de la majorité depuis le début de ce débat. Voilà un exemple concret où le gouvernement pourrait avoir l'occasion de s'inspirer de la grande péninsule pour s'assurer qu'un plus grand nombre de personnes puissent contester une décision administrative abusive. Au lieu de restreindre davantage le *locus standi*, j'invite donc le gouvernement d'aller plutôt dans la même direction que l'Inde et je fais un appel pour qu'il vienne rassurer les citoyens sur le fait que leurs droits ne soient pas bafoués.

Pour terminer, M. le président, j'aimerais citer Edouard Osborne Wilson, entomologiste et biologiste qui a popularisé le terme 'biodiversité' dans la littérature scientifique et qui dit "l'humanité ne se définit pas par ce qu'elle crée mais par ce qu'elle choisit de ne pas détruire".

Je vous remercie pour votre attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I choose for a break, 45 minutes.

At 4.59 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.50 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah!

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. D. Koonjoo-Shah): Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to, first of all, thank you for giving to me the opportunity to share my views on the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2020.

Mr Speaker Sir, we need to consider the fact that it is always appropriate to take on board the broader international context in which we are called to steer the development of any country for the wellbeing of its people. We are not an exception to this rule of governance, Mr Speaker Sir.

Let us consider the analytical reports from the World Bank, and with your permission, I shall quote extracts from its June 8, 2020 report on “The Global Economic Outlook During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Changed World”.

- The Report states, Mr Speaker, Sir, that “as the health and human toll grows, the economic damage is already evident and represents the largest economic shock the world has experienced in decades”.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought economic activity to a near-standstill as countries imposed tight restrictions on movement to halt the spread of the virus.
- The pandemic is expected to plunge most countries into recession in 2020, with per capita income contracting in the largest fraction of countries globally since 1870.
- Over the longer horizon, the deep recessions triggered by the pandemic are expected to leave lasting scars through lower investment, an erosion of human capital through lost work and schooling, and fragmentation of global trade and supply linkages.
- For emerging market and developing countries, many of which face daunting vulnerabilities, it is critical to strengthen public health systems, to address the challenges posed by informality, and implement reforms that will support strong and sustainable growth once the health crisis abates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a wake-up call for each and every citizen of the country, starting with our political leaders, some of whom (with their constant prophesizing of doom) seem very impatient to see our people suffer, impatient to see the country down on its knees or impatient to see us go back to lockdown and our economic activity goes into a standstill

mode. We do not need this kind of political leaders, Mr Speaker, Sir. As much as we all wish that the world was spared this pandemic, one must admit that the COVID-19 has provided us with the chance to value real leadership in the face of adversity. And let me put this on record, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Prime Minister has, once again, brilliantly proven his mettle.

We are not in the business as usual mode, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are in a new normal mode. This mode calls for strategic reforms and transformation, innovativeness, solidarity and engagement, sustainability and inclusiveness.

I had, Mr Speaker, Sir, during my intervention on the Budget 2020-2021, laid emphasis on those points. What remains constant, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the commitment of this Government towards its people at all times and in particular, during this harsh time we are all going through.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to comment on a few points that perfectly translates the strategic reforms and transformation into legislative enforcement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Finance Bill highlights the need for urgent action to cushion the pandemic's health and economic consequences, to protect vulnerable population, and to set the stage for a lasting recovery.

The amendments to the Banking Act, to the Bank of Mauritius Act and the Financial Services Act.

Mr Speaker Sir, the FinTech, the use of crypto currencies, the use of block chains will have a huge impact on the ways we do banking businesses traditionally. I am, thus, happy to note that the Banking Act is being modified to now recognise digital banking business, that is, banking business carried on exclusively through digital means or electronically. The Bank of Mauritius Act will now provide digital banking licences to companies which will carry on exclusively digital banking business. The recognition of digital currency is now possible with the amendments in the Bank of Mauritius Act, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The same applies to the amendments in the Financial Services Sector. These amendments now define moneylenders other than banks or non-bank deposit taking institutions and peer-to-peer lending which is defined as a financial business activity enabling a person to lend funds through an online portal or electronic platform which matches lenders and borrowers. And this, Mr Speaker, Sir, is one step towards the new normal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the amendments to the Banking Act, the Bank of Mauritius Act and the Financial Services Act pave the way to a transformational change in the banking landscape and are going to be very impactful in the future in ensuring continuity and competitiveness of our businesses. It translates the trends in our innovative ways of doing banking businesses.

The Introduction of a Business Obstacle Alert Mechanism.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is ranked 13th out of 190 countries assessed according to the latest edition of the Ease of Doing Business Report 2020 of the World Bank. This represents the best ranking ever for Mauritius since the publication of the report in 2007. Mauritius consolidated its lead position on the African continent as the best place for doing business. Last year, Mauritius was ranked 20th globally, progressing from the 25th position in 2017, and 49th in 2016. Our country also ranks second among Middle-Income economies, just behind Malaysia which also scored 81.5 points, just like Mauritius. This leapfrogging in our ranking is due to the continuous effort and commitment of this Government to improve the competitiveness of our country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government of Mauritius will put in place a Business Obstacle Alert Mechanism. The functions of this mechanism are meant to –

- enable an enterprise to log in any bottlenecks in relation to delays in determination of licences, permits and other clearances, and
- enquire about any issue and make recommendations to public sector agencies.

This measure, Mr Speaker, Sir, is yet another strong one that goes in line with our strategies to consolidate the position of Mauritius in the ease of doing business.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to now comment on the setting up of a Sports Economic Commission. We all know that Mauritius has talents that have proven themselves in the different streams of sports at very competitive levels.

The Finance Bill 2020 makes provision for the setting up of a Sports Economic Commission with the aim to -

- promote Mauritius as an international centre for the hosting of international multi-disciplinary sports events, and

- also aims at facilitating and promoting the Mauritius Sportstech Incubator for start-ups.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if we are to improve our competitiveness in sports, in addition to the world class existing facilities that we have in Mauritius, we need to provide the framework for sports to evolve into a vibrant industry; and the more we look at sports from an industry perspective, the more we can open up opportunities for associated-businesses to be linked up.

Mr Speaker Sir, we have experienced how solidarity played an important part in our national efforts to combat the pandemic. Mauritius has always shown this spirit in hard times and we have, Mr Speaker, Sir, been able to rise up any challenge as a nation full of resilience amidst the roughest tempest. One of the ways we need to demonstrate this solidarity and equity is to balance the act of imposing additional taxation and boosting the economy. Mr Speaker, Sir, while measures of the Budget and the Financial Bill 2020 ease out the burden of personal tax by increasing the threshold, we have to call upon the understanding of many of our compatriots to the contribution to this solidarity levy at the rate of 25% in excess of Rs3 m. of his income. Likewise, the same principle of solidarity and equity has been applied in many tax computations, Mr Speaker, Sir.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, much incentives have been given in terms of tax relief to businesses. The expenditure incurred on patents and franchises, where, in an income year, a company incurs; costs to comply with international quality standards and norms. All these incentives, Mr Speaker, Sir, provide “*une bouffée d’air frais*” to those businesses which run or wish to run on franchise.

With regard to the wage assistance to technically unemployed, true it is, Mr Speaker, Sir, that many businesses have not been spared by the Covid-19 Pandemic, not only in the hotel sector but also in other sectors where vulnerability is at its peak. The Government Wage Assistance Scheme and other measures such as the Transition and Employment Benefit will ensure that eligible employees in the private sector, who are technically unemployed, receive an adequate financial assistance during a specified period. This scheme concerns both Mauritians and foreign employees working in Mauritius. Such measures, Mr Speaker, Sir, demonstrates the commitment of this Government to honour the social contract it has towards thousands of employees, in particular, those who are in a very vulnerable position at the moment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am happy to note that amendments will be brought to the Economic Development Board Act 2017 to enable the EDB to introduce a “Smart and Innovative Mauritius Development Scheme” and issue to that effect a “Smart and Innovative Mauritius Development Certificate”. This, Mr Speaker, Sir, goes along the lines of our strategic economic transformation to bring in more innovative businesses that will contribute to the growth of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this scheme will encourage the creation of organisation, institution, centres engaged in research, development in fields of biotechnology; pharmaceutical; nutraceutical; biomedical technologies and medical research. This is, Mr Speaker, Sir, yet another transformational change in the business landscape of our country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the amendment to the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing Act to operate and manage a national wholesale market is again another change in the landscape of the agricultural or agri-business of Mauritius. The impact on this sector, on which we rely so much for our post-Covid recovery, is going to be tremendous.

The coming into operation of the National Wholesale Market provides the necessary infrastructure for the handling of fruits and vegetables for onward sale. It puts in place a fair and transparent mechanism for setting up the price of fruits and vegetables with a view to ensuring that the planters obtain a reasonable price for their produce; providing a modern and accessible market information system on the evolution in this price of the produce. Through this operation, Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is addressing a critical missing gap in our food production and supply chain much to the benefit of thousands of our planters.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are not living in a context, today and in the near future, whereby we keep our old paradigms and hope that things will change for the better. In this context of unknowns, we need to be bold as a nation as no-one is able to forecast today, with confidence, the depth and the duration of this economic contraction.

This, Mr Speaker, Sir, is where the leadership of this Government differentiates itself from that of other parties: through the measures enunciated in its 2020-2021 Budget and in the Finance Bill 2020. This Government’s leadership showed boldness, it has demonstrated innovativeness. It transcends the belief that we can make it “*ensam*”, together in this unprecedented difficult period in our history because the people have trust in the Government and its leadership. I wish, Mr Speaker, Sir, to highly commend, once again, the excellent

work done by our Prime Minister, and by the hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development.

I thank you very much for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

(6.07 p.m.)

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the House on the Finance Bill.

I will particularly comment on two clauses of the Bill, namely the Medical Council Act at clause 41 and the Pharmacy Act at clause 50 of the Bill. Mr Speaker, Sir, it will be presumptuous of me to share my views on the 71 clauses due to time constraint and also my limited expertise in some aspects of the Bill.

However, many friends on this side of the House have already commented on the number of fiscal policies that have gone the very short test of time and thus been modified, changed as compared to its initial presentation during the Budget Speech. Mr Speaker, Sir, a sequence of backpedalling, self-denial and pleading ignorance seems to have taken precedence of the upbeat Budget Speech which was accompanied by the numerous *tap latab*. I do, however, note that the Minister of Finance has taken cognizance of the outcry regarding the Solidarity Tax, the discrepancies of tax levied on Mauritians as compared to foreign residents having similar income, amongst others, and has since then made sensible amendments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now refer to the proposed amendment to the Medical Council Act section 22, subsection (1)(c)(a), where it is recommended to delete the words “such examination as the Council thinks fit” and replacing them by the words “an examination.”

The word “examination” on its own is far too vague since this examination is being carried out at a very crucial and specific time in the medical career of a newly qualified doctor, following his/her internship/training of 18 months. I, therefore, suggest that it still be called “medical registration examination”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the frequency of this examination needs to be mentioned as it is an important landmark as to whether it is a 6 monthly or yearly examination. Because of the

time lag that would exist between the completion of 18 months of internship and preparing for examination by the junior graduate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one has to keep in mind that an aspiring doctor will have plenty more examinations to sit in the future should he/she seek to attain specialisation or sub-specialisation and if the Medical Council were to standardise registration of specialist degrees in the future through examination, each examination conducted by the Council needs to be name specific.

Talking about specialist registration, currently, the Post Graduate Board comprises of 3 specialists who make such assessment on the basis of an oral, theoretical knowledge with no practical evaluation of surgical specialities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it would have been an opportunity to bring amendments to the Medical Council Act so as to standardise and assess properly specialist since they graduate from numerous universities around the world with different standards of practice.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the second amendment at section 22 of the Medical Council Act is -

“Adding new subsection (4) for the purpose of having - with the administrative assistance of the Council, be conducted by such examining body of international repute as the Minister may, after consultation with the Council, approve.”

I suggest that such “examining body” includes “national or international repute or both as the Minister may, after consultation with the Council, approve”. Already the Medical Council has sent correspondence to all specialists and consultants in this country as to submit their name as a possibility of being a candidate or either to set a bank of multiple questions for the purpose of conducting examinations. I do have a copy of this correspondence anyway, if anyone wants to consult. The request has been sent for the purpose of probably having a National Board of Examiners and having a National Bank of questions.

The administrative assistance goes without saying that it is paramount for the smooth conduct of the examinations. Mr Speaker, Sir, those examinations should reflect the vast pattern of diseases that are common in Mauritius and which the new graduate will be facing daily either in the Emergency Department or in the hospital wards. It is, therefore, extremely important that the examiners, be it of national or international repute, have a feel of our commonest pathologies that prevails and it is why I strongly believe as a Senior Consultant, myself, in Obstetrics and Gynaecology and like in other specialities, my friends who are good

clinicians and surgeons, have been qualified from top-notch medical institutions, be empowered to set examinations together with the expertise of foreign institutions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since we are being marketed as a medical hub, we do therefore, have the knowledge and clinical skills that are being recognised internationally and the proof is that we have more and more foreign patients that come to seek medical treatment in Mauritius and as seen recently one Malagasy patient did come by a private jet.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to make a plea to the Minister of Health on behalf of the number of the newly qualified doctors who have already registered as pre-registration trainee with the Medical Council and awaiting to be recruited as pre-registration doctors in the public hospital. That number amount to approximately 175 to 180.

Mr Speaker, Sir, many of these young graduates come from low to middle class families whose parents have taken bank loan to support their academic studies and who were supposed and expected to be the pride of the family. Sadly, some of them are today even taking job as pharmacy dispenser, looking for Nursing Assistant post, working as brick layer in the construction business or any manual job in an attempt to support their families. This is heart-breaking. This is heart-breaking because of the sacrifice these young doctors have made during their 6 years of academic lives; heart-breaking because their parents cannot, today, have the pride that their youngsters, their sons and daughters work as doctors.

In this context, I request the Minister of Health that all these pre-registration trainees since 2015, be given a fair chance to be recruited as Pre-Reg Doctors so that in 18 months' time, they can take their exams and get fully registered. A policy of pick and choose or selective approach must not prevail. Finance at the Ministry of Health should not be an issue to recruit these youngsters because of their spending spree that we have been seeing recently.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as for the French specialists which was mentioned, already qualified in France and registered at *l'Ordre des Médecins*, the Minister may request the Medical Council to have an MOU with the French counterpart as to the satisfaction of training of our nationals trained over there and requesting to come back to serve the country.

M. le président, c'est impensable qu'un chirurgien hautement qualifié en France ou médecin en médecine interne et qui exerce comme chef de clinique pendant des années est appelé à faire un internat de 18 mois à Maurice avant qu'il puisse pratiquer. Si des exemptions du *Medical Council* sont autorisées à des *visiting Consultants* venant de France ou de la Réunion pour aider nos confrères dans certaines spécialités, pourquoi pas nos

propres compatriotes qui ont eu des responsabilités attribuées en France pour leur connaissance médicale, ne peuvent pas le faire ? Certes la solution peut être trouvée, il suffit d'avoir du bon sens.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope, in the interest of good practice of medicines, these two amendments, that is, examination to be referred as a medical registration examination in section 22, subsection (1)(ca) and section 22, subsection (2) examining body of international repute be replaced by examining body of national or international or both be considered.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now comment on the very topical Pharmacy Act whereby section 2 of the Act is being amended in the definition of standards and deleting “or European” and replacing by “European or Indian”.

M. le président, dans le fond, c'est une bonne chose et je redis dans le fond, c'est une bonne chose mais dans la forme, l'honorable ministre, j'ai des fortes appréhensions. Il ne faut pas sourire quand il va de la sécurité et la qualité des médicaments pour notre population, il n'y a pas de compromis quand il s'agit de la santé de notre population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, incorporating Indian Pharmacopoeia will go in a long way in breaking monopoly and cartel but extreme caution and I repeat extreme caution is required.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me explain myself. So much confusion and different information has been given about the interpretation and the understanding of Indian Pharmacopoeia. Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission is an autonomous institution of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in India which sets standards of all drugs that are manufactured, sold and consumed in India. Indian Pharmacopoeia is standards set to manufacture, sell and consume drugs in India alone. Indian Pharmacopoeia drugs are destined for the local market. Indian Pharmacopoeia is a regional standard which does not conduct quality control test as per standards set by the World Health Organisation. While British Pharmacopoeia, European one and the US Pharmacopoeia are international standards having the good manufacturing practice, a quality standard set by the WHO that has an important role in assuring guidelines in pharmaceutical products to avoid 4 things –

- 1) cross contamination;
- 2) mixed up;
- 3) counterfeit medications, and
- 4) false labelling.

I am tabling it, if you want to see it, it has been tabled before. We already had the problem of false labelling before concerning very important drugs such as sodium valproate being replaced by Clavulanic acid and Amoxicillin acid, known as Augmentin.

Drugs manufactured under the USP Pharmacopoeia, British Pharmacopoeia are not saleable in India local market, *per se*, so as to protect the emergence of their local manufacturers and local market economy of the pharmaceutical industry in India. If we were to buy India Pharmacopoeia drugs, we are also accepting to buy drugs, unfortunately, by bogus importers from wholesalers and not solely buy from manufacturers.

There are 33,000 pharmaceutical companies in India that exports drugs and they all have the British and the United States Pharmacopoeia standards. Mauritius has always imported drugs from India, from highly reputed companies such as Cipla, Ranbaxy, Glenmark, AstraZeneca with BP, British Pharmacopoeia and United States Pharmacopoeia accreditation. Accepting such international standards imply our procurement process are harmonised in line with the SADC.

With British Pharmacopoeia, European Pharmacopoeia and the US Pharmacopoeia, we benefit, *de facto*, and this very important, we benefit, *de facto*, from inspection and control from the US FDAs and the European Middle East African Institution for public procurement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if we are to allow India Pharmacopoeia drug which I repeat is meant for the local Indian market, which usually do not have the COMP certificate, then do we have a quality control lab for medicine imported in Mauritius? We are here talking of a serious aspect of security, safety, quality and efficacy of medication that would be given to our public, particularly those attending the public hospitals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my concern is what? 80% of the population do not attend the private institution, private clinic. 80% of the population go the public sector and we have a duty.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, would mind coming back to the Finance Bill?

Dr. Aumeer: Yes, I will. I am trying to explain why I have an issue with having the Pharmacy Act amended. All I am saying is to prove my point that I personally have strong concerns with Indian Pharmacopoeia coming without having any barriers as to quality control.

Mr Speaker: You already made that point! Move on!

Dr. Aumeer: I still have to make the point, Mr Speaker, Sir. Please!

Mr Speaker: I am ruling! Hon. Member, I am ruling! You cannot comment after my ruling. Carry on! You already made the point! Carry on!

Dr. Aumeer: Okay, thank you. We have a duty to protect and to ensure that we get the best and if we, from this side of the House and even you, on the other side of the House who do not fight for our close ones, kids, kin, who will do that? And I put the question to all Members of the House: will you accept medications that have not gone through the rigorous testing, or will you request for the best when you shop at the counter? I am sure because we all here, mostly, can afford to go to private chemist and get the best medication, we will look for the best.

Mr Speaker, Sir, unless we have a highly advanced quality control lab then it will be safe to have such medications in Mauritius. We do not, for the time being, have a quality control lab and only when quality issues arise then random sample of incremented batches are sent to Government Analytic Division at Réduit. It is only then that comparative tests are bought to compare. Our imported medications are not accredited by the Mauritius Standards Bureau because we have always and always been buying Indian drugs accredited with European Pharmacopoeia, US Pharmacopoeia and British Pharmacopoeia. Two third of the medicine bought in Mauritius for the public sector come from India and we fully support that and this is being on-going for years but at the same time, we have been buying generics from reputed companies that have got the GMP certificate, such as Ranbaxy, Cipla, Glenmark, Dr. Reddy's Lab, Intas, Zim Lab. The Pharmacy Board has a database of registered products and only those products registered can be put on sale.

Mr Speaker, Sir, listening to the hon. Minister of Finance during his intervention last Tuesday, with regard to the Gambling Regulatory Act whereby at Clause 25, the Minister mentioned about having laboratory test to supervise gambling machines. I recommend and I hope that our Minister of Health for such life dependent commodity, such as drugs whereby no provision for either upgrading or setting of a new control lab is mentioned that amendments be made.

Indeed, there is Pharmacovigilance Department at the Ministry of Health, but my information is that there is not even follow-up on adverse drug reaction and if we were to accept Indian Pharmacopoeia, can we, therefore, include the Chinese Pharmacopoeia or even

the Japanese Pharmacopoeia? Because the active pharmaceutical ingredient, all comes from China. So, it does make sense that we do include China and Japan as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding backdating the amendment to January 2019, I request if the Minister of Health will give us some information as to why this amendment needs to be backdated for 18 months? Is that good governance? Is it a ploy to protect certain suppliers who have already delivered Indian Pharmacopoeia medications months before as per their pro forma advice given to them and therefore, payments can be expedited? Or is there such a huge stock of medications IP that have been imported since long and awaiting to be taken on-board by the Ministry of Health? We need formal clarification to this issue. Backdating to a maximum of 6 weeks would have been far reasonable. The Minister is, however, compelled to give us some explanation as to why such a lengthy backdate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now comment on what hon. Minister Seeruttun mentioned in his address last week pertaining that we are very happy to go to India and have treatment there, but we are apparently against the Indian drugs, and I quote –

“So many Mauritians go for treatment in India. Why do they go there?”

Saying that because we are telling India is substandard. My hon. friend probably, with due respect to him, made the comments from what he has been advised and told. However, I would like to point out that we, Mauritians, go to India for treatment and the main reasons are –

Firstly, the advanced logistics of medical care in cardiology, cancer, sub-speciality like paediatric surgery, in vitro fertilisation, among others.

Secondly, the highly trained medical consultants in many sub-specialities.

Today, speciality is no longer the talk of the town, sub-speciality is what makes things happen, example, we had it recently the separation of conjoint twins, recently liver transplant.

Thirdly, advanced therapeutics, bone marrow transplant, and

Fourthly the low cost.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these treatments are usually carried out in the very best of Indian hospitals Apollo Hospital, Fortis, Manipal Group, Max Healthcare and Colombia, among others. And when it comes to using treatment i.e. drugs, they do have access to the British Pharmacopoeia, US Pharmacopoeia Medication manufactured in India, which have GMP licence, and these highly quality generic drugs are manufactured by reputed accredited companies

such as Sun Pharma, Glenmark, Cadila and Wockhardt. That is why we, as clinicians, do not have any issue with the treatment being provided there and rightly so, we do recommend patients to go there for treatment. I, like many of my colleagues, we have, we are and we will always support the Indian pharmaceutical products made in India, there is no bashing and which have the full WHO endorsement, that is, the GMP certification, but will not condone those of substandard with no quality assurance, safety and sourcing information.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these are very sensible issues as most of us have umbilical links to India and many of us have roots there, including me and many here; and while we are surely having a clash of ideas and opinion with regard to safety, quality of medication that our population is entitled to have in the public service, we must all refrain from dangerous comments that step outside the parameters of professional and ethical discussion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will personally and my colleagues, on this side of the House, and I am sure certain, on the other side, will leave no stone unturned to ensure that our people, the 80% of the population who cannot afford private care, attending public hospitals be served with the best, the safest, the highest standard and quality medications. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am compelled to mention Pack & Blisters as per the numerous comments and media coverage we had so far. I wish to highlight a few points which I will leave to the Members, particularly on the other side, to reflect and have their own judgement. *En votre âme et conscience, vous allez plus tard être responsables de vos décisions.* Pack & Blisters incorporated in 2012 and changed name three times from Loropharma to No Stock Business and finally, as we know it, still bears the same business number. It changed Directors six times. Why? The founder was condemned in 2015 for fiscal fraud and a fine of Rs125 m. equivalent and condemned for 13 years. The company has a turnover of only €1.3 m. as tabled last year in its last financial statement and yet, was entrusted a contract to the value of Rs474 m. Was the Pack and Blisters the only company that could apparently supply us ventilators in time during the COVID period, an equipment which is sensible, life threatening and has not been able to do so as yet, despite that other recognised suppliers for such life threatening equipment have not been given the leave way, the opportunity to bring ventilators, because apparently they could not have delivered it in time?

I am not going to indulge at present on the conflicting reason that has been enunciated by different Members and advisors on the other side, but I put it rightly, if effectively those ventilators were defective, then, right at source, we chose the wrong company, we should not have bought from them. There has been for Pack and Blister no information as to its local

representative, no information as to the technical back-up, training and commissioning and whenever, and if ever they get delivered.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it appears that in the last Audit Report published, mention was made of the angiography machine at Dr. Jeetoo Hospital, with regard to the lack of technical support, no local engineer in Mauritius; another hitech lifesaving machine that has, once again, unfortunately, fallen on deaf ears *ou soi finn mett de l'huile dan zoreil*.

Mr Speaker: You have only a few minutes, hon. Member.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. Do ask yourselves where is credible KYC good governance in it all? Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope my comments and concerns will be given some due attention.

Thank you all.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Jagutpal!

(6.33 p.m.)

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am going to limit my intervention only to amendments pertaining to clauses 21 and 50 of the Finance Bill 2020.

Clause 50 of the Bill proposes to amend the Pharmacy Act to include the Indian Pharmacopeia as additional standard concerning medicine; Mauritians have become very much familiar with IP now. Members of the Opposition have made it their priority to induce the population in error as to this pharmacopeia. A lot has been said and one word in particular, repeated with insistence, politics, cheap politics about substandard.

Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will explain to this august Assembly, why we should move to adopt IP as an additional standard. I will also call it the bluff of the Opposition; put in light their fabricated insinuations and their half truths about this Indian Pharmacopeia. I have, here, a list of documents of the public sector as well as the private sector about the drugs that have been purchased by the Ministry, not since today, not during the COVID-19, but well before. I am, at the same time, going to remind the hon. Member that in the clinic that he is practicing - I will just give a letter dated 23 August 2019.

Dr. Aumeer: Mr Speaker...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jagutpal: I will only just say what has been written -

“Kindly note that we accept to use IP...”

Dr. Aumeer: The hon. Minister has made a...

Mr Speaker: No! I have not given you the floor. Is it a point of order?

Dr. Aumeer: It is.

Mr Speaker: Are you sure?

Dr. Aumeer: It is a point of explanation.

Mr Speaker: No, you have no right for any point of explanation. Please!

Dr. Aumeer: So, I will just...

Mr Speaker: Please! Do not disturb the proceedings of the House! Continue Minister!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have not one letter, but many letters about the use of IP drugs in the private sector. I will only read one line -

“Kindly note that we accept to use IP specifications as per prescribed products below and will be solely used in our facilities.”

So, these are the letters; I do not have one, I have many, as well as for the public sector. And IP drugs - should I repeat it again? I have many. Anybody who wishes to consult it with me, they are most welcome. The date for this one is 23 August 2019 and it is for IP drugs. Similarly, for the public sector, I have a lot of documents which I want to share with you. These documents have been shared about...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Parliamentary democracy, please!

Dr. Jagutpal: ...the purchase of IP drugs. At that time...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Parliamentary democracy, please! Parliamentary democracy! Hon. Shakeel Mohamed, my ruling is not to be questioned. I do not take orders from you!

(Interruptions)

I do not take orders from you! I do not take orders from you!

(Interruptions)

I do not take orders from you!

(Interruptions)

I do not take orders from anybody!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Only from the Prime Minister!

Mr Speaker: The last warning I am giving you, hon. Shakeel Mohamed! The last warning I am giving you. This is the last warning. Continue, Minister!

Dr. Jagutpal: So, I have many documents for the public sector as well. This is the proof, common practice to have recourse to such medicines. Members will note that the supplies of IP drugs are not only for one company, but for many companies. For example, I got nothing to say against these companies. On 26 September 2019, my Ministry gave approval for the purchase of some medication called Bleomycin of Indian Pharmacopeia and same was supplied by one company called SH; this is a bogus company that has been mentioned.

Now, similarly, in the past, at hospital level, local purchase of IP drugs were approved by the then Director of Pharmaceutical Services and among these drugs were Isoprenaline; there are so many. Another example, Mr Speaker, Sir, on 14 May 2019, one private health institution approached again IBL for the import of Syntocinon - my colleague in the same profession as me will know. These are IP drugs and that private institution clearly stated the following requests -

“Kindly note we accept to use IP specification.”

So, IP specification does not date since yesterday. The law, at that time, was not law, then there was no security, then there were no side effects like the hon. Leader of the Opposition was saying! Then, there was no conspiracy, then there was no emergency and this was the logic of the Opposition. See how they are trying to put the population in error. Now, I will move on.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jagutpal: It pains! It is going to be very painful.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Jagutpal: I guess....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister!

Mr Mohamed: On a point of order!

Mr Speaker: Make sure you have a point of order!

Mr Mohamed: Why are you threatening me every time?

Mr Speaker: Make sure you have a point of order! I give you the floor.

Mr Mohamed: I mean, it is not a point of conversation, I can assure you.

Mr Speaker: I give you the floor.

Mr Mohamed: Thank you very much, how kind of you! My point of order is that I hear the hon. Minister and I apologise for disturbing him. And I am so happy and very thankful to you, Sir, for having allowed me to speak.

Could I just please request, through your permission and your authorisation, that he, at least, table the documents that he is referring to? That is Standing Order; that is all I wanted to say. I hope I have not offended you. Please!

Dr. Jagutpal: The documents are here...

Mr Speaker: After your speech you can do so.

Dr. Jagutpal: ...public sector's documents, private sector's documents.

Mr Speaker: You carry on!

Dr. Jagutpal: Okay. I guess from now, hon. Mohamed will move to initiate enquiries on all those companies which supply IP drugs.

(Interruptions)

I remember very well!

Mr Speaker: I ruled that after his speech he will table it! Continue!

Dr. Jagutpal: I will table the documents. Please!

(Interruptions)

Wait, let me finish! I will take reference. Now, Mr, Speaker, Sir, I remember that ‘his people within my Ministry’ will surely assist him in leaking the corresponding documents because at one time when the PNQ was addressed to me, documents were leaked from my Ministry. And why those documents have not been leaked - I ask this question. This is called hypocrisy, cheap politics. This is what should be expected from such Members. They portray themselves as patriots working for the country, but the impression is that they serve for powerful lobbies. I will explain. Last week, in his speech in Finance Bill, hon. Shakeel Mohamed concluded on a saying from Stephen Hawking. Allow me to quote it -

“The thing about smart people is that they seem crazy to dumb people.”

These are the documents that will tell you who are smart, who are dumb and at what time they become dumb.

(Interruptions)

This is the document that will tell you who are smart, who are dumb, and at what time they become dumb!

(Interruptions)

On this note, allow me now to expose the unacceptable and systematic smearing of the IP by Members of the Opposition. I will quote from same Hansard. Hon. Shakeel Mohamed claimed to have gone through; this is what he stated in this House on 14 July 2020 -

“(...) They will not be able to produce a document where it is specifically stated in Hansard or otherwise or other where that the Leader of the Opposition or Members of the Opposition have stated that medication from India is substandard (...).”

We are talking of IP drugs. Are we talking of drugs from America? We are talking of drugs from India! And that’s what they were referring to. Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to refresh the hon. Member’s mind...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No conversation!

Dr. Jagutpal: Let us bear in mind that hon. Shakeel Mohamed is seated next to hon. Dr. Boolell. He also clearly made it understood that he is somewhat gifted in hearing things emanating from orifices - that he has himself said - but he failed to grasp what has to be grasped. On 08 June 2020, during the debates on the Budget of 2020-2021, hon. Dr. Boolell was commenting on setting up of a pharmaceutical industry and adoption of IP in Mauritius, he stated the following – again from the Hansard –

“(...) when you look at the amendment in relation to Pharmacopoeia (...) I would advise Government to have a fresh look at this. What it means is that we are going to manufacture drugs which are not of quality (...).

On 15 June 2020, during the PNQ, in supplementary questions on medicines imported from India by a particular company, the Leader of the Opposition stated the following, I quote –

“So, it means that it has been supplying medication to the hospitals, and medication which is substandard! Again, substandard medication!”

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No response on this side! This is fair debate in parliamentary democracy!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jagutpal: On 15 July 2020, during the debates on the Finance Bill 2020, the same Leader of Opposition stated, I quote –

“(...) We were safe (...)”

Yet, we were having those medications.

“and we have revised procurement protocol facilities to buy substandard drugs of Indian Pharmacopoeia (...).”

The hon. Leader of Opposition is clearly referring to medicines from India as substandard systematically, and each and every time he talks about IP. It is on record.

(Interruptions)

How can someone be so irresponsible when talking about standards of a country with which we share close relationships, a country that has helped us time and time again when we are confronted with difficulties, with difficult situations, especially during COVID-19. The hon.

Leader of the Opposition was himself a Minister of Foreign Affairs; this is how he managed diplomacy. Such unfounded faults and hurtful comments, dangerous that cannot be voiced out shamelessly in this House, especially for cheap politics!

Last week, on the same Bill, hon. Shakeel Mohamed read from two documents, bearing Minutes of my Ministry's Permanent Secretary, and he claims that these documents have, supposedly, been tabled. I checked, Mr Speaker, Sir, no such documents have been tabled in this House. In fact, the hon. Member was reading from confidential documents that 'his people', 'his people inside my Ministry'...

(Interruptions)

...shamelessly leaked out those documents week in and week out! Again, this is how these gentlemen and women operate, and this is the definition of conspiracy; a conspiracy blatantly condoned by hon. Shakeel Mohamed and, of course, the Opposition. The hon. Member read an advice from the Principal Pharmacist of my Ministry, and it is in Hansard again –

“It is it is primordial to carry out a due diligence on the source of supply as it entails efficacy and safety concerns.”

Then, he said –

“If the hon. Minister has decided to depart from the advice of the Principal Pharmacist referring to efficacy and safety concerns, that is his problem.”

I will come to that again. The hon. Member should think, revert back to these people inside the Ministry. Does he think that there has been no follow-up? He has only part of the document, and with part of the document he has come here to show that he wished to impress the Members of the Opposition. In fact, why should he bother to know or ask more questions, he only took what serve his purpose, and that vile purpose was simply to give the impressions that drugs being source from India are flawed and devoid of efficacy. Again, hon. Shakeel Mohamed went further in his remarks – Hansard again –

“(...) the law is the law. (...)The Pharmacy Act today says clearly that no one shall bring drugs into Mauritius that do not conform to a prescription or to specified standards.”

Yet, those drugs are here. I'll again try to give a mention about the ventilators over here, the ventilators that we have purchased, whatever has been specified for the ventilators, all have been respected by the technicians, by the consultants. All the documents needed, especially –

it is good that he has raised this point about the maintenance of the ventilators and accessories. Obviously, all have been taken into account before we bought all those ventilators. Now, I have no doubts, Mr Speaker, Sir, on the legal insight of someone who has a deep knowledge about books. However, I repeat it again for hon. Shakeel Mohamed; it would be good to note that purchase of IP medicine is common practice for years now. I am sure that hon. Dr. Aumeer also – he happens to be a consultant - is well aware of this. If he is not aware, I will give him this document and he will come to know. IP drugs, mentioned earlier are source by established suppliers without any problem at all, it is only when Government has source IP drugs, it's a problem! So, this is pure demagogy. The Ministry also had recourse not only to one, but to several suppliers over the years, and these drugs are readily available and they save lives.

In the same vein, last year, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was no emergency, no COVID, we bought Herceptin. I believe that they know what this drug is. This drug called Trastuzumab is used to treat breast cancer; it is from Patel & Co. Now, this drug does not even have a pharmacopeia standard; this drug neither goes to BP, as hon. Dr. Aumeer said, nor IP, nor European or American standards or any standard. Yet, it has been bought by the Ministry, why, because this drug is life-saving. What should we have done? Shouldn't we have bought those drugs, should we let the people who are suffering from cancer...

(Interruptions)

I am just referring to him.

Mr Speaker: Don't interrupt!

Dr. Jagutpal: Because he mentioned about IP, BP. He should know...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Parliamentary democracy! You should leave the hon. Minister to debate!

Dr. Jagutpal: I wish that Members of the Oppositions contact 'their people' within my Ministry to get some leaked documents as has been their strategy. Mr Speaker, Sir, the backdating of the proposed amendment to the Pharmacy Act will, in fact, allow us to regularise all these issues. There is no cover-up, as suggested by the Opposition; it's only common sense. Of course, some companies will retaliate through their ambassadors. You know very well why!

As a caring Government, it's our duty to establish fair pricing model, encapsulating the existing and new medicines, I can see no wrong in adopting the IP, because the IP drugs are available in Mauritius since years. The hon. Members on the other side of the House are referring to retrospective amendments, as if it was a completely new concept in this House.

Last week during the debates on the Finance Bill, hon. Uteem has commented on the amendments. I quote –

“(...) How can we be asked today to backdate a law, to make it lawful to do what this Government did and know fully well, was illegal, unlawful at the time they did it.”

I trust the learned Member of the Opposition is aware that the Supreme law of the land. Our Constitution provides for the following –

“Section 46 (4) –

No law made by Parliament shall come into operation until it has been published in the Gazette but Parliament may postpone the coming into operation of any such law or make such law retrospective in effect.”

I'll only inform the House who moved the Bill in the House. Speaking about retrospective law, the House is familiar with the National Assembly (Retiring Allowances) Act. Who moved the Bill in the House? It was none other than the Leader of the Labour party. We should remember that this Act was amended with retrospective effect, which means that it was deemed to have come into operation on 16 November 1995 by Act 7 of 1996. Now, this is, in fact, very interesting, because, Mr Speaker, Sir, the amending Act, that is, the National Assembly (Retiring Allowances) (Amendment) Act 1996 had the effect of deeming the period that general elections were postponed constituted a served term. I am tabling the shocking section 3 of subsection (4) which is introduced by the National Assembly (Retiring Allowances). I believe that this will help Members of the Opposition to know what is the retrospective legation.

Again, hon. Mohamed, during his intervention on the Finance Bill last week, said that I have met the Director of Hyperpharm in my Office and that I was conspiring to make an unlawful act. This is how these people used to operate in the past, Mr Speaker, Sir. We, in this Government, do not follow their *modus operandi*. The Opposition has opened the debate to include my past tenure as Chairman of the Medical Council of Mauritius and have thought to suggest that I have been favouring Mr Ashwin Bundhun. For the record, I stated in the House that I did not know Hyperpharm Ltd or any other dozens companies owned by Mr

Bundhun. I don't know his companies, but I never stated I didn't know that man in person, Mr Ashwin Bundhun. In fact, I have crossed words with Mr Bundhun in the Medical Council of Mauritius.

On 04 July 2017, 11 members of the Council, including 5 newly appointed members, frontally challenged my decision and that of the Council to have a sitting Judge as Chairperson of the interview panel for the appointment of a new Registrar of the Medical Council. In fact, Mr Bundhun was one of the 5 newly appointed members who were part of the challenge. They were somehow uncomfortable with a sitting Judge of the Supreme Court chairing the interview panel. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the letter sent by the 11 members challenging my decisions.

In fact, on 29 May, 2020, a meeting was held with Directors of Hyperpharm along with Directors of other companies, namely Mr S. M. of FTM and Mr A. G. of IBL Health companies who import psychotropic drugs in the country and our meeting was solely meant to see how – it's good that they are good at doing some investigation – the Ministry could facilitate timely import of such drugs because there was a shortage of these drugs on the market. My Ministry, in fact, approved the quota for the purchase of psychotropic drugs by suppliers. In order to make sure that there is no shortage, we had to review the timing process. It has been convened to process the demands of the suppliers and deliver the quota approval to prevent potential shortage. The meeting was also attended by the SCE of my Ministry.

I challenge the hon. Member, hon. Mohamed, and to come up not to hide behind parliamentary immunity and to go to competent authorities, initiate an enquiry on what he has claimed.

(Interruptions)

You have, you stated.

Mr Speaker: Continue! Continue! No comments!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, someone who has stated...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No comments on the speech of the hon. Minister!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, what he said about the Minister has decided to depart from the advice of the Chief Pharmacist, either he is blissfully unaware of the role of a

Minister or he is pretending for the sake of political mileage, not to be aware of the role of the Minister, I have to remind him, Ministers by virtue of section 62 of the Constitution, have the following responsibilities –

“The President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, may, by directions in writing, assign to the Prime Minister or any other Minister responsibility for the conduct (subject to this Constitution and any other law) of any business of the Government, including responsibility for the administration of any department of Government.”

This section should be read together with section 68 –

“Where any Minister has been charged with responsibility for the administration of any department of Government, he shall exercise general direction (...)”

General direction and not to interfere in the administration of the Ministry. So, somebody who has been Minister in the past and he is reasoning as such! I don't know. Fortunately that they are not Ministers at present!

The Finance Bill also proposes to amend sections 22 and 24 of the Medical Council. The House will note that prior to the introduction of pre-examinations for newly graduated medical students, they were provisionally registered by the Medical Council of Mauritius. The Medical Council determined the duration of the training but since November 2016, pre has become mandatory in order to allow first graduates to be registered as pre-reg. officers to do internship in our hospitals. The Act was further amended in 2013 to the effect that the medical graduate to register medical practitioners had to produce documents stating that he had passed at one sitting three subjects with HSC level with a minimum of 21 points.

Given the above provisions, we now ensure that students enrolling on medical studies have good academic standards and holding the pre is therefore super plus. After 18 months of training, pre-reg. would have to be successful in the medical registration examination in order to be registered as Medical Practitioner. These examinations were organised by the National Board of Examination (NBE) for the past six years. The latest MoU we had with the NBE lapsed in 2019 and it will be renewed this year.

The House will also note that necessary arrangements have already been made to carry out the MRE examination this year by end of August. It is our duty to ascertain that Medical Practitioners entering our service duly qualified and possessed the necessary skills

and academic background required. I am however, once more, sorry to note the stand of the hon. Leader of the Opposition on this choice.

During his intervention on the Finance Bill 2020, he, in fact, invited me to give due consideration to work with institutions of repute of the likes of the Imperial College of London. I have absolutely no problem with the Imperial College of London which is, in fact, a body of international repute, but then by stating that, we should consider the likes of the Imperial College. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has once more been discourteous and demeaning towards the Indian institutions which have been since 2013 helping Mauritius to get those examinations.

I also here wish to mention what hon. Dr. Farhad Aumeer said that he intends that we should have a national examination, but, unfortunately, our doctors are not academicians, our doctors are clinicians and to do examinations, we require academicians. We don't have that expertise in Mauritius. We can't on the next day, decide that the Medical Council will start organising the examination. In fact, at the same time, he just proved that, the leader of the Opposition has said to go for Imperial College and he said that we should have a national examination. It is good that they sorted their matters between themselves. We have worked out with the MBE for the last six years without any problem and now I don't understand the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Boolell's grudge against the Indian standards - we have seen that - and institution, but this has to stop and we should accept that MBE remains a body of international repute.

The Leader of the Opposition and hon. X.L. Duval also highlighted what they believe are discriminating practices against those who have studied medicine under the French system. They are absolutely wrong and I can assure the House that there is no discrimination whatsoever. The hon. Members will note that as we speak, we have 245 registered specialists with French qualifications in Mauritius, 156 general practitioners with French qualifications and 24 temporary medicine practitioners who qualified from France and only 8 practitioners who have been rejected. I will tell you why. Hon. X.L. Duval suggested that I could solve the situation in Mauritius with a stroke of a pen. A decision of life saving, especially for doctors, we have to bear in mind. I understand his concern, but unfortunately, those doctors have only an *attestation*. Do you want us, with a stroke of a pen, to say that an *attestation* is a specialist?

Now, do you want to have derogation only for the French? We can't do that. If we have a law, we have to get it universal and do you know if we do that, we open the door because you should know that in Mauritius we have Doctors qualified from so many countries. Now, at the same time, I will recon that there are doctors who have not done their preregistration because the system in France has changed. They have doctors who have done their undergraduate and then moved on to the post graduate immediately. But those doctors who have done post graduate for five years in specialties where there is clinical practice we have no problem to register them. But it happened that there is one case of a doctor who is very good, who has obtained 5 'A' at HSC level, who has got a scholarship, but unfortunately that doctor has joined micro biology and he has not done any clinical training. I totally agree with you that we have to do something for that doctor, but at the same time, we can't open the door for everybody. This, I am sure I am going to work it out and I am going to come with an amendment on that aspect. Now, allow me to inform the House that the claim of the Opposition is not just blowing matters out of proportion.

To conclude, allow me again to quote Alexander, an Indian politician from the State of Tamil Nadu, and maybe hon. Mohamed should listen to this very carefully –

“The trick to being smart is knowing when to play dumb.”

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

(7.05 pm.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Contrary to what the hon. Minister has been doing, that is, talking on everything except on the Bill, I would limit myself, Mr Speaker, Sir, on the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill shall be bringing amendments to some 70 legislations and I shall be speaking on a few amendments being brought that, in my humble view, either do not have their *raison d'être* in this omnibus Bill or are not clear as to their intents and purposes in many instances as pointed out by hon. Xavier Duval and hon. Reza Uteem at the last sitting which has resulted in the hon. Minister to backpedal on some key components of his Budget Speech which the hon. Minister, in all humility, ought to have acknowledged this backpedalling in his intervention. I will, during my intervention, elaborate on same, Mr Speaker, Sir.

While economic observers, after the presentation of the budget, were forecasting a whole array of measures and amendments that would have aimed at supporting local enterprises and entrepreneurship, protecting employment, defending our currency, reigniting the economy and alleviating the plight of the downtrodden, this Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill has, unfortunately, adopted a less proactive pathway to bring clarity and transparency to many of the amendments being proposed.

Despite significant, unprecedented and an overtly selfless contribution from the Bank of Mauritius, this Bill is first and foremost introducing new ways and means to come forward with measures to tax our people from all spheres of the society. Being the superrich, the rich, the upper middle class, the middle class, the lower middle class and the most vulnerable ones, and this despite being fuelled with abundant money from the Bank of Mauritius, I fail to understand this lack of empathy towards our people when Government, through this Bill, is seizing each and every opportunity to tax them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me also add, it is without any surprise that these measures have steered passionate debates among stakeholders and among Members in this House. But I have a special thought for those in the global business industry who also felt being parked on the sidewalk at a time when all odds seem to be against its very survival as an international financial centre. I will come to the amendment being brought to the Financial Services Act later on. But Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the most unfair measures is the proposed amendment to the Value Added Tax. At Clause 70 of the Bill, it introduces a new section 14A to the VAT Act to provide for an enabling clause for the charging of VAT on digital and electronic services provided by a foreign supplier and it goes on to add at proposed section 14 (b) that VAT shall be charged on a digital or electronic service supplied by a foreign supplier to a person in Mauritius subject to such conditions as may be prescribed. This is cited at pages 113 and 114 of this Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, first and foremost, the hon. Minister has not provided details as to how the suppliers, the subscribers and subscriptions to online platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime video will be taxed exactly. More confusing also is how with regard to the other electronic and digital services, this new amendment to the law will apply, for example, online learning platforms or distance learning programmes.

Thus, Mr Speaker, Sir, yet again, the population at large is being called upon to make sacrifice and even under entertainment in those gloomy days of our history, they will be

paying 15% more on Deezer, on Netflix, on Amazon Prime, on Office 364, Cloud storage services and online purchase of antivirus software amongst others, and the list is not an exhaustive one.

We cannot again, on such an important issue, in the day to day life of the youth of this country and the population at large, come with regulations afterwards as may be prescribed by the hon. Minister as mentioned in the Bill and this Bill shall thus, for instance, be taxing also online games, online shopping and online learning as well as it sense. But to make things bitterer for our people to swallow, Mr Speaker, Sir, the imposition of an additional sugar tax is also an outcry measure.

Clause 19 of the Bill is bringing amendment to the Excise Act so that as from 01 November 2020, all sugar sweetened products will be touched by this so-called sugar tax which is more a tax on food products, purely and simply. If we take into account all products that will be concerned with as per the annex to the Budget Speech 2020-2021, pages 8 and 9, you would see, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are taxing Ovaltine, yogurts, cereal products, all basic necessities, basic food for people to eat. In a recent interview published in the Sunday Telegraph, the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson had this to say with regard to the UK Government facing calls to impose a sugar tax on food and I quote –

“On putting up prices of food for people who may not be on high incomes, I am not instinctively in favour of that.”

And I quote –

“On putting up prices of food for people who may not be on high incomes, I am not instinctively in favour of that. There are other ways of doing it.”

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are other ways of doing it. It is not the right time to tax people, to tax their food commodities at this very point in time in our history.

At first, when we tax sugar, we put the burden on people who are already burdened. All we are doing is continuing to make food more expensive. While chronic diseases related to sugar like heart disease, obesity and diabetes affects all of our society, they disproportionately affect the poor. The sugar tax is another round of policies that blame the victims rather than uprooting the systems that cause these chronic diseases.

Second, putting this policy into place satiates our need to address the real problem. So, the real problem continues, Mr Speaker, Sir. In such a difficult time for our nation, taxing

our people in such a way is unbecoming, the more so that, according to the latest edition of the well-known magazine CEOWORLD Magazine, Mauritius is among the 15 most expensive country in the world in terms of cost of living. The hon. Minister should at this point in time not press forward with the proposed amendment to the VAT Act, and this should be extended to the sugar tax that is also being proposed by amendments, being brought to the Excise Act at clause 19 of the Bill.

Before going on the amendments being proposed to the Income Tax Act, let me express my dismay with the lack of initiative on the part of the hon. Minister to come forward at clauses 2 and 3 respectively of the Banking Act and the Bank of Mauritius Act with amendments to those Acts, with regard to introducing a component of accountability to Parliament, in view of major amendments brought to these two Acts, since the enactment of the COVID-19 Act and the creation of the Mauritius Investment Corporation Ltd. This is very important, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The role of Parliament is also to oversee those expenses that are being made by the Bank of Mauritius and those monies that are being given to Government to do its budget. And in most of the democratic countries, the Bank of Mauritius is accountable to either the House of Commons or to the Senate, for example, in the United States. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, it was in the best interest of this country that such an amendment ought to have been brought to the Banking Act, to the Bank of Mauritius Act, for them to be accountable, for them to be scrutinised in Parliament.

With regard to clause 28, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Income Tax Act being amended, the solidarity levy applicable to individuals. The provisions relating to the application of solidarity levy with respect to income derived by resident individuals is being amended as follows -

The threshold of the applicability of the solidarity levy has been reduced from 3.5 million to 3 million.

I have said earlier on, we are taxing everyone, rich, super rich, upper middle class. The rate applicable to the solidary levy has been increased from 5% to 25%. However, the maximum solidarity levy payable to a resident individual is limited to 10% of the sum of that individual's net income and dividend received from Mauritius resident company and corporative and society and share of dividend from a resident *société ou succession*.

Every employer is henceforth required to withhold under the PAE system, tax on solidarity levy payable by an employee at the time emolument is made available to such employee. For example, where such employee's emolument exceeds Rs230,769 in a month, the employer will be required to withhold in addition to the 15% income tax, an additional tax on the amount exceeding the Rs230,769 at the rate of 25% provided that the additional tax withheld does not exceed 10% of the total emolument. The total income tax of an individual in respect of his chargeable income in excess of Rs3 m. will as a rule not exceed 15%.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, the marginal tax rate of income earned in the bracket of Rs3 m. to approximately Rs5.5 m. may reach up to 40%, as opposed to a flat maximum of 20% under the previous legislation. No, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are no longer a low tax jurisdiction. Dividends are now taxed at 10% and Mauritius may no longer be viewed as a low tax jurisdiction, given that many countries do not tax dividends. Only time will tell whether we will be attractive enough, compared to sophisticating economies like Dubai, Singapore and Hong Kong. As opposed to what was announced in the budget, this Bill is now contradicting its own philosophy and hence, telephony services will not be required to pay solidarity levy if they are making losses. This, to some extent, is in line with the imposition of solidarity levy and companies of rating in other industries. To put it simply, Mr Speaker, Sir, the levy should only be imposed on profitable companies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the time for payment of corporate tax by companies in the tourism industry, for example, has been extended, which is a good thing. However, more could have been done in this field, and I would have expected amendments being brought through this Bill, such as suspending the advanced payment system, reducing penalties and interests or freezing tax audits for, at least, a year. We cannot ignore the fact that businesses will take time to recover from the effects of the pandemic and those hardly hit companies should be allowed some breathing space.

With regard to amendment being brought by clause 21 to the Financial Services Act, the moneylenders licence, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Finance Bill introduces a new licence under the Financial Services Act, namely the Moneylenders Licence. Under these provisions, a company other than a bank or a non-bank deposit taking institutions whose business is that of moneylending, whether or not it owns property or funds derived from other sources, and whether or not, it acts as a principle or an agent, will be required to obtain a moneylender's licence from the Financial Services Commission. The carrying out of a moneylender's

business without a licence will carry a fine of not exceeding Rs1 m. and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not see the rationale. Why this component is being taken away from the Bank of Mauritius and being handed over to the FSC? Why? It is only after this Bill is voted that the FSC is expected to issue appropriate guidelines and instructions as well as prudential requirements for the supervision of moneylenders. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is as if, once again, we are putting the cart before the horse. You need to have proper guidelines and directives drafted and same disseminated amongst all stakeholders first and then come forward with the necessary amendments to the law. Because we all remember, Mr Speaker, Sir, how in the past, amendments were brought to the same Act, in the same manner, to allow and empower FSC to give private banking licence and we all know how Mr Alvaro Sobrinho obtained his licence.

So, with the note of caution, Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall invite the hon. Minister to reconsider this amendment and come to this House with a separate Bill as moneylending activities have been identified by international agencies as one of the main areas where money laundering activities flourish. The hon. Minister should address this issue properly.

With regard to clause 42, amending the National Pensions Act, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is commonly said too much taxation kills businesses and it is wise to balance the act of imposing additional taxation on taxpayers and boosting the economy. However, on this side of the House, we are utterly disappointed that despite the call for a wider consultation from the *association* of actuaries, there are still no signs that the Government will revisit the introduction of the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*. The Finance Bill 2020 does not shed light on the rate to be applied or the persons excluded from the payment.

On the basis of equity, Mr Speaker, Sir, should all employees, irrespective of private or public sector be called upon to contribute to the Fund? This has not been addressed at all, unanswered by the hon. Minister. So, the CSG as it is couched, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a disguised tax and has been described in several quarters as an unsustainable scheme.

So, the CSG as it is couched, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a disguised tax and has been described, in several quarters, as an unsustainable scheme and is more a Ponzi-like structure. No studies elaborated by professionals in the sector have been undertaken to see to it whether the terms of fairness and the impact it will have on the cost of doing business in Mauritius will change for the better or for the worse.

Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, such an important component that will change the routine of employees as well as employers ought to have been brought to this House by way of a substantive piece of legislation and not in a piecemeal manner as it is the case now. Same for the amendments being brought to the Pharmacy Act at clause 50, with all the saga of purchase of medical equipment - the hon. Minister is gone - pharmaceutical products under the cover of emergency procedures and major investment funds being committed through the Mauritius Investment Corporation, the introduction of a new Pharmacy Bill should be brought to this House instead.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will conclude with the Economic Development Board at clause 16 of the Bill, whereby with the introduction of a new section 17B, EDB will be getting additional powers to process application for Smart and Innovative Mauritius Development Certificate and also with the creation of the Sports Economic Commission which will fall under the ambit of the Economic Development Board. This is a dangerous precedent, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Again, when such powers are being given *ad nauseam* by this Government, making EDB as if already, as in the case of Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd, operating as a super Ministry through those amendments. The Sports Economic Commission operating under the ambit of the EDB is as if this Government does not even believe in or want to empower its own Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports & Recreation. Same was done with Landscape Ltd with the creation of this famous land bank that they wanted to create for the agricultural lands. Again, this ought to have come before this House as a separate Bill for us to debate, on the accruing powers being given to the Economic Development Board.

Hon. Xavier-Luc Duval has rightly so pointed out the confusion surrounding the amendments being brought to the Workers' Rights Act and the Opposition Whip, hon. Shakeel Mohamed has also expatiated on same. And I know that there has been an attempt to propose some cosmetic amendments at Committee Stage. So, I shall seize this opportunity to urge the hon. Minister to take stock of what hon. Members from this side of the House have voiced out and bring the corrective measures that we have canvassed. Mainly do not go ahead with the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, instead go for a wider national consultation with all stakeholders before coming back to this House with a substantive piece of legislation.

Do not go ahead with the tax on food, on cereals, on yoghurts, on custard products, on Ovaltine, on basic food necessities of our citizens. Do not go ahead with the imposition on

VAT, on digital and electronic services. This is not the right time to debate on these issues. People are suffering, people are stressed, people are distressed. This pandemic has brought the biggest shock to workers' wages since independence and it is the paramount duty of Government to support our vulnerable households, our stressed working class, and Government has got the means to do so as per the very figures mentioned in the Estimates 2020-2021 at Appendix A, Summary of Revenue. And taxing our people is certainly not the way forward.

I will end on this note, inviting the hon. Minister, inviting Government to remediate matters. We have got still time, not to go ahead with those taxes. Do not tax our people, for God's sake.

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon Dhaliah!

(7.26 p.m.)

Mr R. Dhaliah (Second Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I thank you for the opportunity given to me to contribute to the debate on the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2020-2021.

This year, the Budget 2020-2021 has been presented under exceptional circumstances. It has been a trying moment for businesses, workers and households with the sudden COVID-19 outbreak at the beginning of this year. We have been living in a disenchanted world, a world of self-isolation, of social distancing, lockdown and curfew. This Government has worked round the clock since the outbreak of this pandemic to respond to the extraordinary challenges posed by the Coronavirus to people's lives and livelihoods. We are at the midway of the year 2020 and we are still grappling with the effects of COVID-19. There is still the apprehension of the next wave of the pandemic around the world as some countries are still fighting against this invisible and deadly enemy.

When the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development delivered his Budget Speech on 04 June 2020, he announced a budget focused on putting into action the pledge made to the electorate at the general elections of 2019 as well as the commitments translated in the Government Programme 2020-2024. In addition, he carefully explained the reasons for a very ambitious and wide ranging set of measures subtly designed to tackle the Coronavirus pandemic, buttress the services and support people, families, youth and businesses affected by the pandemic.

M. le président, le *Finance Bill* vise à guider l'économie et la population sur la voie de la guérison et de la croissance en ces temps de ralentissement économique mondial et local, hausse du chômage et de moral bas causé par la pandémie de Covid-19. Ceci poursuit également son objectif de construire un environnement innovant, favorable aux investissements locaux et étrangers avec pour objectif global de transformer Maurice en une économie à revenus encore plus élevés. Le gouvernement a exposé ses plans pour stimuler l'économie et trouver notre nouvelle normalité qui consistera également à jeter de nouvelles bases pour un pays plus prospère, initiative verte, attraction de talents et d'investissements étrangers, secteurs numériques et innovants sont désignés comme moteur de la croissance future.

Dans le même temps, la *Mauritius Investment Corporation*, le *MIC* dont le capital est de R 80 milliards agira de la même manière qu'un fonds souverain. Ce qui devrait soutenir la reprise des secteurs-clés et investir dans les futurs moteurs de croissance. Maurice se classe premier en Afrique pour l'indice *Ease of Doing Business*. Afin de renforcer et d'améliorer encore l'écosystème des entreprises pour les investisseurs locaux et étrangers, ce projet de loi a mis en évidence une série de mesures de facilitation des affaires, en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur les PME.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill which we are debating today is crucial to the development of this country. It aims at amending no less than 70 pieces of current legislations to consolidate the necessary legal and institutional frameworks to facilitate the implementation of the budgetary measures. This is a rare fact that such a number of existing laws are being amended to give effect to the implementation of the budgetary measures. Some people think that it is too many. Yes, it may be too many for them because they cannot digest that much.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for this Government, it is not too many. We have to bring forward these amendments because *gouverner c'est prévoir*. We just had our share of trying times with COVID-19 and we have successfully managed it so far. If we want to continue to progress on this trend, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels with only a few measures that do not holistically address the prevailing situation. We can neither operate like in normal times where only a few legislations required amendments. Today, we are in a new House normal that demands new thinking and new mindset.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me now to delve in some of the key features in this Bill. The Banking Act is being amended to allow the Bank of Mauritius to issue banking licences to

banks willing to engage in the digital banking business. In the midst of these challenging times, the use of digital technologies is gaining momentum at an unprecedented pace across the globe.

This Government is not insensible to the need to integrate digital technologies in the daily lives of our citizens. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an ever growing need to reduce face-to-face contacts. The introduction of digital banks will move in this direction as they will deliver new and traditional banking products and services directly to customers through electronic and interactive communication channels. Digital banking offers convenience for both banks and their customers. It will allow individuals, SMEs and corporates to save time and avoid unnecessary hassles by providing an online convenient 24/7 banking platform through which transactions can be conducted instantaneously.

Digital banking also simplifies the on-boarding process of customers given that all relevant documentation required for this process can be uploaded online and automatically processed by the bank's systems. The use of digital technologies makes paperless banking a reality and goes hand in hand with other initiatives taken by this Government to protect the environment.

The introduction of digital banking also reduces the need for banks to operate branches and cuts down overhead cost and staff expenses significantly. The lower cost of operation can ultimately be passed on to consumers of banking services in the form of reduced charges.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another amendment made to the Bank of Mauritius Act pertains to the introduction of a Central Bank digital currency in line with the Government vision to make Mauritius a digital island. A recent survey conducted by the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) revealed that around 80% of Central Banks are already exploring the possibility of introducing Central Bank Digital Currencies at some level. This Government places innovation high on its agenda. The introduction of a digital currency will not only reduce transaction cost and allow faster transfers and bank clearing but also enhance the Central Bank intervention and surveillance. As such, the Central Bank can have complete control over the digital currency and could easily track and trace transactions.

The use of digital currencies enhances regulatory controls and simplifies the tasks of authorities in their fight against money laundering, the financing of terrorism, corruption and tax evasion. Apart from its tracking and tracing abilities, the adoption of digital currencies

enables the retrieval of accurate economic data in real time. The availability of accurate economic data in real time underpins the Central Bank's ability to make informed and efficient policy decisions for the benefit of the country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as enunciated in the Budget Speech, *la relance de l'économie et la protection de l'environnement* remain the priorities of this Government. Amendments made to the Bank of Mauritius Act move in that direction. The Bank of Mauritius will be able to raise loans through the issuance of securities to support investment projects and assist companies promoting the economic development of Mauritius. This includes projects related to the blue economy as well as the green economy. The Government aims to tap opportunities arising from the blue economy in line with its vision of promoting the ocean as one of the main pillars of the economy.

The opportunities arising from the blue economy are enormous and not only include development in fisheries but extend to a vast array of other activities such as aquaculture, energy, transport and trade, tourism and marine biotechnology.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the green economy remains one of the top most priorities of this Government. The Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, has reiterated the commitment of this Government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by the year 2030 at the 18th annual session of *l'Institut Francophone de la Régulation Financière* on the 04 September 2019. To this end, the Bank of Mauritius will support investments in green programmes and projects that protect our biodiversity and ecosystem with the ultimate aim of achieving sustainable development. These projects will be resource and energy efficient and will create green job opportunities for our citizens.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Smart City Scheme is yet another ambitious economic development project aimed at consolidating the Mauritian International Business and financial hub by creating ideal conditions for working, living and spurring investment through the development of smart cities across the island.

The development of smart cities in Mauritius is opening up a plethora of investment opportunities. The Smart City Project is an initiative to stimulate innovative, scientific and technological activities, provide technology-driven facilities to the business community and create a vibrant city lifestyle.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government has set up the Smart City Scheme to provide an enabling framework and a package of attractive fiscal and non-fiscal incentive to investors

for the development of smart cities across the island. The smart city concept is about providing investors, nationals and foreigners with options for living in sustainable, convenient and enjoyable urban surroundings.

These new cities will be built around the live-work-play lifestyle in a vibrant environment with technology and innovation at their core. The concept paves the way for investors to develop and invest in a mix of commercial, leisure and residential users that, as a whole, achieve physical and functional integration. It creates a pedestrian-oriented urban environment, a combination of office, light industries, education, medical and tourism clusters, a high technology and innovation cluster, an infrastructure to service green field sites with roads and inspiring landscape. It also includes clean technology aimed at carbon and waste reduction, efficient transport, low energy consumption buildings, digital solutions, urban sensing technologies and big data analytics energy production and water management and utilities, high end residential estate and real estate investment management.

It is important to note that the Mauritians and Mauritians diaspora have not been left out in the scheme. At least 25% of the residential units will be sold to Mauritian citizens and members of the Mauritian diaspora.

M. le président, le *Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill* vise également à renforcer les normes et la fiabilité de notre secteur de service financier et à consolider davantage la position de Maurice en tant que Centre Financier International (CFI). Un centre qui est transparent et réputé, entièrement conforme aux recommandations du *FATF*. En outre, pour diversifier l'offre du secteur des services financiers, de nouveaux produits, par exemple le *establishing Mauritius as a FinTech hub for the region, start-ups and SMEs, improving the business ecosystem, business facilitation, etc.* de services financiers seront introduits pour améliorer les offres existantes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill also contains amendments to the Financial Reporting Act and the Financial Services Act. The amendments made to section 30 (c) of the Financial Services Act clearly lays down the duties and responsibilities of auditors. These measures will ensure strict compliance with regulatory guidelines and ensure a close and effective monitoring of activities in the global business sector. The amendments brought to the Financial Reporting Act and the Financial Services Act demonstrate the strong commitment taken by this Government to comply with the remaining recommendations of the FATF and to subsequently ascertain that Mauritius is removed from the grey list.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to refer to the book entitled ‘The Twilight of Sovereignty’ by Walter Wriston in 1992. The author predicted that global capitalism would force countries to care for capital, both financial and human. He explained that, I quote –

“If people and money are mobile, they will go where they are welcome, and stay where they are well-treated.”

Certainly, by the standard set 28 years ago, global capitalism is in retreat, but the flow of money and talent remains a force that cannot be stopped. Money and talent won’t wait forever. Other places more open to Tech talent and investment have an opportunity to swoop in. So, Mauritius cannot wait if we want to tap on these financial and human capital.

In this context, the amendments proposed to the existing Economic Development Board Act and the Immigration Act are very much relevant to attract investors and professionals. The Economic Development Board Act is being amended to allow the Economic Development Board to register smart and innovative driven projects under the smart and innovative Mauritius Development Scheme. Appropriate amendments have also been proposed in the Bill to review and harmonise investment criteria for registration of investors from 100,000 USD to 50,000 USD.

Moreover, the salary criteria is set as Rs30,000 a month for professionals in the pharmaceutical manufacturing and food processing sectors. In the same vein, the Immigration Act is being reviewed to provide, among others -

First, reviewing eligibility criteria from 500,000 USD to 375,000 USD for residence permit when acquiring an immovable property again under the different property development schemes;

Second, occupation permit holders to bring their parents to reside as dependents to maintain family unity;

Third, non-citizens holding an occupation permit or a residence permit as retired non-citizen for three years will qualify for permanent resident permit provided other eligibility criteria are met, and

Fourth, the validity period of permanent resident permit will be increased from 10 to 20 years and that of occupation permit from 03 to 10 years to give assurance of residency to the non-citizens and avoid the hassles of renewal of permits after short period of times.

Mr Speaker, Sir, taxes are rarely popular or straightforward, but they are necessary to support our public services. However, the tax measures have taken the plight of the more needy people into account. In this context, the Income Tax Act is being amended to provide, among others, for the increase in the income tax threshold varying from Rs15,000 to Rs30,000 as from 01 July 2020. It will also allow taxpayers to claim for deduction for a dependent who is a bed-ridden next of kin in his care and eligible for Carer's Allowance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government has also taken into consideration the serious financial difficulties facing the businesses operating in the Tourism Industry. In this regard, the income tax liability will be differed for the companies in the Tourism Industry, that is, 50% will be payable on or before December 2020 and the remaining 50% on or before June 2021. The amendments to the Income Tax Act also provide for an 8-year income tax holiday for the development of aquaculture projects and to companies manufacturing nutraceutical products. In addition, this incentive will be extended to a branch campus of an institution that ranks among the first 500 tertiary institutions worldwide with a view to ensuring quality tertiary education.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are living in a dynamic world where change is constant. We have to come up with new and innovative ideas and measures to resolve emerging challenges. It is only prudent and foresighted economic, social and environmental policies that will lead our country to continue unparalleled growth and prosperity. This Government will do what it takes to honour its unflinching commitment to the population and to ensure that the country responds effectively and efficiently to the challenges of the 21st century. This Government has the responsibility to safeguard jobs and protect businesses so that our economy can bounce back as quickly as possible. How we response to challenges posed by any crisis defines our collective resilience and the strength of our people, even more it is a test of our social cohesion and solidarity. My appeal is that with the support of all Members from across this House and as we all look beyond COVID-19, it gives us an opportunity to cement our unity and to make of Mauritius both an enterprising and prosperous nation and the most exciting place to live in peace and harmony.

I, therefore, support all the provisions in this Bill. Long live the Republic of Mauritius!

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I will suspend the sitting for one and a half hours.

At 7.48 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.35 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please, be seated.

Hon. Ramful, please!

Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before we went for dinner, I was listening with great interest to the speech of the Minister of Health and Wellness, who, unfortunately, is not here - *il a fait son show et puis il est parti*. From his speech, he tried to give the impression that as if, we in the Opposition - and he was speaking on the Leader of the Opposition and hon. Mohamed. He tried to give the impression as if, we, in the Opposition, we are against the importation of pharmaceutical drugs from India.

This is the impression that he is trying to give to the population out there. We know the message that he is trying to pass to a certain section of the population. And I repeat, hon. Seeruttun as well the other day tried to do that. The Minister of Health and wellness is trying to play with the emotions of certain section of the population. Let me tell him - unfortunately, he is not here - that when it comes to the health of the people, his emotional blackmail is not going to work.

We, in the Opposition, when it comes to the health of the population, we are going to stand up and we are going to challenge and question this Government, whether the pharmaceutical drug comes from United Kingdom, comes from Spain, comes from France or be it India, what we want is to have medication that are of good quality and that are acceptable to our population. Let me make this very clear. So, I hope that the message to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is very clear.

Laissez-moi, M. le président, adresser cette auguste Assemblée sur quelques provisions du *Finance Bill* que, je considère, requièrent des commentaires. D'abord les amendements au *Banking Act*.

M. le président, ces amendements qui paraissent à première vue inoffensifs peuvent, à mon avis, être perçues comme étant contre les intérêts des actionnaires, des crédateurs, mais plus important, ceux des dépositaires et je dirai pourquoi. Laissez-moi commencer d'abord avec l'amendement à la section 66. La section 66, par exemple, donne des pouvoirs à un conservateur, nommé par la Banque de Maurice devant *the shares and the assets*, les atouts et

les actions d'une banque en difficulté financière au stade initiale et sans l'approbation de cette banque à un éventuel acquéreur.

The main priority of a conservator, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is supposed to ensure the financial health of institution by preserving its assets. To sell the assets of the Bank without the approval of the shareholders or creditors or depositors is going to be to their prejudice in a situation of - the reason why I am saying so, because in a situation of financial difficulty, selling the assets of a company is a matter of last resort, undertaken at the stage when the company becomes insolvent, provided, of course, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the rights of shareholders, creditors and, more importantly, that of the depositors are secured.

When I look at those amendments, it makes me wonder. I wonder whether in the days to come, in view of the facts that some banks would appear to be struggling, this amendment is being brought to facilitate *la vente à l'encan de certaines banques à des potentiels acheteurs à la seule discrétion de la Banque de Maurice*.

Well, time will tell, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Let me proceed to section 34. That section makes it mandatory for a bank to prepare and finalise its financial statement within three months from the end of the financial year. And now, with the amendments, the Bank of Mauritius shall have the discretion to extend that period on good cause shown. Once again, I hope that with this amendment some banks will not hide away their financial situation to the detriment and against the interest of shareholders, creditors and depositors.

Section 20 deals with the Capital Adequacy Ratio. That section, as it stands, now requires banks to maintain a Capital Adequacy Ratio of not less than 10%. This is a safety net against risky assets in order, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to protect our depositors. The proposed amendment seeks to remove the 10% safety net and instead empowers the Bank of Mauritius to fix the percentage capital ratio at its discretion. The Bank of Mauritius which is a member of the Basel Committee, which was set up after the financial crisis, and I hope that any percentage that will be fixed at the discretion of the Bank of Mauritius will be in line of with what is recommended by the Basel Committee.

With regard to section 2, which introduces the Digital Banking Licence, I have to admit that this is commendable. In fact, many countries have already set up a legal framework to encourage digital banking. The only problem, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, however, is that there should have been a detailed legal framework to regulate that particular

sector, and also make provisions to ensure the security of the system. Our banks, you will recall, Mr Deputy Speaker, have been the subject of fraud through electronic banking on a number of occasions.

The last one dates back to last month when an offshore company was defrauded of Rs600 billions deposited in a renowned bank. So, digital banking, although I have said is commendable, has got some drawbacks relating to security that need to be addressed. Now, there is also one final amendment to the Banking Laws, is with regard to section 52 of the Bank of Mauritius Act, which deals with the setting up of a Credit Scoring Service Agency. Now, there is already at the level of the Bank of Mauritius a Credit Information Bureau that maintains a database which includes information on the credit worthiness of potential borrowers. In addition now, the BOM is coming with this new agency which shall provide credit scores to potential borrowers. There have been some criticisms already about the Credit Information Bureau coming from certain quarters on the failure to regularly update their database, thus, putting potential borrowers in difficult situation to get credit from banks. I hope, therefore, that with the new agency there will be a fair and thorough assessment before credit rating is effected to a potential borrower.

Mais plus important, M. le président, avec les récents scandales financiers, où, six banques se sont vues exposer aux créances douteuses de *USD* 125 millions, presque cinq milliards de roupies. Je parle, évidemment, de *NMC Healthcare*. J'aurai souhaité que la Banque de Maurice étudie aussi la possibilité de mettre sur pied un *Cross-Border Information Sharing Mechanism* pour permettre à nos banques commerciales d'avoir plus d'accès à des informations sur le *credit worthiness* de certaines firmes étrangères et douteuses pour que ce genre de scandale ne se répète pas dans le futur.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the Environment. I shall say a few words in relation to the amendments pertaining to the Environment laws.

M. le président, je dirai que ça ne fait aucun sens si, d'un côté, on approvisionne le *National Environment Fund* de deux milliards de roupies pour soi-disant protéger l'environnement, et de l'autre côté, on restreint le droit d'un citoyen affecté par une construction qui n'est pas propice à l'environnement de saisir le Tribunal de l'Environnement, afin de contester la légalité de cette construction. Avec l'amendement préconisé au *Local Government Act* de limiter la définition d'un *aggrieved person*, à uniquement celui dont un *BLUP* est rejeté, le gouvernement fait marche arrière sur le dossier

de l'Environnement et incite à la construction et l'opération des entités non-conformes à l'environnement. J'avais moi-même pourtant, M. le président, attiré l'attention de l'*Attorney General*, le 14 février 2020 - cette année-ci - pendant l'ajournement des travaux, suite à un jugement qui a été rendu par la Cour suprême, l'affaire Baumann. J'avais demandé à l'*Attorney General* de venir de l'avant avant d'instaurer le droit d'un citoyen de contester une construction illégale devant le Tribunal de l'Environnement. Mais malheureusement, M. le président, l'*Attorney General* a préféré de faire fi à ma demande. Et on veut y faire croire que ce gouvernement a comme priorité la protection de l'environnement !

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me come to the amendment to the Pension Act. The money collected under the so-called *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* shall be credited as per the Finance Bill to the Consolidated Fund of Government. And what does this mean? It means that, unlike the NPF, the money that shall be collected under the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, shall be used to meet the budgetary expenses of Government. So, this *contribution* is clearly a tax that is being imposed on employees, employers and self-employed from the private sector to meet the expenditure of Government. Further, when you look at what is being provided in the Finance Bill, the Minister who shall be responsible to prescribe the rate of the contribution shall not be the Minister of Social Security, but it shall be the Minister responsible for taxation and finance.

It is, therefore, obvious that the contribution under the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* cannot be described as a pension contribution and this sits very awkwardly in a legislation pertaining to pension. It should instead have been incorporated in the legislation on income tax. I don't see why Government does not want to disclose the obvious. Let's call a spade a spade not a gardening tool. If a contribution is a tax, then call it a tax, not a pension. You should not be ashamed. If you have decided to tax the people to meet your budgetary expenses and, in particular, to pay the old age pension in 2024, you have to say so, don't hide behind a pension law.

Je dénonce aussi le fait que le taux de la contribution sera prescrit par simple règlement par le ministre des Finances et il pourra par la suite augmenter ce taux à sa propre discrétion, sans le besoin de venir au Parlement. Cette Contribution Sociale Généralisée deviendra, M. le président, un *money making machine* pour le gouvernement au détriment des employés du secteur privé. *I hope that people out there realise the implications of this Contribution Sociale Généralisée.*

Now, let me come to the amendment to the Workers' Rights Act. M. le président, je vois que parmi les amendements préconisés, le gouvernement veut renforcer la protection contre la discrimination dans les lieux de travail.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse-me one second! Hon. Adil Ameer Meea, hon. Bablee, your mask, please! Thank you, please continue! Sorry to interrupt you!

Mr Ramful: *So, I was saying that in the Bill, Government's intention is to come forward with amendments to reinforce the protection against discrimination in the workplace. Mais qu'en est-il du cas de Madame Rashida Nanhuck au sein du Mauritius Standard Bureau, M. le président. Ça pue de la discrimination. Cette dame a travaillé...*

(Interruptions)

Ask Mr container to shut up!

The Deputy Speaker: Please continue!

Mr Ramful: M. le président,...

(Interruptions)

Mr container ...

The Deputy Speaker: No crosstalking! Hon. Ramful, you are doing very well. Please continue with your speech! Continue! Continue!

Mr Ramful: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when other Members speak...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member!

Mr Ramful: ...I remain silent.

The Deputy Speaker: Sure, that's why...

Mr Ramful: I allowed them to speak. So, please allow me!

The Deputy Speaker: Please, continue! Please, continue!

Mr Ramful: Cette dame...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed! Continue! Continue! Let him continue!

Mr Ramful: M. le président, cette dame a travaillé pour cette institution pendant 30 ans. Elle a donné sa vie à cette institution pendant 30 ans. Elle a été l'*Acting CEO* pendant 8 ans et quand le temps est enfin venu pour qu'elle se postule à la tête de cette institution, un poste de *General Manager* est créé expressément pour caser une nommée politique afin de devancer à la tête de cette institution Madame Nanhuck. C'est ça l'intention réelle de ce gouvernement. And this Government wants us to believe that it proposes to strengthen the law against discrimination! Ask them to clean at their doorstep first. This is what they should do.

(Interruptions)

Let me come to the amendment to the Public Procurement Act, ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Continue! Continue!

Mr Ramful: Clause 55 of the Public Procurement Act. The Public Procurement Act is being amended to extend the use of emergency procurement, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, not only for the purchase of goods and services, but also to consultancy services. I think hon. Uteem talked about it. As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the resort to emergency procurement during the COVID period has been the centre of much debate these days and has even been the subject of a PNQ this morning.

I have listened to the answers given by the hon. Prime Minister in reply to the PNQ. He has tried to justify the use of emergency procurement on the ground that the country was facing an unprecedented crisis and that, according to him, all procedures were effected according to law and that he was satisfied. I agree, not only in Mauritius, in many countries around the world, countries, health Ministries have been resorting to emergency procurement, mais ce que le Premier ministre doit comprendre, c'est que le mécanisme de l'*emergency procurement* ne peut être utilisé comme une façade pour donner des contrats à gauche et à droite, à des petits copains, proches du pouvoir. This is the issue. Il y a une perception dans le public en ce moment, alors qu'on demande à nos citoyens de faire de sacrifices que des milliers de travailleurs voient leur emploi menacé, que le rapport du *PRB* est renvoyé au détriment de nos fonctionnaires, que des allocations sont sacrifiées, que les pilotes d'*Air Mauritius* sacrifient la moitié de leur salaire, que des centaines de travailleurs sont au chômage technique, que l'agenda scolaire de nos enfants est affecté, et des examens reportés et que les prix des denrées alimentaires flambent dans nos supermarchés, les proches du

pouvoir, eux, avec la complicité de ce gouvernement s'en profitent pour rafler des contrats sous le *emergency procurement* au détriment de nos contribuables. C'est ça la question. Sinon, M. le président, comment expliquez-vous ? Comment expliquer à nos contribuables que des *usual suppliers* des médicaments et des équipements qui sont inscrits dans le *database* du ministère de la Santé depuis des années, ont été laissés sur la touche au profit des contracteurs comme, par exemple, l'Hyperpharm Ltée dont le directeur a été membre du *Pharmacy Board* and du *Medical Council* qui rafle un contrat de 67 millions pour la fourniture des médicaments à la Santé. Bissoon Mungroo, à travers sa compagnie, Gitanjali Co. Ltée, qui est spécialisé dans l'hôtellerie, s'il vous plaît, rafle un contrat pour la somme totale...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order ! Order ! Order, please! Continue! Continue!

Mr Ramful: *I repeat*, Bissoon Mungroo, à travers sa compagnie Gitanjali Co. Ltd, qui est spécialisé dans l'hôtellerie s'il vous plaît, rafle des contrats pour la somme totale de R 10 millions pour la fourniture des masques. Jackpot de R 500 millions à Pack & Blister dont le fondateur a échappé de 13 ans de prison pour fraude fiscale pour la fourniture des *ventilators* qu'on attend toujours.

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Ramful: Des bijouteries et des quincailleries raflent des contrats pour la fourniture des produits pharmaceutiques et parapharmaceutiques.

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Let the hon. Member continue!

Mr Ramful: Alors que les *suppliers* habituels dans le domaine sont laissés sur la touche. Quatre containers maritime reconditionnés, reconvertis en *flu clinic*, contrat raflé par un contracteur Modern Jurassic Building and Construction Ltd au détriment de *District contractors* habituels et dont, M. le président, - écoutez-moi bien - son *sister company*, *Jurassic Waterproofing Enterprise Ltd* avait été sanctionné pour les travaux défectueux à la toiture du Parlement.

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Ramful: Et dont son directeur, pendant la campagne électorale au no. 12, avait mis à la disposition du MSM sa salle de mariage appelée Crystal Taj située à Mare d'Albert pour faire des réunions.

The Deputy Speaker: Comme to the Bill!

Mr Ramful: Le directeur de Crystal Taj avait mis à la disposition ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Come to the Bill, I have heard it.

Mr Ramful: ... des candidats du MSM, sa salle de mariage pour faire des réunions. Ce sont là des questions qui sont restées ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, one second ...

Mr Ramful: *I am finishing.* Ce sont là des questions qui sont restées sans réponse et je laisse le soin à la population de tirer leur propre conclusion.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Doolub, please!

Mr Doolub: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that the debates be now adjourned.

Mrs Luchmun Roy rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

(10.05 p.m.)

MOTION

MR SPEAKER – MOTION OF NO CONFIDENCE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the following motion of the hon. Leader of the Opposition (Dr. A. Boolell)

“This Assembly has no confidence in Mr Speaker.”

Question again proposed

The Deputy Speaker: Following the motion of no confidence from the Leader of the Opposition against the Speaker, on the last occasion, I did set out the parameters within which the debate is to proceed. I shall not go into details as to the long statement I made, but be mindful that the debate is as to the Speaker’s conduct while he is in office with regard to his impartiality, bias ...

(Interruptions)

There are more Members here right now. Hon. Patrick Assirvaden, I am doing my job, let me do it. Thank you very much. So, prior to start of the debate, I would like all hon. Members to abide by these parameters. Thank you, very much.

I shall now invite hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy for her debate.

(10.07 p.m.)

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for having given me the opportunity to intervene on this motion of no confidence against the Speaker of our National Assembly which has been moved by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I wish to join my colleagues and Members of this side of the House to reaffirm, in no uncertain terms, our objection to such a motion. Because to my mind, it constitutes an abuse of the process of our parliamentary democracy and the foundations upon which its head office is constructed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have listened very carefully to the mover of the motion as well as the hon. Members on the other side of the House and I should say I am utterly disappointed with the arguments they have put forward in support of the motion. It goes without saying that a motion against a Speaker of the House is and remains an important facet of our democratic traditions which we have inherited from our colonial masters at the time of independence of our country.

The process of advancing a motion of no confidence is clearly spelt out in the Standing Orders of the House. However, it should not become the major preoccupation of Parliamentarians especially at a time when our country is going through difficult times in the wake of the global pandemic. We would have expected the Members of the Opposition to make a more judicious and diligent use of the time of the House to debate on issues of national concern, on issues that have to do with our grassroots how to better the quality of life of our citizens and not waste such precious time with futile and unnecessary motions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must admit that as a young Member of this august Assembly, I am grossly disappointed because this motion of no confidence against the Speaker that we are debating in this House is certainly unwarranted and most uncalled for. At a time when the nation is crippled by the fear of a second wave of the global pandemic, it is really sad that the Members of the Opposition are busy indulging in a petty blame game and using the time of the House to divert the public attention against the good intentions of

this Government, the policy measures that this Government is initiating for the benefit and improvement of the plight and welfare of the citizens.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, do we not refer this august Assembly as the temple of democracy? *Et comme par coincidence* we have Mr Bhagwan here. Is not this House the repository of people's voice where their dreams and ideals are translated into meaningful actions for their common good?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: But then, what have we been witnessing late in this House? Some Members of the Opposition have, through their acts and doings, their misdemeanour, squarely transform this very temple of our democratic traditions into a platform for political demagoguery, into a park play where they believe - and let me stress wrongly so - that their attitude and disrespect for the Chair will be tolerated and condoned. They are making a mockery of our democratic principles. Well, I am sure these are not the principles of behaviour that we are going to legate to our future generations. The dignity and the decorum of the House should take precedence over all other political considerations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in a Parliamentary democracy such as ours, every elected Member of the House from this side or on the other side, has the legitimate right to voice out his or her views freely without fear and favour. Indeed, all voices have a right to be heard. That is because Members of Parliament are duly elected representatives of the people, as such, they represent the people's interest with fairness and objectivity.

As it is commonly said, the Opposition has its say, and the Government has its way. This is the very essence of our democratic system and the pillars upon which it is erected. No Member of the House is excluded in the process of parliamentary debates.

But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is a caveat to the freedom of expression in the House. The immunity that is bestowed on Members of the House by the Standing Orders should not be construed as a licence to systematically flout the authority of the Chair, still less, to constantly challenge his rulings. We have been witnessing it.

The decorum of the House posits that no Member, from both sides, should in any manner whatsoever show any kind of disrespect for the Chair, for the Chair is the repository

of the rules of the House. He is the guardian of the principles of our parliamentary democracy enshrined in the Standing Orders of the House.

But what do we see in this House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? As if it is a tradition these days, Members of the Opposition are regularly staging walkouts, when, in fact, they should be contributing to parliamentary debates on how to better the lives of the people who have voted for them. They are absconding from their responsibility as the duly elected representatives of their constituents. In sum, they are making a mockery of our parliamentary traditions and principles.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we expect something better from our Parliamentarians from the other side of the House, instead of treating us as muppets and so on, just to name a few.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Motion of no confidence against the Speaker, is in a sense, a motion against the Members of the Opposition themselves. It is a self-inflicted motion, an own goal, as we say in the soccer jargon. Because by their demeanour and misdemeanour, I should say, they are demonstrating that they do not deserve the trust and confidence that their constituents have placed in them. By systematically obstructing the process of the House, they are also proving that they have not yet digested "*la raclée qu'ils ont eu en novembre de l'année dernière.*"

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in our system of parliamentary democracy, debates and discussions are *sine qua non* conditions that should be enhanced and upheld at all costs. Indeed, they contribute to further consolidate our democratic foundations that have been legated to us by the stalwarts of our independence. It beholds us now, as young Parliamentarians, to ensure that these foundations and principles are not vitiated.

As the temple of democracy, Parliament plays a vital role in the furtherance of the public interests through the enactment of legislations and implementation of important policy decisions.

And here, let me quote what a towering figure of Indian politics, late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the former Prime Minister of India and an epitome of parliamentary democracy once said, I quote –

“Democracy does not mean simply shouting loudly and persistently, though that might have occasionally some value. Freedom and democracy require responsibility and certain standards of behaviour and self-discipline.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, there is so much wisdom in this saying and I believe Members of the Opposition should be inspired by what late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru stated so many years ago.

We do not deny the fact that in a democracy, the Opposition has the legitimate right and duty, even the obligation to criticise the Government policies and actions *et le contraire nous aurait étonnés*. Indeed, criticisms, I mean constructive criticisms, debates, discussions and questions are part of the political process and constitute essential pillars of democratic accountability. As elected Members, we have all an obligation to account for our actions. But there is a limit the threshold of which we should not attempt to cross without the risk of being sanctioned by the Chair.

For instance, demonstrating in the compound and precincts of the Parliament with a '*pancarte*' is irresponsible behaviour and cannot be allowed to go unchecked. And the Speaker of the House did what any reasonable and responsible person would have done then and there in view of eliciting a principled behaviour from Members of the Parliament while upholding the decorum and dignity of the House. It also showed to what level Members of the Opposition can stoop in their quest for political gains and disrespect to the temple of democracy.

There is a price to pay for unruly and unacceptable behaviour. Many a time, we have been left totally flabbergasted when we hear seasoned politicians from the other side of the House using unparliamentary words, without any show of respect to us, women Parliamentarians.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the sanctity of the House is at risk when Members engaged in unparliamentary activities and behaviours, the more so, as the proceedings are being broadcast live and people from all walks of life are watching us.

In the same manner, the constant and systematic disruption of parliamentary proceedings, sloganeering against Members of this side of the House, or the Chair do not do justice to our functions as Parliamentarians. They portray an erroneous image of the temple of democracy that this House epitomises.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, ever since the debates in Parliament have been live on television, the population of Mauritius has witnessed a show, particularly, by Members of the other side. "*Tantôt, ils jouent aux superhéros, tantôt, ils préfèrent tout simplement de quitter*

la séance pour faire des vidéos en live sur Facebook ou Tik Tok maintenant". What a pity! *Et c'est pathétique!* The Opposition has no vision, and where there is no vision, people perish.

Democracy gives us a vision, a way of life, compels us to accept certain ideals, norms, or standards of behaviour. Our Parliament is the forum where truth is revealed. As elected Members, we argue, we discuss and in the final analysis, we make compromises in the public interest. We make history so that the light of human recognition in the eyes of those who have placed their trust and confidence in us does not grow dim. It is thus our duty to abide by the rules that inform the basis of our Parliament as the repository of peoples' fundamental interests and will as well as those of a democratic society.

The voice of the people must be heard, must be carried out by people who have imbued with the highest sense of responsibility, and not by those who look forward to every single opportunity to create havoc and shirk away from the trust of people placed in them. Let it be reiterated that our parliamentary democracy provides a peaceful way to deal with the recalcitrant Members of the Opposition.

The people of this country know where their interest lies. They know how to distinguish between a Government that is fully committed to enhance their plight and an Opposition seduced by propagandists and salesmen of new-fangled ideas or group loyalties.

We have adopted universal adult suffrage as part of our democratic foundations. We have established a creative democracy, a democracy that serves the common interests by persuasion, argument and adjustment of conflicting views. Frequent elections indicate that our people have the power to remove their representatives. For democracy to function at its best, there should always be an Opposition. It may not be strong in numbers, but it should not be lacking in political intelligence.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Opposition may not compel agreement from Government on policy issues, but it should compel through ideas. Unfortunately, that is not what we have been seeing from our Opposition. Every week, every parliamentary session, we are gratified with a series of cheap telenovela by the Opposition, even Netflix fails here.

How can we expect a Speaker to show restraint when he is constantly challenged, when Members of the Opposition refuse to abide by his rulings, when they simply remain in a sitting position when the Speaker walks into the Assembly and continue to be rowdy and disrespectful?

For the benefit of this House as well as for the benefit of the population of Mauritius who is watching us at this belated hour of the night, allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to enumerate or to give you a few dates to illustrate some uncertain terms of unparliamentary attitude and behaviour of Members of the Opposition -

1. *On 28 February*, la séance parlementaire a été suspendue pendant 15 minutes pour cause, tous les partis de l'opposition ont effectué un *walkout*.
2. Le 5 mai 2020, le *Speaker* de l'Assemblée nationale a expulsé le leader du MMM, l'honorable Paul Bérenger du Parlement. L'altercation a eu lieu durant une question de la députée, honorable Ms Naveena Ramyad.
3. Le 12 juin 2020, l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed expulsé de l'Assemblée.
4. Le 16 juin 2020, masque noir et pancarte en main, l'opposition fait un *walkout*, alors que le même jour, le Parlement devait examiner les dotations budgétaires des ministres en comité.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt that there has been a dereliction of duty on the part of the Opposition. As I said in the beginning of my intervention, this motion of no confidence against the Speaker is ill-conceived. Indeed, it is a self-inflicting motion because the Opposition has faltered all along and absconded from its duties and responsibilities. I doubt whether the hon. Leader of the Opposition is alive to the gravity of his initiative because, if I recall correctly, it was the hon. Leader of the Opposition who had stated during a press conference that he had no issue working with the Speaker. Which is which?

I only hope that they are not suffering from amnesia, because such a method of Opposition is dangerous for our democracy. The country expects and deserves more responsible Opposition, an Opposition that serves the public interest and helps foster growth and development by providing alternatives.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I wish to reaffirm my unflinching and unreserved support and commitment towards the Speaker of this Assembly. I thank you, for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Collendavelloo!

(10.25 p.m.)

Mr I. Collendavelloo (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I start by referring to what you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, said at the inception of this motion, quoting one of your predecessors in the Chair in 1995 -

“A motion must be supported by evidence, not speculative averments, not mere conundrums, not wild allegations, wild statements and baseless allegations. Facts and only facts, evidence, if you want to show improper motive, bias, bad faith, malice on the part of the Speaker when he has given a ruling, then come with the evidence. Don’t just say he is biased.”

And the mover of the motion, the hon. Leader of the Opposition agreed with everything you said. Therefore, after having said that, we all expected that he would indeed bow to the guidelines which you had mentioned. We expected him to bring before the House, cogent evidence in support of his motion. His main argument was that everything Mr Speaker does is actuated by improper partiality and bias in favour of Government, and that is the crux of his motion. So be it! He is entitled to that opinion. But when he comes with a motion of no confidence, his opinion does matter at all. His opinion matters only if it has at least a substratum of facts to support that opinion. Instead, we were treated to a litany, *un chapelet*, a rosary of invectives against Mr Speaker. I will quote ‘blatant partiality’, ‘unbecoming behaviour’, ‘inflammatory tone and language’, ‘he has turned himself into derision and has become the laughing stock of this country’, ‘he has not been able to contain the tyranny of numbers and far from being inadvertent, his actions have been deliberate with a view to consistently undermining the Opposition’, ‘his action is premeditated.’ Very serious accusations, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and it is obvious that it does not act according to his free volition. In other words, the accusation is that what we see in the Chair is as if a remote controlled object, with somebody controlling every decision that he does. This is an extremely serious accusation and would be warranted, if at all we had something showed to us which would indicate that there was somebody pulling the strings. He has an agenda to serve, that of his political masters, that is, the Prime Minister. There we are. That is the basis of the motion, that is, he serves the Prime Minister and no one else and certainly not the House.

This, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is an unprecedented attack. I have gone through the past motions of no confidence. There has never been such an attack on such a scale as what we heard from the mover of the motion and what is at stake is the very foundation of our Parliament, of our parliamentary democracy. We are witnessing a series of ill-founded, childish, baseless, frivolous, vexatious, capricious attacks on the character of the Speaker. But, as I’ve said, mere generalities cannot suffice. And on what evidence has the hon. mover of the motion stated that he is acting.

Let us take one example, postponement of Parliament, as I am quoting –

“without a fixed date because of *a force majeure* due to a sanitation emergency and a quasi-state of emergency”

Of his own words, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and he states –

“The Speaker did not exercise his prerogatives, but acted under duress from the Executive.”

Mark my point, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The point made is not that he suspended or postponed Parliament. That is not his point. His point is that he did so at the behest, under duress, of the Executive. Where is the evidence? And you yourself, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you were quick to see the point because you interjected and asked him: “Do you have evidence to support what you are saying?”

He bluntly answered –

“But the evidence speaks for itself, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.”

From somebody who has been in this House for, I don’t know 35 years or so, the evidence speaks for itself! Because he had to show and still on summing up, he will need to come and say on what evidence he based himself to state that Parliament was postponed because the Prime Minister as head of the Executives had directed him to do so.

Hon. Alan Ganoo has well stated the Speaker had a choice to make. Was he going to expose the staff, the Police Officers, the attendants, the drivers, the VIPSU, the Clerk, and Serjeant-at-Arms to that disease and expose us? He had a decision to take, he took it. Where on earth do you find that he took it at the behest of the Prime Minister?

Let me take another point, his PNQ on pension reform. He says it was disallowed because it was in breach of the rule against anticipation. But the Leader of the Opposition himself acknowledges that it did reformulate his question after which it was then allowed. So, there was an issue on the way the question had been formulated and if he did not agree he should have come with a motion of dissent and say: “Why did you refuse my PNQ?” Surely, he knows what a motion of dissent is, and not put it in the context of a motion of no confidence.

Then, the third point is that the Opposition was ordered out of the precincts of Parliament. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, everyone is entitled to ask oneself one question: what has that Parliament become with this Opposition? Is it a place where you come with

placards? Is this orderly conduct? Parliament is a place where you come to ask questions and debate, put your point forward to the nation because you have got now direct Parliament TV. And he says that he does not agree with the decision of the Speaker, which is his right of course, not to agree but the stage managed a show. They are unhappy and, for instance, my very good colleague, hon. Armance, of Constituency No. 1, tells us: they have been deprived of an opportunity to ask questions at Committee of Supply. And then, they blamed Government backbenchers, why they didn't ask questions in their place? I know hon. Armance, I am sure he couldn't have invented that argument by himself. If they were so contrite about and they should have been, find a solution so that they would have come to be present at Committee of Supply.

And then, the hon. mover of the motion says the suspension was premeditated. How on earth would the Speaker have known that Members of the Opposition were hiding placards under their desks and would have contrived with the Prime Minister beforehand to suspend them?

Then, there is another point, the refusal. And that is, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. mover, the hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned the Erskine May. Erskine May is, of course, a very important book containing all the precedents. It should be consulted. I make it a point to consult it from time to time. There used to be a time when Erskine May was visible on the Clerk's Table. I find that it has mysteriously disappeared. Oh, I see, there is one explanation! Because if Erskine May were read more often, I am sure we would have avoided many of the misunderstandings that have given rise and which have led to the present motion. Let us take one example, catching the eye of the Speaker. That is an ancient phrase and hon. Armance, yet again, commented on the refusal of Mr Speaker to allow the hon. First Member for Constituency No. 15, hon. Lobine to have the floor. He was very upset about this and, of course, he quoted Standing Order 39 (1) –

“A Member desiring to speak shall rise in his or her place (...)”

And then, as if he was reading it for the first time. His tone fell and he mumbled or stumbled on the words -

“(...) if called upon shall address his or her observations to the Chair.”

The all operative words are that a Member who desires to speak shall rise - well we can't rise now - and if called upon shall address his observations. It is the discretion of the Speaker, of the person in the Chair. This is not as a right that you stand up and say I want to speak. Oh,

sometimes there are arrangements between the Whips. You want to speak? Sometimes there are arrangements between the Whips. When there are arrangements between the Whips, the Speaker cedes to these arrangements, but that is mere arrangements. In default of that arrangement, it is up to you and only you, and nobody else, to take that responsibility.

Then, the fifth point of the mover of the motion, now that it becomes hilarious. Why does the Speaker close the Office on Saturdays? Because of this, there is a motion of no confidence, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. But the more shocking is yet to come. I will quote the mover of the motion –

“We have to bow to the rulings of the Speaker (...)”

How gentlemanly you would have thought, but, of course, it is not enough to give oneself the air of a gentleman.

“We have to bow to the rulings of the Speaker when they are fair and impartial, and in compliance with the Standing Orders and parliamentary traditions (...)”

“We do not bow”, says the mover of the motion. And it is amazing; he was reading from his script that it was not inadvertently said. “We do not bow”, he said “when the rulings of those of a Speaker who acts as a partisan politician”. In other words, he decides. And who does he think he is? He decides which ruling he is going to follow, which ruling he is not going to follow and he dares come with a motion no confidence. The motion of no confidence should have been from us against him for coming with such statements. And then, we will have to bow to his ruling on whether the ruling of a Speaker is partial or not partial. It is clear that there are no serious facts in support of such a frivolous and vexatious motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Authority for our rules of conduct is not derived from like the rules of a club. The Authority derives from two sections of our Constitution sections 45 and 48. Section 45 tells us that we determine our privileges, immunities and powers and we have done so in the National Assembly (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act. And section 48 tells us that we regulate our own procedure and we make rules for the orderly conduct of our proceedings. So, therefore, all this big chafe that we hear from the Opposition is not what they decide or what we decide that matters. All this stems from constitutional authority and there are rules for it, and the rules are not determined by the Leader of the Opposition or anyone else.

The responsibility for maintaining order in Parliament is derived from the Standing Orders, and this is why the Speaker is entrusted with the duty of keeping order in Parliament

and if this is challenged in obstructive, vociferous, insulting manners and languages, you are insulting yourself and not anyone else. You are demeaning yourself and not anyone else. You use objectionable words, look at your mirror and then say then. You refuse to comply with Standing Orders. You disobey the order of the Speaker. You disregard his authority. You behave in a disorderly manner. You bring placards. You shout and interrupt, heckle and this has become an everyday occurrence or every week occurrence in our Parliament. And perhaps, it is good that this motion has been made because insofar as I am concerned, this gives me the opportunity of saying what I really think about the behaviour of the Opposition.

Since 2019, the Opposition clearly does not like the Speaker and whatever they say it is not the Speaker or his authority which is in issue, it is Mr Phokeer. The mover of the motion himself admitted that much, when he stated how, and I am quoting, he erred on the side of caution, when he chose not to second the motion for the election of the Speaker.

Mr Speaker has got many powers. He can decide who speaks, who does not speak. He can direct the Member to restrict the length of his speech and the Member has no choice in it, has no say in the matter. Last time, there was a request for a division and the Speaker refused, there was a hoo-ha, but that is tended in all Parliaments of all Commonwealth countries. Read Erskine May and you will see that the Speaker can refuse a division if he wants to do this. You may like it, you may not like it, it is his responsibility and that is why he does it.

In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Mr Speaker has never used all the powers that he really has. I really consider that he has been extremely lenient. Do we realise that he has not intervened when Members were flouting his authority, and that he has intervened only in cases of gross disorder? I cannot believe that it is a weekly coincidence that every Tuesday, we have to listen to insults, heckling, disrespect towards the Chair.

Let me have one word on the refusal to stand when the Speaker enters the House because very few on our side have mentioned that. Erskine May tells us the Speaker, when rising to intervene, should be heard in silence and any Member who is speaking or offering to speak should immediately sit down. Members should not leave their seats while the Speaker is addressing the House.

Members who do not maintain silence or attempt to address the Speaker may find themselves called to order by the majority of the House with loud cries of order, which we failed to do. A Member who persists in standing after the Speaker has risen and refuses to

resume his seat when directed by the Chair to do so, may be directed to withdraw from the House.

This Opposition has violated all the elementary rules pertaining to our democracy.

Remaining seated when the Speaker walks in and remaining standing when the Speaker intervenes, what a lack of respect! Never seen in Mauritius!

Even in the days when there was a strong and vibrant Opposition - I was in the Opposition, we never did that. I think I am not going to say what I was going to say.

Let me give just one statistic, between 03 of February and 23 June 2020, there have been 66 cases of disorderly conduct. 66 cases! Only one from Government side...

(Interruptions)

One from Government side! I come now to points of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, with all due respect, I shall ask you to be mindful of the time.

Mr Collendavelloo: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr Collendavelloo: I have 5 minutes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: You have spoken for about 25 minutes.

Mr Collendavelloo: Thank you.

Points of order. There is a case where there has been extreme leniency. Let me invite Members to read chapter 21 para 49 of Erskine May, because of time constraints, I am not going to read it. The Speaker must intervene to preserve order. If the Speaker does not intervene, then any Member may rise and ask the Speaker to do so. A Member speaking to order must simply direct attention to the point complained of and submit it to the decision of the Speaker.

If the Speaker is of the opinion that the words complained of are disorderly, the Member will be called upon to conform to the rules of the House. Here, the Opposition does exactly the contrary. Points of orders are raised for any matter. The Prime Minister answers to a PQ, because this is to the displeasure of hon. Bhagwan, he raises a point of order because the Prime Minister has taken too long. This is a point of order?

Now, some Members are notorious for raising fake point of orders. Let me just quote what the Deputy Speaker in the House of Commons has said, deprecating a growing practice of interruptions of debate by Members. When the hon. Member who is speaking refuses to give way, they think that the only way that they can get their word in, is by raising a point of order. This constitutes fraudulent point of order and should be stopped.

Let me conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on one incident that will stay in my memory for a long time, and what has shocked all of us here. And I shall be extremely charitable. I shall give due consideration to youth and inexperience of a Member who made a dishonorable intervention on 16 June 2020. That Member waited for all her colleagues to leave the Chamber; alone, with all the superb which one can muster, aggressively, threateningly uttered unacceptable words, and I am being very lenient in my comments, reminding me of a particular scene...

Mr Mohamed: On a point of order!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! I will listen to hon. Mohamed's point of order.

Mr Mohamed: I am listening very carefully to the lessons that the former Deputy Prime Minister is making...

The Deputy Speaker: Come to the point of order, hon. Mohamed!

Mr Mohamed: And the point of order is as follows, following his own lessons that one has to follow what Standing Orders say, there is the obligation on the part of any Member making any accusations of what was supposedly said in this Chamber, to come and substantiate it by evidence and the only evidence...

(Interruptions)

May I continue, please?

(Interruptions)

Can I continue?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order, please!

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode! Hon. Abbas Mamode!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Nuckcheddy! Please, order!

Mr Mohamed: May I continue please?

The Deputy Speaker: Please, go direct to the point.

Mr Mohamed: So, following those lessons, I will stick to what the Standing Orders say. The Standing Orders say...

(Interruptions)

May I continue? Standing Orders say that if anyone is to make any accusation and against any hon. Member of this National Assembly whilst it goes on in the National Assembly, the evidence that has to be brought forward and acceptable is Hansard. Not what he thinks, not what his opinion is, not what his views are, not what all of them may think! The only thing is Hansard!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Then, move your point of order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: The conclusion is, that if he cannot produce any evidence, which is Hansard, I will invite you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to tell him to follow the lessons that he so boldly gives.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: One second! We will come to you. My understanding of previous ruling is, there are certain matters that are in the Hansard and certain matters that the hon. Member is saying somebody has said. It is two different points.

Mr Mohamed: The evidence!

The Deputy Speaker: It's two different points.

Mr Mohamed: The evidence!

The Deputy Speaker: Don't argue with me! Coming back to it, on last occasion I did clearly say, I was in the House. That's final.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Member, I am not giving you...

(Interruptions)

Hon. Ganoo, you have the floor.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, I am arguing that what hon. Shakeel Mohamed said just now is not a point of order or is a fake point of order because the former Deputy Prime Minister is entitled to make a comment on the wrongdoing of a Member, even if this has happened outside the premises of the Assembly.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: No crosstalking! No crosstalking, please! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! One second! One second!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order, please! I have already made it clear what the position of the Chair is with regard to that matter for today. I will take it, but make sure you have a second point of order which is clear, not contesting my ruling. Please!

Mr Mohamed: I am not in any way contesting your ruling, even though I don't agree with you.

The Deputy Speaker: Don't even comment about it. Go on to your point of order!

Mr Mohamed: I am not even commenting, I am saying I don't agree with it. My point is very simple. If I understand correctly, my point is that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are sitting in the Chair, you are asked to rule on something, and you are using your own testimony. Don't you think you are conflicted?

(Interruptions)

You are judge and party!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed, first of all, I am giving you a first warning, you cannot challenge the Chair. First of all! Secondly, it is not a point of order that you have just made. I have given you the lead, be mindful about making wrongful use of point of orders. Thank you very much.

Hon. Collendavelloo, please continue!

Mr Collendavelloo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from my latest count, I have 32 pieces of evidence sitting here, and I have not counted you, because you might be conflicted.

(Interruptions)

Can I recall that a Member speaking to order must simply direct attention to the point complained of and submit it to the decision of the Speaker and not bully the Deputy Speaker, nor harass the House; bully boys can go elsewhere. I will come back to what I was saying. I was just reminding everyone that one has got need to have certain standards when we come to this House. Is there anything else disorderly that warrants a point of order in what I have said? I was saying that this particular Member, and I am not going to mention his or her name, because I just want it to be on record for her own sake, because what she did, reminded me of a particular scene of roots where the planter's wife was haranguing, conducting dig.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Please, continue! Continue!

Mr Collendavelloo: Let me say that you - inexperience cannot...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Collendavelloo: ...and inexperience do not provide...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Collendavelloo: It merely reminded me of a scene and I will never...

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Collendavelloo: I am sorry!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Collendavelloo, please, come to the debate and conclude!
You were doing very well.

Mr Collendavelloo: Yes, I am concluding. Well, let me just say it...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Continue! Continue, please!

(Interruptions)

Mr Collendavelloo: Hon. Member, this is my last sentence in my speech. You are really a chip of the old block, and that is not a compliment.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

(11.07 p.m.)

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): M. le président de séance, *a motion of no confidence* est une déclaration sur la question de savoir si une personne en position de responsabilité n'est plus jugée apte à occuper ce poste, soit parce qu'elle s'acquitte mal de ses obligations ou qu'elle prend des décisions que d'autres jugent préjudiciables.

Le Speaker est tenu de permettre aux membres d'exercer leur droit en tant que parlementaires, il a failli à cette tâche. Il est sensé refléter la dignité de la Chambre de par son comportement en démontrant, et pratiquant une impartialité vis-à-vis des membres de la Chambre ; tel n'est pas le cas.

Durant ma carrière de parlementaire, j'ai connu plusieurs Speakers. L'honorable Ganoo, lui-même, que je ne reconnais plus aujourd'hui pour ses prises de position. J'ai connu Sir Ramesh Jeewoolall, l'ex-honorable Dev Ramnah, l'ex-honorable Razak Peeroo et

l'honorable Kailash Purryag. J'avais eu le rare privilège d'assister à la présidence de Sir Harilal Vaghjee pendant les vacances scolaires alors que j'étais encore étudiante. Tous avaient leur style particulier. Celui-ci, une fermeté teintée d'humour, d'autres plus ou moins conciliants, mais jamais ils ne se sont départis de leur rôle de modérateur. Quand ils voyaient que quelque chose allait mal dans la Chambre, ils ont vite fait de désamorcer la situation avec tact et diplomatie, et l'impartialité était le maître-mot.

Or, aujourd'hui, que voyons-nous? *Le Speaker has displayed partiality and this is so obvious.* Ce parti pris a été démontré de façon flagrante dans la manière dont le Speaker a géré la situation par rapport au comportement du ministre de l'Infrastructure publique. Celui-ci s'est permis d'insulter la mère de l'honorable premier député de Port Louis Maritime et Port Louis Est, en l'apostrophant en ces termes : *'Sorte dehors si to piti to papa !'* Ce sont des propos sexistes et condamnables ! En ce faisant, le ministre essaye de jeter de la boue sur une dame ne faisant pas partie de notre Assemblée, dite auguste, et ternir sa dignité et sa réputation. Ses propos sont sexistes et visent à abaisser la femme. Et cette dame ne fait même pas partie de l'Assemblée, et même si elle en faisait partie, cela aurait été pareillement grave. Quand on n'a pas d'argument, on s'attaque à la maman, à sa dignité de femme, à son honneur. La fin justifie-t-elle les moyens ? Et c'est ce même Speaker qui préside le *Gender Caucus* de l'Assemblée nationale ! Et le Speaker n'a pas expulsé l'honorable membre. Pour moins que cela, le Speaker avait *named* le leader de l'Opposition et le premier député de Stanley/Rose Hill, l'honorable Paul Bérenger. *Naming a Member* est devenu pour ce Speaker très banal et le Speaker a fait fi des *Standing Orders* dans les deux cas. Le *Standing Order* 49(1) stipule que –

“Whenever a Member shall have been named by the Speaker or by the person presiding (...), the Speaker shall forthwith put the question, on a motion being made, that such Member be suspended from the service of the Assembly.”

Et la section 49 (2) continue dans ce sens –

“If any Member be suspended under paragraph (1) of this Order, his or her suspension shall last until such time as the Assembly, by resolution, shall decide.”

Le Speaker a donc fait preuve de partialité et de viol des *Standing Orders*.

Mardi dernier encore, le Speaker a fait preuve de partialité. Alors que mon jeune collègue, le député Uteem intervenait sur les *Estimates of Supplementary Expenditure 2017/2018*, le Speaker lui a intimé l'ordre de restreindre son intervention dans les paramètres

du projet de loi, qui n'est pas mauvais. Or, le Premier ministre a eu tout le loisir d'aller au-delà du projet de loi. Doit-on comprendre que *some are more equal than others?* Ce qui est condamnable également c'est le fait qu'après l'intervention de l'honorable Uteem, le député Lobine a été privé de paroles. Malgré le fait qu'il a, à plusieurs reprises, demandé à s'adresser à la Chambre, le *Speaker* a délibérément refusé de lui donner la parole malgré l'interprétation de l'ex-DPM sur le terme *catching the eyes of the Speaker*.

Mon collègue de ce côté de la Chambre, l'honorable Assirvaden, avait dit dans son intervention sur la Motion que le *Speaker* souffrait peut être de son oreille gauche. Et il n'entend jamais les remarques acerbes des membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre. Jamais aucun membre du gouvernement n'a été suspendu, jamais aucun membre du gouvernement n'a été expulsé de la Chambre. Donnez-moi un seul nom, M. le président de Séance. Alors que l'expulsion de l'Opposition se fait à l'appel, le leader de l'opposition, l'honorable Paul Bérenger, l'honorable Bbagwan et même toute l'opposition pour avoir réclamé la démission d'un ministre.

Je suis tentée de dire que le *Speaker* a un problème non seulement à l'oreille gauche mais également à son œil droit. Il ne nous voit que très rarement pour les questions supplémentaires. Lors de la question de l'honorable premier député de Vacoas/Floreal, adressée à la ministre du Genre le 07 juillet, concernant l'abus sexuel sur un enfant de 3 ans à la Cité Anouska à Curepipe, j'ai essayé à plusieurs reprises de *catch his eyes*. Il feint de ne pas me voir. Quand finalement il me regarde, il secoue la tête de gauche à droite, de droite à gauche et il décide de ne pas m'accorder ma question supplémentaire.

Cela a été vraiment injuste. Je crois qu'il aurait pu me permettre une question parlementaire d'autant plus que j'avais occupé le ministère des droits de la Femme et du Développement de l'enfant de 2000 à 2005 et que j'avais des questions importantes et surtout des suggestions à faire à la ministre sur le sujet.

L'honorable Anquetil a également tenté en vain de *catch the eyes of the Speaker*. Le *Speaker* a-t-il un problème avec les femmes, M. le président de Séance, surtout les femmes de l'Opposition. Ce jour-là, M. le président de Séance, il ne m'accorde pas une question supplémentaire, ni à moi, ni à l'honorable Anquetil, mais il voulait à tout prix donner la parole à l'honorable Assirvaden qui n'en avait pas demandé. Et je rappelle encore une fois que le *Speaker* préside le *Gender Caucus*.

M. le président de Séance, poser des questions est un droit et un devoir sacrosaint des parlementaires. En tant que tels, nos mandants attendent que nous interpellions le Premier ministre et les autres ministres sur des questions les concernant au parlement. La population s'attend que leur problème soit discuté au parlement à travers des questions et des projets de loi. Or, le droit de poser des questions nous a été dépouillé, confisqué. A ce jour, il y a eu 27 séances parlementaires hormis celle de la prestation de serment du 20 novembre 2019 et de ces 27 séances parlementaires, aujourd'hui cela fait la cinquième séance où les questions parlementaires figurent à l'ordre du jour, le 5 mai, le 9 juin, le 30 juin, le 7 juillet et aujourd'hui 21 juillet.

Pour soulever des problèmes relatifs à nos circonscriptions ou d'importance nationale, il ne nous reste que l'ajournement. Or, à l'ajournement nous ne disposons en tout et pour tout que de 30 minutes et là aussi pas de sujet à controverse. Est-ce cela de démocratie parlementaire ? Il n'y a point de démocratie lorsque le gouvernement ne nous donne pas des informations à la nation à travers nos questions. Il y a-t-il *collusion* entre le *Speaker* et l'Exécutif à ce sujet ?

Finalement, M. le président de Séance, le ton et la tonalité du *Speaker* qui hurle à tout bout de champ. Il fait preuve d'une incapacité à se maîtriser. Serait-ce là une manière de camoufler une non-maîtrise des *Standing Orders* ? Alors il hurle et hurle le même mot pendant plusieurs minutes d'affilé tel un robot incapable de s'arrêter jusqu'à ce qu'il ait enfin retrouvé ses esprits. Ce matin c'était *show decorum*. Cet après-midi c'était *parliamentary democracy* et ceci à l'adresse des membres de l'opposition uniquement. Ce comportement agressif ne reflète pas un *role model* ni pour nos jeunes parlementaires et encore moins pour nos jeunes qui suivent les débats à la télévision. Notre société souffre déjà d'agressivité. Le *Speaker* n'a pas à y ajouter. Il gesticule, il menace, il crie, il vocifère, il hurle, c'en est trop, M. le président.

M. le président de Séance, tout ce comportement de la part du *Speaker* est grave. Nous espérons qu'il se ressaisisse au plus vite pour la bonne marche de la démocratie parlementaire car jusqu'ici *the Speaker is failing to carry out his obligations in a fair and dignified manner*.

Sur ce, je réitère mon soutien à la motion présentée par le Leader de l'Opposition.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much! Hon. Dr. Ms Chukowry, please!

(11.22 p.m.)

Dr. Ms D. Chukowry (Second Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have carefully listened to the arguments brought forward by the mover of the motion, the hon. Leader of the Opposition and some hon. Members of the Opposition side who have taken the floor before me.

I do not agree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition who has brought this motion as the reasons and grounds put forward are meaningless and unfounded. The Speaker has always ensured the decorum of the House and shown respect to all Members of this Assembly. On the other side, it is shameful that for the past sessions, the Members of the Opposition chose not to stand up on the arrival of the Speaker in the Chamber. This is no less than ill-fitting behavior coming from hon. Members who are not only disrespecting the Chair but also willfully undermining the sanctity of our National Assembly.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a country that is self-respecting should be able to take pride in the inherent quality of its Parliament and indeed, it so seems that in their blind zeal for showmanship, many have forgotten that we have been chosen by the people to be part of a repository that is hinged on diligence, maturity of thought and action, and, of course, honesty. We are the elected representatives of our people and we have been labelled as politicians for the best or the worse because we are expected to shoulder the supreme and secret duty of protecting, safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing and welfare of our motherland, our fellow countrymen and our common future.

A Parliament remains a crucible of constructive debate and should forever stay as a rampart that sustains the lifeblood of a country. At times, different parties may disagree and there is adequate leeway for those who feel aggrieved to seek redress, but let us not forget that this interaction has to be a proof of fair play and gentlemanship and definitely not descend into pedestrian vulgarity and obscenity.

The Constitution of the Republic of Mauritius bequeaths to every Member of Parliament the right of association and expression and we are fortunate that the rule of law still prevails high and mighty in this country of ours. But a right and freedom of expression should not be construed or rather misconstrued as the green light to speak or act in a matter that would flout the tacit rules of decorum to be observed in Parliament. We need to remember and recall each and every time there is a session our people are watching us and it is, therefore, our duty to be exemplary representatives who translate the will of the nation.

And our Constitution further provides that our Parliamentary interactions be mediated, moderated and presided by the Speaker.

Anyone in this seat will readily confess that it is not the easiest of task to be impartial at all costs to ensure that interventions are within the parameters and to guarantee that order and temperance remain the overarching attributes of our National Assembly, demand that the incumbent be vested within exceptional qualities of rectitude, firmness, judgment and justice.

I am not here to unduly praise or flatter anyone, but since his current tenure, the hon. Speaker has exuded those qualities that would have otherwise turned our interaction into a democracy deficit. Some of you may perceive some of his decisions as clinical, but again, let me underline that it is equanimity that restores and binds the faith of the people into our temple of democracy and no one does it better than our hon. Speaker!

Things have been said and things have been done, but this should not and should never have given rise to unbecoming, shameful and disproportionate behavior from the Opposition. The population can reconcile with the fact that many of them are still young and cutting their teeth into politics and at this juncture a measure of brazenness may be laughably excused but ill-suited demonstration from the so-called learned politician is no less than shocking and abject and are best left to the people to judge.

Let me give you a few dates. On the sitting of 28 February 2020, hon. Shakeel Mohamed uttered the word cowards to the then Deputy Prime Minister, a jargon which is unparliamentary and best left to the streets. He was ordered out by the Speaker. Then, it was the leader of the Opposition who became discourteous as he was challenging the authority of the Chair, the Speaker then ordered the Leader of the Opposition to proceed out and the latter systematically refused. The Speaker even had to seek the help of the Sergeant-at-Arms. Then, all the Members of the Opposition left the House. On the sitting of 05 May 2020, hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger uttered the unparliamentary word *mal élevé* to the Speaker and he was ordered out and all Members of the Opposition once again left the House. On 11 June 2020, hon. Bhagwan was ordered out for refusing to withdraw the word 'voler' which was addressed to this side of the House. On the sitting of 16 June 2020, the then Deputy Prime Minister was invited to take the floor. Members of the Opposition stood up and displayed a poster seeking the resignation of the then Deputy Prime Minister and left the Chamber. Overtly protesting through billboards using the premises of the Parliament testify to the juvenile limitation of some and I am, at least, relieved to state that, fortunately, the faith of

our country has not been placed in their hands, otherwise, we would have been heading straight down into a permanent catastrophe.

The ruling of the Speaker was that the Members of the Opposition had committed a gross misconduct under Standing Order 48 and was ordered out of the precincts of the Assembly for the sitting of that day. On 30 June 2020, hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger uttered the word '*lâche*' to the Prime Minister and was ordered out for not withdrawing the unparliamentary word.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as elected Members of the Parliament, as hon. Members of this august Assembly, we have to exhibit honourable, correct, behavioural patterns, not only during the proceedings of the National Assembly because it is broadcasted live and the people, our people are watching us.

On ne peut se permettre à jacasser toutes sortes d'absurdités et de mensonges parce que nous bénéficions de l'immunité parlementaire.

We have to display upright behaviour wherever we are because people look up to us as role models.

On doit se rappeler que nous avons le devoir et l'obligation de bien nous comporter. J'ai été choquée quand une honorable membre de l'opposition a traité les membres du gouvernement de '*zako*', parce que son paternel a été prié de se retirer de l'hémicycle, après avoir enfreint le *Standing Order*. Je comprends, qu'en tant que fille, elle a voulu défendre son père, mais cela ne lui donne pas le droit de nous traiter de '*zako*', un terme, malheureusement, imprégné de connotation raciste.

Mr Speaker, Sir, le respect d'autrui, ça s'apprend à la maison, et que nous soyons jeunes ou novices en politique n'est pas une excuse. Ce ne sera pas inapproprié de rafraîchir la mémoire, malheureusement, parfois dilettante de certains de nos confrères et consœurs de l'opposition : quand le président du Parlement exige qu'un parlementaire quitte l'hémicycle, c'est qu'il s'appuie sur les *Standing Orders* à bon escient, afin de sauvegarder la bienséance de notre Assemblée. Mais force est de constater que les autres membres de l'opposition se mettent de la partie et préfèrent quitter l'hémicycle, en guise d'une solidarité discutable et douteuse. Surtout, que quelques mois de cela, un leader d'une partie de l'opposition disait que son parti et une autre partie de l'opposition étaient indivisiblement comme le jour et la nuit.

Aujourd'hui que voyons-nous ? L'éclipse au parlement! Faut-il leur rappeler qu'ils sont rémunérés des fonds publics et que leurs responsabilités et sens du devoir envers le peuple doivent impérativement être placés bien au-dessus de leurs intérêts personnels? Un parlementaire, digne de soi et imbué du sens de l'honneur, ne s'adressera jamais dans la désinvolture, avec un manque accru d'un minimum de courtoisie envers le président d'une Assemblée. Alors, de grâce, épargnez-nous, donc, de vos quolibets futiles et tapageurs! Peut-être, que ce sera utile de faire remarquer aux membres de notre chère opposition que ce gouvernement ne fait pas dans la dentelle. On a pris les rênes pour accomplir la vision d'un peuple et on y restera. Et laissez-moi vous dire que le peuple en a assez de vous!

Our confidence in the hon. Speaker of this revered Assembly remains as strong, robust and perennial as ever. He may be a stern judge, but he is the right man in the right man in the right place, to fiercely preserve the precepts of democracy and freedom in this House.

From the above given reasons, I move that the motion of no confidence against the hon. Speaker of the House be quashed and voted against. I believe that the Speaker must continue to uphold the freebies of parliamentary behaviour, that is, decorum, dignity and discipline.

Thank you all for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Ramchurrun!

(11.37 p.m.)

Mr N. P. Ramchurrun (Third Member for Savanne & Black River): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, motion of no confidence against the Speaker of this House. This House known as the temple of democracy and a motion of no confidence is today against the person who rules in this House.

Believe me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I take no joy whatever in speaking in a motion of this nature. I am deeply conscious of the gravity of this motion. How rare it has been in the history of this Parliament for the motion to remove the Speaker from Office, to be put forward for debate. It is a subject of great importance and great significance.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Office of Speaker is more than just a privileged position. It is more than a pomp and ceremony and parades. The Speaker is the custodian of the dignity of this Chamber and it reflects us all who are seated here. The Speaker is the authority in whom the public has confidence because they believe in the fair workings in this Parliament.

Despite political differences, the Speaker must be an impartial umpire of the people and the proceedings of the House. From time to time, the Speaker rebukes Members, Members on both sides, I must say, because he believes that they have not appropriately followed the Standing Orders. If the Speaker undertakes the job, he must earn the right to be respected in exercising that discipline. He is respected and must be respected because he holds an Office entitled to respect. He has built a reputation and earned that respect and this Speaker has formidably done that.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can anybody in this House remind whether the Leader of the Opposition has taken any responsibility for the conduct of his Opposition Members of their behaviour? Has he taken any responsibility for the conduct of Members of his political party and their MPs? Can he, today, admit that he did *rappel à l'ordre l'honorable* Joanna Bérenger for comments made last time for having uttered the word 'zako'?

(Interruptions)

Yes, she said so.

(Interruptions)

Yes, she said so towards us, towards me, and the Deputy Speaker was here. If you have not heard it, you were not in the House. Okay. But she said so.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: No crosstalking! Continue! Continue!

(Interruptions)

Mr Ramchurrun: *Oui, beh line dir sa.*

The Deputy Speaker: Continue!

Mr Ramchurrun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, no one walked up to hon. Ms Jonnana Bérenger and said that this was not acceptable.

M. le président, je suis un jeune parlementaire. Je m'attendais à de grands débats dans cette Chambre, des débats d'idées, à un moment où notre espérance de vie est menacée par une maladie qui fait des ravages. Au lieu de cela, on entend que des insultes, nous traitant même de 'zako' qui, pour moi, est clairement une insulte, venant souvent de ceux qui prônent la suprématie. Et ça, c'est une insulte raciste en Afrique, et c'est grave. C'est très grave! Et nous, nous sommes dans un pays Africain. On est en Afrique nous aussi.

The Leader of the Opposition is great at lectures, on responsibility, but very light on accepting responsibility himself for the unacceptable conduct of Members, of his Opposition Members. But we will none of that from the Leader of the Opposition, because on these questions, he is incapable of change. His double standards should not rule this Parliament. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, good sense, commonsense and proper process are what should rule this Parliament. This is what I believe is the path forward for this Parliament, not the kinds of double standards and political games imposed by the Leader of the Opposition. The hon. Members of the Opposition are expected to uphold the decorum, dignity and discipline of this august Assembly. Unfortunately, most of the times they address this House or follow this side's address to the House, they make it a must to destroy the decorum, dignity and discipline of this august Assembly.

M. le président, il est clair que l'opposition n'arrive pas à accepter sa débâcle lors des dernières législatives et comprendre une bonne fois pour toutes que la campagne électorale est derrière nous. Cette motion n'a pas lieu d'être, cette motion a pour but de faire diversion et de faire de la politique purement partisane à l'intérieur de cette Chambre au lieu de discuter des sujets essentiels et haute importance pour notre pays et nos concitoyens.

Si on jette un coup d'œil dans le passé, on constatera que le MMM et son leader n'ont jamais respecté les leaders précédents. Précédemment, M. Phokeer, on se souvient de sa déclaration, insistant qu'Ajay Daby a été le pire *Speaker* de l'histoire ou sa décision de ne pas se lever quand le *Speaker*, Sir Ramesh Jeewoolall, entrait dans cette Chambre. Le MMM voit toujours le *Speaker* comme un ennemi, sauf quand c'était Dev Ramnah entre 2000 et 2005. Et ce parti ose nous accuser de partisanerie et de mettre en cause l'impartialité du présent *Speaker*. Spécialiste du *walkout*, le Parti travailliste semble vouloir copier le style du MMM, en mettant en avant l'honorable Mohamed dont les gesticulations a pour seul but de créer une tension dans la population. On se souvient de sa déclaration lors des travaux du Metro Express, incitant des gens de la capitale à venir manifester. Comme il le dit si bien cette motion est pire qu'un *zente*, je ne dirais pas l'autre.

M. le président je suis déçu, extrêmement chagriné, je suis dépité comme député. Moi, je suis d'accord avec une motion de blâme mais je pense qu'elle aurait dû être dirigée contre cette opposition et pas contre le *Speaker*. Ça devait être contre cette opposition. Cette opposition qui est la pire opposition de l'histoire parlementaire de notre pays.

Trois grands perdants, trois grands partis. *Shame to them*. M. le président ! Je pense que les membres de l'opposition ne savent plus quel stratège appliquer. Leur démagogie est sans limite. Venir avec des pancartes dans cette Chambre, avec dégoût, haine, machiavélisme et manque de respect et par la même occasion remettre en cause l'impartialité du *Speaker* est du jamais vu.

Je comprends qu'on veut marquer des points politiques mais il y a une limite, M. le président. Il ne faut pas être psychiatre pour diagnostiquer des dinosaures politiques, mabouls qui n'arrivent toujours pas à accepter de nombreuses débâcles électorales. Se payer avec la main depuis quelques années, des nouvelles têtes en politique et que ce soit de ce côté de la Chambre ou à l'opposé, la population a mis des jeunes dans ce Parlement. Que ceux qui ont fait une superbe carrière dans l'opposition continuent à faire des niaiseries politiques, dépassées, je peux comprendre, M. le président, mais à ceux et celles qui sont des nouveaux venus, moi, je demanderai d'être différents. Oui, nous sommes adversaires, mais ne sombrez pas dans la démagogie.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Continue, please!

Mr Ramchurrun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have in front of us, a dangerous Opposition. In fact, no institution is safe from this Opposition. No convention is safe from this Opposition, the Courts are not safe from this Opposition and this Parliament is certainly not safe from this Opposition. It is an Opposition that does not believe...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Continue!

Mr Ramchurrun: It is an Opposition that does not believe in due process, it is an Opposition that does not believe in fairness, it is an Opposition that has no shame and it is prepared to tear down any institution, tear down any convention to get at its objective.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Ramchurrun: Which is to bring back into power the Leader of the Labour Party backed by shameful electoral alliance which is, the three of you, the three big losers.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I won't be long but my last few lines...

An hon. Member: Last few lines.

Mr Ramchurrun: Last few lines...

The Deputy Speaker: Continue, continue!

Mr Ramchurrun: The seasoned Opposition which will let no institution, no convention stand in their way. Hence, I firmly oppose to the core, to the motion of no confidence.

Before ending my speech, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must say that Mr Speaker should keep it up and should carry on with the good job. I thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I suspend the sitting for 20 minutes.

At 11.49 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 00.23 a.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated!

Hon. Bablee!

Mr G. Bablee (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): M. le président, honorables membres de l'Assemblée, après avoir écouté les membres de la majorité et de l'opposition, j'estime qu'il serait salulaire de faire une rétrospective des motions de blâme débattues au sein de l'Assemblée nationale au cours des 50 dernières années.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Continue! Continue!

Mr Bablee: Le 10 décembre 1963, l'honorable Jules Koenig présenta une motion de blâme contre le *Speaker* Sir Harilall Vaghjee qui est devenu Sir après quelques années.

Le 14 septembre 1982, l'honorable Sir Gaëtan Duval présenta une motion de blâme contre le *Speaker* d'alors, l'honorable Alan Ganoo.

Le 7 mai 1985, l'honorable Cassam Uteem présenta une motion de blâme contre le *Speaker* Ajay Daby.

En 1990, l'honorable Sir Anerood Jugnauth présenta également une motion de blâme contre le *Speaker* Ajay Daby.

En 1995, l'honorable Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam présenta une motion de blâme contre le *Speaker* Iswurdeo Seetaram et en 2017, l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed présentant quant à lui, une motion de blâme contre la *Speaker* Maya Hanoomanjee.

Après avoir fait l'historique de toutes ces motions de blâme, M. le président, j'en déduis que notre démocratie se porte vraiment bien. Nous ne tenons pas à museler l'opposition comme certains le supposent.

Ainsi nous nous retrouvons aujourd'hui devant une énième motion de blâme, présentée cette fois-ci par le chef de l'opposition, l'honorable Dr. Arvin Boolell contre le *Speaker* Sooroojdev Phokeer.

M. le président, je voudrais comprendre ce que l'opposition reproche exactement au président de la Chambre. Est-ce sa forte personnalité? Est-ce son franc-parler? Est-ce sa voix tonitruante? Est-ce le fait qu'il se lève assez fréquemment du perchoir? L'honorable Patrick Assirvaden a déclaré, je cite dans son discours –

« Nous avons, en 2020, un *Speaker* qui ne parle pas, il hurle! »

M. le président, dans cette Chambre, on parle tout le temps de l'immunité parlementaire, mais je pose la question ici dans cette Chambre: a-t-on déjà entendu un être humain, hurler? Je pose la question, nous sommes là dans cette Chambre. Quand j'ai écouté l'honorable Patrick Assirvaden venir dire que nous avons un président qui ne parle pas mais qui hurle. M. le président, si l'honorable Patrick Assirvaden se réfère à l'une des définitions du verbe 'hurler', je ne suis pas là pour faire des leçons.

The Deputy Speaker: Your mask, please!

Mr Bablee: Qui est selon le dictionnaire Larousse le fait de, je cite –

The Deputy Speaker: Your mask, please! Thank you very much. Continue, please!

Mr Bablee: Je cite -

« Pousser de longs cris, plaintifs ou furieux, notamment en parlant du loup, de l'hyène, du chien ».

Comment appelle-t-on ça, ici, à l'intérieur de cette Chambre? Est-ce que ce n'est pas la provocation, l'insulte vis-à-vis d'un homme? Et tout ça se fait sous l'immunité parlementaire. Et aujourd'hui qu'est-ce qu'on reproche au président de cette Assemblée? Qu'est-ce qu'on reproche au président? Qu'est-ce qu'on reproche? On dit qu'il parle fort, qu'il a une voix

tonitruante mais je dis à l'honorable Assirvaden, et je vois que madame l'honorable, elle aussi elle a repris cette affaire de hurler, qui n'y a pas de place - je vous dis encore une fois il n'y a pas de place - au sein de cet hémicycle pour une telle médiocrité.

À juste titre, M. le président, je dirais que le *Speaker* a une voix, l'opposition s'attendait peut-être à un président mollasson, comme on le dit dans le langage créole à Maurice, un président *gounga*.

(Interruptions)

Quand l'honorable Assirvaden vient dire que nous avons un président qui ne parle pas, il hurle, mais est-ce que l'opposition s'attendait à avoir un président *gounga*? Par ailleurs, M. le président, plusieurs membres de l'opposition ont déclaré que le *Speaker* doit être un arbitre et non pas un joueur.

Certes, le président de l'Assemblée nationale est un arbitre et nous sommes deux équipes à jouer sur le terrain, pour reprendre le trope footballistique employé par certains membres de l'opposition, il est donc judicieux de rappeler que le rôle de l'arbitre est d'appliquer les règles et de veiller à ce qu'elles soient respectées.

De ce fait, M. le président, quand l'arbitre brandit un carton jaune, il s'agit d'un avertissement, et quand un joueur est menaçant, belliqueux, vulgaire, outrancier et irrespectueux, l'arbitre n'a pas d'autre choix que de l'expulser en brandissant un carton rouge.

Sur ce, M. le président, le *Speaker* a parfaitement joué son rôle d'arbitre depuis la prise de ses fonctions en janvier, car il a tout fait dans le respect des règles et aucun membre présent dans cette assemblée, aujourd'hui, ne pourra dire le contraire.

Il est clair, M. le président, que la motion de blâme présentée par l'opposition contre le *Speaker* s'apparente davantage un délit de faciès, car c'est la personnalité même de l'homme qui est remise en question, sa personnalité, dont je viens de définir, comment il est. Chacun a sa façon, chacun a son style, chacun a sa voix, c'est ça qu'on essaie de faire comprendre. C'est de démolir la personnalité de ce *Speaker* en donnant l'impression que c'est un homme pour qui on n'a pas de respect, parce que ce qu'on critique c'est sa façon de s'habiller, sa façon de parler. Et c'est ça, M. le président!

Alors, d'autre part, M. le président, comme le montre l'historique des motions de blâme auxquelles j'ai fait référence, au début le ou la président et présidente de l'Assemblée

nationale, nommé par la majorité au pouvoir, a toujours été la cible de l'opposition et cela peu importe, je dis bien, peu importe, l'alliance, pas de l'alliance politique, au l'antagonisme entre les partis, les couleurs et les bannières, tel est le jeu politique.

Je choisis, donc, de voter contre la motion de blâme présentée par l'opposition.

Je vous remercie pour votre attention, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Abbas Mamode, please!

(00.35 a.m.)

Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, first and foremost, I would like to highlight that it is not out of pleasure that the Leader of the Opposition came up with such a motion . On the contrary, it is hard for us to bring such a motion, unfortunately, being duty bound, we are being compelled to do so.

The core of this motion is that the Speaker of the National Assembly is being unfair towards us, Members of the Opposition, and I believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that in doing so, he is also being unfair to the population as a whole. We should not forget that we are the representatives, the voice of hundreds and thousands of Mauritians here, in this Parliament. Depriving us from speech, expelling us from the House, and it is important for the record that I have to relate to an episode. *Lors de l'épisode de la pancarte-* for the record - *même si l'honorable Xavier-Luc Duval n'avait aucune pancarte dans sa main, il fut expulsé du Parlement, pardon, expulsé de l'enceinte du Parlement.*

Malheureusement, le donneur de leçons, l'ancien DPM, est absent de l'hémicycle, ignoring our willingness to participate in debates and asking questions, turning down PNQ, turn a deaf ear whenever we are insulted. All these are nothing, but shutting down the voices of those people we are representing in the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the reality is that we, Members of the Opposition, are facing obstruction to perform our duties. This is fact. Only a morally blinded person will deny this fact. I am not here to make a list of all the terms that we have been wrong by the Speaker of the House. The list will be too long, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Yes, around seven months since Parliament has resumed after the election, with all the holidays and lockdown, the few sittings that we had, yet the list is long. Anyway, from baselessly expelling Members of the

Opposition to tolerating insults towards us, we had it all. My colleagues from this side of the House have provided so many examples on same.

On a more serious note, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what I want to express through my speech is that the fundamental, the foundation of our system is at risk, only people as partial, as Members of the Government side can say that there are no cases of partiality. The population as a whole has been made to question the essence of our democracy after various sittings of the Parliament, for we are being watched live on TV, on social media.

I do not believe it is of my or any Member of the House's role to stand up here, today, to tell the Speaker about his roles, but we are forced to do so, because our rights, as rightly elected Members of the House, are being violated again and again. Of course, there has been, there is and there will be differences in opinions, approaches and beliefs. This is the very spirit of being in a democracy. Ideas should be confronted. Questions unrevised for the benefits of our citizens. If we are silenced by being expelled or ignored, I fail to understand how the Government will be able to deliver the bus to the population.

Before I move on, Deputy Speaker, Sir, in an endeavour to show that this motion is of utmost importance and not a waste of time, like hon. Members, on the other side of the House, are trying to show. I would like to cite examples of what has happened in the House before, during the previous mandate. Now, I am not shifting topic. I am not judging anyone here. I repeat it, I am not shifting topic, I am laying emphasis here, as I do not want to be blamed of going out of subject while exposing my views.

Now, let me take a few minutes to tell the House, now that hon. Ganoo is on the other side of the House, in the Government side, he no longer feels that it is discriminatory, that it is being partial when a Member of the House struggles in vain to make his or her voice heard.

Now, hon. Minister Ganoo is talking about understanding how trying and difficult the job of the Speaker is, and demands understanding, but when he was going through more or less the same situation, what did he say? Addressing the then Speaker, Mrs Hanoomanjee, and I quote from Hansard of 17 July...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member...

Mr Abbas Mamode: I have to, because he opened the door, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I am so sorry. I am just replying to what he said in his speech then.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I am not stopping you. Just be mindful where you are trending.

Mr Abbas Mamode: I am quoting from Hansard of 17 July 2018, at page 29 -

“**Mr Ganoo:** Madam Speaker, it is not possible that you could not have seen me ten times ...”

I will quote again. I believe it is important to quote hon. Ganoo, here, to show what it is, in reality, when, as Members of Opposition, we are being deprived of our rights of speech of questioning.

So, I quote –

“**Mr Ganoo:** This is unfair and a discrimination, we all have the same right in this House.”

Again, Hansard of 17 July 2018, hon. Ganoo, in his attempt to perform his duty as a Member of the Opposition explained himself. Do not worry hon. friend! Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not going to read all Hansard like an hon. Member on the Government side did. I will quote for the last time, Hansard of 17 July 2018 -

“**Mr Ganoo:** I have not challenged the authority of the House. I have expressed my opinion. As a Member of the House, I have the right to ask questions.”

I know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the debate today is on the motion of no confidence in Mr Speaker, namely hon. Phokeer, and not hon. Ganoo.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Abbas Mamode: I bear this in mind. I am only citing these extracts as an example to show a parallel in the situation, then and now, and how this motion is rightful. Coming back to what I was saying, I have expressed my opinion as a Member of the House.

“I have the right”, hon. Ganoo did say.

Don't we have the same right today, hon. Minister Ganoo?

(Interruptions)

We are not doing any cinema; we are here for no other reasons...

Mr Ganoo: On a point of order!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I have a point of order from this side.

Mr Ganoo: The hon. Member firstly must address the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. He is questioning me and I am not...

Mr Abbas Mamode: I am addressing the Chair!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member...

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not denying anything that the Member is reminding us. I am not denying anything. He does not have to remind me of all what I have said in Hansard. All this is true?

Mr Abbas Mamode: Yes!

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

(Interruptions)

Order! Order!

Mr Ganoo: The motion of no confidence is not against me, it is against Mr Speaker.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: May I? Hon. Abbas Mamode, I am listening to you, try to stick to the point. You are trying to make your point; you are making it very brilliantly. We are listening, but go as to this present Speaker.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I just interject?

(Interruptions)

When other Members from Government side were talking about me and other Members of Government, then it was fine? Then, when hon. Minister Ganoo is being touched, then it's a problem? That's double standard!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Shakeel Mohamed! First of all, this is not a point of order that you have made. Secondly, you are contesting me in the Chair right now. You are alleging that I have double standard? Is that what you are doing?

Mr Mohamed: I am not saying that you carried out a double standard, but what I am saying is that what hon. Ganoo is saying is provoking double standard.

The Deputy Speaker: No point of order! Continue, hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Abbas Mamode: We are not doing any cinema, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, please continue.

Mr Abbas Mamode: The hon. speaker who spoke just before me, he started from 1963, and you allowed him. I am just referring to 2017.

The Deputy Speaker: I am not stopping you, continue.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Ok. We are not doing any cinema; we are here for no other reasons than to work for the benefit of our people. Moving on, I will refer to the Official Website of the Assembly concerning the duties of the Speaker. What we can read, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and I quote -

“One of the most important qualities of a Speaker is impartiality. He must be above party politics. Once elected to the Chair, he owes his loyalty to the dignity of Parliament.”

Let us take the three main characteristics one by one. Being impartial! Once again, if I undertake the task of listing and citing examples, we will not be done any soon. Just to mention one incident, mentioned so many times before, may be, because it had shocked us the most, when the hon. Minister Hurreeram openly acted aggressively, on unparliamentarily terms, targeting hon. Shakeel Mohamed. Yet, Mr Speaker was so relaxed and declared he did not hear anything!

This whole incident is very much indicative of how partial the Speaker is. What is even more shocking is that the Speaker is not even trying to hide or cover his partiality. He does it openly. Why I am saying he does it openly, is because we were all present in the House during the whole incident.

We all know that it is impossible that the Speaker did not hear or see anything. Yet, he just minimised the whole issue by stating he did not see or did not hear anything.

He is not even trying to mask properly. Hon. X. L. Duval on the Opposition side was sanctioned, while hon. Collendavelloo, then, on the Government side, did his speech without a mask, with the blessing of the Speaker.

(Interruptions)

He was over there. He is down here.

The Deputy Speaker: Continue! Continue! Address me!

(Interruptions)

Mr Abbas Mamode: Now he is going to sleep; he is not even here.

The Deputy Speaker: Talk to me!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Ok, I know. Moving on, *M. le président*, a Speaker should be above party politics. There is, obviously, a reason behind demanding a Speaker to be above political parties. It is so because, as a Speaker of the House, as a judge of this National Assembly, he should be neutral. Also, Members of the Opposition should be able to have trust in the Speaker.

The Speaker should, and has the obligation to be unbiased, and only comply with the Constitution and not to the political belief and tactics of the majority. Can we see those characteristics in the actual Speaker? I leave the question open, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Last but not least -

- A Speaker owes his loyalty to the dignity of Parliament.
- A Speaker should not forget that he is the Speaker of the House.

Unfortunately, we have the impression that our Mr Speaker is a Speaker of the Government. Almost all the time, he never hears the unpleasant comments from the Government side. It is always Members of the Opposition side who are shouted at. Yes, shouting! Shouting at the Members of the Opposition in an attempt to intimidate us is like a common practice in the House for some time now! There should not be any misunderstanding here. We are not demanding the Speaker to be in favour of the Opposition or to be on our side unfairly, far from that, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. What we are expecting is a Speaker for the House, and in a way a Speaker for the nation as a whole, not a Speaker for any particular side or group.

I believe that, by now, everyone knows why the hon. Leader of the Opposition had to put this Motion in the House, and how important it was to do so. All my colleagues from this side of the House express themselves on same, citing examples, giving facts. And, on the contrary, what we can get from the other side of the House, as usual, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when they lack argument, is giving the whole debate a communal turn.

It is a shame to hear an hon. Member of the House relating a debate of such importance to the time of slavery, talking about slaves and masters!

What has this to do with the motion of no confidence, I wonder! We all wonder!

We are demanding equal rights in the House, and hon. Nuckcheddy is trying to create division between inhabitants of our country, rural and urban areas. Another Member of the Government side...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you have a point of order?

Mr Nuckcheddy: At no point of time, I ever uttered anything...

The Deputy Speaker: Wait, wait! Is it a point of order or clarification?

Mr Nuckcheddy: It is a point of clarification.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you giving way?

(Interruptions)

Mr Nuckcheddy: I said clarification.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you giving way?

(Interruptions)

Hon. Abbas Mamode, are you giving way?

An hon. Member: It is not a point of order!

Mr Abbas Mamode: I am not giving way.

The Deputy Speaker: He is not giving way.

Mr Nuckcheddy: It is a point of clarification. It is under Standing Order 40.

The Deputy Speaker: Go on!

Mr Nuckcheddy: For imputing motive because I never said anything which the hon. Member is saying! Okay?

Mr Abbas Mamode: I am not imputing motives.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode, you are a seasoned Member. Continue! Not on this line! Continue!

Mr Abbas Mamode: But when another Member of the Government is addressing a lady MP, a young lady as ‘*maman de Vacaos*’, this is indicative of the fact that they lack arguments to discredit the Motion. The House has been rightly referred to as a temple of democracy by several Members of the opposition side. In this very temple of democracy, the

Speaker should act respectfully, fairly; he cannot allow himself to be biased. He should forget about his political conviction and keep in mind the dignity of the Parliament.

Neutrality, fairness and impartiality are the three things that the House is expecting from the Speaker.

We are looking forward to be able to do our duty as MPs in the best way possible without worrying about *la tyrannie des nombres*, and the Speaker being part of the *nombres*. Difference of opinion will always form part of politics. Within a sane and equitable space, this difference of opinion can be debated and lead to amazing results for the betterment of the population.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Dhunoo, please!

(00.57 a.m.)

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. After listening to the mover of the Motion, and other Members of the opposition who have been debating so much of nonsense and rubbish, already I feel saturated and tired. It is already late or shall I rather say early....

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! Order! Hon. Member...

(Interruptions)

Hon. Member! Hon. Member!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order!

Hon. Dhunoo, be mindful as to the words that you are using. It is not proper to be using the word 'rubbish'.

An hon. Member: *Li bizin* remove!

An hon. Member: Withdraw! Withdraw!

(Interruptions)

Mr Dhunoo: If it's your ruling; if you want, I will remove it, but they have been talking so much nonsense, I had to put it to...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, do not challenge my ruling!

Mr Dhunoo: No, I never challenge your ruling. I go as per your ruling. I remove it.

The Deputy Speaker: Come to the debate!

Mr Dhunoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Members of this august Assembly are all aware that, apart from our Standing Orders, there are certain established Parliamentary customs, conventions, etiquettes and rules that are required to be observed by the Members in this House. No Member should deviate from the decorum, dignity of the National Assembly. It has been mentioned in the rules of the National Assembly, if ever there is any problem regarding the interpretation of the rules, we may refer to Erskine May and to the practice that prevails in the House of Commons in UK. In fact, the very first Standing Order states, and I quote –

“(1) In cases of doubt the Standing Orders of the House shall be interpreted in the light of the relevant practice of the House of Commons of the Parliament of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.’

And then, it goes on to say –

(2) ‘In any matter for which these Orders do not provide the said practice shall be followed, but no restrictions which the House of Commons has introduced by Standing Order shall be deemed to extend to the National Assembly, (...).’

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are governed by the rules. If our rules are silent on any issue, we have the practice of the United Kingdoms. This is important because debates that are held in this House have to be debates where people respect each other, each one exchanging his views. A vote is taken, and the Bill is either passed or is not passed; this is what we are here for. We have heard about Parliamentary democracy and heard about how the House should be run. But let me just remind the House that the Parliament, the National Assembly, is, in fact, the best example of democracy. We, as Parliamentarians, should be the example for the youth of this country. Being among the youngest Parliamentarian, I feel ashamed when I see the behaviour of Members of this opposition. But it is shameful that learned Members of the opposition, choose, on the arrival of the Speaker in the House, to remain seated and not stand up. They talk about respect. This is disrespect not only to the Chair, but to this institution, to the Assembly, and disrespect to the people in this country.

The Speaker is, in fact, being taken to task because he has been attempting to uphold the three D's of Parliamentary behaviour: Decorum, Dignity and Discipline. We have witnessed how Members of the opposition make it a point to try and destroy the dignity of the House. They make it a point to bring as much indiscipline that they can. They make it a point to make this place look undignified. We have seen on an occasion where they used *pancartes* to make protestation.

When the Speaker uses Standing Order 48 to order them for disorderly conduct, they go out and say that they have been thrown out of the House because of their acts. One point I will mention is that for several sessions - I can give examples, I have gone through the Hansard where many Members of the Opposition have gone against Standing Orders of the Assembly, hon. Collendavelloo mentioned it earlier and I have also gone through the Hansard, since the first sitting of the Assembly of this new Government, there have been more than 66 times that the Speaker had to intervene to keep the decorum of the House out of the 25 sessions, excluding that of today. If we see, out of the 66 sessions where the Speaker had to intervene, there was more than 70 times that hon. Shakeel Mohamed has disturbed the House, more than 10 times, the Leader of the Opposition, himself, has been disturbing the House, more than 10 times, hon. Bhagwan has been disturbing the House. Members have been saying things which are unacceptable and unparliamentary. When they are asked to withdraw, they say: 'I will not withdraw.' Then, the Speaker has no alternative than to withdraw the hon. Member from this House, and when they do not want to go, he had to call the Sergeant-at-Arms so that his rulings are respected.

Some hon. Members have talked of decorum and dignity in the House, and the same Members addressed hon. Members of this Government as *zako*. The time that each type of name was given to anyone, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has been abolished since 01 February 1835, and this is unacceptable that Members treat the Members of the Government of such things. I feel ashamed to say that, this young hon. Member should hide her face. Everyone knows whom we are talking. She is not even in the House, she has left.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will not be long. I want to come to the hon. Leader of the Opposition who has insinuated that if all the Members on this side of this House are going to vote against the motion, it will, on the contrary, prove his case that we are altogether on the same side of the Speaker. I have never seen such reasoning. Does he mean to say, therefore, that we must back him and agree for the motion? Then that would have been honourable for us? So, in this House, we will need to accept any kind of disorder, not allow people to

speculate because there are many people out there who like to speculate in this country. And we have seen Members of the Opposition, today itself, a new Standing Order, a new point of order was created by hon. Shakeel Mohamed. We are not of that type, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We from the Government side are not of that brand. We are not of that type, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We believe we should take our stand where there is righteousness. Therefore, we do not agree with the Leader of the Opposition who has brought this motion against the Speaker.

We do not believe in all the reasons that have been put forward. The Speaker had ensured the decorum of this House and follow the Standing Orders. We are going to vote against this motion. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much! Hon. Dr. Rawoo, please!

(1.06 a.m.)

Dr. I. Rawoo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is sad and unfortunate to assist in this august Assembly at this very late time, I would say, early morning, that the Leader of the Opposition is coming up with a motion of no confidence which does not weigh any substance against the Speaker of this House.

So, let me remind him that the first business of this House was to elect a Speaker when this Assembly first met after the general election. Let me remind the hon. Member that he was the one who did not oppose the candidationship of the Speaker. Let me remind him it was those same Members of the other side of the House, among himself, who were chanting recently, '*mille fois Maya*', referring to the previous Speaker of this House, but forgot they were the same people who put a motion of no confidence against her in 2017. It has become a common routine to become amnesiac for some Members of the other side of the House. Confusion and deliberate acts of time wasting has become now a tradition for some Members of the Opposition.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to-night I fail to understand the real motive of the Leader of the Opposition and some Members of the other side of the House. I fail to understand why certain Members, who are meant to be seasoned Parliamentarians always have in this House, in such a manner which can be considered as disrespectful to the whole population who is regularly watching all of us live on TV. Maybe they want to become showmen and famous on TV. My advice, they should have become actors instead. Unfortunately, they are not realising that they are constantly discrediting themselves by doing so. For some Members of

the other side, acting has become their hobby, forgetting what are their main roles as Parliamentarians should be.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as elected Members of this House, we are supposed to show examples to the whole population, especially to the younger generations. Unfortunately, this is not the case for some of the Members of the other side of this House. These Members who will surely identify themselves without naming them are a shame for themselves. They are always shouting and coming up with disrespectful comments and arguments. These same Members are always trying to *zet laboue* on Members of the Government. This has become a common practice for them, using parliamentary immunity to come up with lies and stories. So cheap of them! It is sad and unfortunate to observe that these people are considering themselves as Members of Parliament who can deserve due respect by doing such cheap acts on a regular basis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, do these showmen Members have a mirror in the House? If yes, they should watch themselves more often.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please! No comment! Continue!

Dr. Rawoo: All Opposition Members should watch themselves more often before they come and speak in this august Assembly. I always ask myself the question if they do not have kids in their family. Are they not ashamed when they come and speak like this here? Are they not ashamed to know if their own children or grandchildren are watching them? They are supposed to show examples of being respectful Members. Alas, it is the contrary! Sometimes, I ask myself the question, if they behave themselves like this in this House, how do they behave themselves in their own house!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not here to give lessons, but as a young Member of this House, I expect some decency from experienced Members of the other side of the House.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Dr. Rawoo: Respect is not brought by trying to cheaply throw mud on the face of others, but it is earned through respectful arguments. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, even a child at school follows rules that are set. This child at school respects and listens to his teacher and to the Rector. So, why these supposed seasoned Parliamentarians on the other side of the House,

who are supposed to behave themselves as examples to the nation, always behave in a barbaric way most of the time, always shouting louder than a Speaker, not following the rules of the House, not respecting the orders of the Speaker, always confronting the Speaker and always stopping other Members of the Government to complete their answers. For me, it is very uncivilised to behave like this on a regular basis. This is why the young generations are less interested in politics when they see this type of uncivilized behaviour of some Members of the Opposition.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in any organisation, there are sets of conducts and rules to abide with for its proper running. Without discipline and abiding to these sets of rules and code of conduct, the organisation will fail to function properly. In every organisation, there is a hierarchy to be respected. Without respecting this hierarchy, havoc and chaos will happen and eventually, the whole system will fail. We are not reinventing the wheel. Today, our society is functioning properly because our people are abiding and following rules in a disciplined manner in their daily lives. I came with this simple example to make the Members on the other side of the House understand that this august Assembly has also rules by way of Standing Orders to be followed. Why should these Members be above all citizens of this country? While everyone in our country are following and abiding to rules set in their daily lives, some Members of the other side of the House have decided to do the contrary here in this House, not respecting the hierarchy of the Assembly, who is the Speaker. Have they forgotten that the Speaker is the principal holder of this House? Not respecting the Standing Orders, not respecting other Members of the House, is it that difficult to be respectful and humble? A deep rethinking, for example, as this Member is disturbing, this is a deep rethinking of re-education need to be considered by them.

M. le président, le mardi 23 juin, le leader de l'opposition a mis bêtement une motion de blâme contre le *Speaker* de cette Assemblée et le lendemain, 24 juin, dans une déclaration à la radio, il affirme qu'il ne croit pas à l'indépendance du président de la Chambre. Il cite notamment l'expulsion de tous les députés de l'opposition par le *Speaker* suite à leur protestation dans l'auguste Assemblée contre l'honorable Collendavelloo le mardi 16 juin et également l'incident survenu le 23 juin entre l'honorable ministre Hurreeram et le whip de l'opposition. Il cite que le ministre ne fait pas honneur aux parlementaires. Tout à fait contraire de son propos. Je soutiens fortement l'action courageuse de l'honorable ministre Hurreeram pour son acte de bravoure et de démontrer que certains membres de l'opposition

jouent le rôle d'acteur de bas niveau comme dans une pièce de théâtre tandis que nous, ici, de ce côté de la Chambre, nous sommes là pour travailler pour l'intérêt de la population.

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Dr. Rawoo: *Sa inn tasse dans zotte la gorge!*

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Dr. Rawoo: Le Leader de l'opposition ajoute qu'il faut comprendre que le *Speaker* est un arbitre et non un joueur. Il a raison sur cet unique point car c'est pourquoi le *Speaker* est là, pour soutenir le respect et l'ordre dans cette Chambre. Dans certains cas, afin d'obtempérer, le *Speaker* n'a pas d'autres choix que de suspendre la séance en vue de régler le problème hors de l'hémicycle, c'est-à-dire à son bureau. Des accrochages verbaux, des fausses allégations non fondées, des critiques. Le *Speaker* gère tout ça de façon de maître. Cette motion de blâme venant du Leader de l'opposition est définitivement carrément infondée.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am again not giving any lessons, but it is a simple kind reminder to Members on the other side of the House who have, most of them, supposedly more Parliamentary experience than me, let me kindly remind them that according to Constitution of this Assembly, the Speaker symbolises the authority of Parliament. Let me kindly remind them that the main function of the Speaker is to ensure that the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly are complied with. The Speaker interprets and enforces the Standing Orders and for the purpose of the interpretation, recourse is often had to Erskine May Parliamentary practice, respond to Members' point of Order and giving rulings where necessary. Let me kindly again remind them that his ruling cannot be challenged on a substantive motion to that effect and any criticism of his action outside Parliament may amount to contempt of the National Assembly. Unfortunately, we constantly see that some Members of the other side of the House always take a malicious pleasure to always challenge the ruling of the Speaker. Being seasoned Parliamentarians, this is completely disrespectful.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, even a child in school respects his Head Master, why is it contrary in this House? Why they can't abide to this simple rule of discipline? Why can't they show respect to authority while a child can do so at school? We are not at kindergarten, aren't we? We are here to orderly debates, questions and answers, but unfortunately, when the Members on the other side start crosstalking, throwing invectives, the Speaker is left with

no choice but to act, no choice but to take sanction, harsh, and in my opinion sometimes not harsh enough.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me kindly remind Members of the other side of the House that one of the main duties of the Speaker is to maintain order during debates which becomes sometimes unruly. The Speaker can call Members to order for the use of unparliamentary language, for misbehaviour, for constant interruptions, for irrelevance in debates and for engaging in private conversations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is no logic that the Speaker must vacate his seat. People are talking about survival of democracy where we voice out our opinions and feelings. It is fortunate that we are all living in a democratic country but as elected, educated, hon. Members, we should be an example to the population and abstain using abusive language, unparliamentary words and most importantly, we must show respect to the Chair and it is a real example of utter shame on the other side of the House trying constantly to throw mud at the Speaker and to other Members of the Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we should all work together for the benefit of all Mauritians, we are all here to represent our country and give examples and not act with disrespect. We are in an august Assembly, the highest temple of democracy. By being constantly undisciplined in a disrespectful manner, it erodes the decorum of the House. It prevents speeches and other serious matters to be dealt with smoothly in this House.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me kindly remind them that the Speaker may order a Member whose conduct is grossly disorderly; to withdraw immediately from the House during the remainder of the day's sitting. If a Member persistently flouts the authority of the Chair or willfully obstructs the business of the House by abusing the rules of the Assembly, the Speaker is empowered to name the Member. However, what we see here in this House when this happens, everyone in the Opposition walk out. It has become a tradition for them to walk out. They have forgotten that they have been chosen by the electorate to be their voice in Parliament. Walking out may be the easiest choice for them as they don't respect their own electorate who voted them. Instead they prefer the laziest choice of going home early.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me kindly remind Members of the other side of the House that the Speaker has the power to discipline Members who break the procedures of the Chamber of the House.

If the independence of the Speaker is removed, the House will become a mockery of democracy. The Speaker is the one to implement the rules and principles. Members of the Opposition should know how to behave themselves in this House.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on Tuesday 16 June, the Speaker took the right decision against Members of the Opposition, whose conduct was grossly disordered, with posters in the hand, trying to create instability and manifestation in this Assembly. Maybe they have forgotten that Parliament is a forum for the Members to debate within the parameters of the Standing Orders. According to Standing Order 48, the Speaker or the person presiding shall order any Member whose conduct is grossly disorderly to withdraw immediately from the House during the remainder of the day's Sitting, followed by Standing Order 49, where the Opposition did wilfully obstruct the business of the House by abusing its rules.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as usual, the Opposition does not compel obedience to the ruling of the Speaker, and after that, a motion of no confidence was put against the Speaker, showing clearly a total sense of disrespect to the holder of this Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, irrespective that you are a Member of the majority or you are a Member of the Opposition, the duty of the Speaker is to see whether the rights of the Members are respected fairly. Unfortunately, every time the Speaker exercises his discretion, if it is against the Opposition, they always say the Speaker is not acting judiciously and fairly. It is very unfortunate that sometimes we tend to forget that this House has an important function in democracy, and it is also matter of regret that sometimes Opposition Members tend to forget that this august Assembly represents the aspiration of the nation at large.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, following the rules and regulations established in Standing Orders being given to all parliamentarians, it is the first thing to be learned as an elected Member. Standing Order is the bible of our august Assembly. As a respected Member of Parliament, we cannot come and treat Members of this House with cheap words like '*figir zako*'. It is a cheap act of desperation. Not just because we have immunity that we are allowed to show disrespect in this Assembly. This is one of the reasons why the Speaker has to exercise his duty and compel obedience.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are in temple of democracy in this National Assembly. Rules and Regulations of Standing Orders need to be complied by Members of this House and the Speaker's role is to symbolise the authority of Parliament and whose ruling cannot be challenged and the speakership is the most important Office in this House. We all trust the

qualities of the Speaker, hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, and his loyalty to the dignity of Parliament.

Let me conclude on a John Bercow quote –

“There is no point in worrying about things you can’t influence.”

Let me repeat it, Sir.

“There is no point in worrying about things you can’t influence.”

In this respect, all Members in the Government have full confidence in the impartiality of hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

(1.26 a.m.)

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have listened carefully to the different orators who have intervened on the motion before me.

Members on the other side of the House seem to be surprised and even vexed that the Leader of the Opposition has come with such a motion.

I wanted to talk tongue in cheek, but I leave it to the population to draw their own juicy conclusions on the enlightening intervention of my dearest hon. Dr. Rawoo; a real gem in this House. He, himself, said that we, Members of the Opposition, are here to *zet la bou* at them. Thus, I will not throw my precious words at him *au risque de me salir*. There is hardly any substance in what he said for me to rebut.

I also heard my good and young friend, very nice friend, hon. Dhunoo who has done a lot of arithmetic, who was mentioning how many times different Members of the Opposition interrupted the proceedings of the House. I will request this hon. Member to make his *mea culpa* and take some time and count how many times he, himself, interrupted the proceedings of this House.

In his intervention on this motion of no confidence, again, my good friend, hon. Nuckcheddy, disappointed many of us. I commend you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for ruling that he was mostly irrelevant and you, yourself, drew his attention on several occasions. He

made several communal innuendos and he said, I quote from his intervention on the early morning of 15 July 2020, page 224 from the Hansard –

“Hon. Bhagwan seems to have perpetuated himself in the colonial times.”

It is dangerous to drag the debate on communal terrain. Rest assured, we will not follow him on that ground.

My good friend, hon. Nuckcheddy even alleged that the Opposition was carrying a show and this motion did not have its *raison-d'être*. Let me quote what he said on the early morning of 15 July 2020; refer to Hansard page 223, and I quote –

“Members of the Opposition are getting used to waste the time of this august Assembly. It seems that moving motion of no confidence on the Speaker is becoming their norm.”

Allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to refer to the relevant sections of our Standing Orders, to explain to all those who are listening to us today that we resort to a substantive motion when we note that the Speaker is biased, partial and unfair, and such situations will resort to Standing Order 40, paragraph 5. In fact, Standing Order 40, paragraph 5, reads as follows –

“The conduct of the President and the Vice-President of the Republic or the person performing the functions of the President’s Office, the Speaker, Members of the Assembly, etc...shall not be raised except upon a substantive motion moved for that purpose”.

And this is precisely what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has done and in strict conformity of the Standing Orders. This is the only way we, Members of the Opposition, can discuss the conduct of the Speaker.

Today, I am happy to note that the Opposition is united and stands behind this motion, because we have seen time and again, ever since the beginning of this present mandate, when proceedings have been chaired by the Speaker, the word ‘impartiality’ has taken a back seat, and this is what we deplore.

As a new MP, I had entertained some legitimate expectations that the Speaker would be an impartial protector of the constitutional rights and privileges of each and every Member of this august Assembly. For instance, on 05 February 2020, during a radio programme, I had personally, publicly declared that I had ample reason to trust the Speaker until and unless

proved otherwise. Here we are, a few months later. The population of Mauritius like me and the Members of the Opposition have lost faith in the Speaker.

When the Speaker ceases to be impartial, then we are not far from making a travesty of parliamentary democracy. The way the Speaker assumes his role is directly related to the way our democracy operates. The powers of the Speaker are enough for him to gag, to silence or to muffle the Opposition if he so wishes. He has the powers to refuse questions from any Member of the House. His powers are sufficient for him to expel and even name Members of this House.

As long as he uses his powers impartially and in an unbiased way, we have to comply. But when these powers are used in a discriminatory, vexatious and surreptitious way, then the sacrosanct principles of our democracy are sullied and outrageously trampled.

We, Members of the Opposition, like any Mauritian, we have the right to ask such questions regarding fishy dealings, controversial dominations or promotions in the public or parastatal sector, obscure procurement procedures and other malpractices. Parliamentary accountability is a must. For today's sitting itself, 21 July 2020, I'll rather say yesterday, the question by hon. Patrick Assirvaden addressed to the hon. Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance in regard to the former CEO of the Financial Services Commission and the present Governor of the Bank of Mauritius was turned down without any valid reason.

I humbly think this is where the Speaker should assume his duty and role as a fervent defender of truth, justice and transparency, but, unfortunately, this is exactly when my confidence...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member! Just one second! With all due respect, you are doing very well, but you are not contesting the ruling of the Speaker for not letting you questioning? Are you? So, be careful about it!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you. Thank you.

This is why I am appealing to the Speaker and I kindly request him in the name of democracy, in the name of natural justice, in the name of our Constitution to make amends *de se ressaisir et d'encourager l'opposition à jouer la carte de la transparence*. Sitting here and observing how parliamentary democracy is blatantly, ruthlessly, unsparingly stabbed in this august Assembly makes my heart bleed. I can refer to incidents on 28 February; 05 May; 16; 23, and 30 June 2020. To paraphrase Alan Paton, I would say: 'Cry my beloved Parliament'.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to earn the respect of the Members of the House and public, the Speaker does not need to brandish the Standing Orders and scream vociferously which he does unsparingly. He needs to ensure objectivity in his rulings. The Speaker is the loneliest Parliamentarian because he does not only have to be impartial, but has to be seen to be impartial. If the Speaker had been impartial, we would not have reached this point of no confidence. Jane Austen would have advised the Speaker to use his sense and sensibility instead of his pride and prejudice.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Albert Einstein rightly said, I quote -

“Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.”

It is when the arguments get furious, intense and heated that I expect the Speaker to do honour to his Chair and to restore discipline. We have a Speaker who candidly allows some Members of the other side of the House to have a field day with innumerable innuendos, cheap invectives, verbal abuses and recriminations. There are Members on the other side of the House who have repeatedly threatened and abused hon. Shakeel Mohamed. Verbal abuses are often followed by communal innuendos or attacks. His parents have also been shamelessly attacked by a Member who happens to be a Minister of our Republic, on the other side of the House. Hon. Patrick Assirvaden, hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie and hon. Salim Abbas Mamode have lengthily dealt on this issue. Had the Speaker been impartial, he would not have condoned such an unparliamentary behaviour. Hon. Patrick Assirvaden, hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie and hon. Salim Abbas Mamode have discussed it and proved beyond any doubt that the Speaker is blatantly partial at times.

It is the duty of the Opposition, the press and other free and independent institutions to fight against corruption. The Speaker has often tried to stifle, muffle, silence and gag those Members of the Opposition who try to raise pertinent issues related to corruption, malpractices which indubitably embarrass the Government.

Not later than on 14 July 2020, hon. Khushal Lobine whose name was on the list of orators to intervene on the summing up debate on the Supplementary Appropriation (2017-2018) (No. 2) Bill, but the Speaker categorically denied him. Credit goes to hon. Shakeel Mohamed who rightly and energetically, as the Opposition Whip, asked the Speaker why hon. Khushal Lobine was not allowed to intervene.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now refer to the session of 16 June 2020. On that day, all Members of the Opposition came in the Assembly wearing a black face mask. We wanted

to show our disapproval that the then Deputy Prime Minister had not resigned in the wake of the St Louis scandal. On that day, when the latter started his speech, we, Members of the Opposition, stood up and left the House while holding not *pancarte*, but a piece of paper with the inscription ‘Ivan *Démission*’. This action led to the expulsion of all the Members of the Opposition. *Du jamais vu!* This was deemed to be gross misbehaviour, but look at the turn of events. The then Deputy Prime Minister was revoked, when he refused to resign, by the Prime Minister. It is as if St. Louis has already given us his divine ruling. St. Louis is merciful and the population at large is grateful to St. Louis. Thank you, St. Louis.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Members of the Opposition as well as the population at large felt exasperated, scandalised when the Leader of the Opposition was not allowed to ask his PNQ on 09 June 2020. This one incident is more than enough to prove how biased and unfair the Speaker can be. Even the hon. Bhagwan, one of the longest serving MPs of this august House, has often been barred from conducting his duty as an elected Member of this House simply because he is ruthless, poignant and often talks *carré carré* and makes his statements quite...

(Interruptions)

Obviously, when the Members of the Opposition come with pertinent questions, it will not be honey to the ears, especially to those on the other side of the House. We, Members of the Opposition, we cannot prevent some ears on the other side of the House to have some painful blisters because truth hurts. These painful blisters, I humbly think, may be healed if the medicines provided by Pack and Blisters are used in appropriate doses, *matin, midi et soir* on the strict medical supervision.

The nation has the legitimate hope to expect the Speaker will rise to the situation and will use his sense and sensibility to ensure that this august House breathes the fresh air of liberty, equality and fraternity. We will not condone the Speaker’s attempt to apply the guillotine on our quest for truth, transparency, equity, justice and accountability. I kindly request the Speaker to meditate on what John Bercow said, I quote –

“I am seeking every day to restore faith in Parliament to ensure we have a House of Commons which is representative, effective and reconnected to the people we serve.”

Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, please restore faith in our Parliament. You can do it if you judiciously use your sense and sensibility and forsake your partiality and *parti pris*. As a newly elected Member of this House, I humbly appeal to Mr Speaker to kindly show us that you are a person who can rise above the tide and you can really help to consolidate parliamentary democracy by encouraging democratic accountability in this country. Mr Speaker, Sir, you have a choice of being remembered either as an oppressor of democracy or a protector of democracy. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, kindly establish proper channels of communication with the Opposition and avoid making an abuse of the ‘I order you out’ mantra.

To end, I will refer the Speaker to the following pieces of advice on the Office of the Speaker in the Mauritian Parliament by Sir Radamohun Gujadhur and I quote –

“To earn the respect of Parliamentarians, the Speaker must always act with great tact and when feelings run high as they are bound to do sometimes, the Speaker must somehow manage with courtesy and humour to restore order. The Speaker must also protect Members and minorities.”

We only wish the Speaker will get better instead of bitter as a result of this motion of no confidence. *A bon entendeur, salut*. Long live our Parliament and long live Mauritius.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Balgobin!

(1.43 a.m.)

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Allow me to start by quoting the former President of the Republic of India, Mrs Patil who was first woman to ever hold this position in this country. She said and I quote –

“Parliament of the country is the repository of the sovereign will of the people, and its successful functioning is a joint responsibility of both the Government and the Opposition.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have chosen to quote the former President of India because we know one particular Member of the Opposition who might not appreciate this wise quote because he is often known for practicing India bashing in the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my point here is to make people realise, especially hon. Members of the Opposition, that a concerted effort is needed from the part of each and every

one for a Parliament to function as it should. This is where it is essential for all Members of the House to profoundly understand the Standing Orders of the National Assembly. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case on the other side of the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is important for everyone to appreciate how important a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker are for the proper functioning of a National Assembly. You both hold a vital responsibility to maintain order in this House, and during my intervention I will demonstrate how this function has been admirably performed by the Speaker and yourself.

Unfortunately, during each and every sitting, Members of the Opposition do not collaborate in maintaining order in the House. In fact, they are so disrespectful towards the Chair, it seems that this has become a common practice for Members of the other side of the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, sometimes I wonder what kind of students the hon. Members of the Opposition were. How were they behaving when they were in class? Extrapolating on their action in the House, I am sure that they would have been asking their headmaster to change their teacher each and every time the latter tried to bring them to order. Then, instead of criticising the teacher, they should themselves toe the line and abide by the rules that have been set.

A bit earlier, hon. Dr. Gungapersad himself, being a teacher and a former Rector would understand this. I wonder if his former students ever came with a *motion de blâme* against him while he was maintaining order in his class and now, he is coming to give lessons.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to remind hon. Members on the other side of the House that as per the Standing Orders and rules of the National Assembly, section 39, paragraph 13, it clearly states –

“No Member shall interrupt any other Member except –

- (a) on a point of order, (...); or
- (b) to elucidate some matter raised by the Member (...).”

Clearly, this is not the case for most hon. Members on the other side.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, firstly on 28 February, the Speaker had no other choice than to expel hon. Mohamed and thereafter the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Let us ask the

question: why was hon. Mohamed ordered out on that particular day? While hon. Collendavelloo, the then DPM, was making a statement, hon. Mohamed was getting excited and shouted the word 'coward' to his address. Hon. Mohamed was named by the Speaker and was requested on several occasions to withdraw this word, unconditionally, but he insisted and continued to use this unparliamentarily word. Obviously, he was expelled from the House.

Now, immediately after, the hon. Leader of the Opposition started an argument with the Speaker and continued to disrespect the challenge and the authority of the Chair. Naturally...

Mr Mohamed: On a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hold on!

Mr Mohamed: I will refer specifically to Standing Order 40, paragraph 5 where it clearly states that the conduct of any Member of the National Assembly cannot be put into question unless it is done so by a substantive motion, not only does this apply to the Speaker or the President or other officers but it applies to the Members of the National Assembly. So, what this Member is doing is precisely raising issues pertaining to our conduct. I am not saying he is speaking the truth or telling lies. I am not saying that. I am just saying he is not allowed to do it in line with that particular Standing Order. That's all.

The Deputy Speaker: You have made your point. I get it! One second. Hon. Balgobin, tread carefully on what you are doing. I can understand you are trying to make the point of how the Speaker has to deal with things but tread carefully on how you go about the conduct of, I suppose, hon. Members of the Assembly, specifically hon. Mohamed.

Mr Mohamed: And any Member.

The Deputy Speaker: All Members, specifically you have raised a point, so, I will go to you. Carry on!

Mr Balgobin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the point I am making, I am telling you why the Speaker had to maintain order in the House. The Member cannot come today and decline that he didn't say that word in the House and actions were taken by the Speaker. But as a Member of the House, I will respect your ruling and continue.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it was interesting to analyse the pattern on that day. First, the hon. Member created disturbance.

(Interruptions)

You did create disturbance.

Mr Mohamed: I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. He is going against Standing Order 40, paragraph 5. He has just said I created disturbance, this talks about my conduct and he can't do it in line with that section.

Mr Balgobin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I said first the hon. Member.

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Balgobin: It did not say it was hon. Mohamed.

The Deputy Speaker: So, your reply is? Your reply, what did he say?

Mr Balgobin: In my intervention just now, I said the hon. Member; I didn't say it was hon. Mohamed. Now, if he feels it was him, up to him. I cannot defend him now.

The Deputy Speaker: So, this is what is saying, continue. Delve carefully!

Mr Balgobin: So, that hon. Member, without mentioning any name, kept disrupting the proceedings of the House.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you see let us not basically play with semantics. He is referring to a specific date, where he has already, earlier on, before your ruling, referred specifically to me, and he is continuing on the same particular date with regard to what Hansard says. He is entitled to do so, but by substantive motion. This is what Standing Order 40 paragraph 5 says. Now, I am not stopping him from doing it; it is the Standing Orders. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: You have made your point! Hon. Minister, stick to the debate!

Mr Balgobin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me stick to the debate, but saying it differently. Once upon a time, there was an hon. Member...

(Interruptions)

...who disrupted the proceedings of the House as if he was the Leader of the Opposition. Then, the real Leader of the Opposition, once upon a time - I am not mentioning it is hon. Dr. Boolell; it can be any Leader of the Opposition - who seems to be his assistant, obviously does not want to lose face and tries to back the lead. And then, the whole Opposition walks out, just like a flock of sheep following the shepherd, *moutons...*

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, stick to the debate!

Mr Balgobin: It is obvious, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that at that material time, the Speaker had to ask those Members to withdraw from the House because they were creating disturbance. So, where was the Speaker wrong? And then, the hon. Member feels victimised. He is surprised that actions were taken.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once again, he is challenging your ruling and, now, maybe he loves doing it through the backdoor, but, then again, I mean I do not share his pleasure.

The Deputy Speaker: What I grasp from the hon. Minister is that he is saying the Speaker ordered a Member out because he acted in a certain way. So, go that way! Mr Speaker ordered something because...

Mr Balgobin: But this is what I said exactly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. But then, that hon. Member, when creating disturbance in the House, which is logic when somebody creates disturbance in the House, they are expelled from the Chamber. Is the Speaker wrong? But you cannot go outside and do live videos and express your annoyance that you were out because of that.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now I come to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He comes with a motion of no confidence. Maybe he himself does not believe in his motion or maybe he was ordered by his master, *lion empaillé*, to come with such a motion. Clearly, he does not believe in its relevance. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we can see the bad habits of hon. Members on the other side, which is repetitive, each and every time, crosstalking, interrupting Members who are intervening on this side.

Mr Mohamed: Once again, he is talking about Members on this side conduct; 40 paragraph 5, there is no issue about mentioning the name.

Mr Balgobin: You have done it every time, each and every time interrupt...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member!

Mr Balgobin: He has not made any point of order. It is a point of bluff, not a point of order! A point of order is specifically on the Standing Orders.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Member!

Mr Mohamed: Maybe you should read it to him.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, do not tell me what I have to do. Even if it is two o'clock, I still have my full sense. Carry on!

(Interruptions)

Coming to what you have said, hon. Member, be very careful not to attack the conduct of any Member. I am not saying you have attacked until now. I am saying be careful about attacking the conduct of any Member. Prior to resuming, I have the hon. Deputy Prime Minister who wants to make a point of order.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Just on the very same Standing Order 40, paragraph 5. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if one was to follow the interpretation given by the hon. gentleman to this paragraph, then nobody, on this side of the House, could ever criticise the Opposition and nobody, on the other side of the House, could ever criticise one of the majority. Now, this is preposterous. I would submit, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is making an abuse of points of order throughout the history of parliamentary democracy in our country. This is what parliamentary debate has been about and you will note, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that nobody, on this side of the House, has raised an objection, on a point of order, to all the criticism that has been voiced by the Opposition. I would invite you to rule accordingly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: On the same point of order!

The Deputy Speaker: On the same point, please!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us read what section 40 (5) says –

“The conduct of the President and the Vice-President of the Republic or the person performing the functions of the President’s Office, the Speaker, Members of the Assembly, Judges, Members of Statutory Commissions or other persons engaged in the administration of Justice shall not be raised...”

The operational word is ‘raised’.

“shall not be raised except upon a substantive motion moved for that purpose”

‘Raised’ means challenging, frontally attacking the conduct of any Member, but what the hon. Minister is doing now is commenting and he is explaining the reaction of the

Speaker as a result of the behaviour of the hon. Members. He is not challenging the conduct. He is just explaining that the Speaker had to give that ruling because such and such Member was behaving in such and such a way. He is not criticising the Member. He is not raising the conduct of the Member. He is just commenting.

The Deputy Speaker: You made your point!

Mr Mohamed: May I, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: One second! One second!

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me read the last part...

(Interruptions)

He has been selective...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! We break off! I will come back with a ruling after the break!

At 1.59 a.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.25 a.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please, be seated.

First of all, it is in fact in order to give background of the circumstances you want to make.

Secondly, hon. Shakeel Mohamed, you took the same point of order at least three times, while the Member was intervening. This is persistently taking the same point. I consider that such interruptions constitute a fraudulent point of order. I rule accordingly.

I request the hon. Minister to proceed with his intervention.

(2.26 a.m.)

Mr Balgobin: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for your ruling.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is unfortunate that when you are talking about a political stand of the Opposition, then Members are not happy. But it is important to explain why the Speaker has taken a decision, has given a ruling on a specific scenario, a situation, and to say

whether he was right or wrong. So, you have to explain the scenario. I do not know why my friend, hon. Shakeel Mohamed sees it as something against the Standing Orders. But, anyway, you have given your ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and I continue with my speech.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on 12 June, while my friend, hon. Bobby Hurreeram was doing his intervention on the Budget 2020-2021, a hon. Member, let us put it like this, kept interrupting him, and it can be verified on the 12 June. So, he was ordered out after several warnings from the Chair. So, then, when you do not follow the Standing Orders, you blame the Speaker!

When you are told not to use unparliamentary words, you blame the Speaker! When you misbehaved in the Parliament, you blame the Speaker! It is as if *le monde à l'envers*, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I think he is the one who needs a break, and if he wants to have a Kit Kat, I have one with me. No seriously. I have one with me.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, I cannot tabled it. I have one Kit Kat here if he can...

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned in his debate, and he was right to say so, that the Parliament is a temple of democracy. He is right, but then, on the next day, on 15 July, he wrote on his Facebook page - and I have a copy here which I can table - "*Parlement pas capav continuer ar bann pyromanes*". He comes and says that this is a temple of democracy and he is saying that hon. Members, or any other person, I don't know, because he did not mention - so, I ask him the following questions: was he addressing himself to the Speaker? Was he addressing himself to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? Or was he addressing himself to hon. Members of the House?

Here, I might surprise you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. In fact, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is utterly right by saying so. You know why? Because a pyroman is somebody who asks people to *desan lor la rue, fer desordre*, this is why I say he is right. because his Facebook post is addressed to himself. I tabled the copy of his post.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, who would imagine how low Members of the Opposition could stoop when they violated the dignity of the House on 16 June! I take the same example; the Leader of the Opposition said it is a temple of democracy. People pray in a temple, but

they come with their *pancartes*, completely disregarding any form of etiquette, with a total lack of respect for this sacred institution.

They acted with such gross misconduct as per Standing Order 48, which was rightly pointed out by the Speaker in his ruling. Let me give you another example. On the sitting of 30 June, hon. Paul Bérenger was ordered out. Why was he ordered out? Because, while the hon. Prime Minister was answering a PNQ on this whole issue of St. Paul, sorry I meant St. Louis, hon. Bérenger said the word “*lâche*”, addressed to the hon. Prime Minister. What happened then? The Speaker gave him a chance to redeem himself and requested him to remove the word. Was not the Speaker fair to him at that time? But, what did he do, he refused by saying a big ‘no’ to the ruling of the Chair. But then, the Speaker took the logical decision to ask him to withdraw from the Chamber.

Again, the same scenario on 05 May 2020, while the Speaker was maintaining order, hon. Bérenger said the word ‘*malélevé*’, addressed to the Speaker. He was ordered out, and all Members of the Opposition left the Chamber. Then, again, you blamed the Speaker, because he was maintaining order in the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the whole population watches the live debates. I am sure they are wondering why and when was the last time hon. Bérenger has put any Parliamentary Question since the election of this Government. He is sitting there, creating disturbance, misbehaving now and then, but benefitting the advantages of his position from taxpayers’ money. He has even walked out more times than he has ever asked questions since January 2020. And now, he comes and debates on the motion. Maybe, the hon. Leader of the Opposition should have put a motion against him, a motion of sitting idle instead of a motion of no confidence against the Speaker.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, it is true to say that history is a formidable teacher, but it is also true that no one can escape history. I will quote from Hansard a telling sentence from hon. Bérenger’s intervention on this same debate. He said, and I quote –

« (...) M. le président, je suis dans ce Parlement depuis 1976. »

Back in 1984, the Leader of the Opposition was hon. Paul Bérenger who had tabled a Motion of disallowance against price increases. The then Speaker, Mr Ajay Daby, to break from the debates, asked the Deputy Speaker, Mr Yousuf Mohamed to take the Chair of the debates.

And if you go in the Hansard of 27 of March 1984, you will see the exchanges. Mr Deputy Speaker, I am going to read this quickly.

Addressing to hon. Paul Bérenger, who was then the Leader of the Opposition –

“The Deputy Speaker: I shall order you out of this House if you carry on arguing with me. Sit down!”

And then -

“Mr Bérenger: I am saying it is good manners and I will stand up until the Speaker goes out.

The Deputy Speaker: I order you out of the House now!”

And then on the 03 April 1984, same scenario, addressing to hon. Bérenger, then Leader of the Opposition -

“The Deputy Speaker: You are provoking the Chair! Do not shout at the Chair!”

Mr Bérenger: But, tell me how I am provoking the Chair?

The Deputy Speaker: You are doing so by laughing everytime, by staring at the Chair in a very provocative manner! Now, you’ve got it! I have told you, keep quiet!”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am telling you this, because, *comme dirai l’adage: Chassez le naturel, il revient au galop*. Since 1976 till now, hon. Paul Bérenger is still out. My point here, is, after all those 44 years of Hansard, one finds a long story of not respecting the decorum and the Standing Orders of the National Assembly.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I now come to another hon. Member. He behaves like he is a ‘*taper*’ in the House. On 11 June 2020, while my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance was doing his speech, that hon. Member was ordered out by the Speaker for having used the word ‘*voler*’; but, he refused to leave the Chamber. It is a shame that the Serjeant-at-Arms had to be called to take him out. So, when the Speaker tells you to remove an unparliamentarily word, you blame the Speaker, you say he is not right.

And then, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, how dares this hon. Member call us ‘*voler*’? *Il est très, très malplacé, M. le président!* Maybe, he forgot about the letter he received from a certain lawyer, addressed to him on 30 August 1996. He was the Minister of Local Government...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, the hon. Member said the word '*bachiará*'. He has to remove the word.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Bachiará! To enn bachiará!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member! Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Guett dans Housing ki ...*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! Hon. Bhagwan, order!

Mr Bhagwan: *Mo pena nanien pou reproche moi!*

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan! Order! First of all, you withdraw the word '*bachiará*'.

Mr Bhagwan: No, I won't, Sir! He is a '*bachiará*'!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Mett sa dehors do!*

Mr Bhagwan: *Ki mett dehors, to propriétaire toi, couyon!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! Hon. Toussaint, order! Order in the House!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Taler mo coupe to sévé do couyon!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Hon. Bhagwan, this is the last opportunity to withdraw the word.

Mr Bhagwan: I am withdrawing myself. I am not to listen to that '*bachiará*'.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr Toussaint: *To meme pli grand 'bachiará'!*

Mr Bhagwan: *Aller do bachiara! Tonn gagne cout pied dans Curepipe do couyon!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order in the House! Order in the House!

(Interruptions)

Order in the House! Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order! Order! I suspend!

At 2.40 a.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 3.25 a.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Toussaint, I heard you using improper words, namely starting with ‘b’, ending with ‘a’. Can you kindly withdraw the word?

Mr Toussaint: I withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Coming back to the ruling I gave against the First Member of Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière, hon. Bhagwan, he also uttered the word starting with ‘b’, ending with ‘a’ to the address of hon. Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation. When I ordered the said hon. Member to withdraw the expunged word, the said hon. Member did not comply, but said he was maintaining the word but withdrawing from the Chambers. While leaving the Chambers, the said hon. Member repeated the expunged word several times in a loud tone, totally disrespectful to the House and the Chair. I consider this to be a gross disorderly conduct. In these circumstances, I am naming the hon. First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière, hon. Bhagwan.

MOTIONS – S.O. 17(3) & S.O. 29(1)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the light of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière, I beg, under Standing Order 17(3), to take the time of the House for urgent business.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun) rose and seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

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

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun) rose and seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in view of your earlier decision to name the hon. First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière, I beg to move that the said hon. First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière be suspended from the service of the Assembly for today's and the next two Sittings.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun) rose and seconded.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before the question is put and before any vote is made on this, I wish to know whether Members of the Opposition are entitled to make any statement with regard to this. Obviously, yes.

The Deputy Speaker: No.

Mr Mohamed: Obviously, yes.

The Deputy Speaker: It is a motion, it is not debatable, it is going to be put to vote. You can vote against, no problem.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Balgobin, you may continue with your speech.

Mr Balgobin: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have not, at any moment, mentioned any name when I was doing my intervention, but, unfortunately, a particular Member of the House took it on him. I had no intention to name anybody. I was just explaining the fact that while a colleague

Minister is talking, somebody is saying ‘*voler*’ and it is not appropriate to say the word ‘*voler*’ while a Member of this side is talking. That was all my point.

Anyway, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I continue. I don’t have much to say, but one thing I would like to tell here. Once the Bishop of Winchester and a former Chancellor of England, William of Wikeham said –

“Manners maketh man.”

Malheureusement, ce n’est pas donné à tout le monde. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the whole debate, the whole discussion we are having here about saying the word ‘*zako*’ in the House. I am not mentioning any name. I am not pinpointing finger to any person, but I want to say one thing about saying the word ‘*zako*’. On 14 July, as per the Hansard, there was a point of order while hon. Dhaliah was intervening. The point of order is, and I quote what was said in Hansard –

“Since the hon. Member just mentioned my name and that I supposedly said the word ‘*zako*’, he is imputing improper motives. I have never said that.”

And your reply, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, was, I quote –

“Hon. – the name – with all due respect, I was in the House.”

So, what I want to say here ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Balgobin: *Attane, pas pressé!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please!

(Interruptions)

Order, please!

Mr Ameer Meea: This is new to the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Balgobin: I believe...

Mr Ameer Meea: This is new.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: First of all, wear your mask! Secondly, it might be new and the way you are sitting, the way you are addressing me as well is new. So, please be mindful of orderly conduct. If you have a point of order, do take a proper point of order.

Mr Ameer Meea: My point is, since when in the House, we say a hon. Member, and we do not see the name? This is completely new to me. I have been here for ten years, I have never heard a hon. Minister say - I am not mentioning the name, I will just say, 'a hon. Member', this is totally new!

The Deputy Speaker: This is totally a new point of order as well I am hearing! I am disallowing it, continue!

Mr Ameer Meea: Say it again!

The Deputy Speaker: This is a new point of order I am hearing, I am disallowing it!

Mr Ameer Meea: So, we can take it back now.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you want to argue with the Chair? Hon. Member! Hon. Member, I have not given you the floor.

Mr Ameer Meea: Let me take it.

The Deputy Speaker: You do not have to take anything, just listen!

Mr Balgobin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, why I am saying that, because the hon. Member - I think we are allowed to say hon. Member - ...

The Deputy Speaker: Come to the debate!

Mr Balgobin: ...does not understand maybe the bad connotation linked to the word. I am trying to explain why Members of this side of the House are saying that it was not correct to mention this word in the House. You know why, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have stumbled upon a very interesting document which established laws back in the 17th century. Here, I am referring to the infamous Code Noir of 1723. No, I am explaining why it is not correct. Listen, I am not making allegations nor am I pinpointing any Member. Listen to me what I am saying first.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, talk to me, address me!

Mr Balgobin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Balgobin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if we go to ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! Continue!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order! Order! Order! A last warning, no crosstalking in this House! Hon. Toussaint, no crosstalking!

(Interruptions)

No talking!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Leader of the Opposition! Hon. Leader of the Opposition and hon. Toussaint, this is a final warning to any Member who wants to make any kind of provocation or do crosstalking while I have not given the floor. Thank you very much! I have been very patient, I am listening to all the points of order as much as I can, so please, bear with me, we will listen to the hon. Minister. His speech has started over an hour ago. So, let us hear him!

Mr Balgobin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what I want to say is, if we read Article 44 in this, I am saying, ‘infamous’ document, it was not a good document, Article 44 says, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir: “*Déclarons les esclaves comme des meubles*”. So, what does it mean? That they are non-humans, that is, why I take the words of hon. Dr. Gungapersad. He said earlier: “One should do *mea culpa*”, I invite the hon. Member to apologize on what he said, because all of us here, Members of this side and other side also, we are all human beings, we are all human beings.

Mr Assirvaden: *A point of order.* M. le président, comment est-ce possible qu’un ministre de la République peut tenir des propos aussi dangereux pour l’unité nationale, et vous le permettez, M. le président. C’est une honte! Je préfère partir que d’écouter des gens pareilles.

(Interruptions)

C’est une honte!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, please continue, be careful about treading on any line which is sensible.

Mr Balgobin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to say, we are all elected Members...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members!

Mr Balgobin: I want to say we are all ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Shakeel Mohamed!

(Interruptions)

Please, hon. Nuckcheddy! Hon. Nuckcheddy, last warning applies to you as well...

(Interruptions)

Last warning applies to you as well, to all Members who intend to disturb the smooth running of the House. It is 3.37 a.m.; I want to hear the content of his debate!

Mr Balgobin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to say only one thing, that we are all elected Members in this House, we are all Mauritians, you cannot use this word addressed to Members of this House. This is only my point that I am making, that is all I said. We are all human beings.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I wish to say that we are a responsible Government and we are responsible towards all Mauritian citizens. Members, on the other side of the House, know very well that such motion is built on sandcastle. They are using this vote of no confidence just *pour faire la démagogie*. I am sure the population has already passed a vote of no confidence against the Opposition.

I thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you! Hon. Teeluck, please!

Mr Teeluck: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, upon public demand, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Dr. Padayachy rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 28 July 2020 at 11.30 a.m.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

(3.39 a.m.)

MATTERS RAISED

MAURITIAN NATIONALS STRANDED ABROAD – UNREASONABLE AIRFARE

Mr S. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): In fact, this morning I wanted to raise the issue at question time but I did not have the opportunity to raise it. I will try to be as brief as possible. It relates to the Mauritian Nationals who are stranded abroad.

The Deputy Speaker: Who is it addressed to?

Mr Ameer Meea: It is addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He is not here, I am sure one of his colleagues will take the matter up. I wanted to ask the hon. Minister if we can see to it that Airlines other than Air Mauritius do not charge unreasonable airfare to our fellow citizens because I have a specific case in my constituency, Constituency no.3, where a student in the Republic of Iran who had to travel to Amsterdam, a European country, and from Amsterdam, she will return back to Mauritius via Dubai and Emirates is asking for 60,000 MUR for a one way ticket, which for me, is totally unreasonable. So, I will ask the hon. Minister to see to it that airlines, as I said, other than Air Mauritius, do not make an abuse of the situation by charging high prices to other fellow citizens.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will take the matter with hon. Bodha.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, anybody else? Hon. Nagalingum!

TREFLES – ILLEGAL DUMPING GROUND

Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Merci M. le président. Permettez-moi d'attirer l'attention du ministre de l'Environnement sur un problème dans ma circonscription. Des habitants de Stanley/Rose Hill ont attiré mon attention sur un *dumping ground* illégal à Trèfles. Une pétition a été adressée au ministre de l'Environnement avec copie au ministre des Administrations Régionales, aux députés de la circonscription, au maire de la ville.

En effet, M. le président, un terrain en friche situé à l'angle des rues Ferrière et Sawmy à Trèfles, Rose Hill, est régulièrement utilisé comme dépotoir pour des ordures et de toutes sortes, des carcasses de voitures et d'autres animaux morts. Vous imaginez, M. le président, l'odeur nauséabonde qui s'y dégage et le risque pour la santé des habitants dans la région! Rappelons que ce terrain se trouve dans un endroit hautement résidentiel.

M. le président, je demande humblement au ministre de remédier à cette situation.

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): M. le président, je pense qu'il convient, dans un premier temps, que le propriétaire assume ses responsabilités, de s'assurer que son terrain soit proprement gardé et éventuellement, *fenced*. Bien sûr, entretemps, au niveau du ministère de l'Environnement, nous prendrons toutes les mesures nécessaires pour s'assurer que le terrain soit nettoyé et ne cause plus de nuisance à l'environnement.

The Deputy Speaker: Done? Thank you very much.

At 03.43 a.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 28 July 2020 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MBC - TELEVISION NEWS BULLETINS - SIGN LANGUAGE

(No. B/288) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to sign language, he will state if he will consider using his good offices to request the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation to introduce the use thereof during television news bulletins, local emergency broadcasts and parliamentary debates as a means of inclusion of the deaf community.

(Withdrawn)

SAFE CITY PROJECT - CAMERAS

(No. B/296) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Safe City Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number of cameras and other components thereof installed as at to date, indicating the number of crimes elucidated with the help thereof, and
- (b) if consideration is being given for an extension of the project to additional regions and, if so, give an indication thereof.

(Withdrawn)

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES - JANUARY-JULY 2020

(No. B/300) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to domestic violence, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases thereof since January 2020 to date, indicating the outcome thereof.

Reply (The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare): I am informed that since 01 January 2020 to date, 1,693 cases of domestic violence have been reported to the

Police wherein 541 persons were arrested. These cases relate to offences under the Protection from Domestic Violence Act (PDVA), which also include breach of Protection, Occupation and Tenancy Orders.

At the level of my Ministry, for period 01 January to end of June 2020, 1,188 cases have been reported to the six FSBx located across the island.

I am tabling details of the outcome of the cases.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE

(No. B/302) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) 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 High-Level Committee against Domestic Violence, he will state –

- (a) the composition thereof,
- (b) when the said committee assumed its duties and responsibilities, and
- (c) the recommendations, if any, made by the committee as at to date.

(Withdrawn)

TABLE BAY LTD PROJECT - ENVIRONMENT IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(No. B/323) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the Table Bay Ltd Project at Bel Ombre, he will state if his Ministry is in presence of an application for an Environment Impact Assessment and, if so, indicate when same was submitted and where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

QUEEN VICTORIA HOSPITAL - MRS N. A. – TWINS

(No. B/324) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the allegations made by Mrs N. A. to the effect that she gave birth to twins at the Queen Victoria Hospital on 23 June 2020, he will state if his Ministry has initiated an inquiry thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

SOLIDARITY LEVY - HIGH INCOME EARNERS - QUANTUM COLLECTED

(No. B/325) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Solidarity Levy on high income earners, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the quantum thereof collected for the years ending 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2019, respectively.

Reply: J'ai été informé par la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* qu'un montant de 614 millions de roupies et un montant de 787 millions de roupies ont été perçus au titre du *Solidarity Levy* pour les années fiscales se terminant respectivement le 30 juin 2018 et le 30 juin 2019.

PORT LOUIS CENTRAL MARKET – RENOVATION PROJECT

(No. B/327) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Port Louis Central Market Renovation Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to -

- (a) the scope of works, and
- (b) where matters stand as to the implementation thereof, indicating the expected start and completion dates thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that the scope of works regarding the “Renovation of Port-Louis Central Market - Fish, Meat and Poultry Section” comprise the following -

- (i) Renewal/reconstruction of roof;
- (ii) Renewal of all openings, doors, windows, rainwater downpipes and fly proof netting;
- (iii) New work table with Inox tops as per the requirements of the Ministry of Health and Wellness;
- (iv) Reinstatement of wash basins with discharge pipes;
- (v) General Painting;
- (vi) Flooring;
- (vii) Cold storage for perishable by-products and chilling cabinets according to the requirements of the Ministry of Health and Wellness;

- (viii) Upgrading of main alley, stone pavement and drainage network;
- (ix) Review all electrical installations, including control panels, lighting of the market place as well as plumbing installation;
- (x) Upgrading of toilets, including all plumbing works comprising renewal of existing water network, provision of new water points and taps for each basin;
- (xi) Upgrading of block wall and metal parts where required;
- (xii) Provision of a refrigerated space, next to the gateways and installation of electro-hydraulically operated garbage bins, and
- (xiii) Provision for a loading and unloading of perishable waste.

With regard to part (b), I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that, being given the Central Market falls within the Buffer Zone of the Aapravasi Ghat, clearances pertaining to Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) and Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) have to be obtained from UNESCO prior to the start of the project.

Visio Consulting Ltd was awarded the contract to carry out consultancy services and the company has submitted the Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) report to the Council on 26 May 2020.

A Technical Committee is scheduled for the end of July 2020 to look into the HIA report.

In addition, an overarching HIA/VIA regarding projects falling in the Buffer Zone of the Aapravasi Ghat will have to be carried out. The Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage has already launched tenders for the enlistment of consultancy services for same.

The individual Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) report submitted by Visio Consulting Ltd and the overarching HIA/VIA which will be conducted by the Consultants of the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage will have to be aligned, following which clearances can be obtained from UNESCO.

Therefore, the start of the project will depend upon all clearances being obtained from UNESCO, which according to the timeline of the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage is February/March 2021. The project is expected to take 12 months to be completed.

DEVELOPMENT BANK OF MAURITIUS LTD - BOARD

(No. B/329) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to

the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the composition of the Board thereof, indicating the –

- (a) date of appointment of the Chairperson and members thereof, including the allowances payable thereto, and
- (b) number of subcommittees of the board thereof, indicating the
 - (i) composition thereof, and
 - (ii) allowances payable to the members thereof.

Reply: Je dépose les informations requises par l'honorable membre.

GAMBLING REGULATORY AUTHORITY - BOARD MEMBERS - ALLOWANCES

(No. B/330) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Gambling Regulatory Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the composition thereof, indicating the –

- (a) date of appointment of the Chairperson and members thereof, including the allowances payable thereto, and
- (b) number of subcommittees of the board thereof, indicating the –
 - (i) composition thereof, and
 - (ii) allowances payable to the members thereof.

Reply: Je dépose les informations requises par l'honorable membre.

STC - MEDICINES & MEDICAL EQUIPMENT - EMERGENCY PROCUREMENT

(No. B/331) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the medicines and medical equipment procured by the State Trading Corporation on behalf of his Ministry through the Emergency Procurement, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the date on which the orders were placed and supplied, respectively.

(Withdrawn)

LANDSCOPE (MAURITIUS) LTD - JIN FEI - STATE LAND

(No. B/332) Mr 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 State land at Jin Fei, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Landscape

(Mauritius) Ltd, information as to the number of proposals obtained for development thereat, indicating the number thereof acceded to and the number thereof wherein developments have started.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 - FLU CLINICS – SETTING UP & RENOVATION

(No. B/333) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the setting up or renovation of flu clinics amid the COVID-19 Pandemic, he will state the number of contracts awarded to Modern Jurassic Building & Construction Ltd since January 2020 to date, indicating the contractual values thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS-RODRIGUES SUBMARINE CABLE - ICT SERVICES

(No. B/334) Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the Mauritius-Rodrigues Submarine Cable, he will state where matters stand as to the progress of work of ICT services being put in place for optimum bandwidth connection in Rodrigues following the laying thereof, indicating if the laying of a second optical fibre submarine communications linking Mauritius to Rodrigues is being envisaged.

Reply: The Mauritius and Rodrigues Submarine (MARS) undersea Fibre Optic Cable system was completed and launched in February 2019 under a project undertaken by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA). The cable connects Rodrigues to Mauritius and from Mauritius to the rest of the world. It has enabled the island to engage in digital transformation and development of ICT related services, contributing to its faster economic development.

With regard to provision and enhancement of ICT services to our fellow citizens in Rodrigues, the RRA, as the owner of the broadband capacity under the MARS Cable, is responsible for the optimum usage of the bandwidth available.

Presently, there are two initiatives to connect Mauritius to submarine cable projects, namely the Indian Ocean Xchange (IOX) and Melting Pot Indianoceanic Submarine System (METISS) cable.

With Mauritius eventual connection to these two additional fibre cables, Rodrigues too will benefit therefrom as it is connected to Mauritius via the MARS cable. Therefore, it is not envisaged to lay a second optic fibre submarine communications linking Mauritius to Rodrigues.

ABBÉ DE LA CAILLE MALHERBES-CERE STREET - SEWERAGE INFRASTRUCTURE

(No. B/336) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the rehabilitation of the sewerage infrastructure at the Abbé De La Caille Malherbes-Cere Street, in Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to where matters stand, indicating the estimated impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on the implementation thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority that on 04 March, 2,020 complaints concerning overflows of wastewater in the vicinity of Abbé de la Caille and Cere Street, Curepipe, were received.

From 04 March 2020 to 09 March 2020, the WMA intervened on several occasions, using specialised trucks, known as jetting units and wastewater tankers. However, the problem could not be solved effectively.

Further investigation was carried out on 09 March 2020 and it was observed that an old vitrified clay sewer pipe above 60 years old, of diameter 160 mm had collapsed in Abbé de la Caille Street, around 12 m from its junction with Cere Street. Since this sewer line conveys wastewater generated from the Gujadhur Street, Cere Street and Residence Malherbes, the collapse of the sewer pipe resulted in overflow of wastewater in Gujadhur Street and Cere Street.

The WMA, therefore, initiated necessary actions to proceed with the repair work under Framework Agreement for Sewer Extension Works and Sewer Maintenance Works. Since the damaged sewer pipe was found at a depth of 5 metres, complete closure of Abbé de la Caille Street was required.

Necessary clearances from all stakeholders were obtained and on 18 March 2020, the TMRSU approved the proposed traffic diversion scheme and the closure of Abbé de la Caille

Street as from 19 March 2020. However, following the COVID-19 lockdown on 20 March 2020, the repair works could not be carried out.

Following partial resumption of business activities and with the assistance of the Police, the repair works resumed on 27 May 2020 and was completed on Saturday 30 May 2020. The WMA then proceeded with the jetting of the sewer line to remove all debris which have entered the sewer pipe and which could cause future blockages.

I am further informed that in the first instance, repair of pipe was required. However, at the completion of this first intervention, the WMA observed that there was still a seepage of wastewater on Gujadhur Street. On the same day, that is, Saturday 30 May 2020, the Authority initiated further investigation and concluded that the manhole found on the junction Malherbes Street, Gujadhur Street, Cere Street and Abbé de la Caille Street was in a deteriorated state.

To abate the nuisance, the WMA carried out a second intervention as it was observed that the main manhole at the junction (Malherbes Street, Gujadhur Street, Cere Street and Abbé de la Caille Street) was still retaining sewage. Therefore, the second intervention was deemed necessary and involved the bypass of the junction manhole which was in a deteriorated state with the construction of two additional manholes, namely one at Cere Street and a second one at Abbé de la Caille.

Works started on 12 June 2020 and consisted of –

- (i) replacement of 27 metres of sewer pipe;
- (ii) disusing the existing manhole on the junction of Malherbes Street, Gujadhur Street, Cere Street and Abbé de la Caille Street;
- (iii) construction of 2 new manholes on Abbé de la Caille Street and Cere Street, and
- (iv) laying of approximately 7 metres new sewer pipe.

As at date, 27 metres of sewer line at a depth of 5 metres has been replaced and 7 metres sewer line has been diverted. During the execution of the works, the Contractor also diverted a stretch of 19.3 metres CWA water pipe which was crossing the sewer alignment. Presently, the construction of two new manholes on Abbé de la Caille and Cere Streets are ongoing.

It is to be noted that progress of works is slow due to -

- (i) rainy conditions in the region;
- (ii) presence of very high ingress of wastewater in the trenches as well as the presence of a high rock content, and

- (iii) services, *inter alia*, telecom and CWA pipes which are located across the trench.

I am informed that the work is expected to be completed by 22 July 2020 subject to good weather conditions.

SCHOOLS - ONLINE EDUCATION – WI-FI FACILITIES

(No. B/338) 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 online education, she will state the number of private and public primary and secondary schools which are –

- (a) fully equipped with Wi-Fi facilities, and
- (b) in positions of readiness to provide unhindered teaching and learning support to staff members and pupils.

(Withdrawn)

ONLINE EDUCATION - TRAINERS - MODULES & DURATION

(No. B/339) 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 online education, she will state the number of educators working in both private and state secondary schools who have received formal training in relation thereto, indicating –

- (a) who were the trainers, and
- (b) the modules and duration thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CAP MALHEUREUX - STATE LAND - LEASE

(No. B/340) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to State land, he will state the number of plots thereof located in Cap Malheureux which have been leased since January 2015 to date, giving the list of the lessees and the corresponding rent payable.

(Withdrawn)

VALLÉE DES PRÊTRES - FLOOD-PRONENESS - SURVEY

(No. B/342) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to Vallée des Prêtres, he will state if any survey has been carried out to assess the flood-proneness thereof and, if so, indicate the –

- (a) outcome thereof, and
- (b) urgent measures taken by his Ministry in view of the upcoming rainy season.

(Withdrawn)

MORCELLEMENT GOOLAMALLY - TERRE ROUGE - DRAIN PROJECT

(No. B/343) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the drain project at Morcellement Goolamally, Le Hochet, in Terre Rouge, undertaken by the National Development Unit, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

FISH LANDING STATIONS - DEVELOPMENT & EMBELLISHMENT

(No. B/344) 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 proposed development and embellishment of the fish landing stations island-wide, he will state where matters stand, indicating the nature and schedule of works planned for the landing stations of Bain des Dames and of Pointe aux Sables, respectively.

(Withdrawn)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 1 - 24/7 WATER SUPPLY

(No. B/345) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the –

- (a) regions thereat benefitting from water supply on a 24/7 basis and since when, and
- (b) number of complaints registered since November 2019 to date from the inhabitants thereof for poor water supply.

(Withdrawn)

WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY - STAFF MEMBERS - SUSPENSION

(No. B/348) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Wastewater Management Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the number of staff members and workers suspended since 2015 to date, indicating the –

- (a) reasons therefor, and
- (b) actions taken in relation thereto.

Reply: I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority that since 2015 to date, 26 staff members have been suspended. The reasons for suspension are, amongst others, accident involving WMA vehicle, Committee of Enquiry set up following serious mismanagement at pumping stations, gross misconduct, failure to resume duty, excess and unauthorised leaves and poor attendance.

I am further informed that –

- Seven staff members have been reinstated and sanctioned with a severe reprimand;

- Eleven staff members are still under suspension pending the outcome of the Disciplinary Committee;
- Employment of seven staff members have been terminated by the WMA Board following Disciplinary Procedures, and
- One member of staff under interdiction has resigned with effect from 10 August 2017.

POINTE AUX SABLES MARKET FAIR – OPENING DAYS

(No. B/349) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Pointe aux Sables Market Fair, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if consideration will be given for the opening thereof twice a week.

Reply: The Pointe aux Sables Market Fair is managed and operated by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis.

The Market Fair comprises 163 stalls and is operational once weekly on Sundays from 05.30 hours to noon. It caters for the regions of Pointe aux Sables, La Tour Koenig, Grand River North West and Pailles.

I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that no request has been received from stallholders and members of the public for an additional day of operation of the Market Fair.

Furthermore, the Municipal City Council does not envisage the opening of the Pointe aux Sables Market Fair twice weekly as it would entail huge financial costs.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 15 - CINQ ARPENTS - CREMATION GROUND

(No. B/351) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the former cremation ground located at Cinq Arpents, in Constituency No. 15, La Caverne and Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix, information as to –

- (a) when the installations for cremation thereat were destroyed, indicating the reasons therefor, and
- (b) if an alternative site has been identified/acquired in Cinq Arpents for the setting up of a cremation ground in replacement thereof and, if so, indicate the expected start and completion dates thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that the former cremation ground at Cinq Arpents was located on privately-owned property. In 2015, the owner of the plot of land had requested the Council to relocate the cremation ground away from his property.

I am informed that the Council was only providing cleaning services and collection of wastes at this cremation ground. The Ministry of Health and Wellness was then informed of the intention of the owner not to use his property as a cremation ground any longer. Consequently, the cremation ground was not being used from November 2015. With a view not to disrupting these services, the nearest cremation ground at Highlands which is located some 1.3 km away from the former Cinq Arpents Cremation Ground was extended to cover areas of Cinq Arpents, Camp Fouquereaux and Hermitage.

I wish to inform the House that my Ministry is implementing a project to install 16 incinerator equipment at various cremation grounds across the island, including one at the Highlands Cremation Ground and which has already been installed.

I am also informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that the Central Electricity Board has already fixed electric poles and a transformer for the supply of electricity to the Highlands Crematorium and the incinerator is expected to become operational by end of July 2020.

SME GRADUATE SCHEME - CONTRACTS

(No. B/352) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the SME Graduate Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from SME Mauritius Ltd, information as to the number of contracts signed as at to date, indicating –

- (a) the number of graduates allocated to SMEs within the turnover range of –

- (i) less than Rs 2 million;
 - (ii) between Rs 2 million and Rs 25 million;
 - (iii) between Rs 25 million and Rs 50 million, and
 - (iv) above Rs 50 million, and
- (b) if same is coming to an end by 31 October 2020.

Reply: I am informed that since the launching of the SME Employment Scheme in August 2018, 1,132 placements, including Rodrigues have been effected in different SMEs. To date, 460 graduates and 154 diploma holders are still in post.

Regarding the number of graduates allocated to SMEs in different turnover range, the requested information is being compiled and once the verification is completed, the list will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Regarding part (b) of the question, placement under this Scheme covers an initial period of one year, renewable for one additional year upon satisfactory completion of the first year. For cases where contract has been extended for a second year, same is due to expire between October 2020 and June 2021.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES - WORKERS - OVERTIME

(No. B/356) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the workers of the local authorities, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the local authorities, information as to if they have been paid their overtime dues and, if not, why not, indicating the amount thereof due in each local authority.

Reply: I am informed by the Local Authorities that employees of all grades, except Senior Officials, are eligible for overtime with respect to performing extra duties after normal working hours, on Sundays and on Public Holidays.

However, extra duties vary across the different departments at the level of the Local Authorities and, may include, amongst others, extra hours performed in connection with late night burials, cremations during public holidays, refuse collection, maintenance of infrastructure and street lighting after normal office hours. Also, Local Authorities are entrusted special assignments by other organisations at times requiring workers to perform extra duties.

The procedure for the payment of overtime at the level of Local Authorities involves compilation and submission of claim by workers concerned, the claims are certified by the Head of Department before verification by the Examination Section. It is only then that the claims are sent for final payment, which is included in the salary payroll. The whole process usually takes not more than two months. Thus, overtime performed in a month is usually paid not later than two months, except for unforeseen circumstances.

I am informed that, as at date, there is no backlog of payment of overtime at the levels of six Local Authorities, namely –

- (i) Municipal Council of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill;
- (ii) Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes;
- (iii) Municipal Council of Curepipe;
- (iv) District Council of Black River;
- (v) District Council of Savanne, and
- (vi) District Council of Pamplemousses.

Taking into consideration that overtime is normally paid in arrears, the overtime performed at these Local Authorities during the month of June would be paid in the salary payrolls for the months of July or August.

As regards the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, I am informed that the processing of payment of overtime to the tune of Rs177,515 for the months of January, February and March 2020 has been delayed due to COVID-19 confinement and needful would be done in the salary payroll for the month of July 2020.

Similarly, at the level of Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix, an amount of around Rs2.1 m. is payable for overtime performed during the COVID-19 confinement period and arrangements are being made for payment of same in the salary payroll of July 2020.

Regarding the District Council of Moka, an amount of Rs111,187, representing overtime performed in the months of April and May 2020, is due as a result of piecemeal submission of claims by employees resulting in delay in compilation thereof. Necessary arrangement is being undertaken for the payment of overtime to be effected in the salary payroll of July 2020.

At the level of the District Council of Grand Port, an amount of around Rs449,000, representing overtime performed from the months of January to June 2020, is due as claims submitted by employees were being compiled. The relevant payment will be made in the salary payroll of July 2020.

With respect to the District Council of Flacq, an amount of Rs188,198, representing overtime performed in May 2020, is due as the claims were received after the closure of payroll in June 2020. The relevant payment will be made in the salary payroll of July 2020.

Furthermore, for District Council of Rivière du Rempart, an amount of Rs357,583, representing overtime performed for special assignments in connection with COVID-19, is overdue. The payment will be made in the payroll of August 2020.

HOSPITALS - PRE-REGISTRATION HOUSE OFFICERS - TRAINING

(No. B/357) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Pre-Registration Training of Doctors, he will state –

- (a) the number of qualified doctors awaiting enlistment therefor, and
- (b) when same will be conducted, indicating the –
 - (i) number of seats available, and
 - (ii) proposed date of enlistment therefor.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that 214 applicants are awaiting enlistment as Pre-Registration House Officer.

As far as the examination is concerned, provision is made in the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2020 to remove the requirement that a person be required to undergo an entry examination before being registered as a pre-registration trainee. Hence, no examination will be held once the Act is proclaimed.

With regard to part (b) (i) of the question, the funded position for enlistment of Pre-Registration House Officers in the Budget 2020/2021 is 245. 154 Pre-Registration House Officers are already following the Pre-Registration training in Government hospitals. 110 Pre-Registration House Officers are expected to complete their training by September 2020, 1 by December 2020, 42 by May 2021 and 1 in August 2021.

With regard to part (b) (ii) of the question, in the first instance, 91 Pre-Registration House Officers could be enlisted as soon as the Medical Council (Amendment) Act is proclaimed. Thereafter, in September 2020, the Ministry could enlist a further batch of 110 Pre-Registration House Officers and another batch of 42 in May 2021.

**COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - MEDICINES & MEDICAL EQUIPMENT -
PROCUREMENT**

(No. B/358) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the procurement of medicines and medical equipment during the COVID-19 lockdown, he will state –

- (a) the method used therefor, and
- (b) how the list of the needs of the Ministry were established, indicating
 - (i) if all the suppliers in the database of his Ministry were aware of the needs, and
 - (ii) how they were informed accordingly.

Reply: I am informed that, in view of the nationwide sanitary curfew, my Ministry has had no alternative but to resort to emergency procurement of medicines as well as medical equipment required for the operation of Flu Clinics in all the five Regional Hospitals, under Section 21 of the Public Procurement Act and Directive No. 44 of 2020 of the Procurement Policy Office.

I am further informed that the list of requirements for medicines and medical equipment for COVID-19, excluding those required for Flu Clinics, was drawn up, immediately after lockdown on 22 March 2020, by a team consisting, *inter alia*, of the Consultants-in-charge, Pharmacists and Bio Medical Engineers.

As regards part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that, in normal circumstances, prospective bidders are informed of the Indicative Annual Procurement Plan of the Ministry, which is posted on the website of the Ministry and that of the Public Procurement Office, at the start of the financial year. In this particular case, the requirements for COVID could not be included in the Indicative Procurement Plan, for obvious reasons.

I am further informed that my Ministry, from its data base, invited 15 suppliers to submit their pro forma invoice for different pharmaceutical items, one supplier for 46 other pharmaceutical items having limited stock, because of the inability of suppliers to confirm

deliveries as well as from another supplier for the procurement of medical equipment for the Flu Clinics.

CLEAN PETROLEUM PRODUCTS – SUPPLY

(No. B/359) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the Open International Bidding for the Supply of Clean Petroleum Products with a closing date of 11 August 2020, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the evaluation methodology that will be used for the launching of bids prior to the closing date thereof.

(Withdrawn)

STATE TRADING CORPORATION – MEDICINES – EMERGENCY PROCUREMENT

(No. B/360) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the State Trading Corporation, he will state if consideration will be given for the advisability of revoking the Board and the Director General thereof amid the allegations of malpractices in the emergency procurement of medicines during the COVID-19 lockdown.

(Withdrawn)

INFANTICIDE OF F. J. - SUSPECTED CASE

(No. B/361) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the suspected case of infanticide of F. J., in March 2020 at Quatre Cocos, she will state –

- (a) when the case was reported to her Ministry, and
- (b) when and what action, if any, was initiated by her Ministry in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

SEXUAL CHILD ABUSE - CASES

(No. B/362) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to sexual child abuse, she

will state the number of cases thereof reported to the Child Development Unit since January 2020 to date, indicating if consideration will be given for the setting up of a revised protocol to better protect children therefrom.

(Withdrawn)

**MAURITIUS WEIGHTLIFTING FEDERATION - ATHLETE A. M. - JUNIOR
AFRICAN CHAMPIONSHIP 2019**

(No. B/363) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Mauritius Weightlifting Federation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to why athlete A. M. was not selected for the Junior African Championship, held in Uganda in 2019.

(Withdrawn)

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & CHILD ABUSE – FULL-FLEDGE FAMILY
COURT**

(No. B/364) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to cases of domestic violence and child abuse, he will state if consideration will be given for the advisability of setting up a full-fledge Family Court for the fast tracking thereof.

(Withdrawn)

NATIONAL CURRICULUM - SEX EDUCATION - FULL-FLEDGE COURSE

(No. B/365) 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 sexual child abuse, she will state if consideration will be given for the advisability of introducing sex education as a full-fledge course in the national curriculum.

(Withdrawn)

SCHOOLS (PRIMARY & SECONDARY) – CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

(No. B/366) 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 each primary and secondary school, she will state if consideration will be given for the posting of a clinical psychologist thereat and, if so, indicate when and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

FLACQ - NEW TEACHING HOSPITAL

(No. B/367) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a new Teaching Hospital at Flacq, he will state where matters stand as to the tendering process in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

FLACQ YOUTH CENTRE - TENNIS COURT

(No. B/368) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the tennis court of the Flacq Youth Centre, he will state if actions have been taken to remedy the bad state thereof and, if so, when.

(Withdrawn)

FORT GEORGES - COMBINED CYCLE GAS TURBINE POWER PLANT

(No. B/370) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Design, Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of a Combined Cycle Gas Turbine Power Plant at Fort Georges Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to where matters stand as to the implementation thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Central Electricity Board (CEB) that the tender for the Design, Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of the Combined Cycle Gas Turbine (CCGT) Power Plant at Fort George, which was launched on 08 February 2018, is still at the level of the Central Procurement Board (CPB).

The House may wish to note that challenges were received from some bidders, and the Independent Review Panel (IRP) on 27 December 2018 recommended the re-evaluation of the bids.

On 12 June 2019, the Central Procurement Board informed the CEB that the re-evaluation exercise was completed and requested the latter to demonstrate compliance with the Financial Instructions No. 1 of 2018, that is, the prior written approval of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has to be obtained in relation to all borrowings by public enterprises, prior to making any recommendation for award.

The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, which has been consulted, has informed that part financing of the project under a G2G agreement is being explored.

With the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the electricity demand forecast, the CEB is revisiting its demand supply balance for the short to medium term and an updated Integrated Electricity Plan will shortly be submitted to the newly constituted Board for consideration.

NATIONAL INSURANCE CO. LTD - POLICY HOLDERS & FINANCIAL SITUATION

(No. B/371) 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 National Insurance Co. Ltd, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to –

- (a) the number of insurance policy holders thereof,
- (b) the financial situation thereof, and
- (c) if the accounts thereof have been audited and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIAN RUPEE – DEPRECIATION

(No. B/372) Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Mauritian rupee, he will state the measures that will be taken to contain the depreciation thereof.

Reply: Le régime de change de Maurice est classé comme "flottant" par le Fonds Monétaire International.

Le taux de change de la roupie est donc déterminé par le marché sur la base des fluctuations des principales devises sur le marché international ainsi que des forces de l'offre et de la demande sur le marché intérieur des devises.

La Banque de Maurice assure des conditions ordonnées sur le marché domestique des changes.

Conformément à la Section (5) de la *Bank of Mauritius Act*, la politique monétaire du pays est déterminée uniquement par la Banque de Maurice et cela en toute indépendance.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH & WELLNESS - MEDICATION - STOCK

(No. B/374) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to medication, he will state the procedures followed in his Ministry for the –

- (a) monitoring of the stock and expiry dates thereof, and
- (b) disposal of expired ones.

(Withdrawn)

FLOREAL - YOUTH CENTER - ACTIVITIES

(No. B/375) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Youth Center of Floréal, he will state the activities organized thereat during the year 2019 and since January to June 2020.

(Withdrawn)

VILLE NOIRE - NEW BRIDGE - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/376) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a new bridge at Ville Noire, he will, for the

benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to the work progress thereof, indicating what will be the fate of the existing bridge.

(Withdrawn)

M4 MOTORWAY - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/377) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed construction of the M4 Motorway, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to the –

- (a) alignment;
- (b) total project cost, and
- (c) expected start and completion dates thereof.

(Withdrawn)

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU HOSPITAL – PARKING AREA

(No. B/378) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, he will state if consideration will be given for the –

- (a) setting up of an enhanced management system of the parking area thereof, and
- (b) provision of additional public parking spaces thereat.

(Withdrawn)

ATHLETES (ELITE) - TRAINING

(No. B/379) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the training of elite athletes, he will state the measures taken by his Ministry to ensure the provision of adequate training thereto in view of the forthcoming competitions.

(Withdrawn)

NATIONAL PENSION FUND – ASSETS & INVESTMENTS

(No. B/380) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the National Pension Fund, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the -

- (a) amount of funds available therein as at to date, and
- (b) names of the institutions, companies, banks and other institutions in which the NPF has invested funds, indicating -
 - (i) the respective amount invested, and
 - (ii) when same will come to maturity.

Reply: As regards to part (a) of the question, as at date, the assets of the NPF stand at Rs136.5 billion.

As regards to part (b) of the question, the details of investments made by the NPF are tabled.

MARE D'ALBERT VILLAGE COUNCIL – COUNCILLOR

(No. B/383) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the last vacancy that occurred in the position of village councillor at the Mare d'Albert Village Council, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the said village Council, information as to if same has been filled and, if so, give the name of the incumbent.

(Withdrawn)

CÔTE D'OR NATIONAL SPORTS COMPLEX – MONTHLY EXPENSES

(No. B/384) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Côte d'Or National Sports Complex, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Multisports Infrastructure Ltd., a breakdown of the monthly expenses incurred in relation to the operation cost thereof since January 2020 to date.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC ENTERPRISES DEBT – LOAN AMOUNTS & ACCRUED INTERESTS

(No. B/385) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to Public Enterprises Debt, he will give details of the loan amounts and accrued interests as at June 2020 in respect of each and every public enterprise.

(Withdrawn)