



**SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**PARLIAMENTARY**

**DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**(UNREVISED)**

**FIRST SESSION**

**TUESDAY 30 MARCH 2021**

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## THE CABINET

**(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 Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy	Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
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. 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 Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo	Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage
Hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal	Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms

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**MAURITIUS**

**Seventh National Assembly**

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**FIRST SESSION**

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**Debate No. 02 of 2021**

**Sitting of Tuesday 30 March 2021**

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

**The National Anthem was played**

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### SESSIONAL SELECT COMMITTEES - COMPOSITION

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have a few announcements to make regarding nominations and appointment of Members to serve on several Sessional Select Committees, following vacancies which have arisen therein.

1. Regarding the Public Accounts Committee –
  - On 05 March 2021, hon. Xavier-Luc Duval resigned as Chairperson thereof. Moreover, hon. Juman, hon. Abbas Mamode and hon. Uteem resigned from the Committee on 04, 24 and 29 March, respectively.
  - I have, today, pursuant to Standing Order 69(2) (a), appointed hon. Uteem as Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee.
  - On Monday 29 March 2021, the Committee of Selection met under my Chairmanship and nominated hon. Armance, Dr. the hon. Gungapersad and hon. Nagalingum to serve on the Committee.
2. Regarding the House Committee –
  - On 04 March, hon. Yeung Sik Yuen resigned from the House Committee and the Committee of Selection has, on 29 March, nominated hon. David, in replacement thereof.
3. Regarding the Broadcasting Committee –
  - On 04 March, Dr. the hon. Gungapersad resigned from the Broadcasting Committee and the Committee of Selection has, on 29 March, nominated hon. Yeung Sik Yuen in replacement thereof.
4. Regarding the Parliamentary Gender Caucus -
  - On 04 March, hon. Armance, hon. David and hon. Wochit resigned from the Caucus and the Committee of Selection has, on 29 March, nominated hon. Abbas Mamode, hon. Richard Duval and hon. Juman to serve on the Caucus, in replacement thereof.
  - I also have to inform the House that on 03 March 2021, hon.

Assirvaden, Dr. the hon. Aumeer and hon. Ramful resigned from the Parliamentary Committee on the Independent Commission against Corruption and the duty of filling these vacancies rests with the hon. Leader of the Opposition pursuant to section 59(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Thank you.

**PAPERS LAID**

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

**A. Prime Minister's Office**

**Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications**

**Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity**

The Independent Broadcasting Authority (Licence Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 53 of 2021)

**B. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training**

**Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection**

(a) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 51 of 2021)

(b) The Competition Commission (Amendment) Rules of Procedure 2021. (Government Notice No. 52 of 2021)

**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS****DIRECTOR OF AUDIT'S REPORT 2019/20 - SAFE CITY PROJECT -  
DOCUMENTS - ACCESS**

**The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval)** (*by Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether he will state if he has taken cognizance of the Report of the Director of Audit for the year 2019/20 wherein it is stated that for the Safe City Project, access to important documents were denied or delayed, thereby severely affecting and heavily impairing his audit and preventing him from carrying out his duties under the Constitution and, if so, what actions, including disciplinary action, have been taken.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I would like to inform the House that my Office received the final version of this Private Notice Question at 10 o'clock this morning.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have indeed taken cognizance of the Report of the Director of Audit for the Financial Year 2019/2020.

In regard to the Safe City Project, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that Annex 3 of the Lease Agreement signed between the Mauritius Police Force and Mauritius Telecom, makes provision for a Mutual Non-Disclosure Agreement at clause 3, which reads as follows, and I quote -

“Non-Disclosure of Proprietary Information

Recipient undertakes to retain the Proprietary Information in strict confidence, not to make any use of such Proprietary Information other than as stipulated herein, and not to disclose such Proprietary Information to any third party without the expressed prior written authorisation from an officer of the Discloser”.

In that context, Clause 1 states, and I quote -

“it is anticipated that either party may from time to time disclose (in that capacity the “Discloser”) to the other party (in that capacity, the “Recipient”) certain information which the Discloser regards as proprietary and/or confidential.”

Furthermore, Proprietary Information, as defined under clause 2.1 of the same Agreement, and I quote -

“shall mean without limitation information which is disclosed by the Discloser to the Recipient, related to Discloser’s Technology and/or ideas and/or knowhow and/or business operations and/or products and/or services, and (i) is in written, recorded, graphical or other tangible form and marked “Proprietary”, “Confidential” or with a similar legend denoting the Discloser’s proprietary interests therein, or (ii) is in oral form and identified by the Discloser as Proprietary or Confidential at the time of the oral disclosure, with subsequent confirmation in writing, or (iii) is of apparent proprietary or confidential nature.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, at the time when the officers of the National Audit Office met with the officers of the Police Department, as part of the audit exercise, a number of queries were raised on various aspects of the Safe City Project. They were informed of the nature of the Mutual Non-Disclosure Agreement and were provided with information that could be disclosed. Moreover, a copy of the clause 3 of the Mutual Non-Disclosure Agreement, which relates to the Non-Disclosure of Proprietary Information, was handed over to them. At that time, they did not raise any particular issue on that Agreement as they were satisfied with the replies to their queries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is worth noting that in the Management Letter from the National Audit Office dated 15 January 2021 on the Safe City Project, there is no mention of any issue related to the Mutual Non-Disclosure Agreement. In fact, at paragraph 10 of the letter, the National Audit Office acknowledges with satisfaction the cooperation and assistance extended by the Mauritius Police Force to the officers of the National Audit Office.

On 10 February 2021, an Exit Meeting, chaired by the Deputy Commissioner of Police responsible for the administration, was held with officers of the National Audit Office to discuss issues raised by the Director of Audit for the Financial Year 2019-2020 for the Police Department. During that meeting, the officers of the National Audit Office drew attention that the Lease Agreement for the Safe City Project was not made available to them. The Chairperson explained that it would not be in order to provide a copy of the Agreement due to the clause of Mutual Non-Disclosure under the terms and conditions of the Agreement, as I have stated earlier. The members were informed that the advice of the Attorney General’s Office would be sought on this matter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, I am advised by the Attorney General's Office that the powers of the Director of Audit are set out in section 110(2) of the Constitution, as follows, and I quote -

“110. Director of Audit

(...)

(2) The public accounts of Mauritius and of all Courts of law and all authorities and officers of the Government shall be audited and reported on by the Director of Audit and for that purpose the Director of Audit or any person authorised by him in that behalf shall have access to all books, records, reports and other documents relating to those accounts. (...)”

The duties and powers of the Director of Audit have been made more explicit in the Finance and Audit Act as follows, and I quote -

“16. Duties of Director of Audit

(1) The Director of Audit shall satisfy himself -

(a) that all reasonable precautions have been and are taken to safeguard the collection of public money;

(b) that all laws, directions or instructions relating to public money have been and are duly observed;

(c) that all money appropriated or otherwise disbursed is applied to the purpose for which Parliament intended to provide and that the expenditure conforms to the authority which governs it;

(d) that adequate directions or instructions exist for the guidance of public officers entrusted with duties and functions connected with finance or storekeeping and that such directions or instructions have been and are duly observed, and

(e) that satisfactory management measures have been and are taken to ensure that resources are procured economically and utilised efficiently and effectively.

(1A) The Director of Audit shall carry out performance audit and report on the extent to which a Ministry, department or division is applying its resources and carrying out its operations economically, efficiently and effectively.

(2) The Director of Audit shall not be required to undertake any examination of accounts partaking of the nature of a pre-audit and involving acceptance by him of responsibility which would preclude him from full (...).”

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. May I say to the hon. Prime Minister that there is no need to read the whole Finance and Audit Act to us! He can say clauses 15, 16, 17, 18, 19.

**Mr Speaker:** I got your point. This is not a point of order.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** We know the Finance and Audit Act. If the hon. Prime Minister can just stick to the reply, please.

**Mr Speaker:** You have made your point already and I already ruled; this is not a point of order. The Prime Minister has ...

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not reading the whole of the Finance and Audit Act. I am only referring to sections, and the hon. Leader of the Opposition should have some patience because he will understand why I am referring to that particular section, because I shall come to it later on. But he jumped the gun and he ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Please continue!

**The Prime Minister:** So, I was reading that section, and I quote –

“(...) the nature of a pre-audit and involving acceptance by him of responsibility which would preclude him from full criticism of any accounting transactions after those transactions have been duly recorded.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, further, of particular relevance is section 17(1) (d) of the Finance and Audit Act which provides for the referral to the Attorney General of any question regarding the interpretation of any enactment concerning the powers of the Director of Audit. Section 17(1) (d) provides as follows, and I am only going to quote that section -

“17. Powers of Director of Audit

(1) In the exercise of his duties under this Act, the Director of Audit may -

(d) lay before the Attorney General a case in writing as to any question regarding the interpretation of any enactment concerning the powers of the Director of

Audit or the discharge of his duties and the Attorney General shall give a written opinion on such case.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is through the exercise of his powers and duties that the Director of Audit is able to place before the Public Accounts Committee his report so as to enable the Committee pursuant to the National Assembly Standing Order 69(2), and I quote, to “examine the audited accounts showing the appropriation of sums granted by the National Assembly to meet the public expenditure (...)”

The Director of Audit appears to have overlooked the need to, accordingly, seek the advice of the Attorney General’s Office on whether the constitutional and statutory powers of the Director of Audit in relation to the documents and records pertaining to public expenditure could be validly curtailed by a mutual confidentiality clause in a contract between a Government Department and a Contractor.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the light of what I have already stated, the question of disciplinary action does not arise.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Mr Speaker, Sir, may I, firstly, advise the Prime Minister that we sent the PNQ at 8.30 in the morning to his Office, and it has been substantially unaltered. So, I do not understand why it took one and a half hours, except for withdrawal of three words.

Mr Speaker, Sir, am I to understand that this confidential agreement was made between the Police, under the Prime Minister’s Office, and Mauritius Telecom, a company of which the majority of the shares are held by Government? Is that the case that this agreement is between Government and a Government company and it has, in fact, flouted the right of disclosure even supposedly to the Director of Audit? Is not there a huge conflict of interest here?

**Mr Speaker:** Put your question!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** That was the question! Am I to understand that it is a company owned by...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Do not repeat if you have already put your question! Do not lose the time of the Chamber! Hon. Prime Minister, you have got an answer for that?

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Do not mislead me!

**Mr Speaker:** He has finished?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes. This is a contract between the Mauritius Police Force and Mauritius Telecom. So, what is the issue? I do not understand what is the issue.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** I will tell you what is the issue.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** I will ask the hon. Prime Minister, and this is the question, whether he finds it normal that the CEO of Mauritius Telecom is also the Special Adviser at the Prime Minister's Office, and he himself, therefore, advised on the confidentiality clause and included the confidentiality clause in the agreement between a Government company and the Prime Minister's Office through the Police?

**The Prime Minister:** Not at all, Mr Speaker, Sir. The confidentiality clause has been included in the contract for security reasons. That is why this confidentiality clause has been put, and it is not the first time that there is a confidentiality clause in such a contract. I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows this as he himself has been in previous Governments. I think he should remember cases where confidentiality clauses or non-disclosure clauses have been included in such agreements.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** I always personally avoided these, but I will ask the Prime Minister whether he knows that it is unprecedented in the history of independent Mauritius that information which by right, by the Constitution should be provided to the Director of Audit is denied to him under a so-called confidentiality clause, even where it is between a Government company and the Government itself. This is the first time, unprecedented! He has not replied to questions in Parliament; that, we know. But the Director of Audit has a constitutional right to information, which has been denied.

**Mr Speaker:** You are repeating your question!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Are you aware that this is unprecedented, hon. Prime Minister?

**Mr Speaker:** You are repeating your question for the third time, Leader of the Opposition!

**The Prime Minister:** I have replied to this question, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are, on the one hand, obviously the duties of the National Audit Office, which has to inquire, first of all, and ascertain that whatever money is being spent is being spent in a correct manner. And in this case, there is, I have mentioned, a Non-Disclosure Agreement of which the Police

Force has prevailed itself to say that it cannot give or it cannot communicate the Agreement to the Audit Officer. But it has always been prepared to respond to queries that were submitted to it by the National Audit Office. So, it is a legal issue. On the one hand, there is this clause by which the Police Force says it is bound; and on the other hand, the Audit Office wants to get access to those documents. This is the legal issue and this is why I have said the NAO should have requested advice in order to see what is the way forward.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Mr Speaker, Sir, my information from the NAO differs considerably from what the Prime Minister has told us in the House, in that I was told that the information was requested as early as September, six months ago. Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, will the Prime Minister not agree that there is absolutely no need for the Director of Audit to worry our good friend, hon. Maneesh Gobin, who nobody trusts anymore, anyway? He has no need to...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr X. L. Duval:** He has no need...

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** ...to have access...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I am on my feet! Do not make any comments! Go directly to your question!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Why can't I make comments? Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, section 1 of the Constitution of Mauritius, I know, is crystal clear. You read it yourself, hon. Prime Minister; that the Director of Audit shall have access to all books, records and reports! Shall have! So, we do not agree; there is no reason to trouble our good friend, hon. Maneesh Gobin!

**Mr Speaker:** Okay, you made your point! Let the Prime Minister reply!

**The Prime Minister:** First of all, let me say, that I do not know whether all the Opposition Members do trust the hon. Leader of the Opposition. That is another question!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**The Prime Minister:** But, anyway, I have said...

*(Interruptions)*

**The Prime Minister:** Well, the hon. Leader of the Opposition wants to put another question before I reply?

**Mr Speaker:** Leader of the Opposition, help me!

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said it in my answer. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying that they have requested for information six months ago. It could be six months; it could be even earlier than that. But it is a fact that on 15 January, the NAO writes to the Mauritius Police Force and does not mention or does not make it an issue that there is a Non-Disclosure Agreement of which the Police Force has prevailed itself for not communicating the Agreement; and I said so in my answer.

Furthermore, if there was such an issue that they were not able to get information, I did say that the Police, according to my information, had meetings with Audit Officers. Questions were put, queries were raised and the Police had answered and communicated as much information as they could. Would the NAO then write to the Police at that time, 15 January, to say that: "I take this opportunity to thank you and members of your staff for the cooperation and assistance extended to the audit team in the conduct of the audit assignment"? He would have said: "Police Force, there is an issue. I am not satisfied because the agreement has not been communicated to me."

I shall ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition to have a look at the comments that have been made by the NAO. Referring to this legal issue that the agreement is not being communicated to him, he says, and I quote -

"The constitutionality of clauses in contracts that deprives the Director of Audit of access to public records for audit purposes is questionable."

He, himself, is not sure! He is saying it is questionable! That is the reason why, in my answer, I have said there is relevant provision under the Finance and Audit Act. Wherever he is not sure or wherever he is not satisfied that he is not, according to him, getting the required documents, he can request an advice from the Attorney General's Office. I would say I am disappointed by the comment of the hon. Leader of the Opposition because when we talk about the Attorney General's Office, it is the Solicitor General who gives advice, not the Attorney General!

*(Interruptions)*

You don't know!

**Mr Speaker:** Quiet!

**The Prime Minister:** No, no, no, no! It is the Solicitor General!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Quiet!

**The Prime Minister:** I can...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** No crosstalking!

**The Prime Minister:** I tell you it is the Solicitor General who gives advice.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Duval! Hon. Duval! But do not interrupt!

**The Prime Minister:** If you do not know, you do not know!

**Mr Speaker:** Do not interrupt!

**Mr Speaker:** This is 40 times you are interrupting.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Yes, you are going to beat your record this time.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not here to say whether one is at fault or not. Of course, we do take very seriously comments that have been made by NAO, but, in this case, he, himself, is questioning whether it is legally in order or not for him to question. He should have sought advice. He would have been provided with advice and then he would have carried on with his duty in accordance with the advice that would have been tendered.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Is the Prime Minister allowed to repeat answers? Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether he agrees that he, himself, is admitting that it is unprecedented that information has been denied to the Director of Audit because it is necessary to go for legal advice, because there is no precedent. For the last 50 years, since independence, the Director of Audit, a sacrosanct institution in our democracy, has had access to every single rupee that is spent by Government.

**Mr Speaker:** No speech!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Does he, therefore, agree that it is unprecedented, by his own saying, that we now have to go to the Attorney General, who nobody believes is independent anyway?

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, maybe the hon. Leader of the Opposition does not understand when I answer. I have never said that it is unprecedented. That is his interpretation. Fine, if he wants to interpret it that way! I have said - and probably, the memory of the Leader of the Opposition fails here - that in previous Governments, in which he has been Senior Minister, there have been agreements, contracts which have been signed, wherein there have been confidential clauses or non-disclosure clauses, and, of course, that could apply at that time and not this time! So, I leave it for people to judge, and I can give you examples. But, again, let me say I do not see anything exceptional or surprising if the NAO himself finds, as he stated, that the constitutionality is questionable, that is, he does not know whether, according to the law, he can, he has the powers or what these powers are. You need to get legal advice, and there is nothing sinister, there is nothing wrong in that. We do that everyday.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the fact today that we are discussing is not the fact there were Disclosure Agreements before, but as the Prime Minister seems to agree, it is the first time that such information is denied to the Director of Audit. As for his point concerning the Attorney General, does the Prime Minister not know that when the Solicitor General arrives to an opinion...

**Mr Speaker:** No, there are two questions. You are putting two questions!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** ... when the State Law Office - despite he sent to the AG for vetting, then, he has the final say. Mr Speaker, this is my question now. I am going to ask the hon. Prime Minister...

**Mr Speaker:** A third one! Okay?

**Mr X. L. Duval:** ...whether the denial of the lease agreement - but not just the lease agreement, I will come to that in a moment - and also payment documents were not denied so that we hide the identity of a '*monsieur*', *s'il vous plait*, a '*monsieur Safe City*', that is why all this has been done ...

**Mr Speaker:** Now you are making insinuations! Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr X.L. Duval:** ... so that we can hide the identity of...

**Mr Speaker:** Leader of the Opposition! Help me! You are making insinuations! Don't go along that path! Put your questions directly!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Yes, I maintain the question. And I will also ask the Prime Minister, he is quoting extensively from a management letter, will he have the courage to table in this House the management letter from the Director of Audit for which he has quoted bits and bits of? Table the full letter, please.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall seek advice, and if need be...

**Mr X. L. Duval:** What advice? From the AG!

**The Prime Minister:** I do not work like you, sorry!

*(Interruptions)*

Now you are ...

**Mr Speaker:** Next question! No crosstalking!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** You quote something and you can't table it? Come on!

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

**The Prime Minister:** No, but I have not answered!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** You should have asked him to table it.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question! This is your turn.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, he has put a question; I must be able to answer!

**Mr Speaker:** There was a question?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, there was and there were comments also!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr X. L. Duval:** We can get very cheap hearing aids. I will get you one.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** No, please, don't comment! This is the last time you do that; passing comments on the Chair! You are not a superman!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** You are a simple human being!

*(Interruptions)*

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, what a shame when I hear comment that even when the Solicitor General would have given an advice, it would have gone through the hands of the Attorney General, and the Attorney General would have, as if, corrected this advice. What a shame! This is not the way we work here; we in this Government! Maybe, at the time when you were Minister in the former Government!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** No comments! Next question!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I maintain what I have said about the files going to the AG. Mr Speaker, Sir, we talked about Rs90 billions of expenditure for which no documents or any small extract have been given to the Director of Audit; the biggest infrastructure project ever done almost in this country. Mr Speaker, Sir, now, there were payments made. Why the Director of Audit does not know? This is not under any confidentiality agreement. Rs760 m...

**Mr Speaker:** Question! Question!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** This is my question: Rs760 m...

**Mr Speaker:** It is not question; it is statement!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Rs760 m. paid! To whom? We don't know! Under supposedly this contract, because the Director of Audit says there were no documents available, and I will quote, Mr Speaker, Sir, from his report, page 166 –

“(...) payment vouchers and supporting documents were not produced to the Audit Office.”

Now, what confidentiality agreement protected this one so that you could not even give invoices to the Director of Audit? That is my question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you!

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the payment vouchers for Safe City Project have, in fact, been effected by the Treasury. The payment vouchers are kept at the Treasury and the NAO was informed about that, and he obviously can get access to all those payments that were made by the Treasury.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Mr Speaker, the NAO...

**Mr Speaker:** Last supplementary!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Last one?

**Mr Speaker:** Of course!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Are you sure?

**Mr Speaker:** Yes!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Well, I will stay on this one and I will have a Press conference because, Mr Speaker...

**Mr Speaker:** You will have one last question. Last supplementary!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** As regards this one, this question, the NAO says that the Police Department is a self-accounting department. Now, you are a lawyer, not an accountant, but you will know that the Police have the duty to keep all the documents, whether or not they are paid elsewhere. Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, the refusal to provide the Rs760 m. worth of supporting documents to our Director of Audit....

**Mr Speaker:** No speech! No statement!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** ...whom I wish to congratulate officially - is that to hide payments, shady payments made to X, Y and Z? Is that why the information has not been given to our Director of Audit, who is an officer of this Parliament?

**Mr Speaker:** No speech!

**The Prime Minister:** First of all, on a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would wish that the hon. Leader of the Opposition withdraws the allegation that payments have been made through X, Y, and Z. If he has any information, he can come and substantiate it.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr X. L. Duval:** There is no information, because the information has not been provided.

*(Interruptions)*

**The Prime Minister:** Do not *bla-bla-bla!*

**Mr X. L. Duval:** It has not been provided. I would welcome that the hon. Prime Minister gives me the information; I will then, if he is right, provide all the explanations and apologies required. I am unable, Mr Speaker, Sir, to apologise for information that has been denied to...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** I am on feet! There was a point of order. I have to give my ruling, and you are giving my ruling!

*(Interruptions)*

Allow me to give my ruling. Please!

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Yes.

**Mr Speaker:** You promised to help me. Help me!

*(Interruptions)*

There is nothing wrong to withdraw whatever allegation...

*(Interruptions)*

...and you have done it already. I thank you for that. Please!

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition makes an allegation and he wants me to prove that the allegation is incorrect. I speak as a lawyer. This is a new principle of law that I am learning. But, anyway, let me answer. He mentioned that the Mauritius Police Force is a self-accounting department. Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say it again! It obviously has information with regard to payments that have been made, but the payments were made by the Accountant General, by the Treasury. And all the original documents are there for the NAO to check. That is why they have referred the NAO to the Accountant General. And there has been no - to me, I do not have any information to say; I do not have any information to even suggest that the Accountant General has refused to provide the required information.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** It is here!

**Mr Speaker:** Time over! Prime Minister's Question Time!

Hon. David!

#### **PORT LOUIS HARBOUR - SHIPS - COVID-19 PROTOCOL**

**(No. B/70) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to ships calling from

overseas and boarding in the Port Louis Harbour, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Ports Authority, information as to the –

- (a) COVID-19 protocol established for entry and operation thereof and
- (b) total number of PCR tests carried out on –
  - (i) crew members, giving details of positive COVID-19 tested cases and the actions taken, and
  - (ii) Port-based staff, giving details of positive COVID-19 tested cases and the actions taken.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as from 19 March 2020, subsequent to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, an Order under section 3(1) (a) of the Quarantine Act 2020 was issued, and which has been extended until 31 May 2021, prohibiting the entry into Mauritius of aircraft and ships, except for those aircraft and ships as I may approve. Only cargo aircraft and cargo ships have been allowed entry in Mauritius. As regards cargo ships, I delegated the authority for entry to the Port Master.

Concerning part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority that a special protocol has been established by the Ministry of Health and Wellness for entry and operation of ships in Port Louis Harbour. All ships' agents, in addition to the 24-hour notice of arrival and the maritime declaration of health, are required to submit to the Port Master and the Port Health Officers of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, a list of crew members and report the history of their daily body heat measurements as from the last port of call. Upon satisfaction of the Health Authorities based on the information submitted, the green light is granted for entry of the ship in the outer port.

The Port Health Officers go onboard the vessel at the outer port; the temperature of all crew members is taken and recorded on the crew list. If the Port Health Officer suspects infectious disease onboard, he notifies the Regional Public Health Superintendent on call to initiate the established protocol and the ship remains at outer port.

On the other hand, if the Port Health Officer is satisfied with the status of health of the crew, a free pratique is granted and permission given for the ship to enter the inner port for berthing.

Officers who are required to service the ship, namely MPA pilots, MRA, that is, from the Customs, Police and Cargo Handling Corporation personnel have to strictly abide by the

sanitary protocol established by the Ministry of Health and Wellness, namely the use of hand sanitizers placed close to the gangway, wearing of masks and gloves, keeping social distancing and avoiding physical contact with the ship's crew. A foot dip containing a mat soaked in a disinfectant is placed at the vessel access point. In addition, only stevedores indispensable for operations at berth are allowed onboard vessels and their number is restricted to the minimum.

The ship's crew members are required to remain in their rooms during ship to shore operation except for those involved in specific activities who are required to wear proper personal protective equipment. No crew member is allowed shore leave. The health of the ship's crew is followed up daily by the Health Authorities as from the date of arrival of the ship until its departure.

As regards part (b) (i) of the question, I am informed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness that crew members of ships calling from overseas are subject to a PCR test based on

-

- the maritime declaration of health;
- the history of body heat measurements, and
- cases of crew change during the last 14 days.

I am also informed that 1,276 PCR tests have been carried out on crew of ships calling from overseas since 19 March 2020. From these tests, a total of eight crew members were found positive on three vessels. One was found onboard vessel Stanford Buzzard on 06 October 2020 and was admitted to ENT Hospital. Another five crew members were found on vessel Jasmine S on 23 and 27 October 2020 and they were all admitted to ENT Hospital. The remaining two crew members were found on vessel Marta Reefer on 16 March 2021. They were admitted to Belle Mare Treatment Centre where they are still under treatment. The ships identified with positive COVID-19 cases were not allowed to enter the inner port until cleared by the Health Authorities following further PCR tests.

In addition, I am further informed that on 17 March 2021, a request was received from the Shipping Agent of vessel Blue Marlin which was on its way to the United Arab Emirates, for a medical evacuation of one crew member reported to be suffering from Malaria. The patient was evacuated as requested by the Shipping Agent by Police helicopter to Dr. Jeetoo Hospital. On arrival there, a PCR test was carried out on the crew member and

the result was negative. On 19 March 2021, a further PCR test was carried out and the result was positive. The crew member was immediately admitted to the ENT Hospital where he is still under treatment. All personnel who have been involved with the evacuation and treatment of the patient have been quarantined and the PCR tests carried out on them were negative.

Regarding part (b) (ii) of the question, I am informed that the Mauritius Ports Authority keeps records of Rapid Antigen Tests and PCR tests for its staff and those of the Cargo Handling Corporation Limited.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 until May 2020, 547 employees of the Mauritius Ports Authority have undergone a Rapid Antigen Test and all their results were negative.

As from 10 March 2021 to date, 20 employees of the Mauritius Ports Authority have undergone PCR tests. The results of their PCR tests were negative.

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Mauritius, the Cargo Handling Corporation Limited, in May 2020, had carried out Rapid Antigen Tests on 930 employees and all the results were found to be negative.

**Mr David:** M. le président, alors que nos frontières sont presque totalement fermées, le port et sa zone restent une interface exposée à l'extérieur et, donc, potentiellement au virus et à ses variants, surtout lorsque nous accueillons des navires qui ont navigué moins de 14 jours depuis leur dernier port d'escale. Et M. le Premier ministre l'a mentionné, nous avons vu récemment le cas de ce marin russe testé négatif, puis positif à l'hôpital Dr. Jeetoo. Le Premier ministre peut-il nous dire, alors que nous sommes à priori à l'avant-veille de la première phase de déconfinement, comment se fera le contrôle de restriction de mouvements des marins dont les bateaux ont déjà accosté?

**The Prime Minister:** M. le président, j'ai déjà expliqué. Il y a un protocole très strict de la part du ministère de la Santé. Ce même protocole reste toujours en vigueur jusqu'au moment où on va décider autrement. Mais c'est toujours le même protocole, et je peux rassurer l'honorable membre que s'il y a des membres d'équipage qui ont passé moins de 14 jours sur un bateau, bien sûr, il faudra qu'ils complètent les 14 jours au moins et avec des tests de PCR à intervalle pour s'assurer qu'il n'y ait pas de contamination possible.

**Mr David:** Le Premier ministre peut-il nous préciser s'il existe un protocole sanitaire renforcé pour les navires qui nous arrivent des pays plus durement touchés par la pandémie, et je pense notamment au Brésil ou à l'Afrique du Sud ?

**The Prime Minister:** M. le président, le protocole est le même pour tous les navires. C'est vrai qu'il y a certains pays où il y a beaucoup plus de cas de contamination de COVID-19. Mais qu'est-ce qui est fondamental ? C'est que pour n'importe quel navire ou bateau qui arrive à Maurice, on prend toutes les précautions nécessaires pour s'assurer que les membres d'équipage, premièrement, ne sont pas contaminés. Je ne vais pas répéter. Il y a un protocole au niveau de la Santé ; la Santé suit les membres d'équipage au jour le jour et, de ce fait, on essaie de renforcer autant que possible. Mais, M. le président, il y a bien sûr des limites. Maintenant, s'il y a des propositions pour améliorer ce système, bien sûr, nous sommes, y compris moi-même, toujours à l'écoute et on est prêt à étudier ces propositions.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Dhunoo!

**Mr Dhunoo:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. From his reply, the Prime Minister mentioned that the MPA has done tests on its employees. I would like to know from the Prime Minister if employees of MPA residing in the red zone have done their PCR tests.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, as far as possible, employees who are in the red zone - as I say, as far as possible - if they are not required, they should not move out of the red zone. But, obviously, for those whose services are required, because they probably have some expertise or they are required to work, they are PCR tested, and I have said in my answer that there are 20 employees residing in the red zone who have already undergone the test and they are so far negative. But I must say it is a continuous process because even if tested and they are negative; it does not mean that they will always be protected. And I seize this opportunity to appeal to everybody that, first of all, we follow all the advice that has been tendered with regard to social distancing, wearing of masks and so on, so that we at least make sure that we are protected.

**Mr Speaker:** Last supplementary!

**Mr David:** Puis-je demander au Premier ministre le nombre de personnes travaillant au port et qui ont déjà été vaccinées contre la COVID-19?

**The Prime Minister:** In fact, I have this information, although it does not relate directly to the question. I can provide the information to the House. The number of MPA employees who have already been vaccinated is 230 and Cargo Handling Corporation Limited, 500. I am told that the vaccination exercise is ongoing. And let me again seize this opportunity to appeal to those employees because they are the frontliners, and they are, in fact, more at risk because there is likelihood that they will get closer to people who can

potentially be contaminated. So, it is in their interest and in everybody's interest that they get vaccinated, and obviously, as soon as possible.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

### **MR P. H. – PROHIBITED IMMIGRANT**

(No. B/71) **Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Mr P. H., he will state if he will consider waiving the *persona non grata* status declared against him to enable the latter enter the Mauritian territory to perform the religious mourning/ceremonies of the Mauritian spouse thereof, late Mrs I. H., who recently passed away in Belgium.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, before I reply to the question, let me express my deepest condolences to the bereaved family.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr P.H. has, pursuant to section 8(1) (m) of the Immigration Act, been declared a prohibited immigrant as from 23 April 2019. He has not been declared '*persona non grata*'.

Notwithstanding the fact that he is a prohibited immigrant, Mr P.H. has been informed that pursuant to sections 8(2) and (3) of the Immigration Act, he may be authorised to visit Mauritius, provided that he applies and obtains the necessary approval from the Passport and Immigration Office prior to undertaking any such visit. He has further been informed that he should comply with such conditions as may be imposed.

Consequently, any request made by him to visit the country so as to perform religious mourning ceremonies of his spouse would certainly be considered. I am informed that as at now, no such request has been made by Mr P.H.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that on 29 August 2019, a request was made for Mr P.H. to come to Mauritius and that request was acceded to. He was allowed to come to Mauritius on the condition that he may stay in the country for a period of 14 days and that he should not engage in any gainful occupation.

Mr P. H. arrived in the country on 04 October 2019 and left on 09 October 2019.

**Mr Mohamed:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Prime Minister will recall that the reason why this person, and indirectly his late spouse, happened to be made prohibited immigrants was because he felt insulted by the language that this person had held *à son*

*égard.* Does he not believe that he is in a conflictual position since it concerns his person that the supposed insult was directed to and that he, as Minister of Interior, he is at the Head of the Body and he, himself, deciding on the status of being a prohibited immigrant for those persons? And secondly, if I may, does he not regret his decision finally to get in-between people who are in love?

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the reason that has been put forward by the hon. Member is not 'the reason'.

*(Interruptions)*

Let me answer! You put a question, you want to answer yourself!

**Mr Speaker:** You should help the Chair!

**The Prime Minister:** I said it is not 'the reason', but it is one of the reasons. The main reason is because he was directly involved in major disruptions to the Air Services provided by Air Mauritius Ltd, which had caused substantial financial prejudice to Air Mauritius and major inconveniences to passengers and tourists generally. That is the main reason, but there are other reasons also. And let me take up the hon. Member who is saying that I am conflicted. Mr Speaker, Sir, if I am conflicted, I must, I think, give up my job and my responsibility as Prime Minister!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Come on with your personal comments! Any supplementary? Next question!

### **SAFE CITY PROJECT – VIDEO FOOTAGES**

**(No. B/72) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the cameras of the Safe City Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of days during which the video footages thereof are stored.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Safe City Project is being implemented for the purpose of safeguarding National Security as well as Public Security. As such, it will enable the Mauritius Police Force to effectively discharge its duties under the Police Act and such other duties as may be conferred upon it under any other enactment. It incorporates a

wide array of technology-driven subsystems where their integration and inter-operability are fundamental in obtaining better intelligence for decision makers to be proactive and also to optimize responses. This will thus enhance the safety and security of Mauritian citizens and visitors.

The Project comprises the following deliverables -

- (a) the supply, installation, testing and commissioning of 4,000 Intelligent Video Surveillance (IVS) cameras over 2,000 sites;
- (b) supply, installation, testing and commissioning of 300 Intelligent Traffic Surveillance (ITS) cameras over 75 sites;
- (c) supply, installation, testing and commissioning of 45 Enterprise/Enhanced Long Term Evolution (eLTE) sites, including 4,500 Multimedia Radio Trunking and 500 vehicular mounted terminals, and
- (d) Centralised Command and Control Centre, including –
  - (i) a Main Command and Control Centre;
  - (ii) a modern Integrated Emergency Response Management System (999);
  - (iii) 7 Sub-Command Centres;
  - (iv) a Traffic Management and Control Centre, and
  - (v) a Monitoring Bay at each of the 71 Police Stations and 1 Police Post.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Safe City system has the capacity to store data for a period of at least 30 days on a 24-hour basis. After the 30 days-loop, the older video footages are automatically overwritten by the latest ones. I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that the period of 30 days is considered adequate and meets the requirements of the Police Force.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. R. Duval!

**Mr R. Duval:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In an official document from Huawei about its global practice CT solution in the Middle-East, it costed around \$20 m. and Rs820 m. approximately for the 1,200 cameras inclusive of six months cloud storage capacity. Can the hon. Prime Minister state if Government spent Rs19 billion for 4,000 cameras and still six months cloud capacity? Can the hon. Prime Minister enlighten the House about it?

**The Prime Minister:** Enlighten? Well, I have given the figures. There has been a due diligence with regard to the implementation of this project which is, I think, for 20 years. So, I do not see what more. If the hon. Member has any specific question on which he wants me to enlighten him, I shall do so. If he just asks me to enlighten, I think there is so much that I can say with regard to this project.

**Mr R. Duval:** In reply to PQ B/523 in May 2019, the former Prime Minister informed the House that the Safe City Project has a facial recognition component. Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm that this component has already been activated?

**The Prime Minister:** I am not sure whether it is already operational. In fact, I do not think it is already operational, but I need to check, Mr Speaker, Sir, on this issue.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Ittoo!

**Mr Ittoo:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether the CCTV recording for the City Surveillance Project can be modified, altered, deleted, and whether they have any security system to protect that?

**The Prime Minister:** Well, no, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, no one can edit the footages of these recordings. The Police Officers and the Sub-Command Centres can only view the video footages while the Police Officer in the Main Command Centre can, of course, extract particular parts of the video footages when there is, for example, any complaint or it has to be communicated to authorised institutions like the Court, for instance. But, otherwise, you cannot tamper with these footages.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Juman!

**Mr Juman:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Prime Minister mentioned about seven Sub-Command Centres. The Safe City Project was scheduled to be fully operational by June 2019. Now, 21 months from that date, can we know, out of the seven Sub-Command Centres, how many of them are fully operational?

**The Prime Minister:** In the Central Division of Curepipe, the installation is pending due to lockdown; in the Southern Division of Rose Belle, the installation is completed and is awaiting power for configuration; in the Metro South Division of Line Barracks, the installation is completed and UAT is completed; in the Eastern Division of Flacq, installation is completed; in the Western Division, Rose Hill, it is operational; in the Northern Division of

Piton, awaiting relocation of ACs to start installation, and in the Metro North Division of Abercrombie, the MT is working with the Contractor.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, given that the Safe City Project has been exempted completely from the Data Protection Act, would he not agree that an urgent Bill be presented to this House to ensure that all the valuable and private footages that are taken by the cameras of Safe City are not used against our citizens but for the protection of our citizens and, therefore, have a special Bill as far as data protection for Safe City is concerned?

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Safe City Project is not exempted completely from the Data Protection Act of 2017.

*(Interruptions)*

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has to go and read what is there! There are certain provisions of the Data Protection Act to which the exemption applies. Let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that he has been in Government before. I believe in 2009, he was in a Government; I believe! And in that year, they implemented the CCTV Camera Surveillance Project. Is the hon. Leader of the Opposition aware that there are certain provisions of the Data Protection Act of 2004 from which this project is equally exempted...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** No comments!

**The Prime Minister:** ... the project?

**Mr Speaker:** No comments!

**The Prime Minister:** So, there is nothing unusual about it. You have done it before! The exemption applies under the new Act of 2017. There is no need for any specific legislation to be passed.

**Mr Speaker:** Last supplementary, hon. Armance!

**Mr Armance:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as a global practice, Huawei offers six months cloud storage to all his clients worldwide. In Mauritius, we have only 30 days of storage; the Prime Minister just mentioned it. Can I find from him whether he intends to negotiate with Huawei to increase our storage capacity?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Member must realise that to increase storage capacity means that we need to have more servers, and to have more servers, it means that we need to pay more to acquire bigger storage capacity. So, we have to decide how much money we want to put in with regard to this project. Now, I am told that generally - and I have asked for information - in other countries, 30 days is the normal and reasonable length of time; in some countries! But hon. Dr. Boolell is saying no!

**Mr Speaker:** No, no, forget him! Forget him!

**The Prime Minister:** Forget him?

**Mr Speaker:** Forget him, he is no more! Continue with your reply!

**The Prime Minister:** I try to forget him. Although he is not the Leader of the Opposition, I try to forget him, but I see him! But, Mr Speaker, Sir, ...

*(Interruptions)*

He is coming back? *Vous voulez rendre le tablier?*

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**The Prime Minister:** Okay, so, let me remind the future Leader of the Opposition that when he implemented the CCTV Surveillance Camera Project, the storage capacity was and is still 30 days. So, in this case, it is 30 days, it is okay. Now, we implement a new project, 30 days is not enough!

**Mr Speaker:** The Table has been advised that PQs B/80, B/81, B/82 and B/116 have been withdrawn. Time over!

Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

### **COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - MAURITIAN PASSENGERS STRANDED ABROAD**

**(No. B/85) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to Mauritian passengers stranded abroad, he will state the –

(a) number thereof since 10 March 2021 to date, and

- (b) measures taken by his Ministry to ensure the repatriation of those who left Mauritius on medical grounds.

**Mr Ganoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in response to the resurgence of local cases of COVID-19 since March 2021, Government has taken a series of decisive measures to prevent the virus from spreading further. One of the steps announced is a national lockdown resulting in the suspension of inbound passengers' flight to Mauritius. My Ministry including our missions overseas has taken necessary actions to assist Mauritian nationals who are stranded or find themselves in difficult situations.

On 17 March 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade set up a help desk to ease the difficulties of our nationals abroad. The help desk started to operate on Thursday 18 March following a communiqué which was issued by my Ministry on 17 March. To reassure the population, my Ministry through the helpdesk, continues to tender advice, provide information and give moral support to Mauritians calling. Records are kept of calls received and a database of all information collected regarding Mauritians stranded overseas is being set up. The database includes pertinent information that will in due course assist my Ministry and other Government Ministries in deciding future actions.

To ensure that the Ministry's database remains up-to-date, the Mauritius Missions Consulates honorary consuls as and when needed and Mauritians abroad contact Ministry through the [mfaconsular@govmu.org](mailto:mfaconsular@govmu.org) email and the hotline especially created on 18 March for this unexpected situation. The help desk has received more than 200 calls and 200 mails which are attended to on a daily basis.

With respect to part (a) of the question, Mauritians are currently stranded in diverse regions including UK, France, Italy, Reunion Island, Seychelles, Madagascar, India, USA, UAE, Ghana, Djibouti, South Africa, Australia and Malaysia. Since the lockdown, Mr Speaker, Sir, around 350 Mauritians stranded abroad have registered themselves with the help desk at my Ministry. A breakdown region-wise would include the USA and Canada, Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, Seychelles and Reunion Island and this total includes some Mauritians stranded on cruise ships.

With regard to part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, some 72 patients and carers who were on medical treatment abroad were brought back on 27 March 2021. I understand

that we still have 10 patients from India who have not yet completed their treatment and would be flown in on the next approved flight.

I wish to inform the House that our missions overseas are currently reaching out to our Mauritian nationals in distress and are extending all possible assistance within the constraints of lockdown in the respective countries of accreditation. Through its communication network, my Ministry is updating them of the situation, seeking their understanding and reassuring them that the Government remains sensitive to their plight. My Ministry is urgently working on a plan to facilitate the return of the stranded Mauritians at the earliest.

**Mrs Luchmun Roy:** Thank you very much, hon. Minister. Can the hon. Minister give a tentative date, maybe, of when the Action Plan might be implemented?

**Mr Ganoo:** Well, the plan is being devised right now, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are coming up with this plan which will take into account different issues and the plan will be based, of course, on the priority of the distressed cases, the students and the medical cases and taking also into consideration the availability of quarantine places here in the country.

**Dr. Boolell:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister be more precise as to the assistance because the Minister mentioned all possible assistances being extended to stranded persons overseas? Can we know exactly what are those assistances that are being extended because some of them are run out of money, some of them become destitute and they are in dire straits, so, if the Minister can inform the House?

**Mr Ganoo:** As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I thank the hon. Member for this question. Our missions have been dispensing valuable services to our nationals abroad and these services include their registration, their inclusion in the database, we liaise with authorities of the host country for the extension of visas with regard to the stranded Mauritians who have overstayed because of the lockdown. We intervene with various Government and private stakeholders to facilitate accommodation, for example, we even negotiate rates with hotels and calling on their understanding for the difficulties being faced by our nationals. We facilitate the issue of travel documents for those whose passports have expired, we liaise with local authorities including the Police in view of assisting our nationals who faced special difficulties. We counsel, we comfort our nationals who are in a situation of anxiety and distress and we even maintain contact with the cruise liners to ensure the welfare and safety of our nationals, both passengers and crew members.

**Dr. Boolell:** Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Minister whether the special desk set up at the Ministry has been liaising with our diaspora in the different parts of the world to come and assist those Mauritians who are stranded because they are willing to help.

**Mr Ganoo:** Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a good suggestion but whenever we receive a request from the diaspora who offer help in terms of contacting the distressed Mauritians, we encourage them to do so.

**Mr Speaker:** Another one! Next question!

### **COVID-19 VACCINATION COMMITTEE - MEMBERS**

**(No. B/86) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the members of the Vaccination Committee, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the –

- (a) date of appointment;
- (b) qualifications held, and
- (c) terms and conditions of appointment thereof, indicating the –
  - (i) number of meetings held, and
  - (ii) date of the last meeting and names of the members who attended same.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in January 2021, Government's approval was obtained for a National Vaccination and Deployment Plan, which was prepared by my Ministry, in consultation with the World Health Organisation, the Attorney General's Office and the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

The National Vaccination and Deployment Plan provides for the setting up of a COVID-19 Vaccination Committee.

The Terms of Reference of the Committee are to -

- (i) make recommendations on vaccination policy, and
- (ii) advise on all scientific and technical topics related to vaccines and immunisation.

The Committee meets on a weekly basis to provide the Ministry on strategies to plan for the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines.

The objectives of the Committee are to -

- Recommend on choice of vaccines, safety and effectiveness of data, immunogenicity data on vaccines candidates and constantly review and update on vaccines, and
- To oversee on priority groups to receive on vaccination

Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the Chairperson of the National COVID-19 Vaccination Committee was appointed on 25 January 2021, whilst the members and secretary were appointed on 29 January 2021. With respect to terms and conditions of appointment, same will be approved by the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms.

As regards part (c) (i) of the question, I am informed that 9 meetings of the National COVID-19 Vaccination Committee have been carried out since January 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your kind permission, I will be tabling a copy of the composition of the National COVID-19 Vaccination Committee together with the qualifications of each member as well as the date of last meeting held and the names of the members who attended same.

**Mr David:** M. le président, jusqu'ici nous ne savions pas grand-chose de ce *Vaccination Committee* hormis qu'il était présidé par le Dr. Joomaye alors que ce Comité National relève d'une importance capitale vu que c'est lui - lui, le comité - qui approuve l'utilisation des vaccins qui seront administrés aux mauriciens. Je comprends donc qu'il s'agit de l'équivalent de la *Food and Drug Administration* Américaine et j'invite d'ailleurs notre *Vaccination Committee* à s'inspirer du site internet de la *FDA*. Le ministre peut-il préciser parce que je n'ai pas bien compris dans sa réponse, *les terms and conditions of appointment* des membres de ce comité ?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the terms of reference of the Committee making recommendation.

**An hon. Member:** Not reference.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Now, the objectives are to recommend our choices, Mr Speaker, Sir.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Do you have the right to crosstalk like this? At times, you forget you are in Parliament and you see you are arguing with the Chair!

*(Interruptions)*

As far as I understand terms and conditions of appointment.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already informed the House about the conditions for appointment of a Vaccination Committee, that has been already given and I am going to list down the names of the Vaccination Committee so that they will know how the Vaccination Committee is operating because once ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Behave yourself, Leader of the Opposition!

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir ...

**Mr Speaker:** This is not a way to address a Member of the House.

*(Interruptions)*

You can address me like this but not the others.

*(Interruptions)*

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, this is how our hon. members are behaving, crosstalking, making comments and not allowing me to give my reply. The composition of the Vaccination Committee, I will give the names –

- (a) Dr. Z. J. is Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister's Office, he holds a *doctorat en médecine*, specialist in *médecine interne et hepato-gastroenterologie* and then he has made 15 publications;
- (b) Dr. V. P. is the Chairperson of MAUNITAG, MAUNITAG is the Mauritius National Immunisation Technical Advisory Group and she sits on the Vaccination Committee. This MAUNITAG is also responsible for the immunisation of children;
- (c) Now, the third one is the Director of Health Services for Public Health, he is also part of that Committee;
- (d) The Director of the Laboratory Services, Dr. S. M. is part of that Committee;
- (e) Dr. P. L. is the Consultant-in-Charge of Internal Medicines;
- (f) Dr. T. G. is the Chairperson of the Pharmacovigilance Committee and is a specialist of infectious diseases;

- (g) Dr. F. K. is the Regional Public Health Superintendent, Communicable Disease Control Unit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a lot of crosstalking, if Members will behave.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Members, I heard some voices.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. So all these members, the doctors are responsible for the Vaccination Committee and they advise which vaccine the country should take to vaccinate the population.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Mohamed:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I will try to be very precise in order for the hon. Minister to understand. The question that was put by hon. Member David is as follows –

“(c) Terms and conditions of appointment.”

**Mr Speaker:** No, this is an argument.

**Mr Mohamed:** My question is ...

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Member, try to listen. You asked a permission; you asked the floor to ask a supplementary question and not to argue. If you have one, if you have two, put them.

**Mr Mohamed:** Could he, please, inform the House why he has, up to now, refused to give the terms and conditions of appointment when the question was very explicitly put? Why is he hiding it?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply I said with respect to terms and conditions of appointment, same will be approved by the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms. The Ministry of Health and Wellness does not approve the terms and conditions, it is this Ministry that has to approve the terms and conditions.

**Mr David:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I will try to put another explicit question. May I know from the hon. Minister whether any fee is being paid to each and every member of this National Vaccination Committee and, if so, may he tell us the amount?

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Mohamed, this is not a way to behave in Chamber. He is putting his question and you are turning and monitoring him.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Go ahead! I am sorry for that, people embarrass you. Go ahead!

**Mr David:** Let me rephrase it, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I know from the hon. Minister once again whether any fee or any benefit is being paid to each and every member of this National Vaccination Committee and, if so, can he give the details?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, no fee is being paid to any members of the Vaccination Committee.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Hon. Uteem, last question!

**Mr Uteem:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I know from the hon. Minister before this COVID-19 Vaccine Committee advises the Government on procurement of a vaccine that is not approved by WHO, does that Committee get an advice from WHO as to why this vaccine has not yet been approved by WHO before they advise Government to buy them?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Vaccination Committee works in collaboration with different stakeholders. It is up to them to decide whose advice they are going to take.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

#### **COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - CSR CONTRIBUTIONS - NGOS**

**(No. B/87) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to Corporate Social Responsibility contributions, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Social Inclusion Foundation, information as to the quantum of funds disbursed to Non-Governmental Organisations to support the vulnerable people during the COVID-19 lockdown, since 10 March 2021 to date.

**Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo:** I am informed that the Council of NSIF has approved that an amount of Rs485.3 m. be provided to around 146 NGOs from January 2021 to support vulnerable groups. To date, out of Rs485.3 m. an amount of Rs238.9 m. representing a first instalment has already been disbursed to the NGOs. This represents 49.2% of the approved amount so far disbursed.

Even during the lockdown period, NSIF has been responsive to the financial needs of its registered NGOs with a view to ensuring continuity of their services. Out of the Rs238.9 m. disbursed, an amount of Rs20.8 m. has been disbursed to 33 NGOs from 10 March 2021 to date. In addition to the above, NSIF has approved an additional grant of Rs425,000 in favour of NGO Action for Integral Human Development. This NGO will provide *accompagnement* and counselling to vulnerable people across the island during the lockdown through a hotline service.

NSIF has also taken a series of measures to support vulnerable groups during the lockdown. They are as follows –

- (a) NSIF has liaised with NGOs Caritas to make arrangements for food packs to be provided to 150 families in Canot. In fact, a survey was conducted by the Police in that region and it was found that around 150 families were in need of foodstuff, and
- (b) the food packs have been delivered to Albion Police Station to be distributed to the needy families.

It is good to highlight that NSIF provides financial assistance to NGOs such as APEL, Caritas and *Association Père Laval des sans abris* which cater for homeless persons. During the lockdown, NSIF has liaised with these NGOs to facilitate the vaccination of homeless persons across the island. So far, out of 103 homeless persons surveyed around the island, 51 have already been vaccinated. The vaccination exercise is still ongoing.

NSIF has also liaised and assisted Caritas and APEL to make arrangements to provide two meals to homeless persons during the lockdown. APEL has constituted a network of volunteers to arrange for the distribution of food to some 30 homeless persons on a daily basis in the morning and at night. Caritas is collaborating with two other NGOs for the provisions of two meals to homeless persons on a daily basis.

NSIF acted as a facilitator for NGOs to be provided with WAP facilities in order to enable them to carry out interventions on the field whenever necessary. NSIF also sent an email to the 418 NGOs registered with it on the next day of the lockdown to inform them that they could contact the foundation by mail for any pressing issues that may hinder their ongoing operations.

Moreover, our Government, through the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund, has provided support to vulnerable groups during the lockdown.

On 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021, the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund authorised Caritas l’Ile Maurice to use Rs6 m. allocated by the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund to the NGOs to provide food packs to around 3,000 vulnerable households during the current lockdown NSIF is responsible for the monitoring of the implementation of the programmes by Caritas l’Ile Maurice to ensure that food vouchers are used for the purchase of basic food and sanitary items.

**Mr David:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Minister whether she can table the list of NGOs having received CSR contributions since January 2021, with the corresponding quantum?

**Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo:** Yes. I don’t have it with me, but I will do it in the course of today.

**Mr Assirvaden:** Merci, M. le président. Madame la ministre, vous parliez de *food packs* qui ont été distribués pendant ce confinement du COVID et dans les zones rouges, est-ce que vous pouvez confirmer que des *food packs* ont été distribués dans les circonscriptions 15, 16 et 17 aussi, et à quel endroit, si vous avez les renseignements ?

**Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo:** Well, NSIF does not provide funding for the provision of food packs, but acts as a facilitator to identify NGOs which can arrange for the provision of food packs received from sponsors. I have been told that 67 NGOs which are registered with NSIF have also provided food packs to vulnerable groups across the island, including Constituencies 15, 16 and 17.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Armance!

**Mr Armance:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister mentioned that she caters for food for 30, I say it again, 30 homeless persons only. Does she know how many homeless persons are there in the region of Port Louis? There are more than 200! How can she come here and say that she only provides food for 30 of them and is being proud of that? What are you going to do for all the other persons that you do not provide any food?

**Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo:** Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, I rely on the survey which has been carried out by the Police. We have received a list from the Police that there are around 103 homeless persons across the island. You know, it is very difficult to lay hand on these persons because when you go at a particular spot, they might have moved to another one. So, I cannot act without a report. We act on the report provided by the Police. I must seize this opportunity to thank NGOs for their strong support, engagement and contribution. The

contribution of the NGOs means a lot to Government, especially in these difficult times. Caritas is doing a wonderful job. There are other NGOs also. So, that's it.

**Mr Speaker:** One last supplementary!

**Mr Assirvaden:** Merci, M. le président. Madame la ministre, lors du premier confinement l'année dernière, le gouvernement en association avec les ONG avaient organisé la distribution de packs de vivre. Est-ce que vous pouvez confirmer que, pour ce présent confinement, le gouvernement n'est pas impliqué directement dans la distribution de *food packs* ? C'est bien ça ?

**Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo:** Yes, I understand your point. Hon. Members should understand that this year the situation is different compared to the lockdown of last year. If I may recall you, during the lockdown of last year, there were closure of shops, supermarkets, etc., and that is why immediate actions were taken by my Ministry, by Government to provide food packs to the vulnerable because we are very much concerned, you know, to provide support to the vulnerable people. But this year, there has not been closure of shops. It is only one day, on Sunday, so, on the next ...

**Mr Assirvaden:** Red zone?

**Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo:** Yes, even in the red zone, I am told that shops are open, so, people can buy their provision. As I have said, Mr Speaker, Sir, NSIF does not provide funding for food packs; NSIF is doing the liaising with many of the NGOs who are registered by it to see to it that vulnerable people who are in need of food packs are being given same.

**Mr Speaker:** I suspend the sitting for one and a half hours!

*At 1.06 p.m. the sitting was suspended.*

*On resuming at 2.46 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.*

**Mr Speaker:** Please be seated!

## ANNOUNCEMENT

### PQ B/25 – SITTING OF 23.03.21

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have a short announcement to make in regard to PQ B/25, put by the hon. Assirvaden at the Sitting of last Tuesday.

In the course of a supplementary question to the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, the hon. Assirvaden asked, I quote –

« ...*Est-ce qu'on peut savoir du ministre si l'ambassadeur Soodhun est déclaré persona non grata aux Emirats Arabes Unis?*»

It is a fact that Ambassador Soodhun is, since 25 January 2021, accredited to the United Arab Emirates.

I consider the interrogation of the hon. Assirvaden unfounded and misplaced and puts the Republic of Mauritius in an embarrassing situation vis-à-vis the United Arab Emirates.

Hon. Members, I am, by virtue of the powers conferred upon me under Standing Order 77, ordering that the mentioned interrogation be expunged from the Hansard and the video footage of the proceedings.

I thank you.

**Mr Assirvaden:** M. le président...

**Mr Speaker:** No point of order!

**Mr Assirvaden:** On a point of order, *M. le président*...

**Mr Speaker:** No point of order!

**Mr Assirvaden:** *M. le président !* On a point of order, *M. le président*...

**Mr Speaker:** No point of order!

**Mr Assirvaden:** Non, M. le président, il me faut quand même! M. le président, il me faut quand même! On a point of order!

*(Interruptions)*

Just listen to the point of order, *M. le président*!

**Mr Speaker:** This is my ruling!

**Mr Assirvaden:** J'ai posé une question, M. le président. C'est une question. Je n'ai pas fait un *statement*, je n'ai pas fait une affirmation, je n'ai pas fait des allégations. Je n'ai fait que poser une question. N'ai-je pas le droit de poser une question ?

**Mr Speaker:** My ruling is not to be negotiated!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Osman Mahomed!

**Mr Assirvaden:** Permettez-moi, M. le président ...

**Mr Speaker:** Next question! Please!

**Mr Assirvaden:** Permettez-moi, M. le président, de...

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

**Mr Assirvaden:** I maintain what I have said in my question. I maintain it.

*(Interruptions)*

**Dr. Boolell:** The Speaker...

*(Interruptions)*

...on behalf of Soodhun.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question, hon. Osman Mahomed!

**Mr Assirvaden:** Je n'ai pas fait d'allégation ; j'ai simplement posé une question selon les règles des *Standing Orders* ! Pourquoi vous sanctionnez ma question ? Pourquoi vous enlevez ma question ?

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Patrick Assirvaden, I have already warned you that you are going outside the Standing Orders.

**Mr Assirvaden:** Mais j'ai posé une question...

**Mr Speaker:** I have the right ....

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Assirvaden:** Oui,...

**Mr Speaker:** According to the Standing Orders, I have the right to do what I am doing!

**Mr Assirvaden:** Mais vous me sanctionnez...

**Mr Speaker:** What sanction am I taking against you?

**Mr Mohamed:** By editing his question.

**Mr Speaker:** I am not questioning and I am not sanctioning! I am doing my work!

**Mr Assirvaden:** Donc, je n'ai pas le droit de poser une question ?

**Mr Speaker:** I am doing my work!

**Mr Assirvaden:** Moi aussi!

**Mr Speaker:** You have done your work! I am doing my work!

**Mr Assirvaden:** Mais vous changez ma question initiale, M. le président.

**Mr Speaker:** Then, I order you out because this is what you are looking for. I order you out!

*(Interruptions)*

**Dr. Boolell:** How can you order him out? On what ground?

*(Interruptions)*

You are biased!

**Mr Speaker:** I order you out also!

*(Interruptions)*

**Dr. Boolell:** On what ground are you ordering me out? For failing to do your duty?

**Mr Speaker:** I am ordering you out!

**Dr. Boolell:** On what ground? Under which point of the Standing Orders are you ordering me out?

**Mr Speaker:** I am ordering you out! For the last time!

*(Interruptions)*

If not, I have no other alternative than to name you!

**An hon. Member:** *Dictature! Dictature!*

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Mohamed:** *Samem to kon dir toi! To lintelligence incroyab! To lintelligence ...*

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Assirvaden:** On protège l'ambassadeur Soodhun !

**Mr Speaker:** Don't make any contempt of the Assembly, please!

**Mr Bérenger:** You are a contempt!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** You are the biggest contempt! Now, I order you out! I order you out!

**Mr Bhagwan:** *To faire koma dire to proprietaire Parlement!*

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** You are sanctioned immediately! I order you out! One time!

**Mr Bhagwan:** *Ki to proprietaire Parlement toi?*

**Mr Speaker:** I order you out a second time. Hon. Bérenger, I order you out for the third time and the last time. If not, I will have to name you!

**Mr Bhagwan:** *Ki to proprietaire Parlement toi?*

**An hon. Member:** *L'opposition walk-out!*

**Mr Bhagwan:** *Eh, ferme la bouche laba do bachiara! To enn bachiara!*

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Bhagwan!

**Mr Bhagwan:** What?

**Mr Speaker:** Withdraw that word 'bachiara'!

**Mr Bhagwan:** No!

**Mr Speaker:** I order you out also! I order you out also!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Bhagwan:** You are making *un abus!*

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** I order you out also!

**Mr Bhagwan:** *To proprietaire Parlement twa ?*

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** One time! Second time! Now, I am naming you! I am naming you! I am naming you!

*(Interruptions)*

One time! Second time! Third time! Now, I need force...

*(Interruptions)*

Sergeant-at-Arms, take hon. Bhagwan out!

**Mr Bhagwan:** *Eh, Sergeant-at-Arms, mo pa per do ta!*

**Mr Speaker:** Take hon. Bhagwan out!

**Dr. Boolell:** You are a shame to Parliament! You are a shame!

**Mr Speaker:** I am naming you! I am naming you! I am naming you!

**An hon. Member:** *La honte! C'est une honte!*

**Mr Speaker:** I am naming you also!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Bhagwan:** *Aller do ta!*

**An hon. Member:** *To pas ti bizin presidé meme zordi!*

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Be careful about what you say! Be careful about what you say! Don't talk about my mother! Don't talk about my mother!

*(Interruptions)*

Sergeant-at-Arms!

*(Interruptions)*

Sergeant-at-Arms, do your work!

**Mr Bhagwan:** *Eh, pa pousse dimoun do!*

**Mr Speaker:** Do your work, Sergeant-at-Arms!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Members, I am suspending the Sitting for a few minutes!

*At 2.53 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.*

*On resuming at 3.30 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.*

**Mr Speaker:** Please, remain seated!

**MOTIONS – S.O. 17(3) & S.O. 29(1)**

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Stanley & Rose Hill, hon. Bérenger, I beg, under Standing Order 17(3), to take the time of the House for urgent business.

**The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.**

*The motion was, on question put, agreed to.*

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

**The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.**

*The motion was, on question put, agreed to.*

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Stanley & Rose Hill, I beg to move that the hon. First Member for Stanley & Rose Hill be suspended from the service of the Assembly for today's Sitting and for the rest of the Session, unless unreserved apologies are tendered to the House.

**The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.**

*The motion was, on question put, agreed to.*

*(Interruptions)*

**Hon. Members:** Shame!

**An hon. Member:** Shame on you!

**An hon. Member:** *Dictature!*

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière, hon. Bhagwan, I beg, under Standing Order 17(3) to take the time of the House for urgent business.

**The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.**

*The motion was, on question put, agreed to.*

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

**The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.**

*The motion was, on question put, agreed to.*

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière, I beg to move that the hon. First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière, hon. Bhagwan, be suspended from the service of the Assembly for today's Sitting and for the rest of the Session, unless unreserved apologies are tendered to the House.

**The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.**

*The motion was, on question put, agreed to.*

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes, hon. Dr. Boolell, I beg under Standing Order 17(3) to take the time of the House for urgent business.

**The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.**

*The motion was, on question put, agreed to.*

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

**The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.**

*The motion was, on question put, agreed to.*

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes, I beg to move that the hon. First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes, hon. Dr. Boolell, be suspended from the service of the Assembly for today's Sitting and for the rest of the Session, unless unreserved apologies are tendered to the House.

**The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.**

*The motion was, on question put, agreed to.*

**Mr Speaker:** Question Time continuing!

### **COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - UTILITY TARIFFS**

**(No. B/88) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to utility tariffs, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Utility Regulatory Authority,

information as to if consideration could be given to proposing lower quantum thereof amid the COVID-19 lockdown period in respect of the –

- (a) middle class and those of the lower rungs of the ladder, and
- (b) small and medium enterprises.

**Mr Lesjongard:** Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to both PQs B/88 and B/91 as they pertain to the same subject matter. Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning PQ B/91, I wish to inform the House that Government has already decided that with regard to the utility bills, both Central Electricity Board and Central Water Authority will waive surcharge on unpaid bills during the period of confinement and additional moratorium of up to four months will be provided for payment of bills following the lifting of the lockdown. There will, furthermore, be no disconnection of supply during the moratorium period. In addition, to alleviate the financial burden, especially on low-income families, both the Central Electricity Board and the Central Water Authority will consider payment facilities to customers on a case-to-case basis. The above special measures taken in the context of the confinement have already been communicated in the Press. I wish to also highlight that these measures are applicable to all consumers and not only those residing in the red zones.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to PQ B/88, I have to inform the House that following the COVID-19 pandemic last year, regulations were made by my Ministry for new tariffs to be charged for the supply of electricity under the Social Tariff 110A for domestic consumers and under tariff 215A for small commercial consumers, that is, businesses only. The Social Tariff 110A is applicable -

- (a) to households receiving Government Social Allowance under the Social Register of Mauritius for child allowance;
- (b) socially vulnerable households registered by the National Empowerment Foundation, and
- (c) CEB domestic household consumers registered under Tariffs 110 and 120 having minimum consumption, as defined under the regulations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that for consumers benefitting from the Social Tariff 110A, the prices are an average of 46% less for the first 85 kilowatt-hour per month as compared to the normal domestic electricity tariff rate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as stated earlier, the new electricity Tariff 215A was introduced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic last year to alleviate the financial burden of small commercial businesses, small commercial consumers benefitting from this preferential tariff, pay 10% less than the normal tariff. The above tariffs will be applied up to July 2021.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Thank you. In regard to the waiver of surcharge and additional moratorium which was extended last year during COVID-19 pandemic, is the hon. Minister aware that Statistics Mauritius, in its Report ending September 2020, monitoring the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19 on Mauritian household - the next one is you in a few days, we will know the exact situation - whether in there, albeit and notwithstanding the facilities that are being extended this time again, it is reported that about 39% of household had difficulty in the payment of their electricity bills on time due to financial constraints, while 30% had problems to pay their water bills.

**Mr Lesjongard:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not aware of that Report, but I can say that with regard to the regulations which were published last year in order to alleviate the financial burden of those at the lower rung of the ladder, I can inform the House that around 65,000 consumers of the Central Electricity Board benefitted from the facilities that came with the regulations that were published last year with regard to the pandemic that we were facing.

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** The moratorium and the extension, do they not tantamount to a Cash 22, and I will explain myself why? Is the hon. Minister aware that a few days' ago, that is, 17 March 2021, the Central Electricity Board has issued a communiqué so to speak, warning consumers that –

*« Pendant la période de confinement - it's a french communiqué - les clients résidentiels du CEB ont une forte tendance à consommer plus d'électricité et les tarifs du CEB sont de nature progressive, allant de R 3.16 à l'unité pour les premiers 25 unités, augmentant progressivement pour atteindre R 8.77 l'unité si l'on consomme plus de 300 unités. »*

*De ce fait*, because people stay at home, students learn on line, they use computers the whole day; people work from home. They put on the fan because it is very hot. Does that not amount to a Cash 22, because people will think that they are having great facility from the Government but, in fact, they will have to pay the bill more, in a few months' time to their

surprise, as the Statistics Mauritius has, itself, so to speak, found out for the period terminating September 2020?

**Mr Lesjongard:** Mr Speaker, Sir, if I may put it this way, the reply that I am going to make is in line with what the hon. Member has stated in his question. But the thing is that, he himself said, and we are all aware of that, that it is a progressive tariff, the higher we consume the higher is the kilowatt/hour. For example, for the Tariff 110A, for the first 25 kilowatt/hour, it is at Rs1.74, and then, when it rises afterwards to the next 25, it increases to Rs2.43. Now, what happened during the last lockdown was that CEB estimated bills were calculated on the average consumptions of the 12 previous months, whereas in this case, it will be based on the two previous months only, that is, for the month of January and for the month of February and this will lower down the consumption.

Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, the House needs to know that following what was said and following complaints that were made last year, I understand that effectively the actual consumption had increased by 35%, but after going through an exercise, the CEB had to adjust 192,000 bills and adjusted their payments, representing around Rs8 m. and this was due because the payment was based over a period of 12 months first and, secondly, with the progressive tariff. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Can I ask the hon. Minister whether in the light of the Press conference he gave on 07 December 2020, in the wake of the presentation of the Central Electricity Bill, that, and I quote –

*« Il y a une possible baisse de tarif de l'électricité avec l'entrée en vigueur de l'Utility Regulatory Authority mais tout dépendra de la conjoncture internationale. »*

Which made big headlines, yes. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether in the light of this undertaking, so to speak, that he has taken towards the nation, he has initiated discussions with the URA with a view of reviewing tariffs, let alone for the people who, of course, are at the lower rung of the ladder, as I mentioned in my initial question, but, in terms of cross-subsidisation that is going on right now in CEB, and which the small and medium enterprises do not benefit at all on the, so to speak, cross-subsidisation of the CEB?

**Mr Lesjongard:** Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, with regard to the Press conference I made, I did make that statement and in the presence of the Utility Regulatory Authority (URA), but it will be for the URA to decide. But, as at today, the URA has not yet started to

exercise its function. For the moment, the tariffs will continue to be set by the Central Electricity Board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to small commercial consumers, whereby you have also SMEs falling under that small commercial consumers and benefitting of Tariff 215A, I stated in my main reply that they did, during the last confinement, pay 10% less than the normal tariffs. So, there has been a decrease in their electricity consumption during the last confinement period.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

### **WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION - VACCINES**

**(No. B/89) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the recent decision of the Saudi authorities not to accept pilgrims who have been vaccinated with vaccines that are not approved by the World Health Organisation, he will state if he will initiate discussions with the Saudi authorities in order to address this issue.

**Mr Ganoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, we have taken cognisance of Press reports from various sources, including from Al Jazeera, dated 03 March 2021, stating that the Saudi Ministry of Health will not allow entry to pilgrims who have not been vaccinated. Our mission in Riyadh has not received any official correspondence to this effect. Nevertheless, the whole issue of the organisation of Hajj 2021 will be discussed with the Saudi Authorities at the next opportunity.

I am informed by His Excellency Showkutally Soodhun, our Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who is currently on an official mission is selected to meet with His Excellency Dr. Abdulfattah Mashat, the Deputy Minister in charge of Hajj next week in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The whole issue of the organisation of Hajj 2021, including the sanitary conditions, the quota of pilgrims, etc. will be the subject of discussions between Ambassador Soodhun and the Deputy Minister.

Mr Speaker, Sir, given the ongoing sanitary situation worldwide, it may be generally expected that there will again be a restricted quota allotted per country.

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Thank you. The hon. Minister has quoted from Al Jazeera. Allow me to quote from Haramain Sharifain which is a very reliable source of publication from people who are in the know in the domain of Hajj organisation, and I quote –

“The Ministry of Health has decided to require all external pilgrims wishing to perform Hajj this year to obtain two doses of WHO approved vaccine for COVID-19. The forthcoming Hajjis will be required to receive the second dose of vaccine before arriving in the kingdom, at least, one week before Hajj.”

If it is decided by the kingdom to hold Hajj this year for external pilgrims, Mauritian Hajjis will be leaving Mauritius towards the end of June. So, can I ask the hon. Minister whether the discussions that will be held in Jeddah with the Roving Ambassador, technical issues like, first of all the WHO approved vaccine, because Mauritians are being shot with vaccines right now which are not yet approved, namely COVAXIN and, if so, how?

The hon. Minister has mentioned the quota, which is very important because the ICC here which falls under the Ministry of Arts and Culture has a priority list of Hajjis who will be going this year, because it is first application, first go, that these people be notified to be vaccinated with the appropriate vaccines now. Second dose is done after 3 months and end of June, if we work backwards, is today because we are, now, almost beginning of April. Can this very serious matter be looked into? The hon. Minister has mentioned next week, the roving Ambassador, I think it should be now because from what we see from photos that is being circulated, he is now roving around in Dubai when, in fact, he should be going to Saudi Arabia to discuss this more important issue.

**Mr Ganoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the question of the hon. Member is double loaded. With regard to whether in substance the vaccines will have to be approved by the World Health Organisation or not, I appreciate the information that is being provided by the hon. Member. But I repeat, Mr Speaker, Sir, what we have on our side in terms of information and I can also cite a circular signed by the Minister of Health, I quote -

“The Covid-19 vaccine is mandatory for those willing to come to the Hajj and will be one of the main conditions for receiving a permit to come.”

Nevertheless, let us not pre-empt issues, as I said, all this will be made clearer and I suggest Mr Speaker, Sir, let us leave the whole issue of the organisation to be the subject of discussions between the Ambassador and the Deputy Minister as I said earlier on. Of course, we will welcome all suggestions made by the hon. Member and made by everybody because

this is a very serious matter, what we are speaking of. Mr Speaker, Sir, we will be open and take on board the suggestions made by the hon. Member or anybody in this House for that matter.

**Mr Mohamed:** Mr Speaker, Sir, following the questions that were put by the hon. Member just now, can I impress upon the Minister - since vaccinations, most of them have to be done two vaccinations and there has to be for some of them, 12 weeks between each vaccination, therefore, time is of the essence - Mr Speaker, Sir, to ask that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs not wait on this matter for his Excellency the Ambassador to look in the matter but to be proactive since time would of the essence? And if ever there needs to be World Health Organisation approved vaccination, as put by hon. Osman Mahomed that this be given priority since we all know that we are having this huge issue with the procurement of vaccination approved by the World Health Organisation.

**Mr Ganoo:** Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I totally agree. In fact, at the level of the Ministry, we are also monitoring the situation. In fact, even this morning I had a conversation with the Ambassador, raising up again this issue we are debating now. I agree with what the hon. Member said.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Uteem!

**Mr Uteem:** Mr Speaker, Sir, last Tuesday, I raised the very same issue at adjournment time. And the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness stated and I quote from Hansard-

“Mr Speaker, Sir, WHO approved vaccines for those who will be travelling, obviously, if we have the recommendation from the Saudi Government Authorities, we are going to make available those vaccines as approved by WHO and the Saudi Authorities.”

So, last week, the hon. Minister of Health took a commitment that for pilgrims, there would be WHO approved vaccines but today, the hon. Minister seems to be saying something different, now, we are going to negotiate with the Saudi Authorities. So, may we know which is which?

**Mr Ganoo:** what I understand the Ministry of Health to have said, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that in case the vaccines will have to be approved by the WHO, then what he said would be valid. So, as I said, the information that we have at the Ministry, what has been mentioned is:

‘only to be vaccinated’ and whether it should be approved by the WHO is a matter which we will clear in the days to come.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** I have only one question.

**Mr Speaker:** Last one!

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Yes, please. Being given that the hon. Minister has said himself that it is a very important matter, can I request him to request his colleague, the hon. Minister of Arts and Culture because the question is addressed to him, I convey the message through the Minister to start discussions at the level of the Islamic Cultural Centre so that they *déclenchent la machinerie*? Because we have 3 months before to start getting people who are on the priority list there to start getting vaccination, otherwise the list will be haywire, upside down because people from bottom, because they have been vaccinated will be given priority over people who are on the top of the list, these people will not be able to go because they have not been vaccinated. Can I impress on the hon. Minister of Arts and Culture through you, because my question is addressed to you, to do this?

**Mr Ganoo:** I will liaise with the hon. Minister of Arts and Culture!

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

#### **DIRECTOR, HEALTH SERVICES – NAME, QUALIFICATIONS & EXPERIENCE**

**(No. B/90) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the post of Director, Health Services, responsible for Public Health, he will state the name, qualifications and experience held by the present incumbent thereof.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, following the retirement of the former Director, Health Services, responsible for public health on 05 August 2020, arrangements were made for assignment of duties, at the level of Director, Health Services to the most senior medical practitioner, pending filling of the vacancy.

In accordance with the Scheme of Service, the post of Director, Health Services is filled by selection from among medical practitioners reckoning at least 10 years of service in a substantive capacity in the Ministry and possessing a postgraduate qualification of at least one academic year of study in any clinical specialty or public health or primary health from a

recognised institution. In addition, incumbent should also reckon at least five years' cumulative experience in managing a Specialised Unit, a Medical Unit, a Hospital or a Health Region.

Normally, for long periods, assignment of duties is made on the basis of seniority. Hence, the interest of medical practitioners, as specified in the Scheme of Service, was sought.

Dr. V. D., Regional Health Director, the second most senior in the medical cadre, expressed his willingness to be assigned the duties of Director, Health Services.

Approval of the Public Service Commission was sought accordingly and obtained. Dr. V. D. has been assigned the duties of Director Health Services by the Public Service Commission with effect from 05 August 2020.

In the meantime, the post of Director, Health Services has been advertised by the Public Service Commission on 24 February 2021 with the closing date on 16 March 2021. However, in view of the confinement on 10 March 2021, closing date for submission of applications would be extended.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Dr. V. D. holds an M.B.B.S as well as a specialist qualification in Anaesthesiology. He also holds a Doctorate degree in Business Administration with specialisation in Healthcare Management.

Dr. V. D. has occupied the post of Regional Health Director of Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital from 2015 to 2016, Flacq Hospital from 2016 to 2017 and SSRN Hospital since the year 2017 and up to his assignment as Director, Health Services.

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Dr. V. D., Dr. Dinassing is the Doctor who is replacing Dr. Vasant Rao Gujadhur at the Ministry of Health. Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister, in the light of what he said last Friday on radio in respect of the lump sum of Dr. Vasant Rao Gujadhur, as a former civil servant himself, that when people retire from service or from any other entity earning a lump sum money, this should go beyond critics and for the sake of people who are benefitting ...

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, this question ...

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Member ...

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Would he consider presenting apology to Dr. Gajudhur and to all those people who have been offended?

**Mr Speaker:** Order, put questions!

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not a question related to whatever he has been asking.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question! You have one, sure?

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** I have. Can I ask the hon. Minister why is it that Dr. V. D is not on the platform of the NCC, the platform that is on TV everyday because all we have on the platform are part-timers?

**Mr Speaker:** Do not explain your question. You asked a question, let him answer!

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** He is the person who is in charge of public health in this country.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am on the platform, that's enough!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Before I move to the next question, the Table had been advised that PQ. B/78, B/113, B/117 and B/126 have been withdrawn. Next question!

### **COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - UTILITY BILLS - RED ZONE AREAS**

**(No. B/91) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the utility bills, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Utility Regulatory Authority, information as to if special measures will be taken regarding the imposition of penalty for late payment, disconnection of supply for non-payment due to the current Covid-19 lockdown, especially, regarding customers living in the declared red zone areas.

*(Vide Reply to PQ B/88)*

### **LOCKDOWN - EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS**

**(No. B/92) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the educational psychologists, she will state the-

- (a) number thereof employed by her Ministry and working on a full time/part time basis in each of the 4 Zones and in Rodrigues, indicating the number and

nature of the cases they addressed and the follow-up done during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown, and

(b) number of students they are supporting during the current Covid-19 lockdown.

**The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that there are, as at date, three senior educational psychologists, 31 educational psychologists working on full time basis in the four educational zones as follows –

- Zone 1: 12 educational psychologists and 1 senior educational psychologist;
- Zone 2: 8 psychologists, the senior most one acting as senior psychologists;
- Zone 3: 1 senior psychologist and 6 educational psychologists;
- Zone 4: 1 senior educational psychologist and 5 educational psychologists.

With regard to Rodrigues, I am informed that there are two educational psychologists working on full time basis. I wish to inform the House that they are supported by 26 educational social workers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Health and Wellness Directorate of my Ministry along with the National Education Counselling Service took measures for sound empathy for the psychosocial comfort of our children during the lockdown. The educational psychologists of my Ministry addressed a total of 223 cases during the lockdown period in 2020. I am advised that these were behavioural cases categorised as cases related due to oppositional behaviour, family conflicts, aggressive behaviour, emotional distress, suicide ideation and planning, bereavement, persistent low mood and domestic violence. Cases of children displaying signs of non-school related anxiety, trauma, emotional dysregulation, withdrawal, hyperactivity and school related stress were also tackled.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the lockdown, these children and their parents were provided with help, support, guidance and counselling by the Health and Wellness and the NECS of my Ministry. Interventions made included counselling by phone with students and responsible parties, motivational counselling, guidance to establish effective study plans, referral to other institutions as well.

Follow-up of the cases was done through the phone conversations with the students and their family members. Online working sessions were also conducted whereby parents were explained how to design activities to help manage the behaviour of children at home and how to help their children with their studies during the lockdown period amongst others.

With regard to Rodrigues, I am informed by the Chief Commissioner's Office that no cases were attended individually during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown. However, the educational psychologists did radio interventions for students on the following topics: how to spend time during the lockdown and to endure lockdown positively, sensitisation on mental health and enhancing family bond. Pupils were also provided with emergency numbers which they could contact for psychological support.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the educational psychologists in Rodrigues also did e-counselling with around 15 pupils and parents. Upon resumption of school, counselling had resumed to support pupils and parents. It is to be highlighted that the monitoring of cases referred to educational psychologists was continued during the lockdown period and cases referred during the same period were also monitored after school resumption in July 2020. Furthermore, audio recordings and videos were also prepared by the NECS to support students and their parents during the lockdown period.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, since the start of the current lockdown till date, the educational psychologists have supported a total of 142 students. A brochure to guide students and how to tackle their exams with a more serene and calm state of mind and how to cope with exams stress during the lockdown has also been prepared by the department. The brochure includes coping strategies like breathing mindfully, practicing gratitude and letting go of negative emotions. A support service for students sitting for examinations during the lockdown period is being provided by the educational psychologists along with sensitisation programmes on the MBC.

Though Rodrigues is not under lockdown, I am informed that formative and supportive sessions are currently being done by the educational psychologists for Grade 6 pupils.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know, the number of cases that you have mentioned, 223 during the last lockdown, 142 cases during the present lockdown, how do we come to these cases because we have students who do follow-up during normal time? Has there been an increase in the number because of the lockdown and how did these educational psychologists find out additional or new cases during the lockdown? What was the methodology and mechanism?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, during normal time, students at school are identified and referred to the psychologists through the system. However, during the

lockdown period students contacted, probably the NEC, and from there on, the support was provided.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** This is a very sensitive issue that we are talking. We know that children who are in need of assistance generally come from very vulnerable backgrounds, from backgrounds where there are, maybe domestic violence, abusive parents, parents addicted to illicit substances.

**Mr Speaker:** Put your question!

**Dr. Gungapersad:** So, how did these educational psychologists reach out these students?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have just stated, these students may have contacted the NEC through the educational social workers as well. But I must say that we cannot generalise saying that this type of support is provided solely to people coming from vulnerable groups. Children from all walks of life do require support and the support is provided to one and all on request either through the system, through the teachers who identify them or by the parents or the students themselves contacting the NEC.

**Ms J. Bérenger:** Merci. L'honorable ministre peut-elle nous dire si elle est au courant que selon le *School Safety Task Force* de 2018, les ratios recommandés selon les Etats Unis est d'un professionnel en psychologie pour 500 élèves ou un *School Counsellor* pour 250 élèves pour un accompagnement efficace. Hors, actuellement les ratios selon ses propres chiffres, est d'un accompagnement, un *educational social worker* pour 3,663 enfants. Donc, peut- elle nous dire qu'est-ce qui est prévu par son ministère pour améliorer ses ratios?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** M. le président, nous sommes d'accord que les chiffres sont différents, si on peut arriver à augmenter le nombre de soutiens qu'on offre aux élèves, c'est toujours *welcome*. Mais bien sûr, compte tenu du budget, compte tenu de ce que nous avons là comme ressource, nous devons y dépendre. Seulement, c'est vrai que nous avons toujours et chaque année demandé une augmentation et nous recevons chaque année quelques *additional officers*. Bien sûr, nous allons essayer d'avoir en plus mais là, valeur du jour, nous dépendons de ces professionnels et nous travaillons avec eux, avec le soutien des *educational social workers as well*.

**Mr Speaker:** Last supplementary!

**Dr. Gungapersad:** I would like to know whether all these educational psychologists, even the seniors, receive a Work Access Permit during this lockdown or the previous one?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** No, Mr Speaker, Sir, because as I have just mentioned, they have been working through phones and e-counselling.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** What about ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Next question! You have four questions!

#### **DIGITAL TABLET PROJECT – DISTRIBUTION GRADE-WISE**

**(No. B/93) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the Allocation of Digital Tablet Project launched by her Ministry, she will state the –

- (a) number of digital tablets distributed, grade-wise;
- (b) cost thereof, and
- (c) outcome of the research carried out, if any, to assess the benefits drawn, if any, by the students in terms of enhanced quality performance from the use of the digital tablets.

**The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun):** M Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out, at the very outset, that the project referred to is, in fact, the early digital learning programme. It is a national initiative undertaken with the collaboration of the Indian Government which is being implemented since 2018 as part of the educational reform. The specific aim is to induce a paradigm shift in the teaching learning process. I wish to highlight that this project also involves the development of digital contents that are frontloaded in the devices.

With regard to part (a) of the question, 51,133 digital tablets have been allocated to pupils of Grades 1 to 4 in State and aided primary schools in the Republic of Mauritius. The figures for the different Grades in Mauritius are as follows –

- Grade 1- 13,639
- Grade 2 - 11,227
- Grade 3 - 11,656

- Grade 4 - 11,590

In Rodrigues, the number of tablets provided is follows -

- Grade 1- 723
- Grade 2 - 719
- Grade 3 - 782
- Grade 4 - 761

A total of 36 pupils in the island of Agaléga have also been provided with the tablets.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the capital cost to the project amounts to USD20 m., out of which, an amount of USD14 m. was provided by the Government of India. I wish again to seize the opportunity to thank the Government of India for this very generous support in improving the digital learning ecosystem in our schools.

With regard to part (c) of the question, my Ministry is in presence of reports related to two evaluation exercises. The first one was carried out internally by the MIE and a second one by the University of Mauritius with the support of the World Bank at the behest of my Ministry. These evaluation exercises were primarily meant to be formative in nature. The MIE's first research phase focused on teachers' capabilities to integrate technology in the classroom. The classroom management skills and the modes of learning, including personalised learning, pair and group work with tablets, the use of specific apps as well as drawing and writing tools. The MIE found the results highly encouraging and promising. The University of Mauritius, for its part, has recently submitted its final report. The report states and I quote –

“The use of tablets in the classrooms deeply motivated pupils. They were more engaged, lively and participative. Most pupils indicated that they preferred the tablets over the traditional textbooks and it was further observed that the use of multimedia tablets increased the attention span of the pupils. The multimedia-based lessons and exercises provided the pupils with audio-visual stimuli which contributed greatly to the high engagement observed in most classrooms.”

The report goes on to say that the programme has been off with a good start in that it has succeeded as per its objectives in incorporating digital media in the classrooms. However, the report also recognises that teachers still require further training to translate meaningful change in pedagogical practices and that headmasters should equally be more engaged in the follow-up of the project.

The House would wish to know that my Ministry has already embarked on a series of training sessions for headmasters and school inspectors so as to help them better monitor and support educators in the successful implementation of the project.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** I am not going to question the two studies carried out. The formative evaluations mentioned by the hon. Minister, but this is in strict contradiction with the Audit Report.

**Mr Speaker:** This is debate.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** My question is coming. We are told in the Audit's Report, hon. Minister, that children in 14 out of 40 schools visited could not use the tablets. And here you are saying that it has a good start, you are satisfied. You need to review that. There is a serious problem.

**Mr Speaker:** Put your question!

**Dr. Gungapersad:** My question is: is the hon. Minister satisfied with that situation?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like the hon. Member to just see the timing of the report. When was the report done and whether all the tablets were already distributed at that point in time, and obviously, there are cases that we have noted where due to some delay in the installation of electric wires there was a delay in the use of the tablets. But this does not, in any way, hamper the project. We obviously are sad that we could not start in those 14 schools at the same time but the delay was not a very long one. And as soon as the installations were done, the students were able to use their tablets.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Ramful!

**Mr Ramful:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I just ask the hon. Minister with regard to the School Net 2 Project which is also relevant to this question because it pertains to internet connectivity, whether she can confirm, that Rs81.7 m. has been paid to a Contractor and that, at this stage, no connection has been done at the secondary schools and the money has not been recovered from the Contractor.

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make it very clear. We are talking about two different projects. The EDLP is a project being carried out in primary schools and all primary schools have high speed connectivity today. The question is not related to the secondary schools.

**Mr Uteem:** Is the hon. Minister aware of the problems associated with these digital tablets because of lack of space they cannot be upgraded and they have very limited use because the programmes are preloaded. So, the next year they cannot use it.

**Mrs Dookun–Luchoomun:** No, that is not true. We do upload and frontload certain programmes in the tablets and the tablets are used for different classes. Every year, we have been procuring new tablets for the next class, so, the tablets procured for Grade 1 are used for Grade 1 students and the next batch goes for the next group. It is not the case.

**Mrs Navarre-Marie:** Is the hon. Minister prepared to lay on the Table of the National Assembly the two reports she mentioned?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned that it is a formative report, that we are implementing a new project and the Ministry wanted to make sure that the project is being implemented successfully. And this report is meant for the internal use of the Ministry and was made at the request of the Ministry for our internal assessment and to ensure that the project is implemented according to our aims and objectives.

**Mr Speaker:** Last supplementary!

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Will the hon. Minister confirm that as at now in all primary schools, because on 24 September 2019, there were primary schools where tablets and projectors were still idle and today, when we are talking, has such a situation been remedied?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to bring some clarification to that issue. When we see that tablets are idle, we cannot expect students in Grades 1 to 4 to sit in class a whole day using tablets. Tablets are meant as a supportive device and we must not forget that the psychomotor development of the child has also to be done within the classroom. And we do not expect students to sit with their tablets throughout the day. Next, if ever, one particular teacher at one point in time is not using it, this does not mean that the next teacher coming in class would not be using it. And our aim is absolutely not to get students to sit with a tablet throughout the day.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

#### **ACADEMIES – INFRASTRUCTURAL EQUIPMENT**

**(No. B/94) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and

Technology whether, in regard to the Academies at the secondary school level, she will state if those which were formerly single gender schools, are now infrastructurally equipped and ready to run as mixed schools.

**The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun):** Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, out of the 12 academies, one namely MGI Moka is already a co-educational school with all necessary facilities. Actions have already been initiated by my Ministry to complete all infrastructural works related to the conversion of the 11 single gender schools into co-education institutions before the resumption of the next academic year in 2021. The main infrastructural works involved the provision of separate toilets facilities, additional sick rooms and changing rooms.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Will the hon. Vice-Prime Minister confirm that all the academies at the resumption of studies next school calendar, students will be able to take subjects like Food & Nutrition and Design & Technology?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, we all agree that the new set up with co-educational schools is such that we would allow all students to take all the subjects offered. We know that because of COVID-19 some of the works have been delayed, but we expect that all specialist rooms will be ready by the end of the first term and this would give time for the students to start the subjects, start the theory before going on to practical.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** I will request the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to cross- check the information because, according to me, in some schools, specialist rooms are not ready and students have been advised not to take that particular subject or subjects.

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** This is not possible, Mr Speaker, Sir, because the exams are on right now, students' results will come afterwards and then only students will be identified to move on to their academies. Now, the second thing because the hon. Member is asking me to ascertain, let me say that out of the 11 academies, in 8 of them, all the infrastructural works have already been done. I am talking about 11 because MGI is already ready. I am talking about 8 academies where the works have been completed and I know that for two academies, work is in progress and we are expecting that all specialist rooms would be ready by the end of the first term.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Hon. Vice-Prime Minister, there must...

**Mr Speaker:** Last question!

**Dr. Gungapersad:** It is a case of clear discrimination then, if for academies, everything has been done. I am referring to a letter....

**Mr Speaker:** Put your question!

**Dr. Gungapersad:** I am referring, “kindly note that for combination of subjects for Grade X for the academic year 2021-2022, approval has not been given to any regional girl school to offer Design & Technology or Design & Communication or to any regional boy school to offer Food & Nutrition.

**Mr Speaker:** Question!

**Dr. Gungapersad:** My question is, isn't it a clear case of discrimination against the students of these regional schools, as compared to the academies?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not correct because we do not even know who are the students. Students are not asked to determine right now what are the subjects that they are going to take. We have asked all students to sit for the exams, we will select the best students, and then, once they are admitted to their college, they will opt for their subjects. Right now, no student has been asked to decide upon the subjects to be taken once they are admitted in the academy. So, this information is not correct.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

#### **GRAND BAY LA CROISSETTE & CAP MALHEUREUX - NEW BUS ROUTE**

**(No. B/95) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or)** asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to public transport, he will state if consideration will be given for the introduction of a new bus route to and from Grand Bay La Croisette and Cap Malheureux and or other villages in the vicinity thereof, through the Vingt-Pieds main road with a view to alleviating commuting difficulties thereat.

**Mr Ganoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Land Transport Authority that there is currently no direct bus service from Cap Malheureux to Grand Bay, La Croisette via Vingt-Pieds Road. In fact, presently buses of the Triolet Bus Service Ltd operating along Route 83, St Antoine, Solitude via La Croisette and Vingt-Pieds Road cover only part of Vingt-Pieds main road of over a distance of about one km. The recent construction of several residences and commercial buildings along Vingt-Pieds Road have prompted request for public transport service thereat.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the Triolet Bus Service Ltd has made a request for a new bus route from Cap Malheureux to Port Louis via Vingt-Pieds Road, Super U and La Croisette. The company has already been advised by the NLTA to submit its application for consideration against the prescribed fee. The application will now follow the established procedures.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** May I know from the hon. Minister how long it may take before we see the first bus starting to serve that route?

**Mr Ganoo:** It depends how long the company will submit its application, Mr Speaker, Sir. This will be considered, of course, by the NLTA.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

### **COVID-19 PANDEMIC - LABORATORIES - SEQUENCING TESTS**

**(No. B/96) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state if local laboratories are adequately equipped to carry out necessary sequencing tests to detect the presence of variants in the PCR samples and, if not, indicate the type of equipment required therefor and –

- (a) the reasons why same have not been acquired as at to date;
- (b) when his Ministry proposes to acquire same, and
- (c) the estimated cost thereof.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, DNA sequencing is a process of determining the nucleic acid sequence to study genomes and the proteins they encode. The information obtained allows health and laboratory personnel to identify changes in genes, associations with diseases and phenotypes. Scientists use genomic sequencing to identify the SARS-CoV-2 virus which causes COVID-19, monitor its changes over time into new variants, study the effects of these changes on the characteristics of the virus and measure its impact on health. Genomic sequencing also helps in establishing strains of viruses in circulation.

Previously, there was no equipment to carry out the sequencing tests in Mauritius. Consequently, my Ministry was sending samples to the Francis Crick Institute, UK and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases in South Africa.

The results obtained for incoming passengers from October 2020 to December 2020 and January 2021 to 05 March 2021 showed 5 South African variants and 2 UK variants.

Moreover, results for tests carried out from 05 March 2021 onwards did not show any variant of concern, that is, UK, South Africa or Brasil/Japan.

Mr Speaker, Sir, My Ministry has now acquired a Next Generation Sequencing Equipment at the cost of Rs6.5 m. The equipment has been delivered on 24 March 2021. The equipment is presently being installed and will, thereafter, be commissioned. 14 out of 15 Reagents and consumables have been acquired and the remaining one is expected to reach Mauritius early next week as informed by the supplier. Online training will be given to the staff of the Molecular Biology Department on the use of the equipment. It is expected that the equipment will become operational by mid-April 2021.

**Mr R. Duval:** When the COVID-19 Phase II hit Mauritius on the 05 March due to the lack of laboratory sequencing test in Mauritius, his Ministry sent 40 samples of PCR tests in South Africa. The negative came after three weeks, the question is, what would have been the consequences for the whole country if there were any variants in those samples and can the hon. Minister tell the House the preparedness plan he envisages to take for the future by his Ministry?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the preparedness plan, I have a question set to me and I will be giving the answer in due course, and in terms of the variants.

*(Interruptions)*

Mr Speaker, Sir, this question is clearly related to presence of variants in the PCR sample, how can I reply to a question related to the preparedness plan of the resurgence of COVID-19.

**Mr Speaker:** Next supplementary!

**Mr R. Duval:** Can the hon. Minister tell the House how much has been spent having these sequencing tests being done in South Africa?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have the information with me, obviously I am going to table that information.

**Mr Speaker:** Last supplementary!

**Mr Mohamed:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I see from information that has been provided at some stage by the hon. Minister himself or at least together with his good friend sitting around him during the Press conferences every other day, that at some stage for the detection of variants within the samples provided to a lab with the authorisation of his Ministry, the Ministry of Health and Wellness to a lab called Abiolabs in Mauritius. If since this particular lab has detected variants therein, why is it, therefore, that those results are not accepted by his Ministry when it is his Ministry that authorised that lab to carry out the test?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I will make a statement on this subject during the allotted time for statement.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

### **NATIONAL DEPLOYMENT & VACCINATION PROGRAMME - COVID-19 VACCINE**

**(No. B/97) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the on-going administration of Covid-19 Vaccine to the population under the National Deployment and Vaccination Programme, he will state if, prior to administration, medical and nursing practices standards are being observed and, if not, why not.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the ongoing administration of COVID-19 vaccine to the population under the National Deployment Vaccination Programme, medical and nursing practices standards are duly observed, prior to administration.

Prior to the National Deployment Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 Vaccine, a comprehensive training programme was mounted for all staff, including medical and nursing, who are involved in the programme. The latter encapsulates modules on Regulatory Preparedness, Planning and Coordination Vaccination Strategies, Human Resource Management, Vaccine Safety Monitoring, strict compliance with cold chain and Management of Adverse Effects Following Immunization (AEFI), Injection Safety, Disease Surveillance and Evaluation, amongst others. Some 700 staff have already been trained for this purpose.

Additionally, a Virtual Training of Trainers' Programme was also organised by Serum Institute in India and WHO. The latter comprises sharing of lessons and benchmarking, pertaining to Country Experiences, a COVID-19 Vaccine rollout. Therefore, much emphasis is laid on the importance and types of vaccines along with the underlying protocols and standards. On top of that, in order to ensure the crystallization of this programme, two

simulation exercises were carried out, namely at the Registrar Building and at the Victoria Hospital.

Let me also point out that the Vaccination Programme has been largely catered by the Health Promotion Unit of my Ministry, which has also been granted the Public Service Excellence Award - 2020 Edition, which is a commendable achievement and is, in itself, a testimony of our commitment to Quality Standards and Excellence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that 2,487 PCR Tests have been carried out on our health personnel from 27 March to date and are still going on. This figure covers our health personnel posted in our health institutions throughout the island.

**Mr Quirin:** M. le président, l'honorable ministre est-il au courant que les signes vitaux qui comprennent au moins une vérification de la tension artérielle et la prise du pouls de la personne qui se fait vacciner n'est pas requise, malgré le service mise en place par son ministère à des fins de vérification d'informations et de données de santé de la personne en question?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the question?

**Mr Quirin:** La question est, est-ce-que l'honorable ministre est au courant qu'il n'y a pas de vérification de la tension artérielle et de la prise du pouls de la personne qui se fait vacciner, malgré le fait qu'il y a une équipe qui est là pour prendre les informations, les données de santé, etc des personnes qui viennent se faire vacciner?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, we are doing all according to the guiding principle and there is no need of, you know, to have all the vital checks. So far, we have already done more than 163,000 vaccination and we have been able to manage it properly. I am sure the hon. Member will agree with me that he has seen how the vaccination is being done in the different vaccination centres and that has been done properly and has been appreciated as well as by Members of the other side of the House.

**Mr Quirin:** M. le président, malgré ce que vient de dire l'honorable ministre, nous sommes tous – enfin, je sais qu'il y a une bonne partie des honorable membres de cette Chambre au niveau de la majorité ou de l'Opposition qui se sont faits vacciner et on sait comment ça se passe. Donc, puisqu'à mon avis, je peux ne pas être médecin mais le bon sens me permet de poser cette question. Puisqu'à mon avis, certaines pratiques de base ne sont pas respectées, à mon avis, à mon humble avis, le ministre peut-il rassurer la population qu'il y a

un service de réanimation bien équipé dans les centres de vaccinations autres que les hôpitaux et les centres de santé pour parer à toute urgence ?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I think that the hon. Member when he has been vaccinated, has seen it. There is a well dedicated team for the reanimation. I do not think that I have to give more information on this because of all the requirements and the training that have been done, especially for the reanimation exercise.

**Mr Mohamed:** Mr Speaker, Sir, one issue which I wanted to ask the Minister is as follows. Since he has expatiated upon a whole programme of training that was also delivered online and also training for trainers etc., has part of this training at all included the possibility of including in an equation which would be when, at what pace this vaccination is going on? At what pace does he foresee this training, whether it has helped his Ministry to know how fast this vaccination would go on and when approximately, at least, will vaccinations be over in order to achieve herd immunity?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to the PQ last week, I have given the details of the information sought by the hon. Member.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

### **TRIATHLETE H. R - DEATH - INQUIRY**

(No. B/98) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the death, on 07 February 2021, of triathlete H. R., while participating in an official competition organised by the Mauritius Triathlon Federation, he will, for the benefit of the House, state if his Ministry has caused an inquiry to be carried out thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof and, if not, why not.

**Mr Toussaint:** Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall start by expressing my deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Mr H. R.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the *Fédération Mauricienne de Triathlon* that further to the tragic death of Mr H. R., the treasurer who was acting as Chief Technical Official during that competition has given a statement to the Case Noyale Police Station on 11 February 2021. A Police inquiry is, therefore, in process.

**Mr Quirin:** M. le président, deux morts en moins d'un mois. C'est une évidence que quelque chose ne tourne pas rond dans l'organisation des compétitions au sein de cette

Fédération. Le ministre de ce fait, peut-il nous dire si son ministère a demandé un audit dans le mécanisme qui est mis en place par la Fédération de Triathlon ou l'organisation de ces compétitions, et si non, pourquoi ?

**Mr Toussaint:** Oui, effectivement, M. le président, à la suite de chaque accident qui a eu lieu, nous avons demandé un rapport complet à la Fédération Mauricienne de Triathlon et après le deuxième accident, j'ai même demandé à la Fédération de venir pour une réunion au ministère. Nous avons eu une réunion le 22 février où différents membres de la Fédération étaient présents ainsi que certains athlètes qui avaient participé aux deux compétitions respectivement et nous avons pu prendre connaissance de tout ce qui a été fait le jour, allons dire du malheureux accident du 07 février.

**Mr Mohamed:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Could I ask the hon. Minister whether he can inform us - I know he said that an enquiry is ongoing and that he even at some stage asked for a report - why is it that, at least, at the level of his Ministry he can give us the answer, why is it that for such events it has become the general rule that no proper *encadrement* is provided either by the Police or by members of his officials of his Ministry to ensure not only that there are emergency services that are present there whenever required or to ensure, as in this particular case, that the route was proper and safe for the holding of such an event? Why is, therefore, this his Ministry is absent when it comes to securing the life of people participating in such sporting events?

**Mr Toussaint:** M. le président, l'honorable membre fait complètement fausse route. Si je prends le cas de la compétition du 7 février 2021, la Fédération avait fait la demande et il avait sur place 4 policiers, 2 motards et 2 officiers de police ; la Fédération avait 30 officiels de la Fédération, des personnes qui ont été formées pour gérer ce genre de compétition. Laissez-moi rappeler à la Chambre que ce sont les Fédérations qui organisent leurs compétitions.

Bien sûr, ils demandent l'aide et le soutien du ministère et nous veillons à ce que les Fédérations, dans n'importe quelle compétition, mettent en place tout ce qu'il faut par rapport à l'aspect sécuritaire. Et toujours par rapport à la compétition du 7 février, le St John était présent ; et il y avait aussi l'ambulance du St John qui était présent et d'ailleurs c'est l'ambulance qui a transféré notre athlète vers l'hôpital Cantin. Donc, pour résumer, je redis, l'honorable membre fait complètement fausse route : les mesures de sécurité sont là, la Fédération a pris toutes les dispositions nécessaires ; le ministère, il y a les officiers qui

suivent toute demande par rapport à des compétitions qui sont organisées par les Fédérations. Et comme je l'ai dit aussi, nous avons fait appeler la Fédération à la suite de ce malheureux accident pour venir nous donner une explication et aussi s'asseoir et voir qu'est-ce qui peut être amélioré évidemment.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Nuckcheddy!

**Mr Nuckcheddy:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House on the number of athletes who participated in the competition and in which categories?

**Mr Toussaint:** M. le président, il y avait 131 athlètes pour la compétition du 07 février. Donc, il y avait 131 athlètes et ils étaient de différentes catégories, allant de *youth* jusqu'aux vétérans. Donc, *youth*, junior, senior, aussi bien que les vétérans.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Mrs Tour!

**Mrs Tour:** Mr Speaker, Sir, my question has already been answered.

**Mr Quirin:** M. le président, malgré ce que vient d'affirmer l'honorable ministre, peut-il nous dire s'il est en présence d'information à l'effet que l'autobus qui a occasionné l'accident n'est venu se garer sur un *lay-by* sur la route qu'après le huitième tour du circuit qui comportait, je pense, une dizaine, alors que ce n'était pas autorisé, et de ce fait, il y a eu une absence de vigilance des policiers présents sur les lieux pour assurer, supposément assurer, la sécurité des participants ?

**Mr Toussaint:** M. le président, allons attendre l'enquête policière pour déterminer exactement ce qui s'est passé ce jour-là et, bien sûr, à la suite de l'enquête policière les différentes autorités concernées vont prendre les mesures qu'il faut.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

### **HOSPITALS - STAFF - SAFETY MEASURES**

**(No. B/99) 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 staff of the hospitals, he will state the –

- (a) measures taken for the safety thereof;
- (b) Personal Protective Equipment provided thereto, and
- (c) other sanitary measures taken for the protection thereof.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to parts (a) and (c) of the question, I wish to inform the House that several measures have been put in place for the safety of hospital staff as follows –

- hospital staff have been sensitised on the COVID-19 pandemic, the modes of transmission and infection control through presentations and videos;
- they have been trained in the correct donning and doffing of protective gowns/equipment and their proper disposal;
- COVID-19 vaccination sessions exclusively for hospital staff have been carried out in our Regional Hospitals;
- access to the hospital premises is controlled at the main entrance and temperature checks are being performed on all visitors;
- sanitizer dispensers have been installed at numerous locations on the hospital premises for both visitors and hospital personnel;
- thermal cameras have been installed in the waiting area of Accident and Emergency Departments of Regional Hospitals to screen all incoming patients for fever;
- all Units have been provided with non-touch thermometers to screen visitors/patients entering the Units/Wards for fever;
- bed distancing and regular cleaning of wards (every four hours) with antiseptic disinfectant is being observed to prevent any cross infection;
- the number of visitors allowed per patient in the ward during visiting hours has been reduced from 2 to 1 to limit the risk of spread of infections;
- a Flu Clinic/COVID-19 Testing Centre has been set up to avoid patients attending the hospital with flu symptoms or fever mingling with patients and staff from other Units;
- a Ward is kept as isolation ward for admission of patients with symptoms suspected to be COVID-19, so as to keep them separate from patients with other symptoms/diseases;

- signages have been affixed at strategic points over the hospital premises informing both the staff and the visitors of preventive measures such as, wearing of face masks, regular washing of hands and social distancing;
- markings have been made on floors and on chairs in waiting areas of all Units to help maintain social distancing in the hospital;
- regular cleaning and disinfection of all corridors and other areas within the hospital premises are being done, and
- staff were also informed of the fact that 70% of infections between staff members are likely to occur in common rooms where they usually rest and take their meals. My Ministry took necessary measures to segregate the meal time and rest time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as, face masks, disposable gloves, PPE gowns, goggles, overshoes, face shields and nurses' caps are provided to staff working in close contact with patients in Flu Clinics, Accident and Emergency Departments, in Isolation Wards and Quarantine Centres, as recommended by the World Health Organisation. Moreover, all staff are provided with surgical masks daily.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling our protocol for the rational use of Personal Protective Equipment.

**Mr Abbas Mamode:** Maybe words, Mr Speaker, Sir, but unfortunately ...

**Mr Speaker:** No comments! Put your question!

**Mr Abbas Mamode:** Unfortunately, a hospital is closed in Souillac. So, I want to know from the Minister what is the date, when were these measures applied ? Is it after the closure of Souillac Hospital or was it done prior because if all these precautions were taken in all regional hospitals, *c'est incroyable qu'un hôpital soit fermé après toutes ces dispositions prises par le ministère ?* Donc, le ministre peut-il informer la Chambre quand a pris toutes ces décisions? Est-ce que tous les staffs dans tous les *regional hospitals* sont concernés par le *safety equipment*?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, all these measures that I have announced, they are measures dated since last year's outbreak of COVID-19.

(Interruptions)

**Mr Speaker:** What is happening now?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, that's the reason. Since last year we have been able to stop, curb the curve and we have been able to control the virus. I am sure this time also we will be able to do so. Concerning what happened at Souillac Hospital, Mr Speaker, Sir, we still do not know whether a patient has brought the infection and infected the staff. At this point, it is not right to comment on what have been the precautions that all the hospitals are already taking.

**Ms Bérenger:** Merci. Le ministre peut-il nous dire si les *Regional Health Directors* ou son ministère ont reçu des plaintes concernant une éventuelle politique de deux poids deux mesures avec d'un côté le personnel médical, et de l'autre, le *nursing staff* et le personnel non médical, et si oui, qu'elles ont été les actions prises par son ministère pour s'assurer d'un même traitement pour tous et s'assurer qu'il n'y ait pas de politique de deux poids deux mesures?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, we have received no such complaint at the Ministry.

**Mr Speaker:** Last supplementary!

**Mr Mohamed:** Thank you. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether with regard to the implementing sanitary measures to increase protection, whether he would consider increasing the regular interval verification for PCR Tests for all staff working within hospitals at closer regular intervals and also the possibility of home self-test kits, as is used in the NHS in the United Kingdom?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Thank you, hon. Member for this question. In fact, the Ministry is conducting PCR tests on all staff working in the different settings, and at the same time, will be repeating the tests every 10 days because staff are the most exposed to the risk of infection and obviously, the Ministry is already implementing repeated PCR tests for the staff.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

**Ms J. Bérenger:** Merci. Protéger la santé physique de nos *frontliners* est primordial mais préserver leur santé mentale l'est tout autant. J'aimerais savoir si le ministre est au courant de la pression énorme que subissent nos *frontliners* et si des actions seront prises par son ministère pour leur apporter un soutien psychologique, quelles actions sont en train d'être

prises concrètement, et s'il considérera l'implémentation d'une *hotline* spécialement dédiée aux *frontliners* pour leur apporter un soutien psychologique ?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Thank you again, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Member has rightly pointed out that the Ministry has already made available a hotline for the staff so that they can have phone conversations with the psychologists who are on call on a daily basis and two psychologists in different regional hospitals are available to cater for any psychological issues for the staff.

### COVID-19 IMPACT - GENDER PERSPECTIVE

(No. B/100) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the proposed carrying out of a situational analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic from a gender perspective, she will state where matters stand.

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the situational analysis of the impact of COVID-19 from a gender perspective, I wish to inform the House that the first confinement in 2020, my Ministry had sought technical assistance from the United Nations Development Programme, the UNDP, to carry out a situational analysis on the impact of COVID-19 from a gender perspective. We were then informed that the UNDP had already commissioned a study on the socioeconomic impact assessment of COVID-19 in Mauritius and the gender perspective would be taken on board.

On 02 March 2021, the UNDP released its report. The report was developed with a technical leadership and financial support of the UNDP as part of the advocacy efforts of the wider United Nations system led by the resident coordinator to support the socioeconomic response and recovery efforts to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the support provides an initial assessment of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic in Mauritius. From a gender perspective, the report highlights, *inter alia*, the following –

“An overview of the trend across the lockdown and its aftermath reveals a nuanced picture. At first sight, during the lockdown period, female employment did reveal an even more important decline than male employment as at May last year, 2020. However, subsequently, female employment increased considerably by 27% between May and June 2020 and even between June and July 2020. The severity of the impacts known to be happening elsewhere still appears to have been mitigated in Mauritius. The successful handling of the crisis and the relatively short stalling of the economic

activities and the recovery which the country has subsequently witnessed, has to a large extent, cushioned the impacts in terms of female unemployment, except for some sectors which have been particularly vulnerable to the lockdown such as retail and tourism related activities.”

The findings and recommendations of the report are currently being scrutinized at the level of my Ministry and corrective actions, in consultation with relevant stakeholders will be initiated as soon as possible.

**Ms Anquetil:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, could the Minister state when she proposes to come forward with concrete measures?

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just replied that the report came out on 02 March 2021. The recommendations and the findings are being studied at the level of my Ministry and I am certain that these recommendations and findings will enable my Ministry to make good informed policy decisions, but they are still being analyzed and the concrete results will come after this analysis.

**Ms Anquetil:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, could the Minister state how much time she will take to examine the findings?

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** I cannot provide a time frame, Mr Speaker, Sir, because it is a report that is being studied. It is an important report with important recommendations. So, it is being studied and the measures will be applied when we have studied the recommendations and findings. I cannot provide the hon. Member with a time frame.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Mohamed!

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Thank you. I understood from the...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** No, you have so many questions.

**Mr Mohamed:** Could the hon. Minister provide us - since she said that the report was ready almost a month ago - with the names of those people who are studying the report and how many times have they met and when do they propose, at least, approximately tell us a time, not to be exact, but how many times have they met, who are they and approximately?

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Mr Speaker, Sir, they are the officials of my Ministry, of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare. There is not a set Committee that is sitting

and studying the findings. They are the Senior Officials of my Ministry, taking into account the Gender Unit, who has a Head, and the Administrative Unit, and like I said, there will be consultations held with all the relevant stakeholders before we can apply the measures.

**Mr Speaker:** Last supplementary, if you have one!

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** I understood from the original reply of the hon. Minister that the exercise that she intended to do could not materialise for reasons she has given, and that now she has touched base with the UNDP and that the study monitoring the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19 on Mauritian households is going to take care of what the hon. Minister intended to do.

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the hon. Member did not - is that a question?

**Mr Speaker:** A too long based foundation!

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Let me finish my question. So, can I ask the hon. Minister whether the study that UNDP is doing, and I have with me the one ending September 2020, which does not touch the issue of gender at all, whether the one that is going to be produced and she as a copy right now, is comprehensive enough on what she intended to do originally? Because, it is based on rapid...

*(Interruptions)*

Just to put some elements because the study, if I got it right, is based on rapid continuous multi-purpose household survey done over the phone.

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Not at all. Mr Speaker, Sir, I think there is a bit of a breakdown in communication. Either I am not explaining myself too clearly or my hon. colleague has not understood. I am fairly certain it is the latter, but to go back to replying to your question, I had in this very House itself, said that there will be a situational analysis of the impact of COVID-19 to be carried out with a gender dimension taken into consideration, and I reiterated that post confinement last year, in 2020, my Ministry had gone ahead and sought the technical assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to carry out that very situational analysis, only to be informed that UNDP are already conducting an analysis and a report has been produced by them. So, there would have been a duplication of work. We went to the UNDP to get the situational analysis carried out for the technical

assistance. They were already carrying out the same analysis. I hope that answers your question, hon. Member.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC - BLUE PRINT ON WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS -  
PREPARATION**

(No. B/101) **Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the proposed preparation of a Blue Print on Women Entrepreneurs post the Covid-19 pandemic, she will state where matters stand.

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, in my intervention on Budget 2020-2021 on 09 June last year, I mentioned that my Ministry will come up with a Blue Print on the successful achievement of Women Entrepreneurship in the post-Covid-19 era. My Ministry will be hosting *les assises de l'entrepreneuriat féminin* during the current financial year. Logistics are being finalised to this effect.

The objectives of these *assises* would be to provide a platform for national consultations on women entrepreneurship and the issues associated with that, with a view to adopting a participatory approach geared towards the elaboration of the Blue Print. The *assises* will be an opportunity to bring together public and private sector professionals, representatives of Parastatal Bodies, the Development Bank of Mauritius, associations of women entrepreneurs and other key stakeholders of entrepreneurship development so that we can assess the situation of women entrepreneurship development in Mauritius and then come up with a Blue Print. The Blue Print would comprise strategic measures to scale up efforts to address challenges faced by women entrepreneur, as well as recommendations for sustainable development of women entrepreneurship in our country.

**Ms Anquetil:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister provide details on the composition of a team working on the Blue Print and can we know the Action Plan and the strategy of the Ministry?

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** The team working on the *assises de l'entrepreneuriat féminin* are obviously Officials of my Ministry. We have a dedicated National Women Entrepreneur Council who is giving a very helping hand to that effect. Can the hon. Member remind me the second part of her question?

**Ms Anquetil:** Action Plan.

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Okay, this is the Action Plan. The Action Plan starts with organising the *assises de l'entrepreneuriat féminin* and the Blue Print will *déboucher* of this *assises* along with the consultations with the stakeholders I have mentioned in my original reply.

**Ms Anquetil:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister state who is chairing the National Women Entrepreneur Council and does the Chairperson have competencies to drive the Council, particularly in the context of COVID-19?

**Mrs Koonjoo-Shah:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Council is currently being chaired by Dr. Rooba Moorghen, who happens to be the Permanent Secretary of my Ministry. She has just retired and the composition of the Board is being reviewed and a new Chairperson will shortly be appointed.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question!

#### **INTERIM PROTECTION ORDERS - APPLICATIONS**

(No. B/102) **Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Interim Protection Orders, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of applications made thereunder, indicating the number thereof issued by the Courts during the current Covid-19 lockdown.

**Mr Gobin:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Master and Registrar that for the current COVID-19 lockdown period, that is for the period, 10 March up to yesterday 29 March, there were six applications for Protection Orders and that all six applications were entertained by the relevant Courts and the Courts have issued Interim Protection Orders in respect of all six applications.

**Ms Anquetil:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister state whether he is aware that the District Courts of Rose Hill and Pamplemousses have not entertained application of IPO?

**Mr Gobin:** Well, I can only reiterate what I have just stated from the information provided to me by the Master and Registrar. If the hon. Member has any specific case and their reference, in view of the nature of the applications, this has to be communicated privately, and then I can inform the hon. Master and Registrar accordingly.

**Ms Anquetil:** A last one. I will provide information to the Minister. So, *le ministre, pourrait-il indiquer à la Chambre, qu'en est-il de la problématique de relogement du conjoint violent au vu des obligations de confinement ?*

**Mr Gobin:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will appreciate that this question relates to a policy matter which should be directed to the relevant Ministry.

**Mr Speaker:** Next question, hon. Mrs Mayotte!

#### **ROAD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY - A1-A3 LINK ROAD - CONTRACT DETAILS**

**(No. B/105) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the newly constructed A1-A3 Link Road, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to –

- (a) the name of the contractor therefor;
- (b) the date of award of the contract, indicating the duration and completion date thereof, and
- (c) a breakdown of the cost thereof.

**Mr Hurreeram:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. With regard to parts (a) and (b) of the question, I am informed by the Road Development Authority that the project for the construction of the A1-A3 Link Road was awarded to Gamma Construction Ltd on 28 December 2018. The works which started on 18 February 2019 were completed within 681 days. This period includes an extension of time of 206 days due to the March 2020 lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The extension did not involve any additional costs. The project was completed on 28 December 2020 and the road was open to the public on 23 January 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (c) of the question, allow me to highlight that the construction of such a road on this kind of terrain, is a complex endeavour and it constitutes an oversimplification to just suggest that it is merely identifying an alignment, clearing of the alignment and the subsequent asphaltting or resurfacing of same. Far from that, Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, it involves various intricate components and stages, including surveys, investigations and tests. This is added to the fact that there may be other potential issues which may have to be considered and addressed during the actual implementation of the

project itself. Each of these components, Mr Speaker, Sir, involves diligence, expertise and, of course, costs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the project for the construction of the A1-A3 Link Road is based on a design and build contract. Additionally, due to its specific challenging nature, the project comprised the following components –

- (i) design and associated geotechnical investigation;
- (ii) excavation of a huge amount of earthworks, which is over 128,500 m<sup>3</sup>, and the construction of high embankments over 40,000 m<sup>3</sup>.

To give this House an additional indication, this would be equivalent to filling 51 Olympic swimming pools. We literally had to displace half a hill, so to speak. This is neither an easy nor an inexpensive feat, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The other components are namely dual carriageway, plus shoulder and drainage, 2.7 km of single carriageway plus shoulder and drainage, drainage works including 13 box culverts, one roundabout and two major signalised junctions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the contract for the A1-A3 Link Road was awarded by the Central Procurement Board after due diligence for an amount of Rs294,783,304 inclusive of VAT and there has been no cost overrun.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the cost breakdown of the project.

**Mrs Mayotte:** Will the Minister inform the House about the percentage of the total amount that consists the preparing of the soil?

**Mr Hurreeram:** Mr Speaker, Sir, quite a difficult question, but I will try to answer.

*(Interruptions)*

They may laugh, they may laugh, yes. The amount of work that we had to do to prepare the terrain actually to make the road was almost 50% of that total cost.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Ittoo!

**Mr Ittoo:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. *Je voudrais savoir du ministre, est-ce que le projet A1-A3 Link Road forme partie du Road Decongestion Programme de la NDA ?*

**Mr Hurreeram:** Tout à fait, M. le président. Ce projet fait partie de cet ensemble des projets qui constituent la vision de notre Premier ministre pour cette île Maurice moderne qu'il veut bâtir pour les générations futures.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

**Mrs Mayotte:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Has there been any additional work to protect surrounding inhabited zones from runoff rainwaters?

**Mr Hurreeram:** Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, there is an interface between NDU and the RDA, where we are building drains all around that region, which is in fact, a flood-prone area that has been declared so by the LDA. So, there is drainage work still ongoing, being done by the RDA and the RDA did whatever necessary, whatever has to be done to avoid runoff water from that road in order that it does not fall into that *morcellement* that is low-lying.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Nuckcheddy!

**Mr Nuckcheddy:** Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister, please inform the House if the Contractor who was awarded the contract was actually the lowest during the tendering exercise?

**Mr Hurreeram:** Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, this contract is allocated by the CPB and they will normally go by the lowest tenderer or the one who is technically responsive, but in this case it was the lowest and technically responsive.

**Mr Speaker:** Last supplementary!

**Mr Ameer Meea:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The road that we are talking, is it the same famous road of *trois kilometres aller, trois kilometres retourner*?

**Mr Speaker:** Time is over!

**Mr Hurreeram:** I don't know, maybe it is their time to joke. Maybe when they were kids, they have not played enough, so they are using this august Assembly to do so.

**Mr Speaker:** Time is over! We appreciate the sense of humour.

The Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: PQs B/118, B/119 and B/125.

At times, we need hon. Members like hon. Ameer Meea to make us laugh.

**MOTION**

**SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)**

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

**The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.**

*Question put and agreed to.*

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

**HIS EXCELLENCY MR SHOWKUTALLY SOODHUN - NON-RESIDENT  
AMBASSADOR - ACCREDITATION**

**The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to make the following Statement with regard to the accreditation of His Excellency, Mr Showkutally Soodhun, which was subject to a PQ during the last Sitting of the Assembly.

On 07 January 2020, His Excellency, Mr Showkutally Soodhun was appointed as the Ambassador of the Republic of Mauritius to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with residence in Riyadh.

He was also accredited as non-resident Ambassador to the following countries –

- United Arab Emirates;
- The State of Kuwait, and
- The Kingdom of Bahrain.

In December 2020, the Government decided that Ambassador Soodhun be appointed as Roving Ambassador with residence in Mauritius to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the above-mentioned countries, as it was considered that the Ambassador would be in a better position to coordinate with all stakeholders with respect to crucial projects, as well as strengthen our relations with countries in the Golf region.

Consequently, as from 25 January 2021, Ambassador Soodhun is operating as Ambassador of Mauritius accredited to the countries named above, with residence in Mauritius. He has been allocated an office at the Ministry, with a full staff complement.

Ambassador Soodhun is currently on official mission to the United Arab Emirates and will proceed to Saudi Arabia as the accredited Ambassador of Mauritius to these countries to

pursue issues pertaining to bilateral relations and cooperation. He is also expected to meet with His Excellency, Dr. Abdul Fattah Mashat, the Deputy Minister in Charge of Hajj, next week in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to discuss the whole issue of the organisation of Hajj 2021, including the sanitary conditions, quota of pilgrims and other related issues.

I wish to reassure the House that Ambassador Soodhun was at no point declared *persona non grata* by any of the above-mentioned countries nor was he recalled by the Government. A communiqué was also issued by my Ministry on 25 March 2021 conveying the above.

Our Embassy in Riyadh is fully operational, and is headed by a *Chargé d’Affaires ad interim*.

Thank you.

#### **POINTE AUX SABLES - WASTEWATER DISCHARGE - 09 MARCH 2021**

**The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to make a Statement with regard to the matter raised by hon. David at Adjournment Time at the Sitting of Tuesday 23 March 2021, on wastewater discharge witnessed at sea in the region of Pointe aux Sables on 09 March 2021.

I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority (WMA) that the location mentioned relates to the discharge point at sea from the sewer outfall at *Débarcadère* at Pointe aux Sables.

There is an existing old sea outfall pipe from Pointe aux Sables Wastewater Pumping Station that was previously used to discharge wastewater coming from the Lower Beau Bassin and Coromandel regions to the sea.

However, as from year 2007, the Pointe aux Sables Pumping Station stopped discharging raw wastewater continuously into the sea as it was upgraded. Consequently, the Pumping Station pumps all incoming wastewater to Montagne Jacquot Wastewater Treatment Plant for treatment through a pressure rising main. Nonetheless, the old sea outfall pipe is being kept as a contingency measure only in case of major breakdown, overflow or major maintenance at the Pointe aux Sables Pumping Station.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the WMA that to improve the operations of the Pumping Station and following odour nuisance reported by the inhabitants living in the

vicinity thereof, the WMA has awarded a contract for the installation of an Air Treatment System at the Pumping Station, that is, for odour control.

In order to complete outstanding works to cover the inlet part of the Pumping Station, on 09 March 2021, the appointed Contractor had to empty the inlet chamber to install a steel grating to cover it. To be able to attend to this work, the inlet chamber had to be temporarily emptied. The works could only be performed by diverting incoming wastewater through the old sea outfall pipe leading to the sea for a temporary period as there was no other alternative to divert the incoming flow elsewhere.

The works were promptly completed on the same day and all incoming wastewaters to the pumping station pumped to Montagne Jacquot Wastewater Treatment Plant.

From 09 March 2021 to date, there has been no wastewater discharge through the old sea outfall to the sea and all incoming wastewater to the Pointe aux Sables Pumping Station is being conveyed to Montagne Jacquot Wastewater Pumping Station.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

#### **COVID-19 – SARS-COV-2 VARIANTS**

**The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a Statement to make.

There has been a lot of speculations lately concerning the presence of variants of the SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. I would wish, therefore, to shed some light on this issue for the benefit of the House.

Genomic sequencing is a process which allows researchers, health officials and scientists to identify the virus, monitor its change process, understand how these changes affect the characteristics of the virus and predict its impact on health. The genomic sequencing enables laboratories to establish strains of viruses in circulation and to identify the presence of variants.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as there was no equipment to carry out sequencing tests at the Central Health Laboratory or in the private laboratories in Mauritius, my Ministry was sending samples for testing to the Francis Crick Institute, UK and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, South Africa, which are both WHO collaborating centres.

Up to now, these centres have detected five South African Variants and two UK Variants, all on incoming passengers. No variant has been detected among the local cases,

which lead us to say that there is no variant of concern, whether the UK one, the South African one or the Brazilian one which is circulating in the local transmission. The number of samples sent and their results are as follows -

(i) Francis Crick Institute, UK

20 samples from imported cases for period October to December 2020 sent on 09 January 2021 and the results obtained on 09 February 2021 showed 3 South Africa variants;

(ii) National Institute for Communicable Diseases, South Africa

20 samples from imported cases during period January to February 2021 sent on 04 February 2021 and results obtained on 06 March 2021 showed 1 UK variant and 3 South Africa variants.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in February 2021, one local laboratory made a request to my Ministry for a special license to conduct COVID-19 PCR tests and sequencing. It informed that it had the necessary equipment and capacity to carry out sequencing tests. A site visit was effected at the laboratory by a team of Central Health Laboratory and recommended for approval to be conveyed for the local laboratory to carry out this test on an emergency basis. On 08 March 2021, following the upsurge of the second wave of local cases at the beginning of March 2021, 17 samples from local contamination were sent to this laboratory on 08 March 2021 for sequencing under emergency authorisation. On 19 March 2021, the laboratory reported 7 UK variants from the 17 samples.

However, 40 samples from the local cases of contamination, including the 17 samples sent to the local laboratory were also sent to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, South Africa on 13 March 2021. The results obtained on 24 March 2021 do not reveal the presence of any variant. Moreover, PCR run at the Central Health Laboratory in these samples detected S gene, which also supports that these were not the UK variants.

The Director of the laboratory informed that the results were available since 15 March 2021, but same would be disclosed to the Ministry only after signature of a Memorandum of Understanding by both parties. However, the laboratory communicated the findings of the RT-PCR test and gene sequencing to the Central Health Laboratory on 19 March 2021. On the other hand, the Director of the laboratory revealed the results of the RT-PCR test to the Press, specifying the presence of the COVID-19 variants on 23 February and on 05, 20 and 24 March 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Central Health Laboratory has recently acquired a Next Generation Sequencing Equipment at the cost of Rs6.5 m. to enable it to carry out sequencing tests. 14 out of 15 reagents have also been acquired for this purpose and one reagent is expected to reach Mauritius early next week.

Training of the staff of the Molecular Biology Department of the Central Health Laboratory on the use of the equipment, including on bioinformatics and interpretation of results will start by first week of April and it is expected that the equipment will become operational by mid-April 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Professor Tulio de Oliveira, Director of the KwaZulu-Natal Research, Innovation and Sequencing Platform, a Research Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa, who is working closely with the Africa Centre for Disease Control, has proposed to donate one Nanopore sequencing kit for SARS-CoV-2 sequencing in Mauritius, which is expected to reach Mauritius by FedEx this week. This is a Third-Generation approach used in the sequencing of pathogen DNA or RNA without PCR amplification. In addition to being user-friendly for laboratory personnel, Nanopore sequencing has the potential to offer relatively low-cost genotyping, high mobility for testing, and rapid processing of samples with the ability to display results in real-time.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

### HON. LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION - MOTION - DEFINITE MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Members, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has given me notice of his intention to request leave to move for the adjournment of the Assembly to discuss a Definite Matter of Urgent Public Importance pursuant to Standing Order 11, namely the urgency to devise a National Action Plan to deal with the intensifying COVID-19 crisis.

I have considered the matter. In my view, the matter to be raised does not meet the criteria to warrant the application for the following reasons –

- Firstly, the matter to be raised is not definite inasmuch as it is couched in general terms.
- Secondly, in his notice, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has signified his intention to raise a wide range of issues within that matter.

- Thirdly, the wide scope of the subject matter proposed to be raised, if moved successfully, is most likely to demand the passing of legislation to deal with it in an effective manner which cannot be the subject matter of a motion under Standing Order 11.

Having said that, I wish to emphasise that although according to the provisions of Standing Order 79, I am not bound to give any reason in support of my decisions, yet, I have considered that it would be in the interest of the House that I should do so.

Moreover, my ruling does not preclude the hon. Leader of the Opposition from raising the matter by some other means.

I wish to inform the House that, pursuant to the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 11, had I ruled in favour of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, we would still have required the unanimity of the House for the latter to proceed with his motion.

Thank you.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Mr Speaker, would I be allowed to say a few words? May I motivate my motion?

**Mr Speaker:** Very few words because I have already ruled. When the Speaker rules, there is a Standing Order; you cannot rule after the Speaker.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Then, it is pointless!

**Mr Speaker:** Yes.

**Mr X. L. Duval:** Ok.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 06 April 2021 at 11.30 a.m.

**The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.**

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr Speaker:** The House stands adjourned. Adjournment matter! Specific!

### **MATTER RAISED**

### **RODRIGUES – WATER SUPPLY**

**Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West):** M. le Premier ministre, avant d'élaborer sur le contenu de mon intervention ce soir, j'aimerais mentionner que je vous adresse en tant que député élu de la République de Maurice et aussi en tant que citoyen engagé et un ami de l'île Rodrigues, et loin de moi l'idée de politiser le contenu de mon intervention.

Je vais commencer par vous citer quelques dates : 28 juillet 2010, date à laquelle l'Assemblée générale des Nations unies a décrété ce droit fondamental du droit de tout un chacun à l'eau potable.

M. le Premier ministre, l'eau, c'est la vie. Avoir accès à de l'eau propre et potable est la promesse ratifiée que nous avons prise pour tous les Mauriciens, les Rodriguais et les autres îles qui forment partie de la république de Maurice.

Depuis de nombreuses années, M. le Premier ministre, l'île Rodrigues souffre énormément de la production et de la distribution d'eau. En mai 2015, l'Union européenne accorde plus de R 13 millions à l'Assemblée régionale de Rodrigues pour des projets en relation avec des *boreholes*, mais en octobre 2020, un montant d'environ R 9.7 millions fut retourné à l'Union européenne parce que le projet ne fut jamais complété, et aujourd'hui le problème d'eau reste entier.

En 2017, un accord du consortium a été signé entre l'Assemblée régionale de Rodrigues et les promoteurs, dont MASCARA et QUADRAN ; coût du projet, environ R 26 millions. Mais, M. le Premier ministre, encore une fois, le problème d'eau reste toujours entier à l'île Rodrigues.

Entre 2018 et 2019, on a vu naître les stations de dessalement à l'île Rodrigues. Il y a eu cinq stations de dessalement. Malheureusement, on doute, par rapport aux unités de dessalement, de leur fonctionnement et de leur approvisionnement en eau potable à l'île Rodrigues.

Valeur du jour, l'eau est prise directement des *boreholes* et distribuée à la population Rodriguaise. Certes, c'est filtrée mais pas chlorée et ni purifiée, M. le Premier ministre. D'après nos renseignements, ils y rajoutent de l'aluminium sulfate pour enlever les odeurs uniquement. Des mesures budgétaires ont été annoncées certes. En 2020, le Gouvernement régional a promis, et je cite –

*“delo enn fois par semaine.”*

Promettant de doubler la capacité de production de 4,500 m<sup>3</sup> à 8,500 m<sup>3</sup>, citant encore une fois l'appui et l'aide de l'Agence Française du Développement pour un plan d'action pour le moyen et long terme. Je ne vais pas citer toutes les mesures prises, annoncées dans le budget, mais n'empêche je ne peux que constater qu'aujourd'hui, en 2021, le problème d'eau reste toujours pareil à l'île Rodrigues malgré toutes les mesures budgétaires annoncées par le Gouvernement régional de l'île Rodrigues et l'assistance des instances internationales et par le Gouvernement central, ici, à Maurice.

En 2021, quelques jours de cela, au paragraphe 19 de son discours, le Chef Commissaire annonce « Résoudre le problème de l'eau », comme un item phare de son budget. Il admet que le besoin pour desservir l'île Rodrigues en eau est de 18,000 m<sup>3</sup> alors que la production actuelle est de 9,000m<sup>3</sup> soit le double de ce qui est produit actuellement. Annonce qui ne peut que réjouir les Rodriguais, mais est-ce que cette annonce tout comme les actions citées en haut vont suffire pour résoudre le problème d'eau à Rodrigues ? M. le Premier ministre, le ministère pour Rodrigues tombe sous vos responsabilités ministérielles. Hors, on apprend que le ministre des Finances va fournir un *loan* à travers la *MIC* d'un montant de R 1 milliard pour pouvoir résoudre le problème d'eau à Rodrigues.

Peu de temps de cela, il y a eu des manifestations à l'île Rodrigues, des personnes sont descendues dans la rue parce qu'il n'y avait pas d'eau qui coulait des robinets et ça depuis des mois. Les Rodriguais sont mécontents de la gestion et de la distribution d'eau qui ne se fait pas équitablement. Certaines régions sont favorisées, d'autres défavorisées et d'après les manifestants, d'autres sont politisées, M. le Premier ministre.

Le but de mon intervention ce soir, M. le Premier ministre, c'est de vous demander humblement que malgré les promesses budgétaires de l'Assemblée Régionale, malgré les fonds injectés par les instances internationales, je note qu'on a échoué dans notre politique d'approvisionnement de l'eau potable sur toute l'île Rodrigues.

Je souhaite que l'île Rodrigues puisse avoir enfin accès à l'eau potable dans le robinet et que le Gouvernement central s'assure que les R 1 milliard de la *MIC* qui seront accordées à l'Assemblée Régionale soient utilisées à bon escient.

Merci.

(5.34 p.m.)

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, water, of course, remains a very high priority for the development of Rodrigues. As the House is aware, the Island has been facing an acute

water shortage for decades. The increase in the standard of living and the socio-economic development have contributed to a water stress situation. Improving water production, storage, and distribution are therefore essential to enable the population to have access to adequate water for domestic and other uses on a more regular basis.

The economic development of the island has always been a priority of my Government. Hence, resolving the water shortage is a key issue. As we all know, Rodrigues depends a lot on its agriculture, tourism and related sectors which require an adequate water supply.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at paragraph 285 of the Government Programme of 2015-2019, mention was made that the water problem in Rodrigues would be addressed with the construction of new reservoirs and planned exploitation of available resources. This is further reinforced by paragraph 186 of the Government Programme 2020-2024 which provides that, in order to increase water supply in Rodrigues, Government will support the application of new technologies for desalination and storage. Since December 2014, my Government has been working in close collaboration with the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to implement various measures and projects to improve water production, treatment and distribution. In fact, as from January 2015 to date, an amount of over Rs413 m. has been allocated to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to target water sector initiatives in line with the following strategies –

- (a) increasing water production through seawater desalination projects;
- (b) optimal exploitation of other available water sources, mainly boreholes, springs and dams;
- (c) construction of new reservoirs and upgrading of existing ones;
- (d) installation of wastewater treatment plant;
- (e) encouraging rainwater harvesting;
- (f) upgrading of the water distribution network, and
- (g) reform of the water distribution management.

As a result of measures taken, including the construction of 5 desalination plants and implementation of rainwater harvesting projects, water production in Rodrigues has increased from 4,500 m<sup>3</sup> per day to 9,000 m<sup>3</sup> per day.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, since 2017, 4 rainwater harvesting projects have been completed which were co-funded by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and the European Union. The projects aimed at improving rainwater harvesting at school level, at the level of public buildings, including hospital and household levels.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, in view of improving the water sector in the long-term, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly is working on the setting up of the *Observatoire de l'eau* in Rodrigues and the development of Rodrigues Water Resources Strategy and the definition of priority action plan which aims at providing a sustainable solution to the persistent water scarcity.

The *Observatoire de l'eau* which is being co-funded by AFD and RRA will enable the development of an information system to collect data from all sectors, share information, identify priorities and facilitate decision-making and better resource management.

In this context, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with *l'Office de l'eau* of Reunion Island and the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities for the setting up of the *Observatoire*. The expected completion date of the project is September 2022. As regards the development of the priority action plan, the services of the Consultant Firm BRL Ingénierie have been enlisted for the elaboration of a strategy for the sustainable development of the water sector in Rodrigues. The consultancy is fully financed by AFD to the tune of 100,000 Euros and the report is expected by mid-2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the actual water demand for domestic, agricultural and industrial purposes in Rodrigues is estimated at 18,000 m<sup>3</sup> per day of which the domestic demand stands at 12,000 m<sup>3</sup> per day. Hence, a substantial investment and different projects being undertaken to address the issue of water production and supply in Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during the last visit of the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development to Rodrigues, the issue of mobilising additional funds to meet the set targets has been lengthily discussed. It was agreed that the Rodrigues Regional Assembly will set up a Special Purpose Vehicle which would have as major responsibility the management of water production in Rodrigues. In fact, in his Budget Speech last Friday, the Chief Commissioner stated that addressing the water problem is one of the 5 priorities of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and includes, I quote –

*“L’augmentation de la capacité de production des 5 unités de dessalement de 3,250 m<sup>3</sup> à 10,000 m<sup>3</sup> par jour, la construction de nouveaux réservoirs de 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> à Mont Chery et Coromandel et la mise en place d’un stock de pont de recharge.”*

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member has mentioned that there have been recent outcries by inhabitants of Petit Butte and the region nearby in the south east of the Island just recently regarding water problem. I am informed by the Island Chief Executive that the water problem was due to a breakdown of one main borehole at Lataniers in January 2021, along with the temporary breakdown of Songes, Pointe Venus and Caverne Bouteille Desalination Plants in early March 2021. On receipt of borehole pumps from South Africa in two weeks, coupled with the rainfalls during the last ten days, the water distribution is expected to be back to normal soon.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am confident that all these projects which I have listed reflect the commitment of my Government to improve water distribution and access to safe drinking water on a regular basis.

I thank you.

*(Applause)*

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Members, at this stage I raise the Sitting.

*At 5.43 p.m., the Assembly, was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 06 April 2021 at 11.30 a.m.*

## **WRITTEN ANSWERS**

### **COVID-19 PANDEMIC - SELECT COMMITTEE - SETTING UP**

**(No. B/78) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity) whether, in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state if consideration will be given for the setting up of a select committee to consider and report to the House on all matters relating to the management thereof.

*(Withdrawn)*

**STATE BANK OF MAURITIUS - ALLEGED BREACHES OF BANKING LAWS,  
REGULATIONS & DIRECTIVES - YEAR 2016-MARCH 2021**

(No. B/80) Mr R. Uteem (Second 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 alleged breaches of banking laws, regulations and directives since 2016 to date at the State Bank of Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information, as to if any police inquiry has been initiated thereinto, indicating the number of persons –

- (a) arrested;
- (b) prosecuted, and
- (c) convicted, if any.

*(Withdrawn)*

**COVID-19 VACCINE - PERMANENT IMPAIRMENT OR DEATH -  
COMPENSATION SCHEME**

(No. B/81) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Honourable Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the COVID-19 vaccine administered to the population under the National Deployment and Vaccination Programme, he will state if consideration will be given for the provision of a compensation scheme to cover cases resulting in permanent impairment or death associated therewith.

*(Withdrawn)*

**SYNTHETIC DRUGS – ARRESTS – YEAR 2015-MARCH 2021**

(No. B/82) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Honourable Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to synthetic drugs, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of persons arrested in connection therewith, since 2015 to date, on a yearly basis.

*(Withdrawn)*

**DECAËN FLYOVER – RECONSTRUCTION**

(No. B/106) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the reconstruction of the Decaën Flyover, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to if an assessment of the new structure has been made and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

**Reply:** In my reply to Parliamentary Question B/865 on 17 November 2020, I informed the House that the reconstruction of the Decaën Flyover was due to be completed before Christmas 2020. I also informed the House that since the cracks had occurred during the Defects Liability Period and given that it is a design and built project, all associated costs for the remedial reconstruction works were being borne solely by the Contractor in accordance with the conditions of contract and, at no cost to Government. *Chose promise, chose due.*

Indeed, the repair works were completed by the scheduled date and the Decaën Flyover was reopened to the public as from 24 December 2020 and is currently still under the Defects Liability Period.

As a responsible Government, our priority remains the safety of our citizens and particularly the road users. It is thanks to our diligence that cracks were spotted on the Decaën Flyover in June 2019, defects identified and eventually rectified with the help of the Contractor. In this respect, prior to the reopening of the Decaën Flyover, I personally carried out a site visit on 23 December 2020, with the technical officers of the Road Development Authority (RDA), officers of my Ministry and the Contractor to take stock “*de visu*” of the repaired ramp. On site, assurance was received from both the Contractor and the RDA that the reconstruction works have been completed as scheduled and the Decaën Flyover could be made operational and reopened to the public.

Furthermore, the Contractor has submitted a fit for purpose certificate in respect of the reconstruction works and has certified that all the stages of the design and construction process have been reviewed by an independent Consultant. The latter has given its approval through control visas that were being regularly issued to the Contractor. In parallel, the RDA has closely monitored the whole reconstruction project through detailed investigations, expert

reports, detailed design and construction methodology, including quality control and testing, and is in concurrence with the Contractor.

The Decaën Flyover is operational since three months now and no complaint has been received from road users. The RDA and the Contractor are ensuring a close monitoring of the upward ramp on a fortnightly basis to check for settlement, if any. In this respect, amongst other things, the Contractor has fixed several control points on both sides of the new structure. According to the design calculations, the expected Head Settlement of the piles is 7.6 millimetres. I am informed by the RDA that no meaningful settlement has been recorded as at date and the latter is satisfied with the soundness and integrity of the new structure.

What happened with the Decaën Flyover was the perfect situation to showcase the capacity of this Government to identify a problem and remedy the situation without burdening the tax payer.

#### **ONLINE SERVICES - DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - CALLS RECEIVED**

**(No. B/107) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the online services set up by her Ministry to assist and help victims of domestic violence, she will state the total number of calls received since the beginning of the current lockdown to date, indicating the –

- (a) actions taken, and
- (b) number of persons having used the mobile application *Lespwar*.

**Reply:** Regarding part (a) of the question, I am informed that as from 10 March to 28 March 2021 the total number of calls received are as follows –

- 1074 calls were received on Hotline 139 out of which 172 cases of domestic violence were reported, and
  - 227 calls were received on Hotline 119, out of which 43 cases of family related issues were reported.
- (a) The following actions have been taken for all domestic violence cases reported during this lockdown period –
- Calls received were referred to 6 Family Welfare and Protection Officers (FWPOs) on-call for intervention in regions falling under the

respective 6 Family Support Bureaux (FSBx). If required, FWPOs referred cases to Psychologists for counseling through phone;

- In emergency cases, Police assistance was sought;
- After thorough assessment, if there was need for victims to make application for Protection Orders, the FWPOs sought assistance of Police for an Interim Protection Order to be issued by District Magistrates on-call, either through WhatsApp or through video-conference;
- If victims and their children needed to be admitted in shelters, needful was done by FWPOs/Police Officers to –
  - accompany victims and their children for PCR Tests, and
  - accompany victims and their children for admission in shelters
- In the event victims wanted to be discharged from shelters, FWPOs accompanied victims to the nearest Police Stations to record a statement to that effect, and
- FWPOs obtained a copy of the statement from the Police Station for record purposes.

- (b) The number of persons having used the mobile application is 186 out of whom 10 users have called Hotline 139 through the GBV Mobile App and 68 users have made use of the panic button on the mobile application *Lespwar*.

I would like to seize this opportunity to inform the House that the Mobile Application *Lespwar* has been nominated for World Summit on the Information Society prizes 2021(W SIS Forum 2021).

#### **FLOOD-PRONE AREAS - DRAIN WORKS**

**(No. B/113) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill)** asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the budget allocation of Rs1.2 m. from the National Environmental Fund for the construction of drainage infrastructure in high-risk flood-prone areas across Mauritius and Rodrigues, he will state the number of drain works carried out as at to date in the flood-prone areas, region-wise, indicating the total cost thereof.

*(Withdrawn)*

**FINANCIAL ACTION TASK FORCE'S LIST – MAURITIUS - REMOVAL**

**(No. B/114) 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 removal of Mauritius from the Financial Action Task Force's list of Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring, he will state where matters stand.

**Reply:** Mauritius was placed on the list of “Jurisdictions *under Increased Monitoring*” by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) at the FATF Plenary meeting in February 2020. At the meeting, it was agreed that Mauritius has to address the five strategic deficiencies identified in its AML/CFT framework by the FATF. The five strategic deficiencies were translated into 19 Action items and embodied into an Action Plan which has to be completed by Mauritius at latest by January 2022. However, with its strong political will to exit the FATF list at the earliest, Government has committed to expedite the implementation of the FAFT Action Plan ahead of the agreed timeline.

When a country is under monitoring by the FATF International Co-operation Review Group (ICRG), it has to follow a certain process which comprises a number of technical procedures, including submission of Progress Reports to the FATF at regular intervals, assessment of the reports by the FATF Reviewers, in our case, the Africa/Middle East Joint Group (JG), consideration of the Joint Group Report by the FAFT Plenary and on-site inspections.

Mauritius submitted a Progress Report to the FATF in March 2020 which was not considered by the FATF in view of the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first Progress Report of Mauritius was only considered in July/August 2020, after relevant updating. A second Progress Report was submitted to the FATF in November 2020.

At the last ICRG meeting held in February 2021, the progress made by Mauritius in the implementation of the FATF Action Plan, based on the second Progress Report, was assessed.

It is worth to note that, Mauritius was commended for the progress achieved as at date and was encouraged to keep this momentum. The Joint Group also commended Mauritius for

its strong commitment and efforts to complete the Action Plan, “especially under difficult circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic”.

As per the ICRG Procedures and Guidelines, a jurisdiction is expected to complete all, or nearly all, the actions included in the Action Plan to meet the criteria for the exit procedures. As per the FATF timeline, a third Progress Report will be submitted to the FATF by 02 April 2021 to provide further updates on the progress made by all implementing agencies. Thereafter, a virtual face-to-face meeting will be held with the FATF Reviewers in May 2021, after which the Report will be submitted for consideration by the FATF Plenary in June 2021.

I reassure the House that this Government is leaving no stone unturned to complete, with the strong collaboration and unflinching efforts of all the implementing agencies, the remaining actions under the FATF Action Plan, and exit the FATF list of “Jurisdictions *under Increased Monitoring*” the soonest possible.

#### **STUDENT V. R. - CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS - FACILITIES**

**(No. B/116) 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 student V. R.<sup>5</sup>, she will state if facilities were provided thereto to allow him take part in the forthcoming Cambridge School Certificate Examinations and, if not, why not.

*(Withdrawn)*

#### **BASIC RETIREMENT PENSION - DOOR-TO-DOOR DISTRIBUTION - COST INCURRED**

**(No. B/117) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the of door-to-door distribution of the Basic Retirement Pension, she will state the additional cost incurred in relation thereto, giving a breakdown thereof.

*(Withdrawn)*

### **WAKASHIO SHIPWRECK - COMPENSATION**

**(No. B/118) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Wakashio Shipwreck, he will state where matters stand as at to date regarding the –

- (a) claim for compensation against the Insurance Company, and
- (b) quantum of compensation paid, if any, to the persons and/or entities affected thereby.

*(Withdrawn)*

### **COVID-19 PANDEMIC - WORKERS - UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT**

**(No. B/119) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to unemployment, he will state, since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the number of complaints received at the Labour Offices in relation thereto, indicating the number of workers having –

- (a) been paid transitional unemployment benefit under the Workfare Programme Fund;
- (b) been involved in applications for workforce reduction, and
- (c) applied for reinstatement before the Redundancy Board.

*(Withdrawn)*

### **SOCIAL MEDIA - CHILDREN & WOMEN - INDECENT PHOTOS & VIDEOS**

**(No. B/120) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to indecent photos and videos of children and non-consenting women circulating on the social media during the

Covid-19 lockdown, particularly, in private groups on the application Telegram, she will state the actions taken, if any, to -

- (a) encourage victims to register complaints;
- (b) give psychological support to the victims, and
- (c) raise awareness about child pornography and revenge pornography.

**Reply:** On Friday 19 March 2021, my Ministry was made aware of women and allegedly minors circulating their indecent photos and videos against payment on the social media application called “Telegram”, which as Minister responsible for child and family matters, I strongly condemn.

I immediately called my colleague hon. Deepak Balgobin, Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation to request him to enquire into the matter.

On the same day, a referral was made by my Ministry to the Police Department to open an enquiry through its Cybercrime Unit. They were also requested to inform this Ministry regarding involvement of minors so that psycho-social assistance could be provided to those affected by the diffusion of these indecent items.

My Ministry has since then been closely following this case with the Police Force. At this stage, my Ministry is not in a position to pronounce on whether the circulation of the photos and videos has been done with or without the consent of the women and children in question, as Police enquiry is still ongoing.

I am informed by the Police Department that following my Ministry’s referral, consultation was held between the Computer Emergency Response Team-Mauritius (CERT-MU) and the Cyber Crime Unit (CCU) and a Communiqué was issued by the National Computer Board alerting the population of the dangers and consequences of sharing inappropriate content, including nudity, online.

As regards part (a) of the question, I wish to point out that I personally made an appeal through the Press to the victims and the public at large to contact the hotlines 113 and 119 of my Ministry as well as the 148 of the Mauritius Police Force where they can report in confidentiality and be assured to be provided with appropriate support and assistance without any fear of judgment, whatsoever.

As regards part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that psychological support is provided to all victims of violence reported to my Ministry, be it children or adult cases. The victims are provided with prompt intervention and close follow-up is maintained as appropriate. My Ministry works with victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) by ensuring psycho-social support to them and their families.

As regards part (c) of the question, I wish to point out that my Ministry has ongoing sensitisation campaigns targeting children, parents, stakeholders working with children and the public at large on child protection issues and child violence with special emphasis on sexual abuse and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

These sensitisation campaigns are carried out in schools and colleges, Youth Centres, Social Welfare and Community Centres, Children's Clubs, Residential Care Institutions as well as through radio and TV programmes.

For the year 2020, 13,749 people were reached, including children in 171 sensitisation sessions. The officers of my Ministry also intervened through 12 radio programmes and 2 TV programmes to sensitise the public on child violence and related issues.

I wish to point out here that child/revenge pornography is a phenomenon which is gaining grounds at an exponential rate as we have no control on social media platforms in the cyberspace, especially during the lockdown period. It is a matter of serious concern not only in Mauritius but worldwide. I believe that in order to tackle this problem, we will have to adopt a multi-pronged approach.

I have, therefore, decided to set up a Multidisciplinary Committee to analyse this phenomenon and come up with recommendations as appropriate.

## **COVID-19 PANDEMIC - SMEs - IMPACT - MEASURES & STRATEGIES**

**(No. B/122) Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands)** asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the small and medium enterprises, he will, for the

benefit of the House, obtain from SME Mauritius Ltd., information as to the various strategies which are being envisaged to save the small and medium enterprises in difficulty.

**Reply:** Government is conscious of the difficulties faced by SMEs in the wake of the COVID-19. In addition to the various measures announced in the *'Plan de Soutien'*, including Wage Support Scheme, SME Interest-Free Loan Scheme of Rs100,000 and Rs1 m. SME COVID-19 Special Support Scheme, SME Mauritius, throughout the pandemic, has adopted a strategy of proximity to provide seamless and uninterrupted support in real time.

In this context, all Business Support Officers of SME Mauritius have been assigned specific zonal responsibilities to attend to the needs and queries of SMEs through the provision of information and business support and solution. A chat service running from 9.00 a.m to 6.00 p.m is being maintained six days a week from Monday to Saturday to further support the above objectives. Till date, more than 161 requests have been dealt with through the Online chat system.

This strategy of proximity will continue in the future and can be evidenced through the upgrading of all its current four Regional Offices to provide suitable physical conditions for customised SME support across the island.

Notwithstanding the surveys presently being carried out by SME Mauritius to assess challenges posed by COVID-19, in line with the recommendations of the 10-Year Master Plan, SME Mauritius is continuing its strategy of improving SME resilience and survival through sustained development of their internal capabilities, technology adoption, production capacity and digitalisation of their marketing services through its different Schemes. As at end of February 2021, over 570 SMEs employing some 3,500 people and having a joint turnover of Rs2.5 billion benefited from grants to the tune of Rs28 m. It is expected that the number of direct beneficiaries will exceed 700 SMEs by the end of the present financial year in view of the increase in the number of applications being received at SME Mauritius.

The continuous upgrading of knowledge and acquisition of new competencies are crucial to the progress and development of SMEs and conscious of its strategic importance, SME Mauritius has invested heavily in capacity building for SMEs. SME Mauritius has also initiated Online Training courses in key areas of business management pertinent to business survival, namely business re-modelling, cost optimisation, working capital management,

forecasting methods and digital adoption. These capacity building programmes have benefited some 1,500 SMEs.

SME Mauritius in collaboration with DBM and EDB is also creating awareness and guidance to SMEs on the recent measures announced by Government in the wake of the second confinement to rebuild the confidence of the SME sector and re-igniting its indispensable growth. This collaboration among the supporting institutions is set to continue to ensure that relevant and appropriate strategies are devised and solutions are provided to SMEs in these challenging times.

#### **BASIC RETIREMENT PENSION - FUNDS DISBURSED - JANUARY-MARCH 2021**

**(No. B/125) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Basic Retirement Pension, he will state the quantum of funds disbursed in terms thereof since January 2021 to date, indicating –

- (a) the strategy of Government for the increase thereof accordingly over the next four years, and
- (b) if there has been an increase in the quantum thereof for year 2021 and, if not, why not.

*(Withdrawn)*

#### **MAURITIUS FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION - FOOTBALL CLUBS - FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

**(No. B/126) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Football Association, information as to if –

- (a) the present football league will be maintained or cancelled, and
- (b) any financial assistance will be made available to football clubs.

*(Withdrawn)*

#### **ABBATOIR BRIDGE – WIDENING & UPGRADING WORKS**

(No. A/29) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the widening and upgrading of Abbatoir Bridge, in Vacoas, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to –

- (a) when the contract was re-awarded to Gamma Construction Ltd.;
- (b) when a new works order was approved and given to Gamma Construction Ltd. to complete the works, and
- (c) if additional costs have been earmarked and approved for the completion of the works.

**Reply:** In my reply to Parliamentary Question B/895 on 17 November 2020, I informed the House that the initial Contractor, who had been awarded the Works Order for the enlargement and upgrading of L'Abbatoire Bridge, had gone under voluntary administration. As the Contractor was not in a position to complete the works, I also informed the House that the Road Development Authority (RDA) had approved the reallocation of the Works Order to the second lowest Framework Contractor, namely Gamma Construction Ltd.

With regard to parts (a) and (b) of the question, I am informed by the RDA that a Works Order to the tune of Rs12.4 m. has been approved and awarded to Gamma Construction Ltd on 20 November 2020.

The site was accordingly handed over to the Contractor on 25 November 2020 and the latter has, as at this date, completed the survey and drawings in respect of the project.

Physical works on site were thereafter expected to start on 15 February 2021 with the demolition of the existing footbridge. This would have entailed the closure of part of the main road. In view of the Maha Shivratree Festival, which was approaching, and the rainy season, it was deemed more advisable to avoid carrying out foundation works and closure of the road, which would have caused inconveniences to the pilgrims. The demolition works were, therefore, put on hold and it was agreed to start works after the Festival and the rainy season.

However, in the meantime, the country has entered its second national lockdown/confinement and the works could not resume.

In view of the resumption of works for major ongoing road projects, the RDA is now doing needful for the Contractor to remobilise on site after obtaining the appropriate clearances. The works are expected to be completed by end of June 2021.

As regards part (c) of the question, the project is being funded by the National Development Unit which has earmarked an amount of Rs13 m. for the project in February 2019. Consequently, no additional cost would be required to complete the project.

### **INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION - YELLOWFIN TUNA - CATCH LIMIT**

(No. A/32) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW &Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to yellow tuna, he will state if a virtual meeting of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission was recently held among member States regarding the over plummeting of the stocks thereof in the Indian Ocean and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

**Reply:** I am informed that a Special Virtual Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) was held from 08 to12 March 2021.

The following draft resolutions were on the agenda –

- (a) Minimum reference size of Yellowfin tuna caught to be 92 cm proposed by Sri Lanka;
- (b) Reduction of Yellowfin tuna catch of purse seiners by 18% based on 2014 as reference year proposed by EU;
- (c) Reduction of Yellowfin tuna catch of purse seiners by 35% based on 2014 as reference year proposed by Maldives;
- (d) Reduction in the number of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) from 300 to 150 and a FAD area closure of 3 months proposed by Kenya and Sri Lanka.

I am also informed that the Maldives and EU were requested to merge their proposals, namely proposals (b) and (c). However, no consensus was reached in spite of extensive consultations. Moreover, proposals (a) and (d) were not adopted.

I am further informed that a Head of Delegations' meeting will be held in May 2021 to further discuss the joint proposal of Maldives and EU. Same would subsequently be tabled at the next annual Commission meeting scheduled for June 2021.

Consequently, Mauritius has retained a 7.5 % reduction in the catch of Yellowfin tuna based on 2018 as year of reference as decided by IOTC in 2019, that is, a reduction from 11,322 tons to a catch limit of 10,473 tons.

### **COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – ASSISTIVE DEVICES**

**(No. A/34) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the persons with disabilities, she will state if, amid the current COVID-19 lockdown, her Ministry has taken measures to –

- (a) enable them have access to –
  - (i) assistive devices, and
  - (ii) day to day information related to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- (b) communicate with others to procure their basic needs, and
- (c) give any other form of support thereto.

**Reply:** As regards part (a) of the question, during the COVID-19 lockdown, the delivery of assistive devices has been temporarily suspended with a view to preventing the spread of the virus.

With respect to day to day information related to the COVID-19 pandemic, all citizens of Mauritius, including persons with disabilities, have access to information thereon through radios, TV and other means of communication. Weekly news bulletins in Mauritian Sign Language are being broadcasted during weekends.

As regards part (b) of the question, residents of charitable institutions, including persons with disabilities, are already being provided with their basic needs by their respective institutions. My Ministry continues to provide grants to charitable institutions even during the lockdown for the latter to cater for all the basic needs of their inmates.

As regards part (c) of the question, this Ministry has maintained the medical and paramedical services offered to charitable institutions during the lockdown period. Persons suffering from a disability of more than 60% needing constant care and attention of another person and benefitting from a Carer's Allowance, receive monthly domiciliary medical visits

from the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity. This service is still ongoing during the lockdown.

The Ministry has also issued a communiqué on 19 March 2021 to inform carers to apply for their Work Access Permit (WAP) so that there is continuity to the service offered by Carers to persons with disabilities and elderly persons.

### **SOCIAL HOUSING UNITS – BENEFICIARIES**

**(No. A/37) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the allocation of social housing units by her Ministry, she will table the list of the beneficiaries thereof region-wise, since January 2020 to date, indicating the –

- (a) number of social housing units allocated to her Ministry by the National Housing Development Company Ltd. for vulnerable persons, and
- (b) criteria for selection and allocation of the said units thereto.

**Reply:** By virtue of the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018, the list of beneficiaries on a region-wise basis, who have been allocated social housing units of the NHDC from January 2020 to date, by the National Empowerment Foundation cannot be disclosed.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the National Empowerment Foundation has informed that from January 2020 to date, a total of 47 NHDC housing units have been allocated to eligible households under the Social Register of Mauritius.

With regard to part (b) of the question, to be eligible to NHDC housing units allocated by the National Empowerment Foundation, an applicant should be eligible under the Social Register of Mauritius and should not be owner of a plot of land. Moreover, the following factors are taken into account by the National Empowerment Foundation to select beneficiaries for the allocation of NHDC housing units –

- (a) age of the applicant;
- (b) the repayment capacity;
- (c) the composition of the household, and
- (d) the current living conditions of the household.

