



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 06 APRIL 2021

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(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity
Hon. Louis Steven Obeegadoo	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism
Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology
Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management
Hon. Alan Ganoo	Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail 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

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 03 of 2021

Sitting of Tuesday 06 April 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)

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

Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Construction Industry Development Board (Amendment) Bill (No. V of 2021). (In Original)

B. Ministry of Land Transport and Light RailMinistry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade

(a) The Road Traffic (COVID-19 Sanitary Measures) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 54 of 2021)

(b) The Light Rail (COVID-19 Sanitary Measures) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 55 of 2021)

(c) The Road Traffic (COVID-19 Sanitary Measures) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 65 of 2021)

(d) The Light Rail (COVID-19 Sanitary Measures) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 66 of 2021)

(e) The Africa50-Project Finance (Privileges and Immunities) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 67 of 2021)

(f) The Africa50-Project Development (Privileges and Immunities) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 68 of 2021)

C. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

(a) The Customs Tariff (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 2) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 59 of 2021)

- (b) The Customs (Export to the Republic of India under the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 60 of 2021)
- (c) The Excise (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 2) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 61 of 2021)
- (d) The Excise (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 62 of 2021)
- (e) The Customs Tariff (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 3) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 72 of 2021)
- (f) The Excise (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 3) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 73 of 2021)

D. Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance

- (a) The Securities (Brokerage Fees for Exchange Traded Funds on Foreign Underlyings) (Amendment) Rules 2021. (Government Notice No. 74 of 2021)
- (b) The Securities (Brokerage Fees for Debentures) (Amendment) Rules 2021. (Government Notice No. 75 of 2021)
- (c) The Securities (Brokerage Fees for Turnaround Trades) (Amendment) Rules 2021. (Government Notice No. 76 of 2021)
- (d) The Securities (Authorization of Foreign Investment Dealers) (Amendment) Rules 2021. (Government Notice No. 77 of 2021)
- (e) The Securities (Brokerage Fees for Government of Mauritius Securities and Bank of Mauritius Securities) (Amendment) Rules 2021. (Government Notice No. 78 of 2021)
- (f) The Securities (Preferential Offer) (Amendment) Rules 2021. (Government Notice No. 79 of 2021)

**E. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training
Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection**

- (a) The Workers' Rights (Exempt Employers) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 56 of 2021)
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 7) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 64 of 2021)
- (c) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 69 of 2021)
- (d) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 8) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 70 of 2021)
- (e) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 9) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 71 of 2021)

F. Ministry of Health and Wellness

- (a) The COVID-19 (Closing Down of Premises and Restriction of Activities) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 57 of 2021)
- (b) The COVID-19 (Preventive and Sanitary Measures) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 58 of 2021)
- (c) The Clinical Trials (Registration of Contract Research Organisations) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 63 of 2021)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 - MEETINGS - 01.03.21-06.04.21**

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, in regard to the High-Level Committee on COVID-19 chaired by himself, he will state the number of times it has met since 01 March 2021 to date, indicating if the decisions taken thereat are henceforth recorded and, if so, table copy thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, before I reply to this Private Notice Question, I would like to convey my sincere condolences to the families afflicted by the demise of their close relatives due to COVID-19.

On 30 January 2020, the Emergency Committee of the World Health Organisation declared the outbreak of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern as there were cases confirmed outside China.

Subsequently, the High-Level Committee on COVID-19 was instituted by Cabinet on 31 January 2020 under my Chair to monitor the situation regarding the outbreak of the new coronavirus and the precautionary measures to be taken to safeguard the population against any related health risks. The High-Level Committee is also mandated to take urgent policy decisions based on recommendations of relevant Ministries/Departments, whenever so required.

Since that day, the High-Level Committee has been monitoring the evolution of the pandemic at local and international levels and has provided a platform for rapid sharing of key information amongst different Ministries/Departments and other stakeholders to enable a coordinated and scaled up national response against the pandemic.

Following the detection of the positive cases of COVID-19 on 18 March 2020 in Mauritius, the High-Level Committee met on a daily basis until the situation was under control. Thereafter, the High-Level Committee was meeting on a weekly basis. With the resurgence of COVID-19 in the local community on 05 March 2021, the High-Level Committee has resumed its daily meetings.

Mr Speaker Sir, the High-Level Committee is composed, amongst others, of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and

International Trade, the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the Attorney General, the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, the Minister of Health and Wellness, the representative of the WHO in Mauritius, Dr. Gaud, the Technical Adviser at the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Commissioner of Police, other senior officials and Advisers of Ministries and Departments concerned. Other Ministers and officers are co-opted as and when needed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since 01 March 2021 to date, the High-Level Committee has met on 29 occasions. I wish to highlight that the High-Level Committee has been mandated by Cabinet to coordinate and monitor actions taken by Ministries, Departments and other stakeholders in relation to our national response to COVID-19.

Cabinet is apprised on a weekly basis of the prevailing situation and of the actions taken by the concerned institutions, and policy decisions are taken by Cabinet as appropriate. I also wish to underline that, in view of the resurgence of the virus and the need for expedient action, the High-Level Committee may be called upon to take urgent policy decisions for the protection of the population, and which are subsequently ratified by Cabinet. For instance, issues pertaining to closing of borders, imposing temporary restrictions of movement, preventive and sanitary measures, and the demarcation of red zones, are some of the decisions taken by the High-Level Committee and subsequently approved by Cabinet.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to emphasize that the High-Level Committee, being a coordinating body, each Minister forming part of the Committee is required to ensure that recommendations pertaining to his Ministry and Departments falling in his portfolio are documented and submitted to Cabinet for further consideration and approval. All decisions taken at the level of Cabinet are recorded and transmitted to relevant Ministries for necessary actions at their end. Hence, the need for having formal Minutes of Proceedings of meetings of the High-Level Committee does not arise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the face of the overwhelmingly threatening risks and dangers to the health, safety, security and life of our entire population, it is crucially important to expediently and promptly take all necessary measures to face, resist, counter, and overcome these risks and dangers. We are in a situation where we need the support and collaboration of one and all. It is a time when national solidarity and patriotism are vital and should prevail over all other considerations. The Government and our health authorities are on high alert and we are working tirelessly to keep the virus at bay and prevent its further spread amongst

the population. The Government has all along been guided in its decisions by its duty to protect the population. In this respect, we have taken into consideration, amongst others, scientific advice and guidelines of the WHO.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I, once again, urge the entire population to act as responsible citizens and follow the advice and guidance issued by the health authorities in order to protect ourselves and others.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to, once again, thank all persons, organisations and partner countries for the valuable assistance they are extending to Mauritius in this new battle against the COVID-19.

Before ending, I would like to once more express my gratitude to all our frontliners for their commitment, dedication, courage and professionalism, including, first and foremost, our doctors, nurses, personnel of the contact-tracing teams, Police Officers, employees in other essential services, and all those who are helping to keep the country going in these difficult times.

I am confident that, together, we can, and we will, fight this invisible enemy and break the chain of transmission. I am convinced that the Mauritian patriotic spirit will prevail and we will, once again, defeat COVID-19. The Government will, in the national interest, do whatever it takes to protect and safeguard the health of the population and save lives and livelihood, which remain our topmost priority.

Thank you.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I take it, therefore, that there are still no Minutes, no records of discussions and decisions taken by this very important Committee. So, let me ask straightaway the Prime Minister, concerning the re-entry of the virus into the local community - the Prime Minister is aware of the huge sacrifices made by the population - can he tell the House and the nation how it is that despite all the sacrifices, the virus re-entered the community and, if so, when and at what time, and when was he made aware of that?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have taken a number of measures to contain the virus when it was first discovered in Mauritius, and all the measures that we have taken, in fact, brought us to a situation where, for quite some time, we were COVID safe. Now, unfortunately, the virus has again been discovered. It has contaminated people and, so far, we are not able to establish exactly how this new wave has happened. But, of course, particularly at the level of health, we are trying to keep on our investigation in order to try to

establish how this has happened. And I do not think that we are the only country in the world where this is happening. We have seen that in so many other countries there have been first, second, third and fourth waves. So, it is something which is an invisible enemy and we need again to do whatever is required to be able to contain this virus and to spread its contamination.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, our borders are closed unlike most other countries. Can I ask the Prime Minister when and whether he was made aware of one patient, Mr R., who returned from treatment overseas and was treated at Souillac Hospital, and in so doing, at the end of January, in fact, around 19 January, this patient R. contaminated three officers of the Health Service and, therefore, since January, we have three local cases in Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think one has, at least, to be *raisonnable*. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has asked a general question on the High-Level Committee which I am chairing. Now, he is talking about patient R. I do not have the record; and not everything is especially recorded in my mind about all the cases of patients who have been admitted, either to quarantine or to treatment centres. So, if he has such information, he should have addressed a specific question to the Minister concerned, and I am sure the Minister concerned would have provided him with all the information. Who is patient R.? I do not know who patient R is. There have been so many people who have been admitted in quarantine; and there have been so many people who have been admitted for treatment.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, I would like to tell the Prime Minister that patient R., therefore, travelled to Mauritius and that, he, himself, in an address to the nation on 09 March, told us that the virus was here since February. His Minister said since January; Dr. Gaud said before January. So, there is total confusion in the minds of the population and apparently in the minds of Government. So, on what basis did he say beginning of February in a national televised address if he does not know anything about it?

The Prime Minister: I think you have to be careful when you say I do not know anything. If you do not know anything, do not think that others do not know anything! Be careful! Mr Speaker, Sir, I have made several addresses to the nation and I have also spoken in Press Conferences on many occasions. I cannot recall having mentioned a case...

(Interruptions)

What *ya ya ya*? I cannot recall; I need to check. I do not recall having ever made mention of a case of patient R.

(Interruptions)

But this is your question; it is about patient R.! And it is as if I should know that the patient R. came to Mauritius? This is what you said in your question! So, I am replying to your question. Otherwise, rephrase! Put questions which are appropriate!

Mr X. L. Duval: Don't get excited!

The Prime Minister: Now, to my mind, I cannot recall having mentioned this case of patient R. Of course, I shall check the previous address which I have made to the nation and in Press Conferences about patient R. and, if need be, I shall make a Statement with regard to patient R.

Mr X. L. Duval: I never said he mentioned patient R. I said that in a Press Conference to the nation, he said that the virus was here since early February and his address was on 09 March! So, on what basis...

(Interruptions)

Don't get excited!

The Prime Minister: I am not getting excited! Do not get excited, you!

Mr X. L. Duval: On what basis, did you give that information?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: I am not getting excited! Mr Speaker, Sir, I rely on information that is being provided to me by experts, by doctors, by those who have investigated and have tried to find out, because there is no certainty, when, approximately, the virus could have entered the country. Now, I did make an address and I did say in my address that, according to information that we have gathered so far, the virus could have been in circulation here since February. I said this, and I maintain what I have said. In the light of the evolution of the situation, of the monitoring, and of the investigation that is still being carried out, especially by Health and others, I hope that we shall be able to find out who is the patient Zero, the first person who has transmitted this virus and has brought it in the country.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, my last question on this subject, is the fact that these three local cases arose in late January and this was hidden from the population, which

carried on having its normal business and a number of public meetings were held without any precaution.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: But that is that, Mr Speaker, Sir. I want to move on to the question of hygiene Mr Speaker, Sir. The Prime Minister must surely be aware of the dramatic infection rate amongst health workers. I think more than 40 health workers have been infected with COVID over the last few weeks, and also the same thing has happened now to patients going to dialysis and going to hospital. Will he urgently ask his Minister to review the protocol and the discipline in our hospitals so that this stops right now and does not occur in the future? Because one person has regrettably died today.

The Prime Minister: Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is asking me to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness. He should have directed the question to the Minister of Health and Wellness and he would then have obviously had the relevant information. Now...

(Interruptions)

I certainly take objection to the statement made by the Leader of the Opposition that we have been hiding cases since January. We have never hidden any information. Since the very beginning, last year, of COVID-19 in Mauritius, we have always acted in a transparent manner; we have always given information to the public. In fact, this is a repeat today. Last year, the Opposition was saying the same thing. They were saying that we are hiding information; and that there are thousands of cases! Unfortunately, hon. Dr. Boolell is not here. I think in questions and PNQ, they were saying that there were already thousands of cases of contaminated people; so many people are going to die, and yet, this was false.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet!

The Prime Minister: Again, today, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying that we are hiding information. Every day, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a Press Conference. Our communication team is providing all information to the public and, in fact, so far, I must say we have communicated the number of tests that have been carried out, the number of people

who have been contaminated, the number of people who have been admitted to treatment centres and in quarantine also.

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay!

The Prime Minister: Not okay! You need to know because you do not know! Why okay? When I answer, you say okay? Now you understand...

Mr Speaker: No crosstalking!

The Prime Minister: Be assured. I do not take Xanax to keep cool. I am already cool.

(Interruptions)

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope the hon. Leader of the Opposition does not make, I would say, this kind of frivolous criticisms. You can criticise the Government on other things, but do not say that we are hiding information. And if you say so, prove it, show to us that there have been cases that we have not communicated to the public!

Mr X. L. Duval: I would ask the Prime Minister, very seriously, that he himself or his Minister of Health come with a Statement later concerning the case of Charge Nurse Boodhoo, Dr. Autaram and Mr Baboolal, all three working at New Souillac Hospital. Tell us what happened to them, and then we will find out what happened. I may be wrong! But I may also be right, and you may be wrong.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll go on now to the next question which concerns vaccines. Everybody going to a Vaccine Centre this morning would have found out that there are no more vaccinations in Mauritius because the vaccines have ended almost. During the last few days, we have done only about 4,000 vaccines instead of the 12,000 that were granted.

Now, when, definitely, are we going to get the next vaccines? Is it on 15 April for Sinopharm? Can you confirm? Or others or after, please.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me, first of all, say I do not know whether the hon. Leader of the Opposition is living in a world where he is aware...

(Interruptions)

You are living in Mauritius and you are confined only to Mauritius! You do not know what is happening elsewhere! You should watch TV; watch the news!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet here! Let the Prime Minister reply!

The Prime Minister: Actuellement, M. le président, non seulement les laboratoires ne peuvent pas fournir et satisfaire les commandes, mais il y a aussi une guerre des vaccins. Il y a des pays qui sont en train de s'approprier autant de vaccins qu'ils peuvent. J'espère que le Leader de l'Opposition va s'informer de ce qui se passe entre l'Union européenne et l'Angleterre. Il y a même des blocages ! Il y a un pays dans l'Union européenne qui a même bloqué une commande de vaccins qui a été faite par l'Australie. Il y a des mesures qui allaient être prises - je ne sais pas si elles ont déjà été prises - pour empêcher des laboratoires à fournir des vaccins à d'autres pays.

(Interruptions)

Mais listen! Let me inform you! We are talking about vaccines!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition! Bear with the Prime Minister! Allow him to answer!

The Prime Minister: He has to cool down!

Mr X. L. Duval: *P tourne en rond!*

The Prime Minister: You yourself are turning round, because you are not aware! I have to make your...

(Interruptions)

Je dois faire votre éducation ! Je dois vous informer de ce qui se passe !

Mr Speaker: Again, no crosstalking!

The Prime Minister: He is not aware what is happening elsewhere. And I must say, so far, thanks to India, we have been able to get AstraZeneca and Covaxin. And I need not go into details on the many vaccines that we have. And this Opposition, *vous savez ce qu'ils ont dit, M. le président ? Cette Opposition ? En particulier, un membre ?* Il a été dire qu'on est en train de se servir de Maurice comme cobaye pour un vaccin qui est fabriqué en Inde.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Be careful!

The Prime Minister: *Et ils ont le culot de venir dire qu'on n'a pas assez de vaccins ? Maintenant, M. le président, what was this same Opposition saying when we started the vaccination campaign? 'Be careful, do not sign consent form, do not do vaccine, it is not WHO approved! You do not know what are going to be the consequences!' Ça, ça va rester ; ça va être avec eux pendant longtemps, M. le président.* But, then, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a duty, we have a responsibility, and we are ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: He wants to go home! *J'entends le Leader de l'Opposition dire qu'il veut aller à la maison !* I do not know!

Mr Speaker, Sir, right now, the vaccination campaign is ongoing. We are going to receive vaccines and I must again thank the Government of the People's Republic of China for donating 100,000 of Sinopharm vaccines to us.

(Interruptions)

Bien sûr, M. le président, je dois dire honnêtement...

An hon. Member: *Fer to campagne!*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: *Je dois dire...*

Mr X. L. Duval: You will give extra time?

Mr Speaker: I will give you some extra time, but allow the hon. Prime Minister to reply.

The Prime Minister: Je dois dire, à part les vaccins qu'on a eus, AstraZeneca de l'Inde, Covaxin de l'Inde, on va recevoir les vaccins de Sinopharm de la Chine. Nous avons reçu une petite quantité de l'initiative de Covax, quelque 24,000. Evidemment, à ce stade, on n'a pas de garantie ferme qu'on aura d'autres vaccins. On est en train de faire des démarches et j'espère que ces démarches vont aboutir et qu'on aura, donc, d'autres vaccins en temps et lieu pour pouvoir continuer à poursuivre notre campagne de vaccination.

The Leader of the Opposition has mentioned three cases of health workers apparently. Again, il pose des questions spécifiques qui concernent la Santé. La Santé a les informations ; la Santé peut vous répondre ! Posez la question au ministre concerné et il va vous donner les informations !

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thought I was dealing with a responsible Prime Minister, but I find that I am not.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to ask the Prime Minister, had he pre-ordered the vaccines as we told him months ago, we would not be in this situation. It is because of incompetence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I move on now to a very serious subject, that is, burial. Now, I have looked at the World Health Organisation, the protocol, the guidance on burial where it says that even if you die of COVID, there is no reason to prevent your relatives from paying their last respects to you. Looking at the body, it is very, very important. It's not political. It is very important. I, myself, would be very sad if someone from my family died and I could not look at the body. So, I am going to ask the Prime Minister why is it that we don't follow the WHO protocol here and that we do not show the body, the face to the person's immediate family and if we will not have the protocol changed so that we can follow WHO protocol, at least in this case.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet! Order!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir,...

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have devised this protocol regarding...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode, be careful!

The Prime Minister: We have devised this protocol since last year when the first case of COVID was detected and when, unfortunately, the first death due to COVID also occurred. The protocol, of course, is always under review, but it is what it is because we have

taken into consideration all necessary precautions so that we do not have cases of further contamination even in case of burial.

Now, the Leader of the Opposition is criticising us because he said we should have ordered vaccines months ago.

Mr X. L. Duval: Pre-ordered!

The Prime Minister I listened! Whatever! You call it pre-order or order! We have, since the very first day, got in touch with many of the well-known laboratories. We have ordered, we have tried to get vaccines on the very first day, Mr Speaker, Sir, and, unfortunately, they were not in a position to supply. I refer to the contradiction of the Opposition; now they are saying we should have ordered long time ago, and then, in the PNQ of the Leader of the Opposition, what was he saying? We should only use vaccines that are recognised and certified by WHO! So, this is the very contradiction. They do not know which argument they will need to put forward, but I can assure the country that we are doing whatever it is necessary. We have also been in touch with our missions in different countries in regard to the requests made to laboratories manufacturing those vaccines, and we hope – let us hope - that we shall be able to get vaccines in the future.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the country is in such a mess because we have the Prime Minister so confused. Mr Speaker, Sir, the fines have been increased to Rs500,000, one of the highest in the world, because there has been indiscipline; but the fines are excessive. I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether he has read *L'Express* newspaper, where there is a photo of a Minister talking to the Minister of Health and Wellness without any precaution, and whether he has taken disciplinary and legal action against that Minister. I will table this, Mr Speaker, Sir; it's a copy of a newspaper.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, he wants to set good example. Look at the way he is wearing his mask!

(Interruptions)

Look at the way! But you wear it below the nose!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I think both of you...

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Cover your nose, please! Cover! Ah!

(Interruptions)

Now you pull it down again? Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not serious. Maybe the Leader of the Opposition wants to joke. In fact, we have discussed at length the issue of sanitary measures which have been requested and the same precautions have to be taken by each and everyone. This is not new. We have been advocating that since last year. In fact, we are saying that, but, unfortunately, I must admit, that when we reached a situation where we were COVID-safe and for quite a long time, and we did not have any single case of local contamination, people started to take it easy. I must say, each and everyone thought that, now, we are not going to have the virus. But, unfortunately, it happened again. And, therefore, our advice to each and everyone, not only Ministers, but each and everyone, is that we must take the basic sanitary precautions with regard to wearing of masks, sanitizing, social distancing, and others.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have two last questions. I do not know whether there is time for my colleagues to intervene.

Mr Speaker: No, it's already five minutes!

Mr X. L. Duval: I would like to ask the Prime Minister, firstly, given there are huge sacrifices - just two questions, Mr Speaker, Sir - made by the nation, will he promise to this House today and to the nation that there will be no more *passe-droit*...

The Prime Minister: There will no more be what?

Mr X. L. Duval: No more *passe-droit*, no more delegations from overseas coming here from this and that country at a time when we need to be COVID-free; no more private jets coming and landing and crews going and looking for bedrooms in the night, and no more film crews coming without observing the strict quarantine. I think, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister and the Government owe this to the huge sacrificing nation...

Mr Speaker: Put your question now!

Mr X. L. Duval: The question was at the beginning. Will he promise? That was the question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Prime Minister: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, there is no *passe-droit*. I do not know what he means by *passe-droit*, but there is no *passe-droit*. Each time, we have acted *en tenant compte de la situation et de l'évolution de la situation*. The decision, for

example, to close further our borders is because we started to have local cases. Now, he is saying there should be no delegations coming. I know what he is aiming at.

(Interruptions)

I know! The recent delegation coming ...

Mr X. L. Duval: *Aller do malélevé!*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: *Quel malélevé ...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

The Prime Minister: You should withdraw that word! I am not a *malélevé!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, don't take lessons from others on that question!

(Interruptions)

No! Withdraw that word! Withdraw that word!

Mr X. L. Duval: I cannot ask a question?

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition, please!

Mr X. L. Duval: I withdraw it, Mr Speaker, Sir, but the Prime Minister also should not make these insinuations.

Mr Speaker: No, withdraw that word you just mentioned!

Mr X. L. Duval: I withdraw it. It's withdrawn!

The Prime Minister: In his question, the Leader of the Opposition says: "Not to allow delegations coming and visiting us." I am replying to this! The last official Ministerial delegation that came to Mauritius was led by His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs of India! And we know *toutes sortes de rumeurs, d'allégations, de faussetés qui ont circulé!* They have been saying all this. Some of them; I am not saying you!

An hon. Member: India bashing!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: I am not saying you!

(Interruptions)

I am not saying you! I am saying there are some people who have alleged that this is how Mauritius has been contaminated. It is not the case! It is certainly not the case! And then, these are official delegations. It is not the first time that a delegation led by a Minister is coming to visit us. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan; and the President of Seychelles have been to Mauritius. And then, Mr Speaker, Sir, around the world, even though there is this pandemic, there are still Heads of State, Ministers who do, of course, travel when there is a need to travel.

An hon. Member: Under strict protocol!

The Prime Minister: Of course! I was coming to that. We have devised very strict protocol to ensure that there is minimum risk and we have seen to it that those protocols are applied and I can confirm that there has been no issue with regard to those delegations which have visited us.

Mr Speaker: Time over! The Table has been advised that PQ B/131 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping. PQ B/132 will be replied by hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology. PQ B/134, PQ B/142 and PQ B/143 will be replied by Dr. the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. PQ B/135 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection.

Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

**NATIONAL YOUTH ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL – SETTING UP,
COMPOSITION & MEETINGS**

(No. B/129) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) 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 National Youth Environment Council, he will state the -

- (a) date of the setting up thereof;
- (b) composition thereof, and
- (c) date of first meeting thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, pursuant to my reply to Parliamentary Question B/761 on 10 November 2020, the National Youth Environment Council (NYEC) was set up under the aegis of my Office on 23 October 2020, following which, necessary arrangements were made for its constitution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as already informed, a call for applications from registered Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) was published in the Press during the first week of November last. By the closing date for submission of nominations on 20 November 2020, 40 applications were received. Based on the eligibility criteria set, gender balance and for a better representation of NGOs involved in the conservation and preservation of marine sciences, biodiversity, climate change, sustainable agriculture and education/heritage, five members thereof were chosen, and an offer of appointment was made to the candidates on 26 February 2021.

Following the acceptance of the offer by the Chairperson and other members during the first week of March 2021, the National Youth Environment Council has been constituted as follows –

SN	NAME	DESIGNATION
	Dr. Zaheer Allam, OSK	Chairperson
1.	Mr Valéry de Falbaire	Vice-Chairperson
2.	Ms Sharon Yong-Tit-Kow	Member representing the Prime Minister's Office
3.	Ms Bibi Nabeela Fokeerbux	Member representing the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
4.	Mr Darwin Sunassee	Member representing the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation
5.	Mr Arvind Sookhoo	Member with legal background

SN	NAME	DESIGNATION
6.	Ms Nudhar Bundhoo	Member with social background
7.	Mr Fabiani Appavou	Member representing the UN Resident Coordinator's Office
8.	Ms Farheen Banon Chuttoo-Domun	Member representing the Trade Union
9.	Mr Keshwar Lobin	Member representing the NGO - Sustainable Agriculture Organisation
10.	Ms Ansuya Pratima Ramsounder	Member representing the NGO - Dis-Moi
11.	Dr. Ms Devina Lobine	Member representing the NGO - Junior Chamber International (JCI) Curepipe
12.	Ms Lovena Aime Sneha Vitse	Member representing the NGO - Action Against Global Warming Mauritius Initiative
13.	Mr Narotumdass Yudish Rohee	Member representing the NGO - Junior Chamber International (JCI) Mauritius

Mr Speaker, Sir, I received the Chairperson of the NYEC, Dr. Z. Allam, on 01 March 2021 and briefed him on environment-related policies, vision and strategies of the Government. I also advised him to meet some of the directly concerned Ministers to better understand the existing environmental policies for a more constructive contribution of the NYEC. My Office has already requested these concerned Ministers to receive Dr. Allam and to extend any facility he may require in fulfilling the mandate of the Council.

Due to the resurgence of the COVID-19 and in view of the confinement imposed as from 10 March 2021, I understand that Dr. Allam has been able to meet only the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change. Dr. Allam is planning to schedule meetings with other Ministers at the earliest possible opportunity and at their convenience.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Office is providing the required facilities and logistics for the Council to operate efficiently and effectively.

In regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed that the National Youth Environment Council met for the first time on Tuesday 30 March 2021 through Microsoft Teams, an online platform for meetings, given the prevailing confinement.

I am further informed that, during its first meeting, the Council discussed its strategic vision and agreed on the modalities for its proper functioning, including the setting up of Sub-Committees for focused and thematic discussions so as to come up with appropriate recommendations and proposals.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, hon. Prime Minister. Can we request that the strategic vision of the Council is made public so that external stakeholders like students or other professionals can identify and collaborate in different avenues to better shape future recommendations aligned with the objectives of achieving a sustainable and inclusive Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: Well, I can only convey this request to the Chair of the Council. I cannot pronounce myself on whether they will make it public. If you ask my personal opinion, of course, I do not see any problem for the Council, whenever they have decided on the strategic vision, to make it public, but this is a matter for them to decide on. I do not decide; it is for the Council to decide. But I shall convey, and I shall pass on this request to them.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to know from the Prime Minister if there has been any change in the mandate of the National Youth Environment Council?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I had replied to a PQ before with regard to the mandate of that Council, I think PQ B/761, on 10 November 2020. But let me highlight at least one

aspect which I consider to be very important, but all aspects are important, is that this Council will be making recommendations on national Action Plans and obviously on other environment policy decisions that are or will be taken by Government. This is the very purpose of setting this Council for the youth to be able *de s'exprimer et pour, bien sûr, donner leur opinion et faire des recommandations*, and also what is important is for them to be able to submit policy papers on environment protection and related issues.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Would the hon. Prime Minister consider maybe creating a digital platform - it is more a recommendation as well - like to enable interactions both at national and international level?

The Prime Minister: Well, again, if it is a question that is addressed to the Ministry concerned, I am sure it is already looking into the matter, and I am also sure it will take it onboard. But with regard to this Council, it will be up to them, as I have answered before, to seek the views of others, both locally and internationally and, personally, I do not see any problem. But, again, it should not be seen that I shall be taking any decision with regard to the Council. I shall, therefore, pass on the message to the Council.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

DIRECTOR OF AUDIT'S REPORT – PUBLIC ACCOUNTS OF MAURITIUS

(No. B/130) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Report of the Director of Audit on the public accounts of Mauritius for the year 2019-2020 and the subsequent reports thereof, he will state if consideration will be given for amendments to be brought to the –

- (a) Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly (1995) to empower the Assembly to debate thereon, and
- (b) relevant legislation to ensure that measures are taken to ensure that effective remedial actions are taken on the observations made therein and, if so, when, and, if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, section 110(2) of the Constitution provides that the public accounts of Mauritius shall be audited and reported upon by the Director of Audit and section 110(3) of the Constitution requires the Director of

Audit to submit his reports to the Minister responsible for the subject of finance, who in turn has the duty to lay the reports before the National Assembly.

The audited accounts together with the reports of the Director of Audit are thereafter examined by the Public Accounts Committee, pursuant to Standing Order 69(2) (a) of the Standing Order and Rules of the National Assembly.

It is apposite to note that, in the discharge of its duty, the Public Accounts Committee has the power to send for persons and records, to take evidence and to report from time to time. Moreover, the Committee is assisted by the Director of Audit and/or representatives of his office, representative of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the Accountant General or his representative and by Accounting Officers of Ministries/Departments and their representatives who are called upon to give evidence before the Committee.

It is also noteworthy that the Public Accounts Committee is composed of Members from both sides of the House and it is, by convention, chaired by a Member from the Opposition.

The Public Accounts Committee remains the main form of parliamentary control over public expenditure and it has so far served its purpose as the watchdog of public finances.

Besides, in the last Report of the Public Accounts Committee, the Chairperson, while making a certain number of recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the Public Accounts Committee, acknowledged that, and I quote –

“our Public Accounts Committee is presently functional and is very useful as a means of scrutinising the utilisation of public funds.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, in any case, hon. Members have adequate opportunities to seek and obtain information and clarifications on the reports of the Director of Audit through Parliamentary Questions. The House will recall that only last week, I replied to a Private Notice Question on an issue reported upon by the Director of Audit in his last report.

For all these reasons, it is not proposed to amend the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly to allow debates on the reports of the Director of Audit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question, the need for amendment to the law also does not arise in view of section 22 of the Finance and Audit Act, which already

empowers the Minister to issue financial instructions for the better implementation of the provisions of the Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say that Government has taken a number of measures since 2015 following the observations made by the Director of Audit in his successive reports. These measures include the following –

- (i) in 2015, the Finance and Audit Act was amended to require every Ministry and Government Department to prepare an Annual Report on Performance for submission to the Minister of Finance;
- (ii) consequently, a guideline was issued in November 2016 by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development to assist Ministries/Departments in the preparation of their Annual Reports on Performance;
- (iii) to further improve expenditure management, accountability and transparency, measures were provided in the 2018-19 Budget Speech for the Finance and Audit Act to be amended to make it mandatory for Ministries and Departments to include an Implementation Plan in their Annual Report for preventing recurrence of shortcomings reported by the Director of Audit. Accordingly, the Finance and Audit Act was further amended in 2018;
- (iv) the Annual Report now includes a statement showing an Implementation Plan for remedial action and for preventing the recurrence of the shortcomings, including wastage of public funds referred to in the report of the Director of Audit;
- (v) in this respect, the guidelines on the preparation of the Annual Report on Performance were amended and circulated to Ministries/Departments, and
- (vi) as at date, all Annual Reports on Performance received from Ministries/Departments include the Implementation Plan for remedial actions on the issues raised by the Director of Audit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition, the Internal Control Unit has been strengthened and staff from that Unit have been posted in all Ministries/Departments. They carry out internal audit functions, including risk assessment. One of the functions of the Internal Control is precisely to report on effective remedial actions to be taken following queries of the Director of Audit.

Furthermore, Audit Committees, which are an added layer of control, ensure that the coverage of audit by Internal Control is adequate. They also ensure implementation of the recommendations of the Director of Audit in his Report.

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président. M. le président, il ne sert à rien de se cacher derrière *the PAC*. Le Premier ministre le sait très bien, M. le président, que le rapport du *PAC* n'est pas débattu ici au Parlement et les délibérations du *PAC* ne sont pas retransmises pour que la population puisse être informée. M. le président, le dernier rapport de l'Audit, déposé, montre des dénonciations de millions et de millions de roupies de gaspillage. Chaque année, M. le président, c'est la même chose. Est-ce que le Premier ministre ne trouve-t-il pas nécessaire, en 2021, alors que nous demandons à la population de se serrer la ceinture, le pays est presque à genoux, qu'on débattre de ce rapport ici pour que les parlementaires des deux côtes de la Chambre puissent dire ce qu'ils ont à dire sur ce rapport et, au moins pour l'année prochaine, nous arrêtions ce gaspillage?

Mr Speaker: You made your point, let the Prime Minister answer.

The Prime Minister: M. le président, je suis au moins d'accord avec l'honorable membre sur une chose. C'est que chaque année, le Directeur de l'Audit fait des critiques à l'égard de certains ministères. Il a bien dit. J'ai été voir dans le passé et quand j'ai dit j'ai été voir, j'ai été voir depuis les années 2000 jusqu'à ce jour aussi, même le dernier rapport, et je dois dire que *we are not condoning the fact that there are justified criticisms with regard to management of public funds in certain cases*. Il y a le comité. D'ailleurs, moi-même j'étais ministre des Finances et j'ai mentionné les mesures qui ont d'ailleurs été prises pour veiller à ce que les fonds publics soient bien utilisés, et l'actuel ministre des Finances fait le suivi.

Maintenant, je ne pense pas que l'honorable membre soit aussi un nouveau venu. Il a été dans des gouvernements précédents, depuis 2005 jusqu'à 2014. On a vu des situations avec des critiques à l'égard du gouvernement. Le rapport de l'Audit aussi concernait pas mal - je ne vais pas entrer dans les détails. Il y a même un ancien ministre des Finances qui avait vraiment condamné certains ministres en particulier, à l'époque. A l'époque, ne voyait-il pas la nécessité de proposer à son gouvernement de venir de l'avant avec un amendement de la loi, pour qu'on puisse débattre des rapports de l'Audit au niveau du Parlement ? Le problème, M. le président, c'est quoi ? C'est quand ils sont au gouvernement, ils ne voient pas la nécessité de venir avec un tel changement et quand ils sont dans l'Opposition, ils trouvent à

ce moment-là qu'il faut débattre. Mais je dois redire que je ne vais pas répéter tout ce qui a été dit, ce qu'on a fait *for effective and efficient management of public funds*.

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have listened very carefully to the hon. Prime Minister's answer in this House. May I ask him if it is not high time now to introduce a Fiscal Responsibility Bill to be debated before this House? Because year in, year out, we will have the same criticism from the Director of Audit. We have got the legal framework. But is it not high time to move on and have, in this House, a real piece of legislation like the Fiscal Responsibility Bill to be debated?

The Prime Minister: We will look into that, but, again, let me say that his leader has been Minister of Finance for some years and there was, again, no necessity at that time to bring forward such a Bill as the Fiscal Responsibility Bill. But, anyway, I am open. We shall look into that proposal.

Mr Juman: *Merci, M. le président. J'ai écouté avec beaucoup d'attention la réponse du Premier ministre et nous sommes tous d'accord au sein de cette Assemblée qu'il y a un problème. Mais qu'est-ce qu'il faut faire, M. le Premier ministre ? Parce qu'à chaque fois, on ne peut pas que blâmer l'Opposition ou le gouvernement.* Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether actions will be taken against Supervising Officers of Ministries and Departments for dereliction of duty? I will give you an example...

Mr Speaker: No, no, no example. Your question is okay.

The Prime Minister: As I say, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is our duty to see to it that public funds are being used in the manner of and for the purpose for which Parliament has voted the budget with regard to each Ministry, and also to see to it that each project is carried out in the most proficient manner. I speak not only as a Prime Minister but, obviously, as former Minister of Finance. We have seen on numerous occasions that there are justifiable criticisms that have been made by the Director of Audit with regard to implementation of some projects, and I say that candidly because it is a criticism which has been with so many Governments in the past, and even now also. Of course, there are other criticisms that are not justified, I must say so, because when we look at all those criticisms, and at all the information that has been provided. But it is our duty to see to it that funds are being spent in the proper way. And that is why I said we are monitoring, we keep on coming with new measures and, obviously, in the light of the report, whatever other additional measures have to be taken, we will take

them. But, as I say, we need, first of all, the explanation of the Ministries concerned with regard to those cases which have been mentioned.

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président, la dernière question. M. le président, quand on écoute le Premier ministre parler du passé, je peux comprendre que dans le passé, les *Standing Orders* ne prévoyaient pas que nous débattions du rapport. Mais cette fois-ci, M. le président, il y a deux choses qui sont apparues dans le rapport de l'Audit :

Première chose, le Directeur dit qu'il n'a pas eu accès à certains papiers.

Deuxième chose, notre pays est à genou avec le COVID-19.

Le Premier ministre ne trouve-t-il pas que c'est le moment idéal pour donner le bon exemple à la population en termes de gaspillage, pour sortir de cette opacité et la non-transparence qu'ici, les parlementaires, nous arrivons à discuter, à critiquer et aussi à émettre certaines suggestions pour améliorer le rapport de l'Audit de l'année prochaine, on espère ?

The Prime Minister: Mais qu'est-ce que l'honorable membre est en train de faire ? Il pose des questions ! La semaine dernière, l'honorable Leader de l'Opposition est venu avec une *PNQ* concernant un aspect de l'Audit, et j'ai déjà répondu ! J'espère que l'honorable membre ne veut pas revenir sur cette même question concernant le fait que le Directeur de l'Audit, dans son rapport, vient dire qu'il n'a pas eu accès parce qu'il y avait un *Non-Disclosure Agreement*. *I do not want to repeat again what I have already replied during the PNQ that was addressed to me.*

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Quirin: B/132, please!

Mr Speaker: B/133!

Mr Quirin: Why not PQ B/132? It is addressed to the Prime Minister!

Mr Speaker: Why is it that rebellious characteristic with you? I have already...

Mr Quirin: Oh, he does not want to reply? Ok, that is fine!

Mr Speaker: Why do you bring ...

Mr Quirin: If he does not want to reply, that is fine, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr Speaker: I have already given the signal that ...

Mr Quirin: I did not notice, I am sorry! But the question is ...

(Interruptions)

The question is with regard to the letter addressed to the Prime Minister, ok?

(Interruptions)

He does not want to reply, fair enough! We are taking good note. The population is taking good note.

Mr Quirin: B/133!

Mr Speaker: Before you answer this Question, the transfer of question rests with the Executive, not with you, not with me. This is in the Standing Orders here. And this is why we fight, we quarrel with each other, because you do not look at your Standing Orders, and you are paid out of public money to look at your Standing Orders!

(Interruptions)

Mr Quirin: It is with regard to the letter addressed to the Prime Minister; it is not with regard to the '*Kreol Morisien*'.

Mr Speaker: There is no debate, Sir! There is no debate, this is Question Time! If you have a question, you ask your question!

Mr Quirin: Ok, that's fine.

Mr Speaker: If you do not have, we move to the next question!

Mr Quirin: PQ. No. B/133, thank you!

The Prime Minister: Tout d'abord, M. le président, il ne peut pas faire des commentaires que je ne veux pas répondre à sa question. Comme vous avez si bien dit, il ne sait même pas comment adresser la question et à quel ministre.

(Interruptions)

You should learn! This is a matter with regard to education. *Ale apran!*

Mr Speaker: No debate! Hon. Prime Minister, please reply to the question!

The Prime Minister: He is allowed to make comments that I am not willing to answer?

Mr Speaker: Reply!

The Prime Minister: I take exception to this!

An hon. Member: *Répondez à la question !*

The Prime Minister: *Pa konn poz kestion! Ale apran! Al apran, pren ou Standing Orders, al gueter! Bouffon!*

Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Excuse me! Some Members want to rewrite the Standing Orders. You take your responsibility, and I take my responsibility.

An hon. Member: *Tou les mardis zott mal comporter, toi to bizin al dan conference de presse !*

The Prime Minister: Yes...

An hon. Member: *Toi, reste trankil do!*

NATIONAL DRUG OBSERVATORY REPORT 2019 - ILLICIT DRUGS - DEATHS

(No. B/133) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the National Drug Observatory Report 2019, he will state if same contains information on deaths related to overdose of illicit drugs, and, if so, to give details thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Drug Observatory (NDO)...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: ...was set up in 2015 under the aegis of the Ministry of Health and Wellness in order to monitor and assess the drug situation in the country and to devise appropriate strategies to address the drug issue.

The NDO Report provides comprehensive information on prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services for drug use and harm reduction services as well as supply reduction and related activities, amongst others. It aims at facilitating information exchange among stakeholders so that prompt actions can be initiated to counteract the harmful effects of drug

trafficking by addressing demand and supply issues and identifying trends in drug trafficking at an early stage. The Report contains factual information.

In line with the recommendation of the National Drug Control Master Plan 2019-2023, the National Drug Secretariat (NDS) is responsible for the preparation and publication of the NDO Report. Accordingly, the last NDO Report was prepared and published by the NDS.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that classifying overdose as cause of death can be challenging. Even autopsy results can be relatively non-specific, as in most cases of death due to drugs, the findings are mainly 'Acute Pulmonary Oedema' and 'Acute Cerebral Oedema'. Toxicological analysis and expert interpretation of the results are necessary for proper classification of death.

In fact, cause of death due to drug overdose is a very sensitive and technically complex issue. It requires not only clinical findings of experts during the post mortem but also careful interpretation of toxicology results.

I am also informed that while collecting data for the NDO Report 2019, it was noticed by the NDS that the criteria to establish whether a case of death is due to drug overdose was not clearly spelt out. The term overdose can be misleading as there is no known drug threshold level for illicit drugs. A typical dose while not being lethal for someone might be fatal for another person. The Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) only identifies the substances found in a dead person, but does not quantify them. There was, thus, a need to define the criteria as well as the agency responsible to report it.

Mr Speaker, Sir, therefore, the NDO report for the year 2019 was finalised without data related to death due to drug abuse.

In order to classify the cause of death due to drug abuse, it is important to come up with a set of criteria. Following consultations held, it has been agreed that all stakeholders concerned, namely the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Medico Legal Department of the Police, the FSL and the NDS will continue to look into ways to identify death due to drug abuse.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

Mrs Mayotte: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Prime Minister has already answered my question. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Prime Minister inform the House of the composition of the National Drug Secretariat? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: The National Drug Secretariat, which is guided by and reports to a High-Level Drug and HIV Council which is chaired by me, comprises the following –

- (i) Ministry of Health and Wellness;
- (ii) Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education and Science and Technology;
- (iii) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade;
- (iv) Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation;
- (v) Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity;
- (vi) Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare;
- (vii) Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation;
- (viii) Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management;
- (ix) The Office of the Attorney General;
- (x) Representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations, and
- (xi) Representatives of the private sector.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In relation to admission in public health institution for drug consumption, can the hon. Prime Minister state the trend for the past years for synthetic drugs?

The Prime Minister: Synthetic drugs remain the main cause accounting for 62% of total admissions, that is, 520 out of 834 admissions in 2019. However, it is important to note, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there has been a decreasing trend in the number of admissions related to synthetic drugs combined with mixed unspecified substances. There were 783 admissions in the year 2017; 644 in the year 2018 and 592 for the year 2019.

Mr Speaker: Time over! The Table has been advised that PQ B/131, B/200, B/201, B/202 have been withdrawn.

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/166 will be replied by the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development, PQ B/178 will be replied by Dr. the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Development and Planning, and PQ B/188 will be replied by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

COVID-19 - 'REMDESIVIR' - TREATMENT

(No. B/145) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state if there have been several proposals from different quarters to use "REMDESIVIR" as treatment thereof and, if so, indicate if information will be obtained as to whether same is being considered for approval by the World Health Organisation.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that since the outbreak of COVID-19, the international community has been looking for a way to treat this viral infection. Remdesivir is a broad-spectrum antiviral medication which is usually prescribed for the treatment of patients with Ebola. Remdesivir has been developed by the biopharmaceutical company, Gilead Sciences, which was the first company to obtain marketing authorisation and to file a case for reimbursement in the management of its severe forms.

Unfortunately, the expectations raised by this molecule were soon dashed. On 20 November 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) advised against the use of this antiviral medication as there was no evidence that Remdesivir improved the survival of patients or prevented them from being placed under ventilation.

A committee of experts from the WHO analysed the results of four clinical trials on more than 7,000 patients hospitalised for COVID-19, which was published in the medical journal BMJ and they concluded that there was not enough evidence on the effectiveness of Remdesivir on COVID-19 patients.

Scientists highlight the possibility of having significant side effects from the use of Remdesivir, notwithstanding the relatively large cost and logistical implications of an intravenous medication.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that in several countries, for instance, France, the Gilead Laboratory has withdrawn its request for reimbursement based on the decision of the health authorities of these countries. As the efficacy of Remdesivir is uncertain and it is expensive and potentially dangerous for some patients, Remdesivir is, therefore, not used in Mauritius.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, hon. Minister. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether his Ministry has put in place a protocol for treatment of severe cases?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, my Ministry has put in place a protocol for the management of the cases, from the admission of patients to their discharge of patients, including protocol for mild and moderate, even severe cases. A protocol has been devised by my Ministry.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you so much, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister inform the House who are responsible for devising the protocol?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the protocol has been devised by a panel of experts consisting of the following specialities: interventionist, infectiologist, pulmonologist, gastroenterologist, nephrologist, geriatrician, paediatrician, gynaecologist and biologist.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. The hon. Minister rightly said that the WHO Solidarity Trial did find that there was zero like effect of Remdesivir, however, the FDA did approve it since November last year, and recently, there have been two trials, the REMACP-CAP Trial which has shown that Remdesivir, in combination with the newest monoclonal antibody, which is now proving very, very efficient in ICU critically care, has shown to improve survival...

Mr Speaker: Question, please!

Dr. Aumeer: Will the hon. Minister consider the use of Remdesivir, together with the latest monoclonal antibodies, as it is now being suggested, even yesterday by the Prime Minister of India to have Remdesivir manufactured. Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply, I have already mentioned that the protocol is being prepared by the panel of experts, which I have already mentioned. If the experts consider that this medication will be used in the future, obviously. But, for the time being, whatever be the recommendation of the WHO concerning Remdesivir, we have taken all that into consideration.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Can the hon. Minister inform the House currently what are the medications being used to treat severe cases in Mauritius?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, based on the protocol, it depends upon the severity of cases, but broadly speaking the protocol recommends the use of steroids like Dexamethasone;

Convalescent Plasma in some specific cases, anticoagulants, antibiotics, as well as, anti-fungal agents that the Ministry has already procured to be used for these patients.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman! Question!

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. As my colleague just mentioned, since the Remdesivir is approved by the FDA, can the Minister inform the House whether the reason why we are not using it in Mauritius is because of the expensive cost?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have replied why Remdesivir is not being used; I will not repeat it again.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask hon. Minister whether the latest drug that is being used is called Tocilizumab? Is he aware of that drug and is that available in Mauritius or can he check whether it should be made available?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken note of this drug, which I do not know, but I am going to refer it to the Expert Committee. The Expert Committee has to decide whether this drug will be used or not.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

POLICE DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT – PLASTIC BAGS USE – CONTRAVENTIONS

(No. B/146) **Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to plastic bags, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the *Police de l'Environnement*, information as to the number of contraventions booked for the use thereof since January 2021 to date, if any.

Mr Ramano: M. le président, *l'Environment Protection (Banning of Plastic Bags) Regulation 2020* est entrée en vigueur le 1^{er} mars 2021 et a été adoptée le 26 août 2020, conformément à la vision du programme gouvernemental 2020-2024, visant à faire de Maurice un pays sans plastique dans les délais les plus proches. Ce règlement a, en fait, abrogé et remplacé le règlement de 2015, *l'Environment Protection (Banning of Plastic Bags)*, et prévoit une interdiction de la fabrication, l'importation, la vente, la fourniture de sacs en plastique non biodégradables, tels que les sacs en plastique en rouleau, les petits sacs en plastique, de petite poche, *pocket tag*, et aussi les sacs en plastique transportés par des passagers débarquant de l'avion ou d'un navire aux fins de transporter des effets personnels.

Il est à souligner aussi, M. le président, qu'une dérogation est toutefois prévue pour d'autres types de sacs en plastique, notamment les sacs qui sont utilisés pour le *disposal of waste, including quarantine and clinical waste*, et aussi les sacs utilisés *for the purpose of agriculture, medical purposes, for purpose of sampling or analysis*.

M. le président, des opérations de mise en application ont eu lieu dans le cadre du règlement de 2015, donc, cet *Environment Protection (Banning of Plastic Bags)*. Donc, du 1^{er} janvier au 28 février, il n'y a pas eu de contravention établie. Après l'entrée en vigueur du règlement de 2020, c'est-à-dire, partir du 1^{er} mars, des inspections ont été effectuées par des agents du département de l'Environnement, notamment la Police de l'Environnement et aussi les différents *Enforcement Officers* basés au ministère et je suis informé qu'un total de 347 points de vente, combinant les stands de nourriture, marchés, foires et marchands ambulants, entre autres, ont été visités à travers l'île, et pour la période de 1^{er} au 9 mars 2021, trois contraventions ont été établies et environ 1,3 kgs de sacs en plastique interdits ont été saisis.

M. le président, compte tenu de l'ordonnance pour la restriction temporaire du mouvement qui a été décrétée à partir du 10 mars 2021, il y a aucune opération de répression à haut niveau en cours, mais quand même, les *Enforcement Officers* sont toujours sur le terrain pour s'assurer de la mise en application et aussi du respect des différents règlements qui sont entrés en vigueur à partir du 1^{er} mars.

Permettez-moi aussi de saisir l'occasion, M. le président, pour lancer un appel au public afin qu'il dénonce toutes infractions au règlement 2020, *Environment Protection (Banning of Plastic Bags)* au ministère de l'Environnement, ou même à la Police de l'Environnement. Et permettez-moi aussi de dire que, selon les observations sur le terrain, il y a une adhésion, une conformité croissante du public avec les *regulations of banning of plastic bags*.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his answer, the hon. Minister mentioned about 3 kilos of plastic bags *saisis*. Can he inform the House actually what is done with the plastic bags afterwards?

Mr Ramano: Je dois dire qu'il y a une très bonne collaboration avec le ministère des Collectivités Locales. Il y a des bennes qui ont été prévues à travers le pays pour la collecte des *single-use plastic* et aussi les *plastic bags*.

Donc, ces sacs en plastique qui sont interdits ou même les *single use plastic* qui ont été collectés sont acheminés vers des recycleurs pour être recyclés.

Mr Osman Mahomed : The replacement of the plastic bags is biodegradable bags. Can I ask the hon. Minister which department in Mauritius certifies that the bags are actually biodegradable and to which standard, meaning how long a time does it take for it to disintegrate in nature?

Mr Ramano: M. le président, il y a la contribution du *National Environment Laboratory*. Donc, on fait appel notamment au *National Environment Laboratory* et je dois dire que les scientifiques qui sont basés là-bas apportent leur contribution pour certifier la qualité des sacs en plastique qui sont concernés.

Ms J. Bérenger: Merci. Je rebondis sur la question de mon collègue. Depuis l'instauration de cette loi interdisant les sacs en plastique, nous voyons de plus en plus apparaître des plastiques dits biodégradables avec la norme EN13432 inscrite dessus, mais qui n'est en réalité pas du tout des sacs plastiques biodégradables. Est-ce qu'on pourrait savoir quelles sont les actions prises par le ministère pour contrôler ou pour empêcher la prolifération de ces plastiques qui sont dits biodégradables, mais qui en réalité ne le sont pas ?

Mr Ramano: Je remercie l'honorable membre pour sa question. Donc, M. le président, dans les *Regulations* qui sont entrées en vigueur à partir du 1^{er} mars, mention est faite dedans qu'il y a une obligation de mentionner le nom et le *contact address* du *manufacturer* aussi bien que celui de l'*importer*, que ce soit pour les *exempt non-biodegradable plastic bags* et aussi pour le *biodegradable and compostable plastic bags*. Mais nous sommes au courant qu'il y a quelques sacs qui sont mis sur le marché mais qui ne respectent pas ces provisions. Donc, là, je dois dire que les membres de la Police de l'Environnement, les *Enforcement Officers* sont à pied d'œuvre pour saisir ces types d'articles.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Ramano: Ce que je demanderai toujours c'est que tous ces fabricants, tous ces *manufacturers* doivent nécessairement s'enregistrer avec le ministère de l'Environnement.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr Ittoo: Merci, M. le président. On parle souvent de *single-use plastic bags* pour des sacs en plastique. Je voudrais savoir de l'honorable ministre quelle est la situation des *single-use plastic* par rapport à des *packaging* dans les emballages dans les supermarchés et dans les boutiques ? Comment ça se passe ? Merci.

Mr Ramano: Pour le *packaging*, ce sont des provisions qui sont prévus par la loi. Cela fait partie des exceptions qui sont prévues par la loi en ce qui concerne le *packaging*, mais quand même ce sont des *packaging* qui sont mis *on shelf* pour être vendus aux consommateurs. Mais l'appel qui a été toujours lancé c'est que lorsque nous venons de l'avant avec de telles *regulations*, il y a plusieurs facteurs à considérer, bien sûr que les alternatives existent sur le marché et que les alternatives soient à un prix abordable. Je dois dire que nous travaillons conjointement avec la Chambre de Commerce, nous travaillons conjointement avec *Business Mauritius* pour s'assurer qu'il y ait une bonne coordination entre les opérateurs est aussi le ministère de l'Environnement.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/208, B/209, B/210 and B/211 have been withdrawn.

STATE TRADING CORPORATION - BOARD MEMBERS – INVESTIGATION BY ICAC

(No. B/147) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to State Trading Corporation, he will state if consideration will be given for the advisability of suspending the Board members thereof with immediate effect in the wake of the investigations being carried out by the Independent Commission against Corruption in relation thereto, pending the conclusion thereof.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is premature for me at this stage to consider the advisability of suspending the Board Members of the STC.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, de par la réponse du ministre concernant le Board de la STC, qui, pendant le dernier confinement de l'année dernière, a fait face à de graves allégations et fautes professionnelles dans l'achat de certains matériaux. Dois-je comprendre par la réponse du ministre que si le rapport d'audit et le *management letter* de la STC qui seront remis ou qui ont déjà été remis par l'audit, donc ce rapport est ce *management letter* seront remis au même conseil d'administration qui fait face à autant de graves allégations pendant la COVID. Donc, c'est le même conseil d'administration, M. le ministre, qui va recevoir ce rapport d'audit ?

Mr Callichurn: Well, I have said that I do not have the intention to suspend the Board at the moment. Well, we will see.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, encore une fois, le ministre est avare d'informations et de décisions. Le Board de la *STC*, M. le président, a acheté des matériaux pendant le dernier confinement pour R 1 milliard d'après le rapport de l'audit dans une opacité totale, mais, M. le ministre, votre gouvernement, quelques mois de cela...

Mr Speaker: Question!

Mr Assirvaden :... dans l'affaire de St Louis, a révoqué de Board du *CEB* et le directeur. Ne pensez-vous pas, M. le ministre, pour la transparence, pour la bonne gouvernance, donnant l'exemple de révoquer ce Board de la *STC* ?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I fail to see how this question has a relation with the Board of CEB.

Mr Speaker: I suspend the Sitting for one and a half hours.

At 1.02 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.35 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

CENTRAL ELECTRICITY BOARD - END-OF-YEAR PARTY - EXPENDITURE

(No. B/148) **Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the end-of-year party hosted by the Central Electricity Board for its employees in November/December 2020, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the total expenditure incurred in relation thereto.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Central Electricity Board that a get-together was organised at the SVICC for its 1800 employees in December 2020. This involved expenses related to rental of SVICC and services of fire, Police, security and first-aiders amounting to Rs823,413; transport facilities for 1800 employees for an amount of Rs254,500 and cost of catering services for the 1800 employees stood at Rs3,594,000. The total cost to gather the 1800 employees for the annual end of year get-together at the SVICC including associated standby services was Rs5,243,650.

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président. C'est étonnant, M. le président, nous sommes en plein confinement dès l'année dernière jusqu'à cette année-ci. L'économie est au ralentissement, les mauriciens en général passent par des moments extrêmement difficiles. Le gouvernement, tous les jours, demande à la population de se serrer les ceintures et le CEB

dépense plus de R 5 millions dans un *end-of-year party* extravagante et coûteuse. M. le ministre, est-ce que vous pensez qu'en ce temps difficile, en ce temps de coupure, vous pensez que le CEB, avec le nouveau ministre du CEB je dois bien dire, avec un nouveau directeur, est-ce que vous pensez dépenser R 5 millions pour une fête extravagante et coûteuse ? Est-ce normal en ce temps de COVID, en ce temps difficile?

Mr Lesjongard: M. le président, premièrement, je dois informer la Chambre que le budget alloué l'année dernière pour cette fête de fin d'année est R 2 millions moins que le budget qui avait été alloué l'année d'avant, c'est-à-dire en 2019. Déjà, il y a une baisse au niveau des dépenses.

Deuxièmement, M. le président, permettez-moi, l'honorable membre focalise son intervention, allons dire uniquement sur la dimension pécuniaire de cette fête. Il fait l'impasse complète sur l'aspect social et convivial de cette fête. Il faut, M. le président, comprendre que les 1800 employés de cette organisation font partie d'un service essentiel et ils ont travaillé extrêmement dur, qu'il soit membre du staff ou les travailleurs qui sont sur le terrain, ils ont travaillé sous d'énorme pression l'année dernière et personnellement, M. le président, je pense qu'ils méritent un moment de convivialité et un moment où entre collègues ils peuvent passer allons dire quelques heures à converser entre eux. C'est pourquoi, M. le président, que moi, honnêtement, je pense qu'il mérite ce moment-là et je reconferme que le budget a été réduit afin qu'il puisse organiser cette fête.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, could I ask the hon. Minister since we are talking about an end-of-year party, what is the name of the company that obtained the contract for catering services, what was the amount of money given to the caterer and was there a proper *appel d'offres* and how was the selection made?

Mr Lesjongard: I understand that for the catering services, the name of the company is Meal Express Ltd and the amount I said in my main reply is of the order of Rs3,594,000.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, j'ai écouté avec attention et je suppose que la population toute entière a écouté avec attention la réponse du ministre. Personne ne refuse aux employés du CEB de fêter les fêtes de fin d'année entre collègues. Personne ! Nous sommes, M. le président, en pleine COVID depuis l'année dernière, le pays passe par des moments extrêmement difficiles, les mauriciens arrivent difficilement à payer leurs *bill*.

Mr Speaker: If you have another question, then we take another question.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le ministre, est-ce que vous serez d'accord pour prendre l'argent dédié aux fêtes, les R 4 millions, R 5 millions, R 6 millions pour alimenter les plus vulnérables de notre société, ceux au bas de l'échelle, disons un tarif COVID-19 spécial pour les plus démunis de la société, M. le ministre ?

Mr Lesjongard: M. le président, je suis assez étonné parce qu'on a déjà annoncé les mesures qui vont venir soulager les consommateurs que ce soit du CEB ou de la CWA pendant cette période de confinement. Mais ce qui m'étonne encore plus, M. le président, c'est tout ce que les membres fondateurs du parti, dont l'honorable membre est président, ont milité, ont donné leur vie pour l'avancement des travailleurs de ce pays, pour le bien-être des travailleurs de ce pays. Alors, je pense qu'on est peut-être sur la même longueur d'onde avec l'honorable membre pour comprendre que ces travailleurs de cette organisation méritent de pouvoir passer un moment après une année difficile où ils se sont donnés à fond afin d'assurer que les consommateurs ont un service de qualité pendant cette période de confinement.

Mr Speaker: But do not repeat yourself, make sure!

Mr Assirvaden: Oui, M. le président, une dernière question. M. le ministre, une fête avec de la retenue d'abord. Est-ce que le ministre du CEB peut prendre l'engagement - pour cette année-ci du moins, laissez 2020, pour cette année-ci, on est en 2021, nous passons par des moments toujours difficiles - que la fête de fin d'année du CEB sera fait dans la retenue et non pas dépenser R 5 millions pour une fête?

Mr Lesjongard: Est-ce que je comprends, M. le président, que l'honorable membre est contre que les travailleurs de la CEB puissent passer un moment? C'est un jour pendant 365 jours, M. le président, où ils ont droit à passer un moment socialement et allons dire dans la convivialité ensemble.

(Interruptions)

Mr Assirvaden: Dans la retenue, oui.

Mr Lesjongard: Quelle retenue, je ne comprends pas !

Mr Speaker: So, this question has been canvassed already. Hon. Yeung Sik Yuen!

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC – SME MAURITIUS LTD – LAID OFF EMPLOYEES
– MARCH 2020-APRIL 2021**

(No. B/149) Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the impact thereof on the small and medium enterprises, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from SME Mauritius Ltd, information as to the number of -

- (a) employees of SMEs who were laid off since March 2020 to date, and
- (b) small and medium enterprises having closed down.

Mr Bholah: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, it is universally recognised that SMEs operate both in the formal and informal sectors whereby they contribute significantly to job creation and economic development.

The SME sector is highly dynamic and heterogeneous in nature. Mauritius is no exception. It is estimated that there are around 175,000 active SMEs operating in different sectors of the economy ranging from local corner street food operators to high end self-employed programmers working for foreign customers and export-oriented enterprises.

According to the latest estimates from Statistics Mauritius, I am advised that SMEs are contributing to nearly 50% of total employment creation. The number of SMEs operating in the formal sector stood at 138,553 out of which 81% are micro enterprises, 18% are small enterprises and 1% are medium enterprises. Out of these 138,553 enterprises, only 21% are registered with SME Registration Unit of my Ministry being given that registration is not mandatory under current legislation.

According to the UNDP Socio-economic Impact Assessment Report on Covid-19 in Mauritius dated October 2020, during the lockdown period, the fall in informal sector employment has been more pronounced as compared to formal sector employment. The report also highlights that the disruption of economic activities due to the lockdown would have had a significant impact on output and employment. It was estimated that for period ended December 2020, almost 55,000 jobs across the economy would have been at risk without Government, first of its kind effective recovery plan and schemes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is significant to emphasise the whole array of measures that Government has put in place to mitigate the impact and likely distress caused by Covid-19 and reduce the social impact resulting from economic adversity, closures and job losses. Some 14,600 SMEs covering around 90,300 employees have benefitted from the Wage Assistance Scheme for the month of March 2020 to March 2021 for an amount of Rs3.9

billion. In addition, some, 1,638 SMEs have benefitted from the *Plan de Soutien* of DBM for a total amount of approximately Rs807 m. during the same period.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, as from 19 March this year, Government has introduced the following two additional loan schemes which are being managed by the Development Bank of Mauritius. The SME Interest-free Loan Scheme of Rs100,000 for SMEs with turnover not exceeding Rs50 m. The loan is repayable over a period of 8 years including a moratorium of 5 years on repayment and Rs1 m. SME Covid-19 Special Support Scheme where SMEs with turnover not exceeding Rs50 m. would be able to apply for unsecured loans of up to Rs1 m. at an interest rate of 0.5% per annum. The loan is repayable over a period of 5 years including a moratorium of one year on repayment.

In addition, SME Mauritius is providing the following support to SMEs to ensure their continued resilience. Five different schemes are being implemented and at as date, over 570 SMEs employing some 3,500 people and having a joint turnover of Rs2.5 billion benefitted from grants to the tune of Rs28 m. And some 1500 SMEs have benefitted from capacity building programmes for continuous upgrading of knowledge, acquisition, new competencies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to a report on impact of Covid-19 on businesses in Mauritius by Business Mauritius and Statistics Mauritius in December 2020, some 22% of SMEs in the formal sector based on a sample of 2,707 entities have released at least one employee since the outbreak of Covid-19. Based on information available from the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, I am advised that around 10,000 employees have lost their job due to either downsizing or closure of firms. Given that some sectors of the economy such as the travel, tourism and catering sectors are at a halt, SMEs operating therein are at present not in operation and it cannot be said that they have closed down. However, from information gathered from the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, it is noted that 40 SMEs have closed down.

Mr Speaker, Sir, SME Mauritius Ltd is carrying out a comprehensive assessment of the impact and challenges caused by Covid-19 on SMEs following which additional strategies and supportive measures to uplift SMEs would be implemented.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: M. le président, est-ce que le ministre peut nous informer quelles sont les mesures prises par le gouvernement pour aider les employés licenciés?

Mr Bholah: As I have stated earlier, there has been the *Plan de Soutien* from the DBM namely moratorium on all banks' existing loans, moratorium on all lease facilities with 50% of rental due upon request for month of March – April, deferral of rent payments for tenants upon request, new loan schemes, all these are geared towards maintaining employees in their employment in the different SMEs.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Ramyad!

Ms Ramyad: Can the Minister inform the House if SME Mauritius Ltd is working at its full capacity or does it intend to recruit, bearing in mind the new challenges that it has to face?

Mr Bholah: No, there is no intention to recruit more staff at the moment.

Mr Uteem: May I know from the hon. Minister, what would happen after 30 June when the law which prevents SME from making redundant workers on economic grounds without seeking first help from MIC comes to an end? Has his Ministry anticipated how many SMEs will have to lay off people after 30 June?

Mr Bholah: Well, we are thinking over that and given that Government is coming with the forthcoming budget, there will be measures announced thereat.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

Mr Ittoo: M. le président, j'ai cru entendre l'honorable ministre mentionner, il y a un très faible pourcentage des *SMEs* qui sont enregistrés avec la *SME Mauritius*. Est-ce que depuis la COVID l'année dernière, ce nombre a augmenté, c'est à dire, le nombre des *SMEs* qui s'enregistrent avec la *SME Mauritius* et si non, la raison pourquoi un nombre très faible des *SMEs* sont enregistrés avec la *SME Mauritius*?

Mr Bholah: Well, as I said earlier, it is not mandatory, it is not compulsory for any SME to register with SME Mauritius, but I can add that from March last year to March this year, some 4300 SMEs come for registration with SME Mauritius.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Dans les 175,000 PME, combien de ces PME sont aujourd'hui inactives?

Mr Bholah: As I said, we cannot assess the number of SMEs that are not operating at this moment given that some have simply suspended their operation. If I take the case of the

tourist industry, they have not closed down. For example, tour operators, car rental, tourist boutique, restaurant and all that, given how the situation evolves, how the situation unfolds with regard to COVID-19, I am sure that these operators will resume their activities soon.

Mr Speaker: No more supplementary, next question!

**MAURITIUS REVENUE AUTHORITY - SELF-EMPLOYED ASSISTANCE
SCHEME**

(No. B/150) Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to if it is in presence of appeals from self-employed against the rejection of their applications submitted thereunder and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, ce gouvernement a à cœur l'intérêt des travailleurs, qu'ils soient salariés ou indépendants. C'est dans cette perspective que le *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* a récemment été réactivé. Pour rappel, ce régime d'assistance sans précédent avait initialement été mis en place en mars 2020. Il a été pensé comme un soutien financier aux travailleurs indépendants qui n'étaient pas en mesure d'exercer en raison du confinement imposé à ce moment-là.

Après la levée du confinement le 31 mai 2020, le gouvernement a décidé, pour juin 2020 et les mois suivants, de maintenir cette aide financière aux opérateurs du secteur du tourisme.

Dans le contexte du confinement décrété à partir du 10 mars 2021, le gouvernement a pris la décision d'accorder à nouveau cette aide pour le mois complet aux travailleurs indépendants opérant dans le secteur du tourisme et pour un demi-mois à ceux qui opèrent dans les autres secteurs.

En outre, le Gouvernement a octroyé une aide financière supplémentaire exceptionnelle sous la forme d'une subvention unique de R 10,000 à tous les travailleurs indépendants enregistrés auprès de la *Mauritius Revenue Authority*.

Cela représente en tout plus de 200,000 travailleurs indépendants.

Ainsi, pour le mois de mars 2021, un travailleur indépendant opérant dans le secteur du tourisme a obtenu ou obtiendra sous peu une aide financière totale de R 15,287.

Cela représente R 10,000 sous forme de subvention unique et R 5,287 dans le cadre du *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme*. Un travailleur indépendant opérant dans un autre secteur que celui du tourisme a quant à lui bénéficié ou bénéficiera d'une aide financière totale de R 12,644. Cela comprend R 10,000 sous forme de subvention unique et R 2,644 dans le cadre du *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme*.

Pour faciliter la procédure, la MRA a automatiquement effectué le paiement aux travailleurs indépendants éligibles sur la base de leur demande précédente. Un travailleur indépendant qui n'ayant pas fait de demande antérieure a toutefois eu la possibilité d'effectuer sa demande en ligne.

La MRA a commencé à effectuer les paiements à partir du 20 mars 2021.

A ce jour, les paiements à plus de 211,000 travailleurs indépendants dans le cadre du *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* ont été effectués pour un montant total de R 564 millions. En ce qui concerne la subvention unique, la MRA a versé R 2,04 milliards à 203,653 travailleurs indépendants.

M. le président, le gouvernement a versé, pour le mois de mars 2021, un montant total sans précédent de R 2,6 milliards aux travailleurs indépendants.

En ce qui concerne les demandes rejetées, j'ai été informé par la MRA que quelque 72,474 demandes n'ont pas été approuvées. Je tiens à préciser que toute personne qui s'estime lésée par le rejet de sa demande peut soumettre une requête à la MRA par téléphone ou par courrier.

Toutes les requêtes reçues sont analysées et, si besoin est, des informations supplémentaires sont sollicitées auprès du demandeur. Si, sur la base des informations supplémentaires fournies ou à la suite des modifications apportées par le demandeur à sa demande initiale, il s'avère que la personne est éligible au régime, le paiement est alors effectué par la MRA.

Je tiens à rassurer l'honorable membre sur le fait que toutes - je dis bien 'toutes' - les requêtes émanant de travailleurs indépendants seront dûment pris en considération.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Est-ce que le ministre est au courant que beaucoup de ces *genuine self-employed* dont leurs demandes ont été rejetées peinent à trouver de quoi à manger actuellement?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, cela concerne, comme je l'ai dit, des centaines de milliers de personnes. La MRA est en train de s'occuper de cette question. Ils sont en train de verser directement sur le compte des travailleurs indépendants. Et j'ai dit aussi, bien sûr, peut-être qu'il y a des erreurs. L'erreur est humaine. C'est pour cela qu'ils ont un mécanisme d'appel pour qu'on puisse retravailler dessus et c'est ce qu'ils sont en train de faire. Et si jamais, M. le président, l'honorable membre est au courant de certains *self-employed* qui ont des difficultés pour s'enregistrer ou qu'il y a eu un problème avec la MRA, je serais disposé à recevoir ces courriers et à travailler dessus.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: May I know from the hon. Minister whether consideration will be given to reviewing the eligibility criteria because a number of people who receive social aid, who are very poor, while getting the social aid they were also self-employed, now they are not eligible for this allowance and this is causing a lot of hardship to the poorest members of society, so, whether the hon. Minister can reconsider the eligibility criteria to get this Self - Employed Assistance Scheme benefit?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour sa question. C'est un processus dynamique. Ce qu'on avait mis en place en mars 2020, on l'a remis en place en mars 2021 et on revoit les critères. Bien sûr, si jamais on doit modifier les critères, on le fera mais c'est au fur et à mesure que le processus a été enclenché et qu'on regarde ce qui se passe par rapport au paiement. On ne peut pas dès maintenant dire qu'on va modifier le protocole, modifier le processus. On travaille avec les différents ministères, la MRA est en train de recevoir et on est en train de vérifier cas par cas les demandes qui ont été rejetées. Après cela, s'il faut modifier, si jamais on voit qu'il y a un défaut dans le système, bien sûr on va modifier le système.

Mr X. L. Duval: M. le président, le ministre nous a informé que 72,000 cas ont été rejetés. Est-ce que le ministre peut nous dire quelles sont les raisons principales de ce rejet ?

Dr. Padayachy: Les raisons principales c'est que beaucoup de ces demandes émanent des personnes qui travaillent déjà. Donc, ça c'est la principale raison qu'on a reçu. Il y a aussi ceux qui touchent les pensions, les BRP par exemple. Ils ne sont pas éligibles, parce qu'ils sont retraités, donc ils ne sont pas éligibles et il y a d'autres raisons par exemple, ceux qui effectuent les études tertiaires à plein temps et qui ont fait cette demande. Donc, ce sont des

critères qu'on a établi par rapport à la mise en place de ce système. C'est sûr, je l'ai redit, on retravaille en permanence ce système et si jamais il faut améliorer, on l'améliora.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

COVID-19 VACCINES - COMPONENTS

(No. B/151) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether in regard to the Covid-19 vaccines administered in Mauritius as at to date and those awaiting delivery, he will state the components of each and every consignment thereof, indicating the –

- (a) name of those awaiting approval by the World Health Organisation;
- (b) cost in terms of insurance;
- (c) freight and/or any related costs, and
- (d) name of the local suppliers thereof, if any.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to the Private Notice Question on 23 March 2021, I had informed the House that Mauritius will be provided with vaccines of different brands and at different time intervals, either as donations or procured on a commercial basis as follows -

COVAX Facility		507,200 doses of which 24,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines have already been delivered on 21 April 2021;
Serum Institute of India		100,000 doses of Covishield vaccines. It is a donation that has already been received.
Serum Institute of India		100,000 doses of Covishield vaccines (procured, already received)
Serum Institute of India		200,000 doses of Covishield vaccines (on order, delivery to be confirmed)
Bharat Technologies		200,000 doses of Covaxin vaccines (already received)

Russian Development Investment Fund (RDIF), Russia		1,250,000 doses of Sputnik V vaccines (on order, delivery to be confirmed)
African Union		48,451 doses of Pfizer vaccines and 151,231 doses of Johnson and Johnson vaccines (on order, delivery to be confirmed)
China		100,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccines (Donation, awaiting delivery)

In addition to the above, my Ministry is also proposing to procure 500,000 Sinovac vaccines from China and 1,000,000 Sputnik V vaccines.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that approval of the World Health Organisation is still awaited for the following vaccines -

- (i) Sinopharm;
- (ii) Sinovac, and
- (iii) Sputnik V

As far as Covaxin is concerned, I am informed it has not applied for WHO approval as the vaccine has been approved by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), for emergency use. In Mauritius, the Trade and Therapeutics Committee and the Pharmacy Board have also approved the emergency use of the vaccine.

As regards part (b) and (c) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling the information requested.

With regard to part (d) of the question, there is no local supplier of any COVID-19 vaccines. My Ministry is procuring all the vaccines through diplomatic channels or through pooled procurement channels such as COVAX Facility/GAVI Alliance and Africa Medical Supplies Platform of the African Union.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, thank you. We are grateful to the Republic of India to be able to supply vaccines to us amid this war of vaccines that is going on around the World. Can I ask the hon. Minister, in regard to Covaxin, in which he said in the PNQ he has referred to just now, that a purchase order of 1,000,000 doses were made to the company for which

200,000 was already delivered and 100,000 already vaccinated and 100,000 awaiting second dose, whether like me, when I was preparing for my additional question, he has gone through international Press and see that there are some technical issues with regard to Covaxin reported 3 to 4 days ago? I here quote the New York Times which said that last week ...

Mr Speaker: Question!

Mr Osman Mahomed: My question has already stated and I am finishing it.

Mr Speaker: It is too long a question. It is a supplementary question.

Mr Osman Mahomed: ‘Last week, prosecutors in Brazil sought the immediate suspension of Covaxin purchases after the Government has signed a contract to buy 20 million doses.’

Mr Speaker: You are making a statement, you are taking question time for debate time, I don't know.

Mr Osman Mahomed: This is my question.

Mr Speaker: Do you have a supplementary question? Let me hear you.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether, he has taken cognizance, like I have just done in an international press, that there are some technical issues on Covaxin?

Mr Speaker: That's it!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, different countries are issuing different vaccines and they are issuing their own observations and their own conclusions. Mauritius will still be doing whatever we have done and if the time comes then we will decide about it.

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In regard to the first dose of vaccine that has already been administered to each and every one in Mauritius, can I ask the hon. Minister if he can give a guarantee to the House and the nation that the same vaccine will be administered as second dose to each and every one?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I give the guarantee to the House that the same vaccine will be administered for the second dose.

Mr Speaker: Oh! I can see the hon. Bodha there!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bodha: Thank you! Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - Mr Speaker, Sir, for your permission.

Mr Speaker: You start by Deputy Speaker!

Mr Bodha: Sorry, about that! May I ask the hon. Minister whether he can confirm that under the summary and finance assistance approved under the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund, a sum of Rs400 m. has already been spent at 18 March 2021, for the vaccination programme? The fact that we have already received a donation of a hundred thousand doses, can the Minister confirm this sum and can we have a breakdown of how the Rs400 m. has been spent as at date?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think this question should be addressed - I understand again, he has not been addressing questions to this side of the House. If he addresses me a proper question, I will give all the details of the amount being spent.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

(Interruptions)

Hon. X. L. Duval!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Since the Minister is asking for...

Mr Speaker: Hon. X. L. Duval, don't embarrass the mover of the question. Don't embarrass him!

Mr Osman Mahomed: We heard in and outside the House that there are difficulties to procure vaccines, so, can I ask the hon. Minister whether it is being envisaged now for some people to have their second doses, like he has just mentioned, while others will be awaiting for their first doses? And my specific question will be, how does that affect the herd immunity that the Government is targeting by, I think, August, if I am not wrong?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I understand from the hon. Member is when are we receiving the next dose of vaccines. The first dose of the vaccine for the next priority groups, with time, once we get the confirmation order of the vaccines that I have already mentioned, obviously, the vaccination campaign will keep on proceeding, and that will not affect our herd immunity - what we are proposing to do.

FLU VACCINATION CAMPAIGN 2021 & COVID-19 VACCINES

(No. B/152) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Flu Vaccination Campaign 2021, he will give details about how same is being carried out amid the COVID-19 pandemic and if there is any incompatibility issue with the Covid-19 vaccines.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, every year my Ministry undertakes the procurement of Anti-Influenza vaccines and to administer same to the target groups comprising elderly persons aged 60 plus and above, children with disabilities attending specialised schools and all inmates of charitable institutions and private homes.

In view of the number of positive cases and the extension of the confinement up to end of April 2021, my Ministry is currently working on a plan to administer flu vaccines to our senior citizens, children with disabilities and inmates of charitable institutions.

Mr Speaker, Sir with regard to the second part of the question, I am informed that according to the MAUNITAG (Mauritius National Immunisation Technical Advisory Group), elderly persons who have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccines can be administered the Anti-influenza vaccines.

Technical officers of my Ministry are working on a plan to facilitate vaccination of senior citizens to alleviate their hardship.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a senior citizen who is about to get his 1st dose of COVID-19 vaccine will be allowed to get an anti-influenza vaccine, two weeks or more prior to the 1st jab of his COVID-19 vaccine.

Likewise, a senior citizen, who has already been administered his first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, will be able to get his anti-influenza vaccine two weeks after his 1st COVID-19 vaccine dose, bearing in mind that there should also be a gap of two weeks prior to his 2nd dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Moreover, if the above criteria cannot be met, the senior citizens will get the possibility to get their anti-influenza vaccines two weeks after their 2nd dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for this year, the contract for the procurement of the vaccines has already been awarded and the first consignment of vaccines is awaited by 10 April 2021.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. With the COVID vaccines, first dose and second dose and with the 200,000 doses of anti-flu vaccines, it is going to be a lot of vaccination that is going to happen this year within the next three months or so. Can we have from the hon. Minister, a clear well thought out plan of how this is going to be dispensed, whether this is

going to be through caravan or whether it is going to be at the vaccination centre that has been placed for COVID, for the sake of clarity to the people?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, what is prevailing actually in Mauritius, we have already developed two different scenarios. First scenario - if the confinement is still here, the vaccination will be carried out door to door, as we did last year. So, vaccination will be carried out. And if there is no confinement, obviously, we will do the vaccines in a different set up.

Mr Speaker: Next Parliamentary Question!

MOSQUES - REFURBISHMENT - KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA - FUNDS

(No. B/153) 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 donation of funds by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the refurbishment of mosques, he will state if the funds have been used as at to date.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let me make an observation. The Minister has not yet answered and there is a supplementary question.

(Interruptions)

Very practical!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, no donation of funds has been made by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the refurbishment of mosques as yet. However, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has in August 2019 agreed to donate USD 6 million to Mauritius for the purpose of building of new mosques, renovating existing mosques and building Islamic and Arabic language schools.

The Saudi Authorities are considering to coordinate with the local stakeholders in Mauritius to identify and determine the nature of the assistance needed by the various mosques before coming up with an appropriate Memorandum of Understanding. We understand that they may soon send a delegation to Mauritius for a visual assessment of the requirement.

In fact, in a *note verbale* dated 16 February 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Deputy Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs Management of Islamic Institutions and Bodies have informed that Saudi Arabia would coordinate with the Government of Mauritius to identify the mosques that would need such assistance.

Thereafter, a detailed report evaluating the funding and the types of assistance required by the various mosques would be prepared. The Mauritian side has put forward the proposal for the Islamic Cultural Centre to set up a foundation which will be responsible for coordination between the Saudi Authorities and the mosques in Mauritius. The draft charter of the proposed foundation as well as a copy of the draft MOU in Arabic have been submitted to the Saudi Authorities.

Sir, our Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, His Excellency Showkutally Soodhun who is currently on mission abroad is scheduled to meet with the Saudi Minister of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance this week to follow up on the matter.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. I thank the new Minister of Foreign Affairs for his answer. Last year, I had asked a similar PQ with almost a similar answer, with a touch of difference, but can I ask him how does he reconcile the fact that on three occasions, three different answers are obtained? Hon. Soodhun publicly announced that, “*Mo finn amen Rs200 million in 2019.*” *Finn amené!*

Mr Speaker: No, now you are going to cross-examination!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, that’s ...

Mr Speaker: No, no! This is Parliamentary question and supplementary question. Put your question straightforward!

Mr Osman Mahomed: For the mosques and the fishermen, and now after two years, the Minister has said no donation. So, how can ...

Mr Speaker: If you don’t have a question...

Mr Osman Mahomed: No, I have!

Mr Speaker: Okay!

Mr Osman Mahomed: This is my question. I rephrase my question: how does he reconcile with the fact that over a period of two years we have different versions when, at the same time, funds that have been coming from Saudi Arabia

Mr Speaker: You made your point.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Sorry! Can I finish?

Mr Speaker: You made your point! Obviously, we are waiting for the questions to come!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, just one sentence. Are the funds that were promised have already arrived, like, for example, the swimming pool in Phoenix that was announced at the same time, it has materialised, but this one, after two years, a big zero?

Mr Ganoo: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, my answer is very clear. The question was about the donation of funds for the refurbishment of mosques and no mention of fishermen has been made in this question, so, I gave a clear reply. I am sure that the hon. Member must have understood clearly what I said.

Mr Speaker: Hon Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed between the Saudi Authorities and our counterpart, and if not, why as to date, it has not been signed?

Mr Ganoo: From the information I have, Mr Speaker, Sir, no MOU has been signed as yet between the two parties. What I said is that there is a draft MOU in Arabic which has been submitted to the Saudi Authorities.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary! Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister tell us whether the Foundation that he just mentioned, set up to manage the funds, and on what basis the Board members were chosen and who are the Board members?

Mr Ganoo: Well the information that I have, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that there has been a proposal on the Mauritian side and this proposal was put forward by the ICC to set up this Foundation which will be responsible for coordination between the Authorities and the mosques. And I must inform the hon. Member that, in fact, it was the Saudi Embassy in South Africa, at one time, that informed us that the Government of Saudi Arabia had requested that an appropriate responsible authority be identified in Mauritius with which the Embassy intended to sign a Memorandum of Understanding for the disbursement of the donation. So, this was the origin of the setting up of this Foundation. But, as far as the members of the Foundation, unfortunately, I do not have the information and I can pledge to

the House that I will find out who are the members of this Foundation and table the information to the Assembly.

Mr Speaker: Next Parliamentary Question!

HORIZON PARIS 2024 – MAURITIAN ATHLETES

(No. B/154) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to Horizon Paris 2024, he will state where matters stand as to the preparation of the Mauritian athletes therefor, indicating -

- (a) the criteria for the selection of the thirteen participating Mauritian athletes thereto; and
- (b) giving details of the provision, if any, of complementary mental, nutritional and medical expertise thereto for the progress and performance optimization thereof.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, let me give a brief overview of the project Horizon Paris 2024. In fact, it all started in January 2019 when the Horizon Paris 2024 Committee was set up having as slogan '*On Prend Le Paris*'.

The main objective of this project was to support, monitor and prepare Mauritian athletes until the 2024 Paris Olympics, providing them the opportunity to take part in one of the most important and prestigious sporting competition in the world.

The idea was to initiate before the beginning of a new Olympic cycle a project that would lead our best potential athletes to an Olympic podium in 2024. So, the Ministry decided to have a well-thought plan of action in order to provide the appropriate environment to our athletes in their quest for an Olympic medal in 2024.

Initially, only athletes of sports disciplines that could be competitive in 2024 Olympics were identified, but thereafter the Committee decided to provide the opportunity to all athletes irrespective of their sport to be selected on the basis of the following criteria -

- the athlete should be a potential medalist;
- the athlete should have a medal at continental level or be among the top 15 in the world in his/her sports discipline, and
- the athlete should be within the same age group as the previous Olympic champions with respect to his/her sports discipline.

In September 2019 National Sports Federations were invited to submit records of their athletes for consideration.

Consequently, a technical committee under the Chairmanship of Mr Vivian Gungaram was set up to examine the records of 43 athletes submitted by 10 national sports federations, including athletics, boxing, cycling, weightlifting, judo, rugby, handisports, canoe-kayak, archery and kite surf. To date, 13 athletes have been retained taking into consideration that this list is dynamic.

As the preparation of athletes for a period of four years requires the right setting and necessary funding, it was decided that the private sector should be involved in this project. In this respect, Mr Dominique Filleul, a well-known figure in the sports sector in Mauritius, was nominated as Chairman of the Horizon Paris 2024 Committee. I must say that, so far, he has done a marvelous job in finalising sponsorship agreements with a significant number of private companies through his own personal network.

I am satisfied that our selected athletes are being provided with the necessary medical and paramedical support, including the services of osteopaths, dentists, massage therapists, cardiologists, and physiotherapists. DNA and blood testing have been performed on our athletes so as to facilitate the design of optimised and personalised training schedules. Besides, our athletes are mentally coached twice a month. While some materials have been purchased in view of the Paralympic Games, the Horizon Paris 2024 team is presently conducting a needs analysis with respect to the materials and funds needed by two of our athletes that are presently overseas.

Mrs Tour: In his reply, the Minister stated that some materials have been purchased. Can we know which are these equipment and to whom they have been distributed?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, il y a ce que nous appelons les *wheelchair gloves* pour le handisport. So, five pairs of wheelchair gloves have been donated to Noemi Alphonse and also a foil for kite surf to Mr Jean de Falbaire from the Yachting Federation.

Mrs Tour: Can the hon. Minister inform the House what is the cost for the preparation of one athlete for such a competition?

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, preparing an athlete for the Olympics costs quite a lot amount of money for two cycles of four years, that is, eight years. The cost per athlete comes around Rs1.3 m. per year.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

TOKYO OLYMPIC GAMES – ATHLETES PARTICIPATION

(No. B/155) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the forthcoming Tokyo Olympic Games, he will state the –

- (a) names of the athletes who will be participating therein, and
- (b) measures taken to ensure the safety of the Mauritian athletes during their travel and stay in the Olympic village amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Mauritius Olympic Committee that Mr Richarno Colin and Merven Clair, both Boxers have already been qualified to participate in the Games.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Mauritius Olympic Committee that –

- (i) participation in any qualifying competition for the Tokyo Olympic Games, implies that he or she will have to abide strictly to the sanitary rules and regulations of the host country, and
- (ii) the Tokyo Organising Committee has put in place the following protocol to ensure the safety of participants for the forthcoming Olympic Games –
 - 3 days before traveling to Tokyo, each member of the delegation must do a PCR Test;
 - 3 weeks before travelling, the Tokyo Organising Committee will make available a COVID-19 Application to be downloaded on the smartphone of each delegate. Then, each delegate must register his/her temperature every day before travelling abroad and during his/her stay in the Olympic Village. Upon arrival in the Olympic Village, each member of the delegation will have to do another PCR Test;
 - During their stay in the Olympic Village, each member of the delegation will have to do the PCR Test regularly;
 - A Global Positioning System (GPS) is included in the said COVID-19 Application to facilitate the Organising Committee to trace members of the delegation, and

- All members of the delegation will have to travel only in vehicles dedicated to them. No recourse shall be made to public transport.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry, in collaboration with the Mauritius Olympic Committee, will ensure that all vaccination facilities be put in place to the Mauritian delegation, prior to departure.

Mrs Tour: May we know from the hon. Minister whether the two boxers have been vaccinated as at date and, in the negative, why not?

Mr Toussaint: Yes, the two boxers, Colin and Clair had already been vaccinated.

Mrs Tour: Can the hon. Minister state the number of persons who will form part of the delegation and eventually table a list of same?

Mr Toussaint: For the moment, Mr Speaker, Sir, this has not yet been finalised by the Mauritius Olympic Committee, so, as soon as it is done, this will be made public.

Mr Speaker: Next Parliamentary Question!

MORCELLEMENT PERMITS - APPLICATIONS

(No. B/156) **Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to *morcellement* permits, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to the number of applications therefor processed since a member of the Authority has been co-opted on the *Morcellement* Board, indicating if it is in presence of an application for the construction of a *morcellement* in a flood-prone area in Ste Croix and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

Mr Hurreeram: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Land Drainage Authority is a co-opted member of the *Morcellement* Board since November 2019. I am informed that 849 applications have been processed at its level for the period November 2019 to March 2021. Out of these 849 applications, 17 have not been approved favourably from a land drainage perspective. Applications which have not been approved are located within the confines of flood-prone areas and are crossed by natural drainage path. Such developments are viewed to accentuate the risk of inundations of the areas concerned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the LDA that at the region of Ste Croix, 3 *morcellement* applications have been rejected at the level of the *Morcellement* Board while a Letter of Intent for 3 other *morcellement* projects have been issued on 23 February 2016, 08

June 2018, 15 June 2018, respectively. On those 3 sites, it is noted with concern that there have been backfilling of natural water courses. At one of the sites, namely, *Société Vallée de Ste Croix*, construction works have started, but the promoter is not complying with the conditions as per its Letter of Intent. This has been reported to the Municipal Council of Port Louis on three occasions, namely, 28 December 2020, 06 January 2021 and 30 March 2021.

A Stop Order has been issued by the Municipal Council of Port Louis on the 01 April 2021, and this was not an April Fool, and I am informed that legal actions are being considered. The matter is being looked into closely together with the Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management and Municipal Council of Port Louis.

Mrs Tour: L'honorable ministre est-il au courant que les travaux se poursuivent sur place et cela malgré la notice d'arrêt servi au promoteur?

Mr Hurreeram: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, the promoter is continuing with the works on site and the Municipality of Port Louis has been informed and legal action is being envisaged.

Mr Speaker: Do you have a question?

Mrs Tour: *Yes.* Les habitants de Morcellement La Vallée ont longtemps et beaucoup souffert des inondations. L'honorable ministre peut-il nous informer s'il y a eu d'autres constructions au même endroit sur les cours d'eau naturels et peut-il nous dire quand ces permis de construction ont été octroyés?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already mentioned there have been three Letters of Intent and to which the conditions are not being respected. There has been one construction done straight on a land drainage path and that was issued by the Municipality of Port Louis on 30 June 2010. Unfortunately, we have noticed backfilling of natural drainage path and this has been causing flooding problem in this area of Ste Croix because the flooding, as per the record of the Land Drainage Authority, the first inundation occurred on 13 February 2017 and the flash flood occurred on 04 January 2018 and, since then, we have several dates where the risk region has been flooded. So, yes, the Land Drainage Authority is looking into it and remedial action will have to be taken together with the Municipality of Port Louis. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Ms J. Bérenger: Thank you. As we are talking about the Land Drainage Authority and construction on flood-prone areas, is the Minister aware of land drainage issues related to the application of construction for the Legend Hill Project on the slope of Tourelle Mountain and can the hon. Minister state whether his Ministry is overseeing problems related thereto with respect to the flood-prone area in the district? Thank you.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question relates strictly to the flood-prone area in Ste Croix. I'll request the Member to come with a substantive question.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQs B/185, B/186, B/187, B/188, B/196, B/197 and B/205 have been withdrawn.

Next question!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 4 - FLOOD-PRONE AREAS

(No. B/157) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the flood-prone areas in Constituency No. 4, Port Louis North and Montagne Longue, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the measures being taken to address same.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Land Drainage Authority has identified 289 flood-prone areas. Out of these, 22 flood-prone areas are located within the Constituency No. 4. I am further informed by the LDA, has determined and certified the region of *Morcellement La Vallée*, Le Cornu, Ste Croix, *Morcellement Raffray*, Terre Rouge and Cité Roma, Riche Terre as being high-risk areas where there could be risk of loss of life or damage of property or environment in the event of downfalls. Accordingly, the following projects have been earmarked by the National Development Unit for implementation in these regions –

- (i) Construction of 4 kms of drainage network at *Morcellement La Vallée* at an estimated amount of Rs140 m. The project is ongoing and has been completed up to 33%;
- (ii) Construction of a cut-off drain at foot of the mountain and drain network at *Morcellement Raffray* at an estimated amount of Rs100 m.;
- (iii) Demolition and re-construction of culvert, including cleaning and desilting of river;

- (iv) Provision of rock bun and construction of drain work at Cité Roma, Riche Terre at an estimated cost of Rs45 m., and
- (v) Upgrading of 1.2 km of Canal Anglais and construction of 2 km of concrete aprons at an estimated amount of Rs114.7 m. and the project is ongoing and has been completed up to 13%. Three more projects are currently being undertaken in the region of Morcellement Goolamally, Le Hochet Terre Rouge, Allée Père Laval, Ste Croix and Chitrakoot to the tune of Rs21.7 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the Local Authorities are as well implementing minor water accumulation problems in localities such as Cité La Cure, Ste Croix, Vallée des Prêtres to the tune of Rs2.6 m. Further, the Road Development Authority has also been addressing flooding with regard to water accumulation on classified roads. During the Financial Year 2021, three projects have been completed by the RDA namely the construction of footpaths, cross drains and roadside drains in the region of Vallée des Prêtres, Notre Dame and Crève Coeur to the tune of Rs24.8 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as such, it is noted that within Constituency No. 4, there are 16 drain projects being undertaken by the implementing agency which are valued at approximately Rs449.8 m. with a view to attenuate flooding in the flood prone regions and I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues elected in that Constituency for their support to achieve those works.

Mrs Tour: Can the Minister advice if upon completion of the mentioned projects, same are handed over to the relevant authorities and stakeholders for maintenance or even monitoring?

Mr Hurreeram: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, all the projects, after completion by the NDU mainly, are given to the Local Authorities for them to maintain whereas those being done by the RDA are being maintained by the RDA themselves.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mrs Tour: One of the causes of flooding is due to illegal dumping in the water courses. Can the hon. Minister advise whether he envisages a holistic approach maybe inclusive of educational or informational campaign to sensitise the population?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, the LDA is carrying out sensitisation campaigns before the start of each rainy season. Colleagues must have a notice of the campaign that has been happening on TV and other medias, and to this effect, the Land Drainage Authority has

embarked on an aggressive sensitisation campaign with our youngsters in colleges and primary schools, they being the opinion leaders and the leaders of tomorrow. With all these efforts and the collaboration of the public in Constituency No. 4, we are going to build resilience to inundation in the flood prone areas.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

TAMASSA HOTEL - DIALYSIS PATIENTS - TREATMENT

(No. B/158) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to patients undergoing dialysis treatment at the Souillac Hospital, he will state –

- (a) when and how their quarantine procedures and admission at Tamassa Hotel were done following the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak;
- (b) if they regularly receive the visits of doctors and, if so, indicate the date and time of the first visit since the start of the quarantine period, and
- (c) if dialysis treatment is being administered within the required time frame during the quarantine period and, if not, why not.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to PQ B/158 and PQ B/171 together. They are related to the same subject matter.

As regards part (a) of PQ B/158, I am informed that on 25 March 2021, the result of a PCR test done on the same day on one nursing staff attached to the Dialysis Unit at Souillac Hospital revealed that the staff was COVID-19 positive. Given that this staff was working at the Dialysis Unit at Souillac Hospital, PCR tests were carried out on all the patients and the staff of the Dialysis Unit of the hospital on 26 March 2021.

On that very same day, the PCR tests revealed that 7 staff including doctors, nurses, attendants and 15 patients were tested COVID-19 positive. The COVID-19 tested positive patients were all admitted to the ENT Hospital initially pending the disinfection of the New Souillac Hospital.

On 27 March 2021, after the disinfection of the whole Souillac Hospital, the COVID-19 positive dialysis patients were readmitted in Souillac Hospital for their treatment on the following day.

The other dialysis patients and other staff who were tested negative were quarantined at Tamassa Hotel on 26 March 2021 and are being regularly monitored.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that there were already 2 doctors posted at Tamassa Hotel on 26 March 2021 when the dialysis patients were admitted. On the same day, the visit of doctors and nurses started as from 15.30 hrs. Regular visits are effected daily by doctors and nurses at different time frames starting from 06.30 in the morning till late at night.

Furthermore, as from 30 March 2021, one additional doctor, who is conversant with dialysis, has been posted at Tamassa Hotel to monitor all the COVID-19 negative dialysis patients who are in quarantine. The doctor accompanies the patients daily from Tamassa Hotel to Souillac Hospital and back and stays with the patients until all dialysis sessions are completed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, four dialysis sessions are being carried out daily at Souillac Hospital. Three sessions for COVID-19 negative dialysis patients and one late session for COVID-19 positive dialysis patients. As from 28 March 2021, one additional doctor has been permanently posted at the Isolation Ward at Souillac Hospital to look after the COVID-19 positive patients who have their sessions in the night, that is, the last session at 20.00 hrs.

Furthermore, one Nephrologist from Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital visits all patients admitted at Souillac Hospital and Tamassa Hotel daily for follow up.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (c) of PQ B/158 and PQ B/171, I can assure the House that the dialysis treatment being provided to all patients is according to required protocols and according to the advice from the Nephrologist.

I must also add that a special diet protocol is being applied whereby a nutritionist from the hospital is in constant communication with the Catering Manager at Tamassa Hotel to ensure strict adherence to dietary requirements for dialysis patients.

Furthermore, psychological support is being provided by 2 psychologists posted at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital to ensure that dialysis patients do not suffer from any mental stress that may negatively impact their health. As an additional measure, my Ministry has also put in place a special arrangement since Friday 02 April 2021, to allow one relative to accompany and support the dialysis patients at Tamassa Hotel.

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. L'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire pourquoi des dispositions n'avaient pas été prises par son ministère le 26 mars pour assurer une admission convenable et moins stressante de ces patients à l'hôtel Tamassa qui étaient déjà en état de choc ? Je dois souligner qu'ils ont été forcé à rester pendant deux heures, de 20 heures

à 22 heures dans un autobus et il a fallu que j'intervienne personnellement auprès de l'honorable ministre pour qu'ils aient enfin accès à l'intérieur de l'établissement hôtelier, Le Tamassa, convertit en centre de quarantaine. Peut-on savoir pourquoi ils n'ont pas eu droit à une admission moins stressante?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the hon. Member that on that day, given the number of dialysis patients that we have and the different sessions being carried out for dialysis, it is obvious that this may take some time to get them admitted in a quarantine centre. I agree with him that there were some delays but at the same time we have to see the other aspects of the patients because dialysis patients have some special needs and we have to cater for all those needs. That is why there has been such a delay.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. J'apprends que le ministère autorise les proches qui le souhaitent à séjourner avec les patients dialysés après avoir signé un *consent form*. Le ministre peut-il déposer à l'Assemblée une copie du *consent form* et nous dire si c'est une décision raisonnable d'exposer un autre membre de la famille à la contamination du virus ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that we understand how the dialysis patients are fragile and at the same time, we have to cater for their needs. Families of dialysis patients have requested that they would wish to stay with their relatives and the Ministry has provided the option. If they will stay with their relatives, they will be exposed. And by signing the agreement, the relatives accept to stay with the patients and that is what we have been doing. We are doing that for the benefit of the dialysis patients, for their wellbeing.

Ms Ramyad: Can the Minister state the number of patients doing dialysis in quarantine and the number of medical staff posted, I mean nursing officers, health care assistants, general practitioners and specialists posted there for their treatment on a daily basis?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have the number of patients doing dialysis and staying at Tamassa Hotel. There are in all 52 patients, but for the staff, I can assure the hon. Member that we have adequate staff catering for the different needs of these patients.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, étant donné que nos hôpitaux font face à un manque important de personnels, ce qu'on a compris actuellement car plusieurs d'entre eux sont en quarantaine, est-ce que le ministre pourrait indiquer à la Chambre si son ministère envisage de faire appel aux personnels paramédical du privé ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, even personnel working in the private sector are also being tested positive. They are also facing the same problem that the public sector is facing. But I can assure the hon. Member that the hospitals, be it in the private or in the public sector, are coping with this situation and we are doing it properly.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. L'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire pourquoi, d'après les informations qui nous sont parvenues et malgré ce qu'il vient d'annoncer, aucune équipe médicale n'est sur place en permanence à l'hôtel Tamassa afin de veiller à ce que ces patients dialysés reçoivent les soins appropriés surtout en raison de la complexité de leur condition ? L'honorable ministre, peut-il nous dire pourquoi, malgré lui, maintenant, il vient d'affirmer ...

Mr Speaker: Do not expound your question?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in all the quarantine centres, there are medical staff, there are doctors who are working in there. We call them the quarantine officers who are permanently posted in quarantine centres, especially we know that those dialysis patients would require additional care, that is why there were two doctors posted at that centre since the very beginning. Ultimately, we have made arrangements to get additional doctors because at the same time, we also had to look after those patients who had been tested positive. In my reply, I have given details how the different operations have been carried out so as to satisfy those patients.

Mr Speaker: Next PQ!

MAURITIUS REVENUE AUTHORITY - SELF-EMPLOYED ASSISTANCE SCHEME - ARTISTS

(No. B/159) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the -

- (a) number of artists benefiting thereunder, since April 2020 to date, indicating the total quantum of funds disbursed, and
- (b) if some artists have not benefitted thereunder and, if so, indicate the reasons therefor.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, le *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* a été mis sur pied, comme je l'ai indiqué dans ma réponse à la question parlementaire B/150, en mars 2020 afin de fournir une aide financière aux travailleurs indépendants impactés par la pandémie de la Covid-19.

Parmi ces travailleurs indépendants éligibles figuraient les artistes ne pouvant pas exercer en raison du confinement décrété à cette période.

Le 31 mai 2020, le Gouvernement a par ailleurs pris la décision de maintenir cette aide financière aux travailleurs indépendants opérant dans le secteur touristique à compter du mois de juin 2020 et ce jusqu'en juin 2021.

Cela comprend notamment les artistes se produisant dans les hôtels et autres lieux touristiques.

M. le président, j'ai été informé par la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* que de la mi-mars 2020 à mai 2020, tous les travailleurs indépendants, y compris les artistes, ont pu bénéficier de l'aide financière dans le cadre du *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme*.

A partir de juin 2020, tout membre de la *Mauritius Society of Authors* (MASA) établie en vertu de la *Copyright Act* et répondant aux critères d'éligibilité du régime, a été considéré comme éligible à cette aide financière.

En outre, afin de ne pas pénaliser les artistes n'étant pas membre de la MASA, la MRA accepte de leur part les preuves démontrant qu'ils se produisaient effectivement dans des hôtels ou autres lieux touristiques.

En ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, en moyenne, 367 artistes ont reçu une allocation au titre du *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* pour la période allant de juin 2020 à février 2021.

Un montant total de R 17 millions a effectivement été déboursé à cet effet.

Pour rappel, pour le mois de mars 2021, un artiste se produisant dans le secteur du tourisme est en droit d'obtenir une aide financière totale de R 15,287.

Un artiste qui se produit en dehors du secteur du tourisme est lui en droit d'obtenir une aide financière totale de R 12,644.

M. le président, pour ce qui est de la partie (b) de la question, tous les artistes qui répondent aux critères d'éligibilité du *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* ont bénéficié de l'aide financière.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, je vous remercie. Je suis en présence des lettres qui ont été adressées à la MRA par une artiste elle-même, madame Joelle Coret, où il est question qu'un certain nombre d'artistes d'hôtels en particulier, soit ils n'ont jamais reçu ou ont des difficultés à obtenir leur *Self-Employed Assistance Allowance*. Donc, l'honorable ministre, peut-il nous dire d'abord s'il a déjà pris connaissance de ces lettres que je vais déposer d'ailleurs. Si, oui, peut-il indiquer les actions qui ont été prises une fois pour toute pour régler ce problème qui dure malheureusement afin de soulager ces artistes qui sont financièrement très affectés ?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour cette question supplémentaire. Non, je ne suis pas en présence de cette lettre et dès qu'il va me faire parvenir cette lettre, je vais prendre connaissance et je vais travailler avec la MRA pour trouver une solution à cette requête.

Mr Speaker: Next PQ!

SOLFERINO – INCINERATOR

(No. B/160) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the incinerator at Solferino, he will state -

- (a) when the -
 - (i) construction thereof was completed, and
 - (ii) equipment therefor installed, and
- (b) the name of the contractor for the -
 - (i) construction of the incinerator, and
 - (ii) installation of the equipment

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) (i) of the question, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix that the construction of the incinerator building at Solferino was completed on 12 June, 2020.

As regards the installation of the incinerator equipment, same was installed since 17 February, 2020.

However, it is to be noted that the testing and commissioning initially scheduled for March 2020 by the technical team of the supplier, namely Kanta Electricals India Limited, had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of the board back in March 2020 following the first visit to Mauritius in December 2019. With the assistance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, the technical team comprised of two technicians arrived in Mauritius on 28 November, 2020. After successful quarantine, the technical team started their assignment and the incinerator had already been tested. However, its commissioning which was scheduled for 19 March 2021 had been postponed due to the present COVID-19 confinement. As you know, we went to lockdown on 10 March 2021.

For part (b) (i) of the question, I am informed by the Municipal Councillor of Vacoas/Phoenix that following an open advertised bidding exercise for the construction of the building to house the incinerator, the contract was awarded to Ganessen Construction Ltd.

With regard to part (b) (ii) of the question, my Ministry has invited bids through the EXIM Bank of India as the project is being funded under the Indian Line of Credit. The contract was awarded to Kanta Electricals India Ltd which was the only bidder and whose bid was found to be responsive. Moreover, a due diligence exercise was conducted by the EXIM Bank of India.

Mr Lobine: Can we know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister who is the local representative of Kanta Electricals India in Mauritius?

Dr. Husnoo: The local representative is Steam House represented by Mr Lafraisiere.

Mr Speaker: Next PQ!

VACOAS/PHOENIX - SCAVENGING UNIT - PCR TESTS

(No. B/161) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the employees working in the scavenging unit at the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to if, as at to date, they have been –

(a) made to undergo PCR Tests;

- (b) administered with the Covid-19 vaccine, and
- (c) provided with items of special Personal Protective Equipment.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Chief Executive of the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that the PCR testing exercise were conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness on 12, 13 and 14 March 2021 for employees of the Scavenging Unit at the SMF Quarters in Vacoas. It is to be noted that out of 262 employees, a total of only 114 employees have undergone a PCR test whereas the remaining employees were unwilling to undergo the PCR despite being requested to do so.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with respect to part (b) of the question, in line with the strategy of the Government to have all the frontliners of the Public Sector vaccinated as a priority, arrangements were made for all frontliners of Local Authorities to be vaccinated during the first week of the National Vaccination Programme. This category includes the Scavenging Unit of all Municipal and District Councils.

Accordingly, employees of the scavenging section of the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix were scheduled to be vaccinated on 15 and 16 March 2021. Out of the 262 employees, only 134 employees were administered the Covid-19 vaccine. The remaining employees did not turn up for vaccination.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed that the protective equipment include double insulated layer rubber gloves, fluorescent waist coat, rubber boots and rain suits are provided to each refuse collector on an annual basis and for the Financial Year 2020-2021, same were provided to all of them in August 2020. Moreover, with the resurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic, refuse collectors have been provided with reusable masks, reusable overalls and sanitizer per scavenging team. In addition, the Personal Protective Equipment are reissued as and when required especially upon wear and tear.

Mr Lobine: Is the hon. Vice-Prime Minister aware that only two masks per month are being provided to those employees and they are working in very difficult and dirty conditions? Is it sufficient to provide them with only two masks per month?

Dr. Husnoo: I know, I have just mentioned, two reusable masks are being provided and, if need be, once they make a case to the Health and Safety Officer, they are given more masks.

Ms Bérenger: Je pense que nous sommes tous d'accord que les éboueurs sont nos héros de l'ombre qui assure notre bien-être au quotidien en ramassant nos déchets. Le ministre n'est-il pas d'accord que eux aussi mériteraient l'allocation de R 15,000 qui été alloué aux *frontliners*?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is not part of the question, please.

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président. M. le président, j'irai dans la même ligne que mon collègue, l'honorable Khushal Lobine. M le ministre, c'est un fait que nous recevons pas mal d'appels tous les jours. Les éboueurs de Vacoas-Phoenix tombent dans la zone rouge. Tous les jours, ils nous appellent en ce qui concerne les équipements. C'est effectivement le cas comme disait mon collègue, ils ont que deux paires de gants et deux masques. Deux ! Depuis le dernier confinement à ce jour, ils n'ont pas changé leurs habits. Donc, s'il vous plaît, si vous pouvez intervenir auprès de la Municipalité pour dire au moins la vérité, pas nous raconter ce qu'ils disaient.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just replied, they are given two reusable masks but if this is not sufficient, they contact the Health and Safety Officer, they will be given more masks. I have just replied that.

Mr Speaker: Next PQ!

SOUILLAC HOSPITAL & JAWAHARLAL NEHRU HOSPITAL, AMBULANCE SECTION - COVID-19 POSITIVE STAFF

(No. B/162) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the nursing officer working at the Souillac hospital and the spouse thereof working at the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital in the Ambulance section who had been tested Covid-19 positive, he will state –

- (a) when were they so tested, and
- (b) if they were vaccinated and, if so, when.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the female nursing officer working at Souillac Hospital was tested Covid-19 positive on 25 March 2021 after she went for a screening test as she was having some mild symptoms. The spouse of the female nursing officer was, thereafter, contacted by the Contact

Tracing Team, as per the protocol for contact tracing of my Ministry for a nasopharyngeal swab. The test result of the latter was Covid-19 positive on 26 March 2021.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that the female Nursing Officer has not been vaccinated. However, the spouse of the Nursing Officer was vaccinated on 05 February 2021.

It should be noted that after the PCR test, an in-depth study of the PCR results revealed that the spouse of the Nursing Officer only had traces of the virus, and that the amount of virus he had in his body was not sufficient for him to be infectious.

The result might be explained by the fact that as the spouse was vaccinated, he was protected from infection and the vaccine has prevented the multiplication of the virus to which he was exposed to. He was, therefore, non-infectious for those around him.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

Mr Lobine: Is it not the case, hon. Minister that this could be a good case study to review the protocols that are in place with regard to those working in those hospitals and health departments?

Dr. Jagutpal: Thank you, hon. Member. This is a case study for us to see even those who have been vaccinated. We have conducted the test, the test also revealed the lower side of infectious and that would help the Ministry to change the protocol in the days, in the weeks to come.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Woochit!

Mr Woochit: What measures are being taken to encourage nurses island wide who have not been vaccinated against Covid-19 to receive such vaccination and when they estimate all nurses will be vaccinated?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, following what has happened recently, the Ministry has given the opportunity for the staff working in the different hospitals and in the different health centres to get vaccinated. I do not have the figures now. Last week, from Tuesday to Saturday, they have been given priority and I believe many of them - because in the beginning we were around 30% of the health personnel being vaccinated, the figures will show that we have already crossed 50% to 60% of staff being vaccinated.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. Can I ask the hon. Minister, he mentioned a very interesting point concerning the amount of virus within an individual subject that that amount may cause further infections, I am sure he is talking about...

Mr Speaker: Shorten your speech!

Dr. Aumeer: The question is: he is definitely talking about cycle threshold and whether he is now using that as a concept to evaluate the infectivity of post quarantine transmission?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member rightly pointed out that the Ministry is working on the degree of positivity that can be infectious, whatever. I have some documents related to that. Various recognised and published studies also show that the vaccines directly contribute to drastically reduce the viral load in case of infection. The viral load is the amount of virus per millimetre cube of a collected secretion sample. In all viral diseases, it is important that a certain amount of the virus is injected so as to allow the vaccinated person to be infected. If the amount of inoculated virus is above a given threshold, the person cannot be infected and this even if the person is in contact with the virus. I believe this is it.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad, next question!

**MINISTER OF EDUCATION, TERTIARY EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY - ADVISERS**

(No. B/163) 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 advisers attached to her Ministry since November 2019, she will state in each case the –

- (a) names;
- (b) date and terms and conditions of appointment;
- (c) working conditions, and
- (d) qualifications and experience held.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am circulating the required information in respect of the advisers attached to my Ministry since November 2019.

Dr. Gungapersad: Hon. Vice-Prime Minister, may I know how many out of these advisers sit as Board Members in different councils, organisations which fall under the purview of your Ministry?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: None of them, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Sorry, Mr Suresh Munbodh is in fact a Board Member of the UDM.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

"NATATION SCOLAIRE" – 'BASSINS D'APPRENTISSAGE'

(No. B/164) 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 programme of "*Natation Scolaire*" which involved the construction of '*bassins d'apprentissage*' in primary schools, she will state –

- (a) the number thereof built as at to date, indicating the –
 - (i) cost thereof, and
 - (ii) name of the contractor/s thereof, and
- (b) if a comprehensive report thereon is available.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, on 23 January 2017, the "*Natation Scolaire*" Project was launched by the Prime Minister. This Project is being implemented in collaboration with the Mauritius Sports Council. The main objective of the project is to teach swimming to pupils of Grade IV so as to prepare them in the skills of swimming with the goal of making them autonomous swimmers. We must not forget that we live in an island and we must ensure that the young people learn to swim and develop their survival skills.

The Project which initially concerned 30 primary schools, selected within an accessible range of the nine swimming pools of the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, has now been rolled out in 234 primary schools throughout the island. Since 2017 as at date, some 40,052 pupils have participated in the Project. To ensure that a larger

number of pupils benefit from the programme, in the Budget 2018-2019 it was announced that four '*bassins d'apprentissage*' will be constructed, one in each zone.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the letters of award for the construction of three '*bassins d'apprentissage*', namely at Plaines des Papayes Government School, Melrose Government School and Permal Soobrayen Government School have been issued as at date. I must draw the attention of the House that the tenders were launched on three occasions and had to be cancelled due to non-responsiveness of bids. The contract agreements for the construction of '*bassins d'apprentissage*' at Plaines des Papayes Government School and Permal Soobrayen Government School have not been signed yet.

Yet, in view of pending submission of proper insurance policies and performance guaranties. That of Melrose Government School has been awarded for a contract value of Rs37 m. to Kiften Enterprise Ltd. For Cascavelle Government School, the Project could not be implemented earlier as major changes had to be made in the design in view of the relocation of the Project. The bid documents are now ready for launching, but had to be postponed due to the lockdown.

With regard to part (b) of the question, we do not have any comprehensive report at this stage.

Dr. Gungapersad: Given that rebidding had to take place, did the Ministry of Education carry out a feasibility study, a good planning prior to inviting bids, initially?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, this was in fact done, but, as I have said earlier, we had to re-launch the bids because we did not have responsive bidders.

Mr Speaker: Next Parliamentary Question!

STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - MULTI-PURPOSE HALLS

(No. B/165) **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 construction of multi-purpose halls in the six State Secondary Schools, scheduled to start during financial year 2016-2017, she will state the –

(a) initial cost thereof, and

(b) reasons for the non-completion thereof as at to date.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact the provision made in the 2016-2017 Budget was meant for the planning and preparation fees for gymnasium projects in six State Secondary Schools. As such, actual construction works were expected to start in the financial year 2017-2018.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact bids for two projects, namely Goodlands SSS and Floreal SSS, were launched in January 2017. However, no responsive bids were received. Two additional bidding documents for Sodnac SSS and Ebène SSS were submitted to the CPB in 2018 for launching. However, since no responsive bids were received during discussions held between CPB, representatives of the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development and my Ministry, the CPB advised to proceed with a traditional mode of procurement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the second reason for the delay in the implementation of the multi-purpose hall projects was that the Ministry of National Infrastructure emphasised the need for geotechnical investigations to be carried out and these investigations were not factored in the initial timeframe. This involved further delay for procurement procedures with respect to the geotechnical investigations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another reason for the delay is the expansion of the scope of works. Initially, the project consisted of only the provision of a gymnasium. However, as the decision was taken by the Ministry to proceed with a traditional procurement at the level of MNI, this provided us with the opportunity to include other facilities which would provide long-term benefits to the school users and community in the vicinity. New features such as outdoor playgrounds, football grounds, volleyball pitches, bus lay-bys, parking bays and new access facilities were added to the Project. As at date, the bidding documents have been finalised for two projects, namely Goodlands SSS and Ebène SSS, and will be launched shortly. The remaining four Projects are at the design stage at the MNI and it is expected that the latter will require at least eight months to finalise all designs and bidding documents for the same to be launched.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Dr. Gungapersad: May I know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, what is the amount representing liquidated damages for delays that have been imposed on the contractors causing unnecessary delays?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir, the awards were not done yet, so, no liquidated damages!

Mr Speaker: Next Parliamentary Question!

MELVILLE - GOODLANDS LINK ROAD PROJECT

(No. B/166) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Melville-Goodlands Link Road, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) when and to whom the initial tender was awarded and the cost thereof, and
- (b) why the project was never completed, indicating if consideration will be given for the completion thereof, giving details thereof.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to PQ B/166. I am informed that a work's order for the upgrading of Melville-Goodlands Link Road, commonly known as Kali Road, over a length of about 1 km was issued to Gamma Construction Ltd. on 25 October 2017 for an amount of Rs5.5 m., including VAT. Works started in December 2017 and were to be completed in March 2018. However, during execution of works, signs of major distress were noted along several sections of the road and the road even collapsed at one particular section. Consequently, the road was partly closed to traffic in view of the hazard it represented. It was observed that the cause of distress and collapse was due to the fact that the road structure was built on dry rock fill embedment, reaching about 5 metres at some places. As such, simply upgrading the road, as initially envisaged, would have not been adequate to permanently stabilise the road.

The Work's Order issued to Gamma Construction Ltd was therefore cancelled as permanent stabilisation of the road was outside the scope of works of the initial project.

Subsequently, in view of the complexity of the works to be carried out, the National Development Unit appointed Servansingh Jadav & Partners Consulting Engineers Ltd. as Consultant in July 2018 for identification of appropriate solutions for full upgrading of the road. As per the Consultant's recommendation, the cost of remedial work for the whole road was estimated at about Rs40 m. In view of the budgetary constraint, the National Development Unit decided in the first instance to proceed with remedial works at the

collapsed section. This work was completed in September 2019 and the road was made operational.

The second phase of the works which comprised construction of retaining walls, upgrading of the road surface, associated work estimated at Rs30 m., is scheduled to be carried out during the next financial year, subject to availability of funds.

I am happy to inform that with the collaboration of my two colleagues, the Minister Teeluck and PPS Anjiv Ramdhany, we have revisited the priorities of the project in the constituency and given that we have received additional fund from Ministry of Finance under the COVID Fund, we will be in a position to issue the work's order very soon to build this road again. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. David!

WAKASHIO OIL SPILL - FISHING RESTRICTION - DURATION

(No. B/167) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to fishing restriction following the Wakashio oil spill, he will state the duration thereof and the respective number of registered fishermen, applicant fishermen and fishmongers who received a monthly solidarity grant of Rs10,200, indicating the source of funding therefor.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the grounding of the MV Wakashio at Pointe d'Esny on 25 July 2020 and the ensuing oil spill on 06 August 2020, fishing restrictions were imposed in the regions affected by the oil spill as per Government Notice No. 1148 of 2020.

To compensate the Fisher Community for their economic loss, Government decided to pay a monthly solidarity grant of Rs10,200 to registered artisanal fishers, registered fishmongers and applicant fishers in the affected regions for not being able to carry out their fishing and related activities. Some 613 off-lagoon and 18 in-lagoon registered artisanal fishers, 174 registered fishmongers and 210 applicant fishers concerned were paid solidarity grant amounting to around Rs45 m. for the period from August 2020 to 11 December 2020 from the Special Fund Account created by the Treasury under the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. As at date, the amount of around Rs45 m. has already been reimbursed by the insurer of MV Wakashio, that is, the Japan (Protection and Indemnity) P&I Club.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that, following the upliftment of the restriction for off-lagoon fishing as from 12 December 2020, my Ministry has received representation from off-lagoon fishers regarding difficulties encountered by them for obtaining live baits from the lagoon in the affected region to carry out their fishing activities. Government has given due consideration to the representation made by the fishers and a meeting was chaired by the Attorney General with, *inter alia*, the insurer of MV Wakashio. After discussion, the Japan (Protection and Indemnity) P&I Club eventually agreed to the extension of the solidarity grant to the registered artisanal fishers, registered fishmongers and applicant fishers until the resumption of in-lagoon fishing.

An additional amount of approximately Rs38 m. was therefore disbursed to the registered artisanal fishers, fishmongers and applicant fishers as solidarity grant for the period from 12 December 2020 to end of March 2021. The reimbursement of the amount of approximately Rs13 m. by the Japan Protection P&I Club is under process. Therefore, a total amount of around Rs83 m. has been paid as solidarity grant to the registered artisanal fishers, fishmongers and applicant fishers in the affected region as solidarity grant for the period from August 2022 to March 2021. Therefore, the duration for the restriction of fishing activities started as from 10 August up to 29 March 2021, that is, around eight months.

I am tabling a summary of the solidarity grant paid. Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that the solidarity grant paid to the registered artisanal fishers, registered fishmongers and applicant fishers is only part of the compensation to be claimed from the insurer of MV Wakashio. My Ministry is working out the remaining amount to be paid to them based on the monthly average catch for the period August to December for the last three years to account for their economic loss which will be submitted to the insurer for compensation.

Mr David: Merci, M. le président. J'ai lu le communiqué en date du 25 janvier 2021 de l'assureur du MV Wakashio, mentionné par le ministre, Japan P&I Club et j'ai lu dans le communiqué qu'il y a, à ce jour, 3,000 demandes individuelles de réclamation qui ont été reçues et déjà traitées par des experts du Japon et de Maurice. Alors, vous l'avez mentionné, M. le ministre, dans votre réponse préalable, pouvez-vous nous dire sur ces 3,000 demandes, combien concernent les pêcheurs et les banians, quel est le montant total d'indemnisation et quand ces indemnisations seront payées ?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will invite the hon. Member to come with a specific question because his question is related only to fishermen, registered fishermen, fishmongers and applicant fishers.

Regarding the other claim that has been submitted, it has been done through the e-platform, that is, the 3,267 claims, and I understand that 290 have been paid so far. I just have part of the information. So, if he comes with a specific question, I will answer. I did answer only for the fisher community.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ B/184 has been withdrawn. The time is already over!

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

SAFE CITY PROJECT – FACE RECOGNITION COMPONENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a Statement to make in response to a supplementary question raised by hon. Richard Duval following my reply to Parliamentary Question B/72 at the Sitting of 30 March 2021.

In his supplementary question, hon. Richard Duval sought confirmation as to whether the Face Recognition Component of the Safe City Project had already been activated.

I have sought clarifications from the Commissioner of Police and I have been informed that the Face Recognition Technology is one of the components of the cameras installed under the Safe City Project. It is a biometric software application which is capable of uniquely identifying or verifying a person by comparing and analysing patterns based on the person's facial contours. This technology will be used for tracking the movements of habitual criminals, wanted persons and missing persons. The pictures of these categories of people will be uploaded on the system database by trained and authorised Police Officers.

Only then will the Face Recognition Technology component of the Safe City Cameras be put to use.

As at now, the Face Recognition component is not yet operational as it is at a testing and validation stage.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

NEW SOUILLAC HOSPITAL - HEALTH PERSONNEL - COVID-19 CONTAMINATION

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, following the reference made to the three Health Personnel, namely Mr B., Mr B. and Mr A. by the hon. Leader of the Opposition during this morning's Private Notice Question, I wish to make the following Statement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the patient R.M.R. came from India in a bad state of health following pre-existing health condition on 09 January 2021 after a failed liver transplant. The patient was admitted to New Souillac Hospital on 10 January 2021 and was tested imported positive for COVID-19 on 17 January 2021. The patient was transferred to ENT Hospital for treatment on 17 January 2021.

On 24 January 2021, the patient collapsed and passed away at 05:55hrs in the morning.

The death was not accounted as a COVID-19 death as per the definition of WHO, given that the late patient was suffering from other health problems.

The son of the late patient R.M.R., Mr H.R., 24 years old, who accompanied him for overseas treatment, was also tested imported positive on 17 January 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the three Healthcare Personnel from Ministry of Health and Wellness, namely Mr B., Mr B. and Mr A. who worked at isolation ward with the late patient R.M.R. at New Souillac Hospital, were quarantined at Pointe aux Sables Recreational Centre on 20 January 2021, as per Protocol. They were tested positive during their quarantine on 24 January 2021. That same day, they were transferred to treatment centre at ENT.

All members of the staff were quarantined at Pointe aux Sables Recreational Centre along with the three positive staff. Their contacts, a total of 20 persons stayed on a prolonged isolation period of 14 days at Pointe aux Piments Recreational Centre.

Sequencing of the virus of the late patient R.M.R., his son Mr H.R. and Dr. A. (staff of New Souillac Hospital) was effected in South Africa. The samples were sent on 04 February 2021 and the results were received on 06 March 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the samples for the first 34 detected local cases as from 05 March 2021 were sent for analysis in South Africa on 13 March 2021 and the results were received on 24 March 2021.

It was found that the lineage of the late patient R.M.R., his son Mr H.R. and Dr. A. is not the same as the one currently in circulation in Mauritius.

Further investigation and sequencing is being carried out on 59 samples of incoming passengers and 101 samples from current local cases which have been sent to South Africa on 31 March 2021, in our quest for research on patient zero.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the statement made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition to the effect that information on the three Healthcare Personnel infected by the Virus was not communicated to the public, I am hereby tabling a copy of the two Press Releases dated 25 and 27 January 2021 respectively, which were issued to the Press through Government Information Service informing about the contamination of the three Healthcare Personnel.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PUBLIC BILL

First Reading

THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT BOARD (AMENDMENT)

BILL

(NO. V OF 2021)

On motion made and seconded, the Construction Industry Development Board (Amendment) Bill (No. V of 2021) was read a first time.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 20 April 2021 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned. Adjournment matters! MP Mrs Navarre-Marie!

MATTERS RAISED

(4.28 p.m.)

SCHOOLS - *KREOL MORISIEN* - OPTIONAL SUBJECT

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse à la vice-Première ministre et ministre de l'Education et concerne le sort du *Kreol Morisien* comme langue optionnelle dans nos écoles.

Introduite dès 2012 comme langue optionnelle parmi d'autres langues, le *Kreol Morisien* a connu un intérêt certain. A ce jour, 9,000 élèves étudient cette langue ; 3,000 au primaire et 6,000 au secondaire, soit en grades 7, 8, et 9. L'année dernière, 1,200 élèves de grade 10 ont exprimé leur intention d'étudier le *Kreol Morisien*, avec l'intention de l'apprendre en *SC* et *HSC* éventuellement. Or, il paraît que le *Kreol Morisien* ne sera pas *examinable* en *SC* et *HSC*. Tout le monde est dans le flou, dans un flou total ; les élèves, de même que les établissements scolaires. Le Cabinet a annoncé vendredi dernier la mise sur pied d'un comité présidé par le Premier ministre. Mais entre-temps, qu'advient-il de ces enfants ?

Mr Speaker: Put your request!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Est-ce qu'il y a vraiment une volonté sur le sujet par le gouvernement ? Pourquoi un comité maintenant alors que les cours ont commencé depuis 2012 ? Gouverner, n'est-ce pas prévoir, M. le président ? N'est-ce pas là une discrimination flagrante...

Mr Speaker: You are making a speech! You are making a speech!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: ...envers ces enfants qui ont opté pour le *Kreol Morisien* comme langue optionnelle ?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member! Hon. Member!

SC EXAMINATIONS - FEES

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Ma deuxième requête concerne le paiement des frais d'examen pour le *SC*. Un des critères...

Mr Speaker: This is a specific matter!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: ...pour bénéficier des subsides...

Mr Speaker: I think you are being confused! You are confusing yourself!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: ... est le taux de présence de l'étudiant pendant l'année.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, I suspend the Sitting for some minutes!

At 4.30 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 4.38 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please remain seated! MP Mrs Arianne Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci, M. le président, j'ai fait mon point. Je fais donc un appel à la ministre pour que les informations nécessaires, les informations appropriées soient transmises aux élèves et aux établissements scolaires concernant le *Kreol Morisien* aux examens de SC/HSC, et je fais également une requête à ce que les critères d'exemption, les critères de taux de présence...

Mr Speaker: This is a policy decision! You should know your Standing Orders, Madam! This is policy decision; it does not come within Adjournment matters! Bear with me! I am a human being like you! Next! I move on! Hon. Armance!

Mr Armance: Merci.

An hon. Member: *La ministre n'a pas répondu.*

Mr Speaker: If you want to reply Minister; I don't know what you are going to reply.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: To the first one.

Mr Speaker: I have already ruled!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mais qu'est-ce qui se passe !

Mr Speaker: Hon. Armance!

Mr Armance: She will reply?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Armance! I move on! Hon. Lobine!

Mr Armance: I will intervene, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is ok. I was asking if she was going to answer.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine! Hon. Lobine, go ahead!

CITÉ PALMERSTON, PHOENIX – DRUG PEDDLERS

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you. My request is addressed to the hon. Prime Minister. It concerns the inhabitants of Cité Palmerston, Phoenix, Clairfonds respectively. They are very disturbed, hon. Prime Minister, with regard to the drug peddlers operating with extreme latitude in these regions. The NGOs and *Forces Vives* have made several representations to the Phoenix Police Station, but to no avail. Could you please use your good office to request the Commissioner of Police to take appropriate actions in these regions, please?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course, I will, especially in cases of drug trafficking and drug peddlers. I request the hon. Member to provide me with specific information.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

QUARANTINED FAMILIES - DOMESTIC ANIMALS

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au ministre de l'Agro-industrie et de la Sécurité alimentaire. Nous savons tous qu'en ce moment, dans certaines familles, tous les membres de la famille partent en quarantaine, et certaines sont obligées de laisser leurs animaux domestiques seuls à la maison. Et nous connaissons la détresse de ces animaux et aussi de la famille ; un stress pour la famille, qui part, tout le monde, pour 15 jours de quarantaine. Alors je fais un appel de la part de tous ces amis des animaux auprès du ministre, afin de voir s'il serait possible de trouver une solution pour ces animaux domestiques « abandonnés pendant 14 jours à la maison.»

Merci.

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin): Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for raising this matter. There are two limbs to this issue.

First, it concerns those animals where the breeders have a breeding ground a bit further from their residence, sometimes in another locality. For them, we are doing it on a case-to-case basis with the help of their relatives. In case there are no relatives, then, special arrangements are being made. I have here in mind the areas in the red zones, namely Canot and Dubreuil.

The second limb, insofar as the other animals are concerned, namely pets, perhaps, which the hon. Member has in mind, this is a new situation which is arising and we are having a fresh look at it, how we can come to their rescue, whether with the help of the NGOs or with the MSAW. I shall keep the hon. Member and the House informed as to the measures being taken.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: MP hon. Ms Bérenger!

CRÈCHES & NURSERIES - REOPENING - PROTOCOL

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci. J'aimerais attirer l'attention de la ministre de l'Égalité des genres et du Bien-être de la famille sur la situation des parents qui doivent reprendre le chemin du travail et qui n'ont personne pour garder leurs enfants, parce que les crèches et les écoles sont fermées et parce qu'ils n'ont pas le droit non plus de véhiculer leurs enfants s'ils ont des parents qui sont disposés à prendre leurs responsabilités. Encore faut-il en avoir ! Les employeurs mettent beaucoup de pression pour une présence physique sur le lieu de travail, et encore une fois, cette année, comme l'an dernier, les femmes sont plus à risque de perdre leur emploi, parce qu'on le sait, les femmes ont tendance à plus se sacrifier, professionnellement parlant, pour garder les enfants. Je demande donc à la ministre de faire attention et de bien vouloir s'assurer que les femmes ne subissent pas davantage et injustement le poids de cette crise.

Merci.

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for raising the matter in the House. I can reassure the hon. Member that my Ministry is working in collaboration with other colleague Ministers to draft out a very rigid protocol when it comes to the reopening of crèches and nurseries. We have obviously taken into account all the lessons that we have learnt for last year, but it has to be appreciated that this year, the situation is different. So, the protocol for la *réouverture des crèches* is being reviewed, is being reinforced and, hopefully, we will be able to present that very soon.

Mr Speaker: MP hon. Mrs Tour!

TAGORE LANE, LE HOCHET - RICHE TERRE - METAL GRILL SLABS - THEFT

Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to Dr. the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government, Disaster and Risk Management. Two metal grill slabs have been stolen from a pavement of Tagore Lane in Le Hochet, Riche Terre. Grateful if the Minister would kindly have these replaced promptly as it is actually a real hazard for the moment.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government, Disaster and Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will discuss with the District Council of Pamplemousses to look into it.

AGALEGA - TROCHETIA SHIP - EXPATRIATE WORKER - ISOLATION

Mr S. Mohamed (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to raise an issue, which is to the address of the hon. Prime Minister and Minister responsible for Outer Islands. I have received, as an elected Member for Constituency No. 3, where Agalega is within our Constituency - I am sure my friends elected Members from that Constituency have also received that - this very same complaint that, yesterday, there was a ship called Trochetia that stopped at Agalega and one of the passengers, who is an expatriate worker, was put in isolation in the ship by orders of the ship captain.

The reason why he was put in isolation is precisely because they had strong doubts that he was suffering from the symptoms of COVID-19 in spite of a negative test that had been effected upon him as confirmed by the hon. Minister of Health during one of his Press conferences. There was a request by the inhabitants that all those on the ship should not have been allowed to come on shore unless and until there were reassurances, not from a rapid test which there, but a proper test carried out to ensure that none of the passengers were carriers of the COVID-19 virus. Unfortunately, none of their requests were taken into consideration, all of the passengers disembarked and there was even a demonstration to that effect yesterday on Agalega. So, my request directed to the Ministers concern, but mainly the hon. Prime Minister, is to ensure that all passengers at disembarkation, not only at embarkation, all passengers disembarking at Agalega are tested and quarantine facilities also be put there because there cannot be double standard treatment, where if Rodrigues people can't go ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You already put your request, let him reply!

Mr Mohamed: ...why is it that Agalega should be exposed?

The Prime Minister: There is no double standard. As usual, this hon. Member comes with all sorts of ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: There is no debate in the House!

The Prime Minister: ... allegations to say that there is double standard.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No debate!

The Prime Minister: There is no double standard. First of all, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Adjournment matter is not a debate!

Mr Mohamed: I am not debating, it is double standard!

The Prime Minister: What double standard?

Mr Speaker: But listen! You have put a request, you do not want to listen?

The Prime Minister: When you were speaking, I kept quiet. Can you at least have the decency to listen?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Now, you are putting the House on fire, my dear!

An hon. Member: *Met sa dehors!*

Mr Speaker: What are you doing?

(Interruptions)

You are shouting!

Mr Mohamed: *Twa tone commencer!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: I am not shouting, I am trying to...

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

You put a request, listen! Have the decency of listening!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: You withdraw that word, 'double standard'.

Mr Mohamed: I will withdraw the word 'double standard' and I will listen to you!
Happy!

The Prime Minister: Mr speaker, Sir, first of all, there is a protocol which is already established with regard to any passenger leaving Mauritius to go to Agalega, to make sure that there is no risk of contamination, especially for Agalega because Agalega is Covid free.

Now, as far as these workers are concerned, they came to Mauritius and they were quarantined for at least 14 days. They were all tested and we made sure that there was no positive case amongst any one of these workers. They boarded the ship, and they went to Agalega. There was no reason at all - I say, again, there was no reason at all why there was a protest, an organisation of this *manifestation* to try to prevent those workers from landing in Agalega. I can assure the House that we have taken all the precautions, and tests were carried out in Mauritius, and there was no positive case.

Now, with regard to the reference that the hon. Member has made to the effect that the person was isolated, let me tell him that, in spite of the fact that they were all tested, there was a false positive case that that worker or that passenger, maybe, I do not know whether he is a worker, was tested again on two different occasions and the tests were negative. In fact, we questioned those who were looking into the matter to be sure that that person is not contaminated, and we have been given assurances that that person is, in fact, not contaminated. But in spite of that, we said: 'look, let that person be isolated while he is travelling to Agalega.' I can assure the House that from our side and from the side of experts who are, in fact, looking after those who are leaving for Agalega, we made sure that there has been no contamination. I can also assure the hon. Member that there is no double standard. There is no need to make such kind of allegation. What we obviously want is that there is no double standard, whether in Agalega, or in Rodrigues, or even here, and this is borne out by those measures we have taken with regard to red zones and other regions of Mauritius to try to make sure that we break the chain of contamination.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

(16.50 p.m.)

Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse à l'honorable ministre des Finances, le Dr. Renganaden Padayachy. Bien sûr, les 200 000 *self-employed* le remercient d'avoir cette année-ci, procédé assez promptement à travers la MRA pour les déboursments de fonds. Cependant, l'utilisation de la data base du MRA qui date de l'année dernière, il y a eu des changements par rapport aux adresses et aux différents *place of work* et *place of residence*. Donc, ce qui se passe c'est qu'à travers la MRA, il y a que deux façons de procéder, il y a un numéro de téléphone et un email. Donc, ça a l'air d'avoir un *bottleneck*, ça prend un peu de temps pour ces gens qui ont déjà eu leur WAP, mais par contre pour avoir la flexibilité de voyager depuis leur nouvelle résidence. S'il pourrait intervenir auprès de la MRA pour accélérer ce processus.

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour cette question et je vais m'y pencher et faire le nécessaire.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

(4.51 p.m.)

LOCKDOWN - FRUITS & VEGETABLES - PRICE CONTROL

Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security. It has been observed during these past days that there are significant differences in the price of vegetables and fruits. One vegetable, for example, being sold double or thrice the price in one locality and in the other locality, it is more expensive. I understand that there was an informal way of controlling or deciding on prices by the *vente à l'encan*, which is no longer operating during the lockdown. I would appreciate if the Minister can look into the matter so that the less fortunate ones are not penalised by this system.

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is indeed a very difficult situation to manage because the prices of all fruits and vegetables are not controlled prices, save for a few, for example, onions, potatoes and garlic, but for the remaining ones, it is left to the market to decide, *les forces du marché*. But if the situation continues like that, then we will think of the advisability of making regulations, but we are not there yet. We are closely monitoring the situation. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

(4.52 p.m.)

VOLCY POGNET STREET – DRUG ADDICTS

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête est adressée au ministre de la santé, l'honorable Dr. Kailesh Jagutpal. S'il peut voir avec les autorités concernées pour remédier la situation concernant l'état insalubre aux abords de l'hôpital Jeetoo, particulièrement, la rue Volcy Pognet qui est envahi par des drogués, des alcooliques et aussi par les sans-abri qui ont élu domicile. Des conditions impropres à la sécurité sanitaire des passants, des visiteurs de l'hôpital et des chauffeurs de taxis qui travaillent à côté en cette période de COVID-19. Je fais un appel à lui pour qu'il s'assure qu'une opération de nettoyage et désinfection soit fait rapidement pour la sécurité des gens qui fréquentent l'hôpital Jeetoo.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, I will take this matter and I will look into it.

(4.53 p.m.)

**RELAIS L'OISEAU DU PARADIS CENTRE - CAP MALHEUREUX –
SANITARY MEASURES**

Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Je vous remercie, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse à la ministre de l'Egalité du genre. La situation au Centre de Relais L'Oiseau du Paradis à Cap Malheureux est très préoccupante. Alors que les enfants ne sont pas à l'abri du Covid-19, aucune mesure sanitaire stricte n'a été mise en place dans ce Centre de Relais, pas de distanciation sociale dans les chambres surpeuplées, aucune disposition sur la désinfection et le nettoyage des surfaces et du linge, entre autres. Je sollicite l'intervention de la ministre pour venir de l'avant avec un *strict* protocole pour les professionnels des *shelters* et Centre de Relais afin de mieux protéger ces enfants vulnérables.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for raising the matter during adjournment and I would like to invite her to consult Hansard because I have already answered a question like this and I have deposited the answer with the Clerk of the Assembly. But just to reassure the hon. Member, it is incorrect to say that there are no strict sanitary protocols at *l'Oiseau du*

Paradis. I can reassure the hon. Member that all the sanitary measures are being taken into account, the ratio of caregivers to children present at the moment there. There is already a very strict protocol and it is being adapted at all the shelters.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(4.55 p.m.)

16^{ème} MILE & MIDLANDS – PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The matter I want to raise tonight is addressed to hon. Ganoo, Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail. It regards the public transport for inhabitants of 16^{ème} Mile and Midlands. Currently, buses coming from the South are going till Nouvelle France as 16^{ème} Mile, Forest Side, Midlands and Curepipe were in the red zone. Now that 16^{ème} village and Midlands are no longer in the red zone, the inhabitants cannot go to Curepipe and Forest Side as it is in the red zone. I am making a request to the Minister to see with the NLTA if the buses can come till 16^{ème} Mile and Midlands so that the inhabitants can have access to essential services like pharmacies and supermarkets in Rose Belle.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member for having raised this issue, Mr Speaker, Sir. Indeed, with the removal of certain areas within the red zone of Constituency Nos. 15, 16 and 17, we have to make some readjustments with regard to our transport scheme. So, I will take up the matter with the relevant authorities and do the needful.

Mr Speaker: Time over! Thank you very much for your contribution.

At 4.57 p.m., the Assembly, was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 20 April 2021 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

SEAMEN'S WELFARE DUES - QUANTUM - 2015-APRIL 2021

(No. B/131) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Seamen's welfare dues payable by shipping lines for ships to berth in the port,

he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Ports Authority, since 2015 to-date on a yearly basis, information as to the quantum thereof –

- (a) received, and
- (b) payable to the Seafarers' Welfare Fund, indicating the quantum of funds disbursed therefrom for the welfare of the –
 - (i) Mauritian seamen, and
 - (ii) foreign seamen in transit in Mauritius.

(Withdrawn)

DANGEROUS DRUGS ACT - CANNABIS

(No. B/134) 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 cannabis, he will state if, following the recent decision of the United Nations Commission on Narcotics Drugs to remove same from Schedule IV of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the use thereof for medical and recreational purposes in Mauritius will be reconsidered and, if so, indicate when the appropriate amendments to the existing legislation, more specifically, the Dangerous Drugs Act, will be introduced in the Assembly accordingly.

Reply (The Minister of Health and Wellness): The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) Commission on Narcotic Drugs has, at its last session on the international control of cannabis and cannabis related substances in December 2020, recommended deleting “Cannabis and Cannabis Resin” from Schedule IV of the single convention of Narcotic Drugs. This implies that Cannabis and Cannabis Resin are no longer classified as having “little or no therapeutic value”. Cannabis and Cannabis Resin, however, continue to be in the Schedule I of the Convention implying that they are still considered as “Dangerous Drugs”. Nowhere, does the Commission mention the recreational use of cannabis in the report.

In this respect, the Technical Committee on Cannabis set up by the Ministry of Health and Wellness under the Chair of Prof T. Bahorun, Executive Director, Mauritius Research and Innovation Council for the implementation of the Commission of Enquiry on Drug Trafficking, was requested to analyse the above decision and submit its views.

One of the main mandates of the Committee was to see how to provide advice and recommendations to the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Government regarding

policies and guidance pertaining to the use of medical cannabis and at a later stage establishing the basis of a non-recreational cannabis industry in Mauritius.

A Press Communiqué was issued to the public on 21 December 2020 requesting for their views and comments on the use of medical cannabis, which are being analysed.

Four Sub-Committees, namely the Scientific Sub-Committee, Sub-Committee on Legal aspect, Technical Sub-Committee by Forensic Science Laboratory and the Therapeutic Sub-Committee have also been set up to advise the main Technical Committee.

The Technical Committee on Cannabis has met three times and will submit its report by end of May 2021.

It is only after examining the report of the Technical Committee that a decision will be taken to amend the Dangerous Drug Act accordingly.

COVID-19 VACCINATED PERSONS - QUARANTINE MEASURES & INTERNATIONAL VACCINATION CARD

(No. B/142) Mr S. Mohamed (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the administration of Covid-19 vaccines under the National Deployment and Vaccination Plan, he will state if –

- (a) the 14-days' quarantine period will be maintained for all vaccinated passengers, and
- (b) Government has engaged discussions with the World Health Organisation and all relevant partners to implement a standard recognised and accepted international health passport.

Reply (The Minister of Health and Wellness): I am informed that vaccines against SARS CoV2 are widely recognized as vaccines that protect its recipients from severe forms of COVID-19 and against mortality, as a result of COVID-19 infection.

Various recognized and published studies also show that the vaccines directly contribute to drastically reduce the viral load in case of infection.

The viral load is the amount of virus per millimetre cube of a collected secretion sample.

In all viral diseases, it is important that a certain amount of the virus is injected, so as to allow the vaccinated person to be infected.

If the amount of inoculated virus is above a given threshold, the person cannot be infected and this, even if the person is in contact with the virus.

Currently, we cannot affirm that a vaccinated person is not infectious at all. We can, however, state that a vaccinated person is very much less likely to be infectious, and that he or she might be not infectious.

In reply to part (a) of the question and in view of the foregoing, this is why, at least for now, and up and until we do not achieve herd immunity, quarantine measures will remain in force in Mauritius and these measures will also apply to vaccinated persons.

The waiving of the quarantine measures might be envisaged at a later stage, considering on one hand, that we have achieved herd immunity and on the other, based on the evolution of scientific data regarding the transmission of the virus by vaccinated persons.

In reply to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the World Health Organisation is working with other partners to establish a governance framework and specifications for a digital vaccination certificate for possible use at both national and international levels. The advisability of requirements for COVID-19 vaccination or proof of vaccination for international travellers is designed for use mainly by national public health officials and managers of immunisation programmes.

Government will take appropriate measures in accordance with recommendations of the World Health Organisation and the international community in due course.

However, I wish to inform the House that for the time being, our travellers are using the International Vaccination green card, which is issued by my Ministry and which is duly validated and certified by a Medical Officer. This International Vaccination Card bears the logo of WHO and the Coats of Arms of Mauritius.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - SELF-TEST KIT

(No. B/143) Mr S. Mohamed (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state if Government will consider introducing and providing a Covid-19 home self-test kit to all frontline workers.

Reply (The Minister of Health and Wellness): Self-Test Kits for COVID-19 are, in fact, an additional tool which might be of interest in our National Screening strategy for COVID-19 positive patients.

Self-tests are screening tests, known as rapid tests, which might orientate towards a diagnostic. They do not provide a definite assessment as to the status of its user. A positive self-test does not mean that the user is positive. However, a positive self-test indicates that a PCR Test, which is the only Golden Standard for the detection of COVID-19, should be carried out in order to counter-verify the result.

Self-tests are different from Rapid Antigenic Tests. Rapid Antigenic Tests are carried out by duly trained health professionals, who have to ascertain that the various steps of the test are properly carried out. For self-tests, all the required steps fall under the purview of the user. The latter is responsible for the collection of the sample which needs to be tested; the user himself or herself will carry out the test and will be the one who will interpret the results of the self-test.

There exist two types of rapid auto-tests. There are self-tests based on an anterior nasal swab, where the specimen is collected by inserting an absorbent tip not deeper than 1.5 cm into the nostril. There are also self-tests which require a deep nasal specimen. We also have self-tests which require saliva samples and these types of self-tests are still under evaluation.

I am also informed that samples collected deeper into the nasal cavity are likely to provide even more reliable results, bearing in mind that in the case of self-tests, there is no nasopharyngeal swab as is the case for Rapid Antigen Tests and PCR Tests.

Therefore, regarding self-tests, those requiring a deeper nasal swab are those which are the more widely recommended.

In this case, the nasal swab is done at a depth of some 3 to 4 cm into the nasal cavity with a specific swabbing kit. Once in the nasal cavity, the user will have to rotate the tip of the collection kit at least 5 times inside the nose. Given these specificities, there are indeed various factors at stake, in particular pertaining to the pre-analytic aspect of the self-tests.

Various studies have shown that in the case of tests carried out by Health professionals, the clinical sensitivity is around 80 to 95% for symptomatic patients and around 50 to 60% for asymptomatic patients.

While it is true that these results can be extrapolated to the self-tests, we should also take into account variables involved when a test is not being carried out by a duly formed Health professional.

In the case of self-tests, errors can be committed at various steps of the test, particularly while collecting the deep nasal specimen. We should also take into account

factors like the time taken to carry out the tests, how the self-test kits have been conserved before use and temperature.

The clinical performance criteria retained to validate the tests are: a clinical sensitivity which is superior or equal to 80% and a clinical sensitivity superior or equal to 99% for symptomatic cases.

Given that the self-tests are carried out solely and entirely by an untrained individual, these tests cannot be compared to Rapid Antigenic Tests performed by trained Health personnel.

Antigenic self-tests are recommended for asymptomatic subjects of more than 15 years of age in the two following cases –

- Upon medical advice, in the context of a targeted mass screening exercise and as an alternative to antigenic tests requiring nasopharyngeal swabs. The choice between having recourse to rapid antigenic tests or self-tests will depend upon the organisation of the screening exercise and upon the acceptance of the targeted subjects to carry out themselves their tests.
- Upon indication and restricted to private use, like after having met with relatives not living in the same household. The tests should ideally be carried out on the very day of the contact with other persons or on the eve on the intended contact.

While Rapid Antigenic Tests carried out by Health professionals provide traceability, such an assurance does not exist in the case of self-tests. This lack of traceability can cause great prejudice to the sound management of the SARS COV2 epidemic and they can also affect Contact Tracing procedures.

COVID-19, as per Section 42 in Part 3 of the Public Health Act, remains a notifiable disease. So, in addition to clinical and medical aspects, which need to be evaluated, the use of COVID-19 self-tests will also entail major legal adjustments.

My Ministry is, of course, committed to use all available tools which are likely to help in our strategy to contain the COVID-19 situation. We are already carrying out PCR Tests, Rapid Antigen Tests and Serological Tests. Additionally, we are asking for sequencing for probable variants.

However, the use of self-tests is not a decision which can be taken overnight. There is already a committee working on the rationale of introducing the use of self- tests in our National Monitoring Strategy for COVID-19 and, of course, as soon as we have more visibility, we will be in a position to take a decision.

ESA - DATA & MAPS

(No. B/168) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA), he will table copy of the updated ESA mapping produced under the Mainstreaming Biodiversity into the Management of Coastal Zones in Mauritius Project, indicating if same has been submitted to the District Councils to be used in the course of the decision process in relation to the issue of Building and Land Use Permits.

Reply: The “Mainstreaming Biodiversity into the Management of Coastal Zone in the Republic of Mauritius” project, which is grant-funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is being spearheaded by the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping.

My Ministry is one of the Executing Agencies for one component of the project, namely mainstreaming of biodiversity into local level physical development planning and tourism management and under which the following three activities are ongoing -

- (i) updating data, maps and policy on Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) and recommendations in relation to marine and coastal biodiversity;
- (ii) undertaking an analytical review of coastal and marine plans and planning processes to identify progress made and gaps to be filled, as well as producing a Coastal Atlas. The report will support the development of a holistic approach with regard to integrated coastal zone management planning that fully addresses biodiversity, and reflects international best practices, and
- (iii) developing an Integrated Coastal Zone Management plan for the Black River District, which would ensure that marine and coastal ESAs are fully integrated into the legal and administrative planning frameworks.

With regard to the updating of data, maps and policy on ESAs, the UNDP has hired the services of a consultancy firm, namely FCG ANZDEC Ltd from New Zealand for the production of maps specifically concerning six types of coastal and marine ESAs in both Mauritius and Rodrigues, namely coastal and upland marshlands, sand beach and dunes, coral reefs, seagrass and algal beds, mangroves and intertidal mudflats.

Draft maps have already been produced. However, following a quality assurance exercise conducted by my Ministry, discrepancies were observed on the ESA data and maps and same have been communicated to the UNDP on 18 January 2021 for onward transmission to the Consultant. Accordingly, the ESA maps are currently being reviewed and finalised by the Consultant.

Upon finalisation, the ESA data and maps would be relayed to the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning for integration in the Outline Planning Schemes under the Town and Country Planning Act 1954. The reviewed Outline Planning Schemes would then guide in the decision-making process in relation to the issue of Building and Land Use Permits at the level of Local Authorities.

In the meantime, the draft maps have been uploaded on an Ocean Observatory E-platform at the level of the Department of Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration. However, these would have to be validated by concerned authorities before they become accessible via the online platform.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC – VACCINATED PERSONS

(No. B/170) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state the number of persons having been vaccinated under the Covid-19 National Deployment and Vaccination Plan as at to date, with each vaccine.

Reply: As the House is already aware, our vaccination campaign against the COVID-19 started on 26 January 2021 in Mauritius and on 06 February 2021 in Rodrigues.

I am informed that as at 03 April 2021, a total of 197,646 persons have been administered the first dose of vaccine.

The vaccines currently being administered are Covishield vaccines from the Serum Institute of India, Covaxin vaccines from Bharat Biotechnologies India Limited and the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccines procured through the COVAX Facility/Gavi Alliance.

QUARANTINE CENTRES - DIALYSIS TREATMENT - PROTOCOL

(No. B/171) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to quarantine centres, he will state the

protocol put in place to ensure that the dialysis patients staying thereat are administered with the required dialysis treatment.

(Vide reply to B/158)

**L'OISEAU DU PARADIS RELAY SHELTER - PERSONNEL -
VACCINATION & SANITARY MEASURES**

(No. B/172) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether in regard to the Cap Malheureux Relay Centre, also known as Shelter L'Oiseau du Paradis, she will state –

- (a) if all the personnel thereof currently on duty have been vaccinated and
- (b) the actions taken by her Ministry to ensure the protection of babies, toddlers and adolescents staying thereat during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, there are 51 employees at Cap Malheureux Shelter out of whom 13 have already been vaccinated and 12 are due to be vaccinated by end of April 2021. A request has already been made to the Ministry of Health and Wellness for PCR tests to be carried out for staff of Shelters who have not yet been vaccinated. 23 staff members have informed that they do not want to be vaccinated for personal reasons while 3 staff members have been declared not eligible for vaccination due to their underlying medical conditions.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the following Preventive and Sanitary measures have been put in place at *L'Oiseau du Paradis* Relay Shelter to ensure the protection of children staying thereat during the pandemic –

- adequate provision, in terms of food and commodities, have been made available in sufficient stock at the shelter;
- transport facilities have been provided to employees from their place of residence to the shelter;
- all employees are being provided with face masks and hand sanitizers. Thermometer is used to allow access on a daily basis;
- employees residing in the RED ZONE are not attending the shelter;
- an isolation room has been put in place for staff or residents who suffer from fever; pending that the child or employee is transported to hospital;
- a roster is in place to ensure a 24-hour service;

- transport facilities have been made available for vaccination of staff of the shelter;
- before any new admission, arrangements are made for all children to undergo a PCR test for COVID-19 from the Ministry of Health and Wellness;
- cooks, handy-workers, watchman, administrative staffs, cleaners, child caregivers are on duty to ensure the normal running of the shelter;
- additional Assistant Child Programme Officers (ACPOs) are temporarily posted at the shelter during the lockdown as support to the Officer in Charge;
- monitoring visits are being done by the Chairman of the NCC, Coordinators of the NCC, Enforcement Officers and CDU Officers during the lockdown, and
- residents and staff have been sensitized on the COVID-19. They have been educated on the sanitary precautions to be taken during these times.

SHELTER – MINORS ATTAINING MAJORITY – RELEASE

(No. B/173) **Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the minors placed in the shelters, she will state the structure that has been put in place by her Ministry to support the release thereof from the shelter on turning 18 years old.

Reply: In regard to the minors placed in the shelters, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has a panoply of support in guise of the structure to support them on their release from the shelter on turning 18 years old.

I wish to remind this House that when I took office as Minister responsible for children matters, I carried out a stock taking exercise wherein I reengineered the Child Rehabilitation Services to ensure that the holistic *prise en charge* of the child during his/her stay at the shelter meets all the rehabilitative and reinsertion needs of the latter when leaving the shelter.

Rehabilitative needs and upskilling are worked out in terms of child rights clusters of right to health, sexual reproductive health and general fitness, right to psycho-social support, family life skills, education, sharing of universal values and development as well as participation in decision making, especially through leisure and recreation are non-negotiable and pivotal part of the system.

The right to entrepreneurial skilling for those who are above 16 and are in non-formal education are achieved through various pathways inclusive of in-house special training

programme by MQA approved instructors and experts, as well as collaborative initiatives with private and parastatal partners as hotels, the MITD, Universities, specialised NGOs, and the National Children's Council, amongst others.

We do ensure that all the Shelters are endowed with adequate and appropriate resource persons and professionals to support the eventual reintegration of our children back home in the community.

The Ministry has also reengineered and consolidated the Back to Home Programme to ensure engagement of parents/guardians/next of kin/and any other interested relatives to understand, to show commitment and to be ready to handhold the child upon leaving the shelter for his/her reintegration in the family.

Children who are nearing their majority and have no possibility of going back to a family *pour des raisons évidentes*, are referred to the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions for placement arrangements in Convents, Homes and Foyers and social support as appropriate at their level.

Nevertheless, it is to be noted that at the age of 18, a young person, just like any other adult, has also a right to self-determination and freedom to choose. It is observed that most of the young persons do not stay for long in Homes and prefer to move out and fend for themselves.

Last but not least, my Ministry is right now exploring the possibilities to set up two innovative Half Way Homes to cater for the transitional needs of those adolescents who have nowhere to go upon attainment of their majority because of various factors such as absolute orphanhood since childhood, parents are unknown and are untraceable, or they may be serving life imprisonment or are maintained in asylums to name a few; so much so that the zeal of the young adults in quest of independence and self-determination are nurtured, provided for and monitored in the most appropriate manner by trained caring adults and professionals. In the same venture, the felt need for a roof and sustained motivation underpinning pristine adulthood of young adults who cannot reintegrate a familial environment shall be met.

The main objective of the Half Way Home shall be to equip the young adults with the necessary life skills to allow smooth and confident reintegration into the society in a more resilient, dignified and empowered manner.

The young persons shall be provided with guidance and facilitation regarding placements, on the job training, apprenticeships and other worked out opportunities to facilitate and expedite their penetration in the labour market. My Ministry is seeking funding for these projects from the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development in the

forthcoming budget exercise and it is thereafter envisaged to issue an Expression of Interest for NGOs to manage these Half Way Homes. Currently, my Ministry is working on the specifications for the operationalisation of the Half Way Home Project.

NEW SOUILLAC HOSPITAL – DIALYSIS PATIENTS - LATERAL FLOW TESTS

(No. B/175) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the 14 dialysis patients tested positive at the New Souillac Hospital, he will state the steps being taken to ensure that lateral flow tests are administered thereto by trained professionals.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lateral Flow Tests relate to Rapid SARS-COV-2 Antigen and Rapid Antibody against SARS-COV-2. The Rapid Antigen Tests are predominately used as a screening test to detect the presence of COVID-19 antigen on swab samples, whereas the Rapid Antibody Test used to detect the presence of antibody on blood samples, also known as a serological test. The Rapid Antibody Tests are done to monitor sero-conversion in patients diagnosed with COVID-19. These Rapid Antibody Tests are also conducted at the Central Health Laboratory.

I wish to inform the House that last year, mass screening was conducted by using the Rapid Antigen Tests prior to lifting of the confinement in June 2020. Currently, there is no Rapid Antigen Test which is being used for COVID-19 screening or diagnosis throughout the island, including at Souillac Hospital. All diagnosis is being done by Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) tests conducted at the Central Health Laboratory, Candos.

All COVID-19 tests are conducted by qualified and trained staff of various cadres, namely Clinical Scientists and/or Medical Laboratory Technologist.

In view of the outbreak of COVID-19 this year, my Ministry will carry out mass testing island-wise and more particularly in the red zones. In this context, my Ministry is initiating procedures for the procurement of Rapid Antigen Test kits.

**COVID-19 NATIONAL DEPLOYMENT & VACCINATION PLAN –
CONSENT FORM**

(No. B/176) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the administration of the Covid-19 vaccine under the Covid-19 National Deployment and Vaccination Plan, he will state how his Ministry is addressing the issue of access thereto by the –

- (a) adults without the capacity to give consent, and
- (b) residents staying in care homes.

Reply: As the House is aware, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Health (COVID-19 Vaccines for Emergency Use) Regulations 2021, any person who is 18 years and above and who wishes to be administered the COVID-19 vaccine has to sign a Registration and Consent Form.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the Registration and Consent Form also makes provision for it to be filled and signed by a parent and/or guardian of a person who is unable for any reason to give consent for vaccination.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the same conditions apply for residents staying in care homes. Those residents, who are able to sign the Consent by themselves, do so and same is countersigned by the Carers. For those residents who are unable to sign the Consent Form for any reason, the responsible person at the Care Home signs the Consent Form after consultation and with the agreement of the relatives of the resident.

As of date, 920 inmates from different Care Homes have been administered the Covid-19 vaccines by the vaccination team of my Ministry.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - IMPLEMENTATION - CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

(No. B/177) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state if his Ministry has allocated funds to local authorities to facilitate the implementation of clean environment and promote better public health across local communities through the –

- (a) setting out of a clear agenda for action to reduce people's exposure to harmful pollutants;
- (b) longer-term implications of unprecedented changes in living and working patterns to deliver the environmental commitments, and
- (c) procuring sweeper-lorries to deliver quality environmental commitments and if not, why not.

Reply: The COVID pandemic is an unprecedented global crisis with adverse implications. Nevertheless, I wish to inform the House that this Government is fully committed to its vision of a cleaner, greener and safer Mauritius as the wellbeing of our

workers and our citizens is our prime concern. This commitment has repeatedly been confirmed through a series of proactive actions.

With respect to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that my colleague, the hon. Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change has, at the beginning of his mandate held an “*assise de l’environnement*” with the objective to provide a forum for discussions on environmental issues with a view to adopting a concerted and participatory approach towards elaborating strategic orientations for a sustainable environment in the context of Master Plan for Environment for the next decade. These strategies include, amongst others, actions to improve air quality thereby reducing people’s exposure to harmful pollutants.

As regards part (b), our pledge to addressing climate emergencies has been crystalised through the passing of the Climate Change Act in November 2020 to implement the obligations of Mauritius under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement and other related instruments on climate change with a view to addressing the adverse effects of climate change and developing Mauritius into a greener economy.

With regard to funding, I wish to inform the House that in the year 2018, Government revamped the National Environment Fund with a view to increasing its effectiveness and efficiency and in that Financial Year, for the first time, a sum of Rs2.0 billion was provided thereto and for the funding of various projects for the sustained efforts towards achieving our environmental goals and objectives. In the Financial Year 2020/2021, an amount of Rs2.3 billion was provided in the National Environment Fund to continue the implementation of cleaner, greener and climate resilient measures.

Following discussions with my Ministry, the National Environment Fund has financed several projects for local authorities to materialise our vision.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry is presently working on a pilot project for the acquisition of two units of vacuum road sweeper trucks financed under the National Environment Fund and the Economic Recovery Programme for an estimated amount of Rs30 m. These trucks would be used for sweeping of public roads within the capital city. In the event the project is successful, we would certainly extend this service across the island, including the motorways.

The above-mentioned actions do not comprise an exhaustive list, but clearly depict the commitment and seriousness afforded to such an important issue of environment, climate

change and public health by this Government. The object is and will always be the well-being of our citizens whom we have placed at the heart of sustainable development.

RIAMBEL - PAS GÉOMÉTRIQUES - ALLOCATION

(No. B/179) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the remarks of the Director of Audit in relation to the allocation of two portions of land being Lot 129A1 and 129A2 both on *Pas Géométriques* at Riambel in his Report for the year 2019-2020, he will state –

- (a) who processed and recommended the said allocations, and
- (b) if consideration will be given for the initiation of –
 - (i) criminal and disciplinary actions for breach of the State Land Act, and
 - (ii) actions to recover the said plot/s of land, and if so, when.

Reply: As a matter of fact, Section 6(1A)(a) of the State Lands Act provides that in the specific case of leases in respect of campement sites, not more than one lease shall be held by a person, directly or indirectly, at any time.

I am advised that the lessee has held a Campement Site Lease over Lot 129A1 at Riambel since July 1973. In 2002, the then Ministry of Housing and Lands approved that the lessee be allowed use and occupation of Lot 129A2 on the basis that a Watchman's quarters stood on the latter plot.

With regard to part (a), it stands to reason that the file was processed by officers of the then Ministry of Housing and Lands at the relevant times.

In regard to part (b)(i), I am advised that inasmuch as the lessee does not hold two Campement Site leases, there has been no breach of Section 6(1A)(a) of State Lands Act. As such, the question of criminal and disciplinary action does not arise.

As regards part (b)(ii), I am informed that my Ministry proposes to resume possession of Lot 129A2 and the advice of the Attorney General's Office has been sought to that effect.

Insofar as Lot 129A1 is concerned, an offer was made to the lessee for the grant of a new 60-year lease as per normal practice.

I am informed that the lessee has, on 24 February 2020, accepted the offer.

H. E S. S. - AMBASSADOR - SAUDI ARABIA - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/180) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to H.E S. S., he will table a list of all expenses incurred by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, since his appointment as Ambassador Plenipotentiary and Extraordinary in Saudi Arabia, including, in respect of furniture purchased, *per diem* and medical expenses claimed.

Reply: I would like to inform the House that H. E. Mr S.S. (H.E Mr Showkutally Soodhun) was appointed as Ambassador Plenipotentiary and Extraordinary of the Republic of Mauritius to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with residence in Riyadh, with effect from 07 January 2020.

He was also accredited as non-resident Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, the State of Kuwait, and the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Ambassador S.S. (S. Soodhun) was eligible for the following benefits and allowances, in line with the terms and conditions of service of his contract –

- (a) Salary of an Ambassador as per PRB Report;
- (b) Foreign Service Allowance as per table for Saudi Arabia in the PRB Report;
- (c) Entertainment Allowance as per rate payable to Ambassadors;
- (d) Transfer Grant for cost of moving;
- (e) Warm Clothing Allowance;
- (f) Medical expenses were refunded at 90% on submission of claims;
- (g) Rental and Utilities for furnished accommodation;
- (h) Baggage Allowance;
- (i) Subsistence Allowance, and
- (j) Official travelling.

Air tickets and *per diem* allowances were paid as and when H. E Mr S.S. proceeded on approved missions.

The List of Expenses is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

PRIVATE DIALYSIS UNITS – PAYMENTS

(No. B/181) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to dialysis services, he will state –

- (a) the names of the private dialysis units the services of which were resorted to by his Ministry, indicating in each case, the total amount of money paid thereto over the past two financial years and table copy of the Service Level Agreement signed therewith, and
- (b) when same will be fully provided by the public health institutions.

Reply: As regards part (a) of the question, I am informed that presently, there are 1,532 patients undergoing dialysis treatment; 1,219 patients in our public hospitals and 313 patients in the 6 private clinics/dialysis centres. My Ministry has resorted to the services of six private clinics/dialysis centres, namely –

- AURAM Dialysis Centre in 1997;
- Phoenix National Dialysis Centre in 1997;
- Chisty Shifa Clinic in 2004;
- Nephron Dialysis Centre in 2014;
- Welkin Hospital in 2017, and
- Clinique du Nord in 2017.

My Ministry has entered into Service Level Agreements with these private clinics/dialysis centres in order to relieve the hospital dialysis services and ensure that patients are provided with their treatment in a timely manner. The Service Level Agreements require that

my Ministry makes provision for consumables at the cost of Rs500 per kit and also a payment of Rs800 per patient for each dialysis session.

I am further informed that since the past two financial years, the total payments effected to these private clinics/dialysis centres are as follows –

Rs11,436,600 to Chisty Shifa Clinic;

Rs4,083,222 to Welkin Hospital;

Rs5,267,200 to Clinique du Nord;

Rs17,284,800 to AURAM Dialysis Centre;

Rs9,316,000 to Nephron Dialysis Centre, and

Rs7,124,800 to Phoenix National Dialysis Centre.

I am placing in the Library of the National Assembly the specimen Service Level Agreement signed by my Ministry.

As regards part (b) of the question, my Ministry is continuously expanding the dialysis services in all Regional Hospitals. In January 2019, a new Dialysis Unit was set up at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital with 26 dialysis machines, which cater for 160 patients.

In February 2021, another Dialysis Unit came into operation at Long Mountain Hospital with a capacity of 26 dialysis machines, which caters for 100 patients in the same catchment area. Additional Dialysis Units at Victoria Hospital and SSRN Hospital are also in the pipeline and will be materialised during the next financial year and would cater for an additional 160 patients in each unit.

In addition, an ultramodern Dialysis Unit with the capacity to accommodate 50 dialysis machines is being envisaged within the Renal Transplant Unit, which will be set up at J. Nehru Hospital, with the assistance of the Indian Government. This new unit will cater for 200 patients. Furthermore, with the construction of the New Flacq Hospital, an additional Dialysis Unit with a capacity of 50 dialysis machines will be set up and will cater for 200 patients.

With the expansion of dialysis services in our hospitals, my Ministry intends to enhance patient uptake in the coming years with a view to becoming autonomous in the provision of dialysis services by 2025. Hence, the services of private clinics/dialysis centres will be phased out gradually up to 2025.

CASHLESS BUS TICKETING SYSTEM - FREE TRAVEL SCHEME

(No. B/182) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the Free Travel Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to where matters stand as to the implementation of the Cashless Bus Ticketing System.

Reply: In reply to PQ B/1017 on 08 December 2020, I already informed the House that a Technical Committee was set up at the level of the National Land Transport Authority to examine the current administration of the Free Travel Scheme and to make proposals for a more effective mechanism.

In its Report, the Committee aligned itself with the recommendation made by PricewaterhouseCoopers (India) Private Ltd with regard to the implementation of a Cashless Bus Ticketing System in order to enhance the administration and monitoring of the Free Travel Scheme.

Being given that the Cashless Bus Ticketing System is a highly complex undertaking with wide technical implications and that it also needs to interface with the Electronic Ticketing System of the Metro Express, the Project is still under consideration as there are a number of options being explored, including implementation of the Cashless Bus Ticketing System under a Public-Private Partnership framework.

There is, therefore, need to examine all the financial, legal and procurement facets linked to the implementation of the Cashless Bus Ticketing System so that the way forward is properly chalked out.

Once the optioneering exercise is over and the implementation pathway identified, actions would be initiated, accordingly, in order to go ahead with the introduction of the Cashless Bus Ticketing System.

**FRONTLINE WORKERS - COVID-19 POSITIVE - JANUARY 2021 TO 06
APRIL 2021**

(No. B/183) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the frontline workers, he will state the –

- (a) number thereof, category-wise, having been tested COVID-19 positive, since January 2021 to date, indicating if –
 - (i) contact tracings have been carried out in each case and, if so, indicate the number of COVID-19 positive tested persons traced out, and
 - (ii) any one thereof was tested positive at the time of administration of the COVID-19 vaccine, and
- (b) measures taken to further improve the sanitary protocol applicable thereto.

Reply: I will place the information requested for in a tabular form at the Library of the National Library.

As regards part (a) (ii) of the question, I am informed that as at date, no person attending the vaccination centres for the administration of the COVID-19 vaccines has been tested positive as at the time of administration thereof.

In reply to part (b) of the question, the question of improving the sanitary protocol does not arise for the time being. The sanitary protocol put in place is in line with international recommendation.

VICTORIA HOSPITAL - CANCER PATIENTS - LINEAR ACCELERATOR

(No. B/184) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Linear Accelerator for the treatment of Cancer Patient at the Victoria Hospital, he will state if same is currently functional and delivering optimum service and, if not, since when, indicating the –

- (a) actions taken to repair same, and

- (b) alternative treatment available to cancer patients, indicating the treatment options available to those patients in relation to whom cobalt treatment is inappropriate.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS SOCIETY FOR ANIMAL WELFARE - VETERINARY DOCTORS

(No. B/185) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the welfare of animals, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare, information as to the number of –

- (a) veterinary doctors employed in each office thereof, indicating if all offices are fully operational, and
- (b) sterilizations performed, since January 2019 to date.

(Withdrawn)

DIRECTOR OF AUDIT REPORT - GOVERNMENT VEHICLES - ROAD WORTHINESS

(No. B/186) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the remark of the Director of Audit in his Report for the year 2019-2020, in relation to non-compliance with the legislation and regulations in respect of the examination for roadworthiness of Government vehicles, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to if such exemptions have been duly authorised, indicating the remedial measures that will be taken in relation thereto, if any.

(Withdrawn)

DIRECTOR OF AUDIT - FINANCE & AUDIT ACT - STATUTORY BODY

(No. B/187) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the recommendation of the Director of Audit for the setting up of a statutory body under the Finance and Audit Act to review the shortcomings mentioned in his Report for the year 2019-

2020 with a view to enforcing corrective actions and deal with cases of malpractice, negligence and repeated defaults, he will state if consideration will be given for the setting up of such a statutory body as a matter of urgency.

(Withdrawn)

**QUARANTINE CENTRES - AIRPORT TRANSFER SERVICES &
CATERING SERVICES - CONTRACTORS**

(No. B/188) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the quarantine centres, he will state, in each case, the names of the contractors for the supply, since August 2020 to date of –

- (a) airport transfer services, and
- (b) catering services.

(Withdrawn)

EX-CHA HOUSING ESTATES – ASBESTOS

(No. B/189) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the ex-CHA Housing Estates, he will state the quantum of funds received from the National Environment Fund for the rehabilitation and removal of asbestos therefrom and table the list of those having been rehabilitated as at to date, indicating if such a project is ongoing in Constituency No. 1 and, if so, give the status thereof.

Reply: I am informed that, the then Central Housing Authority, commonly referred to as CHA, constructed, over a period extending from 1960 to 1990, some 19,300 housing units, of which 3,113, funded by the European Development Community (hence the acronym EDC), were erected using panels containing asbestos across 59 Housing Estates.

I am further informed that for Financial Year 2020-2021, provision was made under the Solid Waste Management Programme of the National Environment Fund as follows –

- (i) Rs5 m. for the Removal and Carting Away of Asbestos in ex-CHA houses by the Solid Waste Management Division of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, and
- (ii) Rs5 m. for “Expenses in connection with Houses Containing Asbestos” to be implemented by my Ministry.

I am also informed that a contract for “Dismantling, Removal and Disposal of Cemented Asbestos Sheets for 216 ex-CHA/EDC houses” was awarded in October 2019 by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, further to which, 81 EDC houses have been demolished as at 31 March 2021.

I am given to understand that a total of 65 EDC houses have been dismantled during the present financial year and an amount of Rs3.4 m. has already been disbursed for the dismantling of 40 such houses. Payment to the tune of Rs2.1 m. is being processed in respect of the remaining 25 houses.

I stand informed that the Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management is, in accordance with provisions of the Building Control Act, currently serving notices in respect of 142 unoccupied EDC houses prior to the dismantling of these houses.

With regard to the second part of the question relating to rehabilitation of the ex-CHA houses, I wish to inform the House that, it has never been Government policy to rehabilitate ex-CHA houses.

However, in the case of private owners of ex-CHA houses deciding to rehabilitate their property, Government does, since 2019, extend assistance by way of the Roof Grant Scheme.

As per records available at my Ministry, no EDC houses have been constructed in Constituency No. 1.

BASIC RETIREMENT PENSION - QUANTUM - JANUARY 2021-MARCH 2021

(No. B/190) 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 Basic Retirement Pension, she 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 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.

Reply: I am informed that, for the period January to March 2021, an amount of Rs6.66 billion has been disbursed for the payment of BRP to some 240,000 beneficiaries in the Republic of Mauritius.

In the Budget Speech 2020-2021, it was announced that payment of BRP at the rate of Rs9,000 to all eligible individuals at the age of 60 years and above will be maintained.

**POINTE AUX SABLES – QUARANTINE CENTRE – HEALTH
PERSONNEL**

(No. B/191) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the quarantine centre at Pointe Aux Sables, he will state the number of personnel of the health sector working thereat since 01 March 2020 to date, indicating the –

- (a) measures put in place thereat to avoid contamination, and
- (b) number of persons who have been contaminated thereat, indicating the actions taken by his Ministry in relation thereto.

Reply: Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in Mauritius and the detection of the first cases in March 2020, my Ministry started operating treatment and quarantine centres.

In this respect, the Recreation Centre at Pointe Aux Sables was declared as a Quarantine Centre for the isolation of health personnel working at Quarantine and Treatment Centres.

I am informed that the following personnel are permanently posted at the Pointe aux Sables Recreation Centre –

- 2 Nursing Officers, and
- 3 Office Care Attendants.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that in accordance with the current protocol, the team of officers works with a cohort of medical personnel quarantined at the Pointe aux Sables Recreation Centre. Upon discharge of this cohort, the team of officers is also placed in isolation and is replaced by another team.

In reply to part (b) of the question, I am informed that since 01 March 2020 to date, six personnel who had been working at the Pointe aux Sables Recreation Centre had contracted COVID-19 disease. They had, subsequently, been transferred to ENT Treatment Centre for appropriate treatment.

**NATIONAL EMPOWERMENT FOUNDATION - CONCRETE HOUSING
UNITS**

(No. B/192) 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 fully concrete housing units, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Empowerment Foundation, information as to the –

- (a) number thereof under construction since January 2020 to date, indicating the number of projects therefor which have been cancelled, and
- (b) table the list of all earmarked and on-going projects, indicating the work progress thereof.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the National Empowerment Foundation that the number of fully concrete housing units under construction since January 2020 to date stands at 143 units. Out of 143 houses, 65 have already been completed and the remaining 78 houses are still under construction.

Furthermore, I am informed by the National Empowerment Foundation that no project of fully concrete housing unit has been cancelled as at date.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the list of all earmarked and ongoing projects under the Fully Concrete Housing Scheme from January 2020 to date is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

HOTELS - QUARANTINE CENTRES

(No. B/193) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the quarantine centres, he will table the list of the hotels retained to serve as same, since the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown to date, indicating the criteria used for the selection thereof.

Reply: I am placing the requested list of hotels in the Library of the National Assembly.

Insofar as the criteria used for the selection of the hotels, I am informed that with the coming into force of sanitary and confinement measures on 20 March 2020, urgent consultations were held with both AHRIM and the *Association des Hotels de Charme*, which were requested to invite their members to favourably consider requests to use their hotels as quarantine centres. As a result, 19 hotels accepted to serve as quarantine centres. The 19 hotels were approved by the Ministry of Health and Wellness as the Quarantine Authority and thereafter designated as Quarantine Facilities.

As the House is aware, since 01 October 2020 and up until the second confinement starting 10 March 2021, specific commercial flights were allowed together with paid quarantine of 14 days duration in a designated Quarantine Facility. As from 09 March 2021, commercial flights have been suspended.

Throughout the period extending from 20 March 2020 to date, subsequent to the designation of the 19 hotels as Quarantine Facilities, 5 separate expressions of interest have been initiated by my Ministry to identify and select other hotels to serve as quarantine centres on the basis of criteria agreed between the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Ministry of Tourism. These criteria relate to sanitary requirements, compliance with an overall pricing framework and compatibility with the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) online booking platform mechanism. The identity and number of hotels operating as Quarantine Facilities vary according to the demand expressed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the willingness of individual hotels to remain on the list of Quarantine Facilities.

QUARANTINE CENTRES – CATERERS – 01 OCTOBER 2020-05 APRIL 2021

(No. B/194) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the quarantine centres, he will give the list of the caterers providing services thereat in 2020 and since January 2021 to date, indicating the quantum of funds disbursed therefor in each case.

Reply: The hon. Member may wish to note that with effect from 01 October 2020, all the hotels which are being used as Quarantine Facilities are providing their own catering services. As such, catering services are included in the standard full board comprehensive quarantine packages which are as follows -

Guest House	-	Rs29,000 for single occupancy and Rs49,300 for double occupancy
Tourist Residence	-	Rs29,000 for single occupancy and Rs49,300 for double occupancy
2 Star	-	Rs29,000 for single occupancy and Rs49,300 for double occupancy
3 Star	-	Rs35,000 for single occupancy and Rs59,500 for double occupancy
4 Star	-	Rs50,000 for single occupancy and Rs85,300 for double occupancy
5 Star	-	Rate chargeable fixed by the hotel

Three recreational centres also serve as Quarantine Facilities. As regards the recreational centres at Belle Mare and Pointe aux Sables, catering services are provided by Mythos Co. Ltd and Beachcomber Catering respectively, whereas the catering service in respect of Pointe aux Piments recreational centres is provided by the Ministry of Health and Wellness. The total quantum of funds disbursed between 01 October 2020 and 05 April 2021 for Mythos Co. Ltd and Beachcomber Catering are Rs2,361,065.00 and Rs7,406,925.58 respectively.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - SMEs - NEW LOAN FACILITIES

(No. B/196) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the small and medium enterprises, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd., information as to if new loan facilities are being granted thereto, amid the Covid-19 pandemic and, if so, indicate the –

- (a) loan facilities given;
- (b) number of applications –
 - (i) received, and
 - (ii) approved, and
- (c) amount disbursed.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - DOMESTIC ANIMALS - QUARANTINED OWNERS

(No. B/197) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the domestic animals which are left alone when the owners thereof are taken into the 14 days' quarantine amid the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state the arrangements made by the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security for same to be taken care of, if any.

(Withdrawn)

OCEAN BIODIVERSITY - MARINE BIOLOGISTS S. S. - UNDERWATER PROTEST

(No. B/198) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to seagrass and our ocean biodiversity, he will state if he is aware of the underwater protest by the marine biologists S. S. on 06 March 2020 in relation thereto and, if so, indicate the actions being taken or contemplated by Mauritius, alone or in cooperation with the Seychelles, if any, to protect same, more particularly, in the Saya de Malha Bank.

Reply: I presume that the hon. Member is referring to March 2021 instead of March 2020.

I am informed by the Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration that the Mauritius-Seychelles Joint Commission recently agreed to the request from Greenpeace to carry out marine research in the region of Saya de Malha. I am further informed that Ms S.S had accompanied Greenpeace and had carried out an underwater protest.

Seagrass beds play key ecological roles in marine and estuarine environment.

Seagrass beds, together with mangroves and salt marshes, possess enormous potential to capture, store and absorb carbon. These blue carbon ecosystems are considered important natural carbon sink that would help in mitigating the effects of climate change.

I am informed that in March 2011, following a submission made jointly by the Government of the Republic of Mauritius and the Government of the Republic of Seychelles, the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf conferred upon both Mauritius and Seychelles the joint jurisdiction over an area of 396,000 km² of Extended Continental Shelf in the Mascarene Plateau Region.

This area of seabed and subsoil is referred to as the Joint Management Area (JMA) and comprises to a large extent the Saya de Malha Bank. The two countries jointly exercise sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring, conserving and exploiting its seabed and subsoil resources.

I am informed that the Mauritius-Seychelles Joint Commission has, among others, adopted a Strategic Plan that focusses on five main strategic objectives, including, *inter alia*, the setting up of the institutional framework and technical capacity building necessary to govern the Joint Management Area.

The Mauritius-Seychelles Joint Commission has, in May 2018, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the EAF-Nansen programme, NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) and the Institute of Marine Research, Bergen (Norway), conducted a multi-disciplinary Marine Scientific Research in the region of the Saya de Malha Bank.

This scientific expedition has enabled the Joint Commission to better understand and evaluate the marine living resources in the Joint Management Area, as well as enable the elaboration of a seabed mapping of the underlying living resources. This would be an important input for the elaboration of the Marine Spatial Plan.

I am further informed that the Mauritius-Seychelles Joint Commission has signed an agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/Global Environment Facility (GEF) for the development of the Joint Management Area, based on the concept of sustainable blue/ocean economy that would create benefits to both countries in terms of access to natural resources, as well as maintaining biodiversity and life-supporting ecological system, whilst avoiding conflicts of use that might challenge the sustainability of living marine resources.

For the implementation of this Joint Demonstration project, the Joint Commission has obtained financial support to the tune of USD2.0 m. for the UNDP/GEF. An important

outcome of the project is a full-fledged Marine Spatial Plan and potential zoning of the Joint Management Area, including the Saya de Malha Bank. The project started in 2017 and is expected to be completed by 2022.

I am also informed that Oceanyka, a local Non-Governmental Organisation, has made an application to the Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration for the first 100% Mauritian oceanographic expedition which will be aimed at studying the Saya de Malha Bank, including its rich biodiversity including seagrass beds with their recognised high potential as carbon sinks and biodiversity.

Following this expedition in which the scientists of my Ministry will be deeply involved with other scientists from the University of Mauritius, the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping will be able to define the characteristics of the Saya de Malha and Mascarene Ridge biodiversity hotspot in order to define their potential for the creation of a Marine Protected Area, as well as for the development of the new pillar of our economy, the blue economy. This commitment therefore goes beyond the preservation of seagrass beds of the Saya de Malha bank.

My Ministry is responsible for the conservation and protection of marine ecosystems and has taken several measures for the protection of valuable ecosystems like coral reefs, mangroves and seagrasses.

The Albion Fisheries Research Centre of my Ministry is carrying out a seagrass project that includes mapping of seagrasses and the restoration of degraded seagrass areas around the island of Mauritius.

My Ministry is also in the process of signing an agreement in connection with the seagrass project entitled 'Assessment of Blue Carbon Ecosystem' (Seagrass) which is funded by the United Nations Environment Programme under the Nairobi Convention - Western Indian Ocean Strategic Action Programme (WIOSAP) to the tune of USD190,150.

This project will include an island-wide seagrass survey and mapping around Mauritius and analysis of carbon sequestration content in sediment and will be implemented by the Albion Fisheries Research Centre.

I also wish to inform the House that with regard to projects to protect biodiversity of our oceans, Mauritius and Seychelles are participating in the regional project '*Restoring Marine Ecosystem Services by Rehabilitating Coral Reefs to Meet a Changing Climate*

Future’ funded by the Adaptation Fund Board with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as the implementing agency.

The project budget of USD9,132,420 will benefit Mauritius and Seychelles through coral restoration activities, as well as capacity building programmes and knowledge exchange for the region.

The Albion Fisheries Research Centre (AFRC) and the Mauritius Oceanography Institute (MOI) of my Ministry are the implementing partners for the project. The project implementation has started in December 2020 and would run over a period of six years.

The overall objective of the project is to reduce the impact of climate change on local communities and coral reef-dependent economic sectors in the Republic of Mauritius and the Republic of Seychelles by implementing coral reef restoration with thermal tolerant corals as adaptation to climate change.

FISHING CAMPAIGN - OPENING

(No. B/200) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the opening of the fishing campaign, he will state where the matter stand.

(Withdrawn)

REGISTERED FISHERMEN - UTILITY VEHICLES - PURCHASE

(No. B/201) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the registered fishermen, he will state if consideration will be given for the granting of 100% duty free facilities thereto for the purchase of utility vehicles.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTIONS - BIODEGRADABLE MATERIALS

(No. B/202) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the public health institutions,

he will state if his Ministry will consider the banning and replacement of the use of small zipped plastic bag thereat by those made of biodegradable materials.

(Withdrawn)

QUARANTINE PROTOCOL – INCOMING PASSENGERS

(No. B/204) Mr S. Mohamed (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state if the length of 14 days quarantine period applies equally to all persons coming to Mauritius and, if not, why not.

Reply: I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to Parliamentary Question B/956, at our Sitting of 24 November 2020, whereby I informed the House that all incoming passengers from abroad are made to strictly observe the mandatory quarantine protocol.

All passengers, including children and infants, travelling to Mauritius must possess a certificate of a negative COVID-19 PCR test administered between 5 and 7 days prior to the date of boarding at the last point of embarkation. They should submit proof of purchase of a travel package, including accommodation, on a full-board basis, at a designated hotel for a mandatory 14-day in-room quarantine.

Following the 14-days of quarantine, in the event that they are tested COVID-19 negative, the persons will have to undergo 7 days' self-isolation, following which another PCR test will be carried out.

I am informed that for experts coming to Mauritius on official mission for the Government, such as in the context of the Wakashio Oil Spill or for the maintenance, installation or commissioning of medical equipment, the persons are isolated in a dedicated Quarantine Centre and are not allowed to leave their rooms as long as they have not obtained a negative result for their Day 0 PCR test.

After being tested negative for COVID-19 on Day 0, a sanitary corridor is set up for them to be able to commute from the Quarantine Centre to the place where their expertise is required under strict sanitary supervision of a Health official. During all their outdoor visits, the experts should at all times wear a face mask N 95, as indicated by the health protocol in force, the experts shall proceed to disinfect their hands after each interval of 30 minutes and

shall at all times maintain a distance of 2 metres between themselves and their counterparts. No direct interaction will be allowed between the experts and their counterparts in Mauritius. In case there is a necessity for close interaction, any counterpart from the local Mauritian community will have to be equipped with a full set of PPE.

I am informed that in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961, a special consideration is given to the Head of the diplomatic corps and their families who are quarantined for the duration of their stay at their residence, for up to 14 days. Over the duration of the quarantine, Police surveillance is provided on a 24-hr basis. PCR tests are carried out on Day 0, Day 7 and Day 14. In the event their Day 14 PCR test is negative, they are allowed to proceed with their normal activities.

For official delegations led by a Foreign Minister, a specific Protocol is worked out prior to their visit.

HOUSING UNITS – PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/205) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the proposed construction of 12,000 housing units, as announced in the Budget Speech 2020-2021, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Housing Development Company Ltd., information as to the -

- (a) locations identified therefor, and
- (b) number of housing units which will be delivered in the course of the current financial year.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 – FIRST LOCAL CASE – 2021

(No. B/206) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the first local case of Covid-19 in 2021, he will state -

- (a) the date of the detection thereof, and
- (b) how the patient became infected.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, the first local case of COVID-19 in 2021 was one Mr J.C., male of 44 years old. He was detected in Victoria Hospital Covid Testing Centre on 05 March 2021. He is an employee of SKC Surat Co. Ltd.

On the same day, contact tracing was done for all employees of SKC Surat Co. Ltd, which revealed 2 other cases.

All the other employees were sent to Quarantine Centres. In relation to this cluster, 1,800 contact tracing and testing were done. Subsequently, all members of the Surat family were quarantined.

Serological test for all employees and members of the Surat family was done, which identified the first infected person in this cluster as being one Mr S.S.

Mr J.C. has been the first detected person in the Wootun Cluster and biological studies have revealed that his infection was recent.

The same studies of the family members and employees of Surat have revealed that several other persons had been infected prior to Mr J.C.

Thus, in reply to part (b) of the question, the contamination circumstances of Mr. J.C. are ascribed to other employees from the company given that the members of his personal circle/family members have remained negative.

SUGARCANE SECTOR – VIABILITY

(No. B/208) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Reimbursable Advisory Services Agreement signed between the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security and the World Bank in the context of the study on the viability of the sugarcane sector in Mauritius, he will state if the report of the World Bank has been submitted and, if so, indicate the recommendations contained therein.

(Withdrawn)

BLOOD DONATION CAMPAIGN

(No. B/209) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Blood Donation Campaign being carried out island-wide, he will state if same is advisable amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 NATIONAL DEPLOYMENT AND VACCINATION PLAN - FRONTLINE WORKERS

(No. B/210) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the frontline workers, he will state the number thereof identified according to the Covid-19 National Deployment and Vaccination Plan, indicating the number thereof having been –

- (a) administered with a Covid-19 vaccine as at to date;
- (b) placed in quarantine centers, and
- (c) tested Covid-19 positive.

(Withdrawn)

BUDGET DEFICIT 2020/2021

(No. B/211) Mr Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the budget deficit for 2020/2021, he will give a breakdown of the –

- (a) estimated total revenue, and
- (b) total expenditure.

(Withdrawn)

COUVENT STREET & DUBREUIL VILLAGE – WASTEWATER PROJECT

(No. B/213) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the sewage connection at La Rue Couvent and Dubreuil Village, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the

Wastewater Management Authority, information as to the work progress thereof, indicating if the works will be completed on time.

Reply: I had informed the House in my reply to PQ B/738 at our Sitting of 03 November 2020 that the Wastewater Management Authority (the WMA) had initiated tendering process with regard to sewerage works at La Rue Couvent and Dubreuil village.

Further to recurrent wastewater nuisances faced by inhabitants along some streets in the region of La Rue Couvent/Wooton, the WMA had approved a Wastewater Project in two phases for the whole region of Wooton around La Rue Couvent following consultation with the Municipal Council of Curepipe.

Accordingly, Phase I of the project will be implemented along Bhoyragee Lane and towards Gilbert Joson Street where most cases of overflow are located and involves connection of some 27 houses to the sewer network.

I am informed by the WMA that the contract for Phase I of the Wastewater Project has been awarded on 25 January 2021 and works have started on 19 February 2021. All trial pits have been completed and traffic diversion signs erected. The project duration is one year. According to the programme of works, works are expected to be completed by January 2022.

However, due to the lockdown, activities on site have stopped as from 10 March 2021. Being given that the project area is located in the designated Red Zone, the Contractor has to apply for and obtain Special Red Zone Work Access Permits. Works will thereafter resume and a revised programme of works will be agreed between the Contractor and WMA.

As far as Phase II of the project is concerned, it will cover the remaining region of Wooton. In line with the decision of the Municipality of Curepipe, it will be implemented once the Metro Express Project is completed in Curepipe, in view of traffic congestion already being experienced.

With regard to wastewater works at Dubreuil Village, I had already informed the House that inhabitants, especially those located at the backside of Mahatma Gandhi and SSR Streets, had been facing recurrent nuisances due to the poor state of the old common sewer reticulation network servicing them and the fact that the residents have constructed along the service corridors of their houses rendering intervention of operations and maintenance works of the WMA difficult.

In this connection, the WMA has launched tenders for Wastewater Rehabilitation Works in December 2021. Bids received on 22 January 2021 have been evaluated and in accordance with procurement procedures, notification of award will be made.

The project, which consists of the construction of about 660 m sewer line and connection involving some 55 houses, will be for a duration of one year, starting from date of commencement of works.

CEB RENEWABLE ENERGY SCHEME – NGOs & CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS

(No. B/214) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the CEB Renewable Energy Schemes for Non-Governmental Organisations and charitable institutions, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to where matters stand as to the implementation thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the CEB that under the Renewable Energy Scheme for NGOs and Charitable Institutions, each qualified NGO or charitable institution will benefit from the free installation, by the CEB, of a solar PV kit of a capacity not exceeding 4kWp.

The Scheme will operate under the net billing method, whereby 50% of the monthly energy produced and thereof exported to the grid will be credited every month to the NGO or Charitable Institution electricity contract account at a rate of Rs2.31 per kWh.

Following a call for interest carried out by CEB in October 2020, 23 applications have been received and administratively processed.

A technical assessment of the premises of the applicants as well as a network survey need to be effected by the CEB prior to installation of the solar panels. This exercise, which has started, will resume as soon as the confinement is lifted.

In parallel, the procurement of the solar PV kits is being finalised and bids are expected to be launched through the Central Procurement Board shortly. Installation would start as soon as the kits are delivered to CEB.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC – FUNERAL PROTOCOL

(No. B/215) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to deaths related to the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state if the funeral protocol has been reviewed.

Reply: My Ministry had developed a protocol for the funeral of persons passing away as a result of COVID-19 as from 25 March 2020.

The protocol is comprehensive based on World Health Organisation's recommendation and has also made provision for religious rituals. The protocol consists of removal of dead body from the isolation area, quarantine centre, handling of dead bodies in mortuary, autopsies, transportation to cremation or burial ground.

I wish to inform the House that the protocol developed in March 2020 is still in force.

Upon Death of Patient with COVID-19, hospital contacts the relative of the deceased for necessary documents required by Doctor for issue of relevant documents required for cremation or burial. Hospital informs Health Office of the Region. The Health Office undertakes the following -

- (1) to check by phone with hospital whether "early cremation/burial" has been inserted on the Cause of Death/ Form B;
- (2) to arrange for coffin with hospital;
- (3) to arrange for Mortuary Van and two Mortuary Attendants from Vagrant Depot/Hospital;
- (4) to contact relative of deceased (phone no. available in patient's Hospital File) to confirm whether deceased will be cremated or buried, and to inform the latter about procedures for cremation permit/burial;
- (5) to liaise with Bigara Cremation Ground/Cemetery or if need be, the Municipal Council of Curepipe, for reservation of incinerator or for digging of grave in the section reserved for Covid burials, as the case may be;
- (6) to contact the nearest Civil Status Office or the Civil Status Officer (on-call), for registration of the death;
- (7) in case of cremation, the Health Office issues the cremation permit on receipt of all relevant documents;

- (8) Insecticide Sprayer Operator calls at hospital to disinfect the sealed mortuary bag containing the shrouded corpse, then the coffin in which the corpse is placed. The Mortuary Van is also disinfected once the coffin has been loaded in it by the Mortuary Attendants;
- (9) a PH&FSI escorts the Mortuary Van up to the Bigara Cremation Ground/Cemetery and from that point onwards another PH&FSI of Curepipe Health Office takes over to supervise all operations;
- (10) the coffin is disinfected anew, removed from the vehicle by the Mortuary Attendants and placed either on the trolley for cremation or in the designated grave for burial.
- (11) after cremation or burial, the Mortuary Van and the hall in which the cremation was held or the grave are all disinfected.
- (12) the Public Health Inspector supervising the operations should ensure that –
 - a) all COVID-19 sanitary measures are respected;
 - b) the coffin remains closed at all times;
 - c) not more than 10 relatives of the deceased are present for the burial or cremation;
 - d) all persons present are wearing face masks and maintaining social distancing.
- (13) upon completion of operations, the Public Health Inspector supervising the operations at Bigara Cemetery/Crematorium to report to the Office of the Director, Public Health and Food Safety.

NATIONAL COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMME FUND

(No. B/216) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Covid-19 National Deployment and Vaccination Plan, he will state the quantum of funds earmarked therefor, indicating the quantum thereof disbursed as at to date.

Reply: I am informed that the National COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Fund has been set up as a Special Fund under the Finance and Audit Act to finance the National COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. The main objective of the Special Fund is to mobilise

and manage fund required for the implementation of the Programme, including amongst others, the cost of the vaccines, storage equipment, air freight and other logistics.

As at date, the Fund has received a total amount of Rs435, 166,998.

I am further informed that as at date, a total amount of Rs188,447,235 has been disbursed for the procurement of vaccines as follows -

100,000 doses of Covishield from Serum Institute of India	Rs21,149,472
230,150 doses of Covaxin from Bharat Biotechnologies India Limited	Rs139,600,763
Part payment for 100,800 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines from COVAX Facility.	Rs18,347,000
15% downpayment for the procurement of 151,231 doses of Janssen vaccines (Johnson & Johnson) through the African Union	Rs9,300,000
Total	Rs188,447,235

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & CHILD ABUSE - REPORTED CASES

(No. A/45) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to domestic violence and child abuse, she will state the number of reported cases thereof to the Child Development Unit and the Family Unit, respectively, since January 2020 to date, indicating in each case –

- (a) when same was reported;
- (b) the nature of the case, and
- (c) the actions taken in relation thereto, if any.

Reply: I am informed that regarding cases of domestic violence since January 2020 to date, a total of 3,094 cases have been reported to my Ministry. The details pertaining to (a) when the cases were reported, (b) nature of the cases and (c) actions taken in relation thereof are being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

As regards, case of child abuse, a total of 4,031 cases have been registered at my Ministry out of 7,310 cases of children reported for period January 2020 to March 2021. The details pertaining to (a) when the cases were reported, (b) nature of the cases and (c) actions taken in relation thereof are being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.