



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 11 MAY 2021

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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

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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. 07 of 2021

Sitting of Tuesday 11 May 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)

ANNOUNCEMENT**PARLIAMENTARY SITTING - 04 MAY 2021 - UTTERANCE OF
DEROGATORY WORDS**

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have an announcement to make.

I wish to inform the House that, on Wednesday 05 May 2021, I received a letter from the hon. Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare in relation to the utterance of some derogatory words in the course of the proceedings of the Parliamentary Sitting of Tuesday 04 May 2021, which is being widely and diversely commented in the media.

In the light thereof, I caused an internal investigation to be carried out, under the supervision of the Clerk of the National Assembly, with a view to ascertaining if the alleged derogatory words had, in fact, been uttered and, if so, by whom.

Moreover, in the course of the investigation, it also came to light that a video footage of the relevant time at which the alleged derogatory words were uttered was being circulated on Facebook and it appeared that there is a discrepancy between the Parliament TV version, which is the official version, and the Facebook version.

Hon. Members, I have to report that –

- according to the video footages, some derogatory words had, in fact, been uttered;
- however, it has not been possible to unequivocally identify the person having uttered same, and
- it has been deemed most appropriate to seek and obtain the forensic expertise of the Cyber Crime Office of the Mauritius Police Force for assistance in this matter.

Hon. Members can rest assured that, once I will be in presence of the findings of the said experts, I will report on this matter accordingly.

Moreover, on this same subject, I wish to inform the House that, on 05 May 2021, I also received an email from the hon. Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floreal, (Ms Anquetil), I quote –

“requesting that you, (that is, myself) instruct the Technical Department which is responsible for audio and video recordings of proceedings in the Assembly to ensure

safe custody of all recordings and to prevent any unlawful tampering with these recordings.”

and further stated, I quote –

“You will appreciate that both allegations will have to be properly investigated, hence the need to ensure the authenticity of evidence.”

The House would appreciate that a letter of such a tenor from a hon. Member is most regrettable, inasmuch as it is tantamount to casting doubts on the integrity of the Assembly and the officers serving same.

I thank you.

Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

The Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No VII of 2021). (In Original)

B. Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning,

Ministry of Tourism

The Annual Report 2018-2019 and Audited Financial Statement of the Tourism Authority for the year ending 30 June 2019. (In Original)

C. Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology

The Annual Report of the Private Secondary Education Authority (PSEA) for the Financial year 2018-2019.

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

The Annual Reports of the Residential Care Home Fund for the Years ended 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2019.

E. Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance

The Financial Intelligence and Anti-Money Laundering (Review Panel) Rules 2021. (Government Notice No. 102 of 2021)

F. Ministry of Health and Wellness

(a) The Quarantine (COVID-19) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 99 of 2021)

(b) The Clinical Trials (Medical Devices Trials) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 100 of 2021)

(c) The Covid-19 (Closing Down of Premises and Restriction of Activities) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (Government Notice No. 101 of 2021)

G. Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage

The Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements of the Bhojpuri Speaking Union for the year ending 30 June 2018.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**HOSPITALS - BIRTHS - ALLEGED MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE - 01
FEBRUARY TO 15 APRIL 2021 - COMPLAINTS**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to alleged medical negligence relating to births in regional hospitals occurring from 01 February to 15 April 2021, he will state the number of complaints received, indicating the number thereof having been the subject of further enquiry by the Standing Committee on Medical Negligence, indicating –

- (a) the date of start of the enquiries, and
- (b) if the said enquiries have now been completed, and the number thereof, if any, referred to the Medical Council for further action.

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I wish to inform the House that minimum personal information will be given in my reply to this Private Notice Question and I hope that Members will not impress on me to give very personal details on the procedures for delivery. I entirely empathise with the families in these difficult and trying situations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that nearly 8 million children are stillborn worldwide each year, that is, one infant every 16 seconds, according to joint estimates by UNICEF, World Health Organisation, World Bank and the United Nations in 2020.

In Mauritius, the stillbirth rate was 10.7 per 1,000 births in 2019 and has been stable since several years. The main causes are diabetes during pregnancy, gestational hypertension, auto-immune diseases, haemorrhages before childbirth, maternal infections, pregnancy complications with frequent underlying cause of Intra Uterine Growth Retardation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, prior to 2020, my Ministry had a procedure to investigate into all complaints of alleged medical negligence, including stillbirths.

On receipt of a complaint, a preliminary investigation was carried out at the level of the hospital by the Regional Health Director. A report was, thereafter, submitted to my Ministry and upon examination of the preliminary report, my Ministry decided whether to set up an Independent Inquiry Committee or otherwise. The Independent Inquiry Committee was constituted as follows –

- (i) a Regional Health Director from another region as Chairperson;
- (ii) a Medical Specialist in the field;

- (iii) another co-opted Medical Specialist in the field, as required;
- (iv) a Medical Specialist from the private sector as co-opted member if required, and
- (v) an Assistant Permanent Secretary as Secretary to the Committee.

The Independent Inquiry Committee submitted its report together with its findings and recommendations to my Ministry; and where my Ministry concluded on any evidence of medical negligence against a medical practitioner, the case was referred to the Medical Council under Section 13 of the Medical Council Act for further investigation and appropriate action.

In case charges are levelled against the doctors, the matter is referred to the Medical Disciplinary Tribunal, chaired by a sitting Puisne Judge, which submits its recommendation to the Medical Council. After examination of the recommendation of the Medical Disciplinary Tribunal by the Medical Council, the matter is submitted to the Public Service Commission for necessary disciplinary action.

Moreover, for cases referred to the Courts, these have their own complex procedures which may take years to be resolved, notwithstanding Appeal and Counter Appeals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in May 2020, there were 44 outstanding cases of alleged medical negligence, some of which dated back to 2017, and were still pending at the level of the Independent Inquiry Committees. Due to the heavy workload ...

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. My question relates not to way back; it relates to the number of cases from 01 February to 15 April. I fail to understand why the Minister is taking us back to May 2020, etc. I would like your help, Mr Speaker, Sir, to ask the Minister to stick to the question.

Mr Speaker: Okay, you made your point. Stick to the question.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to addressing this situation, in June 2020, Government set up the Medical Negligence Standing Committee to carry out preliminary investigations into all cases of complaints of alleged medical negligence at the level of public health institutions before referring the matter to the relevant regulatory body. The Medical Negligence Standing Committee started its first investigation on 02 July 2020.

Mr Speaker Sir, the Terms of Reference of the Medical Negligence Standing Committee are to –

- (i) ascertain that reasonable steps, including compliance to protocols and guidelines have been observed in the management of the case;
- (ii) identify any shortcomings which may have led to mismanagement of the patient;
- (iii) confirm if proper diagnosis was made and appropriate treatment/tests prescribed;
- (iv) confirm if treatment administered to patient was appropriate;
- (v) identify any foreseeable cause which could have led to lack of proper treatment and management of the patient which may have led to the death of the patient.
- (vi) identify if any officer by name and grade found to have been negligent in the performance of his duty, and
- (vii) make observations and recommendations accordingly for further action at the level of my Ministry.

The Committee is chaired by a Barrister-at-Law and comprises retired medical practitioners and co-opted medical specialists in the public and private sector in relevant fields.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since the setting-up of the Medical Negligence Standing Committee in June 2020, the Committee has been meeting at least twice a week, except during the lockdown periods, and has been investigating into 49 cases of alleged medical negligence. Out of the 49 cases, 36 cases have been completed. Out of the 36 cases completed, 9 cases concluded with medical negligence and were referred to the respective Statutory Disciplinary Bodies as appropriate. Necessary disciplinary action as provided for in section 46(A) of the Public Service Commission Regulations is taken accordingly when referred by the Medical Council.

The remaining 13 cases are still under enquiry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, two complaints have been received at my Ministry from 01 February to 15 April 2021 and with regard to part (a) of the Private Notice Question, I am informed that from 01 February to 15 April 2021, two cases of new-born complaints have been referred to the Medical Negligence Standing Committee for an in-depth enquiry.

“Case of late baby P. R – SSRN Hospital”

Mr Speaker Sir, following a complaint from the father of late baby P. R. on 14 April 2021 to the Police and subsequently referred to my Ministry on the same date, a preliminary

enquiry has been conducted by the Regional Health Director of the SSRN Hospital on the same day.

The report of the preliminary enquiry by the Regional Health Director, comprising reports from the Consultant in Charge, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Specialist/Senior Specialist, Obstetrics and Gynaecology on call, Medical Health Officer, Regional Nursing Administrator, was submitted to my Ministry on the same day.

After examination of the preliminary report from the Regional Health Director, SSRN Hospital, at the level of my Ministry, the case of alleged medical negligence in respect to the death of baby P. R. at SSRN Hospital was referred to the Medical Negligence Standing Committee (MNSC) for further investigation on Friday 16 April 2021. The Committee has had its first meeting on Monday 19 April 2021 and has had several sittings since then up to Monday 10 May 2021 and is expected to complete and submit its report before end of this month.

The report from the Medical Negligence Standing Committee is, therefore, being awaited.

“Case of Baby E. Q. of Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that Mrs V. Q. was admitted on 01 February 2021 following referral from private Gynaecologist. On examination by the Gynaecologist, I am informed that the patient was found to have loss of liquor. An Ultrasound was done, which showed a foetus with parameters indicating 23 weeks of gestation with anhydramnios, that is, there is complete absence of amniotic fluid.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that, in view of the severe prematurity and anhydramnios, the case was discussed with the Paediatrician for possible admission in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. In view of the gestational age and the biometry, it was decided that the baby would be kept under observation and no aggressive management would be carried out at birth.

I am further informed that the case was discussed with both the patient and her partner who understood the line of management of her condition in view of the very poor prognosis of the foetus; therefore, she was managed conservatively. Within one week of admission, on 04 February 2021 at 16:00 hours, the patient went into spontaneous premature labour. The Specialist on call was informed.

I am informed that on 05 February 2021, it was decided to expedite delivery to minimise maternal complications. The treating Specialist informed the Gynaecologist on call on that day about the case and the management plan which was already decided since the

admission of the patient. At delivery, I am informed that the baby was not responsive. Since the foetus was of 24 weeks gestation, it was considered as an abortion.

I am also informed that the Consultant Gynaecologist, during his usual Ward round, when inspecting the new-born for any congenital malformation, confirmed signs of life in the form of moaning and laboured breathing and subsequently shifted the baby to Neonatal ICU.

I am informed, on examination by the Consultant Paediatrician, the baby showed very feeble and intermittent cry and moaning. Breathing was laboured and irregular with bilateral subcostal recessions, the heart rate was 60-70 per minute and the extremities were cyanosed. There were few spontaneous limb movements and reflexes were absent.

I am further informed that as at date, the baby is still in Neonatal ICU and her condition is stable.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the case has been referred to Medical Negligence Standing Committee for enquiry on 04 May 2021 and I am informed that preliminary enquiry has already started since 05 May 2021 and the next meeting is scheduled on 17 May 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the Private Notice Question, my Ministry is awaiting the reports from the Medical Negligence Standing Committee.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to reassure the House that my Ministry is taking necessary measures to improve the situation of Obstetrics & Gynaecology and Paediatric Units of our Hospitals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also wish to inform the Members that my Ministry has recently launched a new cooling therapy, also known as Therapeutic Hypothermia, in the Neonatal ICU of all regional hospitals. The cooling therapy is a life saving treatment that prevents further brain damage in newborns, who are born with a condition known as perinatal asphyxia.

My Ministry has also procured 14 new neonatal ventilators and also 2 new nitric oxide therapy delivery systems. This nitric oxide therapy is a Selective Pulmonary Vasodilator which reduces blood pressure in the pulmonary blood vessels and increases the chances of survival of critically ill babies.

I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has an ongoing specialised training programme for Doctors and Nurses in Neonatal Intensive Care.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly, let me table two letters from each of the families, asking me to take up this matter in the House. Also, Mr Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I will table Notification of Birth for baby Quirin, which says clearly and contradicts the two

statements made by the hon. Minister as to the baby being 22 weeks and then 24 weeks. The Notification of Birth signed by Dr. Etwaroo himself, the Gynaecologist, says the baby is 26 weeks, Mr Speaker, Sir, and that is extremely important, the number of weeks.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to ask some general questions on behalf of all the mothers who have to use the public services for birth. Now, the first question, Mr Speaker, Sir; the PRB Reports have, over the years now, and the last PRB Report also, have recommended that Gynaecologists and Paediatricians be employed and kept at the hospital on a 24-hour, 7-day basis. Mr Speaker, Sir, I will ask the hon. Minister whether he will arrange, this very week, for this PRB Report recommendation - I have the section, etc. - to be implemented so that any time, day or night, during a bank holiday or otherwise, a mother entering a regional hospital has at disposal a Gynaecologist and a Paediatrician. Mr Speaker, Sir, that is in the PRB Report, and I will also table that.

Dr. Jagutpal: Thank you, hon. Leader of the Opposition. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is right that I have said the baby at the time of admission was 23 weeks on Ultrasound, but, after one week, when the baby was delivered, the baby obviously is 24 weeks. Now, this is the clinical examination of the doctor. I have reported the facts that have been given to me.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the PRB Report, I totally agree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition that we need to have Gynaecologists and Paediatricians on call in our service and, obviously, this will improve the whole Child and Maternal Services. But, at the same time, in 2013, when the PRB recommended such action to be taken, we did not have the number of Specialists in the service. Even outside the service, we did not have the number of Specialists and this could not be implemented.

Nevertheless, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are working on the post of Registrar and we have recently submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Finance so that we can create this post of Registrar, and that will facilitate and upgrade our services. The grade of Registrar was created with the philosophy of having an intermediate grade between Medical and Health Officers and that of Specialist and Senior Medical Health Officers, because even if we are going to create the post to have Gynaecologists stay in the hospital, we don't have the number for the time being.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the Minister for his reply, but there is some confusion. The PRB Report has not asked for Doctors/Specialists to be on call, as he said, but to be physically present in the hospital. Can the Minister tell us when we can expect to

have Registrars, who are middle-ranking Doctors, posted in our regional hospitals, to deal with these two types of emergencies?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, Gynaecologists are on call on a daily basis in the hospital, but, to be physically present, as I mentioned earlier, we need to have more Specialists, more Gynaecologists so that we can implement same. As for the post of Registrar, the Ministry has already worked out all the terms and conditions and procedures. We need to get the approval of the Ministry of Civil Service, the Ministry of Finance and, if we have the green light of the different Ministries, we are going to implement the post of Registrar in our services and we will start by the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the complaints procedure, both the Director of Audit and the Public Accounts Committee have made very strong negative remarks about the current complaints procedure in his Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding baby Quirin - baby 'Q' - the mother made her complaint on 16 February and it was only after there was a large article, a two-page article in *Week-End* newspaper that, apparently, the matter has now been taken up by the Medical Negligence Standing Committee. How can he explain, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, for the three months nearly, the mother has not even been contacted once, not even an acknowledgement once by the Rose Belle Hospital, and what disciplinary action is he going to take about this?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, about the complaints procedure, what has been pointed out in the Audit Report was for previous years. That's why, last year, we set up the Medical Negligence Standing Committee. As I have already reported, there were pending cases since 2017 and thanks to this Medical Negligence Standing Committee, now we do not have pending cases. I have already given the reasons why we had these cases; that was for the previous Audit Report and, obviously, now we don't have such complaint.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the complaint was made to the Police. We received the complaint from the Police on the day that I have already mentioned. And on the same day, we have initiated that an inquiry be done as the procedure is at the level of the hospital, and then, through that procedure, we have already referred the case to the Medical Negligence Standing Committee.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is very worrying. Again, the Minister is being misinformed by Rose Belle Hospital. The lady went personally to deliver a complaint letter; it was picked up by the receptionist, not even by a Doctor at Rose Belle Hospital. Has his

Ministry no record of that complaint made at Rose Belle Hospital on 16 February, nearly three months ago? Not the Police complaint; that's another one. I am asking about the complaint in your hospital, Minister!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already given the procedures that have been followed; the complaint we have received through the Police. And now, if ever there is a complaint by the lady at the level of the hospital, the Ministry would have been informed about the complaint and immediate action would have been taken. But, now, it is at the level of the Medical Negligence Standing Committee. Let them do their work so that we can have an idea when the complaint was made. The complaints procedure is through the Medical Superintendent Office by the parents; that's what I have been informed.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not the time to say that this poor suffering lady is a liar and has not submitted the complaint. This is not the time to say so.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: I would ask the hon. Minister to inquire; call the lady, inquire and find out whether she has or has not - as she had told me personally - submitted and the circumstances in which it was taken.

(Interruptions)

This is a very serious matter. It can happen to any of your parents. So, be careful.

Now, don't treat her as a liar; speak to her and find out what has happened to the complaint because, so far, as I can see, Nehru Hospital has given you two inaccurate answers, easily proven by the Birth Certificate and by the statement of this poor mother. Mr Speaker, Sir. This shows...

Mr Speaker: No. no! Put the question!

Mr X. L. Duval: This is the question! This shows, and will the Minister not agree that the whole complaints procedure...

Mr Speaker: No, no! Put the question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Let me ask the question! The whole complaints procedure is *bancale* and needs to be changed, Mr Speaker, Sir, and needs to be reviewed. Will the

Minister ask an outside Consultant or a firm of Consultants to look at the whole complaints procedure? Because here is a case of wrongdoing and misinformation.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker Sir, whatever the hon. Leader of the Opposition has said, that the patient, maybe, she's a liar, I haven't said so. I will inquire and inform the House whether there has been a complaint lodged at the level of the hospital. But, at the same time, Mr Speaker, Sir, especially about complaints lodged and the time it takes, I will just give a brief of how it was in the past and how the Medical Negligence Standing Committee is now, as I have already reported.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, we had a complaint in 2005, with a death following a Caesarean section. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is only in 2013...

(Interruptions)

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

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to give information about how the complaint is being treated now on a fast track basis and how it was in the past. That's why I am giving...

Mr Speaker: You may continue!

Dr. Jagutpal: I am giving only relevant answers pertaining to the question of the duration of a complaint in process at the level of the Ministry. In 2005, there was a complaint following the death of a patient...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Jagutpal: ... and we had the verdict in 2013 for that complaint. It does not take eight years now. It is taking only a few months or a few weeks to deliver the report for a complaint.

Mr X. L. Duval: Thank you. Mr Speaker, Sir, therefore, I will ask the Minister not only to ask the hospital but to contact the lady herself, please.

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, sure.

Mr X. L. Duval: Now, I am going to talk about baby Ram, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is very, very shocking what happened, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, let's say that the head was severed. Doesn't the Minister agree that the basic human decency would have been to suture, *coudre* the head back before giving it to the parents and not giving it in two parts to the parents? This is my question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No comments! Only one Leader of the Opposition!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will take what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has said. I believe the experts have to tell us whether this has to be sutured because I believe there is a case and it is a Police case; what has to be done after that, I am not the Forensic Medical Practitioner or the Forensic Expert to give an advice on this, but I will surely share your views to the Forensic Expert.

Mr X. L. Duval: I am not asking the Minister to give instructions. Should this, God forbid, happen again, then, it will be a human decency that the head should be sutured back on.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the Minister also, is his Ministry so poor that a baby has to be delivered to his mother in a biscuit box or whatever it is? Astor Biscuit box? Is that the practice? What disciplinary action has he taken and what instructions will the Minister give so that never again this sort of occurrence happens again?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that hon. Mohamed made a comment over there. He has to withdraw it because he does not have the time to give his comment now when the Leader of the Opposition is putting his question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I will give my ruling later on.

Mr X. L. Duval: I will table this, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, about what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has said, it is the Police Medical Officer who can only do such things, the sutures and all that. It has to be done at that level. It is not the Ministry. Whenever such incidents happen, the Ministry will not undertake to do the suturing.

Mr X. L. Duval: So, Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister speak to the Police, the Medical Officer whatever, so that this is done in the future. There is a solution to everything. Mr Speaker, Sir, therefore, as far as the cardboard box is concerned, he has not replied about that one. But don't say the Police.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, I have already said...

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: You are saying it is the Prime Minister.

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

Mr Speaker: One by one!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already replied. Once this incident has taken place, the Police are in charge of everything and now it is the Police and the Police Medical Officer who have to...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You are not ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Quiet! Quiet!

Dr. Jagutpal: But, at this point in time, I will not make any comments on that because this is still an ongoing inquiry.

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: I tabled the photo; there is no need for any inquiry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to come now to the issue of echography, ultrasound. Mr Speaker, Sir, nurses are trained to carry out ultrasound and see what position the baby is, whether it is breech or not breech, the weight, etc. In Mauritius, the nurses are no longer trained to do echography. So, I am going to ask the hon. Minister whether he will arrange, as in the past in Mauritius, to have midwives and other nurses trained so that even when the Gynaecologist is not there, until you have him full-time, that these nurses can do echography and find out the basics of the position of the baby and the size, etc. It is a basic question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, so far, my information is nurses working in Midwifery are trained to do ultrasound and their training to do ultrasound is for the beginning of the pregnancy and when it comes at this stage of pregnancy, it is the Specialist Gynaecologist who should do the ultrasound.

At the same time, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will table a copy of all those Nursing Officers who have been trained to do ultrasound, the midwives who have been trained to do ultrasound in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have one last question. If my colleagues want to intervene, with pleasure.

Mr Speaker: Put your last question!

Mr X. L. Duval: No, usually, the last question is for me, but then the floor is open. It has been like that for years. You are changing it now?

Mr Speaker: Put the question!

Mr X. L Duval: You are changing it now?

Mr Speaker: Time is over! So, you have finished. Thank you very much.

Mr X. L Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is, obviously, with regard to both baby Ram and baby Quirin, the lack of a formal protocol at the hospitals. As far as baby Quirin is concerned, a protocol is required so that the threshold of viability, that is, the number of weeks a baby is to be considered as viable and also the procedures for premature and breech births in Mauritius. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he will not see to it, he will not agree to have urgently a protocol on these issues so that we no longer have these highly regrettable incidents in our hospitals.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a report on the viability of the age of foetus and I will briefly read this viability. At the same time, Mr Speaker, Sir, any baby, premature or not premature, who is delivered, we have the duty to give the chance for life, and that is what has been the philosophy, what is being done in the Ministry.

Briefly, I will just state the viability. In the foetal lung development at 24 weeks' gestation, there is production of surfactant; this is the substance that is crucial to the diffusion of gases, that is, oxygen. Viability definition is based on availability at different levels of Neo-Natal service. I will table this report about the age of viability.

Mr Speaker: Time over! Prime Minister's Question Time! Hon. Ameer Meea!

**PHOTOGRAPHIC ENFORCEMENT DEVICE - OVER-SPEEDING
OFFENCES - JULY 2019 TO JUNE 2020**

(No. B/293) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third 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 speeding, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of contraventions booked by the Photographic Enforcement Device Unit, over the period July 2019 to June 2020, per category of vehicles.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Photographic Enforcement Device Unit (PEDU) was set up by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit (TMRSU) of the Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail and has been operational since December 2008. The PEDU is responsible for the management of the structure, process, and system of the Photographic Enforcement Devices which capture over-speeding offences through Fixed Speed Cameras. The Unit is manned by Police Officers from the Traffic Branch of the Mauritius Police Force.

The Photographic Enforcement Device project comprises a network of Fixed Speed Cameras installed on our roads around the island. These fixed speed cameras are designed to take the photographs of vehicles, including their registration plates, which exceed the indicated speed limits on those sections of the road where the speed cameras are installed. The speed cameras are fixed in zones with indicated speed limits of 40 kilometres per hour, 60 kilometres per hour, 80 kilometres per hour and 110 kilometres per hour.

The photographs taken by the speed cameras are transmitted to the Photographic Enforcement Device Unit which processes the speeding offences. It is linked to the database of the National Land Transport Authority from where particulars and ownership of the vehicles are obtained.

Thereafter, Photographic Enforcement Device Notices are sent by post to the road traffic offenders for the payment of relevant fines for exceeding speed limit, in breach of Section 124 of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act of 2018.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since July 2019 to June 2020, 40,840 drivers have been booked by way of Photographic Enforcement Device for exceeding speed limit.

As regards the categorisation of vehicles contravened, the database system kept at the PEDU has been designed to keep records of the registration number, date, time and place of offence as well as the speed. It also captures photographs of the vehicle found speeding. However, the system does not categorise vehicles in terms of their make and type.

Mr Ameer Meea: During the period July 2019 to June 2020, the Photographic Enforcement Unit downloaded 10,008 images pertaining to speed violation by auto and motorcycles from speed cameras. The number of images relating to auto and motorcycles amounts to 7,751, representing 77% of images that were rejected by the Photographic Enforcement Unit, the main reason being no registration plate and registration plate obstructed. Therefore, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister what is being done to address this issue?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, in fact, the fixed speed cameras are capable of capturing speed offences by motorcycles. However, many offences that are committed by motorcycles are not being processed because of the difficulty in viewing their number plates in the photographs. I am informed that many number plates are not compliant with the required dimensions and with fixing them on the motorcycles as prescribed in the Road Traffic (Construction and Use of Vehicles) Regulations. Amendment was brought to the Road Traffic (Construction and Use of Vehicles) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations No. 21, which came into force on 31 March 2021.

The Regulations make provision for determining the dimensions of the registration plate and the size of the characters. The Regulations also make provision for electric autos and motorcycles to have a registration plate. Hence, the Police and the NLTA have now been urged to carry out crackdown operations to ensure that the provisions of the law are adhered to in regard to the dimensions of registration plate on motorcycles. I shall request hon. Members to also have a look at the Regulations that were in force before, because I know that the hon. Member is referring to the comments that have been made by the Director of Audit.

It was in the Ninth Schedule, and in fact Regulations 58 and 59 are mentioned in the Report, and we can see in the Ninth Schedule the size and spacing of characters on registration plates, and my colleague, the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, came with amendments, which are now contained in the Road Traffic Act Regulations that were made in 2021. So, I shall just ask the hon. Member to see and compare the sizes that have

been prescribed in those Regulations. And then, there is also the issue of how they affix the registration plate, because for the camera to be able to read the number, the number plate has to be affixed in such a way as to be readable. That is why I have mentioned in my reply that the Police Officers and the NLTA will now have to enforce those Regulations.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, Regulations 58 and 59 were already here since 2010, but, according to the Director of Audit's remarks, the Police and the NLTA were not enforcing these Regulations. And to use the words of the Director of Audit, the use of speed cameras to detect speed violation will be ineffective and images captured will be useless if these Regulations are not enforced. Therefore, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister to see to it that these existing Regulations since 2010 are enforced?

The Prime Minister: Yes, as I have already said, and I can understand the comments that have been made by the Director of Audit, but I am sure the hon. Member will appreciate that there were, in fact, two problems. The first one concerns the dimension of the number plate. Now, there is a new Regulation, and the characters have to be bigger and spaced. I shall not go into the details of this issue, but now the number plate is definitely more visible.

The second issue was the place where the number plate is fixed on the motorcycle. In many motorcycles, autocycles, it was fixed on the side. You can imagine that when the autocycle is over speeding, it will be impossible to capture the number plate because it is on the side. So, you cannot read it.

That is why they have now to fix it either in front or at the back and at certain places, which, obviously, will enable it to be captured by the device. That is why I said it is now for the officers of NLTA, and for Police Officers to see to it that those autocycles, motorcycles do abide by the law by affixing it in the required and legal way.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

Mrs Mayotte: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House which company was awarded the contract for installation and maintenance of these cameras?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2008 and 2010, there had been two procurement exercises to procure automatic mobile speed detection camera units and mobile cameras. Then, there was a third exercise for speed cameras that was carried out in 2012. I am informed that Proguard Ltd was awarded the contract for the supply, installation, commissioning, and operation of automatic speed enforcement cameras, which is the system

that we have now. The cost for installation of the speed cameras was Rs171,126,112.25, inclusive of VAT, and the maintenance contractor, since the installation of the system, has been Proguard Ltd. And I am informed that for the period 2020/21, the company was awarded the contract for a value of Rs33.7 m., inclusive of VAT.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the Prime Minister mentioned the number of contraventions. I would like to know, for such offences, is the driver contravened?

The Prime Minister: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are different steps to be followed. Once we have the data, the contraventions established by the speed cameras are downloaded on the server and they are manually processed. The first phase is the number plate recognition and each vehicle registration number is identified and highlighted by zooming at the number plate. Now, if it is a valid contravention, it is accepted, and then the next step is the owner lookup module. If it is rejected, the reason of reject is inserted, for example, in the case of Police vehicles and ambulances. Particulars of the owner are searched in the NTA database and all entries are verified and their appropriate offence is then selected and accepted.

I am also informed that the particulars of the owner of the vehicle are inserted on an envelope as well as in the registered postal book, with a serial number. Same is posted to the owner of the vehicle within 14 days and the owner, if he was not the driver at the time of the offence, has a delay of 28 days to pay the prescribed fine from the date of issue. Otherwise, when the owner was not the driver at the material time, he must inform the Commissioner of Police about the particulars of the driver and notices will have to be reprocessed accordingly.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: The question relates to speeding and contravention. May I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether use is being made of the Safe City cameras also for detecting speeding offences?

The Prime Minister: No, you are referring to the IVS cameras. For the time being, they cannot be used because the system needs to be adapted to the software to be able to do so. It can be done, but if it has to be done, then, obviously, we shall have to have a new agreement so that the software can be installed. But I can assure the House that, right now, they are not being used for that purpose.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the hon. Prime Minister mentioned the details captured. Can we know for how long these captured data are being kept by the PEDU Department?

The Prime Minister: I know that there is no specific time period which is defined in the law, but I am aware that it can be kept for many, many years. I shall try to find out for how many years, but I know it can be kept for many, many years.

ROCHE BOIS MOTORWAY – ILLEGAL ROAD RACING AT NIGHT

(No. B/294) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third 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 motorway at Roche Bois, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of contraventions booked and arrests effected, if any, for the holding of illegal rallies thereat at night, over the past two years, indicating the additional measures being envisaged for the prevention of the holding of such rallies thereat.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since January 2019 to date, no contravention has been booked, and no arrest effected for illegal road racing pursuant to Section 125 of the Road Traffic Act in the region of Roche Bois.

However, following complaints received on 24 May 2019 at night regarding illegal road racing and loud noise, a crackdown operation was immediately carried out by Roche Bois Police Station supported by a team from Criminal Investigation Division (CID) Port Louis North, Emergency Response Service (ERS) and Special Support Unit (SSU) with a view to preventing, deterring, and arresting persons involved in such illegal activities. When the Police reached the spot, they stopped three persons riding their motorcycles and who were suspected to have been participating in illegal road racing.

When Police questioned them, they denied any involvement in illegal road racing and no independent person came forward as witness. Nevertheless, thirteen contraventions, not related to illegal road racing were established against them for the following offences -

- (i) no letter L affixed on vehicle;

- (ii) failing to wear high visibility clothing;
- (iii) failing to produce driving licence or a photocopy thereof on demand;
- (iv) dangerous driving;
- (v) insurance vignette not affixed;
- (vi) motor Vehicle Licence not affixed;
- (vii) inefficient silencer;
- (viii) defaced number plate, and
- (ix) breach of condition attached to provisional licence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 17 April 2021 at night, following an anonymous phone call from an inhabitant complaining about illegal rally along the motorway, Roche Bois, three Police Officers proceeded there. They saw two persons riding their motorcycles at high speed and appeared to be participating in an illegal rally. On seeing the Police, the riders tried to escape. Whilst the Police Officers were trying to arrest the riders, a hostile crowd of about 20 persons present thereat, started throwing stones towards the three Police Officers and the Police vehicle in order to allow the riders to escape. In the course of the incident, the Officers were injured and the Police vehicle sustained minor damages. Enquiry in this case is proceeding.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that not later than 09 May 2021, a similar incident happened along Roche Bois New Trunk Road. Following an anonymous phone call from an inhabitant regarding an illegal rally, the Police went on the spot and saw some persons riding motorcycles at high speed. On seeing the Police, they rode away. And whilst effecting their patrol, the Police faced a hostile crowd of youngsters who pelted unknown objects towards the Officers and their vehicle, which sustained damages at the windscreen. Fortunately, nobody was injured, but no one could be arrested. Enquiry in this case also is ongoing.

Between January 2021 and May 2021, two crackdown operations have been carried out by the Police in the region of Roche Bois, whereby several vehicles were stopped and searched. However, no contravention was established as no person was found to be engaged in illegal road racing.

I am also informed by the Police that checks at Vehicle Check Points are carried out on a daily basis in the Roche Bois region and its vicinity at specific hours, with the participation of different Units of the Police Force targeting illegal road racing as follows -

- (a) on a daily basis, SSU provides night patrols in the North and along the motorway at Roche Bois, and
- (b) ERS jointly with personnel of Roche Bois Police Station perform checks on Friday and Saturday nights.

Safe City cameras, comprising a total of five Intelligence Video Surveillance cameras, have also been installed at three sites along the motorway between Cocoterie and Roche Bois roundabouts on 19 November 2019, 18 June 2020 and 21 August 2020 respectively.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Police have also informed that the following additional measures have been put in place to prevent the holding of illegal road racing on public roads, including the part of the motorway at Roche Bois -

- (a) regular crackdown operations are carried out during the night of Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays at strategic locations with a view to discouraging and tracking down the organisers of illegal road racing;
- (b) since Wednesday 17 June 2020, the Traffic Branch has implemented a new policing scheme called "Visible Patrol" along Motorway M1 and M2. Two mobile teams carry out daily patrols along the motorways from 22.00 hours to 06.00 hours to detect road traffic offences and to deter any illegal activity, including road racing;
- (c) sensitisation campaigns on road safety issues in targeted areas, at schools/colleges, youth centres and youth clubs are organised with a view to sensitising people on the dangers of such activities as speeding and illegal road racing. Since January 2019, 3,450 lectures have been delivered by personnel of Traffic Branch and 82,222 persons have been sensitised, and
- (d) gathering information by Field Intelligence Officers and CID on illegal road racing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the problem of illegal road racing is being faced by many countries around the world and it is also a matter of concern for Mauritius. It should be pointed out that every year, some 8 to 10 applications are received from registered organisations for

Police approval for the organisation of racing events in certain areas. If an application meets the criteria and all the necessary documents are submitted, it is approved.

The possibility of having dedicated spaces for racing activities had been envisaged in the past. But this measure involves certain risks and costs associated with its implementation. That is why we need to be very cautious before taking a decision.

I am informed by the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation that a Rally Circuit project is under consideration. In this regard, it is proposed to carry out a feasibility study and an amount of Rs2 m. has been earmarked in the Budget for that purpose.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, since we are talking about speeding, I will make a polite request to the hon. Prime Minister, if he can speed up his reply because we are running out of time.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to mention that illegal rallies is a current feature in the vicinity of the motorway in Roche Bois whereby several inhabitants have made complaints to the Police but with no fruitful results. And it is good that the Prime Minister mentioned that there are crackdown operations and checks. But can I ask the hon. Prime Minister if Police Officers can be posted permanently during the weekend, in specific time at night, so that they can act as a deterrent to those illegal rallies?

The Prime Minister: First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, when a question is put to me, I try my best to provide sufficient information so that the hon. Member understands my reply. I am not coming here, before this House, to waste the time of the House. And I hope that the hon. Member will appreciate that all I have been saying in my reply is relevant to the question that he has asked. That is my first remark.

Secondly, of course, since the question was put, I have discussed the matter with the Commissioner of Police. I have also discussed it with my colleague, the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, and we are looking into ways and means of how best we can address this issue and, obviously, we do not want people to go against the law, especially when, in the past, there have been fatal cases.

So, we are looking into it in addition to the measures I have mentioned, and I do not want to repeat again what I have said, because, in fact, I have already replied to the supplementary question that is being asked by the hon. Member. And, in fact, asking it again is wasting the time of the House, but, anyway, I do not mind because the question is being asked. And I have said in my reply that there is coordination, first of all, between the

authorities, and on the side of the Police, I am being told that there are patrols at certain times at night. With the support of the cameras which have been installed at different places, the Police will give particular attention to that stretch of the road and, obviously, as I have said, the Officers will have to mount crackdown operations, and I have given instances where Police Officers have attended cases and, unfortunately, they have been obstructed while doing their duty. This is also being looked to ensure a better coordination.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The country has been witness to many tragic accidents as a result of illegal rallies and, at the same time, the Amateur Motor Racing Clubs are willing to live their passion within a safety and legal framework. So, with regard to existing law, does the Prime Minister intend to review the law and consider enforcing more strict sanctions to discourage the practice of illegal rallies and, at the same time, regulate, more ease the organisation of legal rallies?

The Prime Minister: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, the legal provisions and the penalties that are prescribed for illegal road racing have not changed since many, many years. When I look at the law, Section 125 of the Road Traffic Act 1962, it is pertinent that I read what the law says, and I quote –

“Any person who, except with the consent of, and in accordance with any conditions imposed by, the Commissioner of Police –

- (a) promotes; or
- (b) takes part in,

any race or trial of speed between motor vehicles on the road shall commit an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding 1,000 rupees”.

Clearly, this clause relating to the illegal road racing and its penalty needs to be reviewed and it, of course, needs to be made stricter, and I am going to discuss the issue with my colleague, the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, and I myself believe we need, in fact, to amend the law so that it also includes a term of imprisonment. But this is my opinion, and it will have to be discussed with my colleague and then, eventually, Government will come with amendments.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table is advised that PQs B/295, B/299, B/301, B/302, B/303, B/306 and B/308 have been withdrawn! Time over! PQs!

Hon. Ameer Meea!

**STATUTORY BODIES AND/OR PRIVATE AND OTHER BODIES BY
GOVERNMENT - LOANS**

(No. B/309) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to loans advanced to statutory bodies and/or private and other bodies by Government which are still payable, he will give the list thereof, indicating in each case the –

- (a) duration thereof;
- (b) quantum thereof, and
- (c) quantum of arrears, if any, as at to date, indicating the measures taken, if any, for the recovery thereof.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, en ce qui concerne les parties (a), (b) et (c) de la question, je dépose les informations demandées par l'honorable membre.

Par ailleurs, permettez-moi de préciser qu'à la date du 31 mars 2021, il y avait un total de R 12,79 milliards de prêts accordés par le gouvernement dont environ R 2,26 milliards d'arriérés sur le remboursement.

Sur cette somme, R 2,06 milliards concernent des prêts approuvés jusqu'à fin décembre 2014 et R 0,2 milliard pour des prêts accordés depuis janvier 2015.

Ce gouvernement a pris un grand nombre de mesures pour recouvrer les arriérés ainsi que pour empêcher les arriérés de s'accumuler davantage.

À cet égard, ces mesures comprennent –

- (i) un suivi rigoureux du remboursement des prêts comme prévu en envoyant des avis de remboursement en temps voulu et en s'engageant auprès des organismes publics ;
- (ii) le rééchelonnement du remboursement des prêts dans les cas où les organismes publics sont confrontés à des difficultés de trésorerie et financières ;
- (iii) la possible mise en place d'une période de moratoire plus longue pour les prêts afin que les organismes publics puissent rembourser les prêts lorsqu'ils ont commencé à récolter des retours positifs sur leurs investissements, et

- (iv) pour les organismes publics qui n'ont pas la capacité de rembourser les prêts, leurs projets d'infrastructure ne sont plus financés par les prêts mais par des apports de fonds propres et des transferts de capitaux. Ces organismes publics pourront ainsi utiliser leurs recettes pour apurer leurs arriérés et financer eux-mêmes leurs opérations.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, outstanding loans according to the remark of the Director of Audit, have increased by 8% to reach Rs11.5 billion as at 30 June 2020 and, two statutory bodies, namely CWA and Waste Water Management Authority, owed Rs3.9 billion and Rs3.4 billion, respectively, representing 63% of this Rs11.5 billion. Therefore, can I ask the hon. Minister of Finance, what is being done to recoup this money from these two institutions?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, comme je l'ai dit précisément sur cette question, nous avons mis en place plusieurs mesures pour essayer d'aider aussi les entreprises publiques à passer ces moments difficiles. Vous savez, on fait des investissements et il y a aussi des moments difficiles qu'on est en train de passer avec la COVID etc. mais il y a aussi des arriérés qui ont été accumulés dans le passé et pour cela on est en train de faire un travail pour voir comment on peut procéder par la suite si on ne va pas mettre des fonds propres pour essayer d'apurer ces situations difficiles.

Donc, concernant les deux entreprises publiques en question, je vais travailler avec mon collègue pour le prochain budget pour essayer de voir comment on peut continuer pour apurer la situation financière de ces deux entreprises publiques.

Mr Ameer Meea: Reply of the Minister of Finance in the Audit Report is, I quote –

“With a view to further improve the financial situation, the debt servicing ability to these organisations, several efficiency and revenue optimisation measures are being implemented.”

So, therefore, can I ask the hon. Minister what are these optimisation measures?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je viens de donner les détails concernant les mesures pour essayer d'apurer les arriérés de ces entreprises publiques. J'en ai cité quatre. Je ne vais pas revenir dessus. Je pense que l'honorable membre a entendu les quatre.

Il y a aussi un travail continu qu'on fait au niveau du ministère des Finances pour essayer de continuellement améliorer la situation financière des entreprises publiques. En ce sens, on a mis en place un comité de pilotage au niveau du ministère des Finances pour voir

le niveau de la dette et travailler sur les mesures qu'on doit prendre pour essayer de diminuer le niveau de la dette dans le futur.

Donc, à ce stade, on est en train de continuer de travailler et on va venir avec des mesures précises dans le prochain budget pour améliorer la situation financière de ces entreprises.

Mr Ameer Meea: The hon. Minister gave general remarks about what they will do but not precisely what is being done. I will give him two examples whereby the outstanding loans exceed the original loan that was advanced to the statutory body. Two examples; First is polytechnics, original loan is 486 m. and now the balance is 651 m. and the second one is Airport Terminal Operations Ltd, original loan is 494 m. and the current balance is 573 m. So, in these two ICU cases, what is being done to redress the situation?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'aimerais déjà que l'honorable membre enlève le mot "ICU". Je ne vois pas en quoi il y a "ICU Cases" dedans. Je viens de répéter on est dans une situation difficile. Si je reprends concernant la compagnie AML, l'aéroport de Maurice, qui est une compagnie fructueuse, mais, malheureusement, on est dans une situation de COVID et qu'il n'y a pas un seul touriste, ni de passager qui passe les frontières à Maurice, donc on doit prendre en considération cela.

Donc, pour revenir...

(Interruptions)

Je peux répondre à la question s'il vous plaît ? Donc, pour revenir à la question, c'est tout simple, il ne doit pas mélanger et faire le total entre les deux. D'un côté, il y a le montant du prêt et de l'autre côté, il y a les intérêts et autres arriérés qui ont été accumulés et ils ont eu une garantie de l'État et si jamais l'État doit prendre part dans le remboursement, nous allons travailler dessus. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: If these parastatal bodies were companies they would already be in liquidation because they are unable to pay their debt when they fall due. This being the case, is the hon. Minister considering carrying out an audit to ascertain for each parastatal body, why they are unable to repay their debt; whether it is for structural reason, and in the light of this report, whether to consider to write off the debt or capitalise the debt?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour cette question et oui, au niveau du ministère des Finances, on est en train de travailler dessus pour voir entreprise publique par entreprise publique, les dettes qu'ont ces entreprises et qu'est-ce qu'on va faire pour le futur, c'est pour ça que je disais, on va venir avec des mesures précises dans le prochain budget.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

PAILLES – SMART CITY

(No. B/310) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the proposed implementation of a Smart City at Pailles, on the premises of the former *Domaine Les Pailles*, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation Ltd., information as to where matters stand.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, la *State Investment Corporation Ltd* a conclu un *Joint-Venture Agreement* avec *Yihai International Investment Management Ltd* pour le développement d'un projet *Smart City* à Pailles.

Le projet comprend trois phases, dont un ensemble résidentiel d'appartements, *penthouses* et villas; un ensemble de bureaux et de locaux commerciaux, et enfin, un ensemble d'espaces de loisirs.

Le projet a démarré après l'obtention d'un *Smart City Certificate* auprès de l'*Economic Development Board* en octobre 2019. Les deux confinements de 2020 et 2021 en raison de la pandémie de la COVID-19 ainsi que les limitations de la mobilité des ressources pendant ces périodes ont retardé la mise en œuvre du projet.

Malgré les contraintes évoquées, les travaux de construction de la première phase sont actuellement en cours pour quatre villas de luxe ainsi que pour les infrastructures de base pour le drainage et aussi pour la construction d'appartements. Les deux premières villas devraient être achevées en juin 2021 et les deux autres en septembre 2021.

La commercialisation des villas et des appartements est en cours au niveau local et international par le biais de divers canaux. Le promoteur a notamment lancé une campagne de publicité en ligne pour la vente des villas et des appartements. Le rythme du projet de construction des villas et des appartements dépendra des réactions du marché de la part des

acheteurs étrangers potentiels qui souhaiteront peut-être se rendre sur place pour visiter le site et observer les infrastructures avant de prendre leur décision d'achat. Merci.

Mr Ameer Meea : *Mr Speaker, Sir, Le Défi du 26 décembre 2020 titré*

“*La Yihai Garden Smart City est qualifiée comme étant le plus gros projet du siècle par la SIC.*”

Un millier d'appartements de luxe, hôtels 5 étoiles, une centaine de villas luxueuses, un centre commercial entre autres et maintenant nous entendons dire, le ministre des Finances, qu'il y a la construction de deux villas ? Quatre villas et deux en cours de construction!

Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister if he is aware that SIC has invested 97 *arpents* of land? If I take it as *15 millions l'arpent*, it's more than 1 billion taxpayers' money that is in this project since 2015 and today we hear the hon. Minister stating to the House that only two villas are being constructed!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, comme je viens de l'évoquer, dans ce genre de projet, les acheteurs potentiels aiment bien venir voir le suivi du projet. Donc, pour la finalisation de ce projet, nous devons en terminer avec la pandémie qui sévit actuellement dans le pays. Nous savons tous. Je pense que les frontières sont fermées et qu'on est en train de subir de plein fouet le COVID à travers le monde.

Donc, ce projet, et là c'est aussi agréable de l'entendre de la part du promoteur, c'est que ce projet n'est pas mis dans un panier, il n'a pas arrêté le projet parce que, à cause de la COVID il voulait arrêter le projet, non, il dit, il est en train de voir et d'attendre que les acheteurs potentiels viennent voir ce projet et continuent le projet par la suite.

Donc nous, ce qu'on est en train de faire, on est en train de suivre avec Yihai, ils ont déjà commencé la construction, ils avaient prévu la construction de quatre villas, ils vont le faire et par la suite, on va continuer avec ce projet. Je ne vois pas l'urgence de l'honorable membre sur ce projet, il n'y avait pas un délai prédéterminé. En tout cas, ce délai avec la COVID, s'il y en avait un, maintenant avec la COVID, c'est sûr qu'on doit ajouter un délai supplémentaire dessus.

Mr Ameer Meea: COVID is 2020, the project started since 2018 where they obtained all the approvals. So...

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président...

Mr Ameer Meea: I have not finished.

Dr. Padayachy: Non ! Non ! M. le président,...

Mr Ameer Meea: No, I have not finished! I will ask my question, then you can reply.

Mr Speaker: Wait! Put your question!

Mr Ameer Meea: Answering to a PQ B/950 on November 2020, the hon. Minister stated to the House -

« *La structure des financements de phases II et III sera elle aussi élaborée dans un business plan qui sera défini et approuvé par les actionnaires de la joint-venture.* »

Therefore, can I ask the hon. Minister, in the name of transparency, accountability and good governance, can we table a copy of the Business Plan?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, avant de *table* quoi que ce soit, j'aimerais préciser, le projet a démarré - je pense qu'il doit l'écouter encore une fois - le projet a démarré après l'obtention d'un *Smart City Certificate* auprès de l'*Economic Development Board* en octobre 2019. Je n'ai pas entendu 2015 nulle part quand j'étais en train de...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Padayachy: Donc, le projet...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Padayachy: Je vois bien que l'honorable membre n'est pas au courant du processus concernant la mise en place d'un projet. Ça prend du temps entre l'idée et la réalisation d'un projet, M. le président.

Donc, pour cela, oui, je le dis bien, oui, il y a eu un retard ; mais ce retard, je signale bien, octobre 2019, on était peut-être à deux ou trois mois du début du COVID, M. le président. Donc, il y a eu un retard sur ce projet à cause du COVID, c'est pour cela qu'on a eu un problème. Il ne faut pas aller chercher en 2015. Le projet a démarré et je le dis bien, en octobre 2019. Et si je peux *table* le *Business Plan*, je ne crois pas que c'est sur l'autorité du ministre des Finances de *table any Business Plan* ici. S'il a besoin de savoir sur ce *Business Plan*, je dois demander parce que c'est une compagnie privée. Je dois demander quand même l'autorisation avant de procéder avec cette demande et, par la suite, je tiendrai le membre en question - je donnerai une réponse à la Chambre dessus.

Mr Speaker: Hon. David!

LA TOUR KOENIG - BABY M.O.L.L. - DEATH

(No. B/311) **Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the death, on 14 April 2021, of the baby of Mrs M.O.L.L. living in La Tour Koenig, he will state if his Ministry has caused an inquiry to be carried out thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof and, if not, why not.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that there has been no official complaint received at the level of the Ministry on this matter. However, based on press articles relating to late arrival of the ambulance, my Ministry has caused an enquiry to be carried out at the level of Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital by the Regional Health Director.

I am informed that on 14 April 2021 at 07 16 hours, the SAMU Control Room at Victoria Hospital received a call on 114 to attend to a case of labour pain in respect of Mrs M.O.L.L. living in La Tour Koenig. At 07 25 hours, the SAMU Control Room transmitted the request to the nearest SAMU Team at Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital which departed immediately to attend to the case.

The SAMU Team arrived at the place of residence of Mrs M.O.L.L at 07 39 hours.

Upon examination by the SAMU doctor, the patient was found to be conscious and stable.

The SAMU Team proceeded with the third stage of labour on site and the placenta was delivered *in toto*. The stillborn was declared dead at 07 45 hours. Both the lady and the stillborn were transferred to the Labour Ward of Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital and the case was then referred to the Police for an enquiry.

Based on the above report there has been no delay in attending to the patient and the case was properly managed by the SAMU team.

Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 14 April 2021, Police attended to the case at Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital. On the same day, an autopsy was carried out and the cause of death was declared as “Fresh Still Born”.

I am further informed that the Police enquiry is still underway.

Mr David: M. le président, permettez-moi tout d'abord de présenter au nom de notre Assemblée nationale, nos sympathies à la famille L. et je tiens à préciser que c'est avec leur accord que j'ai posé cette question parlementaire.

M. le président, la sœur de Madame M.O.L.L. affirme avoir appelé le SAMU ce matin du 14 avril 2021 à trois reprises et elle a même précisé que le premier appel avait été passé à 6h30 du matin, et elle a rajouté qu'une femme a même décroché et lui a parlé. J'imagine, M. le président, que tous les appels reçus par et émis par le SAMU sont enregistrés et minutés. Le ministre peut-il, donc, nous confirmer le nombre et l'horaire précis des appels reçus par le SAMU et émis par le SAMU concernant ce triste événement du 14 avril ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a copy of the list of calls that SAMU has received. I am going to table the list.

Mr David: Le témoignage de la famille dans la presse, M. le président, et le ministre l'a mentionné, témoignage qu'ils m'ont confirmé lorsque je leur ai rendu visite chez eux à la Tour Koenig le 22 avril, indique que le SAMU est arrivé sur les lieux à 7h50. Encore une fois, je me base sur le témoignage de la famille, soit une heure et 20 minutes après le premier appel qu'ils maintiennent avoir passé à 6h30. Le ministre peut-il nous dire combien d'ambulances et d'équipes du SAMU étaient disponibles au moment du premier appel de la famille et à quel endroit se trouvait l'ambulance disponible la plus proche de la Tour Koenig, car j'imagine que les ambulances sont équipées d'un système de géolocalisation ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have that information, but once I get it I am going to table it, for the hon. Member. At the same time, the recording of the SAMU, the timing of the phone calls received tally with the reply I have made.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci M. le président. Le ministre a affirmé que l'hôpital a reçu le premier appel à 7h16 et que le SAMU est arrivé au domicile de la personne à 7h39, ce qui fait 23 minutes de route. Or, de Port Louis à Pointe aux Sables, il n'y a que 10 minutes de route, d'autant plus que la circulation était fluide en temps de confinement. Le ministre ne pense-t-il pas que le bébé aurait pu être sauvé si le SAMU était arrivé à temps ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the time that SAMU has taken at the time the SAMU was informed and at the time the SAMU has reached the place, I cannot comment about the traffic situation. At the same time, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is quite confidential, but, because this question has been given, the patient had no antenatal follow-up since the beginning when somebody is pregnant; there is no antenatal follow-up. I think it is not proper to give

information, what has been the report from the patient. Based on all that, I think that SAMU – that was whatever factual that I have to give; I have nothing more to add on this affair, Mr Speaker, Sir.

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

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

On resuming at 2.40 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please, be seated!

Hon. David!

FISH (FROZEN) - IMPORTATION

(No. B/312) **Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the announced importation of some 400 tons of fish by registered importers of fish and fish products to cater for the expected shortage of frozen fish on the local market during the winter months of 2021, he will –

- (a) state the -
 - (i) number of meetings held with fishing operators, fishers and importers of fish, prior to and in relation to this decision, and
 - (ii) quantity of fish available on the local market during winter months of 2019 and 2020, respectively and
- (b) table the list of registered importers of fish and fish products for 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I will reply to PQs B/312, B/344, and B/356 together as they relate to the same issue.

At the very outset, I wish to inform the House the announced importation of 400 tons of frozen fish concerns importation of “*Capitaine*” fish, which is a controlled product, and subject to an annual quota of 800 tons. Frozen “*Capitaine*”, which is commonly called “*La Perle*”, is imported to address the issue of shortage of fish on the local market, mainly during the winter months when local operators do not normally embark on fishing trips and also during the festive season.

With regard to surveys and meetings held with operators of the fishing sector, I am informed by the Fisheries Division of my Ministry that a survey was conducted in March 2021 to assess the stock of frozen fish available on the market in view of the coming winter season.

I am further informed that during the survey, officers of my Ministry consulted fish business operators, which include local fishing companies that produce frozen fish from the banks and the importers of fish and fish products, inspected cold rooms and recorded the stock data. The amount of frozen fish unloaded by the local fishing vessels was also taken into account.

The survey revealed that the stock of frozen “*Capitaine*” was only around 225 tons in March 2021.

Four meetings were held with the Industrial Bank Fishing Operators who are the main supplier of frozen “*La Perle*” fish with regard to their inability to operate as they could not hire the services of Malagasy fishers due to COVID-19, and it was, thus, presumed that there could be a shortage of “*La Perle*” in the local market.

Since 2020, I am having regular meetings with the industrial, semi-industrial and representatives of artisanal fishers. The last meeting I had with the semi-industrial fishing operators was on 19 April 2021, just after the announcement of the importation of 400 tons of “*Capitaine*”.

Currently, there are 24 semi-industrial bank fishing boats operating in the chilled fish fishery and 9 boats operating in both chilled and frozen fish fishery. The majority of the semi-industrial fishing boats are involved in the chilled fish fishery sector. The duration of a fishing campaign is about 15 days and, very often, they have only 3 days to sell their catch as they are ungutted, as opposed to the frozen fish, which are gutted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling the information with regard to parts (a) (ii) and (b) of the Question No. B/312.

The quantity of frozen fish available on the local market includes frozen fish obtained through imports, as well as through production by local fishing vessels engaged in bank fisheries.

I wish to inform the House that since 2020 to date, my Ministry has not issued any quota for the import of frozen “*Capitaine*”. At present, we have only two industrial bank

fishing operators, namely Sea Lord Fishing Co. Ltd. and Rhodia Processing Plant Co. Ltd. However, during the current fishing season, only one fishing vessel belonging to Sea Lord has effected only one fishing campaign in December 2020/ January 2021.

The other operator, which mainly employs Malagasy fishers on its bank fishing vessel, has encountered difficulties to hire the services of those fishers due to COVID-19, and thus, could not conduct any fishing campaign since a year now.

The House may also wish to note that since 2018, the amount of frozen fish produced through banks fishery has dropped drastically from 758 tons in 2018 and 750 tons in 2019, and only 205 tons in 2020.

Due to the inclement weather condition in winter, fewer vessels embark on fishing trips to the banks resulting in an anticipated shortage of frozen fish. The local production of frozen fish for the past four months was 70 tons in January 2021, 29 tons in February 2021, 3 tons in March 2021 and nil in April 2021.

Based on the above figures which clearly indicates that in the coming months, there may be a shortage of frozen *Capitaine* on the local market unless it is compensated through imports. This has prompted my Ministry to take a precautionary measure to avoid any shortage of frozen fish during the winter period. As such, my Ministry took the decision to allow the import of some 400 tons of frozen *Capitaine* up to July 2021 only.

The rationale behind this decision is that being given that the main industrial fishing operators, Sea Lord Fishing Ltd and Roja Processing Plant involved in the catch of *Capitaine La Perle* fish have stopped operation and the catch of the only 4 semi-industrial boats since January 2021 to date has been around 30 tons. A shortage of *La Perle* fish is forecasted.

The interested importer is then required to submit an application for import of controlled species on the MNS TradeNet portal together with all supporting documents, such as pro forma invoice and a copy of the HACCP certificate of the exporting establishment. Subject to the applicant meeting all the requirements, the import permit is approved online and the importer may then proceed with the importation of the frozen *Capitaine*.

All consignments of imported fish and fish products should mandatorily be accompanied by a Veterinary Health Certificate issued by the competent authority of the exporting country certifying that the product is fit for human consumption. The Veterinary Health Certificate makes mention of the country of origin and the shelf life is indicated on the

labelling of the product. Frozen *Capitaine* is imported mainly from Indonesia, India, Madagascar and Oman.

With regard to the price of imported fish, I am informed that the price varies as the price of fish is liberalised and sale of fish is demand and Supply driven and the shelf life of frozen fish goes up to a maximum of two years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the decision to import 400 tons of *La Perle* on Monday 19 April 2021, I had a meeting with the industrial, semi-industrial fishing operators, local artisanal net fishers as well as fishmongers. The main concern was –

- (i) Hotels, being their main buyers, are not operating, and
- (ii) markets and fairs were not operating normally due to COVID-19.

In view of the financial difficulties faced by them, they requested that consideration be given to grant semi-industrial operators import permit for the import of *La Perle* fish.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the proposal made by the semi-industrial fishing operators is under consideration at the level of my Ministry. I further wish to inform the House that, as at now, no permit has been issued yet to any operator for the import of *La Perle* fish.

M. le président, après l'annonce de la décision du 19 avril 2021, il ne faut pas que les pêcheurs se sentent trahis. Gouverner c'est prévoir, l'intérêt du public prime sur toute autre considération.

Mr David: Merci M. le président. J'ai bien écouté la réponse détaillée du ministre notamment sur le nombre de bateaux de pêche industriels et semi industriels qui auraient donc diminué ces derniers temps. Pour autant, M. le président, 400 tonnes c'est plus de 880,000 livres de poissons prévus à l'importation donc jusqu'à fin juillet 2021. Autrement dit, dans les deux prochains mois et demi à une période où nos frontières sont fermées, où nous n'avons quasiment pas de touristes, où nos activités hôtelières, économiques et sociales sont au ralenti, le ministre peut-il vraiment nous éclairer sur les considérations et les calculs qui ont été effectués pour aboutir à une telle décision?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have explained, being given that the main industrial fishing operators are not operating and will not operate in the near future also, so, of course, we have to take a decision, but it is still in abeyance. We are still working on it but it is not definite. We have taken authorisation for 400 tons, it is not necessary that we will give 400 tons, it depends. We will check the market before.

Mr Armance: Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the survey that was done, can I find out from the Minister whether there has been consultation with the artisanal fishermen prior to our PQ, me and my two colleagues in this House? Have you dared to meet them, explain to them the needs to import these chilled fish?

Mr Maudhoo: I had a meeting, as I stated in my answer, Mr Speaker, Sir, on the 19th where the operators in the semi-industrial made the request if ever there will be a shortage, priority be given to them as they are in the fishing business of *Capitaine*.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci, M. le président. Dois-je comprendre que les rencontres avec les pêcheurs ont eu lieu après que la décision d'importer du poisson ait été prise?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, we have consultative meetings with the association of fishermen. In 2020, we had 4 or 5 meetings. In 02 March, we had a meeting and then there were the confinements and then, we had a meeting on the 19th.

Mr Armance: Thank you. Regarding the registered importers that you have mentioned, that was going to do this importation, can we have a list of these registered importers? Who are they? Is there Tripod Fishing amongst the list of approved importers? Can you confirm this to the House?

Mr Maudhoo: I have just tabled the list.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: M. le président, merci. Dans le même souffle, est-ce-que je pourrai demander au ministre de déposer la liste des associations de pêcheurs qu'il a rencontré concernant l'importation des poissons?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will.

Mr Speaker: Hon. David!

Mr David: Merci, M. le président. M. le ministre, cette décision prise lors du conseil des ministres le 16 avril dernier, a, vous le comprendrez, surpris beaucoup de monde et surtout entraîné l'incompréhension et la colère de nombreux pêcheurs locaux qui ont déjà, selon leurs propres dires, du mal à écouler leur prises. Le ministre peut-il donc rassurer la communauté des pêcheurs sur le fait que les poissons pêchés localement auront systématiquement la priorité de vente sur le marché local quelles que soient les circonstances d'importation?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we must, first of all, understand that the majority of the fish that are caught by our semi-industrial vessels are chilled fish. They are chilled means

they have only 15 days to be marketed. So, operators come back after 12 to 13 days, they have got only 3 days to be marketed because the fish are ungutted. *La Perle* which are gutted stay for two years, these were being mainly caught by only two companies which I mentioned, but anyway we are having meetings, we will meet again, reconsideration will be looked upon again especially because the hotel market is closed and the local market is erratic because of COVID-19. So, we are still working on it.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Yeung Sik Yuen!

CUREPIPE - HIGH-RISK FLOOD PRONE AREAS - DRAINS

(No. B/313) Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the identified high-risk flood prone areas in Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Curepipe, information as to where matters stand as to the construction of drains thereat, indicating, in each case, the expected start and completion dates thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Land Drainage Authority that there are 14 flood prone areas in the region of Curepipe, namely –

- (i) Chummun Lane, opposite Cape Town Hall, Eau Coulée;
- (ii) Cité St Luc, Curepipe;
- (iii) NHDC Jasmine Network;
- (iv) Dr. Bour Street, Camp Bombaye, Curepipe;
- (v) La Rue Couvent, Curepipe;
- (vi) Pope Hennessy Street;
- (vii) Camp le Juge,
- (viii) Cite Atlee;
- (ix) Louis de Rochecouste Street;
- (x) Rue Lees;
- (xi) Jules Koenig Street;
- (xii) Henri Robert Street;

- (xiii) Morcellement Belluguet, Curepipe, and
- (xiv) Morcellement Devoyenne, Forest Side.

I am tabling a copy of the list.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the drain project being implemented by the Municipal Council of Curepipe, I wish to inform the House that an amount of Rs7,425,833 has been allocated to it under the National Environment Fund in this Financial Year for the construction of drain at seven sites, as follows –

- (i) Anderson Street, Curepipe;
- (ii) Paratian Lane, Les Casernes;
- (iii) Théodore Sauzier, Curepipe;
- (iv) River Lane, Robinson;
- (v) Gilbert Joson Street;
- (vi) Goolam Hossen Road, and
- (vii) Impasse Dumas, Malherbes.

The House may wish to note that the contract with the construction of drain has already been allocated and works started on 07 March 2021 but due to COVID-19 confinement, works had to be all stopped. The contractor had resumed construction works on 03 May 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Development Unit that it has 2 drain projects which have already started in the region of Curepipe as follows –

- (i) construction of covered drain at Abbée de La Caille for an amount of Rs1 m. The contractor has already mobilised on site, and
- (ii) drain at Brown Sequard Street, Morcellement Bellouguet, Curepipe, for an amount of Rs4 m. which has reached 60% completion.

Moreover, the National Development Unit has nine additional drain projects for the region of Curepipe at an estimated cost of Rs34,916,000 which are being finalised. These are

–

- (i) enlargement of bridge at Ramparsad Ramdin Lane;

- (ii) the construction of bridge and construction of retaining wall and drain along Rochecouste Street, Forest Side;
- (iii) construction and upgrading of drain along Gilbert Joson Street and off Gilbert Joson Street, Eau Coulée;
- (iv) construction of drain network at Résidence Les Jasmins, NHDC Forest Side;
- (v) construction of retaining wall at Morcellement Piat;
- (vi) reinstatement of Canal Acajou Street, Forest Side;
- (vii) construction of drain at Stevenson Street, Les Casernes;
- (viii) construction of drain at Morcellement Antelme, Stafford Street, Forest Side, and
- (ix) construction of drain network at Giquel Street, Eau Coulée.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to the above projects, the Road Development Authority also is undertaking a few drain projects in the region of Curepipe, namely –

- (i) cleaning and upgrading of drain along Phoenix/Plaisance Road, that is, A10, at an estimated cost of Rs5,893,062 which has reached 30% completion;
- (ii) drain work along La Brasserie Road, B70 and the improvement of pavement along Sivananda Road, B63 at an estimated cost of Rs4,618,351, which has been completed at about 80%;
- (iii) cleaning of drain at Castel and Eau Coulée at an estimated cost of about Rs1.8 m. which has been completed at about 80%.

As regards the other flood-prone areas in respect of which work has not been initiated yet, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Curepipe that it is presently undertaking a survey to determine the scope of work in collaboration with the Land Drainage Authority. Fund will consequently be applied for under the National Environment Fund for these projects.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Can I ask the Vice-Prime Minister when was the last project of construction of drains before the last flood?

Dr. Husnoo: Sorry, before?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Before the last flood, which happened two weeks ago.

Dr. Husnoo: All the projects are for this year. It has been going on.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Last construction of drains.

Dr. Husnoo: No, but I mean these projects are continuous.

An hon. Member: Ongoing!

Dr. Husnoo: Ongoing. These works are being done by the local authority, are being done by the NDU, are being done by the RDA. It is an ongoing process. It has been going on for the last few years.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, there was no construction of drains since 2015. This is why...

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think this guy is hallucinating.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Husnoo: I think the hon. Member is hallucinating. I have given him the facts and he says there is no drain since 2015.

Mr Speaker: Next supplementary! Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Vice-Prime Minister is aware that the flash flood of the recent week has affected many places. In his reply, he has mentioned it. I would like to know from the Vice-Prime Minister if the Municipal Council of Curepipe is considering of rebuilding new drains in Ghoorun Lane, La Rue Couvent, Curepipe as that built in January 2014 and has cost the State Rs5.3 m. does not serve the purpose.

Dr. Husnoo: As I mentioned, this is on the Land Drainage Authority.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Husnoo: This is among the 14 flood-prone areas. Ghoorun Lane, *naturellement*, is related to La Rue Couvent and we are going to take care of that as well.

Mr Speaker: MP hon. Ms Anquetil!

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Étant donné que les *Wards* 1 et 2 de Curepipe font partie de la circonscription de Vacoas/Floréal, est-ce que le ministre pourrait

considérer la construction de nouveaux drains à Rivière Sèche, Floréal car cette région a été sévèrement touchée lors des récentes inondations ?

Merci.

Dr. Husnoo: Well, I am sorry, I do not know this project has been done in which particular ward, but, anyway, I am going to have a look into it.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Yeung Sik Yuen!

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Can I ask the Vice-Prime Minister why cleaning and maintenance are being done now, just after the flood, not before?

Dr. Husnoo: Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not understand the...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Husnoo: I do not understand the hon. Member because we have given money ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Husnoo: ...to the local authority for cleaning of drains and that was completed in December last year.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub, next question!

FLASH FLOODS & TORRENTIAL RAINFALLS - PLANTERS - FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

(No. B/314) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, following the flash floods and torrential rainfalls of 16 April 2021 in the South/South East of the island, he will state if consideration will be given for the provision of financial assistance to the planters of the said region.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Small Farmers Welfare Fund operating under my Ministry implements two schemes, namely the Crop Loss Compensation Scheme (CLCS) and the Agricultural Calamities and Solidarity Scheme (ACASS) for the benefit of planters to cater for any loss due to natural calamities.

I wish to inform the House that following the torrential rainfall on 16 April 2021, a Loss Assessment Exercise has been conducted by officers of my Ministry together with officers of the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute as well as the Small Farmers Welfare Fund to assess the extent of damage incurred in the fields to determine the degree of loss.

Preliminary assessments have revealed that some 1,300 planters have been affected by the torrential rainfall of 16 April 2021 mainly in the South and South East regions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, bad weather persisted during the month of April and further assessments have revealed that the number of planters affected has increased up to 2,500.

In view of the unprecedented rainfall registered over several areas of Mauritius, Government has approved that affected planters be paid the sum of Rs2,000 per *arpent* under the Agricultural Calamities Solidarity Scheme plus a one off financial assistance of Rs4,000, that is, therefore a total of Rs6,000 per *arpent*.

Planters who have adhered to the Crop Loss Compensation Scheme will be paid compensation in line with their respective subscribed plan.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister recently announced that few vegetables would be imported in view of palliating to some scarcity of locally produced vegetables in Mauritius. Can we have an idea when these will be available and put on sale?

Mr Gobin: Yes, importation of vegetables, there are two limbs to it, Mr Speaker, Sir. First, there are private importers who apply for licence from the National Plant and Protection Office for plants and plant products. They have already made applications. Some private importers have already received their consignments.

And as far as the Agricultural Marketing Board is concerned, the Agricultural Marketing Board is currently doing the needful for importation. Why the difference between AMB and private importers, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is good that I explain? Experience has shown that private importers tend to import the high end product, if I may say so, so that we need the AMB to come in to import the other products so that consumers at large have a wide variety of vegetables on the market.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Minister has informed about planters in the South region and the recent flooding has affected also planters in the central region in

Constituency 17, Curepipe/Midlands and Dubreuil. Is he considering of compensating the planters also in the central region?

Mr Gobin: Yes, of course. Planters were also affected in Dubreuil, Midlands, in the constituency of the hon. Deputy Chief Whip. It is not a question of only the affected regions; many regions have been affected, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, in the Midlands, Dubreuil, Central Plateau, even Glen Park, La Marie and South and South East regions, the damage has been more than 75% in fields, whereas in other areas, it is a bit less, maybe 50%, and in the Northern region, it is even less.

So, depending on the extent, the compensation will be paid and also depending on the number of planters. There are more planters who have been affected in those regions of Central Plateau and South and South East. It's not a question of only South and South East. I mentioned South and South East in the first part of my reply because I think this was the worst affected area.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary.

Mr Wochit: According to the Crop Loss Compensation Scheme, the planters pay a sum under this Scheme and they are not entitled under the Agricultural Calamity Scheme, is it true?

Mr Gobin: No, this is not the case. For the crop loss, they will be paid according to the scheme that they have subscribed; whereas, for the agricultural calamities, plus the one off compensation, this is a separate scheme. Now, when the hon. Member mentions that planters have to pay their premium of the Crop Loss Compensation Scheme, which is an insurance scheme, it is good that the House recalls that in the last Budget, I believe, if I recall, the premium was waived by Government because of specific situations. We are also very well aware of the situation of planters, and wherever there comes the need to bring additional measures, we would never hesitate to do so.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/332, B/333, B/339, B/358, B/359, B/369, B/370, B/371, B/372 and B/375 have been withdrawn. Next question!

PONT FER/JUMBO/DOWLUT ROUND ABOUTS, PHOENIX - GRADE-SEPARATED JUNCTIONS

(No. B/315) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the

construction of the grade separated junctions at the Pont Fer/Jumbo/Dowlut roundabouts in Phoenix, including the construction of viaducts along the M1 over the Phoenix Round About and over the Jumbo/Phoenix Round About, respectively, he will for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to the –

- (a) expected completion dates thereof;
- (b) quantum of funds paid to the contractor as at to date;
- (c) value of the costs overrun, if any, and
- (d) number of information campaigns conducted, if any, regarding the impact thereof on the inhabitants of the vicinity.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Road Development Authority (RDA) that the project for the construction of Grade Separated Junctions are Pont Fer, Jumbo and Dowlut comprises the construction of three viaducts, namely at Pont Fer, Jumbo and Dowlut of a length of 315 meters, 180 meters, and 28 meters respectively. The project also consists of the construction of two new roundabouts and a new link road, linking Phoenix-Beaux Songes Road to Sodnac Link Road.

As at date, the overall progress of works for the project is 86% with 94% completion at Pont Fer, 81% at Jumbo and 74% at Dowlut.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the RDA that the works were contractually scheduled to be completed on 19 November 2020. However, in view of the first lockdown due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and delays with respect to land acquisition, an extension of time of 182 days has been granted to the contractor, that is, 73 days for the first lockdown and 109 days for the land acquisition issues. The expected completion date would, therefore, have been 23 May 2021.

As the House is aware, on 10 March 2021, works were again suspended on site due to the second lockdown coming into force in Mauritius. A phased resumption of works on site started on 25 March 2021 and is still ongoing. Accordingly, a new completion date will now have to be determined by the engineer on the projects, namely, Korean Expressway Corporation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am however pleased to inform the House that a phased opening of the viaducts for the benefit of the road users is being envisaged as from July 2021.

As regards part (b) of the Question, the amount disbursed as at date for the project is around Rs1 billion, inclusive of VAT and representing 71.83% of the contract value of nearly Rs1.5 billion, inclusive of VAT.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (c) of the question, till date, I am informed there is no cost overrun for the construction of the Grade Separated Junctions at Pont Fer/ Jumbo and Dowlut.

As regard to part (d) of the Question, I am informed by the RDA that prior to the start of the works on site, several visits were effected and interactive sessions were held with the inhabitants and the stakeholders in the vicinity of Pont Fer, Jumbo and Dowlut to inform them about the project, its impact and implications and the support required from them for its implementation. These sessions were held as follows:

- (i) on 17 March 2017 at Phoenix;
- (ii) on 18 March 2017 at Nalletamby Lane and Boucan Lane;
- (iii) on 21 March 2017 at Dowlut Lane;
- (iv) on 22 March 2017 at Boucan and Phoenix Mall, and
- (iv) on 23 March 2017 at Phoenix Palmerston Municipal Hall.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, I personally had a meeting at the Sir Abdul Razack Mohamed Hall not later than last week, that is, Thursday 06 May, with the President and members of the Qadiri Square Circle of Phoenix, as well as representatives of the *Forces Vives* of the Phoenix Dowlut region, in the presence of officers of the RDA and my Ministry to give clarifications on the project.

I was, indeed, surprised to learn that since early 2019, several letters were addressed to my predecessor for a meeting with him, but there was no communication whatsoever from him and the inhabitants were left to themselves. I wish to confirm that after my meeting of 06 May, the *Forces Vives* were reassured and fully satisfied with the interactions thereon.

I am also informed that during the implementation of the works, there is constant communication between the engineers of the RDA and members of the public requiring additional information. Moreover, at the request of the inhabitants of the region, the RDA was present in several meetings for further explanations as and when required, such as 10 May 2019, at Sir Abdul Razack Mohamed Hall and on 22 August 2019 at the Municipality of Vacoas-Phoenix.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also advised that, at the beginning of each construction phase, a communiqué is issued through the national television and radio to inform the public of the new road configurations. Besides, any queries, complaints or representations from the inhabitants and the public at large are answered/ attended to in a timely manner. Thank you.

Mr Lobine: I thank the Minister. Hon. Minister, you met the representatives of the Abdul Razack Mohamed Hall and it was decided in that meeting that there would be a plot of land that would be given so that a roundabout would be built for access to Robinson Lane Nos. 1, 2 and 3 in that region. Is that so, and if it is the case, when will this project start?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, during that meeting, several solutions have been agreed so as to give easy access to people in that region of Dowlut; my officers are working on it. I am not able to give any specific date now, because the project is still going on, there is the construction of the viaduct, so constructing the roundabout now doesn't make any technical sense.

Mr Lobine: With regard to the project itself, hon. Minister, initially it was designed for the construction of a three-level flyover and it was then modified to a two-level flyover. Has there been a study or a traffic impact assessment as to the impact that this modification will have on that project with regard to traffic in that region?

Mr Hurreeram: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, there has not been any change in design.

Mr Lobine: Will the Minister consider meeting people of Petit Camp, Valentina and Morcellement Boucan with regard to accessibility when the tramway will start? There will be a difficulty for them to have access to the tramway.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have already said, we have been meeting people that have been there, who have been trying to meet the then Minister for years and not been able to do so. We have met them; we are meeting everyone that we need to meet too.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

RODRIGUES - FOOT & MOUTH DISEASE

(No. B/316) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Foot and Mouth Disease, he will state –

- (a) the number of reported cases thereof in Rodrigues and mainland Mauritius, since April 2020 to date, indicating if –

- (a) mass vaccination campaigns of all animals and cattle in Rodrigues and mainland Mauritius is ongoing, and
- (b) the recommendations of the Fact-Finding Committee on the outbreak thereof provided in March 2017 have been put into practice.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the number of reported cases of Foot and Mouth disease in Rodrigues as at last week is as follows -

- (i) Infected Animals -
 - Pigs: 13
 - *Petits Ruminants*: 23
 - *Bovins*: 101
- (ii) Number of deaths: 8 (*Bovines*)
- (iii) Number of slaughtered animals: 2 (*Bovines*)

As for cases in Mauritius Island, no case of Foot and Mouth has been reported.

For Vaccination Programme, Mr Speaker, Sir, the answer is yes. Vaccination Programme will be carried out. My Ministry has contacted the Indian Ocean Commission for logistical support for procuring the vaccine. We are expecting to receive the vaccine at the end of the month. In fact, while waiting for the PQ to come, I received an SMS right now, if I may read it because it is of direct relevance to the procurement of vaccine.

I am informed that vaccines will be loaded on the Cargo Emirates Flight. We are expecting it on 13 May. Therefore, it should be reaching on that flight of Emirates, if all goes well. The vaccines are being procured from Boehringer Ingelheim. Sufficient number of doses has been ordered for both Rodrigues as well as Mauritius.

But in the meantime, in order to control the spread of the disease, appropriate measures are being taken in Rodrigues such as restriction of movement of animals and they have declared over there, the Commission of Agriculture, Red Zones to contain the spread.

Furthermore, my Ministry has sent two veterinary officers from the Ministry of Agriculture here to help in Rodrigues, of course, after they have been quarantined for 14 days here. They left Mauritius for Rodrigues on 04 May and they are there now, completing the seven days' quarantine in Rodrigues and then they will be out in the field for purposes of the Sero-surveillance exercise.

Concerning the Fact-Finding Committee Report, Mr Speaker, Sir, the following measures have been taken by my Ministry -

- (i) when the restriction of movement of animals from Rodrigues to Mauritius was lifted way back in 2019, a system of movement permit was introduced to better control the movement of animals from Rodrigues to Mauritius. Only farmers whose farms meet the requirement of the Livestock and Veterinary Division (LVD), are allowed to move livestock from Rodrigues to Mauritius. All animals moved from Rodrigues to Mauritius are inspected by Veterinary Officers at seaport and in case of suspicion of a disease as laid down in the Animal Diseases Act or in case of other notifiable diseases, the animals are not allowed to be disembarked in Mauritius;
- (ii) the Import Permit Committee has been dismantled in 2019. Since then applications for the import of products of animal origin and live animals are made to the Livestock and Veterinary Division (LVD) through the Trade Net System, that is, an online platform also known as the MNS. Applications are determined following a risk analysis carried out by the Livestock and Veterinary Division taking into consideration the animal health status of the importing country;
- (iii) in January of last year, 2020, an Animal Health Surveillance and Epidemiology Unit has been set up at the level of Livestock and Veterinary Division of my Ministry. This Unit is mandated to implement the national animal health surveillance in respect of listed diseases, that is, diseases listed by the Office International des Epizooties (OIE);
- (iv) Four OIE listed diseases have so far been covered, namely Foot and Mouth disease, *peste des petits ruminants*, Avian Influenza and African Horse Sickness. Moreover, training of Veterinary Officers and Laboratory Technologists are ongoing through online training sessions carried out under the support towards Operationalisation of the SADC Regional Agricultural Policy, also known as the STOSAR Project and with the support of the European Union
- (v) the feasibility for setting up a State-owned quarantine facility is currently being looked into.

Mr Lobine: Thank you, hon. Minister. Can the hon. Minister inform this House if a Monitoring Committee has been set up as recommended by the Fact-Finding Committee, to be chaired by the head of the Veterinary Service in Mauritius?

Mr Gobin: We are regularly monitoring with the PVO, that is, the Principal Veterinary Officer here, together with the - I forgot his name - officer responsible in Rodrigues, Commission for Agriculture, Environment, Forestry, Fisheries and Marine Parks which is headed by a Departmental Head and I can also inform the House that I am briefing Cabinet at every Cabinet Meeting since the outbreak of FMD in Rodrigues.

Mr Lobine: With regard to the setting up of this Monitoring Committee, the aim was to establish protocols in such a case. So, will the hon. Minister consider establishing that Monitoring Committee?

Mr Gobin: The work is being done, Mr Speaker, Sir and the House will recall that, in fact, the Fact-Finding Committee had laid much emphasis on, firstly, prompt reporting because on the last occasion, I think it was in 2016, there was no prompt reporting.

In this case, the reporting was within a few hours. I think within four hours, Rodrigues had already informed and the process had already started. The Fact-Finding Committee also had recommended for the collect of samples to be sent to confirm whether it is really FMD or not. This was done. Samples were collected and sent to ANSES Laboratory in France. ANSES is *l'Agence nationale de sécurité sanitaire de l'alimentation, de l'environnement et du travail*. Despite confinement, all this was done. ANSES confirmed that the FMD existed. So, all those recommendations for Fact-Finding Committee have been implemented.

I can also recall that as for the Sero-surveillance which is being undertaken, vaccination was recommended as opposed to slaughtering. Vaccination, we have to understand one thing, is not readily available, it should be ordered. We have ordered sufficient amounts, if I recall, it is 180,000. As soon as they arrive, the vaccination will start.

Mr Speaker: A last supplementary.

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform this House if Government is contemplating paying a compensation to all those affected by this disease in Rodrigues?

Mr Gobin: Of course, this is being looked into but it is still quite premature at this stage, in view of especially the number of deaths. But this Government never turns its back on farmers and breeders and this is not the case now to start doing it.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

COVID-19 - PCR TESTS

(No. B/317) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the PCR tests being carried out to detect the presence of Covid-19 amongst the population, he will state the-

- (a) number thereof being carried out daily, and
- (b) places where the samples are stored, indicating the number of laboratories involved in the analysis thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that since 05 March 2021, an average of 2,260 PCR tests is being carried out on a daily basis and the total number of tests carried out as at 09 May 2021 is 87,390. The tests include 29,576 samples collected by the Contact Tracing team, 3,864 samples collected from people admitted in quarantine centres and 53,950 samples from those attending Covid Testing Centres and hospital wards respectively.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question, the swabs are received in Viral Transport Medium (VTM) or Nuclear Acid Testing (NAT) Medium in cold boxes and conveyed to the Virology Department of the Laboratory where the tests are conducted on the same day.

Analysis of the PCR tests is presently being carried out by the Central Health Laboratory at Candos and the Airport Health Laboratory located at SSR International Airport. The Central Health Laboratory has a capacity to conduct 2,000 tests per day while the Airport Health Laboratory can conduct 1,500 tests on a daily basis. Besides these two laboratories, PCR test is also being carried out by two private laboratories, namely, Wellkin Laboratory and NOVA Lab with a capacity of 500 and 300 tests per day respectively.

Mr Lobine: Thank you, hon. Minister. When the tests are carried out on the same day, do you get the results on the same day?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the samples have been left at the laboratories early in the morning, the results are available in the afternoon. If the samples are left there late in the afternoon, the results are available either at night or the next day early morning.

Mr Lobine: Do you have an established protocol to avoid contamination when the samples are left to be tested after a few hours or a day or two?

Dr. Jagutpal: Normally, tests are being transported in such a medium and once it is being left at the Central Laboratory in the Virology Department, these are samples that may have the potential of getting infection. In fact, there is a strict protocol for leaving the samples over there and, at the same time, these samples are being taken up by the laboratory technicians.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Ramyad!

Ms Ramyad: Can the Minister inform the House if a database record is kept for the samples collected and the results eventually at the Ministry and whether it is demarcated it has been tested at the airport or at the other laboratories?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, the record starts from the point of collection of the samples. There is a register where all the names from whom the samples are taken are recorded. And, at the same time, these records, once the tests are available, they are entered on a system called the LIMS; the Lab Information Management System, which can retrieve all the information so that those who have sent the samples and the tests, at that time, can be located and be informed of results.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

RIVIÈRE DES CREOLES - FLASH FLOOD

(No. B/318) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the retaining wall along Royal Road at Rivière des Creoles which gave way during the flash floods of 16 April last, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to when and which contractor had put up same, indicating –

- (a) if a prior extensive study of the geotechnical properties of the soil in the region had been carried out;
- (b) the reasons for the absence of steel netting within the bare concrete, and

(c) were there any outlet drains to carry water out and away from the slope.

Mr Hurreeram: M. le président, avec votre permission, je tiens tout d'abord à exprimer mon affliction et ma solidarité envers les familles qui ont été affectées par les inondations du 16 avril 2021.

Mr Speaker: No, come to your question! Come to your question!

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is an undeniable fact that climate change, which is of a global dimension and a global concern, is having devastating impact on countries all around the world. Even countries with a state-of-art information technology and infrastructure, are not being spared from the effects of climate change. Unfortunately, these consequences of climate change are expected to grow in intensity in the forthcoming decades.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in brief, the world is at the mercy of the effects of climate change and Mauritius, being a Small Island State, is very vulnerable to these adverse impacts. One such episode occurred, unfortunately, on 16 April 2021, where the country experienced a torrential rainfall of 404 mm in the southern part of the island, which I am told, is for the first time ever and which inevitably led to exceptional consequences.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Road Development Authority (RDA) that in 1997, the services of Consulting Engineering Services Ltd, an Indian company, were enlisted to carry out a feasibility study and detailed design for the construction of the South Eastern Highway Project. In this context, I am advised that the company carried out extensive geotechnical studies in the region.

The construction of the South Eastern Highway Project, which was entrusted to the Beijing Chang Cheng Construction Corporation, a Chinese contractor, started in 2004 to be completed in 2007. The slope treatment measures along Royal Road at Rivière des Creoles, which included a shotcrete and not a retaining wall, were implemented by the contractor, based on the recommendations of Consulting Engineering Services Ltd. It was understood that such shotcrete was put up almost when the road construction project was being completed.

Regarding part (b) of the question, let me, at the very outset, state that the question of the hon. Member regarding the absence of Steel Netting in the bare concrete of the slopes, is not correct and I will explain.

I am informed by the RDA that slopes, which are often created during construction of highways, are generally designed so that the soil mass can support itself. This is achieved by considering the angle at which the terrain is stable or able to support itself based on the size, shape and composition of the soil's particles and the extent of land available. This is what currently Engineers will call the angle of repose.

Whenever land is not available, additional stabilisation to avoid slipping and failure is provided. In the present case, as recommended by the Consulting Engineering Services Ltd, shotcrete together with mesh, that is steel netting and soil nails were used as stabilisation techniques. So, it is obvious, that it is not correct to speak of absence of steel netting.

Mr Speaker, Sir, shotcrete is concrete spraying under pressure. I am informed by the RDA that it is a technique extensively used in the construction industry to act as protective coating, filling cracks and fissures and preventing loose material from falling. And I wish to highlight that there was no untoward behaviour of the slopes prior to the heavy rainfalls of 16 April, which, as I mentioned earlier, was an unexpected and an exceptional event.

With regard to part (c) of the question, following a survey carried out by the Land Drainage Authority (LDA), it has been observed that weepholes have been provided for the evacuation of water from the slope. I am informed by the LDA that roadside drains have been implemented at the toe of the shotcrete skin for evacuation of the water emanating from the weepholes and surface run off from the road.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir,

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. I do associate myself to your concern and empathy to the families concerned during this tragic rainfall on 16 April. I am sure the Minister is aware of two particular families, namely Roussick and Esuree whose houses are right above, what we are talking now, the shotcrete wall which gave way. My question is, whether necessary actions are being taken, as a matter of urgency, to find an alternative safe accommodation for these families, rather than them having to rush to the Community Centre each time there is a heavy rainfall?

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, you will appreciate that the lodging of the families does not fall under the purview of my Ministry and this does not form part of the main question.

Dr. Aumeer: I am sure as a matter of human concern, you would be interested to look into it...

Mr Speaker: No!

Dr. Aumeer: ...together with your colleagues in Cabinet.

Mr Speaker: No! No! No! Let me allow the question to hon. Osman Mahomed.

Mr Osman Mahomed: The hon. Minister has invoked climate change as one of the reasons why the slopes collapsed, but Engineers, they do cater for worst-case scenario, 100 years flooding, etc. What is it that went wrong this time? Who is responsible for it? And who will bear the cost of repair for this failed slope?

Mr Hurreeram: Very interesting question, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, in 2007, the hon. Member and his colleagues were in power then, so definitely...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Hurreeram: What has gone wrong, this Government will definitely repair. And concerning the families that need to be relocated, my colleagues of the Constituency are taking very good care and not being in presence of a reply, I don't think I can come here and give an approximate reply!

Mr Speaker: Next question! No supplementary!

VICTORIA HOSPITAL - CANCER PATIENTS - LINEAR ACCELERATOR

(No. B/319) 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 Patients at Victoria Hospital, he will state –

- (a) if same is currently functional and delivering optimum service and, if not, since when, indicating if actions have been taken for same to be repaired;
- (b) the alternative treatment offered to cancer patients in the interim, and
- (c) the treatment options available to cancer patients in respect of whom cobalt treatment is inappropriate.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the Linear Accelerator at Victoria Hospital for the treatment of cancer patients is in use

since 1994. The photon beam energy of the equipment is not functional since 09 February 2021.

The Linear Accelerator is under maintenance agreement with a specialised service provider. I am further informed that on 10 February 2021, the service provider carried out troubleshooting and found that the power supply and a Printed Circuit Board Regulator were faulty. The spare parts were replaced on test purposes on 31 March 2021, but the equipment was still not functional.

On 06 April and 12 April 2021, the service provider carried out further fault-finding exercises following which they have suspected that other spare parts might be faulty and have recommended that same be ordered.

My Ministry has, on 29 April 2021, already ordered these required parts to be supplied by the same service provider. The spare parts will reach Mauritius by flight today, this afternoon.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as for part (b) of the question, I am informed that alternative treatment to cancer patients is provided by the two cobalt machines available at Victoria Hospital. Cancer patients for whom cobalt treatment is not appropriate are sent abroad on a case-to-case basis on the recommendation of the treating doctor.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the upcoming Cancer Hospital project includes two Linear Accelerators which will no doubt contribute towards enhancing treatment to our patients.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. The Minister is surely aware that there is only one Linear Accelerator for the whole of Mauritius and that has not been working in optimum condition or repetitively under repairs over the last two years, as per the oncologist and the radiotherapist working at Victoria Hospital. Can the Minister inform the House what steps his Ministry is undertaking to ensure a safe and continuous service for the time, until we have the new machine at the new Cancer Hospital?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have already informed the House, alternative treatment to cancer patients is provided by the two cobalt machines. And, in case, these patients need other treatment, they are sent abroad on a case-to-case basis on recommendation of the treating doctor.

Ms Ramyad: Will the Minister give an update on the two new Linear Accelerators to be procured for the upcoming Cancer Hospital project and when it is projected to be fully operational?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the consultants who are in charge of our project of the new Cancer Hospital, have already submitted tender documents and cost estimates for medical equipment, amongst others, the two linear accelerators for the Cancer Hospital. On 05 October 2020, consultants submitted the cost estimates. On 01 December, the consultant was requested to initiate tendering process and, in the meantime, the list of equipment to be procured for the coming up of the new Cancer Hospital had been revised in light of duplication of certain equipment. The revised and updated list of equipment will be submitted to HSCC for procurement by the end of this month.

Mr Speaker: The table has been advised that Questions B/363, B/364 and B/365 have been withdrawn.

Next Question!

Dr. Aumeer: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have only one supplementary question.

Mr Speaker: No, no, no. You should observe the rules and regulations.

MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE STANDING COMMITTEE - CASES

(No. B/320) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Medical Negligence Standing Committee, he will state the -

- (a) the terms of reference thereof, and
- (b) number of cases investigated, indicating the outcome thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, prior to the setting up of the Medical Negligence Standing Committee, my Ministry already had a protocol to investigate into complaints of alleged medical negligence as follows -

- (i) on receipt of a complaint, a preliminary investigation was carried out at the level of the hospital by the Regional Health Director;
- (ii) a report was thereafter submitted to my Ministry;
- (iii) upon examination of the preliminary Report, my Ministry decided whether to set up an Independent Enquiry Committee or otherwise;

- (iv) the Independent Enquiry Committee submitted its report together with its findings and recommendations;
- (v) where my Ministry concluded any evidence of medical negligence against a medical practitioner, the case was referred to the Medical Council.

The Independent Enquiry Committee was constituted as follows -

- (i) a Regional Health Director (from another hospital);
- (ii) a Medical Specialist in the field;
- (iii) another co-opted Medical Specialist in the field, as required, and
- (iv) a Medical Specialist from the private sector as co-opted member if required.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in May 2020, there were 44 outstanding cases of alleged medical negligence which were still pending at the level of the Ministry. Due to the heavy workload in the respective regional hospitals, the Enquiry Committees have not been able to schedule regular sittings. In addition, the recurrent services of Consultants in Charge and Senior Specialists to act as members of Enquiry Committees were resulting in disruption of clinical work in regional hospitals. With such a situation, the enquiries were being unduly delayed and no disciplinary action could be taken.

Moreover, the National Audit Office in its Report 2018-2019, had highlighted the inadequate mitigation measures being taken up by my Ministry and the financial implications in terms of damages claimed due to alleged medical malpractices and had, therefore, requested that necessary action be initiated to monitor and prevent medical malpractices and enforce disciplinary actions.

With a view to addressing this situation, in June 2020, Government set up the Medical Negligence Standing Committee to carry out preliminary investigations into all cases of alleged Medical Negligence at the level of public health institutions before referring the matter to the relevant regulatory body. The Medical Negligence Standing Committee started its first investigation in July 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, the Terms of Reference of the Medical Negligence Standing Committee are -

- (i) ascertain that reasonable steps, including compliance to protocol and guidelines have been observed in the management of the case.

- (ii) identify any shortcomings which may have led to the ill-treatment or death of the patient.
- (iii) confirm if proper diagnosis was made and appropriate treatment/tests prescribed.
- (iv) confirm if treatment administered to patient was appropriate.
- (v) identify any foreseeable cause which could have led to the death of the patient.
- (vi) identify if any officer by name and grade found to have been negligent in the performance of his duty in relation to the case and to specify in clear terms the shortcoming/s observed.
- (vii) make observations and recommendations, accordingly, for further action at the level of the Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that since the setting up of the Medical Negligence Standing Committee in June 2020, the Committee has been meeting twice a week, except during lockdown period and has been investigating into 49 cases of alleged medical negligence. I am also informed that out of the 49 cases, 36 cases have been completed. Out of the 36 cases completed, 9 cases concluded with medical negligence and were referred to the respective Statutory Disciplinary Bodies for in-depth investigations and disciplinary actions, as provided for, in section 46(A) of the Public Service Commission Regulations.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. Can the hon. Minister inform the House as to the particular reason, why there was a need in August 2020 to have this Medical Negligence Committee while knowing quite well himself, as a former Chairman of the Medical Council, that there is a subcommittee of the Medical Council that deals with medical complaints, and alleged medical negligence, having at the moment two parallel investigation committees? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply, I have already stated that prior to referring a case to the Medical Council, the Ministry has to conduct a preliminary investigation, and before, that preliminary investigation was conducted by the Regional Health Director, the Specialist, the Consultant in Charge. Now, in 2019, due to many cases being pending as far back as 2017 were still there and the Audit Report also mentioned it. How to get all these cases being investigated and how they are reported, the Medical

Negligence Committee came into play. With the Medical Negligence Committee, all the backlog cases have already been cleared and now we are able to meet the demand. Once cases are referred to the Medical Negligence Committee, investigation starts rightaway and reports are submitted in a short time without undue delay.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Dr. Aumeer: The hon. Minister, like myself, we know quite well that in suspected case of medical negligence the normal public, the average public will usually turn to the Police for initial investigation. Does the Police, as it does nowadays, request opinion of the Medical Council before proceeding any further in their investigation? Do the Police also, now, by the *locus standi* that the Medical Negligence Committee has, seek for opinion from the Medical Negligence Committee as well?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as for cases referred to the Police, if they concern the private sector, they are directly referred to the Medical Council for investigation and if public officers are involved, the cases are referred to the Ministry. Following a preliminary inquiry done at the level of the Ministry, the case is referred to the Medical Council.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Quirin!

CHEBEL - RÉSIDENCE LES CHEBECS - FLOODING - DRAIN NETWORK

(No. B/321) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the locality called Chebecs, at Chebel, adjoining the new NHDC Complex, in Constituency No. 20, Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Drainage Authority and the National Development Unit, respectively, information as to if any construction of drains project is earmarked for implementation thereat and, if so, indicate if an early implementation thereof is being envisaged to alleviate the hardships caused by the recurrent flooding problems thereat.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me, first of all, to express my sincere condolences to the hon. Member on the demise of his mother, Solange.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a Consultant was appointed in 2018 to undertake a study with a view to proposing long-term measures which would relieve the inhabitants of *Résidence les Chebecs* which is found on the low-lying part of Chebel. The Consultant

submitted its proposal in detailed Design Report in October 2019. However, the design could not be finalised due to way leave issues.

I am further informed that the Land Drainage Authority has determined and certified the region of Coromandel and surroundings, including Chebecs, Chebel, as a high-risk flood prone area on 17 December 2020.

The Consultant has proposed the construction of a drain network which would mitigate the risk of flooding at Residence Chebecs. The design for this drain network has been completed and finalised in consultation with the Land Drainage Authority. The hon. Member would like to know that the Land Drainage Authority has submitted its no objection to the design on 26 April 2021.

This project which is estimated at a cost of around Rs62.2 m. would be implemented in two phases. Phase 1, which would require no way leave, includes evacuation of water which accumulates at the lowest point away from Residence Chebecs. Phase 2 is planned for implementation after the completion of Phase 1 and acquisition of land will be required for the works to start.

Phase 1 is estimated at Rs23.7 m. and Phase 2, at Rs38.5 m.

Bids for Phase 1 of the project is being finalised and is expected to be launched by early June 2021.

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président, à mon tour de remercier l'honorable ministre pour son témoignage de sympathie. Pourrai-je lui demander, M. le président, je pense qu'il est, bien sûr, au courant que ces inondations que subissent cette région de Chebecs lors des pluies torrentielles ne date pas d'hier et que cette situation s'est davantage aggravée avec la construction des appartements de la NHDC.

Donc, vu l'urgence de la situation, j'ai bien compris la réponse du ministre mais je voudrais aussi qu'il donne la garantie à ces familles qui vivent dans une angoisse permanente, ainsi qu'aux députés Bhagwan, Foo Kune et moi-même qui suivons de près cette situation, que les travaux - comme il l'a bien mentionné - vont démarrer effectivement à l'entame de la nouvelle année financière parce que ça fait quand même pas mal de temps que ces familles vivent avec ce stress et que ces pluies torrentielles occasionnent des inondations à n'en plus finir. Donc, pourriez-vous confirmer justement que les travaux vont démarrer rapidement?

Mr Hurreeram : Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member will agree that Chebecs is in a very low-lying area and the studies have, in fact, taken much time because we did not want to just build a drain and like, take the problem from Point A and deliver it to Point B. So, we wanted a solution *à l'épreuve du temps*. We wanted something that would last forever, so to speak.

So, all this has been done already and I am just confirming again what I have already said. The tender will be launched in the first week of June. So, it is all done and ready to shoot now.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 20 - DRAINS - CLEANING

(No. B/322) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the recent cases of flooding in Constituency No. 20, Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Drainage Authority and National Development Unit, respectively, information as to if immediate actions are envisaged for the cleaning of drains and construction of new ones along –

- (a) Chebel Branch Road, from Royal Road to the Kovil,
- (b) Independence Lane, Chebel, and
- (c) Belvédère Lane, 5th Mile, Beau-Bassin and, if so, indicate the expected start and completion dates thereof.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the National Development Unit has appointed a Consultant for the submission of a comprehensive long-term proposal for the mitigation of the flooding problem reported by the inhabitants for the whole catchment area of Chebel.

The design report has not yet been finalised because the Consultant has been requested to carry out in-depth investigations to confirm availability of corridors for the evacuation of storm water from Residence Chebel through a network of narrow roads with buried services. The report has also been delayed by the major changes to the landscape from construction of the A1 – M1 and A1 – A3 roads at the junction of which is located the outlet of Chebel catchment which discharges into the *Grande Rivière Nord Ouest*.

I am further informed that the works carried out by the Road Development Authority to the existing drain opposite Chantier Ramtoola along Chebel Road which is a classified road, has attenuated the overflowing of water into Residence Chebel.

With regard to part (b) of the question, Independence Lane is affected by storm water from Chebel Branch Road and from local precipitation. The RDA has been requested to look into replacing the concrete slab covers along Chebel Branch Road and across the whole width of Independence Lane by metal gratings to prevent storm water from flooding the said lane. It is expected that the design report of the Consultant working on the Chebel project will provide comprehensive measures to mitigate flooding of Independence Lane and Residence Chebel over the long term.

As regards part (c) of the question, I am informed by the NDU that an absorption drain was constructed at Belvédère Lane, 5th Mile, by the NDU and the hon. Member will appreciate once again, Belvédère also is a very low-lying area. So, the Consultant is at it, but I should admit there is no solution as at today.

The Land Drainage Authority, on a monthly basis, holds Coordination and Maintenance Committees with all councils. The Land Drainage Authority has accordingly devised a maintenance plan for all local authorities and is monitoring same.

The Council was requested, in Coordination and Maintenance Committees, to strictly adhere to the devised maintenance schedule and to ensure cleanliness of drains, rivers and water courses.

During the current financial year, the council has cleaned 6.5 km of drains including 80 m collector drain at Independence Avenue and 40 m absorption drain at Belvédère Avenue.

I wish to highlight that the Land Drainage Authority has embarked on a massive sensitisation campaign to raise awareness of the public at large on illegal dumping in drainage network, poorly designed houses and low ground floor level that increases the risk of being affected by flooding and any effort to reduce flood hazards.

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. L'honorable ministre peut-il confirmer s'il a pris connaissance d'une pétition adressée aux autorités concernées par les habitants de cette région, incluant son ministère, où mention est faite justement— il en a parlé mais je préfère mettre l'emphase dessus – d'une grosse accumulation d'eau sur la route à *Chebel Branch Road* parce que les drains sont obstrués. Il vient de dire que les drains sont nettoyés mais ce

n'est pas fait régulièrement, je dirais, et cela occasionne justement des inondations en périodes de grosses pluies ou de pluies torrentielles. Donc, toute cette eau qui s'accumule sur *Chebel Branch Road* se déverse vers Avenue Independence et inonde toutes les maisons qui s'y trouvent.

Donc, l'honorable ministre peut-il confirmer s'il a pris connaissance de cette pétition et si le département concerné de la municipalité de Beau Bassin/Rose-Hill, a aussi fait des recommandations par rapport aux travaux qui doivent être effectués dans ces régions concernées.

Mr Hurreeram: *Mr Speaker, Sir*, oui, j'en ai pris connaissance de cette pétition qui a été faite à mon ministère et comme je l'ai bien dit dans ma réponse, M. le président, on a demandé à la RDA de remplacer les *Slabs*, les *concrete slabs* qui sont pratiquement collés l'un contre l'autre et en temps de grosses pluies effectivement avec le *momentum* que l'eau arrive et passe directement sur les drains et y atterrit dans la Résidence Chebel. Alors on est en train de remplacer ces *slabs* par des *metal gratings* qui va faciliter l'absorption de ces eaux de pluie. Et ensuite également, il y a aussi comme j'ai dit que les chemins de Résidence Chebel qui mènent vers Coromandel pour éventuellement que l'eau soit évacuée dans Grande Rivière Nord-Ouest, bien là c'est très petit avec les services qui passent en dessous, alors, on n'a pas vraiment beaucoup d'espace pour travailler. Alors ce qu'on va essayer de faire, c'est travailler autour de la Résidence Chebel et placer les *gratings* là où il le faut et retirer l'eau de la Résidence Chebel pour l'amener sur la Route Royale et ainsi ça va directement dans les drains nouvellement construits, et qui sont en train d'être construits sur A1-A3 et A1-M1 et qui vont être déversés dans Grande Rivière Nord-Ouest.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

HIV - PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS – PATIENTS, COST & AWARENESS PROGRAMME

(No. B/323) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), he will state, since the introduction thereof in the HIV prevention service offered by his Ministry -

- (a) the number of persons, gender-base, concerned with this service since 2018 to 2021, on a yearly basis;
- (b) the cost thereof per patient for one year, and

- (c) if any national information and communication campaign has been conducted regarding this service since 2018 and, if so, give details thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is the use of an antiretroviral bitherapy by HIV negative persons who are nevertheless regularly exposed to the virus, so as to prevent them from being infected by HIV.

PrEP has been introduced in Mauritius in November 2018 with the coming into force of the latest National protocol for the medical handling of patients living with HIV/AIDS. PrEP, when correctly done, reduces by 99% the risks of getting infected with HIV.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I am informed that we have had the following new PrEP patients yearly –

- 2 male persons in 2018;
- 37 male persons and 1 female in 2019;
- 27 male persons and 3 transgender persons in 2020, and
- 3 male persons in 2021 up to February.

The total number of persons undergoing PrEP treatment in Mauritius in 2021 is of 73, consisting of 69 males, 1 female and 3 transgender persons. I am also informed that PrEP is, in fact, very efficient in reducing risks of HIV infection. It does not protect from other sexually transmitted infections. Thus, persons undergoing PrEP treatment have medical consultations every 3 months and they are screened for HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and Syphilis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the cost of treatment and follow-up per patient for one year is Rs7,994. This includes the cost of blood investigations amounting to Rs5,420 yearly and the cost of medication amounting to Rs2,574 yearly per patient. It is to be noted that the cost of one tablet of Truvada is Rs7.15 and the patient takes one tablet daily.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards to part (c) of the question, since the introduction of PrEP in 2018, the target populations have been regularly made aware of the PrEP service available and accessible at all the HIV clinics. These awareness programmes have been held through radio and TV (in French, Creole and Bhojpuri) as well as through NGOs' networks.

I am also informed that in 2019, training on PrEP Protocol has been carried out for 1,157 healthcare personnel of my Ministry. Likewise, in 2020, awareness sessions have been conducted targeting the civil society and some 75 personnel have been reached. Posters in PrEP in English have been developed and displayed as from August 2020 in all hospitals,

HIV clinics, Area Health Centres, Mediclinics, Community Health Centres and distributed to NGOs. Leaflets in French have also been produced by my Ministry and widely distributed as from August 2020 during awareness sessions in the community.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that a poster on PrEP in Creole is presently being finalised and a radio and TV spot in Creole is also being developed. The poster will be ready by end of June of this year and the TV spot will be broadcasted by July 2021. A Facebook campaign is also programmed for this year.

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. Dans un document de L'ONUSIDA, il est recommandé d'intensifier la PrEP comme une intervention efficace supplémentaire pour la prévention du VIH et toujours selon des études effectuées par l'ONUSIDA, il est constaté que ce sont les femmes qui sont les plus exposées au virus et par conséquent, deviennent les premières victimes du VIH et là j'ai écouté la réponse du ministre où il est question qu'il n'y a qu'une femme qui suit ce traitement si on peut dire.

Donc, est-ce que le ministre, lui-même, est informé qu'en 2020 il y a eu 118 femmes qui ont été infectées par le VIH selon un rapport de l'ONG PILS et de ce fait, il l'a dit mais les campagnes de communication d'information se font rares. Si cela va être fait à l'avenir, je dis tant mieux mais il n'y a pas eu vraiment de campagnes intensives pour sensibiliser et conscientiser les personnes, les femmes en particulier, par rapport à l'utilisation, les bienfaits de ce service de prévention, M. le président.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for this question. I totally agree with him that the female counterpart is mostly affected and should be enrolled into the prevention campaign. But, as you know, we try to target this population group and try to get them on board so that they can start following this Prophylaxis. I believe the hon. Member is very well aware of what is the situation, especially when dealing with this category of patients and how difficult it is for us to prompt them to have recourse to this treatment.

Yes, we have to promote the campaign. As for the target groups, we do not have the figures, the moreso as we know that female patients are being tested positive and they are being infected. This is what has been going on and my Ministry is much aware of this. We are working at the same time with the NGOs. NGOs have a very big role to play so that we can tackle this problem.

Mr Speaker: Move to your next question!

Mr Quirin: *One last, please, Mr Speaker, Sir, one last quick.* Toutes les instances internationales, M. le président, engagées dans le combat pour l'éradication du VIH/SIDA recommande que la PrEP soit davantage disponible à la population. De ce fait, le ministre ne pense-t-il pas qu'il faudrait que ce traitement soit disponible dans tous les centres de santé à Maurice et pas uniquement dans les *National Day Care Centres for Immuno Suppressed* qui se trouvent dans les cinq hôpitaux régionaux ?

Dr. Jagutpal : Mr Speaker, Sir, this is being taken up by my Ministry, especially as we are training the Community Physicians so that treatment can be available at the doorstep.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

COJI - DIRECTOR OF AUDIT'S REPORT - COMMENTS

(No. B/324) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, whether in regard to the *Comité d'Organisation des Jeux des Îles (COJI) 2019*, he will state –

- (a) the actions taken by his Ministry following comments made by the Director of Audit in his Report 2019-20 pertaining to shortcomings over disbursements of fund effected thereto, and
- (b) if the audited accounts for the financial years ended 31 December 2018 and 2019 are available at his Ministry and, if so, table copy thereof.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, let me point out that it is the practice for any country hosting a major game, to set up a National Organising Committee. For the purpose of organising the 10th Edition of the Indian Ocean Islands Games in Mauritius in July 2019, an organising committee known as the *Comité d'Organisation des Jeux des Îles (COJI)* was set up in 2016.

I would like to seize this opportunity to remind the House of the outstanding performance of Mauritius, both in terms of the organisation of the Games as well as the performance of our athletes. For the first time in its history, Mauritius won the Indian Ocean Islands Games with a record breaking number of medals.

Regarding part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that in his Report on the Accounts of Government for the Financial Year 2019-2020, regarding disbursement of funds to the *COJI*, the Director of Audit mentioned the absence of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between *COJI* and my Ministry.

In my Ministry's reply dated 04 February 2021 to the Reference Sheet of the Director of Audit, it was made clear that while there was no formal MOU between *COJI* and my Ministry, the presence of the Accounting Officer as well as the Manager, Financial Operations of my Ministry on the Board of *COJI* was intended to ensure that public funds were used judiciously. However, while giving due consideration to the remarks made by the Director of Audit, my Ministry will, henceforth, formalise any disbursement mechanism with Committees and/or Organisations to be set up under its aegis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that copies of the audited accounts of *COJI* for the Financial Years ending 31 December 2018 and 2019 are available at my Ministry.

With your permission, I am tabling same. Thank you.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, tout comme dans le cas de la *Mauritius Multi Sport Infrastructure Limited (MMIL)*, nous constatons également que pour le comité d'organisation des jeux des îles de 2019 que les standards de base de comptabilité n'ont pas été respectés, d'après ce que je lis dans le rapport de l'audit. Le ministre de ce fait, peut-il nous dire si une fois encore il compte initier une enquête sur ces manquements ?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, la réponse initiale était très claire. Donc, le directeur de l'audit nous reprochait de n'avoir pas signé un *MOU*, mais je peux rassurer l'honorable membre ainsi que toute la population mauricienne que, le fait que sur le bureau du *COJI* était présent comme membre, le *Permanent Secretary* de mon ministère qui est aussi le *Accounting Officer*, aussi bien que le *Manager of Financial Operations* comme je l'ai dit, de sorte à veiller à ce que les fonds publics soient bien utilisés. Les comptes audités vont montrer cela, donc ce sont ces mêmes comptes que je viens de déposer à la Chambre.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, une dernière question pour le ministre. Peut-il nous dire si cela ne figure pas dans les comptes audités ? Si cela est dans les comptes audités, il n'y a pas de souci. Comment ont été dépensés les R 115 millions du *Loto Fund* qui avaient été mis à la disposition du *COJI* 2019, comme c'est mentionné dans le rapport du directeur de l'audit à la page 323 ?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, tous les fonds qui ont été mis à la disposition du *COJI* ont été utilisés à l'organisation des jeux elle-même, *the accomodation of all delegations*, l'achat des équipements, la tenue des compétitions, que ce soit les R 115 millions du *Loto*,

aussi bien que les sponsors que nous avons reçus. Tous ces fonds ont été utilisés à l'organisation des jeux en général.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/373 and B/374 have been withdrawn.

MR V.P., PERMANENT SECRETARY – HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION & BOARDS OF UNIVERSITIES - BOARD MEMBER

(No. B/325) 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 Mr V. P., Permanent Secretary attached to her Ministry, she will state if the latter is a board member of the –

- (a) Higher Education Commission;
- (b) University of Mauritius;
- (c) University of Technology Mauritius, and
- (d) University of Mascareignes and, if so, table information as to the benefits and emoluments drawn in each case.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that Mr V. P., Permanent Secretary at my Ministry is a Board member of the Higher Education Commission, the University of Mauritius, University of Technology Mauritius, and *l'Université des Mascareignes*.

With regard to the second part of the question, I am tabling the relevant information as to the benefits and emoluments drawn in each case.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. You will concur that for whomsoever, be it a PS or not, sitting in a regulatory body like the Higher Education Commission and sitting on councils or boards of so many public universities does not seem to be in accordance to good practices for obvious reasons. Doesn't the hon. Minister consider that there is a possibility of an overt conflict of interest and, if yes, what does the Minister plan to do to dispel the possibilities of conflict of interest?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, it was brought to my attention that the Permanent Secretary was also on the board of the Higher Education Commission. In fact, the

Ministry has already started work on the redressing the situation. Although, there might not be a direct conflict of interest, but ethically, I believe that he cannot be on the Higher Education Commission as well as the boards of the universities, so we are taking necessary steps for that.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister.

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - EDUCATORS

(No. B/326) 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 educators in the private secondary schools, she will state if changes to the registration thereof have recently been introduced and, if so, give details thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, the Private Secondary Education Authority (PSEA) has been entrusted with the registration of Teachers under Section 4(g) of the PSEA Act 2016.

Consequently, the PSEA carries out the registration of potential teachers and issues the Eligibility to Teach Certificates, commonly known as the Teacher's Licence, to those who fulfil the qualification requirements for teaching, and who desire to take up employment as teacher in Private Secondary Schools.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to ensuring parity between the State and Private Secondary Schools, the Board of the PSEA approved, in 2017, that –

- (i) an Eligibility Certificate to Teach would be issued to applicants who hold a degree or a joint degree in the subject to be taught in the Private Secondary School, except for some specific subjects for which a degree or joint degree with the same appellation does not exist, and
- (ii) no Eligibility Certificate will be issued to those who hold a degree/ joint degree or a Diploma in a subject which is not taught in the Private Secondary Schools.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in September 2020, a Technical Committee was set up at the level of my Ministry comprising, *inter alia*, representatives of the PSEA, the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) to look into issues relating to the

eligibility criteria and make recommendations with a view to harmonising the requirements for the recruitment of Educators in State Secondary Schools, the MIG and Private Secondary Schools.

Pending the finalisation of the report of the Technical Committee, Eligibility Certificates to teach have been issued to prospective Educators as per the Board decision taken in year 2017.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. You must have realised why I came forward with this precise Parliamentary question. You must be aware that there are several degree holders...

Mr Speaker: No, just put the question!

Dr. Gungapersad: It is coming, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Put the question!

Dr. Gungapersad: Yes. There are several degree holders who formerly could teach in Private Secondary Schools, but now, are not eligible. What is the way forward, hon. Minister, for these young graduates, who are graduates from University of Mauritius?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to draw the attention of the House that teachers who are already teaching in secondary schools will be allowed to carry on with their teaching. However, there are certain teachers who were not teaching, who were there in cases where, we say, there is a scarcity area, who have left the school after some time, and then, they are trying to get re-recruited in other schools. So, we are dealing with these situations and, as I have said earlier, those who were already in the teaching profession will be allowed to continue.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. We will submit to you a list, a long list of degree holders who are now barred from having that eligibility to teach at the end of the session.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the House, that there are many cases where the teachers are not being re-recruited not because of their qualifications, but because there is an over entitlement in the colleges where they are. So, we cannot mix up the issues.

PSAC, NEC, SC & HSC INVIGILATORS

(No. B/327) **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 invigilators working for the Primary School Achievement Certificate, National Certificate of Education, Cambridge School Certificate and Higher School Certificate examinations, respectively, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, information as to the mode of recruitment thereof, indicating the respective hourly rates payable thereto.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate carries out, on a yearly basis, a survey among Educators of Primary and Secondary Schools in regard to their interest in working as Invigilators for –

- (a) the Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC) assessment;
- (b) the National Certificate of Education (NCE) assessment, and
- (c) School Certificate (SC) and Higher School Certificate (HSC) examinations.

For the PSAC assessment, the Deputy Head Masters, Holistic Support Teachers and ICT teachers are also included in the survey.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the NCE assessment and SC and HSC examinations, in addition to educators of secondary, unemployed persons are also selected to work as invigilators.

Interested candidates are required to submit, in person, to MES the duly filled in application form which needs to be signed in the presence of MES officers.

Candidates have to, *inter alia*, meet the following conditions to be considered as eligible as invigilators. They should be –

- (a) aged between 22 and 70 years;
- (b) be unemployed or retired from the service;
- (c) have a pass in at least one subject at SC/GCE 'O' level, and
- (d) have a Certificate of character.

Following a screening exercise, the eligible candidates are added to the list of potential invigilators, from which selection and enlistment is made by the MES.

With regard to the remuneration, invigilators working for the PSAC assessment are paid an allowance of Rs2,844 for the whole exercise, that is, for the four days of the examinations.

For NCE assessment and SC and HSC examinations, a daily allowance of Rs486 is paid to the invigilators.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister for the information you provided. The gist of this question is to highlight the fact that when a mathematical calculation is made, it is noted that invigilators working for PSAC and those who invigilate for NCE, SC and HSC exams do not receive the same quantum for the invigilation exercise, for hourly invigilation. Either way, we noted how a huge number of prospective invigilators refuse to work notwithstanding COVID-19. Will the hon. Minister look into the matter and see whether there is a possibility to rationalise the hourly quantum paid to all these invigilators?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I will convey this point to the MES, Mr Speaker, Sir.

BELMONT, GOODLANDS - INCINERATOR

(No. B/328) 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 incinerator at Belmont, in Goodlands, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the District Council of Rivière du Rempart, information as to –

- (a) since when it has stopped operating, and
- (b) if repair works are in progress and, if so, indicate the –
 - (i) name of the contractor therefor;
 - (ii) contract value thereof, and
 - (iii) date of coming into operation thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the District Council of Rivière du Rempart that the incinerator at Belmont has not been in operation since May 2019. However, since that period there has not been any

disruption of service provided to the inhabitants of the locality as they have been diverted to the cremation ground of Piton and Daruty, Petit Raffray which are quite close to Goodlands and where both incinerator and traditional pyres are available.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to providing a better service to bereaved families with respect to the incineration facilities, Government decided to upgrade the existing network of incinerators and install additional unit. In this context, following a bidding exercise, through the EXIM Bank of India under the Indian Line of Credit, a contract was signed on 26 July 2019 between my Ministry and Kanta Electricals India Limited for the supply, installation, testing and commissioning of 16 units of incinerator equipment for the sum of \$2,256,000. The replacement of the incinerator at Belmont, Goodlands which was technically worn out forms part of this project.

Concerning parts (b)(i) and (b)(ii), I am further informed by the District Council of Rivière du Rempart that an expenditure of Rs348,618 has been incurred for the civil and electrical works which started in May 2020 and completed in December 2020. The details of the expenses incurred are as follows –

- (a) civil works carried out by the in-house labour at the cost of Rs123,000;
- (b) removal of the old incinerator by Steam House Ltd amounting Rs41,400;
- (c) supply and installation of roller shutters to the tune Rs61,900;
- (d) supply and installation of aluminium partitioning by Vulture Workshop Ltd at the cost of Rs49,000;
- (e) electrical works effected by Steam House Ltd for the sum of Rs62,675, and
- (f) additional costs for about Rs10,000.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also apprised that the new incinerator was installed in September 2020 whereas the liquefied petroleum gas network including gas tank has been completed in April 2021. The incinerator will be commissioned after the installation of two additional equipment, namely the burners and the Pollution Control Unit by the technical team of Kanta Electricals India Limited.

However, this exercise could not have been carried out as the Indian team flew back to India on 28 April 2021 due to family and health issues in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic situation prevailing in India. The Indian team is expected back in Mauritius in July 2021.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. I agree with you that there has been no disruption but, however, we should not forget the inconveniences caused and let us hope by July 2021 it would be repaired and come into operation. Thank you.

Dr. Husnoo: I hope so, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

(4.22 p.m.)

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): 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 hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL

(NO. VII OF 2021)

On motion made and seconded, the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2021) was read a first time.

Third Reading

THE SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION (2020-2021) BILL (NO. XVI OF 2020)

On motion made and seconded, the Supplementary Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill (No. XVI of 2020) was read the third time and passed.

*Second Reading***THE MENTAL HEALTH CARE (AMENDMENT) BILL****(No. II of 2021)**

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill (No. II of 2021).

Question again proposed.

(4.22 p.m.)

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to bring my humble contribution to the Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill (No. II of 2021).

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset I shall like to recall that until recently the very mention of mental health was regarded as a *tabu* and many patients and their families have been stigmatised as a result of their mental disease. If matters have considerably improved on this front, at least so we believe, there are new forms of mental disorders that have been surreptitiously creeping into a huge chunk of humanity lately and which require urgent attention as the present Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill (No. II of 2021) is being tabled and debated.

It has been just over a year now since the coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic struck the world causing havoc of biblical proportions in some parts of the world. Over a year where we have been adjusting with the so-called New Normal, over a year where some have been working from home, over a year where we have asked our children to adapt to new habits and this year 2021 is seemingly more challenging as that of the previous year on multiple fronts.

For many of our countrymen, this challenge has been more telling on the mental front than on any other plan and here, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to salute the exemplary work, dedication and perseverance, sacrifice as well of our frontliners who have day and night put their very health at risk to keep the rest of the population COVID-19 safe and sound.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, we, as legislators, must not overlook the fact that however much the frontliners are labouring to keep us safe, this pandemic has brought, in its wake, different degrees of psychological, emotional and mental disorders as people are finding it more and more difficult to grapple with what is often so called the new normal. People in general and health carers in particular must be made aware of the likelihood of the plethora of

mental health disorders stemming from the corona virus. While debating on the present Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, we must not lose sight of these new forms of emotional, psychic and mental disorders that are inexorably cropping up and to ensure that our health system has the required preparedness to cater for appropriate care and treatment before they wreak havoc within our population. These new forms of emotional and mental disorders are already gripping various parts of the world, notably Italy, Spain, India, Great Britain and France, where even the most embattled health workers are sulking into a state of deep despondency. To this effect, I would like, with your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, to quote *le cri du cœur* the representatives of the French Medical Corps had raised and as reported by the prestigious newspaper *Le Monde* a few weeks back, I quote –

« Nous, les médecins, sommes équipés d'une armure pour faire face à la mort mais nous n'avons pas d'armure contre les émotions. »

This, Mr Speaker, Sir, sums the advanced level of emotional, psychological and mental disorders that the pandemic is bringing in its wake to the world over. Here, in Mauritius, we should not allow this dangerous corollary of the coronavirus to become rampant. We need to take pre-emptive and preventive actions before it is too late. When the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness mentioned about an amendment being brought to the Mental Health Act, I was curious and I tried to understand the history and progression of the mental health in Mauritius, and I was glad to find out that Mauritius has come a long way in terms of supporting those suffering from mental disorders and depression.

In the year 1998, the Lunacy Act of 1906 was repealed and replaced by the Mental Health Care Act and the Mental Health Care services functioned according to the legal framework. In 2019, amendments were brought to this Act, thus making provision for a new Mental Health Commission and Managerial Committee with each one having different functions. The Managerial Committee is supposed to review all the involuntary admissions, while the Commission is supposed to review all security patients which consist of four types and investigate in matters pertaining to malpractice. The Mental Health Commission found itself overburdened whereby little time is left for investigation. This present amendment is being brought so that the Mental Health Commission will see only two types of security patients –

- (i) those who have been found not guilty by reason of insanity or mental illness and is confined as the BSH, and

(ii) those who are not fit to stand trial in a Court of Law due to mental illness.

While the Managerial will be seeing the other types of security patients, that is, prisoners and people under Police custody requiring admission at the BSH. The main aim of bringing such an amendment is for the Mental Health Commission to dedicate more time to complaints, malpractices and investigations.

The present amendment also gives the Commission the necessary legal tool to carry out investigation and enquiry. There is also an element of dissuasion in the amendment whereby the legal implication will dissuade carers, families and society, in general, to ill-treat or aggress people suffering from mental disorders. It is a step forward towards the protection of those mentally ill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, mental health care holds an important part in our health system. Good mental health is a must for the wellness of our society and a happy life. After several decades, it is now understood that mental health is and must be one of the priorities of the health sector. In this context, this Bill is being proposed today to show the commitment and interest of this Government in improving the Mental Health Care Sector. We have at heart the well-being of those suffering from mental health condition and ill-treatment will never be condoned.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, through this Bill, the Mental Health Commission is being given the necessary power to see to it that the mental patients are treated fairly by everybody.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(4.31 p.m.)

Dr. A. Ramdhany (First Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or): Mr Speaker, Sir, as previously working as a Medical Practitioner, I fully support the amendments proposed in the Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill.

On the last session, a point was raised by an hon. Member on the other side of the House on the definition of “mental health”. It is absolutely irrelevant. If you look into the true sense of the mental disorder, it is the disease of the mind, whereby a significant occurrence of a mental or behavioural exhibit by symptoms indicating a disturbance of a mental functioning, including symptoms of a disturbance of thought, mood, volition, perception, orientation and memory loss, which are present to such a degree as to be

considered pathological. I understand that these amendments relate to management of security of patients in the Mental Health Care Institution and it is important to be reviewed for the patient's right and to adapt it to the evolving time.

The Mental Health Care Act provides for two distinct mechanisms in the administration of mental health care, namely –

- (i) the Mental Health Board with an oversight on promotion of rights and care of the patient, and with a responsibility to advise the Ministry of Health and Wellness on the improvement of the administrative function over the activities, and
- (ii) the Mental Health Commission with the responsibility of protecting lives of the patients, ensuring discipline among Health Care Professionals as well as looking into admission, care and discharge of security of patients.

The amendments proposed in this Bill would eventually enable the Mental Health Commission to focus on the administration of discipline in the service delivery and investigations into complaints.

This Bill also provides for a series of offences under the Act which would be punishable in terms of a fine and together with imprisonment for a term up to a period of two years depending on the discretion of the Court in case of serious misconduct and that would prevent the Commission in the proper exercise of its function.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill will certainly aim at harmonising the operations of the Managerial Committee and the Mental Health Commission by separating the medical duty from the investigative function. I understand the administration of mental health care is faced with emerging challenges with the increasing probability for the need to accommodate new patients and perpetrators of serious crimes, resulting from the nefarious effect of consumption of synthetic drugs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the new section 43 (a) added in this (Amendment) Bill will be able to reinforce the Commission in terms of offences committed by any person. If any person fails to attend the Commission or gives false evidence in terms of document or procure false testimony of a witness before the Commission, shall commit an offence whereby liable to a fine and imprisonment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to conclude and congratulate the Minister of Health and Wellness for proposing these amendments to this House although he is required these days to devote much of his time for the management of COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

(4.35 p.m.)

Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal): M. le président, en raison de mon attachement à la démocratie et en tant que défenseur des droits humains, je considère qu'il est de mon devoir d'apporter ma contribution sur cet amendement en vue de promouvoir les structures sanitaires dans nos centres pénitenciers.

Avant d'entrer dans le vif du sujet, permettez-moi, M. le président, de rappeler aux membres de la majorité, qui disent que l'Opposition ne fait pas de suggestion et passerait la plupart de son temps à critiquer, M. le président, lorsque l'Opposition fait des suggestions pour améliorer le système, la majorité nous reproche d'être hors sujet et de faire perdre le temps de la Chambre. Je voudrais justement rappeler aux membres de la majorité que les députés de l'Opposition ont des droits et des devoirs dans un Parlement démocratique, d'autant plus qu'il s'agit là de l'essence même de la démocratie parlementaire, c'est-à-dire, pouvoir débattre un projet de loi en proposant de manière civilisée des améliorations sans se faire insulter.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Ms Anquetil: Sachez, Mesdames, Messieurs de la majorité gouvernementale que, nous, les parlementaires de l'Opposition, nous ne sommes pas, ici, dans cet hémicycle pour se faire injurier.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, can you start with your first suggestion?

Ms Anquetil: *Yes.* M. le président, j'espère que cet amendement va corriger certains manquements dans la législation. L'Organisation mondiale de la santé s'inquiète de l'impact de la COVID-19 sur la santé mentale. Son Directeur général a déclaré le 06 mars dernier, je cite -

‘Le monde doit se préparer à un important traumatisme mental pour les années à venir après la fin de la pandémie.’

Aujourd’hui encore, la santé mentale est un sujet stigmatisé et tabou dans notre société. À Maurice, nous accordons un retard très important sur la prévention des maladies mentales et leur prise en charge. Il y a encore beaucoup d'efforts à faire. Je m'explique. D’abord sur les programmes de santé mentale adaptés aux besoins et aux attentes de la population, ensuite sur le personnel insuffisamment qualifiés et expérimentés, et enfin, sur les lacunes au niveau du manque de formation du personnel soignant dans le service public. Un seul hôpital psychiatrique, le *Brown Sequard Hospital* pour desservir toute l’île. M. le président, je propose qu'on considère la mise en place d'unité de psychiatrie dans chaque hôpital pour mieux répondre à la demande. Le point 3 du *Explanatory Memorandum* indique qu’à travers cet amendement, *opportunity is also being taken to clarify some provisions of a Mental Health Care Act and to provide for matters related thereto.*

Je souhaiterais, donc, profiter de cette opportunité qui m'est offerte cet après-midi pour faire des propositions constructives pour ne pas déroger à mes habitudes. Le *Mental Health Care Act* de 1999, *PART 1 - PRELIMINARY; 2. Interpretation; definition.* Comme l’a si bien dit mon collègue l’honorable ...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, bear with me. Be careful. The Mental Health Care Act is a larger hub. Now, we are talking about the amendment of that Act. I am just helping you.

Ms Anquetil: *Amendment Bill*, non ? *Yes, Amendment Bill.* Comme l’a bien dit mon collègue, l’honorable Shakeel Mohamed, la définition de *Mental Disorder* dans notre législation est trop vague. Les modifications au projet de loi pourraient être une opportunité pour améliorer cette définition en la rendant plus précise dans le but de freiner les abus en se référant à la législation anglaise. La médecine n’étant pas de mon ressort, je laisse le soin aux experts d'apporter les précisions nécessaires.

M. le président, j’ai une question au ministre : est-ce qu’une récente étude a été entreprise par son ministère pour mieux connaître la santé mentale des personnes incarcérées de notre pays ?

PART IV - TREATMENT, LEAVE AND DISCHARGE, Section 28: Follow up of discharged patients. On pourrait appliquer la loi anglaise sur le *duty of care* envers les *discharged patients*. A la sortie du patient, le personnel s'engage à assurer un suivi médical, incluant la continuité des soins et l'évaluation du traitement du patient.

PART (VIII) - MISCELLANEOUS, Section 43 : *Appeal*. le droit de faire appel si un patient pense qu'il a été détenu injustement existe dans notre loi. Alors, avec cet amendement, c'est le *Managerial Committee* qui va agir en tant que *Mental Health Review Tribunal*. Le *Managerial Committee* doit être un organisme indépendant. Cependant, il faudrait s'assurer que le médecin traitant du patient ne soit pas sur le comité qui va examiner la demande d'appel du patient. L'avis d'un médecin indépendant pour une deuxième opinion est indispensable, autrement cela constituerait à un cas flagrant de conflit d'intérêt. Il serait bien que ce comité soit également composé d'un travailleur social, d'un avocat et d'un psychologue, entre autres. Pour les patients du *Brown Sequard Hospital* qui n'ont pas les moyens de se payer un avocat, je suggère l'attribution d'un représentant légal au profit du patient devant le *Managerial Committee*. L'amendement ne mentionne pas de *community care* lorsque le patient retourne dans sa communauté. Très souvent, on perd les patients quand ils retournent chez eux. On pourrait s'inspirer du *Community Care Act* anglais pour assurer le bien-être des personnes ayant besoin des soins et des services de soutien. Il vise également à amener la personnalisation des services de soins en plaçant la personne au centre du processus. En Angleterre, le *Care Act* a diminué le taux d'hospitalisation ainsi que la durée d'hospitalisation du patient.

M. le président, avant de conclure, je souhaiterais attirer l'attention sur les résidents du *Correctional Youth Centre* et du *Rehabilitation Youth Centre* qui, eux, malheureusement, ne sont pas sujets à un panel de psychiatres pour déterminer si leurs problèmes de comportements sont dus à des troubles mentaux. Le *Fact-Finding Committee on Residential Care Institution and Shelters for Children*, en 2015, recommande que les enfants ayant des problèmes psychiatriques aigus devraient être placés dans une unité spécialisée sous l'égide du ministère de la Santé et de la Qualité de la vie.

Chez nous, M. le président, certains mineurs, au lieu d'être traités pour des troubles mentaux, sont punis et envoyés aussi au CYC et RYC, alors qu'on aurait dû résoudre le problème à la source. Alors que la Convention aux Droits de l'Enfant stipule que l'arrestation, la détention ou l'emprisonnement d'un enfant doit être le dernier recours.

Dans beaucoup de pays, la santé mentale des mineurs détenus fait l'objet d'une attention particulière parce qu'une bonne prise en charge de la santé mentale est porteuse de potentialité pour la construction du mineur détenu.

Pour conclure, M. le président, je fais un appel au ministre de la Santé de ne pas apporter des amendements *piecemeal*, au coup par coup mais, de revoir la législation dans son ensemble, pour répondre aux aspirations de la population.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah!

(4.46 p.m.)

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah):

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will start by congratulating the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness for bringing to this House the Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill (No. II of 2021).

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to reassure the House that this Government is indeed very open to criticism when it is constructive and also that, *Droits and Devoirs au Parlement ne veut pas dire passer à côté de la plaque* when we are intervening on a certain particular Bill. That is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that this Assembly is governed by a set of Standing Orders.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on this side of the House, we have been listening with much attention, hoping that there would have been constructive inputs from the Opposition side. But, time and again, some Members of the Opposition have not only proven us wrong but have also been completely off track whilst at the same time brilliantly demonstrating their total lack of understanding on the matter being debated in this House. It does not really come as a surprise, Mr Speaker, Sir, because most of the time people who pretend to be jacks of all trades are indeed masters of none.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are here as elected Members of the Republic of Mauritius and it is with sheer dismay that, when such an important piece of legislation was being debated last Tuesday, most Members of the Opposition decided to pursue their personal political agenda and chose not to even listen to the mover of this Bill, the Minister of Health and Wellness.

More shameful is to allege that the hon. Minister does not have the support of our Prime Minister. Had this been true, Mr Speaker, Sir, he would not have been presenting this Bill in the House. So, let me state it very clearly once and for all, that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, not only has the trust and support of our Prime Minister, but also the

same trust and support of all his colleagues in the Government and that of the whole population of Mauritius.

And coming to my first point on the Bill being debated, I would like to invite....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, you are given a chance.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: May I continue, Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission.

We are not here to assess personal attribute or demeanour of anybody in this House and one of the Members of the Opposition alluded that our Minister of Health is arrogant and does not have a sense of priority by coming with this Bill in the House. This is actually quite comical, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is akin to the pot calling the kettle black.

But getting back to the Bill at hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to invite hon. Members on the other side of the House to share their definition of priority because the Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill 2021 has been introduced to this House with the very objective of addressing issues of mental health disorders, in order to provide the best possible care to the evolving needs of the mental healthcare users and providers.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to refer to a world authority in mental care, Mr Corey Keyes who talks about a two-continua model of mental illness and mental health which holds that both are related, but with distinct dimensions.

Our piece of legislation, Mr Speaker, Sir, considers the mental disorder dimensions, which means a significant occurrence of a mental or behavioural disorder exhibited by symptoms indicating a disturbance of mental functioning.

In fact, it is unfortunate that Members of the Opposition tried to deviate the purpose of this piece of legislation and they just attempted to “*wow la galerie*”, which most of the time is not even present.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to bring some clarifications on what was purported by one particular Member of the Opposition during her intervention on this Bill. Putting aside the irrelevancy of what was said, I would like to inform the House that this Amendment is not related to the effectiveness of the services of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare.

The Member even went further to mislead the House by stating that the victims of abuse are not provided with psychological support and even worse, alleging that my children placed in shelters are denied such assistance. They are given all the necessary psychological support and counselling throughout. As a matter of fact, all cases requiring psychiatric treatment are referred to the Psychiatric Departments of the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Mr Speaker, Sir, psychology and psychiatry are two very distinct fields of interventions which can broadly be summed up within three main differences-

- 1) Psychiatrists are medical doctors. One of them is sitting on my right here, the hon. Dr. Kailesh Jagutpal, psychologists are not medical doctors.
- 2) Psychiatrists can prescribe medication, psychologists cannot do that.
- 3) Psychiatrists diagnose illness, manage treatment and provide a range of therapies for complex and serious mental illness whereas psychologists rather focus on providing psychotherapy, which is also called talk therapy.

I therefore urge all Members, especially those of the Opposition, to stick to the parameters of the debates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of modernising and decentralising mental health care in Mauritius, psychiatrists are now posted at regional hospitals. Hon. Ms Anquetil, in her intervention, just said that there is only *un seul - pas une seule - 'un seul hôpital'*. It is not true because there are now psychiatrists posted at regional hospital levels, Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital at Flacq and the SSRN Hospital in Pamplemousses and in the same vein, a Dementia Clinic is operational at Candos Hospital as well, Mr Speaker, Sir.

And to conclude on this one particular point, let me say, I do not know if it is a shame or a pity that there has been an attempt to dilute the importance of this Bill which actually shows utter disrespect to the citizens suffering from mental impairments and requiring the specialised care. As usual, but as expected as well, Mr Speaker, Sir, political agenda has taken the front seat when it comes to the interventions of the Opposition Members as opposed to those from the Government side.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government is and remains committed to the welfare of our citizens. The Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill of 2021 aims to amend the Mental Health Care Act of 1998, which was promulgated in 1999 and in March 2019, this Government, under the leadership of hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, took the

initiative to amend the Mental Health Care Act of 1998 to better meet the rights, the requirements, and the expectations of mental health care patients and the providers of this specialised care.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mental Health Care (Amendment) Act of 2019 made provisions for the setting up of a Mental Health Commission that would investigate complaints and look into cases of breach of discipline or professional misconduct or violation of human rights of the said patients.

In addition, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Commission was also called upon to review matters pertaining to admissions, treatment and discharge of security patients. The amendments also catered for the setting up of a Managerial Committee, which would review matters related to admission of patients as well as involuntary admission, treatment, leave and discharge of those patients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government recognises that a psychiatric patient requires specialised care and has to be treated in a dignified manner; the more so, given the dynamics of change in this particular area of healthcare in this COVID era. This Government, through the current Bill, aims to ensure more effective services to psychiatric patients by specifically inserting Section 43(a), which will act as a strong deterrent with regard to ill-treatment of psychiatric patients.

Section 43 (a), Mr Speaker, Sir, as a new Section, equips the Commission with the necessary powers and legal framework to carry out investigations, when there are cases of alleged ill-treatment of patients with mental impairment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill 2021 will consequently enhance the services delivered to psychiatric patients by enabling the Commission to only review two types of security patients, that is, those who cannot face a trial because of their mental impairment. And secondly, those, who, despite having committed an offence, have been found not guilty by reason of mental disorder.

Mr Speaker, Sir, section 43(a) further creates a new set of offences, for example, if a person impersonates or knowingly provides false or misleading information, uses violence or prevents the proceedings from going on judiciously. Such offences and other offences committed otherwise will carry more severe fines and sentences.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government in 2019, came forward with a Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill precisely to improve the legal framework and, therefore, the proper functioning of the mental health care.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, I should remind this House, that some Members of the Opposition, particularly Members of the PMSD party, decided at that time, not to vote for an important piece of legislation like this one. Fortunately, the former Member of the PMSD party, who, in 2019, stated, and I quote –

“The PMSD will not vote for the Bill.”

That Member, I am very happy to see that he has finally seen the light or should I say the sunlight and left the *basse-cour*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the current amendments being proposed are an extension of the willingness of this Government to treat our citizens right, be it our children, adults or elders suffering from mental illness; treat them with care, with respect and, most importantly, with dignity. This Bill demarcates the functions of the Commission with that of the Managerial Committee through enhanced service delivery, hence ensuring not only the security of patients, but also, a more humanitarian care and services to the patients and their families.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to end by congratulating the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and this Government, once again, for bringing these crucial amendments to this House and I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(4.59 p.m.)

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Since we are talking about mental health today, it is mentally disturbing to witness events unfolding in Jerusalem East over the last few days, where I wish to express my strong condemnation of the Israeli forces attack, especially during the month of Ramadan on Palestinians in Qibla E-Awal, Al-Aqsa Mosque violating all norms of humanity...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is this?

Dr. Aumeer: ...and international rules, causing mental torture to the families involved there.

I have listened to the hon. Minister Koonjoo-Shah, quoting that the orators and the speeches made by Members on this side, as being irrelevant and they have not understood the essence of the Bill. I find that very inappropriate since, when I compare all the speeches which I have listened so far, on the other side of the House, where mostly, have been a condensation of praises for the Minister, without having contributed a single positive note about the Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to share my views on the proposed Bill to amend the Mental Health Care Act. Since we are dealing with health matters, which is the focus of attention of all the Mauritians here and abroad, during the last few weeks, I wish to express my deepest sympathy to the bereaved families of dialysis patients among other COVID-19 patients, who lost their lives, due to the COVID-19 pandemic in very tragic circumstances and I want to express my full support to them during these difficult times.

I will surely be by their side to ensure that their loss was not in vain.

Mr Speaker, Sir, health encompasses the composite union of physical, spiritual, mental and social dimensions, according to the World Health Organisation and which recognises that mental health and well-being are fundamental to quality of life, enabling people to experience life as meaningful and become creative and active citizens.

Mr Speaker, Sir, mental illness lasts for a protracted period and has a lifelong impact, which results gradually in poor quality of life and many a times, the families try to hide their condition out of a sense of shame. It is very unfortunate that public knowledge only comes to light sometimes when the inevitable happens, such as horrendous passionate crimes, among a few.

Mr Speaker, Sir, any legislation that authorises the State to intervene in the private life of its citizens, will always be controversial. The Mental Health Act gives the State, what are among the most significant powers, to take away somebody's liberty without the commission of a crime, criminal offence and the power to treat that individual even in the face of their refusal.

It is, therefore, of extreme importance to, have health professionals, assess detainees in the line of medical duty as mentioned in the proposed amendment and maintain a delicate balance between therapeutic benefit and least restriction. Mr Speaker, Sir, the relationship

between psychiatric illness and criminality has been the topic of intense debate and scrutiny in the past, in the light of multiple mass shooting and crimes abroad and as well here.

The popular belief is that people with mental illness are more prone to commit acts of violence and aggression. The public perception of psychiatric patients as dangerous individuals is often rooted in the portrayal of criminals in the media as crazy individuals. Mr Speaker, Sir, the definition of mental disorder, as per the Medical Health Care Act, is, unfortunately, too vague. And encompasses a variety of symptoms, which, unfortunately, stigmatizes, for example, individuals having alcoholic and drug addiction are treated as part of the same group, as persons having specific pathological psychiatric disorder.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while nearly 80% of our admissions in the psychiatric hospital, the only one that we have, are in one way or another related to drug abuse or more, most in relation to the use of synthetic drugs, I would have expected that, the Bill, would contain proposals of how to differentiate these alcohol and drug dependence individuals as non-psychiatric patients, but rather, a more specific medical disorder based on their pathological dependence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this perception extends all the way to the Criminal Justice System where persons with mental illness, get treated as criminals, arrested, charged and jailed for a longer time as compared to the general population. Hence, should the Commission discharge the responsibility of assessing and treating detainees with mental issues to the Managerial Committee, it is also true that a defined Code of Medical Practice and Ethics be applied without bias and appropriate amendments be brought to clarify this important issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have gone through the Medical Health Care (Amendment) Bill, particularly clauses 3 to 11, and with the exception of clauses 10 and 11, the whole purpose of this Bill, in my opinion, is purely cosmetic, without having any focus on the definition of mental patients, improvement of care and welfare of mental patients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the main purpose of the Bill, as per its Explanatory Memorandum, is to entrust the medical duty towards mental patients and the Police custody or Reforms Institution to the Managerial Committee. The medical duty which the Managerial Committee will look into, should be clearly defined to avoid overlap of decision-making and thus gives rise to conflicting circumstances since it has, at its directing reporting authority, the Health Commission itself.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind the House that approximately a year ago, the Mental Care Act was amended, where Sections 5 and 6 of the Principal Act was repealed and replaced by a New Section 5, that is, Mental Health Commission, and New Sections 6A and 6B inserted in the Principal Act, where 6A and 6B relate to the setting up of a Managerial Committee and its functions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while the current Bill is to discern the role and duties of the Managerial Committee, the precise functions, when it comes to medical duty by the Managerial Committee, are not specifically outlined in Section 6B and it is a missed opportunity that the mover of the Bill could have made amend to. I, therefore, suggest that at section 6B, which reads “Functions of Managerial Committee”, a further subsection should have been included as to the specified meaning and description of the Medical Duty that is to be overseen by the Managerial Committee. Mr Speaker, Sir, then, why do we have a Mental Health Care Act with specific mention of Medical Duty? For patients who are under the Custody of Police or Reforms Institution, on one hand, the Mental Health Care Act takes away your liberty and imposes treatment that sometimes you do not want but, on the other hand, it can help restore health and be life-saving for others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the right to appeal is the fundamental right and care has to be taken in amending the Bill, that the professionals who use their discretionary power to keep patients in are not the same professionals whom you have to appeal to.

Our cultural and ethical traditions support the concept of autonomy, allowing everyone to make the decisions that affect their life and accept the consequences of their decisions is a key aspect of respecting the unique value and character of each person. Mr Speaker, Sir, both our cultural and ethical traditions, also support the concept of protecting the vulnerable and those unable to care for themselves. Moreover, most health professionals possess well-developed protective instincts as well as most of us in civilized societies. For instance, if we see someone about to jump from a bridge, we will all try to help them to step away. And it is that protective instinct that the Managerial Committee must strive at the centre of its care to patients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while dispensing the art and science of medical care, throughout various conversations that I had personally with patients, service users, carers, professionals of every description, one thing that was never far from the surface was fear. The public is

often fearful of mental illness and of the consequences that they have been led to believe flow from it, specifically, the danger posed by people living with mental illness.

Mr Speaker, Sir, also professionals are very fearful that, unless and foremost, they adopt a cautious and risk-averse approach to their patients, they will find themselves being publicly shamed for those occasions when those people cause serious harm to others or themselves. As a matter of fact, these patients do not always experience kindness, particularly when the state's powers of coercion have been invoked. Whilst the fear of the mentally ill has decreased in the public, in Parliament and media, a different kind of fear has increased, the fear of making a faulty risk assessment of these patients that may influence our professionals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is easy to see how this would have been reflected in the steadily rise number of detentions, as professionals of all kinds become increasingly risk-averse, and more likely to make coercive interventions that at least in the short-term are likely to reduce the risk of an early dreadful outcome, such as a serious or a fatal harm to a patient, to a detainee or a member of the public.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the reason why amendment to the Act should not only be a copy and paste exercise of replacing "Commission" by "Managerial Committee", but rather ensuring in-depth changes with specific annotations as to the dispense of medical duty. Mr Speaker, Sir, ...

Mr Speaker: You have only a few minutes.

Dr. Aumeer: Sorry! To break the links between mental illness and criminality requires an inter-professional team of psychiatrists, social workers, and patient advocates to detect and reduce or eliminate risk factors that lead persons with mental illness to commit a crime. A targeted approach that includes rehabilitation, education and empowerment must be part of the advocacies of the Managerial Committee.

Mr Speaker, Sir, any amendment of the Act has to bring the law in consonance with the Obligation of United Nations Conventions, particularly on the rights of persons with disabilities in October 2000. The Right to appeal has to be clearly defined.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while the Managerial Committee is set to look after the medical aspect of detainees-security patients, it is worth noting at Section 6A, subsection 2 of the Mental Act, there is no specific mention of the provision of care by qualified psychotherapists, counsellors and psychoanalysts. The mental health professionals must not be restricted to clinical psychiatrists.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if the Bill is enacted, it will imply that the Managerial Committee which was implemented last year still does not define the Terms of Reference of this Committee and I, here, want to mention two very specific circumstances, the use of a specific treatment in the psychiatric hospital, named as Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT), should have been more explicit since a person with mental illness shall not be subject to ECT without the use of relaxants and anaesthesia; the same applies for minors. Such specific treatment should have clear guidelines by the Managerial Committee.

Mr Speaker: You have one minute to finish.

Dr. Aumeer: Avant de terminer, j'aurais voulu faire une parenthèse, M. le président, qui n'est pas directement liée à l'amendement proposé mais qui est liée à la santé mentale des mauriciens. Nous tous présents dans cette Chambre, on a soit des amis, des parents ou des connaissances qui de leur maladie, dite mentale ou psychiatriques, doivent se rendre à l'Hôpital Brown Séquard à Beau Bassin. M. le président, malheureusement, ces patients sont souvent les cibles des remarques très désobligeantes, telles que, « *li sorte lopital fou Beau Bassin ou encore li p al mental la, ou encore...* »

Mr Speaker: You terminate here. You can raise that on Adjournment Matters.

Dr. Aumeer: I am just finishing one paragraph.

Mr Speaker: No, no, it's okay.

Dr. Aumeer: Just one minute; one paragraph.

Mr Speaker: Please! Please! I give you sufficient time. It's up to you to manage your time. You can read a whole book. You are reading a speech; you can read a whole book. I am not here to listen and listen, there is a limit.

So, Dr. the hon. Jagutpal you have the floor!

(5.14 p.m.)

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first of all, thank all hon. Members of the House who have taken the floor and have participated in the debates on this, I insist, a very important Bill that I have presented at our Sitting on 20 April 2021.

The different views expressed show the interest and concern of most hon. Members for the welfare of our mental patients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first of all, highlight the disgraceful attitude of Members of the other side of the House; I am referring to those Members who left the House last week ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Jagutpal: I am referring to those Members who left the House last week, when they had to show their interest in the debates. We have seen that this Bill has been very extensive, especially in the debate where different issues have been raised; the adolescent issues; treatment; management and rehabilitation, yet last week Members of the House have left the House. Now, it is good that...

Mr Speaker: Do not interrupt!

Dr. Jagutpal: ...they have placed their political concerns ...

Mr Speaker: Do not interrupt! Last warning!

Dr. Jagutpal: ... above everything else including the health and welfare of the citizens of this Republic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with this attitude, they did it since the beginning of the COVID-19, we have seen how many times they have left the House, especially when it came to vaccinate the population, that time also they left the House. Leaving this august Assembly on purpose is, in itself, a breach of the oath they took to represent the Population in this House. This shows their disrespect.

Mr Speaker, Sir, their act is an utter and highly condemnable lack of respect and consideration for all those in our Republic who are suffering and who live with mental issues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first come up with what hon. Shakeel Mohamed stated in the opening speech, and what he had to say on this Bill is shocking. This Member - I will use his words - said -

“...as though it is of utmost importance...”

He added, I will quote it from Hansard -

“I am convinced now that the hon. Minister has no sense of priorities...”

This is shocking, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will urge this Member to refrain from associating my actions with absolute lack of consideration by saying that we do not have priorities because

today itself, we have seen it in PQ's time, the questions that were addressed to me, the whole lot of questions were on different issues and all those issues were priorities. Be it the Linear Accelerator; be it the question on HIV patients; everything is a priority, Mr Speaker, Sir, and presenting this Bill to the House is again one of the Ministry's priorities.

The same hon. Member had also raised an issue where I gave references to what a good health system is. At the same time, he said that he has been comparing our health system with that of the UK. And it is very good. I think he made it clear, by comparing our health system to that of the UK where we know what the GDP of this country is, what the GDP of UK is, we know what is the health system there, and really how he rated high our Public Health Care System.

Now again, the hon. Member and other Members also made reference to the definition of mental disorder, insisting that in the UK, it refers to any disorder or disability of the mind. I repeat 'the mind'. I think the hon. Member should know what the definition of the mind is and, he stated himself that, mental disorder includes symptoms, disturbance of thought, volition, mood, perception, orientation or memory. All these are the definition of the mind and what he tried to do, where we are debating on an Amendment; he is debating on the definition of the mind. I would leave it to the House to see what would be the definition of the mind in respect to this Amendment. Again, the hon. Member said that interference and involvement of the Minister or the Prime Minister in our legislations. Once more, these are words for the gallery where there is no substance.

Mr Speaker, Sir –

“The Commission shall consist of – (a) a Chairperson, to be appointed by the Prime Minister, who shall be a Magistrate or a law officer, of not less than 10 years' standing;”

The other members of the Commission are specialist, Regional Health Director, senior medical social officers, public officer holding the office of medical superintendent, and composed of two specialists in the field of Psychiatry with a Nursing Administrator.

I wish to reassure the hon. Member that I will not refer to the *largesse* in the past, but at the same time, it is good that he has been telling me that we have to change that. We do not have to keep on criticizing what has been done in the past. It is good he said that, but he never said what he is going to do; what his Party is going to do; what his Party or his allies are going to do; but he is here to say what we should do. I will invite him now to go outside, go

to the Press and tell them that when – we do not know when that will come, I know that it is not going to be shortly - when he is going to be in power...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Toussaint!

Dr. Jagutpal: ... he is going to get everything out, he is not going to nominate. I am sure if he does this now, today, next time I am going to congratulate him. I am going to congratulate him because I am sure that he is not going to do it. He is not going to do it but he is coming in this House to tell me what I should do.

Now, again, he also seemed to be very concerned about my relationship with the hon. Prime Minister. Indeed, I am very proud to work with my Prime Minister. I am very proud to work under his guidance and his dynamism; he is a hardworking and a caring Prime Minister.

Now, I will ask the hon. Member to state the same thing for his Leader.

(Interruptions)

We know, I am proud to say it, I will keep on saying it. I am saying it now and I will keep on saying it. But I am inviting him to say the same thing for his Leader; he will not. He has been saying that his Leader has to go. Recently, he has been saying that, yet...

Mr Speaker: I can hear some noises from the Government side, be careful!

Dr. Jagutpal: ... he is still there. But I am just repeating what he has said, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, it is for the hon. Member to say – well, I am very proud of my Prime Minister – whether he is proud of his Leader. It is up to him to come and say it.

Mr Mohamed: Is the Prime Minister proud of you?

Dr. Jagutpal: *Bien sûr!* Of course! The Prime Minister!

(Interruptions)

And the same for you. I am not sure! I am not sure!

Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to again differ from hon. Mohamed...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: This is the last time! Last time!

Dr. Jagutpal: ...what remains an urgent matter ...

(Interruptions)

Yes, of course, he would not be able to tolerate it now. Hon. Shakeel Mohamed is pleading to amend even the definition of the mental disorder. I think that I have already given a brief on that and what is the incoherence in his mind. Let us stop it over here. A mere modification of the definition will not bring fundamental changes.

So, what I want to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, I can understand that he has not been able to go through the amendments and what is the purpose of bringing this amendment now. But just reading the definition and trying to compare it with some legislations - well, it is good to compare it to UK - and then come up saying that the definitions; I will come to that again.

Now, let us come to what hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger said. She also intervened in this Bill mentioning that we had only 8 psychologists employed in my Ministry. It is good to do the homework properly. In fact, we have 12 psychologists and my Ministry also works in collaboration with other Ministries such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare. I am informed that there are 66 psychologists employed in the Public Service. So, you can understand, having recourse to psychologists, it should not be confined to the Ministry of Health, but it should be in the different Ministries where psychologists are required especially in these times.

Now, the hon. Member should also note that children with hearing disabilities are not considered as children with mental disorders but are followed by the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology.

I think that it is for obvious reasons that these children are not considered as mental disorders but they are being taken care by the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology.

Now, again, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger also stated that there was an attempt to, I will quote -

« Bâillonner les membres de l'Opposition. »

Tell me how we have been doing *bâillonner les membres de l'Opposition*? I think the hon. Member will understand that she chooses to act against the Rules and Standing Orders, she left the House and then she comes and says that we are involved in *bâillonner les membres de*

l'Opposition. I think that she has to get it - simply it is just flouting the Standing Orders and then, at the same time, playing victim with that.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I admit that indeed I am very disappointed with the language of hon. Juman who said, let me quote -

« *On aura amplement le temps pour discuter de ce qu'on va faire avec l'honorable Jagutpal.* »

Qu'est-ce qu'on va faire avec moi Monsieur ... ?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not *vini mo bribe twa fi*. I am sorry, I'm not a *fi*, but, yet, *qu'est-ce qu'on va faire avec l'ensemble des membres maintenant de l'autre côté de la Chambre ?*

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the *niveau*. Anyway, in this Temple of Democracy; we, elected Members, representing the people, we should know what to say, and how we behave. Again, I think that I should not refer to what the Supreme Court Judgement 475 of 2016 has said, when a Member has been found guilty of corruption for attempting to bribe a Public Officer and I am being told *qu'est-ce qu'on va faire avec moi*. I hope they take me to the Supreme Court and then we'll see who has been to the Supreme Court and who has already had this Judgment.

Now, I leave it to the House.

Mr Mohamed: On a point of order.

Dr. Jagutpal: I will stand guided...

Mr Mohamed: On a point of order.

Mr Speaker: Point of order.

Mr Mohamed: What the hon. Minister has just done is basically attacking someone's character when he is only allowed to do it, if he is attacking him in his function as Member of Parliament, but not outside the parameters of his function as Member of Parliament. That is Standing Orders. He has no right to do that.

Mr Speaker: I listened to your point of order.

Mr Mohamed: You would look into it.

Mr Speaker: I will look into it.

(Interruptions)

You continue!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is good also to point out what hon. Ms Anquetil has said, that we have only one Psychiatric Hospital. Hon. Ms Anquetil, I wish to point out that the...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Are you talking to the Chair like this, this language?

Mr Mohamed: No, I am commenting to myself! I am talking to myself!

Mr Speaker: You have no floor!

(Interruptions)

You have no floor!

(Interruptions)

And don't interrupt the Member! You already won three warnings and now I give you the last of the last.

Mr Mohamed: Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, someone talking to himself is - as a Psychiatrist - a psychiatric disorder.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Dr. Jagutpal: Anyway, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me continue with what hon. Ms Anquetil has said, that we have only one Psychiatric Hospital but just to point out that in 2006-2007, the treatment for psychiatric patients who need psychological treatment have already been decentralised. Psychiatrists are being posted in all the hospitals. We have outpatient departments in all the hospitals where patients are being treated and admitted whenever necessary. In addition, the public can avail of Community Psychiatric Services in all the regional hospitals throughout the island. Just come and ask me, I will give you all the information.

Anyway, the hon. Member also mentioned about studies on Mental Health. Now, the debate is on this Amendment. Let us focus on this Amendment. It is good that you voiced your concern about Mental Health, but, at the same time, it is not good that you left the House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is already working on the fundamental amendments and changes to be made in the Mental Health Act. However, given the number of consultations we had, we have to conduct with all relevant stakeholders, pending the overall Amendment. There is an urgent need, I say it again, an urgent administrative need to bring this present Amendment. It is not only for cosmetic purposes as stated by hon. Dr. Aumeer.

Now, let me explain it. Forced treatment or admission is effected only in cases where the person constitutes a danger for his own safety or other persons as a consequence of mental disorder. Where the person has not consented to his admission and treatment within 24 hours of his admission in a declared Mental Health Care Centre, the Superintendent or other person in charge of the centre has to forward to the Magistrate of the district where the patient ordinarily resides, a copy of the Admission Report with a request for validation of the admission and this patient is referred to as a high-security patient category A and B as I have already mentioned in my opening speech.

The Mental Health Care Act was amended in 2019 to enhance the legal framework for the proper functioning of the Mental Health Care to, *inter alia*, prevent prolonged hospitalisation and institutionalisation of patients. The new Mental Health Commission and the Managerial Committee which were set up under the Act were made responsible to ensure that no patient is admitted against his or her will. I think hon. Dr. Aumeer rightly stated the definition. The functions of the Managerial Committee and that of the Commission have to be clearly demarcated and that is what is being done in the present Bill.

In this regard, the Commission conducts inquiries into cases where patients have been admitted or are being kept into a centre against their will. This is the purpose of the amendment. The Managerial Committee is also responsible for reviewing matters relating to involuntary admissions, treatment, leave, discharge and continued treatment of patients.

The Mental Health Commission also oversees the Managerial Committee from which it receives quarterly reports to make sure that there is no abuse of the person's rights. Where the Commission or the Managerial Committee are satisfied that the condition of the patient is such that his/her continued stay for treatment in the centre is no longer necessary, the patient

shall be discharged, as soon as reasonably practicable. Hence, hon. Member of the Opposition and Mr Speaker, Sir, this is why this administrative Amendment has to be brought urgently to demarcate the role of the Managerial Committee and that of the Commission. This will allow to better cater for different patients categorised as involuntary patients, security patients, high-security patients, in four categories, namely ABCD and for the Automatic Review Process, as stipulated in the Act. With this new Amendment, the Committee will undertake the automatic review of only involuntary patients and C and D category of security patients while the Commission will concentrate on the high-security A and B category patients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, contrary to the averments of hon. Shakeel Mohamed and hon. Dr. Aumeer as well, alcohol and drug addiction are not considered as Mental Disorders. Patients with alcohol problems are treated in general hospitals like any other patient. In fact, there is an Addictology Unit available in all the five regional hospitals.

However, patients developing mental disorders following alcohol intake or substance abuse, who are aggressive and cannot be controlled, are treated at the Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre.

As far as learning disabilities are concerned, and again, contrary to what hon. Members have stated, learning disability is also not considered a mental disorder. In fact, as stated earlier, it falls under the purview of my colleagues, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology and the hon. Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity.

Similarly, various neurological and developmental disorders, such as autism, epilepsy and Down syndrome are not considered as mental disorders and are treated generally in the general hospitals by paediatricians and neurologists. However, only severe cases which cannot be managed at home or in general hospitals are referred to Brown Sequard Hospital because of severe behavioural disorders. My Ministry has recently set up a Child Psychiatry Unit - again, I am referring to hon. Bérenger - to take care of children with mental and behavioural disorders and these services are available in our regional hospitals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I will make reference to the competition of Guru Dronacharya in the sacred Mahabharata, of which I am a follower. I think you know that the Pandavas and the Kauravas were asked to strike the eye of a wooden fish hanging on a tree, and that they could only aim at the fish by looking at the reflection in the pond. Now, while

all other students of Guru Dronacharya were distracted because people around were laughing at them, and Arjun resolved only on his target. What I wish to say is that, similarly, Government has a firm intent of achieving its objectives and the Government is not distracted by what is being said by the Opposition. We will stay guided by our Prime Minister's vision for the greater good of this country and the citizens, just like Arjun, when he was asked what do you see, he says, I can only see the eye of the fish.

I am confident, with the help of our citizens, we will strike our target.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now, commend the Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill (No. II of 2021) to the House.

(Applause)

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

PUBLIC BILLS

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill (No. II of 2021) was considered and agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Mental Health Care (Amendment) Bill (No. II of 2021) was read the third time and passed.

At 5.40 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.37 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

ANNOUNCEMENT

HON. S. MOHAMED - UNAUTHENTICATED PHOTOCOPY DOCUMENT

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have a short announcement to make.

During the debate on the Supplementary Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill (No. XVI of 2020), hon. Shakeel Mohamed purported to table a document in relation to a list of all the money that had been recouped only from the sale of shares of a supposed Ponzi Scheme. A perusal of the said document reveals that it is an unauthenticated photocopy document which cannot be tabled. The said document is, therefore, being returned to hon. Shakeel Mohamed.

Thank you.

(6.39 p.m.)

Second Reading

THE TAXI OPERATORS WELFARE FUND BILL

(No. III of 2021)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I move that the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill (No. III of 2021) be read a second time.

As detailed in the Explanatory Memorandum, the purpose of this Bill is to set up a welfare fund for taxi operators with a view to promoting their socio-economic well-being and those of their families.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at this present juncture, amidst an unprecedented worldwide sanitary and economic crisis, the importance of such a structure to cater for the welfare of taxi operators cannot be overstated.

The setting up of such an entity for the benefit of taxi operators constitutes, yet another laudable initiative of this Government to put the human factor at the heart of our considerations.

The well-being of citizens, be it in the public, private or informal sector, has always been one of the top priorities of this Government.

As a caring regime, our objective has always been to improve the work-life balance of our citizens and there is no better way to do so than by setting up an appropriate mechanism to promote their welfare.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to say that this Government values the meaningful contribution of its human capital, without which, this country would not make it to the next level. This includes all workers such as those of the

transport industry who played a crucial role in the shaping of the present-day Mauritius by facilitating the movement of people and of goods.

M. le président, je voudrais me prévaloir de cette occasion pour rendre un vibrant hommage à ces milliers d'hommes et de femmes œuvrant dans le secteur du transport, dans les autobus, le métro et les taxis, qui en dépit de ce virus meurtrier avaient continué à être au service de la population durant le premier confinement en 2020 et tout récemment.

Les chauffeurs de taxis, M. le président, sont souvent exposés à des situations dangereuses dans l'exercice de leur fonction. Tristement, certains d'entre eux ont même payé de leur vie. Ce projet de loi est surtout un témoignage envers ces opérateurs de taxis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it also cannot be denied that, taxi operators, oftentimes, play a crucial role in ensuring the first and last mile connectivity to the bus or light rail stations as well as providing commuters with late night services in case of medical emergencies or for safely attending work during odd hours.

This is why the time was ripe to promote and advance the welfare of taxi operators and of their families as their contributions in enhancing the movement of people and connectivity throughout Mauritius cannot go unnoticed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the creation of a welfare Fund for taxi operators was first evoked in this very House in the budget speech for financial year 2019/2020 where it was proposed to have a study to assess the need for a Taxi Operators Welfare Fund.

The House will appreciate that in the very same budget speech, the Prime Minister, who was also the then Minister of Finance and Economic Development, announced that taxi operators would benefit from a duty free car every four years instead of five years. This already denoted the importance that the Prime Minister attaches towards taxi operators.

In that respect, as soon as I took office, my Ministry and the National Land Transport Authority initiated discussions as early as January 2020 with representatives of taxi operators with regard to the setting up of such a Fund. During consultations, I had with these representatives, it emerged that taxi operators were supportive of that proposal.

This is to say, that the views of the taxi operators have duly been taken on board during the consultative process and it is only after being assured of their support that arrangements were made for the Bill to be introduced.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the modernisation of the land transport sector is ongoing. With the operation of the Metro Express, Mauritius made several strides in providing its citizens with a comfortable, reliable and green mass mode of transport.

However, the transformation of the transport industry cannot be achieved without the support of all stakeholders of that sector. As the challenges in the sector continue to increase, the support of all transport players is vital to keep pace with the modernisation of the transport landscape. There is a continuing need to promote good working relationships and build strong collaboration with all transport players in order to keep the morale of the transport sector high, thus, the introduction of this Bill in the House today.

Mr Speaker, Sir, welfare Funds have proved to be popular outlets to which employees or other beneficiaries readily resort to, for the purpose of upscaling their social comforts and making optimum use of schemes being provided.

This is what has led to the introduction of various Funds to cater for the different economic sectors of Mauritius including the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund, the Fishermen Welfare Fund, the Small Farmers Welfare Fund, the Seafarers Welfare Fund, amongst others.

For the same reasons in 2002, the then MSM-MMM Government of which, a few of us today present in the House formed part, took the right decision to set up the Bus Industry Employees Welfare Fund (BIEWF) with the mandate to further the advancement and promoting the welfare of employees of the bus industry and that of their families.

Since then, we have not looked back on our decision. The BIEWF, today, has not faltered in its role in promoting the welfare of bus employees. Sports and leisure activities are now annual features of the Fund in addition to providing training courses to workers of the bus industry and to their families.

We can proudly say that the establishment of the BIEWF back in 2002 has, today, allowed thousands of employees to benefit from loans and other facilities as well as to avail schemes and programmes. We can boldly say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the BIEWF has fully met with our expectations and it bears testimony that we were right to cause such a Fund to be established.

There is, thus, no reason why the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund (TOWF) should not enjoy a similar fate. In fact, we will draw from lessons learnt in the successful operation of the Employees Welfare Fund to steer the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund in the right direction and for it to be a success story as well.

Today, we are laying the cornerstone of a structure which will prove to be of massive importance to taxi operators for the years to come. We are proud of making history again in order to provide taxi operators with a welfare fund wherein which they can avail of facilities for their socio-economic well-being.

We are proposing for the Fund to operate in the same manner as other welfare funds but with the notable difference that schemes and facilities that will be provided will be tailored to the needs of taxi operators.

Accordingly, the development of welfare activities and projects will be devised in such a manner to cater for the specificities of the taxi industry. In that respect, the Fund will be called to periodically consult representatives of taxi operators so that facilities and schemes being provided by the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund are aligned to the expectations of the taxi operators.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government acknowledges that families constitute the basic knit of the society. This is why the objects and functions of the Fund have been carved in such a way that the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund would not restrict itself only to the taxi operators.

In fact, while devising projects and facilities, the Fund will have in mind families of the taxi operators as well so that schemes and activities are designed to enhance the well-being of all these persons also.

The Fund will also, as is the case of the Bus Industry Welfare Fund, set up loan schemes for the benefits of taxi operators and of their families. In line with its objective of ensuring the social wellbeing of the taxi operators, the Fund will also plan welfare activities to cater for their recreational needs. I am sure that the House would share my belief that a healthy Work-Life Balance is required to maintain the emotional and physical wellbeing of taxi operators.

Mr Speaker, Sir, having explained the rationale of setting up such a Fund, I will now delve on the provisions of the Bill. For the purpose of this Bill, as provided under Clause (2), a taxi operator is defined as either the holder of a taxi licence or a full-time driver. The Fund, as detailed at Clause (4) will be set up to do all such things as may be required in order to

advance and promote the welfare of taxi operators and their families, that is, to foster the well-being of taxi operators and their families.

Clause 4(2) elaborates on the modalities of how this promotion and advancement will be undertaken. I have to, first of all, reassure the House that the Board of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund, set up by Clause 5, would operate in complete independence in managing and administering the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund.

The Board would be given free reins to propose schemes and recommend on facilities to be extended to the taxi operators subject to strictly adhering to established procedures and to applicable legislation. It is for this reason, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Board of the Welfare Fund would comprise four representatives of taxi operators so that they fully partake in the decision-making process.

On the other hand, the representatives of Ministries forming part of the Board of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund would ensure that decisions of the Board are in line with the corporate responsibility of the Fund in terms of financial management, compliance with labour requirements as well as the regulatory aspects governing taxi operations.

With regard to Clause (5) of the Bill, though the Board will be the supreme instance to take decisions, my Ministry will provide assistance and advice as and when required to the Fund in any matters pertinent to its good running and to ensure sound management of the Fund without, however, encroaching on the prerogatives of the Fund.

Clauses (6) and (7) of the Bill also caters for proceedings of the Board and makes provision for members of the Board to disclose their interests so that they do not take part in proceedings and/or in any discussions in which they have direct or indirect financial or other interests.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the proper running of the Fund and in order to plan and arrange for the day-to-day administration of the Fund, the Bill makes provision at Clause (8) for the appointment of an Administrative Manager. The latter will, *inter alia*, be responsible for implementing decisions of the Board and will provide such assistance as may be required to the Fund in meeting the objectives of the Fund.

With this provision, the Welfare Fund Board will be able to ensure that its decisions are duly executed and that the Fund operates without hitches.

For the purpose of expediting the business of the Fund and for swift implementation of decisions, provision has been made in the Bill at Clause (9) for the Board to delegate its functions to the Administrative Manager. Such provision is in line with modern management practices which promote staff empowerment and favours delegation of responsibilities.

However, the Administrative Manager will still be accountable to the Board and will need to report to the latter with regard to the activities and operations of the Fund.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the taxi industry comprises over 7,000 operators, in fact 7,078, there is need for the Fund to be adequately staffed in order to achieve its mandate and to effectively deliver on its responsibilities. For this reason, Clause (10) of the Bill allows for the Fund to recruit staff for the discharge of its functions.

The need for staffing will first have to be validated by the Board and the latter will then initiate necessary procedures for the recruitment process. The selection process will be done in strict transparency and will be in line with the spirit of good governance and of equal opportunities for all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause (11) of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill provides for every taxi operator to be registered with the Fund on commencement of the Act. For that purpose, the National Land Transport Authority (NLTA) will assist the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund in providing the list of all the 7,078 taxi operators licensed in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

In order to avail facilities extended by the Fund and as I explained earlier, the person would need to be either the holder of a taxi licence issued by the NLTA or be a full-time taxi driver registered with the NLTA and where, for example, he may be operating for a *succession*.

In addition, some licensees for health reasons or other impediments often employ a full-time driver to operate their taxis on their behalf and it is, therefore, appropriate, in such cases, that these drivers be eligible to benefit from schemes and facilities provided by the Fund. This is why such provision has been made in the Bill for these drivers.

I also need to add that all taxi operators would be called upon to form part of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund irrespective of whether they are based at hotels, airport or other localities.

With a view to ensuring that every new licensee is registered with the Fund, a mechanism will be put in place in line with Clause (11) so that the Welfare Fund is able to register new taxi licensees or full-time taxi drivers within a reasonable delay. In that context, the NLTA will be approached to assist the Fund accordingly in providing the required information for the Fund to build an updated register of operators. This will also apply in case taxi licences are transferred in the names of other persons.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in order for the Fund to be financially sustainable and for it to generate adequate revenue for reinjection as loans, schemes, grants and organisation of welfare activities, it is of utmost importance that provision be made for all taxi licensees or taxi drivers, as the case may be, to contribute to the Fund.

This is the reason why the Bill makes provision for the registration of all taxi licensees and of taxi drivers, as applicable, so that the Fund is able to receive contributions from all operators involved in the provision of taxi services.

In that context, consequential amendments as at Clause (26) are, accordingly, being brought to the Road Traffic Act to ensure that taxi operators are regular with their contributions. These amendments to the Road Traffic Act are required in order for all operators forming part of the Fund to be up to date with their monthly fees so that the long-term sustainability of the Welfare Fund is preserved.

I, now, come to the rate of contributions payable to the Fund as provided at Clause (12) of the Bill.

The Bill makes provision for a taxi operator to pay a one-off Entrance Fee of Rs200 upon joining the Fund and for a monthly contribution of Rs300.

The rate of contribution has been arrived after consultations and in order for the Fund to generate an adequate stream of revenue to fund its activities and schemes. In fact, the monthly contributions would be the major revenue accruing to the Fund.

The rate of contribution has been arrived after consultations and in order for the Fund to generate an adequate stream of revenue to fund its activities and schemes. In fact, the monthly contributions would be the major revenue accruing to the Fund.

These rates may, in due course, be reviewed by way of Regulations in line with Clause (24) of the Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also pleased to inform the House that funds to the tune of Rs800,000 have been made available by Government in the context of Budget 2020/2021. This sum would serve as a seed capital to kick-start the operations of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund (TOWF) and for meeting the initial administrative expenditures of the Fund. Here again, such a gesture portrays the support of Government to the taxi operators in general.

May I remind the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the sum of Rs800,000 was generously allotted to the taxi operators of this country during the presentation of the last Budget, at a time when the country was already caught up in the throes of the pandemic, at a time when all the Ministries had been directed to curtail their expenses. In fact, the economic situation was already deteriorating and it was during this time that this Government generously allotted to my Ministry the sum of Rs800,000 for the taxi operators. I think the Minister of Finance needs to be applauded for this generous gesture, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Moreover, with a view to maintaining the ratio of administrative expenditures to revenue generated to a minimum, the Welfare Fund would initially be administered by Officers of my Ministry so that there is a pooling of resources until the Fund is able to generate a reasonable amount of revenue to operate on its own. This arrangement will help in ensuring minimal administrative expenses.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on this note, I have to reassure the House that control mechanisms would be put in place before payments are sanctioned by the Board or by the Administrative Manager, as the case may be.

As regards facilities and schemes to be provided by the Fund, due diligence would be made by officers of the Welfare Fund so that any grants, loans and other support provided by the Fund are thoroughly assessed to ensure that the financial resources of the Welfare Fund are judiciously used.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause (13) of the Bill makes mention of powers accruing to the Minister. In line with other similar pieces of legislation, as we all know, such powers are restricted to giving general directions to the Board and in no manner whatsoever does the proposed Bill confer onto the Minister the power to override the Board of the TOWF which is supreme and independent.

Likewise, the Board remains accountable for its decisions and is to provide the Minister with such information or documents on the activities of the Fund.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill also makes provision at Clause (14) for the Fund to invest its Surplus so that the Welfare Fund is able to generate additional revenue. However, with a view to ensuring that the investment strategy of the Fund is economically sound, the concurrence of the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development would have to be obtained beforehand.

Moreover, with a view to promoting sound financial management, provision is made in the Bill at Clause (21) for the Fund to lay its Annual Report before the National Assembly so that the activities and financial statements of the Fund are under the scrutiny of Parliament.

Clause 21(2) of the Bill, in fact, makes mention of this requirement, and at Committee Stage, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will make a minor amendment because I shall add the word 'National' before the word 'Assembly' and this correction will be made at Committee Stage.

Provision has also been made in the same Clause for the Director of Audit to be appointed as the Auditor of the Fund in order to ascertain that the Welfare Fund complies with strict financial and reporting standards and adopts the best financial practices.

Likewise, the Fund would mandatorily be required to prepare its Income and Expenditure estimates for each financial year so that there is effective budgetary planning and that resources can be allocated accordingly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before I end, allow me to share on some of the proposed schemes and facilities that the Fund could provide -

- (i) scholarships to children of taxi operators in the form of monthly stipend or grants to attend courses in local tertiary institutions;
- (ii) grants upon retirement of taxi operators or financially assist them during hardships by providing interim allowances for a specific duration during periods where they are not in a position to operate their taxis, and
- (iii) at a future stage, the Fund could extend soft loans with minimal interests rates. For instance, financial assistance could be granted for specific projects such as house renovation or for the organisation of social and family events like marriages or even for those proceeding on vacation.

While framing schemes to be provided to taxi operators, the Board of the Welfare Fund will have to take into account the specific characteristics of taxi drivers, such that no member contributing to the Fund is penalised. Accordingly, facilities extended by the Fund

will have to be devised in such a manner to ensure that any specific situation arising in the course of their profession is duly catered for.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to stress on the need for all licensees to operate with the existing legal provisions as laid down in the Road Traffic Act which require taxis to operate from their base of operation or from such place as may be authorised by the NLTA. In that respect, I would like to make an appeal to all taxi operators to comply with the conditions attached to their licence as the NLTA does not authorise any person nor the holder of a Taxi Licence to operate an IT Platform for the purpose of hiring of taxis against payment of fares. As taxis are primarily licensed to serve the locality or region they are based at, such IT platform tends to run counter to existing arrangements and may upset the usual provision of taxi services duly licensed by the NLTA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in a nutshell, the legal framework of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund is similar to other existing welfare funds set up by Government and the Bill includes the necessary legal provisions for the good running of the Fund.

I am confident that there will be consensus on both sides of the House on the need to have such an entity to cater for the welfare of taxi operators.

I do not foresee any major disagreements from any Member of this House on the provisions of this Bill as the subject matter transcends petty politics.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill includes all the necessary legal parameters required for the Fund to operate and sets out in no uncertain term the mandate and functions of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund as well as the responsibilities devolved on the Board of the Welfare Fund. The statutory obligations of the Fund are also laid down in the Bill as well as the requirements for taxi operators to be regular with their monthly contribution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government has clearly proven that it will always honour its commitment. Nothing in what it pledges remains pious wishes.

We, on this side of the House, are not only proud that we remained steadfast on our words but that we have also, in spite, and in the face of this unfortunate and unprecedented crisis, been able to fulfil a project that will lead to the betterment of taxi operators and of their families.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on this side of the House are seated men and women of promise and not of mere promises.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I now commend the Bill to the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo) seconded.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I can see a long list of 17 Members speaking; the hon. Minister twice, so, 16. I would urge you to be short, precise, not to make repetition, not to read too much from your text, but to state facts, figures, comment on the Bill and, I am sure, we will finish the Bill soon, instead of saying we will wake up early.

MP Bodha!

(7.05 p.m.)

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): I will do my bet to rise up to the tenets of what you have mentioned, Mr Speaker, Sir. Every Welfare Fund Bill in the House has been welcomed because it relates to the welfare of the working class. I, myself, I introduced the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund Bill in 2002.

As the hon. Minister rightly said, the idea of this Welfare Fund was mentioned in the Budget of 2019-2020.

On my side - I hope also on the side of my friends here - we welcome the coming of a Welfare Fund because it will bring changes in the life of the taxi operators and it will provide a number of facilities and amenities to the members of their family, to their wards. We know many children, who, because their parents were at the Sugar Industry Welfare Fund or any other Welfare Fund, have been able to have scholarships and to do well later and have a better career.

There are a few questions I want to ask the hon. Minister. First of all, the number of taxis mentioned by hon. Minister Ganoo is 7,078. I presume that he is including the 2,000/2,300 taxis operating at the hotels. And, if that is the case, I would like to say that there was a committee which was chaired by the then Deputy Prime Minister, hon. X. L. Duval. I was a member of that committee where we had a number of requests from the taxi operators for the betterment of their welfare, of course, but for their business and for their livelihood, and the law, the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund Act of 2002 was amended in 2016 by the Finance Act. It was amended so that, I read Clause 16, subsection (1B) -

“Any hotel-based or airport-based taxi operator shall make a monthly contribution to the Fund according to such rate as may be prescribed.”

That is, there was a request from those taxi operators, that they be allowed to contribute to the Welfare Fund and to be able to benefit from all the facilities. So, the law was amended in 2016, and when I had a discussion with the taxi operators at the hotels, they told me that they pay Rs80 as their contribution today.

So, my question is whether they will have to pay the Rs200 to be part of the Fund, first. Second, they will start paying Rs300 instead of Rs80 and whether they will be given the opportunity to stay where they are, because in the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund, you have about 40,000 people and the Fund is much bigger, financially stronger, has more muscles to provide for the amenities and to provide for the requests of the workers. So, that is my first question.

My second question is that if we multiply Rs200 for the Entry Fee by 7,000, that's Rs1.4 m. and if we multiply Rs300 by 7,000 and over a year, it is Rs2.5 per month, about Rs30 m. per year. So, the Fund will start with a sum of about Rs30-35 m. And, from the experience we have about other Welfare Funds, it is very easy to deplete that Fund because of the number of requests that you have with all the facilities that usually we give in the Welfare Fund.

So, my question is whether that sum will be enough to cater for the 7,000 taxi owners. And there is also another problem in the Welfare Fund since often, we have loans where you have a number of arrears and we end up having a situation where you have a lot of people asking for loans, but you do not have the funding for the loans to be able to be paid.

So, first of all, my question is about the taxi operators in the Tourism Industry. Second is about the quantum for the Fund to be able to generate enough facilities for the requests of all the workers. Now, when it comes to the welfare, we know that the Fund provides for the welfare, but the question today Mr Speaker, Sir, is that it is not only the welfare which is at stake, in the period that we have today with the pandemic, with the two lockdowns, with the Tourism Industry being in a very bad shape and we do not see any visibility. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) just mentioned that we may see some visibility in 2022. The taxi operators, mostly in the hotels, but also the others, have to face a very difficult patch today.

So, it is not only a question of welfare. It is, in fact, the livelihood of the taxi driver, of the Taxi industry which is at stake today. And as regards the taxi operators in the hotels, I have been told that they are benefiting from the Self-Employed Scheme and the question is

also how long this is going to be done, to provide them with some revenue. So, there is a lot of uncertainty and there is a lot of loss of revenue for all these operators and they have to face this period which is coming, where we have no visibility.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are a number of issues which go with the industry itself because we can think of the welfare of the operator and the family, but we have to think about the future of the taxi industry in Mauritius. How does it shape up; whether it is not time to re-engineer the whole taxi industry in Mauritius because of new modes of transport?

You have the Metro Express, you have the New Bus Service, we have semi-low floor buses. Tomorrow, we will have buses which are going to be electric buses, better buses, more comfortable. You have the new hubbing concept of the Urban Terminal, the shuttle service to connect the first Mile and the last Mile. And in this given context, in this re-engineering and the modernisation of the public transport system, the question is: where lies the place of the taxi industry in Mauritius?

I think the time has come to go beyond the welfare and to think of their place in a multi-modal public transport system and to see to it that, in the context of today, for example, online booking which is something very simple and very popular in many countries, we are still maintaining *ce qu'on appelle tête de station*, and whether we should not re-engineer the taxi industry in this new context, where you have the multi-modal system, where you have the Urban Terminals as hubs and you have the issue of online booking.

In 2019, we had this issue with Uber; Uber which has become so common and so popular around the world, and there were many tourists who were already booking online before coming to Mauritius. And the Uber Group also made a request for them to come and operate in Mauritius. Then we went to Cabinet and said, no, we will not let Uber come in. The best thing would be - that is what I had said then - that the taxi industry in Mauritius should be able to rise up to the challenge of online booking and should be able to have a platform where they can thrive and have their livelihood in a multi-modal system with the Urban Terminals.

And I think that the time has come, that we have to go beyond the welfare and re-engineer completely the taxi industry. And we should also see whether, in some places, we have a ratio of taxis with regard to the population of the locality, but we all know that in some localities, you have more taxis than should be needed and in other localities, this is not the case, and I think we should also see whether we cannot have a redistribution of the permits.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been talking to the taxi owners. Welfare goes beyond the loans and facilities. We should see where the taxi drivers are, from where the taxi operators operate their business. In this context, when we designed the Urban Terminal and Urban Terminal of Victoria, there is a site where the taxis will form part of the multi-modal system. And when I have talked to the Association, they have made a request, and I am going to make the request to the hon. Minister and to the Minister who is in charge of Urban Terminals, they said they would like to have, in the Urban Terminal, a small office, some premises for their welfare so that while they are working in the Urban Terminal, they have premises where they can cater for their own needs.

In fact, in the Urban Terminals, I had proposed that we should have for all the workers, that is, the bus industry workers, the taxi owners, premises where they can meet up, where they can have some rest, where they can have lunch, where they can have some facilities. So, my appeal is that, first of all, we have to re-engineer the whole taxi industry in the new public transport concept, involving the Metro Express, the new bus system, the shuttles and the other facilities that we are having.

The second thing is we have to go beyond the welfare and we have to think really about the business; they are the livelihood of the taxi driver, the revenue, the remuneration he can have from his job, so that it can be sustainable.

My third issue is about the taxi drivers in the Tourism Industry. The time has come to see with them whether we can have some visibility. I know that some have been relocated to some of the villages, but I have been told that they are in a very difficult patch and we should be able to think about how to see to it that they earn a livelihood.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think that in the Urban Terminals, we can have some facilities for the taxi owners and I think, Mr Speaker, Sir, that beyond the welfare, we have to see the livelihood as well. So for me,...

Mr Speaker: Two minutes left!

Mr Bodha: Yes. For me, Mr Speaker, Sir, we need a total rethinking of the place of the taxi owners in the new normal and the new public transport in the street. They have contributed; taxis form part of our life. But there is another issue which goes with this, *les taxis marrons*, and this also is an issue we have to address, and see to it that the new public transport industry will be able to rise up to the challenges of modern Mauritius.

I think that the Bill for the Welfare is a very good thing, but there are a number of other issues which have to be raised. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bholah!

The Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives (Mr S. Bholah): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my views and offer my comments on the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill. As has been stated by hon. Ganoo and also by hon. Bodha, there are presently a number of Welfare Funds in favour of employees of different sectors which have been enacted in the past. Just to list a few, the Bus Industry Employees Welfare Fund enacted in 2002 and proclaimed in November 2003; Small Farmers Welfare Fund set up in 2002; Fishermen Welfare Fund set up in 2000 and operational since 2001, and the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund set up in 2002.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when we delve into the objects of each of the above Funds, we can see that they are meant to improve the livelihood of its members and also their families, by providing financial assistance, loans and schemes, and by other projects. Now, the object of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill is not dissimilar to those of the other Welfare Funds I just mentioned earlier. Now, listening to hon. Bodha, I am a bit confused in the sense that this Bill concerns the welfare of all those who are working in the taxi industry as well as their members.

But when he talks about Urban Terminals, the taxi industry, this has nothing to do with this Bill. We should contain our comments and intervention to the welfare and how we can increase or improve the welfare of the taxi drivers and the taxi owners as well. He speaks about the Self-Employment Assistance Scheme. In fact, he raised the issue about the difficulties of taxi drivers, those operating at the airport, those operating at the hotels, and he mentioned that. Government has, in fact, come up with assistance in the form of Self-Employment Assistance Schemes.

When I look at hon. Bodha today, I see the image of a lonely taxi operator, with no passengers and nowhere to go. I'm sorry for that. There are presently, Mr Speaker, Sir, some 7,037 taxis in operation, out of which 1,071 are based at hotels, 72 at the airport, and the remaining 5,894 in different localities.

Government has always advocated towards the inclusion of taxi operators by putting forward financial and fiscal policies. They are meant mainly with regard to acquisition of their vehicles. In Budget 2020/2021, provision has been made for the Development Bank of

Mauritius to provide loan facilities of a maximum amount of Rs100,000 at an interest rate of 2% per annum, with a repayment period of four years and a moratorium of one year to taxi operators based at hotels.

In this respect, some 400 taxi operators in the tourism sector have benefited from loan facilities from the DBM, for an estimated amount of Rs35 m. since July 2020 till date. For the year 2020, according to figures provided by DBM, some Rs52 m. have been disbursed to taxi operators as financial assistance, such as business loan, leasing and income subsistence. Previously, in the Budget 2019/2020, provision has been made for taxi operators to benefit from duty free car every four years instead of five years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to further the social and economic prosperity of employees in this specific sector, it was high time to set up the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund. So, I commend my colleague, the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, hon. Ganoo, for this remarkably caring and laudable initiative. It required audacity, Mr Speaker, Sir, to bring the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill before this House, as for years this has been a highly challenging problematic and festering issue. Since ages, taxi operators have been seeking equality, inclusion and appropriate access to opportunities, but for some reason or other, for years, their legitimate requests have been left unattended.

We should all feel proud that this present Welfare Fund Bill adds up to the list of measures and initiatives taken by Government to enhance the quality of life of workers and self-employed of our country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, how do we pride ourselves of being inclusive and considerate when more than 7,000 taxi operators, who are as much frontliners as others, are left on the sidelines to fend for themselves, without any social cover? For how long could we knowingly disregard taxi operators, as unsung heroes, an integral part of our transport network?

We have to acknowledge the important role they play in connecting people, facilitating movement, support economic activities, of fully playing their social roles in cases of emergencies, accident, sickness or for people with special needs.

Being a taxi operator is not a nine-to-five job, Mr Speaker, Sir. Very often, taxi operators are literally dragged out of bed or have to forego rest time and family time to attend to urgent cases in the community. For taxi operators, going out for work every day is like going to battle, uncertain conditions, of not knowing whether they will earn enough for their households, basic needs, make ends meet and provide their families with a decent living.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for all the effort and dedication, the sad reality is that, up to now, the system provided very little protection, support and security to taxi operators. As hard as taxi operators try, they have not enjoyed a safe ride. The precariousness of the finances is often an obstacle to transform their ambitions and that of their family members into reality. Instead, they have for long been exposed to not having social power and risks related to their jobs, that of not getting paid, abuse, insults, mugging, theft and outright assault and violence. We already know of so many cases of physical assaults, of thefts of vehicles and even of murders.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are all aware of additional untold difficulties that COVID-19 Pandemic has created for taxi operators and their families, especially for those in the tourism sector. Many have fallen into debts and face the prospect of losing their livelihood, if appropriate measures are not initiated to support them.

In these challenging times, the establishment of The Taxi Operators Welfare Fund will undoubtedly help in responding to the needs of taxi operators and their families. New financial schemes, projects and measures made under this Fund and eventual benefits are expected to have a lasting impact on the social net economic well-being of taxi operators, and secure the future of their families. With the implementation of the Welfare Fund Bill, taxi operators can now aspire to implement projects such as construction or extension of their houses, enjoy medical cover and provide higher education expenses for their children, expand their businesses or realise their personal ambitions. Here, I would urge the hon. Minister to see to it, although it's not his job, it is the Board's job and the administrator's/ manager's job that proper accounting transactions are recorded accurately because, as it is stated in Clause 21, the Minister will have to lay in front of the Assembly, the audited financial accounts and it's good that the accounts will be audited by the Government Director of Audit and if the initial financial transactions are not properly recorded, this will jeopardize the drawing of the accounts thereafter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, The Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill clearly comes to acknowledge and recognise the crucial contribution which taxi drivers as self-employed make to our economy and our society. We can proudly say that today justice is being done for some 7,000 or so taxi operators in the country. As importantly, the introduction of the Bill reflects the sensitive and compassionate approach of this Government in ensuring that the economic recovery underway does not leave anyone behind. I am proud to say that more than anything, The Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill is yet another act of faith in the workers of this country, coming rightly after 01 May when we celebrated Labour Day. It genuinely reflects

the best of human nature. Being inclusive can only ensure our journey to shared prosperity is less bumpy.

Thank you for attention, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: You made it in 10 minutes. Next orator would be MP Osman Mahomed!

(7.30 p.m.)

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Make it in 10 minutes also.

Mr Osman Mahomed: 10 minutes? I was given 20 minutes.

Mr Speaker: 10 minutes, okay.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Well, thank you. So, I will be very short.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has mentioned 7,000 taxi drivers, which I am given to understand by taxi operators that I have spoken to, before coming to the House, comprise of three categories: the early risers, the Taxi Collective which starts in the morning, and ferry people to their destination, 4 to 5 people. Then, the second taxi operators are at the *La Place Taxi* and the third one are the taxi drivers that are based at the hotel sites and they have contributed a lot to the tourism industry.

I am glad to intervene on this Bill tonight because taxi operators, who have spoken to me, namely the Taxi Proprietors Union, whom the Minister has consulted quite extensively as well, has raised a few points to me, but I am glad to see that although they were not in the original Bill, in his discourse the Minister has addressed quite a few of them. Like for example, what happens to the surviving spouse, who represents *la succession* which was not part in the original Bill, but I am glad the Minister has mentioned just now that, *la succession* will benefit the same entitlement from the Fund going forward. Is that correct? Because he did address this issue. This was one of the main points because Section 11(1)(a) of the Bill did not quite address this issue of *succession*. That was the first point.

The second point is, it has been said that CID Capital will be to the tune of Rs800,000 and the bulk of the contribution will come from the taxi drivers themselves, meaning Rs200 entrance fee and Rs300, meaning Rs10 per day, monthly contribution. In order not to have

any problem, my suggestion to the hon. Minister tonight, would it not be advisable - because a lot of money will be collected - to have the Fund under the supervision or the Financial Services Commission. That is a suggestion I would like to make because other Schemes and Pension funds, although this is not a Pension fund, they are under the scrutiny of the Financial Services Commission. This is the first suggestion and a second suggestion will be what kind of schemes and facilities will be provided. Although there was some mention in the Explanatory Memorandum, I noticed that the hon. Minister has extended these facilities to cover for a few more types of schemes, meaning for marriages, renovation, soft loans, renovation of houses, student loans and etc. But can it be facilities provided in the taxi domain *per se*? For example, if they want to buy a new car, if they have problems paying for the insurance cover, or if they have problems changing the tyres regularly, because in times of economic turmoil, these are pertinent difficulties that taxi drivers face. That is a second proposition.

And the third one is, I noticed that the Minister has mentioned the Seafarers Welfare Fund, which was the subject of a Parliamentary Question of mine today, but which was not reached because of time constraint. But there, there is a catalog of problems and I have a lot of documents with me, which I could not table earlier, and I would be very glad to pass them on to the hon. Minister for him to see what kind of complaints have been leveled against the Seafarers Welfare Fund from the shipping companies themselves, like the Mediterranean Shipping Company, from the old Seafarers Association, from individuals and even Press articles where it is written, '*les anciens marins en quête d'une compensation*'. So, I will be very glad to give it to you. It is a catalog of problems, you can base yourself upon when you have problem going forward for this Fund.

Mr Dhunoo: On a point of order, I refer to Section 40 (1) -

“A Member shall confine his/her observations to the subject under discussion...”

We are talking about the Taxi Welfare Fund, he is coming with the Seafarers.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! That was a point of order! Order!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Maybe the hon. Member has not been following because the hon. Minister himself in his discourse has mentioned. You have to listen! And even ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo, you made your point of order! It is for the Chair to rule! Do not take decisions in my name! You may continue!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Well, I am not too sure how long am I left with ...

Mr Speaker: You have 4 minutes left!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay. The other issue that the taxi drivers had was because the contribution was left as voluntary, but now I am glad the hon. Minister has linked it to the Road Tax Insurance because if taxi operators do not contribute, they will have problem getting their Road Tax. This is, I think, a good proposition because the success of this Fund will depend on contribution of all the 7,000 or so, taxi operators. This is a good point.

Now, during the Electoral Campaign of 2019, the hon. Prime Minister had announced a grant of Rs100,000 to all taxi drivers if the Party were to win the General Elections, which it did. However, there has been a little twist to this promise and it was given in terms of rebate on VAT at the time of purchase of the new taxi. Well, with this arrangement, taxi drivers, especially those in town, who have very different clientele as opposed to Hotel taxi operators, normally invest in a car costing typically between the range of Rs400,000 to Rs500,000. So, they benefit only a rebate of Rs60,000 to Rs75,000 and there is a *reliquat* which is lost. So, a proposition will be, can this *reliquat* be contributed to the Fund under their own name so that if tomorrow they have difficulties, like I said, pertinent to the operation of their taxi, they can actually use that money.

And a last proposition before I conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the use of technology. I see the Bill mentions to develop and implement projects for the welfare of taxi operators and their families. True enough, today, with cashless payment, we have Juice and MyT being used extensively by taxi drivers, but I am thinking of booking through the use of Apps, like certain countries have been using right now. And, I think, this will go a long way in enhancing the value of the taxi services in Mauritius going forward.

Well to conclude, I understand the creation of this Fund was much awaited by the majority of the 7,078 or so taxi operators, most of them have welcomed, because I have consulted them, and the success of the Bill which will become law will very much depend on the contribution of each and every taxi operator to the Fund, monetary-wise, and the sound management of its affairs by a competent Board of the Taxi Welfare Fund to be eventually constituted.

I thank you.

Mr Speaker: I thank you also, you took only 9 minutes! Well trained orator!

Now, it is the turn of hon. Dhaliah!

(7.40 p.m.)

Mr R. Dhaliah (Second Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me the floor. It is indeed a pleasure to contribute to the debate on the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill presented by the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade.

As previous Members have said it, this Bill represents a very important piece of legislation for the welfare of the employees and especially operators involved in taxi services as well as their families.

This Bill is the start of a journey which will enhance the welfare and well-being of taxi operators in line with the main objective of this Bill, which is to provide a welfare fund for the advancement of promotion of the welfare of taxi operators and their families.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we must also situate the context of this Bill, which is not coming out of the blue. This Bill translates the objectives of this caring Government under the visionary leadership of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth who has at heart the welfare and well-being of people, the employees of this country and their families.

This Bill, as has been mentioned before, is pursuant to the budgetary measure enunciated in the Budget Speech 2019-2020, which relates to the setting up of a Welfare Fund for taxi operators. However, following the announcement of this measure, the Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail had to carry out a series of consultations with all the stakeholders concerned in order to gather their views and proposals. We must nonetheless admit that the ground works had taken some time, amidst other pressing issues, in the wake of the first wave of the Pandemic at the start of last year.

Government had to redirect its focus on other urgent issues which the country faced as a consequence of the Pandemic. Had we not faced inconveniences associated with the lockdown last year and had we operated under normal conditions, I have no doubt that this Bill would have been presented much earlier.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the welfare of employees of any sectors of the economy as well as their families has been high on the agenda of this Government. We have always put people at

the centre of the development and progress of the Republic of Mauritius. On this side of the House, we have always fulfilled the pledge we make to the population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not the first Welfare Fund that is being established by an MSM-led Government to cater for the welfare of employees and their families. The MSM has, when it has been at the helm of Government, established a number of Welfare Funds and those Welfare Funds have always been for the benefit of employees and their families. And I am not going to list all of them because they have been mentioned several times in this Assembly tonight. I will give only one example, the Small Planters Welfare Fund, but there are others, tourism and others have already been mentioned.

An important point, however, I wish to mention is that, in addition, we have reviewed and modernised other similar legislations; it is not only coming up with new ones, but also modernise existing ones.

My point, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that this testifies the seriousness of purpose and the visionary leadership of our Prime Minister who has always shown a keen interest and given special attention to the welfare of employees across all the sectors of the economy. And the taxi operators have also their share of contribution in building a better and modern Mauritius and they, along with their families, cannot be left out.

Mr Speaker, Sir, taxi services are a vital component of the Mauritian Public Transport System. Their flexibility, both in terms of round-the-clock availability and door to door service, compliments regular schedule services provided by other forms of public transport. Taxi services are essential and valuable, particularly to the less mobile groups in the community, which include the elderly and the disabled persons.

On the other hand, there is a diverse range of users who rely on taxi services, which include regular users such as businesses, tourists and people who do not own a mean of transport. The services of taxis are also heavily solicited in cases where people work during extended hours or when they are required to go out late at night.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we may also recall that buses did not always cover every part of the island and people have relied on the services of taxis to fill that gap. In the absence of a 24/7 public transportation system, taxis have played a *sine qua non* role in saving the lives of many people, particularly in emergency situations, in the middle of the night, and within the least possible delay.

They have further been of great support, at short notice, during unforeseen circumstances such as funerals and especially at times when other means of public transportation were not operational.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have some 7,078 taxi operators licensed by the National Land Transport Authority and our taxi operators derive great pride in their profession. Good taxi drivers, they know their roads and destinations, they know when and where customers are waiting and they plan their routes well, try very hard to avoid traffic jams and provide the best of customer service they can at any time.

Taxi drivers, especially those conveying tourists and foreigners are the real Ambassadors of the Republic of Mauritius. As the saying goes, first impression created, lasts. Taxi drivers are part of those groups of people who create a better image of Mauritius as a tourist destination. Taxi drivers are among those who contribute significantly in promoting Mauritius as an attractive, safe and reliable destination to visit, based on the courteous services they provide to tourists and business people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are fully cognisant of the numerous challenges being faced by taxi operators, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This Government has, through the schemes put in place, provided all possible assistance to alleviate the plights of taxi operators so that they can support themselves and their families. Examples of such assistance extended to taxi operators pertain to the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme, moratoriums provided on loan repayments, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the taxi industry contributes to the economy, both directly and indirectly. One of the biggest contributions of taxi operators within the transport industry is through employment. Some 7,000 taxi operators or drivers earn their livelihoods and feed their families through this industry. Besides providing employment, the industry generates economic activities for workers in other sectors of the economy, notably, mechanical and automotive suppliers, car reparation workshops, vehicle cleaning, petroleum suppliers and insurance agencies, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to comment briefly on some key features of this Bill and I wish to stress, because that has been mentioned previously by other hon. Members that, although the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund will be governed by a Board and that Board will consist of a mix of representatives of taxi operators and Government Officials, all those members will hold office only for a period of two years, with the possibility of

reappointment, but only for two years. And persons who are engaged in active politics, whether at the National Assembly or the Local Authorities level, will not qualify for appointment as member of the Board.

Moreover, this Bill requires Members to disclose their interest to ensure that they do not take part in such proceedings where they may have direct or indirect financial or other interest.

The other point I want to stress, is that in line with sound governance principles at Clause 21 of this Bill, requires the Fund to disclose its Annual Report before the Parliament and this clearly promotes accountability by both the Board and management of the Fund. And Clause 11, defines the criteria for the registration of taxi operators as members of the Fund while Clause 12 lays down the contribution to be made to the Fund by each taxi operator. The fact that taxi operators have to contribute to a one off entrance fee of Rs200 and a monthly contribution of Rs300, that can be considered as nominal when compared to the benefits that the Fund will extend to operators and their families. And the fact that the taxi operators would make contributions to the Fund, will add another dimension to their sense of belonging to the Fund, thus creating more interest in the Organisation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on a concluding note, I would like to reiterate that this Government went to the November 2019 General Elections with a program for the population, including employees of this country. The Electorate collectively gave the Government an overwhelming majority and a clear mandate to deal with matters of greatest concerns to all employees of this country. The electors have voted this Government which is willing to engage with the people in a spirit of partnership. We wish to reaffirm the continued commitment and dedication of this Government led by the Hon. Prime Minister towards the realisation of the dreams and aspirations of all Mauritians from all walks of life.

We have started the journey and together, we extend our request to all citizens of our Republic to join us in this journey so that we can collectively make our transportation system more effective, while ensuring a better and brighter future for its employees and their families. *Ensam tou possib*. With these words, I fully support all the provisions in this Bill for the welfare and well-being of taxi operators and their families. Long live the Republic of Mauritius! Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nagalingum, you have got 10 minutes. Do not read too much.

(7.51 p.m.)

Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Mr Speaker, Sir, on this side of the House, we certainly welcome the introduction of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one cannot but agree with the objects of this Bill which are to provide for the establishment of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund for the advancement and promotion of the welfare of taxi operators and their families, namely through the setting up and development of various schemes for taxi operators and their families. I would be tempted to say finally because taxi drivers have been fighting for the setting up of this Welfare Fund for quite some time. I have many friends who are taxi operators in Rose Hill, Beau Bassin and elsewhere around the island and I know quite well their plight and their aspiration. The ongoing economic gloom directly impacts on their revenues, low esteem by certain members of the public, rampant insecurity, especially for trips after sunset, unfair competition from unlicensed operators, high maintenance costs due to mainly to the price of spare parts.

Mr Speaker, Sir, because taxi cars are common features of the urban and rural landscape, we have a tendency to underestimate the vital role of the Taxi industry to the economy and to our everyday life. Taxi is an international used word and the industry plays an important role as transportation alternatively around the world. In many developed countries, taxis tend to be used as a substitute for private vehicles by passengers who use the service for convenience reason or because they do not want to own a car. In developed countries, taxis are often used to supplement inadequate Public Transport System based on buses or train and light rail.

Taxis provide a public available service and are, therefore, part of public transport. However, the absence of regular schedule routes and set stations, all characteristics of public transport, gives it a semi-private character. Fixed public transport services cannot support all travel demand. Hence, full area and time coverage is dependent on taxis which operate 24/7 and from point to point. They are a vital link in public transport system, functioning in accordance with public demand. Therefore, they are a useful supplement to conventional public transport.

In some remote areas, taxis are even the only form of public transport available. In some countries, we have taxi browse, others have Taxi Moto, here we have Taxi Train that provides an essential service to communities, especially when public transport is not that efficient. And often, in case of medical emergency for those who are not car owners, the only

possibility is to call a taxi driver *pou enn course l'hospital*. Taxi drivers have thus contributed to save many lives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we must also highlight the importance of the taxi industry to the tourism sector. Taxi drivers provide the opportunity for tourists to visit remote locations which mainstream tour operators tend to avoid. Small restaurants and shops around the island are thus able to tap this lucrative market. We have, of course, a special thought for hotel taxi drivers who are facing harsh time on account of the standstill of the tourism sector due to the pandemic. Other economic operators, from the *marsan la plaze* to five-star hotels, though at a different scale, are facing unprecedented crisis.

Taxi services are becoming increasingly important to the economy and for mobility, but they have to face challenges due firstly to security of taxi drivers. It is true that more than three-quarters of the population have the perception that the level of insecurity has grown up in the country, and these assaults against taxi drivers are just not immune from that. Technology should be used to detect such crime; GPS for quick location of stolen vehicles; hidden cameras; panic alarm should be introduced where possible for enhanced security of taxi drivers; early trial and harsh sentences should also be considered if deemed necessary; all the challenges related to safety issues, related to vehicles' quality and drivers' behaviour.

Mr Speaker: Four minutes left!

Mr Nagalingum: Quality of service: low quality of vehicles and service; inability of customers to access quality; competition with unlicensed operators; social issues; long working hours and low irregular wages; illicit behaviour; competition of passengers; illicit activities; overpricing; weak negotiations; position of customers. This is, Mr Speaker, Sir, a burning issue of often the cause of bitter argument between the client and the driver. The Association of Taxi Drivers should take the lead to find an acceptable solution for all parties, including the industry because, as we all know, the *brebis galeuses* are almost everywhere and the industry cannot bear the blame for a few unscrupulous operators. The industry cannot and should not be perceived as a lobby group resistant to change. In other parts of the word, Uber and other peer-to-peer taxi services have been introduced. The Mauritian taxi industry will also need to do a shake-up not just with luxurious cars, but also for enhanced customers' satisfaction and a long-term sustainability of the industry.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are in favour of this Bill, but we would also like to insist that setting up the right institution is one thing, putting the right people to drive it *à bon port* is another thing.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next orator will be hon. Hurdoyal!

(7.59 p.m.)

The Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms (Mr T. Hurdoyal): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to bring my contribution to The Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill being debated in this august Assembly. I commend my colleague the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade for introducing such a Bill, which aims at promoting the social and economic welfare of taxi operators and their families. This bears testimony to this Government's commitment to enhance the quality of life of the taxi operators' community in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, currently, we have some 7,000 taxi operators licensed by the National Land Transport Authority operating around the island, of which 1,100 operate in different hotels and 72 are based at the airport. This implies that this economic sector caters for the livelihood of around 30,000 Mauritian citizens. In my constituency alone, there are 238 taxi operators; an additional of some 300 taxi operators are based in hotels located in the eastern region.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the taxi business in Mauritius dates back to the colonial days and has been the livelihood of thousands of poor Mauritian families. This economic activity has contributed immensely in the uplifting of the downtrodden from the shackle of poverty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, as I intervene on this Bill, it is with great pride that I remember my late father who was a postman/driver but would also work as a part-time taxi driver at night just to be able to cater for our needs and our education. Many taxi operators should be proud of their children who have been able to acquire your higher education and become competent professionals in various fields such as medicine, engineering, and law. It must also be recognised that the taxi business has provided job opportunities to our fellow citizens who could not obtain a decent job in other economic sectors. For instance, many youngsters living in villages in the late 70s and early 80s, who could not engage in

exhausting activities such as masonry and labourers, became taxi drivers, formed a family and lived quite comfortably.

Mr Speaker, Sir, taxis are a vital component in our national transport system. The flexibility both in terms of round the clock availability and door to door service is an important complement to regular scheduled services provided by bus companies and Metro Express. They are of valuable importance for people with disabilities, elderly and patient transfers to and from hospitals. They provide people with special needs the ability to commute to work, run errands and participate in recreational and social activities that would otherwise be very difficult for them to attend. However, a diverse range of other users also rely on taxi services such as businesses, tourists and the general public. As American Journalist and Political Commentator, Armstrong Williams said, I quote –

“We tend to admire the people in our society who have accumulated such wealth as to seem somehow great. But we shouldn't forget that it was the everyday working class man who made this country great.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, taxi services perform an important safety function through the provision of safe and reliable services to people staying out late at night. This leads to lower drink driving, reduce anti-social behaviour and also provide safe transport for late night workers. Moreover, the industry generates economic activity for upstream industries such as mechanics, car repairs and painters, automotive parts suppliers, the insurance companies and the fuel distributors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is an undeniable fact that the taxi operators play a key role within our tourism industry. Not only do they provide a transport service to the tourists but they are also effective ambassadors who market the image of the country as a secure and reliable tourist destination.

This Government has, since coming to power in 2014, introduced a series of measures to improve the quality of taxi service and support the taxi operators –

- Firstly, all taxi operators are provided 100% duty free to enable them to renew their vehicles.
- Secondly, the eligibility for 100% duty free has been reviewed from five years to four years.

- Thirdly, taxi loans and leasing facilities through the Development Bank of Mauritius to enable the taxi drivers to renew their cars and provide a better service to the public. An amount of Rs18.8 m. was disbursed last year by the DBM to taxi operators under the Leasing Scheme.
- Fourthly, immediately after being re-elected in November 2019, this Government introduced a Taxi Grant Scheme in February 2020 to provide a one-off VAT exemption of Rs100,000 for the acquisition or replacement of a taxi car under the scheme.

Mr Speaker: Five minutes left!

Mr Speaker, Sir, last but not the least, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the downturn of the Tourism Industry, Government has provided through the DBM to all taxi operators based in hotels an Income Subsistence Allowance in the form of a loan of Rs100,000 repayable over 4 years with a moratorium of one year. In this context, the DBM disbursed an amount of Rs30.6 m. last year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the introduction of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill is yet another measure being implemented by this Government to enhance the welfare of taxi operators and their families. It must be underscored that it is the first time that a Government is coming up with a piece of legislation to improve the quality of life of taxi community.

We, unanimously, recognise that the taxi community has been hardly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and the activities has been drastically curtailed particularly those working directly with the tourists. Government is providing all the possible assistance through the Wage Assistance Scheme to alleviate the burden of our fellow taxi operators.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the setting up of the Fund comes at an opportune time and will enable the taxi operators to benefit from different loan schemes, projects and other forms of financial assistance. The Fund will also organise a series of leisure and recreational activities for the benefit of the taxi community as it is the case for other welfare funds such as the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund.

The Fund may operate such schemes as the Educational Loan Scheme to meet the educational expenses for their children and Social Grants Schemes such as Marriage and Death Grants.

The Fund could also organise training programmes to better equip taxi drivers with basic skills and expose them to foreign languages so that they could serve the Tourism Industry with professionalism and expected courtesy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 5 of the Bill makes provision for the administration of the Fund by a Board consisting of Government officials and taxi operators. All the decisions of the Board and projects to be implemented by the Fund would thus be decided concurrently with the representatives of taxi operators. This implies that the taxi operators will be fully involved in the formulation and implementation of schemes to be put up by the Fund.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the introduction of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill bears testimony to this Government's pledge made during the Electoral Campaign to improve the living conditions of the taxi community. The different schemes and projects that will be developed by the Fund, in close collaboration with the taxi operators, will go a long way in promoting the welfare of taxi operators and their families.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government is working for the welfare of our people, without any discrimination. I am confident that taxi operators would appreciate this laudable initiative of this Government. They can rest assured that, as a caring Government, we will always be by their side in difficult times.

Thank you all for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much.

I will ask the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated!

Hon. Prakash Ramchurrun!

(8.09 p.m.)

Mr P. Ramchurrun (Third Member for Savanne & Black River): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address this august Assembly on the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill (No. III of 2021). It is indeed with immense honour and gratitude that I am sharing my views on a legislation which has its core, the well-being of one of the key groups of unsung heroes of our country, namely taxi operators.

The Bill presented will, undoubtedly, mark a major change within our country's transport landscape and I will endeavour to contribute constructively to today's debates. From the very outset, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me commend my colleague and tenure from Constituency No.14, Savanne & Black River, the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before I delve further into the Bill, I would like to acknowledge all the taxi drivers federation, stakeholders, and the official of the Ministry who have worked and continue to work tirelessly and collaboratively to ensure the voices of taxi operators are heard and their welfare needs are being catered for.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, whenever the MSM has been in power, the interest of taxi drivers has been well catered for. Indeed, since the MSM took the reins and power in 2014, Sir Anerood Jugnauth left no stones unturned to address the then rising issue of assaults against taxi drivers. With the help of the Police Force, increased patrols and checks were undertaken as well as sensitisation campaigns to educate taxi drivers and the need to take the necessary precautions for their safety.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us not forget that it is only under the Prime Ministership of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth that through the Budget 2019-2020, a change in the law was introduced to ensure that taxi operators are granted their 100% duty free car every 4 years instead of 5.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we all know that taxi operators are the only group which grant thousand kilometres across the Island at the service of their clients and they benefited immensely from this measure. Moreover, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, last year our Government also introduced a grant of up to Rs100,000 in the form of one-off VAT exemption for the purchase of a new and replacement car under the Taxi Grant Scheme.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, again the MSM-led Government is indeed very satisfied to have provided a number of incentives to taxi operators whenever it was in power. We have never backed down to grab the opportunities to help taxi operators. In fact, the Taxi Federation has been requesting the setting up of this Welfare Fund for many years now and only the *L'Alliance Morisien*-led Government had been able to draft and present the Bill alongside with the necessary financial provisions. It is very sad that the Labour Governments were unable to present such a Bill for the well-being of taxi drivers.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Opposition has, in fact, been unable to present any concrete ideas on how to improve the working conditions and welfare of our fellow taxi operators. They only remember the existence of taxi operators when elections approach and forget them in between.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I hope that during their interventions, Opposition MPs will be able to explain clearly to the House and the population, the reasons why they were unable to come up and present the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill (No. III of 2021) while they were in power.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Opposition Members will not be able to use their usual excuses today. The blatant truth is that the genuine welfare of the taxi operators was not their priority. It was not even on any of their plans. Accountability works both ways, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Today, in this august Assembly, the Opposition must be accountable to the population and the taxi operators as to why they did not present any such legislation.

They were shamelessly carrying this burden till now. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I hope that the new Opposition MPs were able to hold their leaders accountable before addressing the House today. In fact, there is an important management lesson to be learned from their administration of the taxi operators dossier as they ultimately manage everything else during their mandate, that is, with a sheer holistic approach, it seems they were more concerned about quantity than quality, that is to use the grant of taxi licences as a political tool rather than delving into genuine concern of taxi drivers to the extent that the Equal Opportunities Commission launched an investigation in the granting of licences and I quote from the 2014 Annual Report –

“In light of the opacity that underlies the process of grant of licenses, on a balance of probabilities the Commission came to the conclusion that the complaints were well-founded.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, through the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund, the social and economic welfare of taxi operators will be at the forefront of the Government. Hence, four representatives of taxi operators will be able to sit on the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Board. This will ensure that taxi operators have an adequate and strong voice on the Board towards the management of the Fund.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I welcome the clear aims of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund as the issues being faced by fellow taxi operators are in need of urgent address. There is

a need to provide support schemes to the families of taxi operators as they tend to suffer most given the odd hours operated by taxi drivers. The majority of the taxi drivers are the only bread earner for their families, and when hit by a certain demise or serious injuries caused by accidents or horrible assaults, the families are left to struggle on their own. Hence, the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Board can work on the setting up of a one-off grant scheme to compensate the families in case of such losses. Such financial help will support the dependence of the taxi operators in case they are victims of serious injuries or health issues as well.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I also expect the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Board to come up with appropriate scholarships to support the children of taxi operators to unlock their educational potentials. Moreover, a pension scheme should be considered in collaboration with insurance providers to ensure that taxi operators are able to contribute reasonably towards a pension scheme which will cater for their financial commitments after their retirement.

It is important to note that many taxi operators are forced to work beyond the national retirement age as they are the sole income earner for their families and cannot afford to retire decently. Hence, the pension scheme will help them to plan their retirement by investing very early in a pension scheme.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a very serious issue impacting taxi operators over many years has been their physical and mental well-being. In fact, taxi drivers are faced with numerous mental side effects following accidents, which, unfortunately, are undiagnosed and left untreated. I am thus of the opinion that the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Board should support the taxi drivers through a dedicated health and well-being cell to provide the necessary help, advice and support needed by taxi drivers. Hence, the support should step after any member of the Fund has been a victim of accident, or even be a continuous forum where regular sessions are organised to sensitise and educate taxi drivers on the importance and potential tools and techniques to manage their health and well-being. For instance, many taxi drivers...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, one more minute!

Mr Ramchurrun: ...are prone to back pain given the nature of their job as well as non-transmissible diseases such as diabetes and high cholesterol and blood pressure, given their poor on-the-job diets. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would also expect the Taxi Operators

Welfare Fund Board to collaborate with insurance providers to consider the setting up of a dedicated Health Care Insurance Scheme for its members.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I also hope that taxi Operators Welfare Fund Board will consider a reasonable monthly contribution amount for the members, as well as being cognisant with many taxi operators who are based at airports and hotels already have to contribute to the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund on a monthly basis.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the taxi operators are an integral component of public transport network, as well as the significant carrier of the elderly and disabled Mauritians by facilitating a quality of life they might otherwise not enjoy 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Through this Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our Government intends to pay tribute to the nearly 7,000 taxi operators across the island who are on call day and night and sacrifice their family's time to earn a living for their family. My address today was mostly geared towards how the Bill presented today by the Minister of Land Transport, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade aims to benefit taxi operators and their families, as well as ensure that the taxi drivers are more prepared to service their passengers. I congratulate hon...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member...

Mr Ramchurrun: ...Alan Ganoo for presenting the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill. The legislation which will undoubtedly be a driver in achieving the modern and caring island our hon. Prime Minister has envisioned.

Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Richard Duval!

(8.21 p.m.)

Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): M. le président, d'abord cela fait presque une décennie que la mise sur pied de ce fonds destiné au bien-être de la grande famille des chauffeurs de taxi s'est fait attendre. Ce fonds permettra enfin à 7,000 chauffeurs de taxi à travers le pays, et aussi Rodrigues, de pouvoir s'assurer d'un avenir sécurisé pour eux et pour leurs familles, que ce soit en termes d'allocation d'emprunt, d'assistance financière et si cela est accompagné d'une contribution mensuelle de

leur part, car M. le président, ces gens-là ne sont pas couverts à leur retraite par aucune pension tant que pour eux et leurs proches.

D'où mon appel, M. le président pour que ce soit inclus dans ce projet de loi une assurance vie octroyée aux chauffeurs car ils sont souvent victimes aux mains de leurs clients. Ils sont des proies faciles. Ils sont pris à partie par des voyous ; ils sont volés, torturés et maltraités, et la question que je me pose c'est que se passera-t-il si les chauffeurs meurent pendant l'exercice de leurs fonctions. Leurs proches, leurs enfants, leurs avenir, comment survivre, c'est avec une assurance vie que leurs proches souvent leurs enfants, en bas âge, les collégiens, souvent auraient un *fall-back position*. Pour revenir encore à la sécurité de ces chauffeurs de taxi, M. le président, il va en soit qu'il faudrait introduire un même système qui existe ailleurs. Pourquoi ne pas permettre, M. le président, à tous les taxi de se prémunir d'un paravent anti coup de poing qui va les séparer de leurs clients. C'est une suggestion envisageable, surtout applicable en ce temps de cette pandémie.

Par les temps qui courent, j'estime, M. le président, que nos chauffeurs de taxi méritent cet effort du gouvernement alors qu'ils sont la vitrine de notre société et notre secteur touristique.

Sur un autre volet de mon intervention, M. le président, il demeure un fait indéniable que certains ont subi une discrimination par rapport au naufrage du Wakashio. Tous les *taxi men* du Sud sud-est du pays ont beaucoup souffert de ce désastre que les gens de la mer car ils dépendent exclusivement des opérateurs touristiques en l'absence de ces activités.

M. le président, je les côtoie quotidiennement. Certains n'arrivent pas à rembourser leurs *loans*, d'autres songent à rendre leur licence, à vendre leur voiture juste pour survivre, et c'est la réalité que certains, je dis bien certains, ont à faire face ces derniers temps. Dans ce moment de marasme pour eux, M. le président, je fais un appel au ministre de tutelle de considérer que ces chauffeurs de taxi et leurs familles de la région Sud sud-est, comme les sinistrés du Wakashio, tout comme les gens de la mer, afin de leurs offrir une allocation du *Wakashio Solidarity Fund* pour la période janvier 2020 à avril 2021, et leur permettre d'avoir des emprunts du même fonds du Wakashio.

Ce qui me laisse pas indifférent, M. le président, j'ai eu l'occasion de parler à une bonne partie des *taxi men* à travers le pays et leur requête c'est qu'ils ont aucune considération avoir un emprunt, un loan, comme stipulé par l'honorable Bodha plus tôt.

Et là, je fais un appel au ministre de bien vouloir considérer cette requête et à revoir ce mécanisme afin de leur faciliter leurs prêts.

Autre volet de cette législation, M. le président, je voudrais faire ressortir qu'à aucun moment de ce projet de loi, la garantie n'est donnée à ce que ce fonds est censé faire en cas de décès du chauffeur de taxi d'un grave accident, entraînant une incapacité physique, et le quantum de compensation qui sera octroyé dans ce cas. Rien n'a été pensé dans ce sens ; je compte sur le ministre.

En dernier lieu, M. le président, je voudrais demander au ministre de revoir la section 16 du projet de loi qui parle de *Protection from liability*, et qui dit ceci, je cite : 'Aucune poursuite criminelle ne sera attachée au fonds, au Board, aux membres, officiers d'action faite pour avoir omis de faire de bonne foi dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions'. C'est cette bonne foi que je remets en doute, M. le président. Comment un membre de ce Board pourrait se permettre de tout faire sans avoir à rendre des comptes à personne? Cet argumentaire est paradoxal, et vous en conviendrez, M. le président, pourquoi nous, parlementaires des deux côtés de la Chambre, nous sommes redevables devant le Parlement, et devant la justice, alors que de leur côté, ce n'est pas une bonne foi? Ils doivent totalement quelque part être responsables ; ce paragraphe mérite d'être revu.

Je voudrais terminer, M. le président, par dire que nous traversons par des moments très difficiles de cette 2^{ème} phase du COVID-19 mais, néanmoins, je pense sincèrement que cette législation amènera beaucoup de gaieté de cœur dans les foyers respectifs de ces chauffeurs de taxi.

J'en ai terminé, M. le président. Je remercie la Chambre de m'avoir écouté. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Nuckcheddy, please!

(8.28 p.m.)

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir. Last year, I had the opportunity to participate in the debate on several prodigious Bills and, today, I am here to debate on the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill.

At the very outset, I would like to congratulate the hon. Minister for such a Bill, which I welcome, and there are various reasons for me to do so. First of all, this Bill is long overdue. I represent here Constituency No. 9 and from the figures that I have received, I

conclude that about 14% to 15% of the taxi operators are from my Constituency, which means that I am well acquainted with the needs and requirements of those people.

I have also known, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that some people consider taxi operator as an easy job. However, the reality is something different. The life of a taxi operator is not easy. How many a time have we not heard of taxi drivers being robbed, attacked and even killed! These attacks, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are *un drame familial, drame social et drame humain*.

By this Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government has once again shown its commitment towards the welfare of our people and our propensity is the welfare of our Nation. This Government will be known for its prodigious measures to help our people. Today, we are talking about the welfare of our taxi operators; we are talking of about some 7,000 taxi operators. We are talking about 7,000 families and we start talking about the welfare of families, we then start to understand the kind-heartedness of this Government. We are not waiting for tomorrow to save for tomorrow. This Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, makes provisions for everything that is needed, for a sustainable plan that is responsible, competitive, accessible and accompanying. If we look at the evolution of the economy, the interest rates, the risks and everything else, it is clear that savings is no more a means to secure the future. In this situation, we have to follow the recommendation of what the Forbes had published in its Edition of January 2021, which mentions that the best way to secure the future is to prepare for a passive income, but passive income is not instant, it actually requires a lot of hard work. So, we have to create a Fund which can generate a passive income. Only God can create something from nothing, a Government can't, what a Government can do however, is to come with Bills like this one.

Income, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, comes in seven ways, what some people have described as the 7 R's. So, in order to understand the importance of this Bill, it is important that we understand the 7 R's. What are the seven R's? They are the Rates, Remuneration, Replications, Rent, Royalties, Rights and Returns. So, the Welfare Fund will generate returns for these people when they will be no more active and I am proud to bring my contribution here in support of this Bill.

This Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, makes provision for the establishment of a Welfare Fund for the advancement and promotion of the taxi operators and their families. The functions of the Fund, among others, will be to look after the social and economic welfare of

our taxi operators. In fact, the Bill provides that our taxi operators will be operating their life in such a way that they will be the master of their fate and captain of the soul. “To be master of the fate and captain of your soul”, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is a very famous phrase from the poem *Invictus*, which inspired and motivated late Mr Nelson Mandela when he was in prison in Robben Island.

My opinion is that this Bill is very timely since the world is facing the common threat of COVID-19 pandemic, and this is a threat, not only to the life but also to the livelihood of our people. It has affected most of our established practices, norms and regulations and has emerged as the biggest disruptor. The primary impact of this disruption has been economic, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It is a very important matter. In this current situation, the marginalised sections of the population are suffering the most; those people who are in the lowest rank, the poorest of the poor. The Government is doing his utmost to help those people and this Bill is a proof. If we, as a responsible Government, do not provide a level legal protection, it will be more difficult for them.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have completed 50 years of our independence and in this long period, hundreds of Acts have been passed in this Parliament for different sections of the population and all sections of the people in our country have legal protection. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, even animals in our country have legal protection. Even jungles and forests have legal protection, but it is surprising that, in our country, these 7,000 people who sweat have no umbrella over their heads. There is no plan for this section; there is no Act for the welfare of taxi operators of our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our country has managed to make of the tourism industry a very important and solid pillar our economy. Even at this point in time, when we are looking for recovery, our eyes are staring at our airport to welcome tourists in our country. Those people, whom we call the taxi operators, are the first and are, in fact, the real first point of contact. It is these people who indirectly market tourists for us.

I would like to talk today, Mr Speaker, Sir, about a British tourist who has been continuously visiting us twice a year with his wife since the last 20 years. During these 20 years, he even recommended our country to his friends and other members of his family. One day, I asked him what is it so special here that even at his age (he is above 70), he travels all along 10,000 km twice a year. And do you know what, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? His answer was that when he first came here, he was impressed by the service provided to him by the taxi

driver. The taxi driver's name is Satish and that tourist told me: "Satish gave me satisfaction." This is how these Mauritians contribute directly and indirectly, not only to our economy but also to provide a good image of our island. Till today, there is no such Act in this country about the welfare, about the accident benefits and about the social security measures. Those people, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are a deprived lot. A lot of the widows of those passed away taxi operators are living below the poverty line. This Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is going to redress the situation.

The Deputy Speaker: One more minute, hon. Nuckcheddy!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Any welfare fund or scheme, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, brings a new hope and this is what this Bill is preconising for our taxi operators, a better world for tomorrow. Bills like this one should inspire the whole world. In this current context, when we know like all our population, the taxi operators have suffered a lot during a lockdown, when people are not allowed to move, to travel and when the borders are closed, you do not have any tourists, these people suffer. The Bill makes provision to help them cope with the economic challenges that have been aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This Welfare Fund is a new scheme for a better future. Our country is looking towards the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, almost done?

Mr Nuckcheddy: Finally, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to express my gratitude to the family of all those taxi operators who have lost their lives while being in service, those families who have suffered because of lack of such a Welfare Fund.

I thank you for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Wochit, if you are going to be less than 10 minutes, we take it or we break. Okay? Are you going to be less than 10 minutes?

Mr Wochit: 10 minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: We break then.

(Interruptions)

Mr Wochit: Less than 10 minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: Less than 10 minutes! So, we will listen to you.

(8.39 p.m.)

Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill. In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill contains various measures as announced by the hon. Minister and as outlined in the Explanatory Memorandum and strives for the promotion of the welfare of taxi operators and their families.

With the fierce competition within the transport industry and with the advent of the metro system, coupled with the Covid-19 pandemic, the economic well-being of taxi operators is likely to witness a deterioration unless bold measures are taken timely with proper funding from the Ministry of Finance to this Welfare Fund.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me remind the House the historic contribution of the taxi operators to the emergence of the tourism sector. The lack of public transport in the coastal regions of Mauritius was flagrant. For example, in my Constituency, at Pointe aux Piments, Le Goulet, Baie-du Tombeau, among other places, it was the taxi operators who, without any assistance, initiated their entrepreneurship to drive the Mauritian workforce as well as the tourists around the island. I appreciate that due recognition and consideration are being given with the creation of this Welfare Fund.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the taxi operators' sector has also been subject to criticisms due to fierce competition with what is commonly known as *taxi marron*. It is therefore expected that the Bill, as per section 11, will address the re-structuring of the taxi business in an orderly manner to restore its dignity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will seize this opportunity to make some suggestions to enhance the provisions which is in this proposed Bill. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I note that the Bill defines a taxi operator to exclude any taxi licence holder who does not undertake the taxi driving on a full-time basis. Therefore, it has no consideration for taxi licence holders who are medically unfit, handicapped, old-aged or widows who have no alternative than to appoint a driver to run their household. These vulnerable persons and their dependent children will be unable to benefit assistance from this Fund which is a necessity and they should not be set aside nor alienated.

I recommend specific provisions be made in the Bill for -

- 1) Family Insurance Schemes, given that operation of this business has a high road exposure and thus more prone to accidents.
- 2) Scholarships & grants to well-performing dependent students.

- 3) A Work Placement Scheme for children of beneficiaries.
- 4) The creation of a Pension Scheme, that is, the taxi drivers undeniably contribute to the Consolidated Fund through their fuel consumption and the high tax on Petrol. So, it is just and fair and undeniable for the State to assist them back in the implementation of this Pension Scheme which will further support them in their retirement

I now refer to Section 13 of the Bill as regards the Powers of the Minister –

“Powers of Minister

(1) The Minister may, in relation to the exercise by the Board of its powers under this Act, give such general directions to the Board as he considers necessary and the Board shall comply with those directions.”

While I understand that Ministers are empowered to give policy directives to statutory boards falling under their respective Ministries, this section could be wrongly interpreted and allow for unwarranted interferences in the day-to-day management of the Welfare Fund. I suggest that this section be clarified and amended to ensure that the Minister’s directives to the Board will be only in respect of the policy so that there will be no undue influence by the Minister on the day-to-day management of the affairs of the Fund.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I now come to Section 16 of the Bill concerning civil and criminal liability and I quote -

“No liability, civil or criminal, shall attach to the Fund, the Board, a member or an officer in respect of any act done or omitted to be done in good faith in the discharge of its or his functions under this Act.”

I believe that the purpose of this section is to afford protection to the Board members and the staff from personal liability in the execution of their duties and where damages might be sought from aggrieved persons.

However, I fail to understand why members and their staff should be protected from criminal actions, the more so that criminal prosecutions are usually undertaken on behalf of the State. Such a provision could prove dangerous and encourage criminal malpractices such as corruption, and it would be difficult to distinguish a decision made in good faith for the benefit of the Welfare Fund but unfair and detrimental to members. This provision therefore undermines the purpose of the Prevention of Corruption Act, that is, the POCA, when we are

faced with numerous enquiries into apparent malpractices. I therefore suggest that the word “criminal” be removed and be read as follows -

“No civil liability shall attach to the Fund, the Board, a member or an officer in respect of any act done or omitted to be done in good faith in the discharge of its or his functions under this Act.”

Otherwise, to further protect the employees from civil liability, I propose that the protection afforded to the public officers under Sections 1, 2, 3 and 4, subsections (1) and (2) of the Public Officers' Protection Act be extended to the employees of the Welfare Fund.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would also like to share my concern on the constitution of the Board, under Section 5, Subsection (2) Part (f). Instead of having 4 representatives, I suggest 5 region-wise representatives, say from the 4 sides of Mauritius, that is, North, South, East and West and one from the Central districts. I strongly believe that nominations should be consultative under this Section.

However, on the basis of democratic principles, as enshrined in our Constitution, this should be represented by way of election – not by selection, by way of election - within the relevant Union or Association of the taxi operators. Furthermore, under Section 6, Subsection (3), I propose that at least two members be present as referred to in Section 5(2) (f) instead of only one.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, referring to Section 4...

The Deputy Speaker: One second. Kind reminder to all Members; masks are to be worn on top of the nose. Everybody heard me! Masks to be worn on top of the nose!

Please continue!

(Interruptions)

Please continue!

Mr Woochit: Referring to Section 4, Subsection (2), I hope that the Board will not only cater for the physical aspects of the well-being of the taxi operators, but will also consider their mental wellbeing. I suggest that this new organisation should, as a priority, commission a study on the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the taxi operators, especially those working in the Tourism sector, so that prompt remedial measures are implemented to sustain their mental wellness.

In the same wake, the Welfare Fund could also ensure facilities and training for a sanitization and disinfection programme and the enforcement of a driver seat shield-screen to avoid any contamination of the COVID-19 virus.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, very often, cases of conflicts between taxi drivers and passengers are reported in the media. To remedy the situation, I propose under Section 24, to make provision for a Taxi Bill of Rights, which shall contain a statement of principles, outlining expectations between taxi drivers and their respective taxi passengers to minimise litigation.

In the same line, a Complaints Unit with a dedicated hotline should be set up by the Welfare Fund to attend to complaints.

The Deputy Speaker: One minute to wrap up.

Mr Wochit: This Fund should also look into the preventive measures such as compulsory GPS system and smart application-based taxi service providers to ensure safety for both passengers and operators. This will further afford protection against fare evaders, numerous attacks and will also prevent homicides.

I also suggest a scheme which shall provide families, facilities to taxi operators to be equipped with on-board facilities for physically-disabled persons, who rely heavily on personalised transport.

I also propose that training should be imparted for disability awareness and a minimum number of taxi vehicles be allocated region-wise and reserved for having on-board facilities for these disabled persons by the Board.

We should also cater for the environmental aspect. In light of the climate change debate, our environmental responsibilities are not to be neglected. As such, resources should be made available to support operators to move to zero-emission electric vehicles, which will mitigate pollution.

Another priority to be considered by the Board.

The Deputy Speaker: Bullet points to sum up, please! Sum-up in two lines.

Mr Wochit: Special provision be made to all taxi operators in case of *force majeure*, for example, like the current pandemic, firstly to re-schedule their car loan repayments with a reasonable moratorium. Secondly, during the recent torrential rains, taxi operators who rely

on this business for earning their daily bread have had zero income. I also suggest an Income Support Scheme for bad weather in that respect.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. You are well above 10 minutes. We'll break for 45 minutes.

At 8.50 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.45 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please, be seated!

Dr. the hon. Mrs Chukowry!

Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry (Second Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, hon. Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen. First of all, I would like to convey my words of thanks to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for affording me with the opportunity to bring my contribution on The Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill.

Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate hon. Alan Ganoo, Minister of Land, Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade to bring to the House The Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill, amidst the trying times the country and the world, indeed, is facing as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the much awaited Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill could not have come at a better time than our current juncture. In a COVID-19 troubled time wherein most economic activities have come to a mortifying halt across the globe, and wherein the crude and dreadful reality of impoverishment hits hard in practically every household, the Government in its instinctive drive to hold the hands of its citizens and help them to cross the river, and thus, preserve the sanctity of a livelihood, is tabling this Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it goes without saying that one of the most vital components of the transport infrastructure in Mauritius is the cluster of taxi operators. Sometimes we may take them for granted, but these people are so important in our life. Many of them unhesitantly respond to the beck and call of the people, sometimes at their own risk and peril. But it is essential that we recall that these very same individuals are leaving their families behind to cater for our transport and mobility needs, come what it may, at undue hours sometimes, regardless of climate or circumstance. However, the COVID-19 Pandemic has changed everything and for the worse for taxi operators, who have registered a drastic loss of business as a result.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Government had already forecasted, this dire situation, hence, the tabling of this Bill, which will institute a financial repository, which shall, amongst others, provide the requisite monetary support to taxi operators and their family through structured, monitored and audited processes. It is, however, important to note that for the purpose of this Act, there shall be an establishment of a Taxi Operators Welfare Fund, which shall be administered and managed by the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill Board.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Members of the National Assembly, Local Authorities or any person actively involved in politics are not qualified to be a member of the Board. But beyond the narrative financial assistance, it is of essence to realise that the Bill gives due recognition to the invaluable engagement of taxi operators in supporting our socioeconomic démarche, and thus, bequeathes them with a necessary safeguard in times of constraint.

God bless them, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir!

Thank you very much for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

(21.51)

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank you. It gives me immense pleasure to share my views on The Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill.

For the purpose of this Bill, I met a few taxi operators, presidents and secretaries of different Taxi Operators Unions and I had meaningful interactive sessions with them. They shared their concerns, expectations and views on the Bill with me. I salute all the taxi operators from all around the island.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when we read the rationale of the Bill, in Section 4, under the heading ‘Objects and functions of Fund’, there is no doubt that The Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill has the ambition to ensure the welfare of the taxi operators as well as that of all the members of their families. There is no debate regarding our concern for the welfare of taxi operators. It is imperative that the well-being of each and every member of the 7,000 taxi operators’ families to be taken into consideration by the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, other hon. Members, especially the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, have delved lengthily on the historical background of this Bill. Most workers in the public, private, even in the parastatal sectors have their Welfare Fund.

In *Le Défi* dated 24 February 2020, the President of the Taxi Proprietors Union had proposed the creation of a Taxi Proprietors and Drivers Welfare Fund for the well-being of taxi drivers and taxi owners. Today, the Taxi Proprietors and Drivers Welfare Fund has become the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund. The slight change in the name of the Fund has not changed anything in its main and salient objectives. What's in a name, Shakespeare would have winked.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the inception of this Fund will have a far-reaching impact on the lives of so many taxi operators, as mentioned in Section 4 of the Bill. It is hoped that with the implementation of The Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill, the taxi operators will be spared the whims and caprices of unscrupulous money-lending agencies. They will be relieved as they will not have to mortgage their property in order to secure loans to buy a vehicle and they will pay competitive interest rates on their loans. The Welfare Fund proposes to do much more than providing loans. The objectives of the Fund are far-reaching and aim at enhancing the quality of life of both the operators and their family members.

Our taxi operators have been relentlessly fighting year in and year out to safeguard their profession from the many challenges which they have to face. Even in normal time, taxi operators have to face a series of hurdles, namely –

- (1) the pressure to secure and pay loans while purchasing a vehicle;
- (2) the tension of working in dire conditions to provide the basic needs to their families;
- (3) working in harsh and difficult circumstances and at odd hours;
- (4) the tension of dealing with the rise in the cost of operations with regular hikes in the price of mogas and gas oil;
- (5) the drastic drop in the number of passengers and the subsequent drop in the income, and
- (6) the ordeal of facing cut-throat competition.

I would like to commend and laud the courage and dexterity which these taxis operators displayed during the lockdowns, as they were the ones who often ferried pregnant women, ailing patients, senior citizens or even students taking the exams, be it in the red zone or elsewhere. The taxi operators are the unsung heroes, but there are many like me who will recognize the positive role taxi operators have played in one way or the other in our lives.

Today, all of us sitting here, on both sides of the House and, even those outside this House, are unanimous to say a huge thank you to all these taxi operators.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Regulations passed on 30 March 2021, by the hon. Minister, which is known as the COVID-19 Sanitary Measures Regulations in relation to Section 198 of the Road Traffic Act, go a long way in recognising the vulnerability of taxi operators during the lockdown period. The COVID-19 Sanitary Measures Regulations are meant to protect taxi operators.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think we need to restart reflecting on how to further buttress and revamp the security of taxi operators even after the lockdown is lifted, and in a post COVID-19 situation as well. Their security is not less at risk in non COVID-19 period. For me, the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund is not an end in itself. It must be part of a larger welfare scheme and programme for all taxi owners, and taxi drivers designed to address the hardships they face in the exercise of their duty.

When we talk about the welfare of taxi owners and taxi drivers, we should not obliterate the fundamentals and the essence of their well-being. This Bill should not make an abstraction of the many problems facing these taxi operators. If we want to genuinely cater for the well-being, safety and happiness of these taxi operators, we should walk the talk and address the other snags decried by these taxi operators, especially their Unions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while we are debating on this Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill it would be most befitting that we cast a cursory look at the hotel and airport taxi drivers in particular, as they are the ones who are the worst hit by the pandemic. Many taxi drivers who are 60 and above are not entitled to benefit from the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme. I hope this injustice be repaired as soon as possible for the general welfare of those who are 60 and above.

I will also suggest that taxi operators be considered as a Small and Medium Enterprise and they should be treated as such, and benefit from whatever treatment that they should, and deserve.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, just to remind you, you have less than 2 minutes.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, many taxi operators, whom I met in the context of this Bill, told me that the all-inclusive packages are asphyxiating them. They believe that apart from this piece of the legislation, if we care for their welfare, we need to

help taxi operators to fight against different forms of lobbies which push forward all-inclusive packages, illegal and unfair competitions, put up by online platforms as argued by the Secretary of the General Taxi Owners Union.

Furthermore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will join hon. Richard Duval and re-edit the request to the mover of the Bill to have a fresh look at Section 16.1, which deals with the ouster clause and reads as follows –

“No liability, civil or criminal, shall attach to the Fund, the Board, a member or an officer in respect of any act done or omitted to be done in good faith in the discharge of its or his functions under this Act.”

The Section 16.1 prevents an individual member’s personal liability from being engaged and this, irrespective of the extent of his negligence and/or ignorance once he proves....

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Be ready to wrap up! Be ready to wrap up! 10 minutes is done! One line or two lines!

Dr. Gungapersad: Yes, I am concluding now. To conclude, will the taxi operators benefit from the fund in case they cannot operate due to –

- a) bad weather or natural calamities,
- b) social unrest or rioting, and
- c) pandemic and lockdowns like in other sectors?

The Taxi Operators Welfare Fund has brought a ray of hope for thousands of taxi operators. I hope this Welfare Fund will go a long way in enhancing the lives of taxi operators and their families, and their hope for a better future will come true.

Thank you, very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister Maudhoo!

(10.00 p.m.)

The Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping (Mr S. Maudhoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the floor and thus the opportunity to intervene on the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill.

At the very outset, I would like to thank our Prime Minister, under whose blessings, guidance and approval, hon. Ganoo has now been able to present this Bill. There have been

several Welfare Funds. In my Ministry, we have the Seafarers Welfare Fund; the Fishermen Welfare Fund; we have the Small Planters Welfare Fund, amongst others. But today, it is this Government, under the Prime Ministership of hon. Pravind Jugnauth, that made it possible for such a Bill to be debated in this august Assembly. Being given my relationship and concern for the taxi operators, I must say that I am very proud of this Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the purpose of this Bill is the advancement and promotion of the welfare of, not only the taxi operators, but also of their families. Taxi drivers usually have a tough life working on a daily basis to sustain their families, as say: *travay gramatin pu kav manzé tanto*. All of us here in the august Assembly, we all know, how often taxi drivers are, unfortunately, the victims of assault, larceny with violence, and even murder while carrying out their duties.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the objective of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill is to manage and optimise its financial and other resources to uplift the social and economic welfare of taxi operators and their families. I will, therefore, humbly propose if this welfare fund could provide the following facilities, amongst others.

Firstly, the setting up of a pension scheme, whereby, the taxi owners could receive a specific pension over and above the basic retirement pension. Working as a taxi driver day and night, for the whole of your life, is not an easy job; there are no days off on the weekends, public holidays, casual leave, or sick leave for them. And after the age of 60, they are left more vulnerable; they are left to live with the basic Retirement Scheme. An additional contributed pension would help them better enjoy their retirement. This contributed pension will provide much needed relief in case of accident, whereby, they are no longer fit for work.

Again, a medical scheme for both the taxi drivers and their families, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these taxi operators, do not have any sick leave. A medical scheme both for them and their families would relieve their burden by assisting in covering medical expenses, especially in the case of accidents or serious illness.

Also, we have like, funeral grant and assistance. We all know that nobody escapes death, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Today, funeral costs ranged between Rs50,000 to Rs60,000. A funeral grant would no doubt be of great assistance to the families of the taxi operators.

Also the provision of educational scholarships for the children at the primary, secondary and even tertiary levels; life for the taxi driver is not easy at all, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Out of their daily revenues, they are required to cater for their loan payments,

warranty of the cars, insurance, fuel and so on. Should there be any amount left, that is what they have to live of. When the level of taxi activity goes down, the taxi drivers return home penniless, being deprived of trips. A vivid example would be that of these days. One just has to go and see all the taxi drivers alongside the Air Mauritius Building in Port Louis, which I happen to witness every day on the way to my Office. Providing support to their children in terms of educational facilities is not a big request. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have always held the belief that every child of our motherland has a right for a better education and a better life.

And last, a one-off provision of GPS for the security of the taxi drivers as mentioned by numerous hon. Members here in this Assembly. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, all of us, in this august Assembly, are aware of the security concerns of the taxi drivers and how many have lost their lives, or got seriously injured at work, along with the damages sustained to their cars. Their security is our prime concern. Providing them a one-off funding assistance for the purchase of GPS Tracker System would make criminals think twice. In all developed countries, such a decisive system acts as a deterrent for horrific crimes. In a difficult situation, the driver can activate the hidden system, linked to the Police system. Then this message is quickly relayed to the nearest Police station for prompt intervention.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with these suggestions, I commend the Bill to the House. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, one within 10 minutes. Hon. Mrs Tania Diolle!

(10.06 p.m.)

Mrs Diolle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo) Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 18 May, 2021 at 11.30 a.m.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned. Adjournment Matters! Hon. Armance!

(10.06 p.m.)

MATTERS RAISED

BUSES – SOCIAL DISTANCIATION

Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci M. le président. Ce soir je souhaiterais interpeller le ministre du Transport concernant la distanciation sociale dans les autobus depuis l'annonce du déconfinement partiel. Si M. le ministre peut se donner la peine de m'écouter.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, can you please! Hon. Minister and Deputy Prime Minister!

Mr Armance: Donc, je disais que j'aurais aimé souhaiter interpeller le ministre du Transport concernant la distanciation sociale dans les autobus depuis l'annonce du déconfinement partiel.

M. le ministre, il y a, en moyenne, 64 personnes assises l'un à côté de l'autre, 6 à 8 personnes debout dans tous les autobus qui circulent sur nos routes à Maurice...

The Deputy Speaker: Make your point! Make your point!

Mr Armance: Il n'y a absolument pas de *social distancing*. Je vous demanderai de ne pas mettre la santé des passagers à risque, de vous ressaisir, de rectifier le coup, de prendre les mesures qu'il faut pour protéger les usagers de la route ainsi que le public en général.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, please!

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have

already explained through the Press, through the Media, the decision of Government with regard to the issue raised by the hon. Member. From expert advice that we have received, Mr Speaker, Sir, from the doctors in the High-Powered Committee, COVID Committee and other technical advice that we have been given and taking into consideration all the other economic and financial factors, the decision that my Ministry has taken, is to insist on *les gestes barrières* inside the buses, that is, the passengers should wear the mask; there will be no standing in all the bus transports; the windows of all the buses should be kept open at all times, except when it is raining, of course, and this, according to the advice that has been given to us, is sufficient to break the chain of contamination.

Now, the reason also is financial reason. Today, there are 450,000 people, commuters, who use our public transport and we have 1,800 buses which are providing the service. *1,800 autobus*. So, if we transport 50%, that is 30 passengers instead of 60, we will need 3,600 buses to transport *les 450,000 passagers mauriciens qui voyagent tous les jours*. We do not have anywhere in the bus operators' garage, in a parking somewhere, 1,800 buses more. That is if, therefore, we carry 50% only, everybody will be late at work, the whole system will be perturbed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Secondly, all these bus operators today, including the National Transport Corporation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since the first COVID wave, have not been able to recuperate their ridership, most of them now are running with 17% passengers less, before the second wave of this COVID. That is, they have not been able to recuperate after the first COVID wave. *Donc, ils sont en train de perdre 17% de leurs recettes tous les jours*. They have even sent claims to Government for us to compensate them for their seats which have been unoccupied because we have regulated last time that only 30% of the passengers should be transported in the buses and they are facing financial difficulties. And we can imagine, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in a bus carrying 30 passengers, 10 are old age people, 5 or 10 are students, it will mean on a bus carrying 30 passengers, only 10 passengers will be paying. And these bus operators are doing a business, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Already, as we all know, Government is subsidising heavily the Transport Industry in Mauritius.

So, we are for social distancing on the bus stop, on the stations, when there is no financial implication. We are for social distancing in the *lieu de culte* because it does not involve any economic or financial involvement. There is no involvement at that level, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. That is why *nous avons à faire la balance entre la protection sanitaire de notre population et la situation financière de l'industrie du Transport*.

The Deputy Speaker: We got your answer. Thank you very much, hon. Minister.
Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

(10.12 p.m.)

LONG MOUNTAIN - DRAIN - CLEANING

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development. The inhabitants of Long Mountain would be grateful if he could request the RDA for the cleaning of the drain alongside B19 Long Mountain.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I thank the hon. Member for giving advance notice of this issue. I have also received that issue from hon. Mrs Tour through a Mail and hon. Lesjongard. RDA is looking into it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Mohamed!

REUNION ISLAND – STRANDED MAURITIANS

Mr S. Mohamed (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The issue I wanted to raise is addressed to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as the Minister of Tourism, the Deputy Prime Minister.

It concerns not only all the Mauritians who are stranded away from Mauritius but it concerns specifically those Mauritian citizens who are at the moment only a stone's throw away, if I may say so, in Reunion Island. I have had the opportunity of speaking to them, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and they have intimated to me all the financial difficulties they are going through. A lot of them have been there for medical treatment; some of them have been there for funeral of close relatives, and they have not been to Mauritius, some, for the past five months, some for three months. And the common denominator, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that all of them say that whenever they call the Consulate in Reunion Island, the answer they receive is: "We don't have information emanating from Mauritius." Whenever they call Air Mauritius and there is a booking, Air Mauritius is not on the same page as the Mauritius

Tourism Authority, or the MTPA. And then whenever they call Air Mauritius and have a booking, Air Mauritius happens to confirm and then cancels the booking. They have all booked quarantine in a Hotel and then it has been moving and moving and moving, and then they do not have the same. They have already paid and they are asked to make PCR tests every time and they are in financial difficulties.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my request to the Ministers concerned is as follows: I totally understand that because of the danger of whatever variant that may exist in Reunion Island, one has to take the safe decision to protect the Mauritian citizens and the country. I totally understand. However, it has been seen that aircrafts are landing from another country such as India where there is also a most dangerous variant. So, the request is to give this equal treatment and to bring back our citizens to Mauritius from Reunion Island. I am sure it will take a lot of effort, but we are confident that just like you and I, we all are Mauritians...

The Deputy Speaker: I think...

Mr Mohamed: ...and we would like to put the effort to bring them back home.

The Deputy Speaker: I think I got your request as well...

Mr Mohamed: And financially when they come to Mauritius, that the quarantine cost...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed!

Mr Mohamed: ...if it could be borne by Government.

The Deputy Speaker: The request is quarantine request and ...

Mr Mohamed: And that they be brought to Mauritius during the month of May itself.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Hon. Deputy Prime Minister, are you going to take it?

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Allow me a few minutes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to explain the situation very clearly.

We are aware that there are some Mauritians that are stranded on Reunion Island; stranded in the sense that they reside on the island of Mauritius, and that they went there for a specific purpose and they now want to return. Now, we are following the advice of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, as to what we should do and what we can do to win the battle against the COVID; and this is a very difficult moment. We have just come out of a

second wave of COVID and we are trying to ensure that the situation is under control. We have an imperative of gradually lifting restrictions and moving on to a new strategy of learning to live with COVID and applying red zones, as and when necessary on the basis of the tracing, testing and isolating strategy that has worked, and that has made of Mauritius an exception in the whole African and Indian Ocean region, as testified to by statistics of the World Health Organisation.

Now, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade keeps a constant watch over all stranded Mauritians across the world. The message is clear, any Mauritian who considers himself stranded can contact one of our Embassies or Consulates abroad or can register online on a dedicated page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website and can call a dedicated telephone number. The message is very clear.

Since the second wave struck, since confinement in March, there have been no commercial flights but only repatriation flights organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the basis of the list of persons registering themselves as stranded. On that basis, there have been several repatriation flights from Paris; only yesterday, a flight arrived from London and Paris. We have had repatriation flights from Dubai and once in a while when we have cargo flights coming back from Mumbai, Air Mauritius has been allowed to bring back some stranded Mauritians, and especially medical cases, as we know the State sponsors sick Mauritians who go to India for treatment. However, we have been warned by the World Health Organisation that there are a few dangerous variants, one of which is the South African COVID variant and the other is the Brazilian variant. So, there is a special - it is called a NOTAM, Notice to Airmen, which is a regulation, if you so wish, of Civil Aviation that concerns four countries or regions, namely Brazil, South Africa, Mayotte and Reunion, because in Mayotte and Reunion the majority of COVID cases are from the South African variant. So, for these four countries or regions, persons who are there and who want to travel to Mauritius have to quarantine for two weeks in another territory, in another country before coming to Mauritius. Such is the situation.

Now, as regards Reunion, on a case-by-case basis, we are allowing for medical repatriation. So, anybody who has been to Reunion for medical treatment can apply to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with all his documents, which will be vetted by the Ministry of Health and Wellness, and if the Ministry of Health and Wellness certifies that this is a case of medical repatriation, those persons will exceptionally be allowed, under a special derogation from the NOTAM, to come back to Mauritius with all precautions taken.

Now, for the others, and it is not just for Reunion, we are painfully aware, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister and everybody in Government, we are painfully aware of the difficult, of the dire straits in which these Mauritians do find themselves, especially in South Africa, in Madagascar, as well as Reunion, because we do not have flights from those countries allowing Mauritians to come back. We are working very hard within the Republic of Mauritius to get the COVID situation under control, and as soon, I repeat, as soon as we can bring back those Mauritians to Mauritius without endangering our own population here, we will do so; that is the commitment of Government, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Nagalingum!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 19, STANLEY & ROSE HILL - THEFT & LARCENY CASES

Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Mr Deputy Speaker, allow me to draw the attention of the hon. Prime Minister - I presume that the Deputy Prime Minister will answer - on an issue which is taking alarming proportions in Constituency No. 19 Stanley & Rose Hill, I make reference here to the increasing cases of theft and larceny, particularly in *Cité Corps de Garde* and *Camp Levieux*. I humbly request the hon. Prime Minister to look closely into the matter and as one immediate preventive measure to ask the Commissioner of Police to organise more frequent patrols in those regions.

And, secondly, to renew with what has been done in the past, that is, the Police organising in collaboration with the inhabitants, Neighbourhood Watch. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, I shall be pleased to convey the hon. gentleman's concern to the Prime Minister. As he knows, the Prime Minister, as Minister of Home Affairs, is always attentive to such issues. If the hon. gentleman has any specific information that he would care to convey to the Prime Minister, I am sure that the Prime Minister will take appropriate action.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

SOKAPPADU GOVERNMENT SCHOOL, CHEMIN GRENIER - LAY-BY

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Merci M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse et à la vice-Première ministre et ministre de l'Éducation ainsi qu'au ministre des Utilités publiques concernant l'aménagement d'un *lay-by* autour de l'école Sokappadu à Chemin Grenier. Cet aménagement est en attente depuis presque un an et je suggérerai au ministre de profiter de cette période où les cours ne sont pas dispensés pour entamer les travaux afin qu'à la rentrée - on espère - les enfants puissent faire cela dans la stricte sécurité.

Merci beaucoup.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. We shall take it to the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology or the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): I will certainly look into the matter and will try to make sure that the project gets completed as soon as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Lobine!

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Prime Minister, who is not here, but, with your permission, may I address same to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister?

The Deputy Speaker: Please, go ahead.

Mr Lobine: My request concerns the disturbing situation being faced by the people of Palestine, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The attacks by the Israeli forces against the Palestinians and the Al-Aqsa mosque, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan are against all humanitarian norms and human rights laws.

May I request the Government to forcefully condemn those atrocities and to join the international community to intervene properly, to review our diplomatic ties with Israel, and convey the dismay of the people of Mauritius; that such atrocities are in violation of international law. And, I am thus requesting the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to convey same to the hon. Prime Minister, to take a strong stand and that Government should consider suspending all diplomatic ties and commercial relations as we did in the past with Israel, until there is an immediate cessation of all Israel attacks against Palestinians, civilians, and targets,

including the Al-Aqsa mosque, the Gaza Strip and Sheikh Jarrah residents, and until the Israeli Government complies with all United Nations resolutions.

The Deputy Speaker: We got your request! Thank you very much!

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, I shall certainly convey the hon. gentleman's concern to the Prime Minister, but he may rest assured that we are very attentive to what is happening in Israel and Palestine, and the Government has always been steadfast in its expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Dhunoo!

(10.25 p.m.)

ATLEE – NEW BRIDGE

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request tonight is addressed to hon. Hurreeram, the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development, it concerns the bridge situated at Atlee. Due to the recent flash floods, the bridge which was constructed during the colonial times is in a very bad state and cannot be accessed by the public nor by their vehicles. Since, it is a classified road, I will request the Minister if he can look into the matter with the Road Development Authority so that we can find a solution to this problem for the benefit of the inhabitants and traffic users.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this bridge, as my hon. colleague just mentioned, dates back to the colonial time and with the help of the Deputy Prime Minister, we have been able to launch a tender and the contract has already been awarded to the tune of Rs11 m. for a totally brand new bridge.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

(10.26 p.m.)

GOODLANDS MARKET - PUBLIC TOILETS

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management. My attention has been drawn by the users of the Goodlands market regarding the despicable conditions of the public toilets found there. I fully acknowledge that a new market is currently under construction and until it becomes fully operational, the present market of Goodlands needs to provide basic hygienic conditions to the users. I hope instructions to do the needful will be given to the concerned authorities to remedy the situation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I undertake to convey the hon. Member’s concern to the Minister.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Fabrice David!

(10.27 p.m.)

LA TOUR KOENIG - ANDREANUM STREET – ATMOSPHERIC POLLUTION

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président, ma requête de ce soir s’adresse au ministre de l’environnement et concerne la région de La Tour Koenig et plus particulièrement la zone qui se trouve autour du dispensaire communautaire Micheal Leal, rue Andreanum. J’ai été informé aujourd’hui en fin de journée par un habitant de cette zone qui effectue depuis hier soir des mesures de pollution atmosphérique à l’aide d’une sonde mobile qui lui appartient, qu’il y a visiblement des concentrations importantes de dioxyde d’azote dans l’air environnant. Puis-je demander au ministre de prendre les dispositions pour que son ministère puisse effectuer une campagne de mesures, identifier les potentielles sources de pollution afin de faire prendre les actions correctives par les responsables concernés.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): M. le président, je remercie l’honorable membre pour le point soulevé et je comprends parfaitement que cette zone de La Tour Koenig, surtout dans le quartier

industriel, est une zone très sensible. Nous avons des surveillances régulières qui se font là-bas. Il y a une équipe du *National Environment Laboratory* qui fait des prélèvements réguliers. Je passerai le message avec le département concerné du ministère de l'environnement et bien sûr je tiendrai la Chambre au courant.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Navarre-Marie!

(10.28 p.m.)

RODRIGUANS STRANDED IN MAURITIUS

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au Premier ministre - qui n'est pas là malheureusement mais je pense que le message lui sera communiqué - et concerne les Rodriguais qui sont bloqués à Maurice et qui ne peuvent pas rentrer chez eux en raison du confinement. Certains sont mères de famille et parmi il y a même une femme enceinte de 7 mois. Au total, il y a une quinzaine de personnes. Une lettre ouverte paraît-il...

The Deputy Speaker: Make your request so that I can give everybody a chance.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Pardon?

The Deputy Speaker: Make your request!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: C'est ce que je suis en train de faire.

The Deputy Speaker: Rather than like narrate the whole ...

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Une lettre ouverte a été adressée dans ce sens et qui a, paraît-il, paru dans la Presse. Je fais donc un appel au Premier ministre pour affréter un vol spécial à cet effet afin que ces personnes puissent rentrer chez elles.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Deputy Prime Minister!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Permettez-moi, M. le président, d'éclairer la Chambre. Je remercie madame la députée d'avoir soulevé cette question. Il y a bien évidemment bon nombre de résidents de Rodrigues, qu'ils soient natifs de Rodrigues ou pas, mais des gens qui, normalement, habitent Rodrigues et qui sont bloqués à Maurice. Bloqué à Maurice, parce que tout le monde et le gouvernement Régional Rodriguais et le Gouvernement Central à Maurice, nous voulons à tout prix préserver l'île Rodrigues de la COVID-19 puisque Rodrigues n'a jamais connu de cas de COVID-19 jusqu'à présent. Donc, lorsque nous avons

abordé cette nouvelle étape du deuxième confinement, il a été agréé entre Port Mathurin et Port Louis, d'abord, qu'il ne sera plus libre à toute personne de Maurice de s'envoler pour Rodrigues sans précaution aucune. Donc, n'importe quelle personne désirant se rendre à Rodrigues doit faire une période de quarantaine de 14 jours à Maurice. Ensuite, cette personne est conviée par un corridor sanitaire à l'aéroport, prend l'avion, arrive à Rodrigues où elle est sujette à une quarantaine additionnelle de 7 jours. C'est ce qui a été demandé par Port Mathurin et agréé selon un protocole visé et approuvé par le ministère de la santé.

Pour se faire, nous avons déjà organisé le transfert de 3 groupes de Rodriguais. Ce qui nous fait à peu près 200 personnes. Chaque groupe va en quarantaine et cela coûte à l'État près de R 2 millions au finance publique.

Ensuite, il y a un vol qui est financé en partie par l'État parce que cette avion qui va à Rodrigues avec des résidents de Rodrigues revient vide, n'est-ce-pas ? Donc, là aussi, il y a un coût très conséquent pour l'État. Malgré cela, l'effort de solidarité est là, 3 groupes ont déjà pu regagner Rodrigues. Il y a un quatrième contingent de résidents de Rodrigues qui sont présentement en quarantaine, qui vont bientôt s'envoler. Je crois que le vol est prévu pour le 14 mai et par la suite il y aura d'autres vols de rapatriement qui seront organisés. Donc, nous sommes très sensibles aux difficultés de ces personnes qui attendent d'être rapatriées. Nous sommes en correspondance régulière avec le chef commissaire et le Gouvernement régional et nous allons tout mettre en œuvre, malgré le coût très élevé, pour accompagner ces personnes voulant rentrer sur l'île Rodrigues.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ehsan Juman!

(10.32 p.m.)

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. In the same vein of hon. Lobine, my request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade. In view of the unacceptable attacks of the Israeli forces against Palestinians, at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the holy month of Ramadan, defying all humanitarian norms and human rights laws, I strongly urge the Government of Mauritius to suspend all diplomatic ties with Israel in sign of protest. This was already done by the previous Labour Government but since this Government chose to renew these ...

The Deputy Speaker: No!

Mr Juman: ... in spite of our commitment...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ehsan Juman, I am willing to take your request. Your request is same as hon. Khushal Lobine. I am allowing you to make the request, do not go in the petty politics at this time! Let us hear it from the hon. Minister.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have already answered.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger!

(10.33 p.m.)

LA TOURELLE MOUNTAIN- LEGEND HILL PROJECT

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au ministre de l'Environnement et concerne le projet *Legend Hill* qui défigure actuellement le flanc de la montagne de La Tourelle. Bien qu'il s'agisse d'un projet développé sous le *Property Development Scheme*, le permis *EIA* de ce projet développé sur des pentes de 40 degrés a été délivré par le ministère de l'Environnement et les conditions du permis *EIA* ne sont pas en train d'être respectées. Ce projet représente non seulement encore un massacre écologique mais surtout un danger pour la sécurité des habitants. Il y avait eu déjà des éboulements dès janvier ...

The Deputy Speaker: What is your request, hon. Ms Bérenger? Make your request.

Ms Bérenger: Pour pouvoir venir avec ma requête, je dois expliquer mon point, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: No.

Ms Bérenger: Il y avait déjà eu des ...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger!

Ms Bérenger: Oui, j'arrive sur ma requête, M. le président, mais je dois pouvoir expliquer mon point ; pourquoi je lui demande cette requête-là.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, make the request!

Ms Bérenger: Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: Your request is?

Ms Bérenger: Ma requête est que le ministre utilise les prérogatives qui lui reviennent pour que les travaux de ce projet soient suspendus en attendant que la motion de *Stop Order* déposée par les conseillers de village soit débattue et en attendant qu'un rapport indépendant soit soumis comme demandé par les conseillers de village, parce que ce projet, après les pluies torrentielles, augmente les risques d'inondation pour les régions en contrebas et il y a eu de gros éboulements avec les pluies torrentielles, des fissures dans des infrastructures existantes et l'écroulement d'un mur de rétention. Tout cela représente un gros danger pour les habitants.

Merci de bien utiliser ces prérogatives pour que les travaux soient suspendus.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much for the direct request. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): M. le président, donc, effectivement, il y a eu un permis *EIA* qui a été délivré aux promoteurs, mais malgré les insinuations qu'il y a eu dans une certaine presse et au niveau de certaines personnes pour dire que l'*EIA* a été délivré en catimini pendant le confinement, c'est totalement faux. L'*EIA* a été délivré en 2019...

Ms J. Bérenger: This is not the point.

Mr Ramano: Laissez-moi...

(Interruptions)

...avant les élections générales, mais je dois dire, M. le président, qu'il y a un monitoring qui est en train d'être fait par plusieurs autorités, que ce soit au niveau du *Geotechnical Unit* du ministère des Infrastructures publiques, du *Land Drainage Authority* et aussi au niveau du ministère de l'Environnement et du *Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning*.

M. le président, si l'honorable membre a des points particuliers pour avancer, pour dire quels sont les points de l'*EIA Permit* qui ne sont pas respectés, je me ferais un plaisir, et c'est mon devoir de vérifier, bien sûr, si ces points, ces conditions qui ont été émises par le ministère de l'Environnement ne sont pas respectées ; je me ferais un plaisir de vérifier cela.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Nuckcheddy, you have 30 seconds to make your point! 30 seconds!

Mr Nuckcheddy: 30 seconds?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Good night.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Have a good day!

At 10.36 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 18 May 2021 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

AIR MAURITIUS LTD - RESCUE PLAN

(No. B/295) **Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Rescue Plan of Air Mauritius Ltd., (Administrators Appointed), he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

CONSULTATION PAPER OF ICTA - PROPOSALS

(No. B/299) **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 proposals contained in the Consultation Paper of the Information and Communication Technologies Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to –

- (a) the reasons behind same, and
- (b) if consultations were held with the operators of the social media companies, including whatsapp and Instagram, prior to the elaboration thereof.

(Withdrawn)

PENITENTIARY CENTERS - DETAINEES - HEALTH PROTOCOLS - LOCKDOWN

(No. B/301) **Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River)** 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 detainees, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) number thereof who joined the penitentiary centers since the start of the current lockdown, and
- (b) health protocols established for the incoming detainees transferred from police remand cells to prison cells.

(Withdrawn)

MRS S. R-C – SENIOR ADVISER - CONDITIONS OF APPOINTMENT

(No. B/302) Mr E. Juman (Fourth 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 Mrs S. R-C., he will state when she was appointed as Senior Adviser at his Office, indicating –

- (a) the terms and conditions of appointment thereof, including the salary, other benefits and allowances drawn, and
- (b) other positions held in Government, Government-owned companies and parastatals, indicating the salaries or allowances drawn, if any.

(Withdrawn)

DR. A. S. - REFUSAL TO BE QUARANTINED

(No. B/303) Mr E. Juman (Fourth 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 Dr. A. S., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been initiated after his refusal to be quarantined after positive cases were registered at Melbees Nursery School and who was later tested positive, indicating if legal actions have been initiated against him.

(Withdrawn)

HON. M. E. J. - PRESENCE IN RESTRICTED ZONE – 05.01.2021

(No. B/306) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) 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 presence of hon. M. E. J. in a restricted zone of the port, on 05 January 2021, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

POINTE AUX CANNONIERS – SEIZURE OF DRUGS – 02.05.2021

(No. B/308) Mr E. Juman (Fourth 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 seizure of approximately 269 kg of drugs at Pointe aux Cannoniers on 02 May 2021, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the inquiry initiated thereinto, indicating the -

- (a) number of arrests effected in connection therewith, if any, and
- (b) additional measures being envisaged to secure our borders to prevent the entry of drugs into the country.

(Withdrawn)

**SEAFARER’S WELFARE FUND – FUNDS RECEIVED FROM
MAURITIUS PORTS AUTHORITY**

(No. B/331) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Seamen’s Welfare fee payable by Shipping Lines for ships to berth in the port, he will for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Seafarer’s Welfare Fund, since 2015 to-date on a yearly basis, information as to quantum of funds –

- (a) received from the Mauritius Ports Authority, and
- (b) disbursed for the welfare of the –
 - (i) Mauritian seamen, and
 - (ii) Foreign seamen in transit in Mauritius.

Reply: I am informed that Section 4(1)(d) of the Ports Act provides for the welfare of employees, and of persons working or living on a vessel in a port. In this respect, the Port

(Fees) Regulations 2008, allows the Mauritius Ports Authority to levy Seamen's Welfare fees as specified in the First Schedule of the Regulations.

On the other hand, under Section 16 (a) of the Seafarers' Welfare Fund Act, all monies from the Seamen's Welfare fees collected under the Ports Act are paid into a General Fund set up by the Seafarers' Welfare Fund.

Hence, the Mauritius Ports Authority collects the Seamen's Welfare fee for their subsequent transmission to the Seafarers' Welfare Fund for use in providing welfare facilities to the community of seafarers, both Mauritian and foreign. Mauritian seafarers must be registered with both the Shipping Division of my Ministry and the Seafarers' Welfare Fund, and fulfil certain eligibility criteria to benefit from these welfare facilities.

From 2015 to date, a total amount of Rs83,382,975 has been received from the Mauritius Ports Authority and an amount of Rs17,291,659 has been disbursed for the welfare of local and foreign seafarers.

I am placing in the Library of the National Assembly a breakdown of the yearly amount received from the MPA as well as the amount disbursed for the welfare of Mauritian and foreign seamen.

The Seafarers' Welfare Fund strives to empower the community of Mauritian seafarers by providing financial assistance to registered seafarers, both active and retired, through numerous schemes, such as the medical and dental health schemes, educational schemes and death grants, amongst others. These facilities are also extended to the families of seafarers, that is, spouse and children.

I am also placing in the Library of the National Assembly an extract of the Annual Report of the SWF detailing the various welfare schemes and benefits available to local seafarers.

In the case of foreign seafarers, the Seafarers' Welfare Fund provides a grant to the Mauritius Sailors' Home Society which then provides assistance to foreign seafarers. The Mauritius Sailors' Home Society operates from its centre located at the Trevesa House. The Mauritius Sailors' Home Society is a voluntary organisation whose objective is to assist and cater for distressed seamen who are in transit in Port Louis Harbour.

I wish to inform the House that since I took Office, I have received several representations from various stakeholders to the effect that the assistance provided to the seafarers is inadequate. In that context, I have, on several occasions, personally met the stakeholders concerned to assess the situation.

In fact, I have chaired several meetings to discuss the allowance provided to the MSHS for the welfare of foreign seafarers. Following my intervention, the SWF and the MSHS have reached an agreement and are in the process of finalising a Memorandum of Understanding to be signed between the Seafarers' Welfare Fund and the Mauritius Sailors' Home Society.

The MoU will mainly provide for the monthly grant to the MSHS to be increased from Rs100,000 to Rs300,000 so as to enhance the assistance provided to seafarers. The MoU will also spell out all the facilities to be provided to foreign seafarers. I will shortly seek Government approval for the signature of the MoU.

In the meantime, I am informed that the SWF will shortly procure gym equipment and indoor games for the Trevecca House for the benefit of seafarers. Additionally, a coach will also be bought for the conveyance of both local and foreign seafarers for excursion and shopping trips.

As regards Mauritian seafarers, I am informed that the Board of the Seafarers' Welfare Fund is currently elaborating new schemes for enhanced benefits to local registered seafarers. These new schemes will be finalised shortly and made public.

NEW SOCIAL LIVING DEVELOPMENT LTD – HOUSING UNITS - PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/332) **Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the proposed construction of 12000 housing units, by the New Social Living Development Ltd., he will state the source of finance for the implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

INFANT MORTALITY

(No. B/333) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to infant mortality, he will state the -

- (a) annual rate thereof since 2015 to 2020, indicating the reasons thereof, and
- (b) measures taken to reduce same.

(Withdrawn)

SHELTER HAVRE D'AVENIR 2 - RELOCATION

(No. B/334) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Shelter known as *Havre d'Avenir 2*, she will state if same has been closed down and, if so, indicate the date and the reasons therefor.

Reply: I wish to refer the hon. Member to the statement that I made on the relocation of minors from Shelter *Havre D'Avenir 2* on Tuesday 20 April 2021 in the National Assembly.

I had clearly mentioned that in the light of the outcome of the Police enquiry, appropriate actions will be taken, and the enquiry is still ongoing.

STILLBIRTH DELIVERY - INTRAUTERINE DEATH

(No. B/335) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to stillbirth delivery and intrauterine death, he will state the protocol and support measures established by his Ministry, in respect of the pregnant women who are faced therewith.

Reply: The main causes of stillbirth delivery and intrauterine deaths are diabetes during pregnancy, gestational hypertension, auto-immune diseases, haemorrhages before childbirth, maternal infections, pregnancy complications with frequent underlying cause of Intra Uterine Growth Retardation.

The Protocol which is currently used in Mauritius by the majority of obstetricians is the Late Intrauterine Fetal Death and Stillbirth Protocol of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. The Protocol provides, amongst others, for the following –

- optimal method for the diagnosis of late Intrauterine Fetal Death;
- clinical assessment and recommended laboratory tests to assess maternal wellbeing;

- possible means of avoiding further pregnancy complication;
- timing and mode of birth;
- best practice for induction of labour, and
- psychological and social aspects of care.

I am placing a copy of the Protocol in the Library of the National Assembly.

As regards the support measures in place for stillbirth delivery and intrauterine deaths, the parents are followed up, if they so wish, by the Clinical Psychologist for any supportive therapy in addition to the routine postnatal check-up in six weeks' time.

NATIONAL BLOOD TRANSFUSION SERVICE – STOCK

(No. B/336) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the National Transfusion Service, in Candos, he will state the stock of blood available thereat, indicating if there exists any protocol in respect of the carrying out of Blood Donation Campaigns in different regions of the island amid the COVID-19 pandemic and, if so, give details thereof.

Reply: I am informed that as at 05 May 2021, the stock of blood at the National Blood Transfusion Service was 484 pints.

My Ministry has put in place a 'Standard Operating Procedure for Blood Donation during the COVID-19 pandemic' to ensure the protection of both the donor and the staff of the National Blood Transfusion Service (NBTS).

The NBTS works in collaboration with all stakeholders so as to have a sustainable supply of blood and blood components during the confinement periods.

One of the main organisations is the Blood Donors Association (BDA) whose Blood Donor Coordinators work on the field together with the media to create awareness so that our objective to have sufficient blood for our public hospitals and private hospitals from March to May 2020 be attained.

The different blood donors associations which had organised blood collection targeting a critical number of pints of about 25 to 50 during that period are –

DATE	ORGANISOR	NUMBER OF PINTS COLLECTED
21.03.2020	National Blood Transfusion Service	25
21.03.2020	Central Prison, Beau Bassin	30

07.04.2020	Calebasses BDA North	57
08.04.2020	Bharat Ekta Sang	34
10.04.2020	Dagotièrè BDA	27
13.04.2020	Royal Road, St Hillaire BDA	43
	Bel Air Police Station	33

Total Number of Pints collected from March to May 2020: 4,332.

Total Number of Pints collected from March to May 2021: 3,211.

I am placing a copy of the Standard Operating Procedure in the Library of the National Assembly.

COVID-19 - LOCAL EXPORT-ORIENTED ENTERPRISES - PERFORMANCE

(No. B/337) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the local export-oriented enterprises, he will state the performance thereof during the year 2020, indicating how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected same.

Reply: The performance of our EOE sector for the past few years has demonstrated a stable trend, in spite of the traditional challenges facing our export sector, namely competition from low-cost countries, trade tensions among major economic giants and trade liberalisation. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country in March 2020 and the propagation of the virus in our main global markets threatened the very foundation of the EOE sector to the extent that all projections made at that time were indicating a major contraction of the sector. It was predicted that the exports of the EOE sector would drop from the Rs42.3 billion level of 2019 to a low Rs30 billion in 2020.

This major contraction of the EOE sector did not take place. Instead, the sector has displayed positive traits of resilience and recovery, recording exports to the tune of Rs37.4 billion for 2020, as opposed to the forecasted level of Rs30 billion.

A month-to-month comparison between 2019 and 2020 clearly depicts the build-up of the resilience of the EOE sector.

- i. the drastic drop of 81% experienced by the EOE in April 2020 (compared to April 2019) as a result of national lockdown became less severe in June 2020 with a drop of only 21%.

- ii. In September 2020 (compared to September 2019), this trend was reversed with EOE exports recording a notable and positive increase of 12%. The same increase was observed in November 2020 (compared to November 2019) and a slightly higher increase of 14% in December 2020 (compared to December 2019).

I wish to illustrate further the resilience recorded in the major sectors of the EOE.

The Textiles & Wearing Apparel sub-sector is the backbone of the EOE sector as it accounts for around 53% of the total EOE exports. It was feared that the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic might loom over the performance of this sector considerably. However, we were relieved to note that, due to an array of measures put in place by the Government, the sector was able to record a decline of only 15.6% in 2020 (falling from Rs22.16 billion in 2019 to Rs18.71 billion in 2020). In addition, exports of textile yarn & fabrics have remained quite stable during the year 2020.

I have to point out that during the lockdown period, Government has enabled most of the enterprises in the export sector to operate at a lower production capacity and helped enterprises to face difficulties such as cash flow hitches, supply chain disruptions due to unavailability of raw materials, and cancellation or postponement of orders.

As for the Fish and Fish preparations sub-sector, which is the second-largest sub-sector of the EOE, it accounts for 23% of the EOE exports. In 2020, the value of exports of the “fish and fish preparations” sub-sector have gone down by 5.2% (Rs507 m.). This was due to the continued lockdown prevailing in our main markets, namely the United Kingdom, France and Spain. It is relieving to note that the drop was partly offset by exports of fish fillets to countries such as Italy and the Netherlands.

The Medical Devices sub-sector which accounts for 3% of the EOE exports is considered as a promising and emerging sector within the EOE. During the lockdown in 2020, Government showed its unflinching support to operators in the sector and ensured that major companies pursued their production activities safely. The result was that the sector recorded a positive increase of 2.8% in its exports and at the same time was able to respond to increasing orders.

There is an increasing demand for our textile yarn and fabrics, which will lead to greater export from this segment. The Medical Devices sub-sector remains a promising line of activity which has not suffered any major setback during the 2020 lockdown. With the

newly published Industrial Policy & Strategic Plan, we are poised to bring about a major transformation in the EOE sector in the next five years to yield sustained positive performance.

CAESAREAN-SECTION DELIVERIES - CASES & CAUSES

(No. B/338) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Caesarean-Section delivery, he will state the number thereof since July 2020 to December and January 2021 to date, indicating the –

- (a) number thereof carried out in private clinics and public hospitals, respectively, and
- (b) main identified causes leading thereto.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that a Caesarean-Section delivery is recommended in specific circumstances such as foetal distress, prolapsed umbilical cord, labour not progressing or any other health concerns for instance a heart or brain condition. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, which is the premier professional membership organisation for obstetrician–gynaecologists, caesarean birth can be life-saving for the foetus, the mother, or both in certain cases. For certain clinical conditions such as placenta previa or uterine rupture, caesarean delivery is firmly established as the safest route of delivery.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that from July to December 2020, there have been 1,997 deliveries in the private clinics. Out of this figure, 1,252 deliveries were caesarean section deliveries, which represent 62.7% of the total deliveries for this period. From January 2021 up to 30 April 2021, it is estimated that 825 caesarean section deliveries out of 1,300 deliveries have been performed in the private clinics. This represents a caesarean section rate of 63.5%.

With regard to public hospitals, there have been 3,994 deliveries from July to December 2020. Out of this figure, 2,151 deliveries were caesarean section deliveries, which represent 53.9% of the total deliveries for this period. From January 2021 up to 30 April 2021, there have been 2,914 deliveries in the public hospitals. Out of this figure, 1,508 deliveries were caesarean section deliveries, which represent 51.8% of the total deliveries for this period.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that based on data gathered from 2016 to 2020, the main identified causes of caesarean section are abnormalities of the pelvic organ, failed induction, foetal distress, previous caesarean section, hypertension in pregnancy and other maternal conditions.

STC - EMERGENCY PROCUREMENT EXERCISES

(No. B/339) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the emergency procurement exercises carried out by the State Trading Corporation on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Wellness in 2020, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to –

- (a) if the procurement procedures were complied with and if not, why not, and
- (b) the goods and services procured, giving a breakdown therefor.

(Withdrawn)

GYNAECOLOGICAL DEPARTMENTS - ALLEGED MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE

(No. B/340) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to alleged medical negligence in the gynaecological departments of the public hospitals, he will state the number of complaints therefor received over the past five years, indicating the –

- (a) actions taken by his Ministry in relation thereto, in respect of each hospital, and
- (b) other corrective measures taken or proposed in relation thereto.

Reply: I am informed by the Medical Council that there are 24 gynaecology and obstetrics complaints which have been reported from year 2016 to date in our public hospitals.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has a well-established protocol to investigate into all complaints of alleged medical negligence. After receiving a complaint, a preliminary enquiry is carried out at the level of the hospital by the Regional Health Director and the report is submitted to the Ministry for any appropriate action by my Ministry.

After analysing the preliminary report, my Ministry submits the case to the Medical Negligence Standing Committee for the conduct of an independent enquiry to look into the alleged medical negligence. The Medical Negligence Standing Committee submits its report together with its findings and recommendations to my Ministry. Where my Ministry finds any evidence of medical negligence against a practitioner, the case is referred to the appropriate statutory disciplinary body for further investigation by an investigating committee.

Following the in-depth independent enquiry and depending on the recommendations of the report, the Ministry refers the case to the Medical Council under delegation of power by PSC for another enquiry with appropriate recommendation under Regulation 46 of PSC Regulations for further investigation.

In case the Medical Council concludes that there is evidence of medical negligence, the case is referred either to the Ministry for disciplinary action or to the Medical Disciplinary Tribunal. The Medical Disciplinary Tribunal will look into the charges of medical negligence levelled by the Medical Council. In case the charges of medical negligence are proved by the Medical Disciplinary Tribunal, the Medical Council refers the case to the PSC for appropriate action.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the discipline of obstetrics and gynaecology has long been a tradition of leadership in quality assessment activities which have been associated with an increase in patient safety. The Gynaecologist/Obstetrician, Paediatrician and the Anaesthetist who are on call are required to be physically present in the hospital to attend to any emergencies. The quest for patient safety is an ongoing, continuously refined process incorporating information sharing and collaboration into daily practice. In terms of intrapartum care, a continuous foetal monitoring is conducted especially in high-risk cases of pregnancy. Moreover, emphasis has been laid on the antenatal care at area health centres.

NEW SOCIAL LIVING DEVELOPMENT LTD - HOUSING UNITS - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/341) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplousses & Triolet) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to construction of 12000 housing units by the New Social Living Development Ltd. he will state the expected start and completion dates thereof.

Reply: I am given to understand that once all preliminary stages are completed, the contract for construction works is expected to be awarded early next year and works to be completed in fiscal year 2023-2024.

FISH - IMPORTATION

(No. B/344) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the announced importation of some 400 tons of fish for the local market, he will state –

- (a) if a survey has been carried out to determine if there is any shortage of fish on the local market and, if so, by whom, giving details of the outcome of the survey;
- (b) the procedures followed for the said importation, and
- (c) related prices thereof, indicating the country of origin and shelf life of the fish.

(Vide PQ No. B/312)

BAIN DES DAMES & POINTE AUX SABLES - FISH LANDING STATION

(No. B/345) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the proposed Debarcadère-Fish Landing Station project at Bain des Dames and Pointe aux Sables, he will state where matters as to the implementation thereof, indicating the measures taken in the short run pending the implementation thereof.

Reply: Following a request from my colleague, hon. Dr. Mrs Dorine Chukowry, in regard to the representations made by the residents of Bain des Dames and the fisher community for the proclamation of the existing fish landing area into a public beach, site visits were jointly carried out by officers of my Ministry, the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning and the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development to identify another location for the Bain des Dames Fish Landing Station.

Subsequently, the strip of land of an approximate extent of 1,000 m², which is part of State Land formerly known as Victoria Battery, was identified at Bain des Dames for that purpose. The strip of land has been vested in my Ministry on 15 January 2021 to be used as a Fish Landing Station at Bain des Dames.

With a view to implementing the project, the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning has been requested to carry out a pegging exercise. I am informed that the pegging

exercise, which could not be effected earlier due to the second national lockdown, will be shortly carried out.

In the meantime, the fishers are continuing landing their catch at the existing Fish Landing Station at Bain des Dames.

Regarding the Fish Landing Station at Pointe aux Sables, I am informed that a plot of land of the extent of 1,286 m² was vested in my Ministry on 23 July 1996 for the construction of a Fish Landing Station at Pointe aux Sables. However, no structure could be built as that sitej which extended 24 metres from the high water mark was non-compliant with the planning regulations of 30 metres from the high water mark.

Subsequently, on 21 August 2018, the Ministry of Housing and Land was requested to identify an alternative plot of land to accommodate the project.

On 15 March 2019, a new plot of State Land of the extent of 2,030 m² being part of *Pas Géométriques* Pointe aux Sables has been vested in my Ministry.

I am informed that the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development has not been able to carry out the required topographical survey following the site visit held on 03 December 2020 at Pointe aux Sables due to the second national lockdown. Same is expected to be carried out shortly.

I am informed that once the topographical survey is completed, the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development will proceed with the design, specifications and cost estimates of the project.

In the meantime, the fishers are continuing landing their catch at the existing (initial) site at Pointe aux Sables and instructions have been given to the Fisheries Protection Services of Pointe aux Sables to ensure that the site is always kept clean and safe.

**VICTORIA HOSPITAL – COVID-19 POSITIVE TESTED PATIENT –
STAFF – PCR TESTS**

(No. B/348) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Cancer Unit at the Queen Victoria Hospital, at Candos, he will state –

- (a) when was the first Covid-19 positive tested patient thereat detected;
- (b) if the personnel thereof have been made to undergo PCR tests and, if so, when, indicating the outcome thereof, and

- (c) if all the staff were quarantined and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

Reply: In reply to part (a) of the question, I am informed that one patient following treatment at the Radiotherapy Unit of the Queen Victoria Hospital at Candos showed symptoms for COVID-19 on 29 March 2021 and was, subsequently, tested positive on 31 March 2021. The Radiotherapy Unit was declared a Quarantine Ward and all staff who had been in direct contact with the patient were subjected to a PCR test. A massive testing exercise was also effected on the same day at the Radiotherapy Unit of the Queen Victoria Hospital.

As regards part (b) of the question, in accordance with established protocols, after conduct of their PCR tests on 01 April 2021, arrangements were made to transfer 55 staff who had been in direct contact with the COVID-19 positive tested patient to Quarantine Centres on 01 and 02 April 2021 respectively. Out of the 55 staff in Quarantine Centres, 3 were found to be positive on 03, 04 and 08 April 2021, respectively.

On the other hand, 15 staff who had not been in direct contact with the COVID-19 positive patient were advised to self-isolate. PCR tests were carried out on those staff on 08 April 2021, out of which none was found to be positive.

REGIONAL HOSPITALS - NEWBORN BABIES - DEATHS

(No. B/351) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the newborn babies, he will state the number thereof who –

- (a) died since January 2021 to date, indicating the number of cases thereof referred for inquiry, and
- (b) have been admitted in neonatal ICU, in each regional hospital.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that from January 2021 up to 18 April 2021, there was a total of 2,571 births in the five regional hospitals. The number of newborn babies who passed away since January 2021 up to 18 April 2021 is 42. The main causes of death of these newborn are extreme prematurity, sepsis, septic shock, severe intraventricular haemorrhage, severe pulmonary haemorrhage, severe cardiac anomalies, birth defects, which is incompatible with life and perinatal asphyxia.

Since January 2021 to date, there are 2 cases of newborn deaths which have been referred to the Medical Negligence Standing Committee for an in-depth inquiry.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that there are 155 newborns which have been admitted in the neonatal ICU of the 5 regional hospitals. From January 2021 up to 18 April 2021, there were 28 admissions and 13 deaths at Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital, 18 admissions and 8 deaths at SSRN Hospital, 58 admissions and 2 deaths at Flacq Hospital, 24 admissions and 8 deaths at Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital and 27 admissions and 11 deaths at Victoria Hospital.

However, I wish to inform the House that, despite our best efforts in terms of medical care, some babies, unfortunately, do not respond to the treatment provided and inevitably pass away. I wish to inform the Members that my Ministry has recently launched a new cooling therapy also known as Therapeutic Hypothermia in the neonatal ICU of all the regional hospitals. The cooling therapy is a lifesaving treatment that prevents further brain damage in newborns who are born with a condition known as perinatal asphyxia.

My Ministry has already procured 14 new neonatal ventilators and also 2 new nitric oxide therapy delivery systems. This nitric oxide therapy is a Selective Pulmonary Vasodilator which reduces blood pressure in the pulmonary blood vessels and increases the chances of survival of critically ill babies.

NEW CANCER HOSPITAL

(No. B/352) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the public hospitals, he will state the number of patients undergoing chemotherapy thereat, indicating when the New Cancer Hospital will be fully operational.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that chemotherapy treatment is presently being provided at the New Cancer Centre, SSRN Hospital, Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital and Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital. Following the opening of the New Cancer Centre, all patients who were undergoing chemotherapy at Victoria Hospital have been redirected thereat. My Ministry will, in the near future, also extend chemotherapy services at Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital.

As regards the number of patients following chemotherapy services, I am informed that there are around 600 patients at the New Cancer Centre, 279 patients at SSRN Hospital, 54 patients at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital and 132 at J. Nehru Hospital.

I am informed that the contract for the construction of the New Cancer Hospital was awarded to Messrs Swadeshi Civil Infrastructure Private Ltd on 29 October 2018 with a contractual completion date of the works of 20 May 2020. However, following the first lockdown last year, the completion date has been extended to end June 2021. With the second lockdown this year, the completion date has been further extended to 31 October 2021.

The New Cancer Hospital project involves the renovation of the existing building (Ground plus two floors) and the construction of a new building (Basement plus Ground plus 3 floors). Works pertaining to the renovated building has been completed and the latter is operational since 23 October 2020, providing chemotherapy sessions to some 100 patients daily and having the bed capacity of 75 for inpatient facility.

The Cancer Hospital will be fully operational once all the infrastructural work is completed and the required licences have been obtained.

E-HEALTH PROJECT - IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/353) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the implementation of the e-Health Project, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to Parliamentary Question B/318, at our Sitting of 21 July 2020, whereby I informed the House that following launching of bids for the e-Health Project by the Consultant, Hospital Services Consultancy Corporation (HSCC) (India) Ltd, the latter informed that none of the bids received were technically responsive.

Thereafter, a Steering Committee co-chaired by the Permanent Secretaries of my Ministry and the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation was set up to make appropriate recommendations for the e-Health Project. A Technical

Committee was also set up under this Steering Committee to look anew into the requirements of the project and to review the tender documents accordingly.

A series of working sessions were then held by different working groups to finalise the user requirements. The IT Security Unit of the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Information also submitted the IT Security Considerations and the inputs from the Government Online Centre were also included.

Following the submission of the user requirements, several meetings were held to finalise the technical specifications and the new cost estimates for the implementation of the National e-Health Project.

It has been proposed that the project be implemented in a phased manner as follows -

- (i) Phase 1: e-Health Pilot in one Health Region and setting up of Main Data Centre and Disaster Recovery Site;
- (ii) Phase 2: Roll-Out in two Health Regions, and
- (iii) Phase 3: Roll-Out in the remaining two Health Regions.

The United Nations Development Programme, together with the University of Washington, is providing support to my Ministry in the implementation of the COVID Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) during this global pandemic. As the LIMS was an initial component of the National e-Health Project, the UNDP has proposed to support to review the project free of cost prior to its launching.

In view of the complexity of the project, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has advised that an independent review of the project specifications and cost of the National e-Health Project be carried out and has endorsed the proposal of the UNDP.

The UNDP will subsequently be requested to assist in the preparation of the tender documents and supervision of the project in collaboration with the Central Informatics Bureau.

My Ministry has already approved the Terms of Reference for the UNDP to hire a Consultant for the review of the National e-Health Project. The review is expected to be completed by mid-July 2021. My Ministry will then proceed with the implementation of the National e-Health Project taking into consideration the recommendations to be made by the UNDP Consultant.

NEW CANCER HOSPITAL - IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/354) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the New Cancer Hospital, he will state where matters stand as to the full implementation thereof.

Reply: The contract for the construction of the New Cancer Hospital was awarded to Messrs Swadeshi Civil Infrastructure Private Ltd on 29 October 2018 with a contractual completion date of the works of 20 May 2020. However, following the first lockdown last year, the completion date was extended to end June 2021. With the second lockdown this year, the completion date has been further extended to 31 October 2021.

It is to be noted that the Project is being funded by Saudi Fund for Development and the Loan Agreement for an amount of USD 25 Million was signed on 22 October 2018.

Following the Signature of a G2G Agreement with the Government of India, the Consultant, Hospital Services Consultancy Corporation (India) Ltd (HSCC), which is specialised in the construction of health infrastructure, was appointed to implement major health infrastructural projects, including the Cancer Centre. The design of the new Cancer Hospital was prepared by HSCC.

The New Cancer Hospital project involves the renovation of the existing building (Ground *plus* two floors) and the construction of a new building (Basement *plus* Ground *plus* 3 floors).

Works pertaining to the Renovated Building has been completed and the latter is operational since 23 October 2020, providing chemotherapy sessions to some 100 patients daily and having a bed capacity of 75 for inpatient facility.

I am also informed that the infrastructural work for the construction of the new block has reached 68% as at end of March 2021 and as already stated, same has been further extended up to 31 October 2021, due to the second lockdown and shortage of materials.

With regard to furniture and equipment for the new building, HSCC Ltd has submitted the list and specifications for furniture and equipment, which is being vetted by my Ministry and tender will be launched accordingly.

I am informed the high-tech equipment required for the hospital will be procured through an International bidding exercise. This exercise is expected to take 3 to 4 months.

The Cancer Hospital will be fully operational once all the infrastructural works are completed and the required licenses have been obtained.

SSR NATIONAL HOSPITAL - NEW BORN - DEATH - INQUIRY

(No. B/355) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the death of a newborn during the night of Tuesday 13/Wednesday 14 April 2021 during delivery by one Mrs S. R. at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam National Hospital, he will state if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto, indicating the outcome thereof.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that following a complaint from the father of late baby P. R on 14 April 2021, a preliminary enquiry has been conducted by the Regional Health Director of the SSRN Hospital on the same day. The report of the preliminary enquiry by the Regional Health Director, comprising reports from the Consultant in Charge, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Specialist/Senior Specialist, Obstetrics and Gynecology on call, Medical Health Officer, Regional Nursing Administrator, was submitted on the same day.

After examination of the preliminary report from the Regional Health Director, SSRN Hospital, at the level of my Ministry, the case of alleged medical negligence in respect to the death of baby P.R. at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam National Hospital has been referred to the Medical Negligence Standing Committee (MNSC) for further investigation on Friday 16 April 2021. The Medical Investigation Committee has had its first meeting on Monday 19 April 2021 and has had 14 sittings since then up to Friday 30 April 2021 and has scheduled further meetings in the coming weeks.

The report from the Medical Negligence Standing Committee is, therefore, being awaited.

FISH - LOCAL MARKET - IMPORTATION

(No. B/356) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the announced decision to import fish for the local market, he will state the rationale behind the said decision.

(Vide Reply PQ B/312)

LAVENTURE - TRAFFIC LIGHTS - INSTALLATION

(No. B/358) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the proposed installation of new traffic lights at the northern entrance of Laventure, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

FLACQ MARKET - UPGRADING

(No. B/359) Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the upgrading works project at the Flacq Market, he will state the work progress thereof.

(Withdrawn)

SOUTH-SOUTH EAST REGIONS - FLASH FLOOD

(No. B/363) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the flooding which occurred on Friday 16 April last following the flash flood rain in the South and South East regions, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Risk and Reduction Management Centre, information as to when it was informed of the deterioration of the weather, indicating the measures taken to inform the inhabitants, and

- (b) table report and minutes of meetings of the Centre held from 12 to 16 April 2021.

(Withdrawn)

AFRICA PROJECTS - FUNDS ALLOCATED - 2020-2021

(No. B/364) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the funds allocated in 2020-2021 to finance projects in Africa, he will state the –

- (a) projects which are being considered, indicating in each case, the amount of funds budgeted therefor and the amount of funds disbursed as at date, giving the list of beneficiaries thereof;
- (b) feasibility criteria therefor and the minimum expected rate of return, and
- (c) benefits accruing to the local economy therefrom.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC OFFICERS - UNUTILIZED SICK LEAVES - YEAR 2020

(No. B/365) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms whether, in regard to the unutilized sick leaves for the year 2020 of public officers, he will state if consideration will be given for the refund thereof and, if so, indicate when.

(Withdrawn)

PORT LOUIS - MUNICIPAL CITY COUNCIL – GREEN SPACES

(No. B/366) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the green spaces falling under the jurisdiction of the Municipal Council of Port Louis, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, the list thereof which are embellished and maintained by private companies and, if not, indicate if proposals therefor will be made to private companies of Port Louis.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that only one green space falling under its jurisdiction, namely Le Champ de Mars, is embellished and maintained by a private enterprise of Port Louis, i.e., the Mauritius Turf Club.

The other 95 green spaces are embellished and maintained by the City Council.

I am further informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that it is currently not envisaging collaboration with any private companies of Port Louis for the embellishment and maintenance of green spaces under its jurisdiction.

ASTRAZENECA VACCINES- SURPLUS IN EU & US -REQUEST FOR DONATION

(No. B/368) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Covid-19 vaccines, he will state if he is aware that there is a surplus thereof in the European Union and the United States and, if so, indicate if consideration will be given for a special request to be made through diplomatic channels for donation thereof.

Reply: I have been informed that the US Government recently announced its decision to share up to 60 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccines with developing nations.

Following this announcement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade has already approached the Embassy of the United States of America in Mauritius with a request for special consideration in view of providing 500,000 doses of the vaccines to Mauritius. A response is still awaited.

With respect to the European Union, I am informed that on 29 January 2021, the European Commission adopted a measure requiring that vaccines exports are subject to an export authorisation by Member States. The measure is to ensure timely access to COVID-19 vaccines for all EU citizens and to tackle the current lack of transparency of vaccine exports outside the EU. The purpose of this mechanism is to ensure quicker delivery of the vaccines to the European citizens, support planning and vaccination strategies with the ultimate goal to protect public health.

Moreover, on 13 April 2021, Denmark announced that it would stop using the AstraZeneca vaccines altogether, becoming the first European country to do so over suspected rare but serious side effects. At that point in time, Denmark had a stockpile of some 200,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccines. Following the Danish announcement, many

European countries expressed interest in purchasing unwanted AstraZeneca vaccines from Denmark, among which, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Latvia.

It is not yet clear whether such deals are possible and permitted under EU procurement rules. Over 20 April 2021, the European press reported that Denmark was in discussions with a number of countries over exchanging its shelved AstraZeneca vaccines.

I wish to reassure the House that my Ministry, in consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, is following up the matter closely and would take the necessary actions required accordingly.

CONSTITUENCY NO 17 - FLOOD PRONE AREAS

(No. B/369) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to flood prone areas in Constituency 17, Curepipe and Midlands, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to if a survey has been carried out in relation thereto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

LA BRASSERIE - FOOTBALL PLAYGROUND PROJECT

(No. B/370) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the implementation of the football playground project in La Brasserie by the National Development Unit, he will state where matter stands.

(Withdrawn)

CUREPIPE - ROBINSON ROAD GOVERNMENT SCHOOL – RENOVATION WORKS

(No. B/371) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the proposed demolition of old blocks and of the reconstruction of new ones at Robinson Road Government School, in Curepipe, she will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

CHILD/REVENGE PORNOGRAPHY - TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

(No. B/372) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Technical Committee set up in her Ministry to study the phenomenon of child/revange pornography following the circulation of indecent photos and videos against payment on the social media application “Telegram”, she will state where matters stand as to the work thereof.

(Withdrawn)

2020 COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - NEETEE SELEC LTD. – CONTRACTS

(No. B/373) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to Neetee Selec Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the mode of payment for the contracts awarded thereto during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE – VEHICLES AVAILABLE

(No. B/374) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the vehicles available at the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the current number thereof which are in operation and under repairs, respectively, category-wise in terms of fire-fighting vehicles, utility vehicles, rope rescue vans and those equipped with aerial ladders at each fire station.

(Withdrawn)

CDU - MINOR CHILDREN IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

(No. B/375) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to minor children in difficult situations, she will give details of the protocol in place at the Child Development Unit to deal therewith, indicating the composition of the intervention team in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

ROSE HILL – URBAN TERMINAL PROJECT

(No. A/49) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Rose Hill Market, the Sir Gaëtan Duval Stadium and the Taxis Stand found in the vicinity of the Rose Hill Market, he will state if a Master Plan therefor is being envisaged and, if so, give details thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning that at this stage, there is no Master Plan under preparation for the Town of Rose Hill.

However, the coming into operation of the Metro Express Project has offered additional scope for upliftment and modernisation of the town centre of Rose Hill for the development of an integrated modern urban terminal.

The new modern urban terminal shall comprise taxi stands, a modern market and fairs with a view to encouraging better pedestrian linkages among major trip generators in the town centre and thus help in the revitalisation of the central area and shape the future development thereof.

It is to be noted that the Sir Gaëtan Duval stadium is not concerned with the Urban Terminal Project.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 2 – WATER SUPPLY

(No. A/50) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to Constituency No. 2, Port Louis South & Port Louis Central, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to if a sustainable solution will be found for the water pressure and erratic water supply problems in certain regions thereat.

Reply: The CWA has informed that it supplies water in six District Water Supply (DWS) zones across the island irrespective of Constituencies. The regions forming part of Constituency No. 2, namely Port Louis South & Central, more specifically, Lower Vallée Pitot, Upper Vallée Pitot, Upper Tranquebar and Eidgah, are located in the Port Louis DWS.

The regions of Lower Vallée Pitot and Upper Tranquebar receive potable water by gravity from Upper Monneron Reservoir (Capacity: 2,000 m³) which itself receives treated water from Pailles Water Treatment Plant via New Plaine Lauzun Pumping Station. The elevated parts of Upper Tranquebar are supplied via a booster pump located at Tranquebar. The hours of supply under normal conditions are around 8 hours daily.

On the other hand, the regions of Upper Vallée Pitot and Eidgah are supplied with potable water from Vallée Pitot Reservoir (Capacity: 1,000 m³) which receives treated water from Pailles Water Treatment Plant via pump. The hours of supply are normally around 10 hours daily.

The reason for the intermittent hours of supply in the above regions is due to inadequate water resources and the existing 400 mm DI pumping main from New Plaine Lauzun Pumping Station which has limited carrying capacity since it also supplies Vallée des Prêtres and part of Plaine Verte.

With a view to improving the water supply distribution to the above concerned regions, the CWA will lay a dedicated 400 mm DI pipeline from New Plaine Lauzun Pumping Station to Upper Monneron Reservoir. This 400 mm DI pipeline will increase the volume of water being pumped from Plaine Lauzun Pumping Station. It is expected that the hours of supply will be increased from 12 hours to 16 hours and pressure of water in taps will also improve.

The CWA has further informed that funds have been made available under the Economic Recovery Programme for the implementation of this project. Accordingly, procurement procedures have been initiated for the laying of approx. 5 km pipe and associated connection works along the new pipeline to transfer more water to Upper Monneron Reservoir and Vallée Pitot Reservoir. Works are expected to be carried out over 15 months. Detailed design and bidding document have been prepared and submitted to the Central Procurement Board on 05 March 2021 for vetting and launching.