



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 18 MAY 2021

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THE CABINET

(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

| | |
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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 Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail |
| Hon. Alan Ganoo | Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development |
| Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy | Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity |
| Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, GCSK | Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives |
| Hon. Soomilduth Bholah | Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change |
| Hon. Kavydass Ramano | Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance |

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| Hon. Mahen Kumar Seeruttun | Minister of Energy and Public Utilities |
| Hon. Georges Pierre Lesjongard | Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security |
| Hon. Maneesh Gobin | Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation |
| Hon. Jean Christophe Stephan Toussaint | Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development |
| Hon. Mahendranuth Sharma Hurreeram | Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation |
| Hon. Darsanand Balgobin | Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training |
| Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn | Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection |
| | Minister of Health and Wellness |
| | Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping |
| Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal | Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare |
| Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo | Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage |
| Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah | Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms |
| Hon. Avinash Teeluck | |
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| | |
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| Deputy Speaker | Hon. Mohammad Zahid Nazurally |
| Deputy Chairperson of Committees | Hon. Sanjit Kumar Nuckcheddy |
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 08 of 2021

Sitting of Tuesday 18 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)

PAPERS LAID

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

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

- (a) The Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill (No VIII of 2021). (In Original)
- (b) The Annual Report 2018/2019 of the Information and Communication Technologies Authority.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**AGALEGA - INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the infrastructural works being undertaken in Agalega, he will state the –

- (a) facilities being constructed thereat, including aerodrome and deep-water port, giving details thereof, indicating if these will include fuel, weapons and ammunition storage facilities and accommodation for personnel;
- (b) total cost of construction thereof, and
- (c) estimated total annual cost of operation of the facilities, including cost of human resources, transportation, repairs and maintenance and insurance.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, there are currently two main infrastructural development projects that are being implemented for improving sea and air transportation facilities in Agalega, namely the construction of a new airstrip and a jetty together with the associated infrastructure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the existing Agalega airstrip of 1,300 metres long and 30 metres wide was constructed during the years 1984/1985 and is made up of compacted corals. As from 1998, the surface of the airstrip started to deteriorate, with small pebbles coming off from the surface.

Some remedial works were carried out in 1999 to resurface the airstrip, but, unfortunately, the bitumen materials used did not adhere to the surface and over time it started to peel off again. In view of the bad state of the airstrip, the Civil Aviation Department had since then not authorised the landing of commercial planes. Only medical evacuation by the Dornier was allowed.

Since 2003, several attempts had been made to upgrade the airstrip at Agalega, but these have not been successful.

Access by sea to Agalega is also severely constrained owing to inadequate infrastructure and facilities, as there is no proper jetty on the island for embarkation and disembarkation of passengers and cargo.

The possibility of the Indian Government providing assistance to upgrade the airstrip in Agalega had been raised with the Indian Authorities on several occasions since 2005.

In March 2014, the Indian Authorities proposed that the Government of Mauritius could consider –

- (i) designating a suitable Implementing Agency for preparing a Detailed Project Report for the infrastructural works in Agalega and for overseeing the overall implementation of the project; and
- (ii) setting up of a Joint Project Monitoring Committee comprising representatives of both India and Mauritius to oversee and monitor the implementation of the project, as well as to monitor progress made by the Implementing Agency.

The Indian side also agreed to consider deputing relevant technical experts, as and when required, to assist and work with the Implementing Agency for the preparation of the Detailed Project Report up to the final implementation of the project.

Being given that Mauritius had no technical expertise in those specific areas, the Indian Authorities were requested to consider commissioning a full-scale technical study.

A Joint Project Monitoring Committee was thus set up in April 2014 at the Ministry of Local Government and Outer Islands and a Technical Committee was set up to work on the technical specifications of the infrastructural projects.

In August 2014, three Indian technical experts proceeded to Agalega for the preparation of a comprehensive work plan for the implementation of the projects.

In parallel, following discussions at the level of the Joint Project Monitoring Committee, a draft Memorandum of Understanding for the development of air and sea transportation facilities in Agalega was prepared for consideration by both sides.

Subsequently, both sides finalised the Memorandum of Understanding and the then Government approved the MoU on 31 October 2014.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. My question is very specific as to what is presently being constructed in Agalega. Time is going to run out. Already five minutes have gone, and the Prime Minister is taking us back along history lane!

The Prime Minister: Yes, what I am saying is ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: Answer the question as it is!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: I need your help, Mr Speaker, Sir. We need time.

Mr Speaker: I am giving you my help. Give me your help; I have no control over the Executive. You have been a former Acting Prime Minister of this country.

Mr X. L. Duval: I understand what you are saying.

Mr Speaker: I pay you due respect. Please continue!

The Prime Minister: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am stating the actual facts to explain how this project is materialising today...

Mr Speaker: You may continue!

The Prime Minister: ...and it started even before I was part of the Government.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No debate! This is question and reply.

The Prime Minister: During the State Visit of His Excellency Shri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India to Mauritius in March 2015, the Memorandum of Understanding, which had already been approved by the then Government in October 2014, was signed between Mauritius and India. A copy of the MoU was laid on the Table of the National Assembly on 31 March 2015 during the reply made to the Private Notice Question on Agalega.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, as the House is also aware, the two projects, namely construction of new airstrip and jetty in the island of Agalega, are being implemented by AFCONS Ltd. The new runway will be of 3 kilometres in length and 60 metres wide in the north-south orientation, parallel to the existing runway. The associated infrastructure will comprise an air traffic control tower, passenger terminal building, aircraft hangar and runway lighting, amongst others. It will be an all-weather concrete runway with capabilities for day and night landings.

As regards the new jetty, it will have a berthing face of 255 metres in length. The jetty will have associated infrastructure for providing services such as fresh water, fire fighting, electricity, and crane.

The new expected completion date of these two projects is end of December 2021. The completion of some of the associated infrastructure works may go beyond December 2021 because of the constraints regarding mobilisation of manpower due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the projects do not include storage facilities for weapons or ammunition. Fuel storage facilities will be limited to the requirement for re-fuelling of ships and aircraft, running of electric generators, vehicles and other machines. Facilities will also be available to accommodate personnel of the National Coast Guard.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question, these projects are being entirely financed by the Government of India.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (c) of the question, a Committee under the Chair of the Permanent Secretary of my Office and comprising representatives of the Outer Islands Development Corporation and the port and airport authorities, is currently assessing the future operational requirements of these facilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Agreement signed with the Government of India on the Infrastructural Projects in Agalega is intended only for the implementation of measures to promote, protect and safeguard our maritime security needs in the following areas -

- (i) surveillance of our vast EEZ;
- (ii) counter-piracy, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics and human trafficking;
- (iii) controlling poaching and illegal fishing;
- (iv) provision of hydrographic services;
- (v) promoting economic development of Agalega;
- (vi) emergency response, including search and rescue, and
- (vii) marine pollution responses.

As I have stated previously in the House, let me reiterate, most emphatically and in unequivocal terms, that there is no agreement between Mauritius and India to set up a military base in Agalega.

Mr Speaker, Sir, apart from the two main projects being implemented by AFCONS Ltd, the Outer Islands Development Corporation is in the process of implementing the following capital projects -

- (i) a Fish Landing Station;
- (ii) an Office Block;
- (iii) a Refugee Centre;
- (iv) an Open Gymnasium;
- (v) a Library, and
- (vi) equipment for coconut harvesting.

In addition, the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning is in the process of constructing 50 housing units.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Infrastructural development in Agalega will certainly improve air and sea connectivity, thus improving the standard of living of the Agaleans as it will generate significant economic and commercial opportunities for them and the Republic of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as we have done for Rodrigues, where development has been spearheaded and accelerated every time the MSM has been leading the Government, we are putting Agalega on the path of development and progress with the help of India. We want development to reach every single part of our territory since our people remain at the heart of our development goals. We have also committed to develop islands of the Chagos Archipelago once we are able to exercise our full sovereign rights on the islands as determined by the United Nations, the International Court of Justice and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Mr Speaker, Sir, I seize this opportunity to once again thank the Government of the Republic of India for the help and assistance it has constantly extended to Mauritius.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the questions I will ask are the questions that are on the lips of every Mauritian and Agalean, and also the Prime Minister will note that the International Community will be watching closely.

The first question relates to the inhabitants. Hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo stated on 16 April 2019, in response to a PQ, that -

“When the project of construction will start, we will make sure that Agaleans are fully involved in the project.”

Is the Prime Minister aware that not a single Agalean is actually working on the construction of all these facilities on their doorstep, although there are dozens of Agaleans unemployed?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, I am aware that inhabitants of Agalega are not currently employed by AFCONS, except during embarkation and disembarkation of Trochetia. But I must say that they have been offered other jobs in accordance with their skills, but, unfortunately, they have not responded. However, I am informed that once these projects are completed, they will be given priority for employment in accordance with their skills.

Mr X. L. Duval: May I ask the Prime Minister to double-check this information? This is not what the Agaleans have told me.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, Agaleans have been trying to import cement for their own house extension, and this possibility has been denied to them. I would like to ask the Prime Minister why would the Government of Mauritius deny Agaleans, simple Agaleans, the right to import cement to improve their housing?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of a request for importation of cement. I must look into the matter.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, – now, this was in the paper, the Prime Minister must be aware of it - one Agalean, Mr Poulay, asked to start a cattle rearing project, and this also was denied to him. So, he cannot, in fact, start to earn a decent living by himself there. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, isn't all these tantamount to actually constraining the Agaleans?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not aware of anybody having been denied a project or an initiative to rear cattle. I shall check into the matter.

Mr X. L. Duval: Because the Prime Minister is also Minister for OIIC.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Mr X. L. Duval: So, he should know; he should be aware what is happening, especially...

The Prime Minister: So, I should know if somebody is wanting...

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

The Prime Minister: Let me answer! Should I know, Mr Speaker, Sir, if somebody wants to buy cement? Should I know if somebody wants to buy cattle? Should I know if anyone wants to do...

Mr Speaker: You made your point.

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Let us be serious! Let us be serious! Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, this was given...

The Prime Minister: No, but I am answering...

Mr X. L. Duval: This was given wide publicity. You have given me the floor, Mr Speaker, Sir.

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

(Interruptions)

Can I complete my answer? A question is being asked. If the hon. Member intended that I shall answer those questions, I believe he should have been specific, and he should have at least ...

(Interruptions)

I am not here not to provide information. I shall provide all the information that I am able to provide, but, please, put specific questions! Do not ask me if somebody wanted to have a haircut and he was denied to go to a barber! *Enfin!*

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister should be on top of his files, especially this particular file. I am going to ask the Prime Minister this question. The airport under construction, the port under construction, neither AML and its many engineers nor the MPA and its many engineers are at all involved in the development of these facilities in Agalega, whereas for Rodrigues they are fully involved. How can he explain that we seem to have washed our hands completely of the development in Agalega?

The Prime Minister: We have not washed our hands completely. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is completely beside the point. There are Consultants who are monitoring the projects. There are three technical people who are based in Mauritius; two of them are regularly in Agalega and one is on and off in Agalega to monitor those projects. So, how can he say that we have completely washed our hands when we have these projects?

Mr X. L. Duval: I am going to table, Mr Speaker, Sir, an article - this one, I think the Prime Minister will be aware - titled “*Agalega: Massacre écologique en cours*”. I hope this is not to do with his haircut. Here, he might be able to know about this. And here, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no Mauritian based there at all; no supervision at all by the Government on a permanent basis in Agalega. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, substantial irreparable damage is being done to one of the most pristine environments in the world. What has he got to answer to this photo that appeared? I will table this, Mr Speaker, Sir; an article in *L'Express*.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, I have also been provided with this photo and I am informed that the problem was due to heavy continuous rain from June to October, and from water coming from side fields and which accumulated in the cleaning zone for the construction of the new airstrip parking, and as it came from the fields, it carried mud and humus, which made the texture of the water brownish.

(Interruptions)

This is the truth, and, further, I shall refer you...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: Tell the Prime Minister, it does not impress me when he shouts! It does not impress me!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: Keep cool!

The Prime Minister: Yes!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Have you finished with your reply?

The Prime Minister: Let me also...

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: I have not finished! Keep cool you!

(Interruptions)

Let me also ...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

The Prime Minister: Let me also refer the hon. Leader of the Opposition - I am sure he must have read because the same issue was raised by his good friend, one Mr Bruno Laurette...

(Interruptions)

... and questions were asked to Her Excellency the High Commissioner of India, who did her homework to find out about the veracity of those allegations and she had replied to say that this is not correct and there was no pollution and nothing of such sort emanated from the construction works. So, also I hope you have taken good note of that.

Mr X. L. Duval: You don't know what is happening in your own Ministry! Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister this question: on 23 October, PQ B/901, the VPM, hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo stated in respect of Agalega –

“(...) they will have to submit an EIA Report.”

And same was repeated many times by the previous Minister of Environment. I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister, although we know that Agalega has been exempted, delisted, etc., there was a commitment made to this House that there would be a voluntary EIA Report prepared. Now, does he know whether an EIA Report has been prepared for Agalega and will he table same, please?

The Prime Minister: First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the first remark of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I know perfectly well what is happening in my Ministry. But, I think, he does not know what is happening in his Party!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Let me ...

(Interruptions)

Let me say again, the hon. Leader of the Opposition does not know, because in his question he is asking whether the project has been exempted or delisted. It has not been exempted; it has been delisted, and we have gone according to law, and to the regulation which has been published. Now, there is an Environment Report which has been prepared and the Consultants, obviously, monitor the situation with regard to all the measures that are contained and that have to be applied by the contractor with regard to those two projects.

Mr X. L. Duval: The Prime Minister should be aware of what his own Ministers are saying against him! The question was: will he table a copy of this Report? Because Mauritians, this House has a right to have a copy of this Report.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have additional information that the works are being supervised by RITES Ltd of India and a qualified Environment Engineer is posted at the site by the contractor. Additionally, there are authorities like the National Coast Guard, the Mauritius Meteorological Services, OI DC and others which, of course, according to the Environment Protection Act, do assume their responsibility and if there is anything that has to be communicated to my Ministry, they will do so. Of course, that is the purpose of delisting these projects from the EIA. The hon. Leader of the Opposition knows perfectly well that it is not the same procedure as is adopted for obtaining an EIA licence whereby the Report is published and then it is also subject to any objections that can be made by anyone. This is different and he knows perfectly well the law that regulates the delisting of projects.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am saying that his Ministers - not himself - took a commitment in this House to publish this very EIA Report that he says is in his possession. Now, is he going ...

(Interruptions)

Yes, I have it here! It is here!

The Prime Minister: Which PQ?

Mr X. L. Duval: Which PQ? Do you want to know which PQ?

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Mr X. L. Duval: And then you will do it? If you tell me yes, you will do it, I will tell you which PQ.

The Prime Minister: Which PQ?

Mr X. L. Duval: PQ B/901. That is the PQ.

The Prime Minister: I shall check.

Mr X. L. Duval: Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, in relation to Agalega, again, RITES has been appointed by the Government of India. My point is that there is no Government representative for the Government of Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, let me come to the cost and economic benefit, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the use of the place. I am happy that the Prime Minister has said unequivocally now that it is not going to be a military base because there has been a lot of articles written in Mauritius and overseas. Let me ask, Mr Speaker, Sir, however, how can he reconcile this to what, again, the VPM, hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo said on 23 October 2018 in a PQ, that it will be both for civil and other uses, meaning military use? And this is what is causing the confusion.

The Prime Minister: What is causing confusion?

Mr X. L. Duval: That your VPM at the time said that it is for civil and military use.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I trust that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is living in Mauritius. He has been a Minister in charge of the airport and the seaport. Does he know how many military aircrafts have been landing in Mauritius? For so many years, permission has been granted to them, and they were not only from India, France, United States. Does he know how many military ships call at the Port here, in Port Louis? Maybe I should ask my officer to provide statistics to inform the hon. Leader of the Opposition. So, if we have the airstrip which is under our control, where request to land or to berth at the jetty will have to be addressed to the MPA or the Department of Civil Aviation - I am talking about Mauritius, the Republic of Mauritius - so, what is the problem? It will be for us to give authorisation or not, as we are doing right now for our infrastructure here. So, I do not see anything abnormal and I do not see anything wrong in the answer that was given by my colleague, the then Vice-Prime Minister.

Mr X. L. Duval: It is one thing for occasional use and it is another thing for daily use, and we should not mix issues.

I would like - because time is, in fact, going by, Mr Speaker, Sir - to have a firm assurance from the Prime Minister. Given that we know now that the runway in Agalega will also be used by military aircrafts and the Port also, presumably, will be used by military ships, can he give a firm assurance to this House that he will never authorise any ships or planes with military weapons to berth and to land at Agalega?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not know if my previous answer was clear enough, but let me repeat again. And let me say...

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I meant nuclear weapons. I am sorry, not military; nuclear weapons. That is the question.

The Prime Minister: Nuclear?

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes.

The Prime Minister: I do not know if, in the past, there have been either military aircrafts or ships which have landed in Mauritius, carrying military weapons. I should not think so because I think we are a party to a Convention whereby we agree that the Indian Ocean should be demilitarised and, therefore, we are not having nuclear weapons, but I cannot say because I need to find out what is the position with regard to nuclear weapons. But, let me say, again, that with regard to military aircrafts and naval ships carrying weapons, this has always been the case with regard to a number of countries which have made requests, either to call at our Port or to land in Mauritius. Approval has been given. I know of so many cases. Therefore, I do not see why the same that we do in Mauritius should not apply for Agalega.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have one last question, but I do not know if my colleagues would wish to intervene.

Mr Speaker: If you are allowing them, hon. Armance asked prior to others.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Armance!

Mr Armance: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Prime Minister mentioned that RITES Ltd was appointed as Consultant. May we know when they were appointed and by whom?

The Prime Minister: I do not have the exact date when they were appointed and by whom, but I undertake to provide this information to the House.

Mr Speaker: Put your last question if you have one!

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister, we know it is going to be under control instead of MPA or AML, but the actual employees there, people fuelling the aircraft and looking after Air Traffic Control, the firemen, all these people, are these people going to be from Mauritius, and, if so, it is only going to be in a few months' time, what arrangements have been made to post these people there, or are they going to be foreigners manning these posts in Agalega?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been provided with figures with regard to the number of employees employed by OIDC. There are 176 of them right now, out of whom 151 are Agaleans.

With regard to the future requirements in terms of employment for the infrastructural projects, I cannot say now how many will be required, and what kind of personnel will be required. It is difficult to say now, but, of course, I have replied that when employment is available, we shall offer to the Agaleans, depending, obviously, on their skills.

The information I have is for the previous question that was asked by hon. Armance. RITES Ltd was appointed by the Government of India on 23 September 2016.

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

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/378 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development; PQ B/390 will be replied by the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology.

Hon. Nuckcheddy!

HON. M. E. J. – RESTRICTED ZONE OF PORT – PRESENCE ON 05.01.21

(No. B/376) 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 Honourable 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.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the restricted areas of the Port, as defined in the General Notice 193 of 2012, comprise, amongst others, the terminals and quays where ships are berthed, goods are handled and stored.

I am also informed that there is a Joint Working Agreement between the Port Police, Mauritius Ports Authority Port Security Unit, Cargo Handling Corporation Limited Security and Mauritius Revenue Authority, which defines the specific roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder in the control of gate posts leading to the restricted areas.

According to this Joint Working Agreement, the established protocol for entry into and exit from the Port Area stipulates that Cargo Handling Corporation Limited, in respect of its operational areas, is responsible to control access of its gates to ensure that only authorised persons and vehicles are given access.

As regards the Police, it is responsible to, *inter alia*, stop and check suspicious persons and vehicles and forfeit prohibited goods from entering and leaving the Port Area and assist Custom Officers in enforcing the law.

I am also informed that signboards are fixed at the various gates, notifying all persons entering the Port Restricted Area that it is mandatory to be in possession of a valid access pass. According to the records of the Mauritius Ports Authority Access Pass Office, neither hon. M. E. J. nor the vehicle used by him was issued with an access pass to enter the SSR Container Terminal.

I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 05 January 2021, two cases involving the hon. M. E. J. have been reported by the Port Police for offences in breach of Regulations 226(1)(a)(b) and 252(1) of the Port (Operation and Safety) Regulations 2005. The offences are -

- (i) entering Port Restricted Area without a valid access pass, and
- (ii) bringing motor vehicle into Port Restricted Area without a valid access pass.

Regulation 226(1) stipulates that, and I quote -

“No person shall –

- (a) ...enter, or remain in, any part of port premises unless he is in possession of a valid pass issued by the Authority or, in respect of access to any part of the port premises under the control of its licensed operator, by the licensed operator; and
- (b) bring any vehicle into port premises unless he is in possession of a valid pass issued by the Authority with respect to the vehicle.”

I quote Regulation 252(1), which stipulates that -

“...any person who does an act which is prohibited by these regulations or omits or fails or neglects to do an act which he is required to do by these regulations or fails or neglects to comply with any lawful order, direction or instruction issued by or on behalf of the Port Master or the Authority under these regulations, shall commit an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding 5000 rupees and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months.”

Police has informed that it has started an enquiry into these offences and the enquiry is ongoing. After completion of the enquiry, the file will be forwarded to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following this incident, additional measures have been implemented to reinforce security by the Port Police, the Mauritius Ports Authority, the Mauritius Revenue Authority and the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd. The services of additional Police Officers on extra duty have been hired by the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd and more frequent patrols are being undertaken at the terminals and within the Port Area.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Mr Speaker, Sir, in an interview on 06 January 2021 on TOP FM, the concerned hon. Member stated that he went there because he was concerned about the entry of drugs in our country. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House if the hon. Member made any statement to the Police on any suspected items he found there?

The Prime Minister: I have requested information as to whether there has been any statement made by the hon. Member and I am informed by the Police that no statement whatsoever has been made by the hon. Member.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether hon. E.J. has ever been involved in such offences in the past?

Mr Mohamed: That's allowed? Mr Speaker, Sir, that's allowed?

The Prime Minister: Well, as far as I know, hon. E.J...

Mr Mohamed: On a point of order! Point of order! Point of order, Sir!

Mr Speaker: You asked for the point of order?

Mr Mohamed: Yes! I am asking.

Mr Speaker: You can't shout before asking the point of order.

Mr Mohamed: I had the impression you could not hear.

Mr Speaker: No, no! Don't shout at me!

Mr Mohamed: I am not shouting!

Mr Speaker: You have the right to ask for a point of order.

Mr Mohamed: I did not know that!

Mr Speaker: But, just taking the floor outright is not permitted!

Mr Mohamed: I said point of order!

Mr Speaker: Now, state your point of order!

Mr Mohamed: My point of order is he is asking with regard to the previous offences committed by the hon. Member. That is not allowed by the Standing Orders. Because Standing Orders say very clearly you cannot attack the character of a Member, and that's stipulated in the Standing Orders, unless you come by a substantive Motion! That's a fact!

Mr Speaker: You made your point of order...

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: You will check later on!

Mr Speaker: You are the shadow Speaker of this House! You are the shadow Speaker of this House! You know everything!

Mr Mohamed: No, no, no! Only the question!

Mr Speaker: You put the question and you know the answer; you know everything!

Mr Mohamed: You know better; teach me!

Mr Speaker: I will teach you! Please, be a good student.

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Yes, I...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, continue if you have to reply to the question.

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: As far as I know...

Mr Mohamed: What about the point of order, Sir?

Mr Speaker: I will come to you.

Mr Mohamed: Oh, I knew!

The Prime Minister: The hon. E.J. has never been involved in such similar offences. But I am being told that he has been convicted of an offence of Bribery of Public Official and he was sentenced before the Intermediate Court to undergo one month imprisonment. After a social inquiry was conducted, the sentence was converted into 60 hours of Community Service Order at *St Jean Hospice de Dieu*. What is also interesting to know, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the substance of the offence of bribery related to what he said to an Officer who was issuing him a PF ...

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, what is the relevance?

The Prime Minister:that the driver stated the following –

« *Mo bourgeois, prend sa R 100 là pou ou, laisse mo allé.* »

(Interruptions)

But there are other offences also; I do not want to go into them.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House if it is a normal practice for hon. Members to enter a Restricted Area without any permission or if hon. E.J. is a registered detective or a ‘Columbo’?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: It is certainly not in order, not only for hon. Members, but also for anybody, as I have said, to enter a Restricted Area without prior authorisation. The law applies, as I have said, to each and every one. Now, whether the hon. Member is a private detective, I do not have this information, but, from what I have been watching, I know that ‘Columbo’ never goes against the law.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Prime Minister aware that hon. E.J. has posted on his Facebook account images of him present in the Restricted Area?

The Prime Minister: Yes. There is a post, which is public knowledge, on 05 January, on his Facebook account, wherein photographs of the Restricted Area at the Port were displayed, and he merely made averment that he entered a Restricted Zone. There is also a video which he has posted, but he withdrew the video after some time.

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

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: He is very biased.

AIR MAURITIUS LTD – AIRCRAFTS, ASSETS & WATERSHED MEETING

(No. B/377) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether in regard to Air Mauritius Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Administrators thereof, information as to the –

- (a) number of times the Watershed Meeting thereof was postponed, indicating the reasons therefor;
- (b) number of aircrafts and other assets sold, if any, as at to date, giving details thereof, and
- (c) quantum of fees paid to the administrators as at to date.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall reply to Parliamentary Questions B/377 and B/392 together as they relate to the same subject matter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will note that, since long, replies to Parliamentary Questions and Private Notice Questions on our national airline have systematically and

pertinently emphasised that Air Mauritius, being a company listed on the Stock Exchange of Mauritius and being governed by the provisions of the Companies Act, the Securities Act and its Memorandum and Articles of Association, it would certainly not be in order to disclose information of a commercially sensitive nature, as such disclosure seriously risks causing prejudice to the Company. Only information which relates to any specific matter under the purview of Government may be provided.

The information being sought by the two hon. Members, regarding the Watershed Meeting and sale of aircrafts and other assets of the Company respectively, are matters that concern solely and are under the sole purview of the Administrators, in whose mission as Administrators, there can be no Government intervention.

Mr Speaker, Sir, thus, on a specific matter under the purview of Government, I indicated in my Statement to the House on Tuesday 04 May 2021 that, in view of the deteriorating financial situation of Air Mauritius, the Company was put in Voluntary Administration on 22 April 2020, by virtue of a resolution of the Board of Directors, but, despite this, it is still listed on the Stock Exchange of Mauritius. However, dealings in its securities have been suspended with effect from 22 April 2020.

It is also pertinent that Listing Rule 11.3 of the Stock Exchange provides that a listed company should keep the Stock Exchange of Mauritius informed of any information relating to the company, including information on any major new developments in the company's sphere of activity which is not public knowledge and which, *inter alia*, might reasonably be expected to materially affect its market activity and the price of its securities. Listing Rule 11.4 further provides that the information required to be disseminated under Rule 11.3, which I have just mentioned, must not be given to a third party before it is notified to the Stock Exchange of Mauritius.

This is further reinforced by Section 87 of the Securities Act inasmuch as Section 87(1) of the Securities Act provides for a transparent manner for reporting by listed Companies such as Air Mauritius. Section 87(1) thus provides for the issue of a press release, where a material change occurs in the affairs of a reporting issuer that is likely to have a significant influence on the value or market price of its securities, unless such disclosure would amount to a criminal offence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following their appointment, the Administrators have, pursuant to the provisions of the Insolvency Act, taken control of the Company's affairs and they also act

as agents of the Company at all times. The role and powers of an Administrator are laid down in Sub-Part IV of the Insolvency Act. There is no provision in the Act for Government to give any directives to the Administrators.

Consequently, and for the reasons I have already given, the information sought by the two hon. Members cannot be provided.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

Mr Ramful: The hon. Prime Minister does not want to answer the questions on assets for reasons that he has given. The Watershed Meeting, Mr Speaker, Sir, was due last year; it has now been postponed to June this year. It has been nearly one year now. Now, as majority shareholder in Air Mauritius, can we have the assurance from Government that this time the Watershed Meeting is not going to be postponed, and once for all, a decision is taken with regard to the future of Air Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: I have replied extensively and I have quoted the law to say that Government has no power to intervene in the administration, into the affairs of the Administrators. So, how can I now go and direct them? The hon. Member is asking me to go and direct the Administrators what to do.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister, the last Government Budget had included billions, if I am not wrong, Rs9 billion or more, of Government money to be invested into Air Mauritius to help it become more solvent. Can the hon. Prime Minister tell the House how much of that money has actually been paid to Air Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: I have to find out. This is a question that has to be addressed to the Minister of Finance. The amount of money has been budgeted and voted and how much money has been spent. The hon. Leader of the Opposition can come with a specific question, and I shall answer.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: The hon. Prime Minister just said that, as a majority shareholder, he does not have any power to dictate to the Administrator. But isn't he aware that under the Insolvency Act, the majority shareholder can apply to Court to have the Administrator removed or directed to do things if the shareholder is not satisfied with the conduct of the

administration? And now that he knows he has this power, will he care to look into the matter and take any actions that he may deem fit against the Administrator?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member is presuming that Government is not satisfied with the Administrators? The Board of Air Mauritius has appointed them as Administrators, and I do not see any reason why we should go now to Court and apply for an Order to remove them as Administrators. What do we want to do? I mean, Air Mauritius is already down on its knees. Do we want to bury it right now? This is what the hon. Member means?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

Mr Ramful: Well, the hon. Prime Minister does not want to disclose the fees that are being charged by the Administrators, but can I invite the hon. Prime Minister to consider Section 2(17) of the Insolvency Act, whereby the Administrator can charge a reasonable fee and that the Government, as majority shareholder, can even go to Court and ask that a reasonable fee be imposed?

The Prime Minister: When the fee is going to be asked, we shall have to see whether it is reasonable or not.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bodha!

Mr Bodha: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister what is going to be the role of the new Air Mauritius in the new tourism industry once we reopen the frontiers?

The Prime Minister: Which new Air Mauritius are we talking about? I have answered, Mr Speaker, Sir, to say that according to this principle and the practice, each Minister, prior to my answering this question, has been answering in the same manner. Hon. Bodha was part of our Government when we had answered questions on Air Mauritius in the same way. He has been part of other Governments also, together, of course, when the same answers have been given. Maybe I should quote, at least, one question that hon. Ganoo, at that time, who was in the Opposition, had asked about hedging exercise, financial situation of Air Mauritius. And this is what the then Prime Minister, on 14 December 2010 stated after referring the hon. Member to previous PQs. I do not want to mention them, but only the relevant part, and I quote -

“I reiterate that Air Mauritius Ltd is a public company listed on the Stock Exchange and it is governed by the Constitution and Articles of Association as well as the Listing Rules of the Stock Exchange.

The nature of the information being asked is considered as privileged information. Such information as requested by the hon. Member can only be released to the Board of the Company.”

We are talking about hedging losses at that time. I do not want to make further comments on that, but this is the stand and *c'est ce principe*, and this stand has systematically been taken by different Ministers, including hon. Xavier-Luc Duval also.

Mr X. L. Duval: I replied to a PNQ.

The Prime Minister: You replied. Okay. Let me refresh your memory then. To PQ No. B/659 that was asked by hon. Jhugroo then with regard to Air Mauritius, hon. X. L. Duval, then Deputy Prime Minister, stated, and I quote -

“Madam Speaker, as already indicated in replies to previous Parliamentary Questions, Air Mauritius Ltd is a Company listed on the Stock Exchange of Mauritius and is governed by the Memorandum and Articles of Association and the Companies Act.

It would, therefore, not be appropriate to provide the information asked for by the hon. Member.”

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Quirin!

INTERNATIONAL RACING DAY, DECEMBER 2019 - INQUIRIES

(No. B/379) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to horse racing, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if alleged attempts to rig some races during the International Racing Day in December 2019 and the first race meeting of the 2020 season have been reported and, if so, indicate if inquiries have been initiated in relation thereto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first and foremost, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the bereaved family of Jockey Nooresh Juglall who passed away in tragic circumstances during the first race meeting of Season 2021 on Saturday 15 May 2021.

I share the expression of sympathy demonstrated by racegoers and all those involved in the horse racing industry who have been afflicted by the sudden demise of Jockey Juglall.

I also convey my best wishes for a speedy recovery to the other Jockeys, namely Benedict Woodworth, Akash Aucharuz and Apprentice Nabeel Sheik Batchameah who sustained injuries during the same race meeting.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Wednesday 15 July 2020, one Mr P.K.B., the then Head of Integrity and Compliance of the Gambling Regulatory Authority, contacted one Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) from the Anti-Drug Smuggling Unit and communicated to him information regarding alleged attempts to rig horse races in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the concerned ASP prepared a Report dated 17 July 2020 on the matter and submitted same to the Commissioner of Police. Following the receipt of the Report, the Central Crime Investigation Division (CCID) initiated an investigation during which Mr P.K.B., the then Head of Integrity and Compliance of the GRA, was convened on several occasions to the CCID.

I am also informed that, during the course of investigation, the then Head of Integrity and Compliance of the GRA gave two statements to the CCID on 12 and 18 August 2020, wherein he stated that he had information regarding attempts to rig races during the International Jockeys' Week-end held on Saturday 30 November and on Sunday 01 December 2019, and during the first race meeting of the Season 2020 held on Saturday 20 June 2020.

Mr P.K.B. also stated to the Police that, through his intervention, the Mauritius Turf Club had taken necessary measures to halt the attempt to rig races during the International Jockeys' Week-end held on Saturday 30 November and Sunday 01 December 2019.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the first race meeting of Season 2020 held on Saturday 20 June 2020, Mr P.K.B., in his statement, informed the Police that he had information regarding attempts to rig a few races during that day and he provided certain information to the Police for investigation purposes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that investigation into alleged attempt at Horse Race Fixing is ongoing.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, permettez-moi, avant de poser ma première question supplémentaire, de ce côté de la Chambre, nous présentons nous aussi nos plus vives sympathies à la famille du jockey Juglall, qui est mort tragiquement samedi dernier.

M. le président, j'ai bien écouté la réponse du Premier ministre. Cela fait pratiquement une année qu'une enquête a été enclenchée. Peut-on savoir depuis, s'il y a eu des arrestations; si on peut savoir justement quelles sont ces personnes qui ont été arrêtées par rapport à cette affaire ; est-ce que ces personnes ont été convoquées justement par la police ?

The Prime Minister: M. le président, personne n'a été arrêté, je crois, jusqu'à présent, mais je suis au courant qu'il y a un jockey à qui la *MTC* a demandé de ne pas monter pour cette course, et puis il y a eu une affaire en Cour. Finalement, le jockey n'a pas monté, mais il y a eu une affaire en Cour et le jockey a retiré son affaire par la suite. Donc, l'affaire a été réglée. C'est ce que je peux dire à la Chambre.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, est-ce que l'honorable Premier ministre est au courant que l'une des personnes citée dans cette affaire est un bookmaker, Monsieur A. J., qui, dans le cadre de la *Catamaran Party* en 2017, avec plusieurs jockeys, avait été impliqué dans des tentatives de truquer des courses et, si oui, peut-on savoir pourquoi la *GRA*, la *Gambling Regulatory Authority*, a-t-elle accordé à ce même bookmaker une licence d'opération ?

The Prime Minister: Je peux dire à l'honorable membre que la *GRA* a suspendu la licence de ce bookmaker depuis le 07 août 2020 après qu'une charge provisoire a été logée contre lui en Cour de District de Port Louis depuis le 06 août 2020.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, le Premier ministre peut-il nous dire si des dispositions ont été prises au niveau de la *GRA* afin que toutes les personnes liées avec cette affaire n'aient plus accès aux courses et que le *Personal Management Licence* ne leur soit pas octroyé, que ce soit pour cette année, pour cette saison hippique ou pour les saisons à venir ?

The Prime Minister: M. le président, comme je l'ai dit, il y a une enquête qui est en cours. La *GRA* certainement suit l'affaire de près. Mais si elle doit prendre des mesures ou une sanction quelconque, ça va être à la lumière des faits qui sont avérés et qui sont prouvés. Je n'ai pas les informations concernant si la *GRA* a pris une mesure quelconque ; je parle en termes de principe général. Mais, soit je peux demander des informations à la *GRA* ou si l'honorable membre peut poser une question au ministre concerné, bien sûr, je suis sûr qu'il va répondre.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/397 and B/426 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. PQ B/432 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping. PQs B/420, B/422, B/440, B/452, B/453, B/454 and B/455 have been withdrawn!

Hon. Members, I also have to inform the House that Dr. the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has informed me that he has to participate in the *Sommet sur le Financement des Économies Africaines* this afternoon, which will be held through video conference.

The hon. Minister has made a request for his questions to be taken out of turn and I have acceded to his request. I invite hon. Members to be brief in their supplementary questions. Moreover, supplementary questions will, as far as possible, be restricted to the mover of the question.

I call hon. Quirin!

HORSE RACING – PERSONAL MANAGEMENT LICENCE

(No. B/398) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to horse racing, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority –

- (a) information as to the date of introduction of the Personal Management Licence (PML), indicating –
 - (i) the reasons therefor, and
 - (ii) if Mr N. G., Mr N. G. and Mr R. G. have been issued therewith and, if so, indicate when, and
- (b) the list of the PML holders for the 2020 and 2021 racing seasons, together with the respective address and occupation thereof and table same.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Speaker, Sir, ...

An hon. Member: *Met to mask!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Speaker, Sir, ...

Hon. Members: *Met to mask! Mask!*

An hon. Member: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a point of order here!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président,...

An hon. Member: There is a point of order here!

Dr. Padayachy: Avant de répondre à cette *PQ*, je tiens à présenter mes sincères condoléances...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a point of order here!

Mr Speaker: A point of order by whom?

Mr Osman Mahomed: By me!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No, the hon. Member cannot ask a point of order for somebody else! He has to ask his point of order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: He never stood! We can review the recordings!

Mr Mohamed: He has been asking!

Mr Speaker: You continue!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I have a point of order?

Mr Speaker, Sir, I received a call from the Whip of Government yesterday, last night, and, again, reiterated by my colleague this morning, hon. Ms Anquetil, to withdraw my question addressed to the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, which I did, on her request. And now, you just mentioned that the question will be taken out of turn. So, I am a bit confused. Can you please enlighten me?

Mr Speaker: Did you write to withdraw your question?

Mr Osman Mahomed: I did.

Mr Speaker: Okay! So, let us continue!

Mr Osman Mahomed: So, what is your ruling?

Mr Speaker: I will give my ruling later on!

Dr. Padayachy: Avant de répondre à cette *PQ*, je tiens à présenter mes sincères condoléances aux proches du jockey Juglall.

Dans le discours du Budget 2017/2018, il a été annoncé que le gouvernement "introduira la *Personal Management Licence* pour les secteurs des courses hippiques et des jeux d'argent afin de favoriser l'intégrité et de mieux superviser les activités de jeu, comme cela est applicable dans le cadre de la *UK Gambling Commission* et de la *British Horseracing Authority*."

La *Gambling Regulatory Authority Act* a été modifiée en 2017, par la *Finance Act*, afin de prévoir, en vertu de l'article 93B de la *Gambling Regulatory Authority Act*, la délivrance d'une *Personal Management Licence (PML)* aux titulaires de licence dans le secteur des jeux d'argent.

Cela inclut donc toute personne impliquée dans les courses hippiques. La section ci-dessus est entrée en vigueur le 01 août 2018. Je tiens à préciser qu'elle a pour principal objectif de vérifier qu'un individu engagé dans des activités de courses hippiques et d'autres activités, est bien « *fit and proper* ».

Des règlements ont ensuite été adoptés en 2018, 2019 et 2021 pour établir le mécanisme de délivrance d'une *PML* et définir les agents auxquels la licence doit s'appliquer.

En ce qui concerne les courses de chevaux, le terme "agent" comprend les directeurs, les gestionnaires, les propriétaires de chevaux ainsi que les responsables principaux et techniques de l'organisateur de courses de chevaux. Ceux-ci sont énumérés dans les règlements.

La demande de M. R. G. a été reçue le 30 janvier 2021. Cependant, aucune licence n'a été délivrée car le demandeur n'a pas respecté les conditions spécifiées dans les règlements *PML* de 2018 et 2019. En effet, il n'a pas transmis les informations requises par la *GRA* conformément au processus d'application. J'ai en outre été informé par la *GRA* qu'aucune application n'a été reçue pour l'émission d'une telle licence pour Messieurs N.G. et N.G.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la Question, je tiens à informer l'Assemblée que les procédures ont été validées au premier trimestre de 2021. La *GRA* a publié les communiqués au cours de la période allant de janvier 2021 à mars 2021, invitant les candidats à la *PML* à se manifester. La date limite de dépôt des candidatures était fixée au 15 mars 2021. Cependant, en raison du confinement annoncé, l'Autorité a fait preuve de

souplesse pour recevoir des demandes pendant la période de confinement afin de répondre aux demandes de *PML* en vue du début imminent de la saison des courses 2021.

La première course s'est déroulée le 15 mai 2021. Actuellement, l'émission de *PML* est en cours. Il s'agit d'un exercice continu en raison des demandes des nouveaux propriétaires de chevaux. Quelque 750 demandes ont été reçues. En ce qui concerne la saison des courses hippiques de 2021, les informations demandées par l'honorable membre sont en cours de compilation. Elles seront remises à l'Assemblée d'ici le 28 mai 2021. Merci.

Mr Quirin : M. le président, peut-on savoir de l'honorable ministre des Finances si R.G. et N.G. sont toujours propriétaires des chevaux Carlton Heights et Shadow Wing, qui d'ailleurs ont couru sur leur nom la saison dernière, et les photos publiées dans la presse en sont les preuves ?

Dr. Padayachy : M. le président, je crois savoir qu'il y a une enquête qui est en cours au niveau de la police et qu'on a saisi les chevaux, mais je dois vérifier les informations ; je n'ai pas toutes les informations en ma possession.

Mr Quirin: L'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire, ou plutôt est-ce qu'il est au courant qu'il y a des personnes qui ne sont pas propriétaires de chevaux et qui ont déjà été inquiétées par la police dans des affaires de blanchiment d'argent et ces personnes ont obtenu leur *PML* pour la présente saison hippique ? A-t-il été informé de cela ?

Dr. Padayachy: Je n'ai pas été informé de cet élément concernant cette question, je vais demander aux autorités compétentes. J'aimerais, M. le président, demander à l'honorable membre s'il a des précisions qu'il puisse me fournir pour que je puisse demander aux autorités régulatrices.

Mr Quirin: Une dernière question, M. le président, est-ce que le personnel de la *GRA*, qui travaille dans le monde hippique, ont besoin aussi d'un *PML (Personal Management Licence)* et, si oui, ils sont combien à détenir justement cette licence?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, à ma connaissance, ils n'en ont pas besoin mais je dois approfondir encore une fois ; je n'ai pas toutes les connaissances des courses hippiques et de ce qui se passe dans les saisons hippiques. Donc, je dois demander, avoir plus de précisions et je reviendrai à la Chambre pour déposer les demandes de l'honorable membre.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Bodha: Merci, M. le président. Est-ce que l'honorable ministre peut nous dire si un certificat de moralité est exigé à tout demandeur d'un *Personal Management Licence* ?

Dr. Padayachy: J'ai précisé qu'on demande par rapport au *Fit and Proper*. Donc, cela implique plusieurs critères et je vais vérifier s'il y a un certificat de moralité parmi ces critères.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Lobine!

MAURITIUS AFRICA FUND - 50-STOREY BUILDING - CÔTE D'OR

(No. B/406) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a mega 50-storey building by the Mauritius Africa Fund at the earmarked site of the Data Technology Park in Côte d'Or, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd., information as to the -

- (a) estimated cost of the project, and
- (b) financing mechanism being envisaged for the construction thereof.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, la *Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd* m'a informé qu'elle n'est pas impliquée dans la construction d'un immeuble de 50 étages à Côte d'Or. En tant que propriétaire du terrain, *Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd* est responsable du développement du *Data Technology Park* à Côte d'Or et de la sélection de promoteurs potentiels pour développer des projets au sein des différents clusters du parc.

M. le président, grâce à la conclusion de trois grands accords de libre-échange internationaux rien qu'en 2021, à savoir avec la Chine, l'Inde et l'Afrique, Maurice a un accès préférentiel à 68 % de la population mondiale. Maurice a besoin d'une structure adaptée pour faire de ces opportunités une réalité et accueillir des entreprises internationales qui souhaitent s'implanter à Maurice. L'ambition est d'attirer à Maurice la marque du *World Trade Centre*, et le projet « *Iconic Tower* » à Côte d'Or va dans ce sens.

M. le président, si le projet se concrétise, le *World Trade Centre* dotera Maurice d'un atout économique majeur, soutenu par un réseau de quelque 330 autres *World Trade Centres* dans le monde. Ce projet est un exemple de partenariat public-privé visant à favoriser le développement économique de Maurice, à moderniser nos infrastructures et à renforcer notre intégration régionale.

À l'heure où la pandémie de la COVID-19 a bouleversé le commerce et les investissements mondiaux, le *World Trade Centre* contribuera -

- à élargir l'espace économique de Maurice ;
- à stimuler l'internationalisation des entreprises mauriciennes, ainsi
- qu'à attirer les multinationales et les investissements directs étrangers.

Le projet du *World Trade Centre* proposé est conçu, promu et développé par le *Mauritius Africa Fund*. Pour rappel, le *Mauritius Africa Fund* est une entreprise publique à part entière, créée en 2014, en tant que le fer de lance des affaires du commerce et des investissements pour la région. À cet égard, il est habilité à développer des infrastructures commerciales de classe mondiale à Maurice et sur le continent africain.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne les parties (a) et (b) de la question, j'ai été informé par le *MAF* de l'intention d'adopter un modèle de « Conception-Construction-Financement-Opération-Maintenance » pour exécuter le projet. L'estimation du coût du projet dépendra du plan d'architecture présenté par l'investisseur-développeur potentiel. Il est envisagé que la pleine propriété du bâtiment revienne au *MAF* dans une période de 30 ans maximum selon les pratiques courantes pour ce mode de financement.

Ce modèle est une méthode d'exécution de projet qui permet à un opérateur du secteur privé de concevoir, construire et financer un projet, puis à termes de déléguer à la structure publique l'exploitation et la maintenance des installations dans le cadre d'un accord à long terme.

Ce modèle permet au *MAF* de s'engager dans une coentreprise avec un partenaire possédant l'expertise requise et le financement nécessaire pour le projet. La contribution du *MAF* dans la coentreprise comprendra deux éléments, à savoir -

- i) d'une part, le terrain où sera érigé le bâtiment, qui a été obtenu de *Landscape (Mauritius) Ltd* pour une période locative de 30 ans renouvelable ; et
- ii) d'autre part, la licence du *World Trade Centre*. Je souligne ici que le *MAF* a soumis sa demande officielle.

En parallèle, le *MAF* a lancé un exercice d'expression d'intérêt le 16 avril 2021, invitant les investisseurs potentiels à participer au développement de ce projet, à la condition qu'un accord avec le *World Trade Centre* soit trouvé.

La date de clôture était le 29 avril 2021.

J'ai été informé que l'évaluation est actuellement en cours. Merci.

Mr Lobine: May I know from the hon. Minister how many expressions of interest have been obtained yet, as per the closing date?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'attends d'avoir plus d'informations avec la *MAF* ; je ne veux pas interférer dans ce processus. À l'heure actuelle, on attend pour avoir plus d'informations. Ça a été clôturé comme je l'ai dit le 29 avril. Donc, j'attends pour avoir plus de précisions dessus.

Mr Lobine: With regard to this...

Dr. Padayachy: Et je tiens à préciser encore une fois que ce projet dépendra principalement de l'acceptation du *World Trade Centre* de venir s'implanter à Maurice.

Mr Lobine: As it is now, hon. Minister, you know how the state of our economy is, as the Minister of Finance, is it a feasible project; is it a priority of this Government within the Mauritius Africa Fund to go with such a mammoth project for Mauritius?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, ce serait, je le redis ici, un honneur si jamais le *World Trade Center* décide de venir s'implanter à Maurice, parce que cela va nous permettre de réellement développer notre capacité concernant les différents accords qu'on a signé cette année. Nous n'avons pas actuellement les capacités nécessaires pour développer pleinement les potentialités économiques liées avec les deux *FTA*, principalement le *FTA* signé avec la Chine et l'autre *FTA* signé avec l'Inde. Le fait qu'on est en train de signer un autre *FTA* avec l'Union Africaine va nous permettre de nous développer réellement en *hub* et de travailler avec 68% de la population mondiale. Et pour cela, on a besoin d'une structure qui puisse et qui a l'expérience de travailler à ce niveau-là. C'est pour cela que quand on a eu cet intérêt de la part du *World Trade Center*, on est en train de travailler dessus et bien sûr, c'est un projet immense. Mais il nous faut aussi travailler sur des projets immenses pour notre pays.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister, given the huge difficulties of setting up PPPs in Mauritius, I think not one, a single one has done yet under the legislation; would it not be much easier and more feasible to simply lease the land to a promoter and get it done? Why go for the PPP when it is actually *un projet immobilier*?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, c'est au niveau du *MAF* qui a eu le processus de négociation avec le *World Trade Center*. Donc, pour nous ce qui est intéressant aussi, c'est le fait de, même si cela n'a pas été fait dans le passé, de pouvoir réussir sur un projet, et un projet iconique. Donc oui, comme je l'ai dit, tout dépendra de l'acceptation du *World Trade Center* de venir à Maurice. Et si cela se fait, je tiens à préciser que la contribution du *MAF* va être simple la licence et l'allocation pour les terres. Ce sont les deux seuls éléments que l'État va mettre sur la table. De l'autre côté, le promoteur privé, lui, il va investir, il va construire le bâtiment et au bout d'un temps maximum allant de 30 ans, il va nous remettre les bâtiments. Donc, pour moi, c'est un projet que j'estime par ces temps qui sont difficiles, si jamais on arrive à le faire, ce sera un immense projet pour Maurice.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: The vocation of the Mauritius Africa Fund is to encourage Mauritian entrepreneurs to invest in Africa. So, is not the hon. Minister of Finance agreeable that instead of trying to go into real estate business, MAF should concentrate on its primary objective of helping Mauritians to go and invest in Africa?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, cette question est très pertinente. Mais je tiendrai à informer l'honorable membre qu'il y a eu l'avant-Covid et il y a l'après-Covid. Nous n'avons même plus d'avions qui desservent le continent africain actuellement, comment faire pour que le *MAF* continue à se développer ? Et je tiens à souligner aussi que Maurice fait partie et partie intégrante de l'Afrique et pour cela si on arrive à développer une plateforme d'échange à Maurice entre l'Asie avec le *FTA*, avec L'Inde, et la Chine, et l'Union Africaine, cela permettra aussi le développement des entreprises à Maurice. Et cela va attirer les opérateurs étrangers à Maurice. Comme vous le savez, Maurice possède plusieurs atouts, et je vais en citer que deux, pour attirer les investisseurs étrangers : la stabilité politique, ils le disent dans tous les rapports ; et deuxièmement on est le pays le mieux classé en Afrique au niveau du *ease of doing business*. C'est pour cela que souvent les investisseurs étrangers préfèrent venir à Maurice pour faire du *business* en Afrique. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Uteem, you have a question standing in your name!

**SME EQUITY FUND LTD – BABUL & SONS FISHING CO. LTD -
INVESTMENT**

(No. B/426) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in

regard to the SME Equity Fund Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the amount of money invested therefrom in Babul and Sons Fishing Company Ltd., and related companies.

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): M. le président, Le *SME Equity Fund Ltd* a été créé en mars 2017 suite à la fusion de *SME Partnership Fund Ltd* et *NRF Equity Investment Ltd*.

L'objectif principal de ce Fonds est de fournir des fonds propres et quasi-fonds propres aux entreprises afin d'alléger leur ratio d'endettement, leur permettant ainsi d'obtenir des financements auprès des banques commerciales.

L'investissement du fonds est plafonné à 49% du capital social de l'entreprise bénéficiaire jusqu'à un montant de R 25 millions.

Les actionnaires du *SME Equity Fund Ltd* sont le gouvernement, la SIC, la DBM et onze banques commerciales.

Le conseil d'administration est présidé par un représentant délégué par la *Mauritius Bankers Association*, qui est actuellement M. D. P. de la MCB.

Pour tous les investissements approuvés par le *SME Equity Fund Ltd* et l'ancien *SME Partnership Fund Ltd*, la diligence et l'évaluation appropriées ont été effectuées, suivies de l'approbation finale du conseil d'administration.

M. le président, j'ai été informé que l'anciennement *SME Partnership Fund Ltd* a approuvé un montant de R 2,2 millions pour un investissement dans Babul and Sons Fishing Co Ltd le 01 juillet 2011 et de R 1,7 million le 26 septembre 2013 pour financer la construction de deux bateaux de pêche.

Ces montants ont été entièrement remboursés en mars 2018.

Suite aux remboursements en temps et en heure de *Babul and Sons Fishing Co Ltd*, l'ancien *SME Partnership Fund Ltd* a approuvé un montant supplémentaire de R 3,5 millions le 23 septembre 2016 pour un investissement dans une société liée, à savoir Ocean Blue Fishing Co Ltd, pour le financement de la construction d'un autre navire de pêche.

Le 22 juin 2018, le *SME Equity Fund Ltd* a approuvé un montant de R 7 millions pour un investissement dans Babul and Sons Fishing Co Ltd afin de financer l'acquisition d'un navire de pêche et la mise en place d'une usine de production de glace sèche.

À ce jour, un montant de R 1,4 million a déjà été remboursé.

M. le président, Je souhaite informer la Chambre que toutes les transactions financières entre le *SME Equity Fund Ltd* et *Babul and Sons Fishing Co Ltd* et sa société liée, ont été effectuées par l'intermédiaire de la banque commerciale, à savoir la MCB et l'ancienne Banque Des Mascareignes.

Une enquête de la police est actuellement en cours, suite à des allégations de trafic de drogue par les promoteurs de *Babul and Sons Fishing Ltd*.

Mr Uteem: May I know from the hon. Minister of Finance if he is aware that even before the record seizure of Rs3.7 billion worth of drug from the promoter of Babul and Sons Fishing Company Ltd who is the prime suspect, This family was also arrested in the context of money laundering, before in February of this year?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, si c'est en février cette année, tous les éléments qui ont été rapportés jusqu'à présent ont été à priori avant février 2021. Donc, comme je l'ai dit, c'est tout simple, le *SME Equity Fund Ltd* est géré de manière équitable avec les partenaires du privé. On est en train d'entrer dans les capitaux des petites entreprises pour les aider à grossir et pour cela on travaille avec les banques commerciales. Quand on a déjà donné l'autorisation pour entrer dans le capital en 2011 et 2013, les procédures continuent si jamais ce client est considéré comme un bon client parce qu'il est en train de rembourser ses prêts. C'est pour cela que vous allez voir qu'en 2016 et en 2018, on a continué, le *SME Equity Fund* a continué de donner le financement à cette entreprise. Mais à partir de maintenant, donc, à partir de cette année, suite à des problèmes spécifiques concernant les critères d'AML/CFT, et maintenant avec le trafic de drogue, c'est sûr qu'il y a une enquête qui est en cours et au niveau de *SME Equity Fund*, bien sûr qu'on a arrêté tous les financements.

Mr Uteem: My question is very simple. The reason why I said February 2000 is because under the law, whenever a company's finance has been used by another company for money laundering purposes, they have to intervene and disinvest. So, how is it that despite the fact that as far back as February, the beneficial owners of these companies were linked to money laundering? How is it that, up to now, SME Equity has allowed Government public funds to remain in the possession of these people?

Dr. Padayachy: Je reviens là-dessus. Je dois vérifier les informations de l'honorable membre parce que je n'ai pas l'information concernant février premièrement, et deuxièmement, je dois vérifier s'ils n'ont pas déjà retiré les capitaux. Comme je l'ai dit, la

dernière transaction dont je suis au courant avec cette entreprise remonte à 2018. La première transaction dont on est au courant remonte à juillet 2011. Donc, suite à cette transaction, on peut le dire ici, c'est suite à cette première transaction qu'on a les autres transactions par la suite. C'est au moment où on découvre qu'il y a des éléments illégaux, qu'on commence à procéder à une enquête, et c'est là que *SME Equity Fund* a décidé d'arrêter les financements. Maintenant, on parle de février 2021, je tiens à préciser qu'à partir du début mars 2021, on est entré en confinement, je vais demander à mes officiers au niveau du ministère de suivre le dossier pour voir si on est en train de se désengager de cette entreprise. Merci.

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

At 1.03 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.48 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS - SUBMISSION OF NOTICE - MODALITIES

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have a few announcements to make.

My attention has been drawn to a Press article dated 11 May 2021 wherein some hon. Members from both sides of the House expressed their views on the modalities for the submission of notice of Parliamentary Questions for inclusion on the Notice of Questions.

Under my direction, by way of email dated 13 May, the Clerk of the Assembly invited the Whips of both sides of the House to submit concrete suggestions to review the manner in which notice of Parliamentary Questions are to be received/dealt with at the level of the Office of the Clerk, to my Office.

Once I will be in presence of the concrete proposals, same will be examined and appropriate procedural steps will be taken, if need be, for the proposed amendments to the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly to be submitted for consideration by the Standing Orders Committee and presented to the House.

Thank you.

**PARLIAMENTARY SITTING - 04.05.21 - MINISTER OF FINANCIAL
SERVICES AND GOOD GOVERNANCE - INSINUATING WORDS**

Hon. Members, in the course of the proceedings of the Sitting of 04 May 2021, whilst the hon. Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance was speaking on the Supplementary Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill (No. XVI of 2020) -

- hon. Assirvaden raised a point of order and requested that the hon. Minister withdraws the words “Gorah-Issac tragedy” which the hon. Minister used when referring to the words “blood on their hands” earlier used by hon. S. Mohamed and which he subsequently withdrew, and
- hon. Shakeel Mohamed also objected to the reference made to ‘*l’affaire Gorah-Issac*’ by the hon. Minister.

I rule that the words uttered by the hon. Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance is tantamount to an insinuation and invite the hon. Minister to withdraw same accordingly.

Hon. Members, in the course of the debate on the Supplementary Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill (No. XVI of 2020) –

- at the Sitting of 27 April 2021, hon. Ramful, and
- at the Sitting of 04 May 2021, hon. Shakeel Mohamed mentioned the name of Mr Bissoon Mungroo, with regard to the acquisition of “Berlines of Iframac”, with some undertones of alleged impropriety.

In the course of the debate instances, I cautioned –

- Hon. Ramful, as follows -
 - I quote - “Talk on the Estimates”, and
- Hon. Shakeel Mohamed, as follows –
 - I quote - “...don’t use the cloak of parliamentary immunity to just accuse people.”

I have to report to the House that on Friday 07 May 2021, I received a letter from Mr Bissoon Mungroo mentioning the above-mentioned instances, taking objection to same and indicating, with supporting evidence, that, in fact –

- Mungroo & Sons Ltd, of which he is the Managing Director and shareholder, acquired commercial vehicles and not limousines, pursuant to a tender exercise following a notice for the sale thereof in the newspaper.

In the light of the above, by virtue of the ample powers conferred upon the Chair by the rules to deal with such situations and considering that the citing of the name of Mr Mungroo by hon. Ramful and hon. Shakeel Mohamed, respectively, may cause harm to the former in a way which undermines his status and position. I have thought it fit and appropriate to make the present announcement and to report the content of the letter of Mr Bissoon Mungroo.

Moreover, I invite hon. Members to exercise the right of freedom of speech with utmost care and without any prejudice to the rights of other persons, especially those who are not present in the House and, therefore, not in a position to defend themselves on the floor of the House.

HON. S. MOHAMED - UNAUTHENTICATED PHOTOCOPY DOCUMENT

Lastly, 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.

Hon. Minister Seeruttun already apologised, and withdraw the words.

Mr Seeruttun: Yes, I withdraw.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy!

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to raise a point of order.

Mr Speaker: Point of order, yes!

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. Pursuant to Section 28 of the Standing Orders, I felt duty-bound to give a personal point of explanation following a question raised this morning during the Prime Minister's Question Time, PQ B/376 regarding my presence at the Port on 05 January 2021. I, therefore, seek your...

Mr Speaker: Can I? We already spoke...

(Interruptions)

Please! Don't do the work of the Speaker! You don't have the floor!

Mr Assirvaden: I am listening, Mr Speaker!

Mr Speaker: You don't have the floor!

Mr Assirvaden: I am listening, Mr Speaker!

Mr Speaker: You don't have the floor! Don't set the House on fire!

Hon. Juman, we spoke in the Chamber and you know the position. The point of personal explanation cannot carry controversial issues. You made the point right now that you want to make a point of explanation. I will give my ruling later on during this session. Please!

Hon. Minister!

LAVENTURE JUNCTION - NORTH ENTRANCE - TRAFFIC LIGHTS

(No. B/394) 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.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Member for having regularly raised the present issue with me and allowing me now to shed light on same.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit that following several fatal accidents which occurred at the north entrance of Laventure junction, it has been proposed that traffic light system be installed thereat. But prior to the installation of the traffic lights, action would have to be initiated for the relocation of a bus lay-by and a bus shelter some 40 meters upstream in the direction of Flacq.

The TMRSU has already initiated procedures for land acquisition at the said locus through the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning to enable the full signalisation of the north entrance at Laventure junction.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the TMRSU that the plot of land to be acquired belongs to *Société Malherbe Limitée* and, as at date, the land acquisition is at the owner's notary office. The owner has requested that, in addition to the agreed amount to be paid for the land acquisition of the new bus lay-by at Laventure junction, an outstanding payment should be settled with regard to land acquisition on a previous project carried out by the Road Development Authority in connection with the upgrading of Bellevue Road B22 in

the year 2014. I am informed that actions have already been initiated by the RDA to settle any outstanding amount due since 2014.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning that the deed of sale for the acquisition of the subject site has already been vetted and finalised at the level of the Attorney General's Office and has been submitted to the notary public. Payment will be effected after signature of the deed of sale by both parties, that is, Government and the owner.

Upon transcription of the deed of sale, the land will thereafter be vested in my Ministry. However, pending the land acquisition, the TMRSU has carried out an on-site survey to come up with an alternative solution to signalise the junction. The TMRSU has, therefore, proposed that the following measures be implemented -

- (a) a temporary bus stop with bus shelter be constructed over 65 meters from the junction;
- (b) the existing zebra crossing be converted into a pelican crossing, and
- (c) the fixing a concrete bollards to close the existing bus lay-by for the junction to be fully signalised.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am equally informed by the TMRSU that the cost of the civil works for the installation of traffic lights and the temporary bus stop with a bus lay-by would be around Rs1.8 m. The works will be undertaken soon. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Supplementary!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I understand from the reply of the hon. Minister that in the project there is a provision for a bus lay-by. May I make a request to the hon. Minister, if another bus lay-by, just opposite, on the other side of the road, as it is the normal practice, to be also added in that project?

Mr Ganoo: I will certainly take the suggestion of the hon. Member on board and liaise with the officers of TMRSU and of the authorities in order to see whether this proposal can be undertaken, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next Question!

FLACQ MARKET – UPGRADING WORKS

(No. B/395) 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.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the District Council of Flacq that the status of the upgrading work at the Central Flacq Market is as follows –

- the damaged electrical network at the Haberdashery section has been repaired;
- new floodlights have been fixed at the Haberdashery section again;
- anti-slippery mat has been placed along the main alley in the food court;
- wastewater system at the food court has been upgraded;
- seven puja shops which were damaged during the fire outbreak in September 2019 in the market, have been reconstructed;
- painting of the fixed vegetable market has been completed, and
- the upgrading of the electrical system at the food court will be completed by the end of this week.

The total cost incurred for the upgrading works amount to Rs2 m.

Mr Speaker: Supplementary!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Mr Speaker, Sir, at the time that the market was under construction, there were concerns that were raised concerning the headroom of the market but no attention was paid to any of these complaints by the then Government and now we are having problem of ventilation. So, may I ask the hon. Minister to please inform the House if in the project they have included anything for the mechanical ventilation?

Dr. Husnoo: Well, I have not been informed about this now, but anyway, I can look into it and certainly inform the hon. Members later on.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

NATIONAL PROPERTY FUND LTD - ASSETS - SALE

(No. B/396) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to the National Property Fund Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to

the total number of assets thereof, indicating if same are being put for sale and, if so, indicate

—

- (a) the reasons therefor;
- (b) if an evaluation of each of the assets has been carried out and, if so, give details thereof, and
- (c) the process by which these assets will be sold.

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the replies I made to Parliamentary Questions B/534 and B/542 on 11 August 2020, when I informed the House that the NPFL, that is the National Property Fund Limited, had already started the process of disposing of its immovable assets which had been transferred into its custody by the Special Administrators of the ex-BAI Co. Ltd. These assets were all situated locally.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in all, eighteen properties were transferred to the NPFL by the Special Administrators in 2015. Two of the properties have already been sold. For two others, the NPFL has already engaged with two prospective buyers and the sale procedures are being followed. Another two are under consideration for lease, whilst the remaining twelve are being put for sale by public advertisement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the assets of the NPFL are being disposed of in order to assist the NPFL to service partly its debts.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that the assets have, in fact, been evaluated. However, I am advised that the detailed information on the assessed value of these properties cannot be disclosed for commercial reasons as the properties are being put for sale and the NPFL expects to get a competitive and fair value for those properties compared to the evaluation carried out.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed that for the twelve remaining properties, the NPFL has called for Expression of Interest through an advertisement on its website and in the local Press.

Mr Ramful: Can we have an idea from the hon. Minister how much funds is the NPFL expecting to recoup from the sales of those properties, approximately?

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I base on the value of those assets that have been recently evaluated, the total value expected of all those assets that are under the custody of the NPFL would amount to about a little over Rs1.2 billion.

Mr Ramful: There is currently a debt of about Rs4.3 billion or Rs4.2 billion which involves credit facilities given to NPFL by the BOM. Now, it appears that the money that is going to be recovered will not be sufficient to reimburse that debt which is due in June 2022. Now, what about the rest of the debt, how is it going to be reimbursed?

Mr Seeruttun: Well, the debt due to the Bank of Mauritius will be due some times in 2022. So, for the time being, we are trying to recover whatever we can from those assets and by the time that we get to the repayment for the debt, we will decide how we are going to settle that.

Mr Ramful: Can we have the assurance from the hon. Minister that these assets will be sold at its market price and we will not have a repetition of what has happened in the past, assets being devalued and sold for peanuts?

Mr Seeruttun: Well, I do not know what happened in the past and what the hon. Member is referring to but I can give the assurance to the House that we have invited the public, through Press Advertisement, for people to come forward and make their offers and I can reassure the House that the sale will be made to the highest offer as far as possible.

Mr Uteem: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether NPFL has retained the services of any Advisers to carry out the sale and whether the advertisement for these will be also be published outside Mauritius, for any buyers from outside Mauritius who may be interested to invest in those properties?

Mr Seeruttun: In fact, last year, Mr Speaker, Sir, the NPFL had recourse to a Transaction Advisor which was for a period of one year which expired early this year. So, from now on, there is no kind of contract with that Transaction Advisor. So, that is why probably you have noticed in the Press, the NPFL has put the advertisement for sale, to invite interested parties to come forward for any offers of those properties that are still to be sold.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. Property, when they are put for sale and the price that will be obtained depends very much on the state of the property when people go to visit before buying. Can we know from the hon. Minister whether these properties are being maintained and if so, the cost of maintenance as well if he can give any indication to the House?

Mr Seeruttun: What I know, Mr Speaker, Sir, some of those properties form part of a syndic and within that syndic fees that they pay, comprises the element of usual maintenance. Some other properties have recourse to security services to ensure that the properties are not being pilferaged.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Quirin!

STATUS OF ARTISTS BILL - INTRODUCTION

(No. B/399) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the proposed Status of Artists Bill, he will state the expected date of introduction thereof in the Assembly.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, the proposed Status of Artists Bill is a much awaited piece of legislation by the Artists Community and it comes at an opportune time as during the COVID-19 pandemic. The cultural and creative sector is one of the sectors most adversely affected. Given the complex nature of this Bill, assistance of UNESCO was sought by my Ministry to prepare the draft Bill. With the support of an expert from UNESCO, my Ministry has had several consultations with a number of stakeholders including Ministries, Departments and the Artists Community at large.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following these consultations, a draft report on the provisions and measures for the draft Status of Artists Bill was prepared by UNESCO and submitted to my Ministry. This has already been submitted to the Attorney General's Office with drafting instructions for the elaboration of the Status of Artists Bill. Meetings have also been held with the Attorney General's Office and the provisions of the draft Bill are currently under preparation at the level of my Ministry. Once these are finalised, they will be forwarded to the Attorney General's Office for legal vetting. Once the Bill is finalised at the level of the Attorney General's Office, final consultations will be held with the Artists Community and other stakeholders for their comments and views.

Given the priority nature of this piece of legislation, I am expecting to introduce this landmark legislation in the National Assembly shortly.

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. Comme l'a si bien mentionné l'honorable ministre lui-même, l'industrie créative et culturelle, en particulier le monde musical mauricien, est en très grande difficulté, et cela depuis plus d'une année, et il y a des critiques qui fusent de toutes parts. Le ministre, de ce fait, peut-il nous expliquer brièvement comment ce *Status of Artists Bill* va pouvoir relancer ce secteur?

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, the gist of the Status of Artists Bill is to categorise and professionalise the status of an artist so that, henceforth, after the Bill becomes an Act of Parliament, an artist will be categorised as a professional worker, akin an atypical worker, thus being entitled to social security benefits, will be recognised under the Workers' Act and so on. So, it is actually professionalising the whole community of artists and also describing and providing for professional artists being registered in Mauritius.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, est-ce que l'honorable ministre peut nous dire justement si *the Status of Artists Bill* prendra en compte la possibilité de mettre en place des plateformes numériques sur lesquelles les artistes pourront exploiter leurs œuvres et générer ainsi des revenus ?

Mr Teeluck: The Status of Artists Bill also establishes the National Body for Professionals in the Arts and part of the mandate of that National Body would be to develop platforms, whether digital or otherwise, so as to create forum and space and create the environment to promote art, creative art and artists as well. So, it will be definitely part of the mandate. One of the mandates of the National Body will be to tap on possibilities to enlarge the environment where they can further boom and further promote.

Mr David: Merci, M. le président. Dans le document d'assistance technique de l'UNESCO mentionné par le ministre, qui a servi, si je comprends bien, de base pour la rédaction de cette loi sur le statut de l'artiste à Maurice, il est préconisé la mise en place d'un *National Body for the Professionals in the Arts*, le *NBPA*. Puis-je demander au ministre de s'assurer, parce que je n'ai pas retrouvé cet élément dans le document, que des artistes puissent siéger sur ce *NBPA*, afin qu'on ne se retrouve pas avec uniquement des *policymakers* et des technocrates déconnectés du monde artistique, car la mission de cette nouvelle autorité sera cruciale pour la formation, la promotion et la protection de nos artistes mauriciens ?

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, I reassure the hon. Member that there will be a reasonable balance between policymakers and artists on the National Body so that we have a National Body that will be operating in the best interests of artists.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, une dernière question, avec votre permission. L'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire si justement ce projet de loi va aussi prendre en considération les compensations nécessaires à être accordées aux artistes si le pays se retrouve à nouveau en confinement ou que la situation tarde à s'améliorer ?

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, it will be rather difficult for me to provide any information or clarification on this. I will rather suggest that we wait till we have a proper Bill which will go through a final consultation for comments from the artistic community. So, then only, maybe that can be taken for suggestion if it is not in the final document.

Mr Speaker: The Table is advised that Questions B/414, B/458, B/459 and B/460 have been withdrawn. Next question!

ATHELETE ASSISTANCE SCHEME

(No. B/400) Mr P. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Athlete Assistance Scheme, he will state if same has been implemented and, if so, since when, indicating -

- (a) the eligibility criteria to benefit thereunder;
- (b) the names of the beneficiaries thereof, discipline-wise, and
- (c) if the terms and conditions thereof have been amended since the implementation thereof to date and, if so, give the reasons therefor.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to make a combined reply to PQ B/400 and PQ B/403, both of which relate to the allowance to high-level athletes.

For recall, I would like to inform the House that in September 1988, Government introduced a scheme known as the 'Assistance to National Level Sportsmen'. At that time, a monthly stipend of Rs200 was granted to eligible athletes.

I am informed that in April 1989, the Athlete Assistance Programme set up under the National Policy for Elite Athletes made provision for a monthly stipend of Rs3,000 to elite athletes. The High Level Sports Unit was set up in October 1999 and a High-Level Assistance Scheme was introduced in December 2000 whereby the monthly quantum allocated to eligible athletes was as follows -

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| World and Intercontinental level | : Rs5,000 |
| Continental level | : Rs3,000 |
| Regional level | : Rs2,000 |

In July 2001, the monthly quantum allocated to high-level athletes was revised as follows -

| | |
|------------------------|------------|
| World level | : Rs10,000 |
| Intercontinental level | : Rs6,000 |
| Continental level | : Rs3,000 |
| Regional level | : Rs2,000 |

In January 2015, the High-Level Assistance Scheme was reviewed in a spirit of promoting inclusiveness to cater for elite athletes with disability.

When I took office in 2017, I spearheaded the initiative to increase the monthly quantum allocated to elite athletes and sparring partners by Rs3,000 and Rs1,500 respectively.

It was observed that the High-Level Assistance Scheme, in its present form, has several shortcomings. In order to address these shortcomings and in line with one of the recommendations made in the National Sport and Physical Activity Policy, adopted by Government in October 2018, namely, the creation of an amateur to elite sport environment. In July 2020, Government approved my proposal to review the High-Level Assistance Scheme. Same was to be known as the Athlete Assistance Scheme.

The main objective of that scheme was to provide financial support to athletes of both Senior and Youth categories with the aim to inspire Mauritian athletes to pursue excellence on the world stage.

However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has, unfortunately, impacted significantly on the organisation of international sporting events in terms of the imposition of sanitary measures and travelling restrictions. A number of major sports competitions had either been postponed or cancelled.

In the absence of regional and international exposure, high-level athletes were not in a position to set targets, making it difficult for my Ministry to assess them as per the criteria outlined in the proposed Athlete Assistance Scheme.

In October 2020, Government therefore decided to put on hold the proposal made in July 2020 until there is clearer visibility in the international sports landscape. In the

meantime, and in order not to penalise athletes, my Ministry has pursued payment of allocation to high-level athletes as per the existing scheme.

Due to the current budgetary constraints, I wish to inform the House that there is a likelihood that the quantum allocated to high-level athletes would be reviewed in the next financial year. Based on the financial resources to be made available to my Ministry for the next financial year, my officers will have meetings with the National Sports Federations concerned in view of finding ways and means to minimise the impacts of any reduction in the allowance of high-level athletes, while keeping them motivated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling a list of 127 high-level athletes, discipline-wise as at April 2021 in receipt of a monthly allowance from my Ministry.

Thank you.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, je peux comprendre les difficultés financières du moment, et malgré tout, j'aimerais que le ministre nous dise si son ministère a un plan qui sera mis en place afin de maintenir justement le niveau de notre élite, alors que les allocations financières pourraient subir une baisse, comme mentionné dans un courrier datant du 23 avril dernier adressé à toutes les fédérations ?

Mr Toussaint: Oui, effectivement, M. le président, pas très loin de cela, nous avons mis sur pied une autre recommandation du *National Sports and Physical Activity Policy*, c'est-à-dire la création de *Team Mauritius*, qui aura pour tâche de veiller à ce que nos athlètes élités ne manquent de rien, même si éventuellement il se pourrait qu'il y ait une baisse dans leurs allocations, mais de veiller à ce qu'ils ont toutes les facilités nécessaires pour continuer à travailler et à s'entraîner, et par cela je suis en train d'expliquer des facilités de transport, les facilités de physio, l'achat des médicaments et des fortifiants. Donc, toute une batterie de facilités pour continuer à encadrer nos athlètes de haut niveau.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, l'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire si les bénéficiaires de *l'Athlete Assistance Scheme* seront pris en charge par le *High Performance Centre de Côte d'Or* et, si tel n'est pas le cas, pourquoi ?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, toute l'équipe de *MMIL* est en train de travailler d'arrache-pied afin de mettre sur pied et de démarrer le *HPC* à Côte d'Or, et aussi mon équipe de *Team Mauritius* ainsi que *MMIL* sont en train de travailler sur les modalités de sorte à ce que nos athlètes élités et autres aussi puissent bénéficier de toutes les facilités qui seront mises à leur disposition au *High Performance Centre de Côte d'Or*.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

VALLÉE DES PRÊTRES - SEWER SYSTEM

(No. B/401) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the sewer system, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to –

- (a) the percentage of households connected to sewerage network as at date in the region of Vallée des Prêtres, and
- (b) if he is aware of cases of illegal connection of rainwater from residential/commercial premises to the sewer system thereat leading to overflow of manholes during heavy rainfall and, if so, indicate the measures taken to address same and the outcome thereof.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority that around 57.6% of the households in the region of Vallée des Prêtres is connected to the Public Wastewater Network. This represents around 2,000 premises connected to the public sewer.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am further informed by the Wastewater Management Authority, that following complaints of overflow in the region of Vallée des Prêtres during heavy rainfall, the Wastewater Management Authority had initiated a survey in October 2020 to identify illegal rain water discharge into the wastewater system from household premises along Bernardin de Saint-Pierre Street, Vallée des Prêtres. The survey was completed in March 2021. A total of 762 houses were inspected by the Wastewater Management Authority, out of which 95 houses were found to be illegally connected to the sewer network.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to measures taken, the Wastewater Management Authority has informed that a Notice, under Section 39 of the Wastewater Management Authority Act, was issued to each occupier of these 95 houses for them to disconnect their rainwater pipe from the sewer network in order to prevent rain water ingress into the wastewater system. Following issue of Notices, the Wastewater Management Authority has carried out a monitoring exercise to check compliance with the Notices served. It was found that occupiers of 70 houses had complied with the Notice. With regard to the remaining 25 Notices, the compliance exercise has resumed after the lockdown period and is still ongoing.

Mrs Tour: Can the hon. Minister advise whether the actual sewage network is sufficient to sustain the number of households currently connected to the network?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware that regularly there are complaints from the inhabitants of the region of Vallée des Prêtres and that for the past few years, with regard to overflowing of the sewer network, especially along Bernardin de Saint-Pierre Street. Mr Speaker, Sir, whether the network is sufficient or not to sustain the number of households, that can only be set through a study. It is for this reason that the Wastewater Management Authority has initiated action to enlist the services of a Consultant to carry out an in-depth study for a long-term solution. But I believe the hon. Member is aware that the sewer network in that area was done on a piecemeal basis. It is for this reason that we are going forward with a study, and then, embark on a holistic solution for the whole area.

There are several projects which are going to start in that region, but that survey or that study will give us an indication whether the network is sufficient or not. The hon. Member must also be aware that, that region, specifically the areas of Caro Lalo, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Cité Vallée des Prêtres, they are close to Rivière Latanier and to the mountain, and this adds to the increase of water flow whenever we have heavy rainfall in that region.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CHITRAKOOT - LANDSLIDE MANAGEMENT PLANS

(No. B/402) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the landslide problem in Chitrakoot, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Geotechnical Unit, information as to where matters stand as to the recommendation for the implementation of –

- (a) landslide management plans in the Japan International Cooperation Agency Report 2015, and
- (b) residents' awareness exercises and relocation, indicating if a survey has recently been carried out to monitor the evolution 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 Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development that, as

part of a pilot project, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) had extended its assistance to that Ministry in the year 2012 for the design and implementation of countermeasure works at Chitrakoot, Vallée des Prêtres. The countermeasure works were proposed to stabilise the soil in that region to lower the ground water level with a view to increasing the safety factor against occurrence of landslides and other slope related disasters. The pilot project was to be undertaken in two phases.

Phase I of the project comprised the construction of cut-off drains and upgrading of the existing rivulets to collect surface water, horizontal drainage systems to remove sub-surface water and construction of vehicular and pedestrian bridges. This project was financed by JICA and completed in December 2014.

The Phase II of the project comprised construction of retaining walls, open type and French drains, other horizontal drainage systems and a bridge. The project was implemented by the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development and completed in October 2018.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development that a plan was devised to maintain the structures built at both Phases I and II. The plan comprises the following measures -

- (i) periodical cleaning of the ditches, channels, bridges and horizontal drainages constructed to ensure the smooth water flows in the drainage system;
- (ii) regular inspection of the state of fencing, in case there are damages by rock fall and debris flow and necessary repairs be effected where required;
- (iii) fixing of sign boards to prevent any trespassing in that area, and
- (iv) sensitisation of the inhabitants of that region, including children, on disaster prevention.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre that awareness campaigns have been conducted with the inhabitants by the Geotechnical Unit of the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development, in collaboration with the JICA, National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre and the Municipal City Council of Port Louis. Simulation exercises are regularly planned and conducted for the landslide prone areas of Chitrakoot so as to maintain community preparedness.

In December 2018, a survey was carried out by the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development, whereby 11 additional houses situated within the landslide prone areas at Chitrakoot were identified. Out of the 11 houses, 10 are occupied and one was used as a community centre.

In addition, the Government has set up an inter-ministerial committee under my chair to look into the relocation of the inhabitants of Chitrakoot, Vallée Pitot, Batelage and Rivière des Créoles, amongst others, due to the risk of landslide in these localities. The committee will submit proposals to the Government after consultations with the different stakeholders.

Mrs Tour: There are currently 14 houses that have been vacated in Chitrakoot and the residents relocated elsewhere. Can the hon. Minister inform the House on what will happen to these vacant houses?

Dr. Husnoo: There is a major problem there, as just mentioned by the hon. Member. The first 14 owners were transferred to different places but, unfortunately, I think that five are still staying there. What is happening is that some of them are renting those damaged houses to other people and that is causing quite a bit of problem. So, we are looking into it because as I said earlier, I am chairing a committee, we are going to look into it and with the help of the Municipal Council of Port Louis and the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development, we are going to see whether we can demolish those houses because it is a danger to the people staying there and we have to find alternative accommodations.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Do you have more questions?

Mr Uteem: May I know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister what is the time frame for this committee to submit its proposal? Because these people have been living in these high-risk houses for years now.

Dr. Husnoo: As I just mentioned, this has been going on for a long time, but I have been given the brief to manage that committee about a month ago. We have had two technical committees so far and it is a very complex problem as we realise so many people do not have a place to go, and we have to find a solution. So, it is going to take a bit of time and we are working on it.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

HIGH-LEVEL ATHLETES - ALLOWANCE

(No. B/403) Mrs S. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the High-level Athletes, he will table the list thereof in receipt of an allowance from his Ministry.

(Vide Reply to PQ B/400)

LA CAVERNE, VACOAS - MORCELLEMENT BER - LATANIERS AVENUE & WATSONIA LANE - DRAINS

(No. B/404) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to Constituency No. 15, La Caverne and Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas and Phoenix, information as to where matters stand as to the requests made by the inhabitants thereof for the construction of drains along Lataniers Avenue and Watsonia Lane at *Morcellement Ber* and in the vicinity of La Caverne, Vacoas.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix that following requests from inhabitants of Watsonia Lane and Avenue des Lataniers at *Morcellement Ber*, La Caverne, Vacoas for the construction of drains thereat, the Public Infrastructure Committee had, approved the construction of an absorption drain over a length of 50m at both Watsonia Lane and Avenue des Lataniers at an estimated cost of about Rs500,000.

However, since the Land Drainage Authority had recommended that the construction of absorption drains is not appropriate to resolve the problem of flooding, the Council did not proceed with the implementation of same.

Consequently, a survey was conducted to identify the existence of any outlet in the nearby region so that consideration could be given to construct a covered drain. However, no such outlet was found.

In view of the situation, as a short-term solution the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix, is now proposing to proceed with the construction of the absorption drain in the financial year 2021/2022, pending further consultation which would be held with the

Land Drainage Authority so as to come up with a more durable solution to this particular problem.

Mr Lobine: Is the hon. Minister aware that it was since 24 September 2018 that there was a petition sent to the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix and since then, nothing has been done?

Dr. Husnoo: As I have mentioned before, the Municipal Council was going to do an absorption drain, but, then, eventually we were told not to carry on with the absorption drain because it is only a temporary measure. That is why I have again explained if you want to have a drain, you must have an outlet where to get the water. But, unfortunately, they could not identify an outlet. So, we are back to square one. But, in the meantime, we are going to do this absorption drain temporarily, as I mentioned, and eventually we will have to find, after discussion with the LDA, a permanent solution for it.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

SOLFERINO - RHUGOO, AUGUM & BHUTOO LANES - ONE-WAY ROADS

(No. B/405) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to Paillotte, in Vacoas, including Rhugoo, Augum and Bhutoo lanes, respectively, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas and Phoenix, information as to where matters stand as to the requests made by the inhabitants thereof for the conversion into one-way schemes of several roads thereat.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix that several requests were received from the inhabitants of Rhugoo, Augum and Bhutoo lanes in Solferino for the conversion of these roads into one-way roads as they are too narrow and caused much inconveniences to the vehicle users.

The prerogative for the implementation of one-way schemes through a proper mix of traffic signs and road markings is vested with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail under Section 184 of the Road Traffic Act. In this context, meetings and site visits were coordinated with the TMRSU.

On 22 January 2021, a preliminary site visit was effected by hon. Bablee, PPS, and Mr Ramburn, the Mayor of the Municipal Council and officers of the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix and the TMRSU.

In February 2021, the TMRSU conducted several detailed site visits and surveys to determine the feasibility of the requests.

On 05 March 2021, the Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail requested the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix to carry out a public relations exercise and the acceptability survey with local inhabitants based on the draft one-way scheme design by the TMRSU, which has concluded that the three roads namely, Rhugoo, Augum and Bhutoo lanes are of average widths of 3m to 3.5m with no segregation of pedestrians from vehicular traffic, and the implementation of one-way schemes onto these three lanes were deemed feasible owing to the availability of interconnectedness with adjoining roads such as Kalimaye Road, Verna Lane and Candos/Vacoas (B3) road.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix that, in view of the lockdown, the meeting which was planned in March 2021 had been rescheduled for Thursday 20 May 2021 with the councillors of Ward 3 of the town and the inhabitants of the locality for a presentation of the proposed one-way scheme. In the event the inhabitants are agreeable with this design, the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail will be informed accordingly.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

COVID-19 PANDEMIC VIRUS VARIANTS - TESTS

(No. B/407) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic virus variants, he will state since when his Ministry has been conducting tests to ascertain the presence thereof in Mauritius and, if so -

- (a) indicate the number of tests carried out and the laboratories that have been processing same, and
- (b) table copies of all tests results carried out.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the first variant of concern detected in UK in December 2020, my Ministry solicited the assistance of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) South Africa and the Francis Crick Institute, UK for regular

monitoring of viral mutations and variants in Mauritius through COVID-19 sequencing tests conducted on positive RT-PCR stored samples referred to them. Both these institutions are World Health Organisation collaborating centres.

In reply to part (a) of the question, I am informed that on 09 January 2021, a first batch of 20 samples were sent to Francis Crick Institute, London, UK from incoming passengers, of which 3 samples failed sequencing and in 17 samples sequenced, presence of South African variant was revealed in 3 cases. The other 14 samples were of lineage of no concern.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that a second batch of 20 samples were sent to National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) South Africa on 04 February 2021, of which 17 from incoming passengers and 3 from local cases. The report indicated that 1 sample failed sequencing and the remaining 19 were sequenced. These revealed 1 UK variant and 3 South African variant, all in incoming passengers. The other 15 samples consist of lineages of no concern.

Moreover, a third batch of 40 samples was sent on 13 March 2021 to NICD South Africa, of which, 7 from incoming passengers and 33 from local cases. 1 failed sequencing and 39 samples were sequenced. These revealed 1 UK variant and 1 South African variant in incoming passengers. 33 local cases revealed lineage B1.1.318. This lineage is classified as a variant of interest and presently reported in 32 countries. The 4 other samples consist of other lineages of no concern.

Additionally, a fourth batch of 160 samples was sent to NICD South Africa on 28 March 2021, of which 61 from incoming passengers and 99 from local cases. So far, 91 have been sequenced and 3 failed sequencing. Of those sequenced, 2 reveal South African variant on incoming passengers and 89 from local transmission cases again, reveal the presence of lineage B1.1.318. The remaining results are still awaited.

I am informed that a fifth batch of 210 samples has been sent to NICD South Africa on 09 May 2021 and results are awaited.

I am also informed that a batch of 40 samples has been shipped to Francis Crick Institute, London, UK on 17 May 2021 and results are awaited.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that another batch of 40 samples will be sent to Reunion Island for sequencing in the coming days.

Thus, so far, a total of 450 samples have been sent for sequencing, of which 120 are imported and 330 are local cases.

Overall sequencing has been successfully done on 166 samples with the following results –

UK variant (B.1.1.7) = 2 (imported cases)

South African variant (B.1.351) = 9 (imported cases)

Indian variant = Nil so far (awaiting further sequencing results)

Variant of interest detected on majority of cases concerning local outbreak during second wave in 2021 –

B.1.1.318 = 122 out of 135 samples.

Number of tests which failed sequencing is 8.

The other 33 samples were other lineages not of concern.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to part (b) of the question, I am informed that individual test results are not submitted to the Central Health Laboratory. However, I am tabling a list of 160 anonymised test results submitted by the Francis Crick Institute, UK, and the National Institute of Communicable Diseases, South Africa.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. As you mentioned rightly, there is a number of variants of COVID-19 ranging from B.1.1.7 to B.1.359 since its first identification in September in the United Kingdom.

Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he can seek information as to whether all the dialysis patients who, unfortunately, passed away, were infected with the same variant or a different variant from which patient R., who came back from India in January, and, unfortunately, passed away?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, the samples of all those patients who have passed away are stored and all have been sent for sequencing. We are waiting for the results.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. Will his Ministry consider the setting up of a genomic surveillance system because of the emergence of new variants, be it alone COVID-19, but any other virus that may come up on the market, knowing quite well that virus does undergo mutation during long-term and since we are faced with a long-term dilemma, probably about the pandemic, and that would be a major step to protect the country?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is right. The Ministry will stand guided by the advice of the Virology Department and that genomic lineage will be conducted on that line.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. From his reply, the Minister mentioned that samples were being sent to UK, South Africa and Reunion Island. Can the Minister inform the House whether his Ministry will consider carrying out sequencing locally?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, the Central Health Laboratory has already procured the equipment to do the sequencing in Mauritius and the reagents have been procured too. At this stage, the Laboratory is proceeding with an ongoing training which will be followed by the validation of the results with the laboratories I have mentioned and, hopefully, in the beginning of July, we will start doing our sequencing on our own.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Dr. Aumeer: Will the hon. Minister, with regard to the emergence of new variants and many, much more probably to come in the future, and depending on the pharmaceutical industries' approach to set up and formulate new vaccines, whether his Ministry will be proactive to secure vaccines that will have a better protection against variants should they come on the market? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will stand guided by the different institutions producing the vaccines and whatever will be the result of the studies, the Ministry will act accordingly.

Mr Speaker: Members are informed that PQs B/423 and B/424 have been withdrawn. Next question!

HYBRID & ELECTRIC VEHICLES

(No. B/408) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to plug-in hybrid/electric vehicles, he will state the number thereof in Mauritius over the past five years, indicating the

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(a) number thereof that have been acquired by the Government of Mauritius,

- (b) facilities available for the charging thereof island-wide, and
- (c) plan being envisaged, if any, to improve access to electric charging on a paying basis.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Land Transport Authority that there are 17,317 hybrid and 304 electric vehicles registered with the NLTA for the period 2016 to date. These include 3 electric vehicles acquired by the Government of Mauritius.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities that the consultancy study was commissioned by the latter in March 2019 to develop a 10-year electric vehicle integration roadmap report, for Mauritius will focus on electric cars.

In this context, the Consultant, EV Consultant of the Netherlands, identified 2 public fast-charging stations near the Total Filling Stations located at Belle Vue and Tamarin.

Furthermore, the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development confirmed that charging facilities are currently available at these 2 filling stations.

Additionally, it is understood that owners of electric vehicles are making their own arrangements, including charges fitted at their place of residence or company premises for instance, the Rose Hill Transport Ltd., which is actually operating 2 electric buses at its own charging facilities in the compound of the company.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (c) of this question, I am further informed by the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities that on the basis of assumptions made by the EVConsult of the Netherlands, with 400 electric vehicles in base, year 2019, it is estimated that the number of electric vehicles would increase to 8,400 by 2025 and same is expected to reach 26,000 by 2030.

With a view to promoting the use of these vehicles, the Consultant has recommended the installation of 2,000, both public and semi-public, fast-chargers in 2025. These charges would accordingly be placed at strategic locations, including private properties like parking slots located at workplaces or hotels but available to the public. I am made to understand that consultations with relevant stakeholders are underway by the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities.

The following main institutions will be involved in this new developing market to cause the progressive rollout of the charging infrastructures over the coming years –

- Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning;
- Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management;
- Ministry of Land, Transport and Light Rail;
- Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, and
- Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. Will the Minister inform the House of further incentives beside Import Duty Relief his Ministry can offer to make these electric and hybrid vehicles more attractive to consumers in our attempt to decrease carbon dioxide emissions and fuel economy?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a good question. In fact, it is in line with Government Policy to shift towards cleaner energy and reduce carbon emissions. That provision was made in the 2019-2020 Budget for a study on the development of a 10-year electric vehicle integration roadmap up to year 2030 and this is why, therefore, my Ministry approached, I mean, the Government approached EV Consult of Netherlands in March 2019.

In the report, Mr Speaker, Sir, the following main assumptions were made in the study; that a total of 14,244 tonnes of CO² reduction is estimated over the period 2019 to 2030 if we make Mauritius amenable to a greater penetration of electric vehicles and we succeed in implementing our plan.

The Consultant has proposed a detailed action plan, as I just mentioned, for the period 2021 to 2026, in which several recommendations were made; I will not go through these recommendations. But to answer the question of the hon. Member, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of my abled friend, the Minister of Public Utilities, has proposed that an Implementation Committee be set up, in fact, to monitor the implementation of this Action Plan. This Implementation Committee is composed of different Ministries, agencies and stakeholders, including the private sector, and I suppose it is this Implementation Committee that will address the important issue which my hon. friend has raised.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. Picking up from the point raised by my colleague, about CO² emission and environment protection, is the hon. Minister aware that at this moment in time, electric vehicles, when charged with CEB sources of electricity, are

more polluting than conventional cars? There is a report attesting to that effect from *Agence française de développement* in 2009. So, picking up again from his question of incentives, can I ask the hon. Minister, whether incentives will also cover facilities like solar photovoltaic installation which will be meaningful in the sense that, at that point in time, there will be no dependency on the grid of the CEB?

Mr Ganoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are talking of a new and very complex issue and this is why I think the hon. Minister of Public Utilities was very wise in setting up this Implementation Committee which shall look at all these different and complex issues, including the point raised by the hon. Member, which I am quite aware. Let us leave it to the Implementation Committee to address all these pertinent, complex and interesting issues. Thank you.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Since we are talking of a very important issue, one of the major drawbacks of electric vehicles is the disposal of its batteries when the time comes - it is not now, it may be in five years or ten years; it contains hazardous items which have a high impact on environment. Can I ask the hon. Minister if the Implementation Committee has started to work on this issue so that when the time comes, we are already prepared how to dispose of these batteries?

Mr Ganoo: This is an interesting point also, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, the report is already on the website of the Ministry of Public Utilities. All Members interested with this issue should have a look at this report. The Consultant, as I just said, has proposed a detailed Action Plan for the years 2021 to 2026. He made certain recommendations and one of them was precisely a National Battery Plan.

So, you are right, a National Battery Plan should be developed and electric car importers should be required to guarantee battery for a minimum of eight years for hundred and fifty thousand kilometres for new vehicles and take back the battery for second life use or recycling. This tantamount to the answer raised by my hon. friend but, as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Implementation Committee will be sitting and, of course, we will delve further in all these problems raised by all Members in the House today.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that the following PQs are being withdrawn: B/431, B/432, B/433, B/434, B/435, B/436. Next question!

**PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTIONS - PCR RT TEST & RAPID ANTIGEN
TEST - MARCH 2020 TO 30.04.2021**

(No. B/409) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state -

- (a) the number of persons having undergone the PCR RT test and Rapid Antigen test, respectively, in public health institutions since March 2020 to 31 April 2021, on a monthly basis, and
- (b) if any laboratory has been subcontracted for quality assurance of the tests carried out at the Central laboratory in the Queen Victoria Hospital.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to part (a) of the question, with your permission, I am tabling the information in respect of the number of persons having undergone the PCR RT test and the Rapid Antigen test, respectively in the public health institutions since March 2020 to 30 April 2021, on a monthly basis.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that -

- (i) The Central Health Laboratory participated in inter laboratory comparison with National Institute of Communicable Diseases, South Africa. The Central Health Laboratory also participates in WHO External Quality Assessment (EQA) Program for detection of SARS-CoV-2 RT PCR through Public Health Laboratory Services, Hong Kong. So far, our results have been 100% concordant.
- (ii) As regards the other 3 laboratories, namely Airport Health Lab., Wellkin and Novalab, arrangements have been made by Central Health Laboratory to enrol these laboratories on an External Quality Assessment organised by Africa Centre for Disease Control, free of charge. The first consignment of External Quality Assessment samples has reached Mauritius and has been distributed to the laboratories.
- (iii) Besides International External Quality Assessment scheme, these laboratories participate in inter-laboratory comparisons exercises organised by the Central Health Laboratory.

- (iv) Moreover, all samples detected positive by them are systematically referred to the Central Health Laboratory for confirmation.
- (v) All these laboratories have been assessed by local audit inspectors, pending foreign team formal assessment in view of World Health Organisation accreditation, using World Health Organisation Laboratory Assessment Tool (LAT). Thank you.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. Unfortunately, I could not get the figure because you were tabling the result, which I will consult later. My understanding is that our percentage of mass testing for COVID-19 in the country ranges approximately between 24 to 28 %, which is still not the level which we would have expected to cover the whole population.

Mr Speaker: Is there any question you want to put?

Dr. Aumeer: Yes. Would the Minister consider having a greater number of COVID-19 testing facilities to encourage the population to get tested and not only when there is a red zone and when a red zone is being declared, and then, there is panic testing in that particular area?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, this question relates to the number of tests done. We should not forget that transmission of COVID-19 is through contact and what is more important other than testing is the sanitary precaution. Even if we get everybody tested at this point in time, there is no guarantee that the result will not be positive at a later stage, given that the incubation period is 14 days.

So, it is more important to put emphasis on precautions than doing testing. Obviously, the Ministry has already set up different COVID testing centres and devised a protocol for all those with fever, for all those having symptoms to do the test. And through this, I can tell you that since last year we have done, in Government institutions, 236,379 tests. I am going to table the list.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister inform the House about the cost implication for carrying out a PCR test in the public health institution?

Dr. Jagutpal: The cost of a PCR test in the Central Health Laboratory is Rs2,015. It is the same price that has been quoted since last year.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can we know the stock situation of PCR test kits, so far?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes. As at today, 18 May, the stock available at the Central Health Laboratory is 141,790 tests.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Dr. Aumeer: Can the Minister inform the House whether criteria, other than the number of positive tests or cases that we get on a daily basis from the National Communications Centre, are being used to consider whether the situation of pandemic in the country is under control or getting any worse, by which I mean either the 'R' value or the cycle threshold?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, this question about the positive test, I believe we all know the number of cases recorded and the public is being informed about the cases daily. So far, the number of cases we had at the beginning has gone down. When we have new clusters, the number of cases go up, and with measures that we have been taking, such as quarantine measures, and testing that have been done, all the positive cases have gone down. So, in this situation, we will have to keep on doing tests, and if the population at large and the public follow all the sanitary measures, definitely we will be able to control the situation better.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

HAJJ 2021 - ORGANISATION

(No. B/410) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the Hajj 2021, he will –

- (a) state if –
 - (i) his Ministry is in presence of any official correspondence from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as to the organisation thereof, and
 - (ii) Government is proposing to impose specific conditions pertaining thereto, and

- (b) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Islamic Cultural Centre, information as to the state of preparedness thereof in the event Mauritius is allocated a fixed number of visas therefor.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the first limb of part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry is not in the presence of any official correspondence from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as to the organisation of Hajj 2021.

In fact, on several occasions, namely 04 March, 25 March, 21 April, 10 May and 13 May 2021, my Ministry had liaised with the Embassy of the Republic of Mauritius in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as well as the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Mauritius, to obtain any latest developments, and my Ministry will continue to monitor the situation, and await any official correspondence from the Saudi authorities.

With regard to the second limb of part (a) of the question, as I have related before, in view of the fact that we do not have any official correspondence from the Saudi authorities, it will not be advisable for the Government to impose any specific conditions yet.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, same is a hypothetical question, and the hon. Member is pre-empting issues. As per Standing Order 22 - Contents of Questions - a question shall not contain hypothetical cases. However, I can reassure the House that my Ministry will continue to closely monitor the situation and should any decision be taken by the Saudi authorities, the Islamic Cultural Centre would be requested to act accordingly.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. Preparedness is an art. The Hajj grant is being allocated every year to the Islamic Cultural Centre to the amount of Rs1.2 m. to Rs1.4 m., which was not disbursed last year. And as you said hypothetically, maybe this year it will not happen again. Can the Minister give us an insight of how this money will be used for the future by the Islamic Cultural Centre?

Mr Teeluck: I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir. What money is the hon. Member referring to?

Dr. Aumeer: Hajj grant.

Mr Teeluck: Hajj grant?

Dr. Aumeer: Yes, it was not used last year because there was no Hajj and this year probably again; this money has to be used by the ICC. It is earmarked for their funds.

Mr Teeluck: I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir, I ...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Aumeer: I know exactly what I am talking about!

Mr Teeluck: I might as well! Mr Speaker Sir, I do not have this information right now. So, I will come back to you if need be.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Uteem: Thank you. Being given there is only two and a half months left before the beginning of Hajj, and the ICC is statutorily mandated by law to organise Hajj, does not the hon. Minister think that it is for the ICC itself to take the initiative, through the Ministry concerned, and contact the Saudi Authorities to find out whether the Hajj would be organised? Because it will be organised. This is the agency that has the statutory duty to ensure that it is organised properly with Mauritius, instead of waiting for the Saudi Authorities to get back to us.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, the ICC is in contact with the Saudi Authorities as well as the Ministry. So, as I said, we do not have any official correspondence at this stage, but there is a close monitoring being done to ensure that as soon as we have any communication from the Saudi Authorities, things are done in the manner it has to.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

ISRAEL ATTACKS AGAINST PALESTINE – DIPLOMATIC TIES

(No. B/411) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to Israel, he will state if, following the recent attacks by the forces thereof against the Palestinians at the Al Aqsa Mosque, he will consider the termination of the appointment of the Consul General thereof and to recommend to Government to sever all diplomatic ties therewith.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to recall that tension between Israel and Palestine had escalated during the last weeks. Palestinians had, over the past weeks, staged a series of sit-ins in the area of East Jerusalem to denounce Israel's attempt to forcefully expel residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood to make way for Jewish settlement.

After the breaking of the daily Ramadan fast on 07 May, thousands of young Palestinians protested near the hill top surrounding Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Israel police fired rubber bullets and stun grenades to disperse the crowds. Militant groups in Gaza then fired rockets into Israel and the latter retaliated through airstrikes against supposedly “military targets”. More than 300 Palestinians were injured and the death toll amounted to at least 212.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has, on 12 May 2021, issued a Press release calling on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and to urgently put an end to the violence and civilian casualties. We have also expressed our deepest sympathy with all the victims of the violence, as well as our concern on the bombardments. Moreover, we have reiterated that Mauritius supports the two-state solution with Israel and Palestine existing side by side and we have called for renewed international efforts to find a just and lasting solution to the long-standing conflict in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The International Community has expressed concern and is working towards ending the carnage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Secretary General of the UN has described the hostilities as utterly appalling, and called for a return to negotiations, with the goal of a two-state solution with Jerusalem as capital of both States based on UN resolutions International Law and prior agreements. China, as Chair of the month, of the UN Security Council, has called for a ceasefire as a priority, and reiterated its support for a two-state solution. I wish also to inform the House that while the tone and contents of official reactions of some of the Middle East and other Arab countries may have been strong. None of those who have established diplomatic relations with Israel have called for or announced the severing of these relations. In fact, the diplomatic channels are being used for mediation.

My Ministry is following the situation closely and is focusing on the most important aspect, that is, the need to stop the spiral of deadly violence. Emotional declarations and actions can only add to confrontational and destructive mindset. This is a time for diplomatic action at both multilateral and bilateral levels. Mauritius maintains diplomatic relations with both the State of Israel and the State of Palestine and both States have accredited Ambassadors to Mauritius. We support the mediation efforts to end the violence. All parties must be encouraged to calm down and use self-restraint. Nothing should be done to encourage violence in this unfortunate longstanding issue.

With respect to the second part of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned earlier, we are monitoring the situation, and, at this stage, we do not propose to take any action to terminate the appointment of the Honorary Consul of Israel. I should further remind that the function of an Honorary Consul is not of a political nature. At a time where communications are especially difficult because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Honorary Consuls are particularly valuable in the discharge of our responsibility to assist both our nationals and nationals of other countries. Mr Speaker, Sir, the position of Mauritius has been constant with regard to the Palestinian issue at the multilateral levels, both at the UN and the EU.

I seize this opportunity to reiterate and express, once again, our solidarity with the Palestinian people in their legitimate aspiration to live in an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State as we support a two-State solution with Israel and Palestine existing side-by-side.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, I think the hon. Minister is ill-informed because he has said that non-Arab countries have taken sanctions against Israel, but, in fact, the Emir of Qatar has already expelled the Israeli Ambassador to his country. So, I wish to put him on record, maybe he can go and check with his Officers later. The fact that Mauritius will not terminate the appointment of the Consul General of Israel, and not to cut any diplomatic ties with Israel, can I ask the hon. Minister whether it has to do with the deals the Government has negotiated with ECI Telecom of Israel which has benefited a Rs200 m. contract from CEB FiberNET to enhance the Government's capability to control the Internet which Israelis are real masters at doing?

Mr Ganoo: This has nothing to do with the statement made by the hon. Member, Mr Speaker, Sir. I just said that in spite of the strong tones and official reactions of many countries of the Middle East and many other Arab countries, none of them who has established relations with Israel, has announced the severing of these relations. So, we are doing the same.

Mr Osman Mahomed: The Press release that the hon. Minister has referred to, issued last week, does not address the issue of attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque at all, which is in the question. Notwithstanding the several UN resolutions to which Mauritius is signatory of, that protects the sanctity of places of worship – and, in fact, the mosque is located in that area - can I ask the hon. Minister whether he has vetted this communiqué or was it left to the

care of the Officers of the Ministry because when one reads through this communiqué, one gets the impression that the Palestinians are also to be blamed for protesting against the injustice that they are being subjected to?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my statement today, I have made mention of the young Palestinians protesting and the attacks which have been suffered on the mosque today. In my statement, it is clear.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ B/437 has been withdrawn. Next question!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can I have one more question, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Mr Speaker: Next question!

DOMAINE LE HOCHET HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, TERRE ROUGE – HOUSING UNITS

(No. B/412) **Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Domaine Le Hochet Housing Development Project at Terre Rouge, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Housing Co. Ltd., information as to the –

- (a) start and completion dates thereof;
- (b) value of the capital investment made;
- (c) number of housing units thereof sold and unsold, if any, respectively, and
- (d) selling price of the housing units.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC VIRUS - INDIAN & SOUTH AFRICAN VARIANTS

(No. B/413) **Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Indian and South African variants of the Covid-19 pandemic virus, he will give details on the state of preparedness of the Republic of Mauritius in relation thereto.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the South-African and the Indian variants are the 2 variants among the 4.000 plus known variants of the SARS-CoV 2 virus.

The World Health Organisation has classified these two respective variants as variants of concern. WHO classifies variants as variants of concern whenever the transmissibility and/or severity, and/or risk of reinfection, and/or the response of the new variants to antibodies is compromised. In fact, these 2 variants have mutation on the spike protein. The spike protein being –

- the protein that allows the virus to attach itself to the human cell, a mutation which facilitates the virus to enter the human cell.
- the protein through which the major neutralising antibodies react to combat the virus.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the South-African variant, available data from several studies carried out have often given contradictory results.

However, although it seems certain that the South-African variant is more contagious, the figures relating to the contagiousness however differ from study to study. The South-African variant, once more, according to available studies, does not seem to cause more severe forms of infection. Regarding possible reinfections after an initial infection from the historical strain of the virus, various studies have shown that this remains possible.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the Indian variant, available data are much more scarce. The combination of 2 already known mutations, which are, however, not associated as at now (this is why the variant has been inappropriately referred to as double variant), might confer to the B.1.617 variant an enhanced transmissibility, but this has yet to be proven on the epidemiological level. WHO believes that the available data should be interpreted with caution as only some 0.1% of positive samples in India have been registered and sequenced on the GISAID platform (Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data).

The South-African and the Indian variants are detected through the RT-PCR tests in Mauritius; the quarantine period of 14 days is imposed on every incoming passenger. They undergo three PCR tests on day 0, day 7 and day 14 respectively in their quarantine period. Subject to a negative PCR test, the person is allowed to leave for his/her place of residence and to self-isolate for a period of 7 days following which the PCR test is carried out.

Mr Speaker, Sir, finally, as at date, the period of incubation of both the South-African and Indian variants, correspond to that applied to the other forms of the virus. The preparedness plan does not contain any particular sub-chapter on those variants because as

explained earlier, infection from these variants do not necessitate a quarantine period which is different from infections with the historical strain of the virus. The clinical management and treatment are also identical.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it can, therefore, be concluded that all the measures listed under the preparedness plan are adequate and meet the set objectives of containing the disease.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. As a matter of fact, basing myself on reply given earlier in PQ B/407, I could ascertain that South-African variants have been detected, but insofar as Indian variants, the Minister has said nil and that he was awaiting for further sequential results. Can I ask from him when do we expect to receive the results from these sequential testing?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, earlier I stated that the tests are being sent to South Africa and UK and we are obviously waiting for the results. Now, once the results will be made available, the Ministry is going to communicate the details of the results.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Insofar as the next generation sequencing equipment acquired to the tune of Rs6.5 m. and all the reagents, as well as the online training that is being provided to the staff of the Ministry and to which full commissioning will occur in July this year, can I ask the hon. Minister whether this set-up will enable officers of his Ministry to detect the variants raised in my question?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, this is the reason why we have purchased the equipment for sequencing, we are doing the trainingg and purchasing the reagents also. It's only to detect the variants, to do the sequencing of the local cases and come up with the type of variants present in the local cases.

Mr Speaker: Hon Juman!

Mr Juman: Hon. Minister, can you inform the House by when we can expect the result of the Indian variant?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have sent the samples. We can't say that this is an Indian variant or South African variant, but once the results will be available, it will be available to the Ministry, we will communicate the sequencing results.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

CUREPIPE – STREET LIGHTING

(No. B/414) 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 street lighting in Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Curepipe, information as to why the damaged lamps on the poles thereat are not being replaced since the past two months.

(Withdrawn)

SC & HSC EXAMINATIONS - GRADES

(No. B/415) 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 cancellation of the examinations of the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate scheduled to be held on 28 April 2021, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Examination Syndicate, information as to how special consideration will be applied in the calculation of the final grades in respect of each of the subjects concerned therewith.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, according to established protocol, all educational institutions remain closed whenever the issue of a torrential rain warning by the Mauritius Meteorological Services is issued.

In this regard, when the torrential rain alert was issued on 27 April 2021 at 16.30 hours with flooding and water accumulation are expected across the island and the suspension of the public transportation on 28 April 2021, it was announced that the SC and HSC Examinations scheduled for that day would not be held. Cambridge Assessment International Examinations was immediately informed of the prevailing situation whereby candidates would not be able to sit for the papers scheduled on 28 April 2021.

The papers scheduled on that day were English Language, German and Arabic for the School Certificate Examination and Design and Textiles, Design and Technology, Hindi, Hindi Literature, Urdu, Marathi Tamil and Telugu and Chinese for the Higher School Certificate. Cambridge Assessment International Examinations informed the MES that it has an established mechanism whereby special considerations apply in some exceptional and adverse circumstances.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the special consideration is a post-exam adjustment which Cambridge International Examinations makes to a candidate's mark if the candidate misses one or more papers in a given subject, provided he has taken at least one paper in that subject. The reasons for this special consideration can be varied –

- illness;
- temporary injury;
- disruption of an examination as a result of a pandemic;
- cyclonic weather;
- earthquakes etc.

In case a candidate is absent from a paper, Cambridge International Examinations will calculate and give an assessed mark for the missing paper, based on the candidates performance in the remaining papers in that subject and on the performance of all other CIE candidates worldwide in the same papers.

For example, for the case of English Language whereby there are two Papers, given that all candidates of Mauritius have missed Paper One on 28 April, the performance of the candidates in the subject would be based on the marks scored in Paper Two and the performance of all candidates worldwide in these same papers.

It is worth pointing out that the special considerations could not be applied for the Hindi Literature paper, advanced subsidiary level, as it is the only paper for that subject. The paper was rescheduled for 14 May 2021.

For the Design and Technology paper, IY, which is a carried forward option, Cambridge International has informed the MES that, as per their regulations, a calculated assessment cannot be effected, based on course works submitted by candidates in another exam series, that is, in October/November 2019. The paper was rescheduled on 12 May 2021 and all the candidates took the paper.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Cambridge International has reassured the MES that candidates will be treated in all fairness as per their established procedures.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. In the past, whenever a student is not happy with his/her SC or HSC results, they normally go for remarking etc. What will happen in this case now?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, whenever a student feels that he is not satisfied with his marks, he has always the possibility of asking for a remarking.

SCHOOL CALENDAR – REVERT TO ORIGINAL CALENDER

(No. B/416) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie and Poudre d’Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the school calendar, she will state if consideration is being given to revert to the original one as against the one adopted in June 2020 amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to both PQs B/416 and B/450 together as they relate to the same subject.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic all schools were closed last year for a period of nearly three months from mid-March to the end of June 2020. While we did successfully switch to an alternative remote mode of learning, it was inevitable that the suspension of the face-to-face instruction in schools during that period would have consequences on the teaching and learning process. It also led to an uneven coverage of the curriculum in our various schools.

Furthermore, it could not be assumed that students would immediately begin to recover missed learning. We, therefore, needed to make sure that at the time of the reopening of the schools in July 2020, all students be given time to reconnect with their studies. We also needed to ensure that the whole syllabus was covered for all students in all grades, particularly for those sitting for the international examinations. In the light of all these considerations, the school calendar was revised and extended by three months to make up for the learning loss.

In parallel, National Assessments and International Examinations were also rescheduled. Accordingly, the resumption of studies was scheduled in June 2021. Briefing sessions were held with all stakeholders at that point in time, namely in June 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to reiterate that the change in school calendar was brought about in an exceptional, unforeseeable and unprecedented, circumstance of prolonged school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The hon. Member will recognise that any change in school calendar is always a difficult undertaking. And reverting to the previous one would be

fraught with a number of implications, ranging from prolonged grade retention, subsequent delayed entry in the higher studies and rescheduling of international examinations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with this in mind and specially in the best interests of learners, it is not envisaged at this stage to revert to the original school calendar as it will entail accumulative stretch of school time by almost one year considering that the academic year was already stretched earlier.

Dr. Gungapersad: Will the hon. Minister receive stakeholders who are willing to help you, your Ministry to revert back to the initial school calendar because they have proposals which are very insightful and can be helpful for the future change of the school calendar?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: *Mr Speaker, Sir*, je dois vous dire que ce n'est pas de gaieté de cœur qu'on a changé le calendrier scolaire. Ça a été fait dans l'intérêt primaire des jeunes. Il faut se rendre compte que les enfants ont été à l'école pendant une durée de 18 mois et que repousser les examens pour novembre/décembre de l'année prochaine, ce sera vraiment pénible pour eux, et demander aux élèves qui sont en *Lower VI* cette année-ci de prendre les examens à la fin de cette année en novembre serait aussi pénible. Alors, pour nous, c'est clair que la décision qui a été prise a été dans l'intérêt primaire des enfants. Nous allons, bien sûr, nous assurer que les enfants ne soient pas pénalisés en aucune façon. Bien sûr, que les *stakeholders* sont toujours libres à venir vers nous avec des propositions. Mais les décisions que nous avons prises ont été dans l'intérêt des élèves parce que vous réalisez aujourd'hui, M. le président, que les élèves ont été dans le même grade, dans la même classe pendant 18 mois. Et si nous voulons les aider, c'est de s'assurer qu'ils puissent faire l'évaluation, prendre les examens le plus tôt possible. Repousser vers novembre de l'année prochaine voudrait dire ajouter six mois de plus sur leur année scolaire. De toutes les façons, demander à ces élèves de prendre les examens aussi à la fin de cette année-ci voudrait dire leur demander d'aller prendre les examens sans avoir complété le curriculum, le syllabus.

M. le président, les *stakeholders* sont toujours *welcome* à venir vers nous avec des idées, mais nous avons pris les décisions en gardant au centre de notre action l'intérêt primaire des étudiants.

Merci, M. le président.

Dr. Gungapersad: The solutions proposed by stakeholders are not for this year; they are short-term solutions. They may take a few years; that is what they have been suggesting.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what I said earlier; that, at this stage, we do not plan any reverting, but we are going to ensure that all students are properly treated and that no one is adversely affected by decisions taken by the Ministry. So, we are going to help and, in due time, we are going to see whether it is possible or not to revert back.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

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

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun) seconded.

Question put and agreed to

(4.32 p.m.)

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

LA TOUR KOENIG – ANDREANUM STREET – ATMOSPHERIC POLLUTION

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to make the following Statement.

At the Sitting of the Assembly on 11 May 2021, the hon. David, First Member of GRNW & Port Louis West, raised an issue regarding alleged atmospheric pollution in the region of La Tour Koenig, particularly in the vicinity of the Michael Leal Community Dispensary, Andreanum Street.

I am informed that regular ambient air monitoring exercise is being carried out by the National Environmental Laboratory (NEL) of my Ministry since 2009 in the region of La Tour Koenig.

I am further informed that, last year, two ambient air monitoring exercises were carried out in the region of Pointe aux Sables at *Morcellement* La Tourelle during the period of 11 June to 02 July 2020 and at *Morcellement* Rey during the period of 24 September to 15 October 2020. Moreover, from 10 February to 03 March 2021, another follow-up ambient air

monitoring exercise was conducted at the University of Technology at La Tour Koenig, which is located about three hundred meters from the Michael Leal Health Dispensary.

As per the International Standards as well as the Environment Protection Act 2002, the ambient air parameters that are mentioned and monitored comprise Particulate Matter, Sulphur Dioxide, Nitrogen Dioxide and Carbon Monoxide. The parameters that were monitored for the above regions were Dust, known as Particulate Matter of size less of or equal to 10 microns, Nitrogen Dioxide, Sulphur Dioxide and Carbon Monoxide. Most of the time, the predominant contaminants in the region were Particulate Matter and Sulphur Dioxide. The presence of these contaminants arises mainly from industrial activities in the region and the concentrations of these pollutants, in fact, at times did exceed limits prescribed in the Air Standards under the Environment Protection Act 2002.

However, I am informed that the last ambient air quality monitoring exercise carried out from 10 February to 03 March 2021 in the regions of La Tour Koenig and Pointe aux Sables revealed that the 24-hour average values for Nitrogen Dioxide ranged from 2.39 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ to 19.56 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, that is, well below the prescribed limit of 200 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ as per Mauritian Standards for Ambient Air Quality under the Environment Protection Act.

Based on the survey results, actions have been taken by my Ministry against potential industries that are causing air pollution in the region. According to records, eight factories equipped with fixed combustion have been granted either an EIA Licence or a Preliminary Environment Report (PER) Approval in the region of Pointe aux Sables and La Tour Koenig. Four out of the eight industries are required, under their EIA Licence/PER Approval, to undertake stack monitoring of their chimney and to submit results to my Ministry. In addition to the EIA/PER mechanism, listed industrial activities are required to carry out industrial waste audit and submit an Environment Management Plan in line with the Environment Protection (Industrial Waste Audit) Regulations 2008. The Environment Management Plan also includes measures for monitoring and abatement of air emissions. Accordingly, the concerned industries are required to submit relevant progress reports to the Ministry at the prescribed intervals for review. The latest stack monitoring results submitted by the concerned industries demonstrated compliance with the Environment Protection (Standards for air) Regulations 1998.

I wish to inform that following complaints received, officers of my Ministry have also undertaken a site monitoring adjoining Michael Leal Health Centre on 13 May 2021,

particularly at the Royal Road, and at Andreanum, Hibiscus and Montagne Jacquot Streets. No environmental nuisance or air pollutants such as Sulphur Dioxide, Nitrogen Dioxide, Nitrogen Oxide, Carbon Monoxide and Volatile Organic Compounds (Benzene and Toluene) were detected through the portable gas analyser. An additional site monitoring was undertaken in the region of La Tour Koenig on 17 May 2021 and no environmental nuisance in terms of emissions of black smoke or odour was reported.

Nevertheless, my Ministry will maintain monitoring of industries in the region of La Tour Koenig and Pointe aux Sables. Regular ambient air monitoring and site inspections will be conducted and more frequent stack monitoring results will be sought from industries. This will ensure that any deviation from standards are promptly identified and that necessary enforcement actions are initiated in line with provisions laid down in the Environment Protection Act.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

THE MAURITIUS EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES COUNCIL BILL

(NO. VIII OF 2021)

On motion made and seconded, the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council Bill (No. VIII of 2021) was read a first time.

Second Reading

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL

(NO. VII OF 2021)

Order for Second Reading read.

(4.39 p.m.)

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2021) be read a second time.

The purpose of introducing the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2021) is to amend the principal Act to provide for the life of 6 years of the entire Municipal City Council and the Municipal Town Council, or the entire Village Councils, to be extended from time to

time by not more than one year at a time, provided that the life of the Councils shall not be extended for more than 2 years when –

- there is, or there is likely to be, an epidemic of a communicable disease in Mauritius, and
- a quarantine period is in force in Mauritius.

The Bill also provides that, in such circumstances where the life of the Council is extended, to consequentially extend the term of the Office of –

- (i) every Councillor, including District Councillor, until the day preceding the nomination day of the local election;
- (ii) every member of the Executive Committee of the Council until the day preceding the nomination day of the local election;
- (iii) the Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons of District Councils and Village Councils of all the Municipal Councils, District Councils and Village Councils until their successors are elected after the next local election.

The Bill also provides for fixing of a period for the issue of writs for the general election.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before proceeding any further, I wish to make an amendment at Clause 6 in the proposed Section 12 (A) as circulated and which I am going to move at Committee Stage.

Accordingly, a period of emergency will not be a situation which would trigger the extension of the life of Councils. Why, Mr Speaker, Sir? This is more indicative of the genuine intention of Government, as well as meant to give further reassurance to the House as to the primary objectives of this Bill. Now the amendments will be only limited to situations of an epidemic or when a quarantine is in force in the Republic of Mauritius.

Initially, it was thought appropriate to include a period of emergency in the proposals so as to circumscribe all possible circumstances in which the holding of the local elections would have to be postponed. However, the definition of an emergency situation is broader. Our main purpose today is to address a particular state of affairs, that is, the pandemic and for which we have to muster all our efforts to combat collectively. Therefore, the Bill which is before the House today is focused and straightforward as to its intent and purpose.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the existing Section 12A of the Local Government Act which concerns the “Transitional provisions until next general election of Village Councils to be held in 2020” was introduced in 2018 to provide for general election of the Village Councils

to be held in 2020 as well as consequential provisions for the proper running of the Village and District the Councils. As we are all aware, the general elections of Village Councils were effectively held within the framework of the Act in November 2020 and, therefore, it has already served its purpose and the transitional provision at Section 12A is now being repealed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for Village Council Elections, at the material time last year, the country was not in a situation of partial confinement and nor was there any case of COVID-19 in the local community and Mauritius was then considered to be COVID safe. The then prevailing sanitary conditions were deemed to be suitable for the holding of the general election of the Village Councils. Thus, Government upheld the organisation of polls despite criticisms from various quarters. We are all aware that, holding of regular free and fair elections is an essential feature of democratic practices which is deeply entrenched in our Constitution. We did firmly demonstrate our strong commitment, as a reliable Government to respect the democratic process.

This Government has and will always uphold the underlying principle of the Rule of Law, which is one of the fundamental tenets of the Constitution of Mauritius. It safeguards the civil and political rights of its citizens, including free and fair elections. This has, over the years, contributed significantly to the political stability and economic growth of our country. We are not going to depart from this principle. On behalf of the Government, I can assure our fellow citizens that we will never attempt to restrict their rights nor limit their freedom. We should, however, bear in mind that our objective is also to preserve the wellbeing and safety of our population, especially during these challenging and tough times and we will not, in any circumstances, flout our responsibilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Professor Stanley De Smith, the father of our Constitution, dedicated much effort in the preparation of our Constitution to ensure the stability of our nation. Nevertheless, he also enshrined exceptions in certain circumstances which are, *inter alia*, “public health and public safety” to protect the community at large. However, these powers are not being used abusively or in an anti-democratic way by this Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is within this perspective that Government is coming forward with this Bill. We are not the only country which has taken such a decision. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), from 21 February 2020 until 09 May 2021, around 78 countries and territories across the world have postponed national and subnational elections due to COVID-19. So, what we are doing now in Mauritius is not an exception.

The general elections for the Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils were last held in May 2015 and in accordance with Section 11 of the Local Government Act, they are due this year.

However, the COVID-19 situation is not the same as October and November last year. We are now facing a situation of partial confinement whereby there is a restriction on public gatherings (not more than 10 persons at a time).

As a responsible Government, we are doing our utmost to avoid a resurgence of COVID-19 in the community. We have seen how some countries are facing dramatic situations in dealing with the second and third wave of this pandemic. Some of them are even facing catastrophic crises with their health services being stretched beyond capacity and their socio-economic structures devastated.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, bearing in mind the prevailing situation in various countries of the world, this Government is not prepared to put this country and our population at risk with a Super spreader event when our economy has already been severely shaken by the consequences of this pandemic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have no other alternative than to take bold measures in the best interests of the nation at large. The Bill makes new provision for the extension of the life of the Councils solely in situations of an epidemic of a communicable disease or a quarantine period is in force in the country. In this respect -

- “communicable disease” has the same meaning as in the Quarantine Act 2020,
- and
- “quarantine period” has the same meaning as in the Quarantine Act 2020.

The aim of the Government is not to delay the holding of the polls indefinitely, not at all, Mr Speaker, Sir. The proposals are for bringing specific extensions to the life of the Councils for short periods of time, not for more than one year at a time and for a maximum of two years. This maximum period of two years is considered reasonable as, at this juncture, even experts in the field do not have any visibility as to when we will manage to control this unprecedented pandemic and we will return to normalcy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, although the Bill makes provision for a maximum period of extension of two years, this Government, to repeat myself, always adheres to the fundamental principle of good governance and respect of our values and traditions and undertakes to hold this election within a shorter period as soon as the conditions allow.

In the Bill, a new provision is now being made at Section 10A to re-establish the life of the Councils to six years, unless sooner dissolved and in case of an extension for the

Councils to continue for the period of the extension and then stand dissolved, unless sooner dissolved.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Local Government Act currently does not prescribe a time limit for the President to issue writs of election after the dissolution of the entire Municipal City Council, Municipal Town Councils or the entire Village Councils.

Accordingly, the present Bill is addressing this issue by amending Sections 11 and 12 so as to provide for writs of election to be issued by the President, for the general elections of Councillors to the entire Municipal City Council, the Municipal Town Councils and the Village Councils, within 60 days of the date of any dissolution of the former Municipal City Council, Municipal Town Councils and the Village Councils. This section is being aligned with the corresponding sections of the Representation of the People Act with regard to the issue of writs of elections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a new section 12A is being introduced and it makes provision for the extension of the time for holding of the general election in this exceptional circumstance. The Bill thus provides for the extension of the life of 6 years of the entire Municipal City Council and the Municipal Town Council and the entire Village Council.

Consequently, the term of office of the councillors are being extended as follows –

- (a) every member of the council, including a District Councillor, other than the Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor, Mayors and Deputy Mayors, the Chairpersons and Vice-chairpersons of District Councils and Village Councils, shall continue to serve as such until the day preceding nomination day at the next general election of the entire Councils;
- (b) the Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor, Mayors and Deputy Mayors, and Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of District Councils and Village Councils, shall continue to serve as such until their successors are elected after the next general election of the entire Councils; and
- (c) every member of the Executive Committee of a Municipal City Council, Municipal Town Council and District Council shall continue to serve as such until the day preceding the nomination day at the next general election of the entire Councils.

Further amendments which are incidental to the Local Government Act has also to be made in regard to –

- 1) firstly, filling in the vacant seat where a vacancy arises in accordance with the existing provision under section 42 and for that person to also hold office until the day preceding the nomination day at the next general election of that entire Municipal City Councils, Municipal Town Councils and the entire Village Councils, as the case may be;
- 2) secondly, filling a vacancy in the office of a District Councillor, by an election, which shall be held within 15 days of the occurrence of the vacancy by the Village Council concerned and conducted in the manner provided in section 13 and for that person to hold office until the day preceding nomination day at the next general election of the entire Village Councils;
- 3) thirdly, filling a vacancy in the office of the Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor, the Mayors and Deputy Mayors, the Chairperson and Vice-chairperson of District Councils and Village Councils by an election to be held within 15 days of the occurrence of the vacancy and conducted in the manner provided in section 34 and for the person to hold office until his successor is elected after the next general election of the entire Municipal City Council, Municipal Town Councils and the entire Village Councils, as the case may be.

Mr Speaker, Sir, an amendment is further being made to section 48 of the principal Act by adding the following new subsection for the Executive Committee of a Municipal City Council, Municipal Town Council and District Council to serve as such until the day preceding the nomination day at the next general election of the entire Council and the Municipal Town Councils, and the entire Village Councils, as the case may be.

The Section 115(4) of the principle Act is also a consequential one inserting, after the word “sections”, the words “12A(2)(a)”, so as to allow business continuity at the level of the Councils, particularly with respect to the consideration of applications for Building and Land Use Permits.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the final amendment concerns section 117 subsection (11) of the principal Act, so as to include the new provisions with a view to eliminating the risks of ‘silent agreement’ for cases of application of Building and Land Use Permits.

This will arise when the deadline for any application falls on or after the date on which a new Permits and Business Monitoring Committee is constituted after the general

election of an entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils, and the entire Village Councils, as the case may be.

A new 14-day period for general application or a 3-day period specifically for Micro and Small Enterprises would commence on the day the new Permits and Business Monitoring Committee is constituted.

I wish to reassure the House and the population at large, that this major initiative of the Government to bring about amendments to these specific provisions of the Local Government Act has not been prompted by any political motive whatsoever and there is no hidden agenda attached thereto. It is only the prevailing unprecedented sanitary conditions that have dictated our action.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I once again reassure the House that the decision of the Government to amend the Local Amendment Act is purely and exclusively motivated to safeguard the health, welfare and safety of the population.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I commend the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2021) to the House.

Mr Speaker: Is that seconded?

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Mr Speaker: So, at this stage, I will suspend the Sitting for 45 minutes.

At 4.57 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.48 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I was so surprised.

ANNOUNCEMENT

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL (NO. VII OF 2021) – DEBATES RESTRICTED TO AMENDMENTS

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, some housekeeping announcement. I wish to draw the attention of hon. Members that this Bill is an amendment Bill and according to the Rule of debate on relevancy - debate must be restricted to the amendments only.

Hon. Members may be oblivious to that fact when they open the debate on the provisions of the main Act, they are in fact opening the debate and subjecting the Act of Parliament, which is not before the House and which has already been the subject of debate.

I make an appeal to hon. Members to kindly restrict their observations to the provisions which are the subject matter of the debate before the House.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mr X. L. Duval!

(5.49 p.m.)

The hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened quite attentively to what the Minister had to say. I have, myself, several important things I want to say. I will stick, of course, to the Amendment Bill.

Now, it is a fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, that on this side of the House, we all earnestly and dearly want to have these municipal elections, as quickly as possible. That is an undeniable fact, at least, on this side of the House. But, I think we accept here, that there is a health emergency, that Mauritius is not COVID-free and neither is it COVID-safe, as once was bragged around.

Now, on the second wave of the COVID-19 this year, there have been 670 positive cases in the last 18 days that is, in May itself, there have been 76 positive cases, all these cases are local cases. So, it is undeniable, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we are in the throes of a second wave.

Now, whilst we are true democrats, whilst, on this side of the House, as I say, we believe strongly in local democracy, whilst we understand that democracy has little meaning, if the period of elections are excessively long, 6 years, 8 years, it makes a mockery of elections. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, we fully understand the importance of properly functioning local authorities. Important activities that the local authorities do and which go a long way or not, or otherwise can be also a poison for the quality of life but, ideally local authorities should be there and are an important vector for improving the quality of life of citizens, improving the local environment, take care of the drainage, when God knows that there are

huge issues with drainage all around the country, not just in the towns, with these heavy rains, deliver promptly permits, etc. and create generally a pleasant living environment for everyone. So, we fully understand this and the importance also, Mr Speaker, Sir, that for these local authorities to be able to function properly, there should be electoral oversight. There should be elections and there should be frequent elections, which will allow people to exercise a choice and also for Municipal Counselors to know that they are not staying there forever.

So, we understand the need for a proper local authority functioning properly. As I said before, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is an alarming number of cases of COVID-19 around in the country. I think the paper put it last week, one case every four hours. And if we want to have a proper election campaign, we will need to organise *réunions nocturnes*, we need to go door-to-door, we need to talk to people and it is not advisable to do so and it will give the wrong message, give the wrong example to the population. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, we agree on the need to postpone the Municipal Elections.

The question, therefore, is not whether there is a need to postpone Municipal Elections, the question is rather: when should the Municipal Elections be held? That is where the problem lies, Mr Speaker, Sir, because as we saw, the Village Elections were held during the quarantine period itself. The borders were closed except for people who wanted to come and stay the two weeks in quarantine, but we were, therefore, in a quarantine period. So, this amendment that is being brought today, Mr Speaker, Sir, has one substantial lacuna for which I am going to propose, at Committee Stage, an amendment, for which, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have circulated an amendment. The question, therefore, is not whether or not to postpone, the question is: when should the Municipal Elections be held?

Now, I am, like the previous orator, unable to say when it will be possible, sanitary-wise to hold elections. I can't say whether it will be in a month's time, in two months' time, three months' time whatever. But we obviously hope that there will be some success in the campaign of Government to hold back COVID-19 and fight COVID-19. We hope that they are not telling us that they will be so unsuccessful in their campaign to fight COVID-19 that we are actually having to wait one year or two years or they will be so unsuccessful in obtaining the vaccines, that they have not obtained up to now, that in fact, the vaccines will only come in 12 months or 24 months as they never followed the advice of the Opposition in pre-ordering vaccines. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, we cannot say that enough, remind the hon. Minister and the Government of their negligence in that respect. So, unless the Government is

going to tell us that it is actually going to take them up to two years to fight COVID-19, we believe therefore, that the Municipal Elections should be held as quickly as possible.

Now, the amendment that is proposed does provide for the *bon vouloir du Premier ministre* to, at a time that suits him, call the Municipal Elections earlier than the one year or two years for which it is being postponed. Now, you remember, Mr Speaker, Sir, the V-Dem Report, which has told us, in fact, that Mauritius is no longer a democracy, Mauritius is an autocracy. And by that, it meant that power rests solely or substantially in the hands of one person and here, again, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a Local Government (Amendment) Bill, which is being brought by the Minister for Local Government but it is the Prime Minister who will decide, *d'après son bon vouloir*, if the elections should be held earlier than the one year or two years provided for in this amendment for the postponement of such elections.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, what I am going to propose is an amendment which makes a lot of sense and which will, in fact, - I read it, if I may, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is how it goes - in Clause 3 in the proposed new section 10A, by deleting subsection 3 and replacing it by the following subsection 3 -

“Notwithstanding this section the Prime Minister shall, as soon as sanitary conditions allow, advise the President to dissolve the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils and the entire Village Councils, (...) for the holding of general elections.”

In fact, this imposes the requirement on the Prime Minister to organise elections as soon as the sanitary conditions allow. Let us imagine what that could be. Let us imagine we were in November 2020 for the Village Council Elections, our borders were closed but there were no active local cases and so we were able to hold Village Council Elections. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have always been the proponent of a traffic light system for the quarantine period, meaning that when there are, as now, many local cases, we would be on a Red Zone and at a time when there were few or no local cases, we would perhaps come to a Yellow Zone or maybe even a Blue Zone, we don't know. So, Mr, Speaker, Sir, what I am saying is that the population during a quarantine period ought to be given stages of danger, same as would be the situation, for instance, when a cyclone is about to come in Mauritius. So, I will not be too long on this issue, all I am going to say, therefore is that I believe that with certain conditions playing in our favour, we could even though there may be a quarantine period,

hold Municipal Elections quite easily as we held Village Elections. And it is for that reason that I am proposing this amendment, which I will propose at Committee Stage to impose a requirement that, as soon as sanitary conditions allow, the Prime Minister should organise for Municipal elections to be held. I think that can only be welcomed after listening to the Minister concerned, who said that it was not his intention to attack democracy, if that is the right word, then that should be welcomed by the Government because that puts clarity in the whole situation and informs the whole population that we are not using, no one is using, the Government is not using COVID as an excuse for postponing the election. And it is, in fact, only the sanitary condition that is the situation. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, that is what I wanted to say on that issue. We cannot leave it to the whim and fancy of anyone as far as holding of elections is concerned.

Now, the other issue that I wanted to speak about, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the fact that I can see as proposed by the hon. Minister that Lord Mayors, Mayors and Deputy Mayors will continue in their posts. Their mandate will be automatically renewed. I do not agree with that, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think they have done their two years, most of them, and there should be an occasion for other councillors to prove themselves as Mayors, as Deputy Mayors, Lord Mayors and as members of the Executive Committees, etc.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, whilst – as I said, I do not mind the postponement with that proviso that should be held as quickly as possible – I do believe it is a mistake to renew the mandates of these Mayors, etc., I believe that is, in fact, as if saying, that the other councillors have no value; that the other councillors cannot do the job and, therefore, we are looking – if you look at this amendment – at the possibility for a Mayor to be there, not for 2 years, as is the practice, but for 4 years, if it goes in a worst-case scenario.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what I wanted to say. I think, therefore, we should give existing Mayors a rest. The mandates are coming to an end next month and we should have new people to come, new people, new blood, new ideas and new energy will greatly help to do whatever can be done before the next election for our towns, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This is what I wanted to say. Therefore, I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Gobin!

(6.03 pm.)

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin): Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have to add my voice to this (Amendment) Bill

and, in doing so, I will address 3 points, Mr Speaker, Sir, and then comment on the points raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

I wish to canvass 3 points, Mr Speaker, Sir. First, what this (Amendment) Bill is bringing in one of the clauses, namely, Clause 10A, that is, in Clause 3 of the Bill. This brings the question of the life of a Council. In the existing Local Government Act, there is no explicit provision governing the life of a Council. And when we talk of the life of a Council, we also have to address 2 issues, namely, earlier dissolution of a Council and, a fortiori, extension of the life of a Council.

Before coming to the Local Authorities, let me explain from where we draw our inspiration on this question of the life of a Council. Inspiration comes directly from the Constitution and the Constitution, when dealing with the question of the life of Parliament, in Section 57 (2), provides that, I quote –

“Parliament, unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for 5 years from the date of the first sitting of the Assembly after any general election and shall then stand dissolved.”

This means that, as a rule, the life of Parliament is prescribed as a life of 5 years. There are 2 exceptions to that rule; ‘unless Parliament is sooner dissolved’, number one; secondly, ‘unless it is extended’. Yes, I repeat, unless it is extended because the Constitution provides for the extension of the life of Parliament beyond 5 years in very, very exceptional circumstances, namely, in a state of public emergency, as defined in Section 57 itself. This is where the inspiration comes from. And when we come to the Local Authority, the House will recall that in 2015 when the amendment was brought to the Local Government Act, the law as it then stood was for elections in Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council to be held in 2015 and thereafter every 6 years.

In December 2018, with the amendment, the same provision was provided for Village Councils, that elections will be held every 6 years and in both Amendments the provision was –

“And at such date as the President shall, on the advice of the Prime Minister, appoint (...).”

This has been a constant provision for both Municipal City and Municipal Town Councils as well as for the Village Councils. In the proposed 10A provision, which is in Clause 3, this is made very clear in simple language for every citizen of this country to understand; in 3 subsections, in simple language. The first subsection being the entire

Municipal City Council, Municipal Town Council and Village Council shall, unless sooner dissolved, continue for 6 years from the date on which the previous poll of the return of the entire City Council, Town Council and Village Council was taken and shall then stand dissolved. This is the exact words of the Constitution when it comes to Parliament.

In the further two subsections, one deals with earlier dissolution and the third subsection, that the President acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister may, at any time, dissolve the entire City Council and Municipal Town Council. This is no different from what the Constitution provides when it comes to Parliament. I will come later on to the powers of the Prime Minister to tender advice to the President. This is the inspiration from the Constitution. Therefore, what we need to understand and what the people out there need to understand, what is the applicable legal regime for Parliament, which is the supreme body in this country, is made the same for the Local Authority. The same regime will apply as to the principle of the life, for Parliament 5 years, for Local Authority 6 and 2 exceptions, first, earlier dissolution or an extension of life in exceptional circumstances. And, therefore, I will come to the exceptional circumstances later.

Let me come to the powers of the Prime Minister to advise. Here, again, we draw inspiration from the Constitution. But before coming to the specific provision of Section 57 in the Constitution, Mr Speaker, Sir, time and again, we hear in this country that a Prime Minister has too much power, that the Prime Minister is almost like an elected Monarch. That is good for debate in Political Science classes. It depends which system we want, whether we want the Westminster System of Cabinet Government or we want a Presidential System. In any event, if it is not the Prime Minister, then, it's going to be the President, if the System is a Presidential one. Somebody at the end of the day will hold the Executive Power. If it's not the President in a Presidential System, it will be the Prime Minister in a Westminster Cabinet System of Government.

So, we can debate on and on, on Political Science as to which form of Government is best, but here, we cannot waste the time of the House with such debate; we need a functioning system. Yes, with checks and balances as Parliament provides on the powers of Cabinet Government, but, we need stability in Government, we need things to work because this directly affects the daily life of citizens.

If I put the question, if the Prime Minister in the existing state of our Law, and that has been so ever since we have a Cabinet System of Government here, even before

Independence, if the Prime Minister can advise the Head of State to dissolve this Parliament, why not the power to advise the President to dissolve a Local Authority? It is the same inspiration, therefore, coming from Section 57 of the Constitution, which provides in subsection (1) -

“The President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, may at any time prorogue or dissolve Parliament;”

He, who can tender advice to dissolve Parliament, is being given the power to dissolve a Local Authority. There is nothing which is new in the powers being held by the Head of our Cabinet System of Government, namely, the Prime Minister.

We say we can debate endlessly as being on terms of art, like we are at the whims and fancy or *on dépend du bon vouloir*. There are many considerations which come into play before advice is been tendered. It's not a question and it has never been, and will never be a question of whim, fancy or *bon vouloir*. There is always the system of accountability, namely accountability to this House. All powers are exercised within a system of checks and balances, as is enshrined in our Constitution, and those checks and balances take the form of accountability before the House, and this will continue.

And we all know also this other Constitutional Principle that the President does not act alone. This principle is enshrined in our Section 64, where the President acts on the advice tendered by the Prime Minister or by Cabinet as a whole. These principles are enshrined in our Constitution and have always been so. There is nothing new that is being provided with the Amendment Bill.

Coming to my third point as to the holding of Elections - in the Clause concerning the issue of writ of elections, Mr Speaker, Sir, that is, in Clause 4 of the Bill, amending Section 11 of the principle Act, we are taking the opportunity here to cure a defect which has been in our Local Government Act.

In the present provision of Section 11(2), I quote –

“(2) Subject to the Representation of the People Act, the President shall, for the purpose of an election of Councillors to a Municipal City Council or Municipal Town Council –

(a) issue a writ of election; and

(b) where necessary, appoint a day on which the poll is to be taken.”

The law does not say when the writ has to be issued. It says 'issue a writ of election', but does not say when. When coming to this House, therefore, my Office had consultations with the Office of the Electoral Commissioner and we have taken the opportunity to specify in the Amendment Bill, at page 4 of the Bill, that is, it will be at Clause 4, paragraph (a), that the writ has to be issued within 60 days. We also, as the distinguished Leader of Opposition said that he is a true Democrat, we are also true Democrats. We have specified now something which was not specified before. We specified it 'within 60 days' the writ has to be issued.

The second point I want to make, and that is in Clause 4(a), Subsection (2). The election of Councillors to the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council shall be held in accordance with the Representation of People Act. What we have to remind ourselves is that, when we say it is being held in accordance with The Representation of the People Act, and The Representation of the People Act provides, in Section 44, Mr Speaker, Sir, I quote -

“Regulations for conduct of elections.

Elections to a Council shall be conducted in such manner as may be prescribed.”

Council is defined as being a Municipal City Council, a Municipal Town Council or a Village Council and those regulations have already been made since 2012, namely, the Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council Elections Regulation 2012, which provides for the Nomination Day, which shall not be less than 15 nor more than 30 days after the day on which the writ is issued and also that the polling day shall be not less than 15; no more than 60 days after the Nomination Day. This brings predictability in the holding of elections. On the regulations, the 60 days delay and predictability in the conduct of elections. Now, this leaves me with my last point and this is perhaps to address what the distinguished Leader of Opposition has said.

First of all, let me say a word of appreciation to what the distinguished Leader of Opposition has said, that, we agree that we are in a health emergency and that we agree to postpone the elections for a variety of reasons, but, essentially, that campaign will not be possible in the present circumstances. But where I respectfully disagree with the hon. Leader of Opposition is on the question of the situation, as compared to the Village Council Elections, which were held in November last. In November last, Mr Speaker, Sir, we had no case in the community. Although COVID was still looming over the whole world, and not only Mauritius, but we had no case in the community, which means that we were COVID

safe. We never said we were free, but safe; the situation is not the same now. As to the renewal of the mandate of Mayors, Lord Mayors -

Mr Speaker, Sir, in two sentences: first, the same regime was made applicable when we had extended the mandate of Village and District Councils in 2018. What is good for the Village Council is good for the Town Council. Last, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister has explained, if there is a vacancy, the vacancy will be filled in accordance, if my memory serves me right, to Section 40, I believe, of the Local Government Act. What I mean to say is that there are existing provisions in the principal Act for filling of vacancy.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, Sir, we agree that there is a need to provide a regime to extend the life of a councillor. We cannot say, nobody can say, when it will be safe from a health standpoint to organise elections. When will that day come, we cannot say. There are too many variables in that equation and when there are too many variables in an equation, any mathematician will say, you will have to leave it to judicious discretion. We cannot fetter the discretion of the Prime Minister in tendering advice to the President to issue the writ, and therefore this Local Government (amendment) Bill comes to provide for this regime of extension; and to provide that the Prime Minister shall tender advice at the appropriate time.

With those words, I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me a few minutes extra on the agreed scheduled time. Thank you very much.

(6:22 p.m.)

Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Merci M. le président. M. le président, sur ce projet de loi j'ai trois points spécifiques à développer. M. le président, je pense qu'il y a l'unanimité dans la Chambre concernant le renvoi des élections pour cause sanitaire. C'est vrai le pays passe par des moments extrêmement difficiles avec le confinement, le Covid-19. C'est vrai que de par le monde, les élections sont renvoyées. C'est vrai que la priorité du groupe de l'opposition, le Parti travailliste, la priorité n'est pas pour nous les élections municipales. Mais là où l'incompréhension, le doute subsiste, c'est quand nous voyons que le gouvernement propose de renvoyer les élections pour un maximum de temps de deux ans. La question principale qu'on se pose, avant de revenir sur le point de l'honorable ministre qui m'a précédé, c'est qu'on se pose des questions sur la gestion de cette pandémie par le gouvernement. Car, l'honorable *Leader* de l'opposition le disait, l'année dernière nous étions plus ou moins dans la même situation, et les élections villageoises se

sont tenues. Et le ministre, juste avant moi, vient de dire que l'année dernière, il n'y avait pas de cas ...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Local.

Mr Assirvaden: Local. Exactement ! Merci pour la précision. Justement, l'année dernière il n'y avait pas de cas local et le gouvernement a jugé bon de tenir les élections villageoises. Mais qui a décidé d'ouvrir, de déconfiner alors que nous avons encore des cas locaux ici dans le pays ? C'est ce gouvernement dans la gestion...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Assirvaden : ... dans la gestion de cette pandémie, a jugé bon de rouvrir, de faire sortir les Mauriciens.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Assirvaden : Et aujourd'hui le Covid-19 a bon dos. J'ai écouté le ministre dire que c'est vrai dans notre système politique, c'est le Premier ministre qui décide de la date des élections, mais le *new normal*, les conséquences de ce qu'on vit de nos jours, ce n'est pas le rôle d'un gouvernement d'ajuster, d'amender et de voir comment ça se fait en Inde par exemple. En Inde, ce n'est pas le président de la République, ce n'est pas le Premier ministre, c'est la commission électorale, M. le ministre qui décide de la date des élections générales. En Angleterre, la date des élections générales est décidée en avance, affichée après cinq ans. Pas simplement l'île Maurice, en Amérique la date est affichée. Donc, pourquoi ne pas profiter de ce que nous vivons et tourner cela en opportunité pour améliorer notre système. Pour améliorer notre système parce que nous savons très bien que nous n'allons pas pouvoir faire campagne, pas de réunions privées, pas de *meetings*, pas de contacts personnels avec les agents. Oui, mais nous aurions pu préparer *a new normal* dans des élections municipales, dans des débats civilisés sous l'égide de la commission électorale à travers la radio, à travers la MBC, à travers la Presse. Des débats pour la présentation de nos candidats, pour la présentation de notre programme municipal, pour la présentation des débats pour un bilan. Pourquoi ne pas le faire ? Donc, les contradictions du gouvernement MSM inquiètent la population et inquiètent l'opposition. Pourquoi ? Parce que pas moins que le *Deputy Prime Minister* en personne est venu à la radio, à la télévision pour dire que la seule solution ce sont

les vaccins, la vaccination. Et aujourd'hui, je peux un peu comprendre que vous n'avez pas de visibilité, vous n'avez pas de feuille de route. Oui, parce ce qu'on n'a plus de vaccins, on n'a pas de vaccins, on n'a pas de programme de vaccins. Mais au même moment, vous dites à cette population, 10 circonscriptions sur 20, plus de 400 000 personnes, vous les privez de leur droit de vote pendant deux ans. Et au même moment, dans ce pays vous permettez à ce que les gens aillent se faire vacciner par milliers. Allez voir à Vacoas-Phoenix lors de la vaccination de la grippe ! Un millier de gens faisant la queue pour aller se faire vacciner, mais faisant la queue pour aller voter le jour des élections, ce n'est pas possible.

Des funérailles, vous avez vu sous le nez des autorités et pas plus tard que deux jours de cela, les funérailles d'un jockey qui est mort tragiquement. Nous présentons la sympathie à sa famille. 5000 personnes ! Mais vous avez des contradictions à ce que vous proposez et ce que vous faites. Le Premier ministre est venu à la télévision. Ce n'est pas un ministre, le Premier ministre est venu à la télévision pour dire à la population qu'il faudra vivre avec le Covid-19. Aujourd'hui, vous renvoyez les élections pour deux ans. Vous auriez pu le renvoyer pour 3 mois. Pourquoi ? Parce que vous avez peur de la gestion de ce Covid-19 ? Vous pensez qu'on va devoir traîner cette pandémie pendant deux ans ? Donc, votre gestion de ce que vous avez fait de la Covid-19 aujourd'hui pousse ce pays à se poser des questions.

Le responsable de la NTA est venu à la télévision, à la radio pour dire que dans les autobus on peut entrer avec 60 personnes. Quelle contradiction ! Et pour aller voter vous dites aux gens : non, ce n'est pas possible d'aller voter, pour mettre la queue pour aller voter. La distanciation sociale sur les arrêts d'autobus mais dans les autobus – *sardines* ! Il faudra mettre un peu d'ordre dans ce que vous dites, la cohérence et la constance dans ce que vous dites. Les étudiants, *HSC, SC et PSAC*, on a pu organiser les examens. Pourquoi ne pas dans un laps de temps de 3 mois de 4 mois ? Parce qu'on va devoir vivre, que vous le vouliez ou non, on va devoir vivre avec cette pandémie. Donc, il faudra je pense chercher des solutions et tourner cela en opportunité pour améliorer notre système parce que qui est au pouvoir dans les municipales depuis six ans ? En 2015, le MSM prend la responsabilité de nos municipalités.

Aujourd'hui, plus de six ans l'efficiencia a foutu le camp, l'incompétence est là. Je parle particulièrement pour la ville de Vacoas-Phoenix, la circonscription 15 et 16, où je me pose la question, est-ce qu'on va devoir - les citoyens de numéro 15, numéro 16, de Vacoas, de Floréal - subir un maire comme le maire actuel, l'incompétence de ce maire, je me pose la question. Je suis parfaitement d'accord avec ce que disait le Leader de l'opposition, pourquoi

garder les mêmes personnes mêmes s'ils sont incompetents. Donc, il y a personne au sein du conseil municipal pour pouvoir prendre la relève. Donc, il y a beaucoup de contradictions dans ce qui est dit, M. le président, et deux ans encore, laissant nos municipalités avec, j'ai dit bien, avec une illégitimité, et ce qui est encore plus grave, M. le président, c'est que dans trois mois, dans quatre mois, on aurait pu, avec de la bonne volonté, avec un peu de consensus, organiser des élections civilisées, saines, dans un débat, et nous profitons pour en finir avec les bases, pour en finir avec ce folklore, et aussi pour en finir avec ce que certaines personnes aiment, comment on appelle, le '*money politics*' pour finir avec cela. Donc, ce que, nous, au sein du parti Travailleiste nous disons, M. le président, c'est que nous sommes d'accord pour le renvoi des élections. Nous sommes d'accord la priorité des priorités doit être la santé, mais il faut une feuille de route claire, établie, pour que les citoyens savent à l'avance quand ils iront aux urnes.

Voilà ce que j'avais à dire, M. le président, je ne serais pas plus long. Je m'excuserai auprès de mes collègues parlementaires car dès que je termine je vais devoir partir, j'ai une session de prière familiale. Donc, je m'excuse d'avance auprès d'eux. Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Hurreeram!

(6.33 p.m.)

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think if we needed a proof that the Opposition cannot agree together, we have just heard it. The Leader of the Opposition, on one side, is agreeable to most of the provisions in this amendment, while making some suggestions, but on the other side, I have never heard such a demagogical speech ever. *Il a dit le tout et son contraire en même temps, l'orateur qui a parlé avant moi.*

Having said this, allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to shed some light to enable our fellow citizens listening to us at their homes to better understand the provision of this (Amendment) Bill which this Government is proposing to the Local Government Act. We are fighting a sanitary crisis, a global and deadly pandemic. Nonetheless, as our democratic duty dictates, we must decide whether to hold local elections right now or do we postpone it temporarily until such a time that it is safe to do so. It is rather unfortunate that the Member who spoke before me, put forward populist arguments without any consideration of the consequences. The fact remains, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we still have local cases of COVID-19 in the community and this kind of thinking can only be counter-productive.

The amendment, Mr Speaker, Sir, aims to simply provide a *modus operandi* for when we have a public emergency, an epidemic or we are bound in a quarantine. The proposed section 12A clearly mentions public emergency in subsection 1(a) and epidemic and quarantine period subsection (b). It could not be any more specific and clearer. Those terms, Mr Speaker, Sir, cannot be qualified as excuses. Those terms represent our current predicament.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the proposed extension ensures that we have a greater approach as prescribed by section 12. This amendment proposes to extend the mandate of the elected Officials one year at a time, but not more than two years. And it is not like two years that the orator before me has been saying constantly. In other words, by the end of this year, if our country is COVID-free again, and Government collectively deems it safe enough for election to be held, we will do so. However, it is regrettable that some of those same hon. Members on the other side of the House, will boast outside this Assembly and in the Press that they are here to defend the interests of the Mauritian citizens and have, overnight, become expert in every field.

As a matter of fact, do not be surprised, Mr Speaker, Sir, if now they claim that they can produce their own vaccine. And what did they advocate for, Mr Speaker, Sir, we should have our borders open, the Mauritian citizens should not be vaccinated, economic activities should not resume, we need a third lockdown, we have just heard it, an eternal exercise, *met baton dan la rou*, and now, they want election, Mr Speaker, Sir.

As a responsible Government, we have, up to now, successfully contained a pandemic while we see that this virus has claimed the lives of almost 3 million people around the world. The deadly toll rises every day. The virus has brought some of the most powerful economies in the world to their knees, and here, in Mauritius, the Government has mobilised all the resources to control the propagation of this deadly virus, provided quarantine facilities in hotels, provided vaccines freely to its citizens, ensure again, the last lockdown, two-months' salaries, and all this while maintaining the economic afloat by allowing economic activities to resume and students to take part in the yearly examinations. Yet again, there are some who still want elections right away.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the whole world is facing the same situation. Allow me, like the Vice-Prime Minister earlier already said it, 78 countries and territories across the globe have decided to postpone elections due to COVID-19, out of which at least 41 countries and

territories have decided to postpone national elections and referendums. These were efforts by these Governments to counter the spread of the deadly virus.

Mr Speaker, Sir, any election requires a considerable amount of resources from Government. It would be totally unreasonable for any Government to instruct Officers of various departments involved, especially our frontliners, to lower their guard for a period of time to not only protect the lives of our citizens, but also to allow politicians to undergo an electoral campaign. I must say, I understand my fellow comrades on the other side of this House. It is not easy to criticise everything to score political points, but I urge them to take a step back and think again.

As a responsible Government, we have to take certain decisions, bold and important, some are even unpopular, like when we had to impose lockdowns. Even if the freedom of movement is guaranteed in our Constitution, we had to take a stand. Same goes for the red zones, the wearing of masks, the ban on travel to and from Mauritius. Yes, we understand very well that such decisions have caused a bit of discomfort among the population. But it was for the greater good and we have done what was in the best interest of the country; maybe some will still question our goodwill. The results speak for themselves, Mr Speaker, Sir, how the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has been dealt with was a prime example of the diligence of this Government. And when the second wave came, many thought this was it, we could have suffered like many big countries such as China and India. We did not. The virus is being contained and managed. It is undeniable that we cannot eternally impose lockdowns, but this doesn't mean that we, politicians, have to start putting the aspiration of our respective parties first. There is still a deadly virus out there, Mr Speaker, Sir, threatening the lives of our fellow citizens.

Gouverner, c'est prévoir. These amendments to the Local Government Act are testimony to the fact that this Government has, is and will always walk the talk, what we advocate are not just “*des paroles en l'air*”. It is not like we are asking that the current Municipal Councilors remain in post for a very long time after their mandate. It is not in the habit of the MSM, and certainly not our leader and Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, to extend elections indefinitely and prorogue Parliament for almost a year in order to tamper with our Constitution. Our constitution, Mr Speaker, and especially the section that refers to the National Assembly, already caters for “*Force Majeure*”. The very same constitution which Sir Anerood Jugnauth, our Prime Minister in 1982, moved to amend, in order to ensure that general elections be held every five years. This was rendered necessary

after the abuse by the Labour Party regime since independence, constantly coming up with all sorts of strategies and schemes to postpone the general elections in order to keep their handhold on power at all cost. However, the Constitution caters for a situation where a state of national crisis renders it impossible to hold an election. My good friend, the Attorney General has canvassed this point sufficiently. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think all of us agree here, we are in a state of public emergency; we are at war, against a deadly yet invisible foe. This battle has been going on for over a year now, but we are confident we are going to win. Unfortunately, much like in Greek mythology, cut one head of hydra, and two grow back. This virus with its mutation and variants is still very unpredictable. Despite the current vaccination efforts being carried out, we are yet to reach herd immunity. And the Prime Minister has announced it, I think, yesterday, that we are receiving another 500,000 doses of vaccines soon. We cannot risk having a disastrous 3rd wave.

As per the Regional Director for Africa for the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, organising elections in 2021 will involve reduced campaigning, and therefore decrease voter turnout. There are data backing these claims: 58% of countries, which have done elections during the COVID period, have seen at least 40% reduction in their voter turnout for national and 30% decrease for local elections. Would such an election be really legitimate? We should also not ignore the impact of the current pandemic on the election turnout among a section of our population. For example, would it be safe to allow our senior citizens to go to polling stations? The current situation will definitely lead to a lower turnout which will deny people of their fundamental right to choose.

Furthermore, with strict sanitary protocols, elections might seem to be less transparent, but more expensive. This altogether may undermine the public's trust and, thus, democracy more broadly; this is quite true, Mr Speaker, Sir. Organising elections without public gatherings, "meetings", "*porte à porte*", and other activities related to our electoral folklore, would be detrimental to democracy itself. And on polling day, with all the sanitary protocols that would have to be put in place, with all the inflexible conditions already imposed by the electoral commission, we can imagine the excuses of some after the results are proclaimed - a "*mise en scene*" where they are all grouped together, claiming: "*election kokin*", "*manque de transparence*", and so on.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have made considerable progress in our attempt to contain this virus. And now, it is not the time to let our guard down in order to entail in a political campaign that would not serve its purpose at the moment. On this side of the House, we

believe in democracy. We believe that institutions should be allowed to function in complete freedom.

Mr Speaker Sir, we must learn from past experiences. Last year, the same “*cocovid*” begged for Village Council Elections. Our Government had just managed to contain the first wave of the COVID-19 outbreak and we are on the way to secure a COVID-free status. We did organise those elections and we all know the results. However, now when we think about it, it was not such a wise decision, because as we would find out later, the real enemy, the COVID virus, was still pretty much alive and wandering. While we constantly maintained that we should be cautious at all times, what did the Members on the other side of this House do? Not content with their sour defeat, they decided to invite Mauritian Citizens to march in Port Louis, grouped together, to criticise Government. We would learn a few weeks later that the virus was already spreading across the community at that particular time. Irresponsible, Mr Speaker, Sir! And we have just seen another ‘*cinéma sans payer*’ yesterday.

You have challenged the results of the General Elections, forcing officers, barristers and our colleague MPs and Ministers to go back and forth from Court Houses, wasting precious time which we could have been used better. You have challenged the authority of the Speaker and that too had us debating for days, criticising the Government, criticising our decisions. They can’t even decide among themselves who better fit to lead the oppositions. And they want to question to this Government, led by Pravind Jugnauth, and formidable allies represented by seasoned politicians, like the Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Steven Obeegadoo, hon. Alan Ganoo, Ivan Collendavelloo; bright minds of this Government. I wish you good luck, but I am afraid, again this feeble attempt of yours to unsettle this Government, will still fail. As a Government, we stand guided by our philosophy, mission and vision for this country. Nonetheless, I urge the Members of the Opposition to put their own personal and selfish political aspirations aside and for once, for God’s sake, to put the country first for once.

When the war against COVID-19 is won, and it is safe for an election to take place, you will have your chance to be on the battlefield and likely off it after the ballots are counted.

Mr Speaker: One minute to conclude!

Mr Hurreeram: With what this Government, and previous one, have achieved in six years, and same progress visible across all our cities, we are confident in our chances and confident in the work we have accomplished.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this extension, provided by the amendments in this current Bill, is necessary, as we cannot risk having all our cities and towns being in red zones and cases on the rise.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(6.51 p.m.)

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Mr Speaker, Sir, just a few weeks ago on 06 May 2021, local elections were held in England, Scotland and Wales. Millions of people turned to the Polls. The Electoral Commissioner there published extensive guidance on conducting elections, balancing campaigning activities with the need to protect and save life. The bottom line, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that elections can be held during COVID pandemic, elections are being held during COVID pandemic.

The hon. Minister who preceded me mentioned that there are 78 countries which postponed elections during COVID-19 and he is absolutely right. In a report published just a few days ago, on 10 May 2021, by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) entitled Global Overview of COVID-19: Impact on elections, we are informed - yes true - that 78 countries postponed elections but 118 countries and territories have decided to hold national and sub-national elections. So, if there is a will, there is a way. If you want to hold elections, you can hold elections.

So, then the question arises: why is it that this Government wants to postpone the elections? Why is it that the Prime Minister wants to be able to direct the President to hold the next Municipal Council Election in up to two years' time when everybody knows that elections are due in weeks to come because the Councils are supposed to end their life next month? There are only two only reasons.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo, last warning!

Mr Uteem: Hon. Nuckcheddy, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are only two reasons I can think of for Government wanting to postpone an election. First, because they know they are going to lose the election and it is not the first time they are going to postpone an election on that basis. They have done it repeatedly. But let us assume that it is not for the purpose of

facing the electorate, then, the only explanation for postponing the election is *un aveu* that they cannot hold elections during COVID pandemic unlike the other 118 countries out there. And yes, in the Opposition we are unanimous to hold that this Government cannot hold elections because this Government is so incompetent, it cannot handle the COVID situation. They used to brag about COVID safe.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Uteem: What happened? Today, we have more cases of COVID-19 than we had last year and the number is rising day by day. You locked us down and closed our borders, you forced us to stay home and undergo quarantine, you prevented us from going to mosque, from going to churches, from going to temples and pagodas, we cannot attend funerals of our dear ones, we cannot eat in restaurant and we cannot go to the gym. All these sacrifices and today you are telling us because of your failure to control the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of thousands of people living in towns are going to be deprived of their democratic right to choose the Councillor of their choice, to sanction the past mistake of the current Councillors and Mayors. And if you had only listened to us and pre-ordered vaccines when we told you to do so. But no, you called us stupid then.

This is what a genius stated in this House answering to a PNQ on the 08 December 2020 when asked by the hon. Leader of the Opposition as to how many vaccines will come to Mauritius in January? In December, 2020, the hon. Leader of the Opposition asked the hon. Minister how many vaccines are going to come in Mauritius in January and do you know what was the answer of the genius? I quote –

“Mr Speaker, Sir, again, there is a lot of stupidity in what the hon. Member is saying.”

We asked a PQ, asking them to get vaccines and they called us stupid! Now, who is the stupid one today? By your stupidity, by the stupidity of this Government and its incompetence ...

Mr Speaker: I can hear some noises on this side. If I identify somebody, please take care.

Mr Uteem: By the stupidity and incompetence of this Government, officially 7 people have died. Unfortunately, we all know that the number is higher because there are more COVID-19 positive people who have been dead but are not counted in the official figures. And now today because of this stupidity and incompetence, hundreds of thousands of people are going to be deprived of their right to vote at the local election. So, Mr Speaker,

Sir, I wonder what is worse, being afraid of holding elections or being stupid and incompetent?

Now, let me go to the most controversial provision of the Bill. It is Section 6 12A and I am glad that there is a proposed amendment to this provision of 12A because originally ...

(Interruptions)

Section 12A as it is in the Bill today, before the amendment, provides that the Prime Minister is able to cause a President to postpone local elections up to two years and he could do that in two conditions –

“At any time when –

- (a) a period of public emergency is in force in Mauritius; and
- (b) there is, or there is likely to be, an epidemic of a communicable disease in Mauritius and a quarantine period is in force in Mauritius,”

Now, what really shocked me, Mr Speaker, Sir, when I looked at that paper, is that as currently drafted, it stated that you needed a period of public emergency and a pandemic. The word is “and”, the word is not “or”. So, what this Government, if this Bill was gone through without amendment, then in order to postpone election, the Government would have had to call a state of emergency in this country and I wonder how this went through Cabinet. How this went through Cabinet, all the Members of the other side, all the Ministers, how this was published? This stated that you needed a period of public emergency in Mauritius and, Mr Speaker, Sir, a period of public emergency is defined under Section 19, subsection (vii) of the Constitution.

It is a situation of exceptional circumstances where Mauritius is engaged in war, where there is a public emergency and public emergency has serious consequences under the Constitution, not only can you postpone General Elections but you can curtail civil liberties.

You can deprive Mauritians of their fundamental human rights. So, was that a genuine mistake or was it initially planned to bring a period of emergency in this country? I would like to hope that it is again stupidity and incompetence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, we are faced with an amendment, this period of public emergency is being deleted, rightly so. But where I do not agree is when the Attorney-General comes and says that he wants this law, he is going to put apart General Elections and Local Elections. I know the hon. Attorney General, he is a respected Barrister, he has worked

as past Magistrate. I am sure he could not have read what the Constitution says and what this Act says. The Constitution, Section 57 subsection (4) - Prorogation and dissolution of Parliament, I read –

“At any time when there is in force a Proclamation by the President declaring, for the purposes of section 19(7)(b), that a state of public emergency exists, Parliament - not the Prime Minister, not the President, Parliament - may from time to time extend the period of 5 years specified in subsection (2) by not more than 6 months at a time.

Provided that the life of Parliament shall not be extended under this subsection for more than one year.”

So, it is very different. Under the Constitution, you can postpone general elections during a period of public emergency but it has to be a decision of Parliament and only for six months at a time and only up to one year.

Today, decision of Prime Minister, for a period of one year and up to a maximum of two years. Now, I am sorry but I hope children are not watching it because these two are very different. Six months is very different from one year, one year is very different from two years and Parliament is very different from the Prime Minister. So, I hope that the Attorney General did not do that deliberately but was just quoting what his officers told him in preparing his speech because otherwise, it will be very difficult to convince us that you are bringing local elections at par when it is not. Then, that begs the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, why a different treatment for local elections compared to general elections?

Now, the question is: does this Government really believe in local Government? Does this Government believe in decentralising power? This is the question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will end by quoting Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln once said that -

“The ballot is stronger than the bullet.”

Election is the bedrock of democracy. We have heard during this debate that many parties have postponed local elections. Even MMM postponed elections when it was in alliance with the MSM. But the fact remains, Mr Speaker, Sir, that no party has postponed local elections more often than the MSM. And now, I will leave you to ponder on this.

Would this Government have introduced this Bill if the Municipal Council were not controlled by MSM and its allies? Would the Government have introduced a similar Bill if instead of Municipal elections, it was general elections that had to be held during COVID-19 pandemic? Because to postpone general elections on the ground of pandemic, we would have had to amend the Constitution and to amend the Constitution, you would have had to get the support of a three-quarter majority and we, in the Opposition, would never have amended the Constitution to allow you to stay in power and today, the only regret I have, is that when my party was in power, we did not amend the Constitution to entrench the holding of local election in our Constitution.

Thank You.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramano!

(7.04 p.m)

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano) : M. le président, je vous remercie de me donner la possibilité d'intervenir sur le *Local Government (Amendment) Bill* qu'il faut le dire, arrive dans un contexte exceptionnel tant au niveau national qu'international. Nous aurons l'occasion d'expliquer les amendements proposés mais il convient aussi de préciser une chose, M. le président, ce semblant de solidarité au niveau de l'opposition, reflète aussi des contradictions profondes entre les partis de l'opposition. On a entendu le leader de l'opposition, dans son discours, adopter au tout début, une position assez sobre mais après, bien sûr, la démagogie revient toujours au galop et comme quoi, chercher le naturel, il revient toujours au galop. Et il persiste pour dire que attention, qu'on est en train de faire exprès, de retarder les mesures pour pouvoir renvoyer les élections.

Il parle de démocratie, d'autocratie, etc., et en même temps, il donne l'impression de vouloir comprendre que la situation est très exceptionnelle en raison de la pandémie et il serait très dangereux pour le pays de venir de l'avant avec des élections dans de telles situations.

Ces contradictions, M. le président, l'honorable leader de l'opposition, prend à contre-pied son propre voisin, l'honorable Khushal Lobine. J'aurais l'occasion tout à l'heure de citer quelques déclarations de l'honorable Khushal Lobine dans la presse ces derniers temps et il prend aussi à contre-pied l'honorable Reza Uteem qui vient de parler. Et l'honorable Reza Uteem a cité l'exemple de l'Angleterre pour dire que des élections se tiennent en ce moment

mais ce qu'il omet de mentionner, M. le président, c'est que ces élections ont été renvoyées de mai 2020 à mai 2021.

(Interruptions)

M. le président, c'est vrai que le *Local Government Act* a fait l'objet de plusieurs amendements et cela provient aussi du fait que pour amender le *Local Government Act*, il suffit d'une majorité relative, en comparaison avec d'autres lois électorales qui requièrent *a qualified majority*.

M. le président, il faut bien le dire que certains gouvernements dans le passé, ont abusé de cette majorité relative et aussi ce *qualified majority*. Quand j'entends l'honorable Assirvaden prononcer son discours, comme quoi, M. le président, il arrive à s'illuminer, on a l'impression d'avoir affaire à des lumières en termes de démocratie.

(Interruptions)

Mais, M. le président, quand on écoute l'opposition Travailleuse/PMSD, on a l'impression d'avoir affaire à des champions de la démocratie alors que nous savons pertinemment bien que dans le passé, la Constitution fut amendée et même, abusée. Avec une majorité dans le Parlement en 1972, ils n'ont pas hésité à renvoyer les élections générales pour, s'il vous plaît, 1976.

(Interruptions)

Les dernières élections générales s'étaient en 1967. On renvoie les élections générales pour 1976 ou encore abolir l'élection partielle pour pouvoir remplir les sièges vacants au niveau du Parlement. Et il a fallu attendre, il faut le reconnaître. Le nouveau gouvernement en 1982, avec Sir Anerood Jugnauth comme Premier ministre, pour rétablir un garde-fou constitutionnel en prévoyant des conditions strictes de majorité, *qualified majority* ou même encore, le référendum afin de prévenir tout renvoi d'élection générale et aussi rétablir l'élection partielle, M. le président.

Le PTR, l'honorable Assirvaden trouve cela aberrant que l'Exécutif, le Premier ministre, puisse recommander la dissolution du Parlement ou même fixer la date des élections. M. le président, je pense qu'il y a un problème de mémoire sélectif au niveau du parti Travailleuse. Le parti Travailleuse, M. le président, a fixé la date des élections en 1976, 1982, 2000, 2010, 2014 et aujourd'hui, le président du parti Travailleuse trouve cela aberrant. M. le président, je pense qu'il y a un problème sérieux au niveau du parti Travailleuse. Les

élections régionales ne furent pas en reste, M. le président. Que ce soit pour les élections municipales ou villageoises, cette même opposition, sous prétexte, des raisons bidons, n'ont pas hésité selon le *mood* politique du moment à renvoyer à maintes reprises ces élections comme ce fut le cas en 2003 et 2010 aussi, M. le président.

En 2010, M. le président, sous prétextes que des consultations sont en cours pour un amendement de la loi, les élections municipales et villageoises furent renvoyées. Ce qui est quand même aberrant et révoltant, M. le président, de 2005 à 2010, pendant 5 ans, il n'y a eu aucune consultation par le PTR et le PMSD et ce n'est qu'à la fin du mandat de 5 ans en 2010, qu'on découvre subitement l'urgence d'une consultation. La loi sur le renvoi fut présentée en décembre 2010, soit à la limite du délai prévu et la nouvelle loi fut présentée une année après.

M. le président, les élections municipales eurent lieu presque 2 années après le renvoi de 2010 et ce sont ces mêmes pseudo-champions de démocratie qui veulent aujourd'hui nous donner la leçon, M. le président.

M. le président, en 2010, l'honorable Bérenger avait quand même trouvé les mots justes mais, il a la mémoire courte quand même, pour marcher ensemble avec le Parti travailliste pour la Saint-Valentin en février dernier. M. le président, permettez-moi de citer l'honorable Bérenger –

“Five and a half years later, the Bill is still not ready. We have lost five and half years.”

M. le président, cela n'a pas empêché des mamours entre ces deux parties à un moment donné. M. le président, le présent amendement n'est à aucun moment un blanc-seing qui est donné à la majorité gouvernementale aujourd'hui. Une situation claire se présente à nous aujourd'hui, *an epidemic of communicable disease in Mauritius and a quarantine period*. Cela est clairement défini sous le *Quarantine Act*.

La loi est explicite, M. le président. Tout abus n'empêche pas à aucun moment un recours à la Cour Suprême ; ce sont les provisions légales qui sont prévues par la loi mauricienne. M. le président, il est clairement mentionné, *there is, or likely to be, an epidemic of a communicable disease in Mauritius and a quarantine period*. Sur l'avis du Premier ministre, le Président peut, par proclamation, étendre le mandat de 6 ans pour une année au plus, deux en deux occasions, au grand maximum.

M. le président, *l'Attorney General* a clairement expliqué le pourquoi de ces amendements, il a donné les raisons, les garde-fous qui sont prévus par la loi et aussi les délais qui sont prévus pour la première fois au niveau du *Local Government Act*, en ce qui concerne les délais pour émettre les *writs of elections*.

M. le président, il est clair aujourd'hui que nous vivons dans une période d'instabilité sanitaire au niveau international. Nous suivons avec une grande préoccupation aujourd'hui la situation qui prévaut en Inde, où le taux d'infection et le taux de mortalité sont arrivés à un niveau record au niveau international ; la plus grande démocratie au monde à respecter son calendrier électorale ; le folklore n'a pas été en reste, les grandes foules ont été au rendez-vous. Malheureusement, la chaîne de transmission a trouvé là, un allié de choix ; sans vouloir adopter une position réductrice de cause à effet de cet ennemi invisible, il est juste d'avancer que l'absence de distanciation sociale et de gestes barrières ont malheureusement contribué à un certain niveau à la propagation du virus. Et, permettez-moi de citer la presse indienne pour dire que –

“The elections were held amid a surge in COVID-19 cases across the country, a second wave that has ridden the country to an unprecedented crisis. The elections scheduled spread across 4 States;”

Notamment, dans les États d'Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal etc.

M. le président, le risque sera toujours là. M. le président, nous avons entendu certains membres de l'Opposition ou encore certains analystes, au niveau des journaux, qui ont avancé qu'on aurait pu avoir recours aux nouvelles technologies dans cette situation de crise sanitaire et il est inacceptable d'envisager un renvoi des élections. M. le président, la question qu'on devrait se poser : sommes-nous prêts aux nouvelles technologies, avec toutes les implications que cela requière, M. le président ?

Cette Opposition qui crie à la fraude électorale après chaque défaite, mais qui accepte l'élection dans leur circonscription ! M. le président, l'honorable Assirvaden, le président du Parti travailliste, parle de débat sous la supervision de la Commission Électorale et, M. le président, que voyons-nous actuellement ? M. le président, plus opportuniste que cela tu meurs ! Cette Opposition qui n'a pas hésité à contester le travail de l'*Electoral Supervisory Commission*, à contester le travail de son Commissaire mais, qui, aujourd'hui, avance qu'on aurait dû faire appel à la nouvelle technologie sous la supervision de cette même Commission Électorale, M. le président !

M. le président, permettez-moi de saluer, ici, le bon travail de l'*Electoral Supervisory Commission* et de son Commissaire ; une institution qui est citée en exemple tant au niveau régional, qu'international et qui est le socle de notre démocratie.

Sous la nouvelle technologie, en parlant de vote virtuel/électronique, M. le président, nous avons la chance que le ridicule ne tue pas, sinon on aurait été tous morts. M. le président, une certaine diaspora, des candidats ratés, ont élu le Parti travailliste comme premier Parti avec 5,000 voix sur 941,719 votants à Maurice et 300,000 diasporas à l'étranger.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order !

Mr Ramano: Il paraît, M. le président, que dans ce monde imaginaire, certains membres de l'Opposition allaient être absents aujourd'hui en raison de la prestation de serment comme ministre.....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Ramano: Aux dernières nouvelles, M. le président, certains ministres de l'Opposition contestent le portefeuille qui leur a été attribué.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order !

Mr Ramano: M. le président, nous savons tous la situation qui prévaut dans les autres pays de la région, La Réunion, Madagascar, les Comores, ou encore Les Seychelles qui a atteint un des taux les plus élevés en terme de vaccination ; Seychelles est souvent cité en l'exemple par le leader du MMM, l'honorable Paul Bérenger, mais malheureusement, nous constatons ce qui se passe aujourd'hui aux Seychelles, M. le président. Ce pays représente un taux de contamination le plus élevé pour chaque '100,000 habitants'.

M. le président, la situation bien qu'étant sous contrôle à Maurice grâce aux mesures de *contact tracing*, de quarantaine et de vaccination, prises par les autorités, restent une situation sérieuse ; il ne faut pas se voiler la face, M. le président, bien que la grosse majorité des mauriciens assument pleinement leurs responsabilités en terme de gestes barrières, il existe encore une minorité de mauriciens, qui, malheureusement, malgré les appels des autorités et

de la société civile, continuent à en faire qu'à leurs têtes et continuent à s'exposer au virus, soit en ne pratiquant pas les gestes barrières ou encore continuent à se rencontrer en groupe.

Le folklore électoral étant ce qu'il est, M. le président, il est impensable d'imaginer à ce jour, une campagne sans porte-à-porte, sans réunion, sans contact humain, on ne peut exposer les Mauriciens à de tels risques. Chaque gouvernement responsable doit faire de la santé des Mauriciens sa priorité, M. le président.

M. le président, face à cette urgence sanitaire, une autorité responsable ne peut rester insensible et rester les bras croisés. Oui, le renvoi des élections est une mesure exceptionnelle, M. le président, les intervenants avant moi, de ce côté de la Chambre, l'ont clairement souligné. À travers le monde, les intervenants ont mentionné les cas qui ont prévalu du 21 février 2020 jusqu'au 09 mai 2021 à travers le monde et les chiffres de 78 pays ont été mentionnés. Ces pays, il y va de l'Afrique, des Amériques, de l'Asie-Pacifique, l'Europe, le Moyen-Orient ; parmi les pays de l'Europe, il y a le cas de la France, où les élections locales ont été renvoyées ; l'Allemagne, d'octobre 2021 à mars 2021 ; l'Italie, ou même l'Angleterre que je viens de mentionner, M. le président.

Oui, nous préconisons un renvoi des élections municipales en de telles circonstances, mais nous demeurons fermes dans nos engagements pour la tenue de ces élections une fois que la situation sanitaire retournera à la normale, M. le président.

M. le président, notre engagement pour la tenue des élections, nous l'avons prouvé une fois que la situation sanitaire s'est rétablie l'année dernière. Nous n'avons aucune leçon de démocratie à apprendre. Que n'a-t-on pas entendu l'année dernière pour les élections villageoises !

L'opposition avait accusé à tort le gouvernement de vouloir renvoyer les élections villageoises mais à force de crier au loup, M. le président, l'opposition s'est fait dévorer par une équipe qui a plébiscité l'équipe gouvernementale dans six des sept *District Councils*, M. le président. Et pourtant, on nous avait prévenu que le mariage à trois entre le PTR, le PMSD, le MMM était solide comme le roc. L'alliance, entente, ils affichaient ouvertement leurs amours dans les rues pour la Saint-Valentin. Mais c'était sans compter avec le briseur de mariage, tranquillement assis dans la dernière rangée de l'opposition, perché dans son arbre à Floréal qui n'a pas hésité à voler la moustache à ce pauvre lion, M. le président.

M. le président, ça doit faire mal de se faire tromper, de se faire duper à cet âge. Ils ont le toupet de dire qu'il ne faut pas se tromper d'adversaires et j'entends très souvent les

membres de l'opposition, surtout les membres du Parti travailliste qui ont été trompés, qui ont été dupés, venir dire aujourd'hui, qu'il ne faut pas se tromper d'adversaires. Mais je pense qu'ils doivent savoir maintenant où se trouve leurs vrais adversaires, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Time to conclude!

Mr Ramano: Oui, M. le président. M. le président, le *Local Government Act* a été amendé à plusieurs reprises et à partir de 2011, il fut institué un *Executive Committee* par les Sections 47 et 48 du *Local Government Act*. Ce comité est composé du maire, du *deputy mayor*, et de cinq autres membres du conseil. Après application des sections 117 et 160 du *Local Government Act*, l'*Executive Committee* détermine les applications pour les *Outline Planning Permissions*, les *Building and Land Use Permits* et *procurement of goods and services*. Le mandat de cet *Executive Committee* est de deux ans après l'élection du maire et quand un membre cesse d'être membre de l'autorité locale, automatiquement il cesse d'être membre de l'*Executive Committee*. D'après cette même loi de 2011, the term of office of a Councillor shall *begin on the day on which he takes the oath and shall terminate on the day immediately preceding nomination day*.

Mr Speaker: One minute left!

Mr Ramano: M. le président, je termine. Il est clair aujourd'hui que l'*Executive Committee* agit comme le poumon d'une ville. Il était important que les conseillers puissent avoir voix aux chapitres. En ce qui concerne les permis également et il est inconcevable que le fonctionnement d'une ville à travers l'émission des permis ou encore le *procurement of goods and services* puisse être bloqué tout simplement parce que le mandat de l'*Executive Committee* était arrivé à terme du mandat de deux ans, M. le président. Ainsi, le présent amendement permettra à l'*Executive Committee* de continuer à fonctionner et il est dit que l'*Executive Committee and the anterior, the Municipal Council*, ce même comité restera là jusqu'à la veille du *nomination day*, M. le président.

M. le président, nous reconnaissons le principe de la permanence de l'état au niveau régional car il va sans dire que les affaires d'une ville ou d'un village ne peut être sacrifié en raison d'un quelconque calendrier politique. Ce principe s'appliquera bien sûr, tout aussi bien en raison de l'extension du mandat de six ans. En conclusion, M. le président...

Mr Speaker: With your permission, may I stop you there? Thank you very much, hon. Minister.

(7.24 p.m.)

Mr S. Mohamed (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I listened with a lot of interest to the hon. Minister of Environment and I have also listened with a lot of interest to the Minister of Public Infrastructure earlier on. There are certain important words that were used today by the Minister Hurreeram who talked about *gouverner, c'est prévoir*. And, I have come to the conclusion, having listened to all those speaking before me and most importantly those from the Government side, that I understand today why a lot of people in Mauritius do not have an easy task to say that they have confidence in *la classe politique*, because I have done some research and I have realised that, yes, I agree with many of us, that it is not the first time that the Local Government Act is being amended for postponement of elections.

When I hear hon. Ramano speak, it is like the pot calling the kettle black. In actual fact, when I read, ever since 2002, the debate on 02 July 2002, when there was hon. Lesjongard, if I am not mistaken, from memory, who was the Minister of Local Government presenting the change in legislation for the extension or the postponement of elections. He presented another one again in 2003 and in 2004 it was another Minister under the same MSM-MMM Government that presented the third amendment to postpone Local Government elections during the same mandate, and that was then hon. Mukeshwar Choonee in 2004 who was Minister of Local Government. So, fair enough, I mean I will not get into the debate as to whether it was justified or not; this debate has already been heard, it has already been decided upon, votes have already been taken on this, and it is an old story.

Yes, in 2005, the Labour Party Government together with PMSD brought changes to the Local Government Act. We restored, if you want to call it that way, Local Government elections in 2006. Then, late Burty David also came up with a new Bill to extend or postpone elections. Labour Party did it; in 2010, we did it again with the MSM. So, as it stands right now, I mean, if we are to try to be very practical or very objective about it, Mr Speaker, Sir, the MSM has done it, the MMM has done it, the Labour Party has done it, the PMSD has done it. We have just done it altogether. So, we have all done it. So, now, I am not going to get into a debate as to who was right, who was wrong. As I have said, all this is behind us, but there is one thing where I agree with hon. Hurreeram. Unfortunately, he is not here, and maybe his good friends could share that with him. He must be surprised that I agree with him on something. He very rarely says things that make sense. So, today, he said something and, today, he said that *gouverner, c'est prévoir*, and that is very true. It is not because we have all done it that it means that we have the right today to come and do the same thing again, which

is criticise one another. In one case, I remember the Minister for Local Government, hon. Lesjongard, in 2002, saying it was important to postpone, but, in 2010, I remember him making another speech when he thought it was a breach of democratic principles to postpone. So, fair enough, he was in the Opposition then, as opposed to him being in Government in 2002.

I, myself, I remember, made a speech in 2005 where I criticised the former regime for having postponed the elections, but I made another speech in 2010, saying we should postpone the elections. So, I think time has come where we should accept to look within ourselves and criticise what may have been wrong some time, some place. But we all agree with one thing, because at different points in time, be it the MSM, be it the Labour Party, be it the PMSD or the MMM, we all agree with one thing: that democratic principles are very important. Postponing elections as a principle should be avoided. We all agree on that. So, if we all agree on that, I don't believe that the debate should be on that. What the debate should be on is the following: there is an intrinsic link between the fact that we are living through difficult sanitary period of COVID-19 and the fact that elections cannot be held, according to Government. This link is there and has been set by Government. The rest is unimportant. Cheap political points can be said; well, you said this, I said that, you did this, I did that. Fair enough! This, people are fed up of hearing. So, what we want to know is - and therein lies the difference.

I speak for the Labour Party today. It is easy to criticise hon. Assirvaden as President of the Labour Party, but, maybe, one should listen to what he is saying, without trying to be on the defensive every time. What he is trying to say is as follows, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I agree with him, and let me try to simplify the principles we stand for.

We stand for a change in the ways of governing the country. Governance is important; democratic principles, *allons retourner à la source*. This is what the people want us to do. Forget about what we think is right! The people of this country, *l'électorat de l'île Maurice veut que retourne à la source la démocratie. Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire? Cela veut dire que* we have to take their views onboard. As it stands right now, you knew that we were living through the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government was aware, ever since last year, that we had to adapt to the new normal. As a new normal does not mean basically going to the old ways of doing things as this Government has been doing. You are just doing the same thing that the Labour Party did in 2010. You are doing the same thing that the Government did in 2002. You are repeating the mistakes of the past! You are, in fact, embracing the old

normal. What we are asking you to do is to adapt and embrace the new normal, and embracing the new normal means if you knew that there was going to be a problem pertaining to COVID-19, you knew that social distancing was important, you knew that you had to ensure that all social barriers and measures and cleaning one's hands, all this was important; you knew it.

What did this Government do ever since last year in order to adapt to the new normal? That is the question! Did it bring in vaccines? We have heard it from our friends. No, it did not. It is very simple; you did not bring vaccines in. We are looking like beggars on the world market; begging from India for a bit; begging from China for the rest; begging for a bit from Sheikh Soodhun trying to bring in 5,000 by private jet!

Mr Speaker: What all these have to do with the Bill?

Mr Mohamed: It is the inability to vaccinate the people that has created a situation today, where we have to consider this legislation because we cannot protect our people by holding elections. Had this Government had a proper vaccination programme and had it prepared ever since last year a proper vaccination programme, we would not have been in this situation today.

The fact remains, if the Government is asking for a maximum of 2 years, let us think about it, Mr Speaker, Sir; a maximum of 2 years. And this is not an innocent request. Two years, why? Because, as it stands right now, we have not – if I am not mistaken – even gone above the threshold of 15% of the population having been vaccinated. *On n'est qu'à 15% de la population!* We have heard from the Minister of Health and Wellness; we have heard from the Prime Minister; we have heard from their experts that you need to reach at least 60% in order to have herd immunity, or more. When are we going to reach that figure? We will not reach that figure even on these 500,000 vaccines coming from China. As it stands, to be honest, we will not even reach it until next year. Seychelles has not even done the second phase of vaccinations properly, and look what is happening in Seychelles. It is shooting up again. So, this is what is going to happen to us. That is the truth, and the reason why I think we should adapt to the new normal is precisely because we are living a time that is very, very complicated. I agree with Government; we are living a complicated time. So, forgive me, I do not agree with Government that we should necessarily have come and postpone the elections. Had I had the choice of, at least, advising Government, I would have simply read simple, beautiful articles and reports written, and one of them I read is from the Institute for

Democracy and Electoral Assistance, and that document is written by Antonio Spinelli and published on 16 April 2021, and the title of this document is “One year into Covid-19: Paving the way to change in electoral policy and practice”. That is what it talks about; changing the ways that people vote. How do you ensure that you have social distancing at the time of vote? How do you ensure - I am not talking only about electronic voting, we are talking about other ways of voting, proxy-voting, we are talking about home-voting, mobile ballot boxes, we are talking about trying to adapt to the new normal. Other countries have done it! Other countries have thought about it! Experts, not me! Not the Labour Party! Not the Opposition! Experts! International experts have written documents about it. This is what I would have expected Government to do in a moment where we agree we are living through difficult times.

Why simply react like the old normal by simply postponing elections? Why did we not set up a committee, ever since last year, if we knew that we would have had to adapt to a new normal, by proposing, preparing and planning for a different way of carrying out elections? Why was this not done together with the Office of the Electoral Commissioner? Why was it not done with the Electoral Supervisory Commission? Why did we not adapt to the new normal?

That is all I have to say. And when you think about hon. Ramano talking about, well, you know what, in England the local elections are postponed for one year. Yes, it was done for one year! We all know the devastation in England as from last year and how the whole COVID matter was not being managed properly. Fair enough! We are a smaller country and solutions should come easier to us than huge democracies like the United Kingdom. Finland, for instance, postponed elections on 18 April 2021; local elections. Finland! And they postponed it to 13 June 2021. Why is it that it can be done in other democracies? And why is it that we all have to follow other democracies literally and why can't we act differently?

So, in conclusion, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think it is a waste of time to keep commenting about what happened in the past because I say it again, we have all done it. So, if we are to keep scores, the MSM leads. But then, it would be ridiculous to say so. The MSM leads because they have done it more than us. Fair enough. Now, if you want to talk about General Elections, then it is another debate; then, maybe we lead.

So, I do not think that is really an important debate. What is important is there was an opportunity, Mr Speaker, Sir, for us to adapt to the new normal, to be able to give an example to other countries, out of those 118 that have held elections or the 70 or so that have

postponed elections, we could have been different. We could have shown that there was a way to hold elections and to adapt to the new normal, but we failed in that aspect.

So, we are before a situation today, unfortunately, where I disagree with the hon. Attorney General, when he says that you can either be a Westminsterien Parliamentary System, where it is the Head of the Executive that decides, it is either the Prime Minister or the President, I disagree with him.

In India, it is not the Prime Minister who decides the dates of the elections. It is not the Prime Minister of India who decides when is the date of elections; it is the Electoral Commission. It is the Electoral Commission! And what I disagree with is if you are to really speak about reality, the hon. Attorney General should not make mistakes, more so, he is the Attorney General. He cannot say that in the United Kingdom, it is the Prime Minister who decides on the date of elections. Untrue! In the United Kingdom, it is a fixed term. Things have been amended. No longer does the Prime Minister go to see the Queen, and Parliament is dissolved. That is not the case. Even in France, that is not the case. It is not the President of the Republic. In America, ever since 1849, it is not the President of the United States of America who decides when they will have elections. So, what is the Attorney General really on about? I fail to understand.

What I am trying to get here is not a competition as to who knows history about law or about the development of the law. It is not a competition between us, Mr Speaker, Sir. The only thing is, if we could have, at least together, have adapted to the new normal for local elections, we would have been an example to the world. And, unfortunately, that is the difference between the Labour Party and the MSM because you make politics about everything, whereas, at least, in the moment of difficulty...

Mr Speaker: Time to conclude!

Mr Mohamed: ...it is an opportunity to be different and to react as the experts and authors have written. It could easily have been implemented! Now, if you want to go on and on and on about what happened in the past, if you feel happy about it, if it really inflates your own political ego and you feel good about it and you can go home and have a nice night sleep, fair enough! But that is not a solution for the future of our country!

I have done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Collendavelloo!

(7:40 p.m.)

Mr I. Collendavelloo (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I shall be talking about the Bill tonight and not of things which are totally irrelevant to the Bill.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr Collendavelloo: Don't thank me. Mr Speaker, Sir, the overall Clause in this Bill is Section 12(A). What does it tell you? And we're going to vote for this tonight. Elections for Municipal Councils will be postponed, if it is voted, on two conditions: because there is an epidemic, in this case, the COVID and, secondly, because we are in a quarantine period. These are two conditions for postponing Municipal Elections. Not only this one! If in ten years, a similar situation, we hope not, arises, this is going to be the case.

Therefore, because of the sanitary conditions which we are experiencing these days, we need to postpone, and we know we would have been campaigning this time; we would have been going around, mixing with people, talking, and nowadays it is impossible to do a political campaign or to queue at the Voting Centre.

We must all acknowledge, as hon. Minister Ramano has done, the sober tone adopted by the Leader of the Opposition and the very sober matters; the sober tone in which he presented his arguments as well as his motion for amendment, which nobody else has talked about, except him. I will talk about it later.

The Bill, the new Section 12(A) tells you that you have these two conditions. Then, the Prime Minister would advise the President to extend, and the overall words, as the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Local Government has stressed, are 'during such periods', that is, only during the period of the epidemic and the quarantine period, not for any other period.

There is an amendment which is going to be made; we do not need to talk about it as the hon. Second Member for Constituency No. 2 did. So, there is an objective test. It is not, as we say, at the discretion of the Prime Minister or at his whims and caprices. It is objective. If there is an epidemic, if we are in a quarantine period, then elections are postponed, and if they are postponed, only for these periods.

This is why I have to turn to the proposal for amendment made by the Leader of the Opposition. Instead of this, the Leader of the Opposition tells us that we should insert that the

Prime Minister shall, “as soon as the sanitary conditions allow”, advise the President to dissolve Parliament, that is, after postponing, because he agrees that the elections must be postponed. But he says that we've got to have elections as soon as sanitary conditions allow. I ask myself the question: what sort of uncertainty is the Leader of the Opposition trying to insert in the law?

Who will judge that sanitary conditions allow the holding of an election? The Minister of Health? And if the Prime Minister decides that the sanitary conditions or the Minister of Local Government decides that the sanitary conditions do not allow the holding of elections, who is going to decide? The Supreme Court is going to go and make a scientific observation on the sanitary conditions?

I believe that amendment which is being proposed by the Leader of the Opposition, and I am not too sure whether this *Alliance de l'Espoir* is having the same music because I hear one language of the hon. Second Member for Constituency No. 2, I hear another language from the First Member of Constituency No. 3. The only one who comes level-headed in the Opposition is the Leader of the Opposition who says, ‘look here, we need to postpone, but, then, instead of bringing an objective test, let us have a subjective test as soon as the sanitary conditions allow’, that is, a vague, uncertain, and nobody knows when the elections will be held.

So, I believe that this amendment should be rejected totally, and I believe that the Members of the Opposition should reflect again on the proposal made by the Leader of the Opposition. Much has been said also on the fact that the mandate of the Mayors and the Presidents of District Councils are going to be extended. Yes, they are going to be extended, but nothing will prevent the Councils to change Mayor in accordance with the Local Government Act if they decide that it is going to be so.

Hon. Minister Ramano hit the nail on the head. After we have heard the Leader of the Opposition and then we listen to the hon. Second Member for Constituency No. 2, we hear two completely different speeches. One says, ‘yes, we agree the COVID situation is such that we cannot hold elections’. The other one does not agree that we should postpone elections and he quotes the number of countries. I have had time to check the website of IDEA. It is not correct what hon. Uteem said. He has mixed two figures. I have had a very quick reading. If you go to the website of IDEA, we will see that the vast majority of countries are now postponing elections. In France, they postponed the elections.

So, we need to see how we look at the figures. Statistics and figures, it's easy to confuse people with this; 78 and 118. It appears so magnificent that people will believe in what you said. Well, check the facts, and you will see that it is not so at all. This is why the hon. First Member of Constituency No. 3 did not know on what music he had to dance. He was just lost. Finally he talked, he made a speech on vaccination; he made a speech on electronic voting, because on the one hand, he had the Leader of the Opposition and, on the other hand, the spokesman of the MMM. We don't know! And we call it *l'Alliance de l'Espoir? L'Alliance de Désespoir! Ça l'espoir?* What are you going to do with this? And you want elections?

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think all people who have a little bit of wisdom will agree that what this Bill is doing is the correct thing to do, and I am going to support the Bill and vote against the amendment which has been proposed by the Leader of Opposition.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

(7.51 p.m.)

Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Je vous remercie M. le président. Nous procédons actuellement à l'examen du projet de loi qui vise à travers la section 12A du *Local Government Act* à proroger les mandats des élus municipaux en cas de situation d'urgence, de crise sanitaire ou de quarantaine pour une ou deux années additionnelles. Ces élections municipales auraient dû avoir lieu le mois prochain. Je voudrais joindre ma voix à celles de mes collègues qui m'ont précédée de ce côté de la Chambre pour dire que nous ne sommes pas contre le renvoi des élections, mais il y a une perception arbitraire et injuste, surtout dans la forme. D'un côté, il n'y a plus de distanciation physique dans les bus, taxis et métro ; seul le port du masque est requis, et de l'autre côté, on reporte les municipales pour cause sanitaire sur une période de 2 ans. Il est un fait que ces élections étaient très attendues dans nos cinq villes : à Port-Louis ; à Beau Bassin-Rose-Hill ; à Vacoas-Phœnix ; à Curepipe, et à Quatre Bornes. Les citoyens se sont mobilisés et sont prêts à toute éventualité pour donner une bonne raclée au gouvernement.

(Interruptions)

Disons les choses clairement. C'était prévisible que le gouvernement, face à une grande impopularité, avec une série de scandales politico-financiers, cherchait désespérément une porte de sortie...

Mr Speaker: Come to the Bill!

Ms Anquetil : ...pour le report de ces élections.

Mr Speaker: Come to the Bill!

Ms Anquetil : La Covid-19 a bon dos. Il est inconcevable que la Covid-19 serve de prétexte à une répression excessive. De toute évidence, le gouvernement a peur du verdict des urnes et n'hésite pas à mettre la démocratie sous cloche pour retarder une débâcle dans nos cinq villes. Les enjeux sont énormes pour l'Exécutif. Nous avons en effet affaire à un pur calcul politique. Est-ce que tout cela n'est pas un prétexte d'arrière-pensée politicienne du gouvernement ? La gestion de nos villes ces dernières années laisse à désirer et les bilans des cinq municipalités sont défavorables et peu flatteurs. On parle même d'administration bancaire.

M. le président, on ne change pas une équipe qui gagne, dit-on. Néanmoins, celles qui sont aux commandes des cinq municipalités actuellement sont appelées à disparaître lors des prochaines élections municipales.

Il s'agit d'un projet de loi concernant le droit de vote des citoyens. La démocratie repose sur le respect des échéances électorales déterminées par la loi. Sur le fond, les arguments défendus reposent principalement de ne pas mettre en danger la santé des centaines de milliers d'électeurs et les candidats. Ce qui dérange, c'est surtout le principe de sincérité autour de l'Article 12A. Est-ce un délai raisonnable que de décaler ces élections pour une durée de 2 ans maximum ? Pourquoi le gouvernement ne propose-t-il pas de repousser le scrutin à court terme, c'est-à-dire pour une période de 3 mois ? Au bout des 3 mois, faire une évaluation pour déterminer s'il y a une évolution de la situation sanitaire et voir, après soumission d'un rapport scientifique, si les conditions sanitaires sont réunies pour déclencher les élections.

M. le président, la démocratie ne peut pas rester confinée. Je rappelle à la Chambre qu'après le premier déconfinement, soit le 31 mai 2020, il y a eu la tenue des élections villageoises dans les 6 mois qui ont suivi, plus précisément le 22 novembre 2020. Pourquoi le gouvernement n'appliquerait pas le même principe de tenir les élections urbaines dans 6 mois, par exemple ? Pourquoi cette politique de deux poids deux mesures ? Pourquoi une

politique de *divide and rule* ? Nous rêvons d'une nation arc-en-ciel. Pourquoi ne pas faire de l'île Maurice le pays d'une seule grande ville ? La question qui s'impose : est-ce que le gouvernement ne serait pas en train de brader, voire de court-circuiter la démocratie en reportant le scrutin pour une période maximum de 2 ans ? Déjà pendant le confinement, le pouvoir Exécutif, les députés du gouvernement, les maires, les conseillers, les présidents de districts ont bénéficié d'une forme de monopole de mouvement, alors que les députés de l'opposition ont été mis à l'écart, n'ayant pas de *WAP* pour circuler, ce qui fausse le jeu démocratique. Quel mépris de nous avoir octroyé le *WAP* quasiment à la veille du déconfinement, suite au procès intenté par notre collègue Richard Duval !

Pour conclure, je dirais que le gouvernement n'a pas le courage d'affronter ces élections municipales. Par rapport aux changements apportés aux règles électorales, s'agit-il des modifications temporaires ou définitives ? La manière d'agir du gouvernement démontre une forme d'abus et confirme, malheureusement, que nous avons affaire à un gouvernement autocratique, alors que nous nous attendions tous à un gouvernement démocratique.

Je vous remercie M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for one hour.

At 7.59 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.04 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated! Dr. the hon. Mrs Dorine Chukowry!

Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry (Second Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): *Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.* M. le président, pour commencer, je conseillerais à l'honorable Ms Anquetil, qui malheureusement n'est pas présente dans la Chambre - elle arrive - de bien faire son *homework* avant de venir dire n'importe quoi dans cette auguste Assemblée. Je tiens à préciser que les *PPS*, les *backbenchers*, et même les ministres n'avaient pas de *WAP*, comme l'honorable Ms Anquetil a voulu faire croire, et a donc induit la population et le Parlement en erreur. Cette décision a été prise pour nous protéger, pour vous protéger.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I wish to congratulate Dr. the hon. Husnoo, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management for his caring gesture by bringing to the House the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2021) during this period of COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I feel that my sense of duty overrides anything else when it comes to standing for and by the measures and, indeed, philosophy envisaged through the enacting of the Local Government (Amendment) Bill. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the ever first woman to shoulder the responsibilities of Lord Mayor not so long ago, it goes without saying that my intervention on this Bill fits the calling of this noble tenure.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before everything, it will certainly be of vital assistance that our collective memory be refreshed for the purpose through a slice of our political history. Let me recall some important dates. District Council Elections were held on 31 August 1997, on 11 December 2005, on 02 December 2012, and also in November 2020. Elections were postponed because all the successive Governments in power believed that there were good reasons for doing so.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me indulge in another surveying of our rich history. In 2010, the Government in power under the prime ministership of Dr. the hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, postponed the Municipal Elections from 2010 to 2011 and re-postponed to 2012, because, again, the deferment was backed by reasons which were perceived to be valid and justified by the then Government.

M. le président, l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed nous demande de ne pas regarder en arrière. M. le président, le passé est important. On ne peut pas conduire une voiture sans regarder de temps en temps dans le rétroviseur.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will quote what hon. Shakeel Mohamed said in his speech on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill of 2010 concerning postponement of elections. I quote –

“What we are doing today has nothing to do with anti-democratic principles. Democracy would have been threatened had we cancelled the elections, but democracy here is being consolidated because we, as a responsible Government, have decided to come to this august Assembly, recognizing the principle of separation of powers, recognizing that it is Parliament that has to decide upon it. Long live democracy.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at that time, there was no pandemic and the election was postponed by two years. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and now, this Government strongly believes that the Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council Elections should be conferred with a transparent and structured legal implement in the event that a postponement

thereto is warranted. People should ask themselves how many Governments in the past, and even from different territories from ours, will go the extra mile to clearly and in no uncertain terms label out the legal implications, measures, procedures and motivating reasons for the postponement of such elections. There is a need for our psyche to register and assimilate the notion that a Government that thinks with both its head and heart will only seek to strengthen the locus of its citizenry for the present and the future.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Local Government (Amendment) Bill states that the postponement of Municipal City Council or Municipal Town Election or Village Council Election or the extension of political tenure will be effected in the event of, and I quote –

“an epidemic of a communicable disease in Mauritius and a quarantine period is in force in Mauritius.”

And that brings forth a very worrying state of affairs. How is it possible that some are insisting on a date? Hon. Xavier-Luc Duval, Leader of the Opposition, said, ‘when should the election be held is the problem’. We know that those vying for a date must be secretly confessing to themselves, even some talking to themselves that this is the best Government they have ever experienced. You will also agree with the required maturity of thought and wisdom that no sensible Government will ever be in a position to provide a specific future date for the simple reason that we are living in uncertain times, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, wherein every other day brings its lot of challenges and which require typical measures, and for good measure, it is fundamental to remind ourselves that the overarching necessity to have such amendments is to, first and foremost, in our relentless efforts as a caring and attentive Government to preserve the safety of our people.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, any election brings about gathering of all sorts and it is, therefore, inconceivable that we are going to willingly allow such a thing to happen. Hence, the need to postpone the Municipal City Election or the Municipal Town Council and Village Council Election at such time when the situation will safely allow us to do so. God protect our Prime Minister, his Government and his people!

Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Nagalingum!

(9.13 p.m.)

Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I rise to partake in the debates on Second Reading of the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2021), which aims at postponing the Municipal Elections due this year, I am reminiscent of my earlier service as a Municipal Councillor and a Mayor of the town of Beau Bassin /Rose Hill and my sense of outrage is at its peak.

Indeed, the decision of the Government to, unilaterally and abusively, deprived at the very last minute the inhabitants of the urban regions of the right to vote and to determine who should run the affairs of their respective regions is not just a mockery of democracy, it is also a constitutional crime because clearly we are not just looking at an amendment to the Local Government Act. Let us not make any mistake about that. The Bill that the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Mngement has brought to this House goes in truth and, in fact, beyond the scope of Local Government. It touches the very foundation of our democratic system, as set out in Article 1 of our Constitution. It is said, and I quote, Mr Deputy Speaker, that –

‘Mauritius shall be a sovereign Democratic State.’

I beg to ask, as a rule, do Democratic States suppress the right to vote? Do Democratic States postpone elections? Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are some States which do at the time, but they have the decency of not calling themselves democracies. They are, in fact, undemocratical, dictatorial, tyrannical and totalitarian States. Has Mauritius become one of these? To understand the horrendous action of the Government of robbing the people of their right to vote, it is important to set the historical context. Contrary to what some people believe, Local Government in Mauritius is not an offshoot of Government and did not come into existent only in the 1960s. In fact, the Ministry of Local Government came in existence in 1959, with Félix Laventure, a nominated legislator being appointed Minister and followed thereafter by Sookdeo Bissoondoyal. But Local Government has existed in Mauritius ever since the French Revolution in 1789, and in 1790, the Municipalities were set up. It is true that they were abolished later and re-introduced under the British Rule after 1810. Today, by a stroke of a pen, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management is erasing and insulting such a rich and historical legacy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now come to the Bill. It is stated in the Exploratory Memorandum to the Bill and it is, of course, borne further in section 6 of the Bill, that the reason to come up with an extension of a six-year term of a Municipal or Village Council is public emergency,

epidemic or communicable disease and quarantine period. These reasons, whether taken individually or together, appear to lack of seriousness of thought. Public emergency is already rooted in our Constitution. Article 18, we all understand, and we all agree that in a situation of emergency, in order to prevent *déravage et dérive*, the State has to give itself the mean to provide for stability in order to run the affairs of the country.

Public emergency is what it is; it is a necessary evil. It is a measure of last resort. It is the exception rather than the rule. There are already constitutional provisions for public emergency, including also adequate safeguard as to how a proclamation regarding public emergency lapses if it is not endorsed by the House after 07 days, 21 days or 6 months of making, as the case may be and Government should have left it at that. What was the need or relevance for the Government to import public emergency from the Constitution of the Local Government (Amendment) Bill, I fail to understand or rather I understand only too well that Government did not have enough valid reasons and have to resort to this poor face-saving artifice?

The second reason, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, put forward by the Government, links both an epidemic communicable disease and a quarantine period. They are to be read conjunctively. There again, it is difficult to follow the Government. Let's try to understand that for a moment. At this present moment in time, as I am speaking, an epidemic or pandemic or quarantine is not stopping the free movement of persons, or of goods or of services. It is not also stopping any economic activity, but conditions apply. Full scale work in both the public and private sectors is not stopped. If all that is possible in the mind of economic recovery and dynamism, why can't we also uphold the long fought and acquired right to vote in the name of democracy?

In the world of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, the peak of the second wave of Coronavirus is behind us. We have only localised infections which are under control. It is unrealistic and far-fetched to believe that the Municipal Election could have been held with special measures and arrangements to prevent crowds. Could we have used more voting centres with lesser people in each of them?

What I want to say is that so much could have been thought of to organise these elections while ensuring safety and security. Instead the Government has chosen the too easy and undemocratic option of postponement. Even if there was a real concern to prevent the further spread of the pandemic and to ensure the safety and protection of the population, why

is the Government providing for a one- year extension or at one time and a maximum extension of two years? That is way too long if really the concern is safety and security of people because we all know the plans are to ensure herd immunity by September 2021 and the reopening of our frontiers and the full-scale operation of all economic activities are then expected.

There is a clear inconsistency, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It seems that Government wants time to consider when it will be most appropriate for it to hold the election. I hope that at Committee Stage, Government will hear the voice of reason and will agree that an amendment for the Municipal Election to be held not in one year or two years as proposed by the soonest possible otherwise it will reveal its true intention of only running away from defeat.

In any democracy worthy of that name, the objective of Government is to pursue further the democratic ideal and to progress and make advances in that regard. It is to always remember that it is the people who decide. In a democracy, there is no place for imposition or arbitrariness or suppressing or curtailing of rights. It is true that some countries have indeed postponed their election because of the COVID-19 pandemic, however they are countries with sizably large population and which are severely hit by the pandemic; such is not the case of Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the present state of matters, Government will have its way but it is not too late for the hon. Vice Prime Minister to take a commitment on behalf of Government to repeal that new section 12A of the Bill at the soonest. Today is a sad day for Local Government. Today is a sad day for freedom and today is a sad day for democracy.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to borrow the words of Lyndon Johnson, I quote –

“The right to vote is the basic right without which all others are meaningless. It gives the people as individual the control over their own destinies”.

I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister Koonjoo-Shah.

(9.24 p.m.)

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Allow me, from the get go to congratulate my

colleague, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management for bringing this Bill to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2021) is being brought to this House because we are not in a business as usual mode. Due to the prevailing sanitary situation, the Bill makes provisions to allow the extension of Council Elections by not more than 1 year at a time, provided that the life of the Council shall not be extended for more than two years when there is or likely to be an epidemic of communicable disease in Mauritius and when there is a quarantine period in force. That is, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is based on an objective condition.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the entire world, unfortunately, is currently battling one common enemy and that is the COVID-19 pandemic. Since November 2019, we have been at the mercy of this pandemic and our country has had to adapt in many ways to face this unprecedented situation. We have had to take bold measures and decisions in order to curb the spread of the virus, in order to protect our population from a sanitary catastrophe. We have had to close our borders, we have had to impose a total lockdown allowing only for essential services and businesses to operate and despite the threat that this pandemic poses to our economy, this Government took necessary measures to provide every kind of assistance to the population and this is contrary to what an hon. Member from the Opposition has tried to insinuate that the Government has not been successful in the handling of the pandemic, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. And this Bill is yet another bold measure to prevent the upsurge of COVID-19.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is not the first or the only country to adopt measures to extend the period of the holding of elections because of the prevailing sanitary situation. My previous colleagues before me have elaborated extensively on this by citing many examples. The one that comes to my mind is in Jamaica; Local Government Elections originally scheduled for 29 November 2020 has been postponed twice initially to February 2021 to eventually February 2022.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some Members on the other side of the House have alleged that we are flouting our democracy and this is incorrect to say the least. The very fact that we are debating on this important piece of legislation today in this Temple of Democracy is, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, proof enough that this Government values fairness, transparency and democracy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me, with your permission, to put the question to this very House and to the population at large. Would we rather carry on with the Council Elections as stipulated and, in doing so, we rush head long into a sanitary disaster or will it not be wiser, more prudent and in the best interest of the citizens of Mauritius to choose to put off these Council Elections not indefinitely but at a more appropriate time? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are already waging one war against COVID-19. Let me reassure the Opposition, in particular hon. Anquetil, and reassure the population that this Government will not only win this battle against COVID-19 but also Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when the time arrives, we shall also win the Council Elections.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the objective of the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2021) is not to postpone indefinitely the Council Elections, it rather makes provisions that, when there is, or there is likely to be a pandemic of communicable disease, the provisions are there to extend Council Elections. And with your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to bring to the attention of the House, let the House recall that hon. Reza Uteem earlier in his intervention...

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: ... stated that he regretted that when his Party was in power, the Party did not amend the Local Government Act in order to be able to postpone Local Elections for a period of six months.

The Constitution, it is important to note, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and perhaps it is a good reminder to hon. Uteem that out of 50 years of existence of the MMM, they have only been in power for a cumulative amount of 10 years. So, it is not a big wonder that they were unable to amend the Constitution.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we must appreciate and acknowledge that it is not with merriment or mirth that this Government is proposing to extend the council elections, but in these unforeseen situations, we remain mindful of the protection of our citizens and that, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, remains the topmost of our priorities.

Allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to put this in perspective and informing the House of the very bleak situation prevailing in some countries that insisted on carrying out their scheduled elections during this period.

According to a study carried out by the European Parliamentary Research Service, published last year in July, in Cameroon, Mali and Burundi, there have been cases of

officials, citizens, politicians falling sick. In Guinea, the referendum held in March contributed to the spread of the virus and in Burundi, sadly, the country's President's death is very highly attributable to the virus and imagine our heartbreak if that would ever happen to any Member of the House, especially to the beloved Members of the Opposition.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Members of the Opposition are very busy shooting in the dark with their unfounded criticisms and, at this stage, it is important to remember that when demand for those vaccines was greater than the supply on the global market, when the whole world was rushing frantically to acquire vaccines, this Government, under the foursquare leadership of the Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Jugnauth, secured those vaccines for the population.

Now, let's take a look at the stand of the Opposition when we launched the vaccination campaign. Members of this Opposition started casting doubts on the efficiency of those injections.

(Interruptions)

While this Government was bending over backwards to get the population vaccinated, the Opposition's priority was revolving around consent forms. The Opposition's priority was to discourage the population from getting vaccinated. This is the Opposition that claims to be patriots and wish to give us lessons on democracy Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

This Bill endeavours to adopt an approach to protect our voters and all stakeholders and in doing so, we are allowing more citizens, who, because of safety reasons or otherwise, would have refrained from casting their votes due to the sanitary conditions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Bill is not a subterfuge to suit neither Members on this side nor the Members of the other side. It is not a politically-driven piece of legislation - at least not from our side - rather, it is a measure to protect this country and its citizens. I shall invite Members on the other side to try and for once put politics aside and focus on tackling this health emergency. Like some of my colleagues earlier on reminded this House that this is not the first time that elections have been deferred, there are some occasions where Municipal Council elections could not be held and were postponed without any valid reason.

And allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to very quickly refresh the memory of certain Members in this House, that in 2014, there were no Parliamentary Sittings between July and December because the Labour Party and the 50-year old MMM Party was switching on and off before the general elections and this is the Opposition's definition of Putting People First

and their definition of democracy, shutting the door of this Temple of Democracy for nine months. It is like parking an army tank in front of the gates of this Parliament.

(Interruptions)

So, I do not understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, why the vehemence to oppose this (Amendment) Bill. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, why?

(Interruptions)

I wonder. Let me reply to you. I wonder. Maybe your former Leader of the Opposition is reminiscing about the last municipal elections, and who knows, maybe he was looking forward to serving a plate of *macaroni* on the table of *l'espoir*. Maybe that's why there is the vehemence to oppose this (Amendment) Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

M. le président, le temps n'est pas à la démagogie. Les enfants, les inondations, la vaccination ou encore les relations diplomatiques ne sont pas des sujets sur lesquels nous devons faire de la politique partisane. Nous n'avons pas de temps pour cela. Le pays n'a pas besoin de cela. Le pays a d'autres priorités, beaucoup plus urgentes telles que la santé de notre population, la relance économique, l'adaptation à une nouvelle normalité ou plus important encore, le rétablissement du bien-être de nos citoyens.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I would like the House to humbly recall the urgency with which the COVID-19 pandemic has ripped through the worldwide social, economic and political landscapes. Let this act as an eye-opener that illustrates the objectives of this Bill and brings, hopefully, unanimity for it to be voted for.

Allow me to end by quoting, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Benjamin Disraeli, who says, and I quote -

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

I thank you very much for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Bodha, please!

(9.37 p.m.)

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to give me the opportunity to say a few words on this Bill.

First of all, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the key word today is ‘uncertainty’ and I would like, from the outset, say that I am going to be supportive of the proposed amendment of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I will mention that in the end.

First of all, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we know that we cannot have municipal elections now. We know that we cannot have municipal elections which will become a super spreader of the virus.

(Interruptions)

The question is: when are we going to have the municipal elections? And the other question is: in what conditions can we have these municipal elections, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

The Government never believed that a second wave of the COVID-virus would hit Mauritius. The thinking, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, was that from a COVID-safe environment, we would move to a COVID-vaccinated environment. But then, there was no preparedness as regards to a second wave because ...

(Interruptions)

I listened to everyone carefully.

(Interruptions)

Please, let me speak.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order in the House! Let’s listen to the orator, please!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Bodha: There was the issue of preparedness and today, we have the second wave. We have more than 650 cases, a number of people who have died. We do not still have the National Vaccination Campaign Horizon and we still need a little less than 1 million doses of vaccines for the months to come, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Now, there is no visibility and there is no certainty and we cannot have the municipal elections today.

So, the Government is coming with a proposed amendment of the Local Government Bill and, in Clause 6, the proposed section 12A, we are being asked to delete subsection 1 and replace it by the following subsection -

“At any time when –

- (a) there is, or there is likely to be, an epidemic of a communicable disease in Mauritius; and
- (b) a quarantine period is in force in Mauritius.”

When we read the subsection (a), you have two possibilities: when there is a pandemic, and the second one, is, where “there is likely to be”. When can we say that “there is likely to be”? Let us say that we have a period, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, where we are COVID-safe, we don't have local cases, we can always say from that moment, that “there is likely to be” a pandemic in the weeks to come, a new wave can flare up, we can have red zones and we can have the fact that there is no liberty of movement, and there is no liberty of association because of the confinement.

So, when we say that “there is likely to be,” it would mean that we need to have a window to be able to have municipal elections, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Today, there is a pandemic, tomorrow we need to have a window where “there is likely to be an epidemic of a communicable disease,” then, this will apply.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, à situation exceptionnelle, est-ce qu'on peut avoir des élections municipales dans un environnement exceptionnel ? Est-ce qu'on peut avoir une campagne électorale exceptionnelle parce qu'au plus profond de nos citoyens, il y a l'exigence du vote ? Les citoyens, que ce soit dans les municipalités, que ce soit dans les villes, que ce soit dans les régions rurales, souhaitent exercer leur droit fondamental, M. le président.

Hon. Mohamed came with a very interesting idea. Why cannot we sit down and organise, have a set-up, have a protocol, learn from what has been done elsewhere to be able to hold the municipal elections in Mauritius? Et comme j'ai dit, à situation exceptionnelle, on peut faire une campagne électorale exceptionnelle, M. le président.

M. le président, le droit de vote est sacré. Aujourd'hui, on ne peut pas faire les élections ; nous sommes d'accord. On explique pourquoi mais, il faut qu'il y ait une certitude à quand on pourrait faire les élections et comment on pourrait les faire.

When we are thinking of the Municipal Election, we are thinking of the same classical electoral campaign, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. And we want to have the same, what hon. Shakeel Mohamed said, the same old normal. Why, if we are all for democracy, if we are all willing that our citizens can exercise their right, and we all agree that today we have a pandemic and we all agree that there is no visibility, then, we should sit down and see to it, come up with a protocol which will allow our citizens to exercise their sacred right.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have a few other issues to raise. It is true that in the Constitution...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please! Continue! Continue! Look at me!

Mr Bodha: Can I..?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Bodha, look at me!

(Interruptions)

Order please, on this side!

Mr Bodha: In the Constitution, it was mentioned by hon. Uteem...

Mr Dhunoo: On a point of order!

The Deputy Speaker: I listen to it.

Mr Dhunoo: On a point of order! Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger uttered an unparliamentary word towards me; I want her to remove it.

(Interruptions)

Linn dire 'malelvé'. Tire li!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, did you...

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Hon. Ameer Meea!

(Interruptions)

Order, please!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Withdraw!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please! Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, did you say the word?

Ms Bérenger: Yes, I did.

The Deputy Speaker: Would you please withdraw it?

Ms Bérenger: It was not addressed to him; it was addressed to all the people...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Ms Berenger:...who are talking while someone...

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Ms Bérenger:...is giving a speech...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! Let me hear what she has to say! Please!

(Interruptions)

Ms Bérenger: I withdraw; but, they should have some respect.

(Interruptions)

Ms Bérenger: Respect others!

The Deputy Speaker: You are withdrawing unconditionally the word to whomever it was addressed. It is not appropriate to be saying it in the Chamber. Okay, thank you.

Please continue!

Mr Bodha: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. In the Constitution, and that was mentioned by hon. Uteem, extension of Parliament is allowed in an exceptional case for six months, and then, for one year. The mandate of Parliament of the National Assembly is five

years. So, the whole length with the extension in the cases of *force majeure* is 5 plus 1, that is, 6 years. The mandate for the local elections, that is, the municipal election, is six years, and now, we are being requested to vote for an amendment which will bring the six years to eight years. I think that this is unreasonable, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Now, the other thing is about the extension of the mandate of the Mayor, the Lord Mayor, the Mayor and the Councillors. In Municipalities, at least, I know one, where the Mayor has been there for the last four years. Would that mean that we are going to have the same Mayor for the next two years, which would mean six years? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that also, I believe, is totally unreasonable and I totally agree that there should be, the law should allow, the Bill should allow for a flexibility to choose the best to deliver as regard to the administration of the Municipality.

Mr Deputy Speaker, let me come now to the amendment of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He said, notwithstanding this section, the Prime Minister shall, as soon as the sanitary conditions allow. Hon. Collendavelloo said this is another uncertainty. But let me now read to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what the very extremely important publication, The Lancet, says about the virus –

“Science has uncovered much about the SARS virus, the COVID-19 and made extraordinary and unprecedented progress on the development of the COVID-19 vaccine, but there is still great uncertainty as the pandemic continues to evolve. COVID-19 vaccines are being rolled out in many countries, but this does not mean that the crisis is close to being resolved. We are simply moving to a new phase of the pandemic.”

It continues by saying –

“Naive assumptions about herd immunity, given the appearance of new and challenging variants, could seriously risk repeated outbreaks and recurrences.”

And the conclusion, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is as follows, from The Lancet –

“With such uncertainties, we should not assume that recent scientific progress on COVID-19 diagnostics, vaccines, and treatments will end the pandemic. The world is likely to have many more years of COVID-19 decision-making ahead - there is no quick solution available at present.”

No one in this House can say when Mauritius will master the pandemic. We are saying that we are giving the Government two years to be able to find this window, where we can have Municipal Elections, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Nobody knows how this is going to evolve and I have said this is the authoritative, professional scientist experts, who have talked at the level of the Lancet. We do not know how long this pandemic is going to live with us. So, I think that giving two years is just a date, what we need is that we have a certainty as we can have a Municipal Election. So, what is the Leader of the Opposition saying as soon...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Bodha, you have about one minute.

Mr Bodha: One minute! Okay. What the Leader of the Opposition is saying: as soon as the sanitary conditions allow. So, we should define it among ourselves. If we love this country, if we love democracy and we should be able to say: *situation exceptionnelle, solution électorale exceptionnelle*, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. And this is why I am saying Dr. the hon. Minister said that there is no political agenda, that they like the whole issue of democracy, there is no political move. Let us say we trust them, but what we need is we need certainty because I do not think that within two years, we will have this window.

To end up, I would like to say two things, Mr Deputy, Speaker, Sir, it is high time that we re-engineer our regional democracy and the way we administer our cities and our towns. We are spending billions and we are not getting the result.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: And I would like to end by saying, let the dates be fixed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for a Municipal Election then, we will see how the Opposition will react and we will see how the nation will react.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister Lesjongard!

(9.53 p.m.)

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): *Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. M. le président, je vous remercie de me donner la permission de dire quelques mots sur les amendements proposés au Local Government Act.*

M. le président, en écoutant les discours, que ce soit des collègues du gouvernement ou que ce soit les membres de l'opposition, et surtout en écoutant l'intervention du chef de l'opposition, l'honorable Xavier-Luc Duval, j'étais sous l'impression qu'on avait aujourd'hui, un consensus sur le report des élections municipales. Mais cette impression n'était qu'éphémère, M. le président. Ce qui me gêne aujourd'hui, c'est qu'avec ce consensus, M. le président, toute la classe politique mauricienne aurait envoyé un signal fort à la population sur le report des élections et leur faire comprendre que la priorité de la classe politique aujourd'hui, c'est la santé de la population.

Malheureusement, ça n'a pas été le cas. Et pire, j'ai écouté aussi l'intervention de l'honorable Reza Uteem. J'ai comme l'impression en l'écoutant, M. le président, qu'on ne suit pas ce qui se passe de par le monde. On n'est pas au courant de combien d'élections ont été renvoyées, et ceux qui ont tenu les élections, qu'est-ce qui s'est passé par la suite ? Allons prendre la plus grande démocratie du monde. M. le président, j'ai avec moi les observations des juges de la Haute Cour de Madras à Chennai en Inde. Et je vous demanderais de me permettre de citer ces observations, parce que ce que disent ces juges-là ont toute son importance dans ce qu'on est en train de débattre aujourd'hui à l'intérieur de cette Chambre, et ces observations ne sont pas adressées à un gouvernement ; ces observations sont adressées à la Commission électorale indienne. Je cite-

“Public health is of paramount importance and it is distressing that Constitutional Authorities have to be reminded in such regard. It is only when citizens survive that they enjoy the other rights that this Democratic Republic guarantees onto them. The situation is now one of survival and protection, and everything else comes after.”

Et cette Commission s'est fait rabrouée par, et je cite le nom des deux juges, le *Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee* et le *Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy*. Et ils viennent dire -

“that the Electoral Commission should be put up on murder charges for being the most irresponsible institution.”

Est-ce que c'est ça que nous voulons dans notre pays en organisant des élections ? C'est pourquoi, M. le président, je ne comprends pas la position de l'opposition. Déjà, en écoutant les interventions, nous notons - et c'est bon que la population note ce qui a été dit, parce qu'en dehors de cette Chambre, ils donnent l'impression qu'ils veulent aider non seulement le gouvernement mais qu'ils veulent aider la population aussi à surmonter cette

pandémie. Et ce n'est pas le cas, M. le président, en écoutant les positions qu'ils ont prises à l'intérieur de la Chambre.

Je vais plus loin dans mes observations. J'ai écouté avec beaucoup d'attention ce qu'a dit l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed dans son intervention. *He treated our country as beggar; we begged India for vaccines, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.*

M. le président, qu'avons-nous dit pendant toute cette pandémie ? Nous avons dit qu'il faut un élan de solidarité. Ce que l'Inde a fait vis-à-vis de Maurice, c'est dans un élan de solidarité, M. le président. Et ces quelques bonbonnes d'oxygène que nous avons envoyées en Inde, *they were not beggars ; we sent that* dans cet élan de solidarité, M. le président.

Ce que vous donnez dans la vie, ce n'est pas la valeur, ce n'est pas la quantité qui compte, c'est l'intention qui compte, M. le président. Voilà, c'est pourquoi je vous dis, M. le président, je suis extrêmement déçu de par la position prise, parce qu'au tout début de son intervention, je pensais qu'on avait consensus aujourd'hui, et c'est ce qu'avait fait comprendre le leader de l'opposition et c'est ce qu'avait fait comprendre, l'honorable Bodha. Mais l'honorable Bodha, je comprends sa position. Tout récemment, il était avec nous, ministre de ce gouvernement, il a fait partie de ce *High-Level Committee* qui est présidé par le Premier ministre. Il sait pertinemment bien, et le mot-clé de son intervention a été l'incertitude. *We have no visibility, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. How can we, when we have no visibility, say when we are going to hold elections, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?*

Tout le monde le sait. Quand je dis tout le monde, c'est le Monde, c'est notre planète, M. le président. Ceux qui ont essayé d'organiser les élections, ils ont vu ! Je prends l'exemple des élections municipales en France. L'année dernière, le taux d'abstention était de 54.5%. Déjà, à Maurice, quand on organise des élections municipales, le taux de participation ne dépasse pas 50%. Vous voulez faire des élections avec 25% ? Mais ce n'est pas possible ! Parce que l'autre argument, si on fait des élections et qu'il n'y a qu'un taux de participation de 25%, vous savez qu'est-ce que les gens vont dire ? Mais vous n'avez pas gagné les élections avec 25% !

(Interruptions)

Maintenant...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Virtuel sa! Virtuel!*

Mr Lesjongard: Non, arrivons à cet aspect de virtuel, parce que j'ai entendu l'honorable Bodha et l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed avancer l'argument, M. le président, que *'we are in a new normal situation; let us organise elections differently; let us ask the Electoral Commission to organise elections differently.'* And I believe that argument was raised by hon. Minister Kavy Ramano, when he intervened, and that was canvassed by him. But I want to canvass that again, because what is being done in other countries, yes, in the new normal, vote by proxy! Do we want again petitions for rigging elections in this country? Municipal elections? Do you think that we can ask people to vote by proxy in this country? This is not possible, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It is for this reason que la classe politique de ce pays aurait dû envoyer un signal fort à la population de ce pays contre ce virus invisible, contre cette situation qui fait des millions de personnes contaminées, des millions de personnes qui meurent de par le monde : nous sommes à vos côtés aujourd'hui.

C'est vrai, M. le président, dans le passé, que ce soit au MSM, que ce soit au Parti travailliste, que ce soit au MMM, nous avons tous participé dans le renvoi des élections municipales. Moi-même, M. le président, en tant que ministre, j'ai piloté un projet de loi pour renvoyer les élections. Mais je suis même, en tant que membre de l'opposition - et l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed l'a dit dans son intervention - intervenu pour dire pourquoi on renvoie les élections.

Mais le cas n'est pas pareil, M. le président. Le monde est à genoux, vous-autres ! Il y a des gens qui ont perdu leur emploi. Est-ce que ce n'est pas ça la priorité dans notre pays aujourd'hui ? Il y a des gens qui n'ont pas à manger aujourd'hui à cause de COVID-19 ! C'est pourquoi la démocratie a toute son importance, mais dans une situation de force majeure, il y a d'autres considérations à prendre, M. le président.

M. le président, je n'ai pas beaucoup de temps avant de terminer mon intervention, mais ce que je souhaiterais dire avant de terminer est que ce combat contre le COVID-19, nous allons le gagner en restant un peuple uni. Faire la basse politique sur le COVID-19 n'est pas une bonne chose. Tous ceux qui jusqu'à maintenant ont contribué à éliminer le COVID dans notre pays, il nous faut les saluer aujourd'hui, M. le président, parce que ce sont ces mêmes personnes qui, demain quand on va organiser les élections, seront les *frontliners*. Nous, nous sommes bien lotis ici. Il y a des gens qui risquent leur vie tous les jours et pas pour une semaine ou un mois, plus d'une année, M. le président! Qu'ils soient dans le service hospitalier, qu'ils soient des éboueurs, qu'ils soient dans le port, qu'ils soient à l'aéroport, ils

risquent leur vie tous les jours. Et c'est pourquoi je vais terminer sur cette note, M. le président.

Je les salue, ces personnes-là, et au niveau du gouvernement, nous leur souhaitons bon courage et nous espérons qu'ensemble nous allons refaire toute une population retrouver le sourire.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much! Hon. Wochit!

(10.06 p.m.)

Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank you for availing me with the opportunity to give my views on this (Amendment) Bill to the National Assembly.

In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as a former Chairperson of the District Council, I can say that the expectation of the public at large has remained unattended as at now, as this Bill ignores the predominant role of the Ministry of Local Government in the proposed Amendment Bill for both rural and urban voters.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Local Government (Amendment) Bill, (No. VII of 2021), constitutes a sad event in the political history of our country. If I understand the Bill correctly, the proposed Amendment empowers the President of the Republic to postpone the municipal elections by extending the life of Municipal Councils for a period of up to 2 years, if certain conditions are satisfied –

- (i) there must be a period of public emergency in force in Mauritius;
- (ii) there is or there is likely to be, an epidemic of a communicable disease in Mauritius, and
- (iii) there must be a quarantine period in force in Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, many countries around the world that were due to organise elections have had to decide whether to hold them, as originally planned, introducing mitigating measures, putting them on hold or to postpone them on a later date. It is to be noted that we have no such plan as far as Mauritius is concerned. When deciding whether to continue with elections or not, decision-makers need to consider a series of legal, technical and sanitary parameters and implications, as well as

constitutional provisions, to ensure that democratic institutions operate as they should in normal circumstances and to ensure that people's fundamental rights and freedom are upheld.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Municipal elections as well as Village Council elections are essential to ensure the democratic functioning of our local authorities. Local democracy is essential to ensure that local policies reflect the needs and preferences of local communities and effective local democracy can facilitate public participation, improve service delivery, strengthen communities, and improve development outcomes.

In that vein, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to recall that it was the Labour party, which took the initiative of introducing legislation so as to ensure a fairer gender representation by stipulating that at least one-third of candidates standing for local elections should be of a different sex. This bold measure has resulted in significantly improving the representation of women councillors in Municipal Councils from 12% in 2005 to 35% in 2012.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since 2015, the political landscape of Municipal Councils has changed; some councillors who were elected to serve a particular area or ward have migrated to outside their regions; some have taken up with new employment and some for other related reasons.

The result is that these councillors are unable to attend to the several problems encountered in their respective wards or are simply not interested in fulfilling their commitment which they undertook in 2015 when they were elected. It is to be noted that the last Municipal Elections were held in 2015 and, therefore, as per the provisions of the Local Government Act, the elections are due in this current year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the right to vote is an essential aspect of our democracy and the democratic fibre of our country is embedded in our Constitution, which is the Supreme Law of Mauritius. Our Constitution clearly stipulates that Mauritius is a sovereign and democratic country, and it provides for general elections at regular intervals so that citizens can choose their Government. Elections, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, make a fundamental contribution to democratic process whereby elected Members acquire the right to take decisions on behalf of their citizens during their mandate.

Our Constitution even goes further to ensure that the lifetime of our Parliament is a maximum of 5 years from the date of the first Sitting of the Assembly. Furthermore, Section 47(3) of the Constitution makes it almost impossible for the postponement of General Elections. A Bill for an Act of Parliament to postpone the holding of General Elections

cannot be passed by the Assembly, unless 25% of the electorate decides so in a referendum and receives the unanimous vote of all the Members of the National Assembly. Unfortunately, the Local Government Act does not provide for such a similar safeguard.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what will happen if at the eve of general elections, our country is faced with a situation of emergency due to a new surge of COVID-19 or any other epidemic? It is clear that the Constitutional provisions will prevail and will prevent the postponement of the general elections, even all, but one MP, agree to the postponement. As the Prime Minister has said on several occasions, we must learn to live and cope with situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. We, therefore, need to look for measures as to how the democratic process can operate in such situations of sanitary emergency.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do understand that there is a need to strike a balance between the health of the population and the democratic and civic rights of our citizens. Instead of planning to postpone Municipal Elections outright, any serious Government would have considered ways and means to hold the elections without putting at risk the health of the population.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have also been given to understand that Government is planning to open the borders by July or August this year itself, when a significant proportion of its population would have been vaccinated. I, therefore, fail to understand the necessity of postponing Municipal Elections for a period of up to 2 years. It would be more sensible to hold the elections towards the end of this year, rather than completely postponing the Municipal Elections for a period of up to 2 years.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there will obviously be some difficulties in the organisation of the elections, especially during the polling day. However, if adequate and appropriate sanitary measures are observed, this exercise can be carried out, with minimal risk of infection. For instance -

1. Hand sanitizer should be available for voters and poll workers.
2. Alcohol should be available to disinfect surfaces and voting materials.
3. Face masks should be available for poll workers in sufficient quantity to be replaced after every four hours.
4. Voters and polling clerks should wear face masks, keep at least one meter away from everybody, and regularly sanitize hands and materials.

5. Social distancing among voters in poll queues should be maintained by signs on the floor.

Together with these measures, campaigns on TV and the media could publicise the mandatory use of face masks in polling stations and encourage voters to bring their own pens for voting.

Observing the sanitary measures could result in a slow voting speed, and to remedy this situation, polling stations could operate for longer hours; for instance, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., without interruption. Counting and the proclamation of results could be arranged on the same day, as it was done for the Village Council Elections held last year.

The popularity of the present Government has been constantly declining due to the numerous scandals since this Government came into power – which I don't want to elaborate on right now. If the Government believes that by postponing the Municipal Elections, it can mitigate the damage caused to its image and regain its popularity, then, it is surely mistaken as it is too late. On the contrary, postponing Municipal Elections will increase the growing frustration and anger of the population. In this context, I suggest that the Bill be put on hold for the time being and we wait until end of August or September, when the borders would have been opened. If we happen to contend the transmission of the COVID-19 disease to an acceptable level, then, the Municipal Elections can be organised under strict sanitary conditions, as outlined earlier, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

However, if ever the pandemic situation remains a serious threat, then, we will still have time to come up with amendments so that the Municipal Elections be postponed and held in three months after the period of public emergency in force in Mauritius or after an epidemic of a communicable disease or after a quarantine period is in force in Mauritius, as the case may be. I am of the opinion that, this Bill, if voted, will negatively impact on the results of the next General Elections in three years' time, as far as the Government party in power is concerned. Fortunately, for the General Elections, we can rely on our Constitution to safeguard our democracy, as these elections cannot be postponed by a mere Act of Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to conclude, there are several amendments that are more important than the postponement of the Municipal Elections, and which need to be considered by the Minister of Local Government. For example, we need to review the appeal system, in particular, the functioning of the Environment and Land Use Appeal Tribunal

(ELAT) to prevent delays in granting permits, as this causes much frustration and hardship to our citizens. The role of Local Authorities need be revamped for a more inclusive society.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us hope that the Minister of Local Government will take the wise decision to withdraw this Bill which in the light of my arguments, is not justified.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Mrs Tour!

(9.19 p.m.)

Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): I must admit, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that having to delay the Local Elections might not seem ideal at first hand. It is not ideal to postpone the choice of the people to choose who they want to run their local communities, but, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are far from being in an ideal situation right now. The aim of this Amendment clearly states its objective, which is to amend the Local Government Act to provide that, at any time, where there is or likely to be an epidemic or a communicable disease in Mauritius and a quarantine period is in force in the country, there shall be an extension.

Effectivement nous sommes en période de crise sanitaire, nous faisons face à un ennemi invisible et mortel et, au sein de ce Gouvernement, M. le président, quand il s'agit de faire le choix entre tenir les élections et la sécurité de la population, eh bien, la sauvegarde de la population mauricienne l'emporte. Pendant que certains trépignent à l'idée de donner une raclée au Gouvernement lors des élections municipales, le Gouvernement est en train de mettre toute son énergie et ses moyens pour donner une raclée à cette pandémie. Il est donc clair, M. le président, que certains membres de l'Opposition n'ont que faire de la santé des Mauriciens.

This proposed Local Government (Amendment) Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, ensures that we can focus our energy fighting off the current crisis and get back as quick as possible to the desired ideal where our children can go back to school, where we can all go back to work safely, where the activities of the country can resume steadily and we can all look forward to a better future for our Mother Island.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is an unprecedented global pandemic, the world is shaken and is crumbling around us. We see friendly countries battling for survival and we do

not wish to see the desolation that we witnessed on international news in Mauritius. We pray that a similar situation does not come to our shores.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I urge my fellow elected representatives not to get entangled into trivialities of partisan politics when we are faced to such a difficult situation, and I would magnanimously encourage them to support the amendment for the security of our citizens. Indeed, this Bill proposes to postpone the election. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we should remember that elections have been postponed in the past, but then it was for pure political reasons, and not because we were facing a global life-threatening pandemic.

The safety protocols, like social distancing, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are keys to breaking the chain of transmission of this deadly virus. However, an election process is in a sense the opposite of social distancing. It is a gathering of the civil societies with the common goal of taking a decision that is, who they want to appoint to certain tasks and responsibilities. We all know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that local elections involve public events and gathering of many people at times to discuss social matters, suggestions and ideas. The candidates and their supporters should and will reach out to the public to get the votes out. Door to door, leaflet distributions, mass rallies with activists drumming up support are all signs of a healthy election and a working democracy, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. As rightly pointed out by the eminent Professor Toby James, election, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are also supposed to be a time for talking. Simply holding an election is insufficient because citizens should actively consider their interests and their issues way up competing arguments made by candidates and discuss around dinner table, in coffee shops, or around street corners. But, unfortunately Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, all these activities compulsory to have fair and healthy elections in this time of predicament will be irresponsible and dangerous, and will definitely put the lives of our people at risk. This amendment ensures that we will be having the elections when it is appropriate and most of all safe to do so. It is vital for our democracy that we have healthy elections when everyone will feel safe to go out and vote.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, limiting the election process to just voting activity is a reductive idea and a false argument to begin with. We all know that each election has its own folklore and traditions, and despite the best efforts, it will be difficult to ensure that safety measures are respected during those activities. An election campaign, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, should not be a vector to increase the number of COVID-19 cases in Mauritius. Moreover, on the Election Day citizens turn up to polling stations are handed a ballot paper to cast their choice. There is a whole logistic that is set up, empowered by dedicated public

servants. The intent of this Bill does not only concern the voters, but also takes on board the public service staff who often work full days to keep our democracy alive. We should not deliberately put them in harm's way if we can avoid doing so. Countries like the UK were forced to take the same approach and postpone their local elections due to this pandemic. There are many such actions taken by Governments and authorities around the world as they try to contain the virus.

On the local front, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are many elected officials who are there in the Municipal Council, who stem from the Opposition. Some of them are currently running a Council, not doing a great job I must admit, but they were chosen to do this job. It would be wrong and worth the outcry if we had unelected people running the Council. The current teams in place were legitimately elected; chosen by people to serve a term. Through this Bill, what we are asking them, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is to keep their post for a bit longer, to carry on serving their country in their current capacity, while we focus on fighting this invisible foe and prevent it from spreading, and at the same time keep our attention geared towards building an inclusive society for all the people of Mauritius in these extremely difficult times. A battle, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we can win, but we should be incisive and bold in our actions.

This amendment, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, explicitly mentions that the extension of the current mandate shall not be extended by more than one year. The intention of this amendment does not in any scenario perpetuate indefinitely any power system, and is far from being the hegemonic ideology that my colleagues from the other side of the House are creatively portraying. Section 10A (3) of this amendment also provides the prerogative to the President who, upon the advice of the Prime Minister, may at any time dissolve the entire Municipal City Council, and Municipal Town Councils, and the entire Village Council, and hold.

It is understood that should we be COVID safe in a few months' time, we can absolutely be certain that the President and the Prime Minister will make the right call. This amendment imposes a time limit; there is an expiry date if you wish. I am confident that it will be safer to carry out elections by then. Democracy in our country has always prevailed and we will be the guardian of it. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we need to ensure that we do not endanger the very people that we have sworn to serve and to whom we owe protection above our own party politics. I therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, recommend this

sagacious Local Government (Amendment) Bill to the House for the security of our nation. I thank you for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Mr Speaker will resume the Chair.

At this stage, Mr Speaker took the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Lobine!

(10.30 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall be brief and I shall stick to the Bill and the amendments being proposed to the Local Government Act. I do not wish to be repetitive, Mr Speaker, Sir in as much as I am of the view that it has been sufficiently canvassed before this august Assembly, that in view of the current sanitary conditions, the postponement of the Municipal Elections is in principle agreeable by hon. Members from both sides of the House as an exception to the rule. But, where there are some diverging views, it is mostly with regard to the fundamental question: when will the next Municipal Elections be held?

This is on the lips of many inhabitants of the City Council and the four other Town Councils and this is the issue that this House should debate upon. We are facing the second wave of the pandemic and, at this point in time, it is our level of preparedness to operate as a democracy as the hon. Vice-Prime Minister put it which is at stake, and upholding the rule of law and engaging in free and fair elections as our guiding principle. This is where I shall invite the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to also take into account what other countries have been doing. Yes, many democracies, Mr Speaker, Sir, have been postponing elections. As per the International Foundation for Electoral Systems as at May 2021, some 119 election events have been postponed. So, I agree that we are not being an exception but what other countries are doing while bringing amendments to their respective electoral laws, they are preparing guidelines, rules and support as to how to go about and organise elections as soon as it is reasonably possible.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for example in the UK, their Government postponed local elections and by-election for a year and same were recently held. But throughout that period, between the postponement of the elections up to the holding of the elections, they stood guided by various reports prepared by independent experts and disseminated those information to their public at large so as to prepare them. One such report, Mr Speaker, Sir, was a report prepared by the British Academy, entitled 'How to hold elections safely and democratically during the

COVID-19 pandemic' and I shall respectfully invite the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to consult this document and as the hon. Prime Minister has himself stated, we have to live with COVID-19. Now, coming to the amendment being proposed by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, this goes in line with the principle of certainty, Mr Speaker, Sir. With a view to consolidating democracy at the local level, in 2015, while debating on the then amendment being proposed to the law at that time, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, who was Minister of Local Government at that time, also went on to state the following, and I quote –

“We all know that the local Government is the first public authority due to its proximity where citizens look up to solve their immediate social, welfare and environmental problems. It is also the level of democracy in which the citizen has the most effective opportunity to actively and directly participate in decision-making for the society. In other words, Mr Speaker, Sir, a vigorous local democracy is the basis for a healthy national level democracy.”

In that same spirit, Mr Speaker, Sir, I invite the hon. Members from both sides of the House to ponder and accept the proposed amendment to clause 3 in the proposed new section 10A (3) of the Bill. What this amendment is all about, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with regard to the element of certainty. Instead of where the Prime Minister may at any time move to dissolve the entire Municipal City Council, etc., this proposed amendment is asking that the Prime Minister shall, as soon as the sanitary conditions allow, advise the President to dissolve the entire. So, it goes in line with what has been canvassed in this very august Assembly for years now, an element of certainty in local elections.

And also, Mr Speaker, Sir, I also tend to agree with the arguments of the hon. Attorney General with regard to another element of certainty introduced in this Bill with regard to amendments being brought by way of what is being proposed by clause 4 of the Bill, by amending section 11 of the Principle Act, and including now, a timeframe to issue writs of elections within 60 days of the date of any dissolution. So, party politics apart, I am of the humble view that the proposed amendment of the Leader of the Opposition, both sides of the House should have a look at it. It is only consolidating what we call the element of certainty. And to conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall also humbly request the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, after the enactment of this Bill, to kindly work on the guidelines, the protocols, for example, as per the Report of the British Academy, so that we are prepared to face very soon the next municipal elections with serenity.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Balgobin!

(10.36 p.m.)

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the floor to debate on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill.

As extensively canvassed by my colleagues earlier, it is of utmost importance to understand the amendments being proposed today. That is –

“to provide at any time, when there is, or there is likely to be, an epidemic of a communicable disease in Mauritius and a quarantine period is in force in Mauritius, the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister can extend the life of the Councils.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, when we hear the comments of the Members of the Opposition, that this Government is doing these amendments for the sole purpose to postpone the Municipal Council elections and it is being done just for the sake of postponing election.

Mr Speaker, Sir, compared to what Members on the other side of the House are stating, the COVID-19 pandemic is not an excuse but it is a genuine reality. The stakes of the holding of local elections during a pandemic are way too high. Let me ask them a question: Are we the only country in the world which is proposing such amendments in law for potentially postponing an election because of an unprecedented pandemic?

Obviously, the answer is no, Mr Speaker, Sir. Many elections around the world - and this topic has been canvassed by many of my colleagues - have been disrupted by the Coronavirus crisis. Earlier, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, my colleague hon. Hurreeram and others mentioned about it. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, that has been cited today many times by many orators, which is an inter-governmental organisation, mentioned in the Report. Yes, 78 countries and territories across the globe have decided to postpone their national and subnational elections, due to COVID-19 –

- 14 countries in Africa
- 17 in the Americas

- 27 in Europe
- 17 in Asia-Pacific and at least
- 3 countries in the Middle-East

Mr Speaker, Sir, when I hear hon. Uteem very proudly say that my colleague, hon. Hurreeram deliberately omitted to say that, yes, 78 countries postponed the election but 118 countries held the elections, very proudly he said it, look what is happening in other countries. Yes, it is a fact. 118 countries decided to hold the elections. He seemed to vouch for such countries that held the elections, but what hon. Uteem deliberately failed to mention, which are the countries among those 118 countries he mentioned held election in the pandemic.

Let me give you the examples, to refresh his mind, he is vouching for countries like Israel who held election in March 2021 or local elections in India in January 2021, constitutional referendum in Italy, or the Senate election in France. So many examples. But then, what he omits to say is what happened to those countries after holding those elections. We could see a big surge of COVID-19, but, this, he doesn't mention. Russia, the third most affected country in the world at that time, held national vote over seven days in June 2020 on constitutional amendments. The country had no other choice, and the vote was stretched over several days to minimise health risk. But critics pointed out that this also made it harder to monitor, and there was an increase in the spread of the virus in the community.

Elections held in India, as pointed out by my colleague, hon. Lesjongard; an example is in West Bengal. And again, what happened? The Indian Press - and I have it here - titles "Bengal elections 2021: Rallies lead to a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases". They had more than 17,000 cases per day and more than 90 deaths per day in that State after holding elections and doing public gatherings and rallies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is good also to highlight that in the past, elections have been postponed for public health reasons, including those in the light of Ebola crisis in West Africa between 2013 and 2016; the 2016 presidential election in Democratic Republic of Congo, and the 2014 senatorial elections in Liberia. Mauritius is no exception. The priority of this Government, under the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, is to protect each and every citizen and limit the spread of the virus in the community. We love our people. We love our children. We love our families. We love our motherland, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Opposition is asking - and we hear many orators asking - for a timeframe, asking for a date to be included in the proposed legislation to say when Municipal Elections will be organised next. But what date? Which time frame? Can they give a time frame to the population with respect to the world being cured of the COVID-19 pandemic? It's so easy to come and say 'give us a date'. We don't have visibility with this invisible enemy, Mr Speaker, Sir. Members of the Opposition so conveniently choosing to ignore the fact that when we had the right sanitary conditions in the country and no threat was in line of sight, our Government did organise the Village Council Elections in November 2020. Ultimately, if the guiding principle, as an Opposition, is so loose, their narrative and arguments will be equally easily flexed to suite their political agenda, as they have been pinning down all the way along the proposed amendments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when I hear the Members of the Opposition, they are trying to blame us for the pandemic. Unfortunately, they don't realise that our enlightened citizens are not going to be carried away by their statement, as they know it is primordial to stay safe. Voters will protect themselves. This Government would protect the population, but the Opposition will doom us all. How irresponsible and deplorable. All that for what? All that just for the thirst of power and rule?

Mr Speaker, Sir, when we listen to all the colleagues on this side of the House, we are all aligned together. But when we hear Members of the Opposition, some would say, 'we should do the elections'; others say, 'no, we agree, let's postpone the elections'. Some would say, 'we postpone with a date'. They themselves don't know what do they want. It is, as if, you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, you postpone the elections, *dimoune li koz ou*; you don't postpone the elections, *dimoune li koz ou*. They don't know what do they want.

I am very sad hon. Bodha is questioning the mandate of a certain Mayor; that, in some cases, a Mayor has done such and such mandates. And he is most probably referring to the Mayor of Curepipe – most propably. But he seems to forget, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this very Mayor has been his *fidèle lieutenant* for many years; this *fidèle lieutenant* who has helped him to be elected in so many elections. And, today, just because he is in the Opposition, he forgets about the Mayor and he has a problem about him being in the post. And then, Mr Speaker, Sir, they dare come and say that this Government has *bafoué la démocratie*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, history bears testimony. Whenever the Labour Party has been in power, it has violated our sacred democracy. Earlier, hon. Ramano mentioned about it. And

hon. Shakeel Mohamed said, 'we have to see for the future; let's see tomorrow'. But it's good that we remind everybody in this House that the Labour Party and PMSD Government amended the Constitution in 1969 to extend their mandate till 1976 without any election. That is violating democracy. Labour Party has another non-democratic accomplishment, that is, abolishing by-election in 1973, and then they used the Best Loser System to replace seats of elected Members who either resigned or passed away. And what was that then? Elections were eventually restored by Sir Anerood Jugnauth by legislation on 06 July 1982 to correct this injustice and restore democracy. And we can go on and on on the anti-democratic achievements of the Labour Party. More recently - I hear hon. Kushal Lobine say that was long back - in 2014, what happened? Their Leader held the country and the National Assembly at ransom, by proroguing Parliament to discuss electoral alliance. He used *l'appareil de l'Etat* to suspend Parliament for nine months, and while pretending to be working very hard. I wonder where he was working very hard.

(Interruptions)

On an electoral reform proposal, in complicity with the Leader of the MMM, which was never even presented in Parliament. And then, today, you come in this House, and hon. Nagalingum says 'it is a sad day'. That was a sad day for democracy.

An hon. Member: *Ganoo pu repone toi taler la.*

Mr Balgobin: Hon. Ganoo was not the Leader of the MMM. You have to ask your Leader who was discussing alliance at that time.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Requin, requin moustache!*

(Interruptions)

Some, at that time, even were shadow Ministers, some at that time were not even thinking about Municipal Elections, democracy, they even went to get VIPSU for them, they go and choose their cars for them and some even go and *coude costume* because they were going to be Ministers in alliance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government will not risk the lives of its citizens by organising a Municipal Election as we gather our efforts together with our population to fight this invisible virus. The decision of my colleague, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management, Dr. Anwar Husnoo is hence commendable. Let

us all agree that the fight against the pandemic, since more than a year now, took a heavy toll on each and every one of us. Our lives have changed, Mr Speaker, Sir, as we are living in a New Normal but this Government, this Prime Minister, we are not giving up. We will keep fighting and together we shall overcome.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

(10.52 p.m.)

Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Merci, M. le président. La santé des citoyens c'est ça qui préoccupe le gouvernement. C'est ce qu'a dit l'honorable Tour tout juste. Je l'invite d'aller parler aux patients et aux parents des patients dialysés de Souillac. Allez voir le niveau de services dans nos hôpitaux, l'état de nos équipements. Parlez à nos médecins et les personnels hospitaliers pour savoir dans quelles conditions ils travaillent. Allez voir le nombre de dossiers, des enquêtes ouvertes pour l'achat des équipements pendant le confinement.

M. le président, pour nous c'était évident que le gouvernement allait *zoué sové* sur la tenue des élections municipales. Ce n'est pas une surprise. D'autant plus que les indicateurs économiques, tous les indicateurs démontraient clairement que le gouvernement se dirigeait vers un *baté bæuf* en cas des élections. Les manifestations citoyennes où des dizaines des milliers de personnes sont descendues dans les rues de la capitale sont d'ailleurs la preuve sans compter que les citoyens, on le sait, ne tiennent pas le gouvernement en odeur de sainteté comme ils l'ont démontré lors des dernières élections générales. C'est ce que nous craignons le plus, M. le président, soit le renvoi de ces élections municipales, donc c'est derrière la porte aujourd'hui. C'est une fuite en avant du gouvernement pour ne pas faire face à la profonde colère des citoyens, l'honorable Ramano.

Comme dans des villages, l'honorable Ganoo ne peut pas me démentir. Une façon de *buy time* en espérant qu'elles pourront se tenir des meilleurs jours pour les régimes en place. Malheureusement avec la pandémie COVID-19, le gouvernement a eu le parfait prétexte pour les renvoyer pour une durée indéterminée, pouvant aller jusqu'à deux ans selon le bon vouloir du Premier ministre qui disposera encore plus de pouvoir. Cependant, M. le président, plus la tenue de ces élections est retardée plus les conséquences seront lourdes pour le gouvernement car il ne pourra pas échapper à la vindicte populaire. C'est une véritable raclée qu'il attendra au tournant et cela il ne faut pas être magicien pour le savoir. N'en déplaise à l'honorable

Ramano que je pense rêve toujours les yeux ouverts. Faut-il que je lui rappelle qu'à ce même élection virtuelle organisé par la diaspora donc il a fait mention, que 5,000 voix pour le Parti Travailliste mais pour ce même élection, le MSM n'a pas eu même 500 voix.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister!

Mr Juman: Ceci-dit, ...

(Interruptions)

Pas peur toi.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister!

Mr Juman: Ceci-dit, il faut savoir, M. le Président, que nous sommes le premier à concéder qu'il serait déraisonnable de tenir des élections dans l'immédiat surtout quand on enregistre toujours des cas positifs quotidiennement depuis la résurgence causée par une mauvaise gestion de la pandémie couplée d'un relâchement et de laxisme au niveau des autorités. N'oublions pas que ce même gouvernement qui prévoit d'atteindre l'immunité collective d'ici août 2021, ce qui devra normalement freiner la chaîne de transmission, je ne vois donc pas pourquoi les élections ne peuvent pas être tenues, allons dire d'ici la fin de l'année, M. le président, au maximum.

Si au cas où la situation ne s'améliore pas, ne nous permet toujours pas, on peut revoir, M. le président. Pourquoi faut-il le renvoyer pour un an ou deux ans et que se passera-t-il si la pandémie rode toujours dans les parages d'ici deux ans? Devrions nous tiré un trait sur les municipales rendant le pays encore plus autocratique qu'il ne l'est déjà comme en témoigne le rapport V-Dem ? D'ailleurs, ce que je ne comprends pas, ce que si 60 personnes sont autorisées de voyager dans un autobus sans qu'il y ait, selon le ministre de la Santé lui-même, des risques de contamination, pourquoi des élections qui se tiennent dans des centres de vote où la distanciation sociale est possible ne peuvent-elles avoir lieu?

M. le président, venons maintenant aux raisons pourquoi les élections municipales doivent être tenues le plus vite possible? Savez-vous qu'à Port Louis les jardins d'enfants sont dans un piteux état. Depuis plusieurs années, ils sont presque impraticables, représentant des réels dangers pour les enfants. Les services de voirie patinent, passant même de trois fois la semaine à deux fois la semaine. Au marché central, les infrastructures sont dans un état lamentable. Il y a un manque de loisirs criant à l'égard des jeunes, des femmes et des sportifs

et résultat une recrudescence des délits liés surtout à la drogue et à la délinquance. Les éboueurs qui s'éreintent pour travailler durant le confinement sans obtenir les R 15,000 réservées pour les *frontliners* sont même contraints d'acheter leurs propres masques et gants pour travailler alors qu'ils sont censés de recevoir les équipements appropriés. Ce sont ces genres de gestion et d'administration malsaines auxquelles nous serons confrontées durant les deux prochaines années en absence des municipales, M. le président.

La capitale s'asphyxie, M. le président, il nous faut une nouvelle administration pour pouvoir redonner un nouveau souffle. Cela résume aussi la situation dans les autres villes. A Beau Bassin-Rose Hill, un maire du ML avait même fait l'objet d'une motion de censure, qui aurait dû démissionner par la suite. A Curepipe, la rénovation de l'hôtel de Ville fermée au public depuis 2016 traîne toujours, passant par la même occasion de R 38 millions pour le projet à R 135 millions. La liste de la mauvaise gestion des administrations actuelles est longue. M. le président, on ne peut pas continuer à laisser nos villes entre les mains de ces équipes incompetentes. Je plaide donc pour que les élections municipales, au lieu d'être renvoyées pour un ou deux ans, soient remises d'ici décembre 2021 et ce n'est pas parce que vous n'avez rien pu faire avancer pendant ces six ans que dans les deux ans vous allez pouvoir le faire. Les citoyens ne peuvent plus continuer à payer les pots cassés.

Je vous remercie pour votre attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

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

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

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

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

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the forthcoming presentation of the Budget and the ensuing debate, I move that the orders of suspension of the Assembly dated 30 March 2021, affecting the hon. First Member for Stanley and Rose Hill (Mr Bérenger), the hon. First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière (Mr Bhagwan) and the hon. First Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes (Dr. Boolell) be terminated immediately after the next Sitting in order to allow the aforementioned hon. Members to participate in the proceedings of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 25 May 2021 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned. Adjournment Matters!

(Interruptions)

So, let's call it a day.

At 11.04 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 25 May 2021 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON HORSE RACING REPORT - MONEY
LAUNDERING - RECOMMENDATIONS**

(No. B/378) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to horse racing, he will state the measures taken to combat money laundering in relation thereto, following the recommendations contained in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Horse Racing in Mauritius which was set up in September 2014.

(Withdrawn)

**MAURITIUS INVESTMENT CORPORATION – IMF END-OF-MISSION PRESS
RELEASE**

(No. B/397) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to the recommendation based on the preliminary findings of the International Monetary Fund staff expressed in the recent End-of-Mission press release to the effect that the central bank should relinquish ownership of the Mauritius Investment Corporation and that the financing thereof should be provided through the budgetary process, he will state if consideration is being given thereto.

(Withdrawn)

GRAND'BAIE & POUDRE D'OR – FLOOD PRONE AREAS

(No. B/417) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk whether, in regard to the construction of absorption drains and road side drains in Constituency No. 6, Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the District Councils of Rivière du Rempart and Pamplemousses, information as to if a survey has been carried out as to the number of flood prone lateral and main roads identified therefor and, if so, table copy thereof.

Reply: First of all, I wish to inform the House that as per Section 5 of the Land Drainage Authority Act 2017, one of the key functions of the Land Drainage Authority is to identify flood prone areas in collaboration with the local authorities, National Development Unit, Road Development Authority, National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre and any other relevant stakeholder.

With regard to the question put by the hon. Member, on 30 April 2021, the Land Drainage Authority has submitted an updated list of flood prone areas to my Ministry, which also includes sites newly identified as flood prone after the flash floods of April 2021.

Out of a total of 298 flood prone areas identified across Mauritius, nine are found in Constituency No. 6, namely -

- i. Camp Caroll, Grand Bay;
- ii. Mahatma Gandhi Road Opposite Super U, Grand Bay;
- iii. Pyndia Lane, Pereybere;
- iv. Stephane Lane/Beach Lane And Surroundings, Pereybere;
- v. Near Police Station, Poudre d'Or ;
- vi. Jankee Street, Poudre d'Or;
- vii. La Croisette Round About;
- viii. Fond du Sac, and
- ix. Forbach Road (Opposite Stone Crusher Plant), Fond du Sac.

3D IMAGERY DIGITAL ELEVATION MODEL – ACQUISITION

(No. B/420) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed acquisition of a 3D Imagery Digital Elevation Model to map the topography of Mauritius by the Land Drainage Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCY 2015 REPORT - LANDSLIDE SITES

(No. B/422) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the landslide sites identified in the Japan International

Cooperation Agency Report 2015, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Geotechnical Unit, details thereof, indicating the remedial measures taken in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

GOVERNMENT SERVICES - DIGITALISATION

(No. B/423) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the Government services, he will state the initiatives taken by his Ministry to digitalise the delivery thereof with a view to limiting the physical proximity of members of the public in public areas when availing themselves thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CHILD ABANDONMENT - CASES - JAN 2020 TO 18.05.21

(No. B/424) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to child abandonment, she will state the number of cases thereof reported to her Ministry since January 2020 to date, indicating the measures taken to address this issue.

(Withdrawn)

NATIONAL SOCIAL INCLUSION FOUNDATION –REGISTERED NGOS

(No. B/428) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the National Social Inclusion Foundation, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the number of Non-Governmental Organisations registered therewith, category-wise, indicating the eligibility criteria for the allocation of funds therefrom.

Reply: To date, there are 418 Non-Governmental Organisations registered with the National Social Inclusion Foundation.

The list of Non-Governmental Organisations registered with the Foundation can be accessed on the website of the Foundation.

The Foundation allocates funds to Non-Governmental Organisations according to the following eligibility criteria -

- (i) relevance of the project;
- (ii) effectiveness of the planned activities;
- (iii) efficiency of the project;
- (iv) expected impact of the project on target groups, and
- (v) sustainability of the project.

CARER'S ALLOWANCE - QUANTUM

(No. B/431) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the Carer's Allowance, she will state if consideration will be given for -

- (a) a review of the procedures to benefit therefrom, and
- (b) an increase in the quantum thereof and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

WAKASHIO VESSEL – WRECK – FISHERMEN & SKIPPERS - COMPENSATION

(No. B/432) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the fishermen and skippers affected by the wreck of the Wakashio Vessel, he will state the number of applications received therefrom for the payment of compensation, indicating the number thereof which have been approved and number of cases in which funds have been disbursed.

(Withdrawn)

INDIAN PASSENGERS - COVID-19 POSITIVE & QUARANTINE

(No. B/433) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the passengers coming from India since the start of the 2021 lockdown, he will state the number thereof having been tested COVID-19 positive, indicating the number thereof who are currently in quarantine.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 VACCINATION CAMPAIGN

(No. B/434) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, he will state where matters stand as to the carrying out thereof.

(Withdrawn)

SHELTERS/RESIDENTIAL CARE INSTITUTIONS - SAFETY

(No. B/435) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to Shelters/Residential Care Institutions, she will state the measures taken by her Ministry to ensure –

- (a) the safety thereof;
- (b) that they do not accommodate more children than allowed, and
- (c) the proper administration thereat.

(Withdrawn)

LA COLOMBE, POINTE AUX SABLES - MODEL SHELTER

(No. B/436) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a Model Shelter at La Colombe, Pointe aux Sables, she will state where matters stand, indicating when same is expected to be operational.

(Withdrawn)

CHILDREN - VICTIMS OF ABUSE

(No. B/437) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to children victims of abuse, he will state if it is the practice for the medical files of the parents thereof to be communicated to third parties and, if so, on what terms and conditions.

(Withdrawn)

AGALEGA - PROJECTS

(No. B/440) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the projects being implemented at Agalega, he will state -

- (a) if same are exempt from the requirement of the Environment Impact Assessment licence and, if so, why and, if not, will the EIA reports be made public and, if not, why not;
- (b) the actions -
 - (i) taken to mitigate the negative impacts thereof, if any, on the environment, and
 - (ii) that will be taken for the rehabilitation of the ecosystems thereat, if required, and
- (c) who is carrying out environmental monitoring onsite.

(Withdrawn)

PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS - EIA LICENCES

(No. B/442) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to EIA licences for private development projects, he will state, since November 2019 to date, the number of applications therefor –

- (a) disapproved and rejected, and
- (b) requested to be submitted in respect of an undertaking to which a Preliminary Environmental Report relates.

Reply: Any undertaking listed under Part A and Part B of the Fifth Schedule of the Environment Protection Act 2002 (as amended), requires a Preliminary Environmental Report and an Environmental Impact Assessment, respectively.

With regard to part (a) of the question, since November 2019 to date, two Environmental Impact Assessment applications received for private development projects have been disapproved and rejected by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change.

As regards part (b) of the question, the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change has, since November 2019 to date, not requested for the submission of any Environmental Impact Assessment application in respect of Preliminary Environmental Report applications for private development projects.

It is to be noted that regular post Environmental Impact Assessment and Preliminary Environmental Report monitoring for the projects for which Environmental Impact Assessment Licences or Preliminary Environmental Report approval have been issued is carried out by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change together with all concerned authorities. The objective is to ensure that all conditions stipulated in the Environmental Impact Assessment Licence or Preliminary Environmental Report approval are fully complied with.

RODRIGUES - VACCINATION - HERD IMMUNITY

(No. B/443) Mr J.B Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in view of the fact that Rodrigues Island has not registered any case of the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state if consideration is being given for immediate mass vaccination in Rodrigues island, with vaccines from the COVAX facility, so as to reach herd immunity prior to the resumption of normal activities.

Reply: In my reply to previous Parliamentary Questions, I have already informed the House that my Ministry finalised the National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 vaccines with the support and collaboration of the World Health Organisation and other stakeholders. The plan which was approved by the Government in January 2021 highlights the target population, including Rodrigues and Agalega, which is as follows –

- Priority No. 1 covers 15,000 frontline healthcare workers; 5,000 frontline Police and Prison Officers and 25,000 other frontline workers;
- Priority No. 2 covers 9,000 healthcare workers from the public and private sectors; 10,000 personnel from the Mauritius Police Force and 52,000 other essential workers;
- Priority No. 3 covers persons above the age of 60 years, and

- Priority No. 4 covers adults with at least two comorbidities, residents of dedicated homes, teaching and non-teaching staff of educational institutions, fire fighters, staff of supermarkets, bank front office personnel and scavenging personnel.

The vaccination campaign in Mauritius started on 26 January 2021 and in Rodrigues on 06 February 2021 with the vaccination of these frontline workers. However, with the upsurge of the second wave of COVID-19 as from beginning of March 2021, my Ministry had to review the vaccination strategy, the more so as the country was in lockdown and movement of the population was restricted.

Priority for vaccination is, therefore, being given to other sections of the population who are considered to be at most risk. Thus, as from beginning of March 2021, patients undergoing dialysis treatment, cancer patients and senior citizens are also being administered the COVID-19 vaccines.

My Ministry has also started the vaccination of all personnel of educational institutions, kindergartens and nurseries, including the teaching and non-teaching staff as well as the drivers of school vans.

With regard to the agreement entered into with the COVAX facility, I wish to inform the House that the facility is not providing vaccines for mass vaccination. The COVAX facility is assisting countries to acquire vaccines in order to vaccinate frontline workers, including health workers who are the most at risk to contract the virus. In this regard, the facility is providing vaccines to cater for only 20 % of the population.

As I mentioned earlier, the vaccination campaign in Rodrigues started on 06 February 2021 with the vaccination of health frontline workers, Police Officers, Port and Airport personnel, hotel frontline workers and scavengers.

I am informed that 5,300 doses of AstraZeneca/Covishield vaccines, 2,000 doses of Covaxin vaccines and 1,920 doses of Sinopharm vaccines have already been made available to the health authorities in Rodrigues. As at date, 2,744 persons have been administered the first dose and 917 persons have received the second dose.

MAURITIUS - PFIZER BIONTECH COVID VACCINE - CHILDREN

(No. B/444) Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the recent permits obtained by the Food and Drug Administration for the inoculation of children aged 12 and above with the Pfizer BioNTech Covid vaccine, he will state if a program will be established in Mauritius for the vaccination of the children.

Reply: I am informed that on 10 May 2021, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration expanded the emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for the prevention of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) to include adolescents 12 to 15 years of age.

The FDA amended the EUA originally issued on 11 December 2020 for administration in individuals of 16 years of age and older.

This decision has been taken following the publication by PFIZER, of a study carried out with children aged 12 to 15 years. The study concluded that the Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine had a 100% efficacy with children aged 12 to 15 years, the antibody response was robust and even exceeded the response noted among those aged 16 to 25 years during former studies. The 12 to 15 years' age group also showed excellent tolerance following vaccination. It should be noted that studies are currently being carried out regarding the utilisation of this same vaccine among children aged 6 months to 11 years.

I am informed that there is, for the time being, no information following studies, regarding the efficacy of the vaccine for children aged 12 and more.

This Emergency Use Authorisation, nevertheless, constitutes a very important breakthrough as it paves the way for the possibility to offer COVID-19 vaccination to children in a near future. This will allow to better protect children against the virus and at the same time enhance and accelerate the obtention of a better herd immunity.

I am further informed that for the time being, the Pfizer BioNtech COVID-19 vaccine has not been rolled out in Mauritius. We should, therefore, wait for similar studies carried out with other vaccines, namely those which are currently in use in our Republic.

In Mauritius, it is the National Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination which grants authorisations for the use of any given COVID-19 vaccine. As soon as studies regarding the use of vaccines available in Mauritius with children are available, the results of those studies will be forwarded to the National Vaccination Committee on COVID-19 for its views.

COVID-19VACCINES - DONATION, PURCHASE, ORDERS & HERD IMMUNITY

(No. B/446) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state the –

- (a) number of vaccines received as donation, purchased and ordered since April 2021 to date, indicating in each case the country of origin and total cost incurred in relation thereto;
- (b) strategy to reach herd immunity by July 2021, and
- (c) number of persons having received
 - (i) only the first dose, and
 - (ii) both doses, as at to date.

Reply: Part (a) of the question is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

The World Health Organisation supports achieving 'herd immunity' through vaccination of at least 60 % of the population. Accordingly, my Ministry finalised the National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 vaccines with the support and collaboration of the World Health Organisation and other stakeholders in a bid to vaccinate 70% of our population by July 2021.

The plan approved by the Government in January 2021 highlights the target population, including Rodrigues and Agalega, and is as follows -

- Priority No. 1 covers 15,000 frontline healthcare workers; 5,000 frontline Police and Prison Officers and 25,000 other frontliners;
- Priority No. 2 covers 9,000 healthcare workers from the public and private sectors; 10,000 personnel from the Mauritius Police Force and 52,000 other essential workers;
- Priority No. 3 covers persons above the age of 60 years, and
- Priority No. 4 covers adults with at least two comorbidities, residents of dedicated homes, teaching and non-teaching staff of educational institutions, fire fighters, staff of supermarkets, bank front office personnel and scavenging personnel.

As part of the plan to achieve herd immunity, my Ministry actively worked on various mechanisms for procuring of COVID-19 vaccines through diplomatic channels or through pooled procurement channels, such as COVAX Facility/GAVI Alliance and Africa Medical Supplies Platform of the African Union.

Accordingly, Mauritius was able to secure 507,200 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines through the COVAX Facility, out of which 62,400 doses have already been received. Moreover, 100,000 doses of Covishield (AstraZeneca) vaccines from the Serum Institute of India and 200,000 doses of COVAXIN from Bharat Biotech International Limited were received in March 2021. My Ministry also received 100,000 doses of Covishield (AstraZeneca) vaccines and 100,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccines as donation from the Government of India and the Government of the Republic of China respectively. 5,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccines will also be received as donation from the United Arab Emirates soon.

I wish to inform the House that orders have already been placed for additional vaccines with the different companies so that we can achieve vaccination of at least 60% of our population by July 2021. We are expecting a consignment of 500,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccines manufactured by the China National Biotec Group Company Limited on 20 May 2021.

The vaccination programme started with the frontliners, that is, the medical staff, Port and Airport staff and staff of the tourism sector. It continued with the vaccination of the senior citizens and patients with two comorbidities. However, with the lockdown, the vaccination programme was targeted for persons who had been granted the Work Access Permit.

With regard to part (a) of the question, 100,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccines were received as donation from the People's Republic of China on 13 April 2021. On 09 May 2021, 38,400 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines, out of the 507,200 vaccines ordered through the COVAX facility, was delivered. Moreover, 500,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccines have been purchased in May 2021 and additional 500,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccines have been ordered from the China Biotech Group Company Ltd.

I am informed that my Ministry, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, embarked on a targeted vaccination programme for teaching and non-teaching staff on 24 April 2021. As at date, a total number of 12,071 staff working in the education sector has already received their first dose of the vaccine.

Furthermore, the vaccination programme is still ongoing at the different vaccination centres where administration of the second dose is being carried out.

As regards part (c) (i) and (ii) of the question, I am informed that as at 12 May 2021, 221,951 persons have received their first dose of the vaccine, while 102,250 persons have been administered both doses of their vaccines.

SMES MAURITIUS - BOARD - COMPOSITION

(No. B/447) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for G.R.N.W. & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to SME Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the composition of the Board thereof and the name of the Chief Executive Officer thereof, indicating the remuneration and fringe benefits drawn in each case.

Reply: The requested information is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

**RÉSIDENCE SIR GAËTAN DUVAL – ROAD RESURFACING & DRAIN
WORKS**

(No. B/448) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to *Résidence* Sir Gaëtan Duval in Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to if consideration will be given for the

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- (a) re-asphalting of the roads thereat, and
- (b) carrying out of drains works thereat and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that on two occasions, it had mobilised its team at *Résidence* Sir Gaëtan Duval in Constituency No. 1, Grand River North West and Port Louis West, for undertaking patching works thereat, namely on 31 August 2020 and 12 January 2021 respectively.

However, the works could not be carried out following protests from the inhabitants who have requested for the resurfacing of the whole road network. As a matter of fact, the employees of the Council met with a hostile crowd of residents who prevented them from carrying out the works.

I am also informed that the costs of resurfacing would amount to around Rs8.3 m. and for which funds have to be identified.

In this regard, I am informed by the National Development Unit that a project for resurfacing and drain works at *Résidence* Sir Gaëtan Duval has been included in its proposed projects for the next Financial Year 2021/2022 at an estimated cost of Rs30 m.

**NATIONAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT COMPANY LTD - CASTING OF
ROOF SLABS SCHEME**

(No. B/449) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the Casting of Roof Slabs Scheme, he will, for the

benefit of the House, obtain from the National Housing Development Company Ltd., information as to the –

- (a) eligibility criteria to benefit thereunder, and
- (b) number of applications received since January 2019 to date, indicating the number thereof which have been approved.

Reply: With regard to part (a), the information requested by the hon. Member is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly. Furthermore, the information is available on the website of the National Housing Development Company Ltd under the heading “*Aide financière pour couler la dalle*” and “*formulaire d’application pour la dalle*”.

In regard to part (b), I am informed that from January 2019 to 12 May 2021, the NHDC has received 3,351 applications under the Casting of Roof Slab and Purchase of Building Materials Scheme. Of that number, I am further informed –

- (i) 2,604 applications have been approved;
- (ii) 190 applications have been rejected because of non-compliance with the established eligibility criteria, and
- (iii) 557 applications are being processed, out of which, in 112 cases, applicants have been requested to submit additional documents which are still awaited.

**POINTE AUX SABLES, TERRASSON - MARTELLO TOWER PARKING -
SOUND POLLUTION**

(No. B/451) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, he will state if he is in presence of representations from the residents of Terrasson, at Pointe aux Sables, in regard to sound pollution on the Martello Tower parking, at Pointe aux Sables, causing nuisances thereto and, if so, indicate the actions taken or that will be taken in relation thereto.

Reply: On 06 May 2021, a complaint was received by the *Police de l’Environnement*, from a lady residing at Terrasson through a local Radio Station deploring nuisances arising from loud music constituting sound pollution at Martello Tower parking in Pointe aux Sables. Subsequently, patrols were carried out by the *Police de l’Environnement* on the parking of Martello Tower on 07 May 2021 at 23hrs 20. The area was also under watch from 00hrs 00

on 08 May 2021 to 01hrs 15 on 09 May 2021. However, no loud music or noise nuisance was discerned during those patrols.

Nevertheless, the *Police de l'Environnement* took the opportunity to sensitise several occupants of cars parked at Martello Tower on the Environment Protection (Control of Noise) Regulations 2008.

The *Police de l'Environnement* is monitoring the situation, especially during crack down operations on noise nuisance. Additionally, La Tour Koenig Police Station is collaborating with the *Police de l'Environnement* for further monitoring at that location. The complainant has been contacted and apprised of measures taken so far and has been reassured of further preventive patrols in the locality. The latter has expressed satisfaction with the actions initiated.

BANYAN TREE BANK (MAURITIUS) LTD - ACTION PLAN/TASK FORCE

(No. B/452) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Banyan Tree Bank (Mauritius) Ltd., he will state if an Action Plan/Task Force has been put in place to work on the refund of the capital to the tune of Rs2.4 billion injected by members of the public therein and, if so, indicate where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

HORSE RACING SEASON – FUNDING & HORSE IMPORTERS

(No. B/453) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the forthcoming horse racing season, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to -

- (a) the name of the importer of each horse therefor, indicating the purchase price thereof;
- (b) if due diligence exercises have been carried out regarding the sources of funding thereof, and
- (c) the name of stable under which the horses will be running.

(Withdrawn)

GAMBLING REGULATORY AUTHORITY - HORSE RACING - ILLEGAL BETTING

(No. B/454) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to horse racing, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to the actions taken to combat illegal betting in relation thereto, indicating if all bookmakers are connected to the central server of the Mauritius Revenue Authority and the penalty applicable for non-compliance therewith.

(Withdrawn)

STATE-OWNED NON-BANK DEPOSIT TAKING INSTITUTIONS

(No. B/455) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the State-Owned Non-Bank Deposit Taking Institutions operating under the aegis of his Ministry, he will state if his Ministry is envisaging to convert one or more of them into banking institutions and, if so, give details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 - PUBLIC STATEMENT & CIRCULAR - WORK FROM HOME

(No. B/456) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms whether, in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, he will state if his Ministry has issued a public statement and a circular to the effect that public officers will be allowed to work from home (WFH) and, if so, indicate the number of public officers currently working from home since beginning of April 2021 to date and table the list of public institutions currently applying WFH.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that Government has adopted, on 19 March 2021, as part of a proposed Business Continuity Plan for the Public Sector, the “Work from Home Protocol” developed by the UNDP Consultant, PricewaterhouseCoopers Ltd in an attempt to increase the resiliency of public administration and agility in public service delivery. Work from Home is applicable across Public Institutions, in general, where such pattern of work is possible and under certain specific conditions. It cannot, however, be imposed but should be subject to discussions and agreement by all concerned parties.

Consequently, my Ministry issued a Circular on 22 March 2021 inviting Supervising Officers of all Ministries/Departments to make appropriate arrangements for the implementation of the Work-From-Home Protocol at their level and in Local Authorities/Parastatal Bodies/State-Owned Enterprises falling under their purview.

According to information compiled by my Ministry, out of 14,000 public officers providing non-essential services and excluding those in the Education Sector, 2,214 public officers are working from home in 42 Ministries/Departments, representing 16% of public officers in the non-essential sector.

I am tabling a list of Ministries/Departments where the Work-From-Home is currently being implemented indicating the number of officers working from home.

The list regarding Local Authorities/Parastatal Bodies and State-Owned Enterprises is presently being compiled and will be laid in the National Assembly.

LAND DRAINAGE MASTER PLAN - IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/458) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the Land Drainage Master Plan, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand as to the implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - ICT SECTOR – DIGITALIZATION REQUIREMENTS

(No. B/459) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the ICT sector, he will state the measures and initiatives being put in place to cope with future digitalization requirements of the country to the benefit of the citizens amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

(Withdrawn)

LAND DRAINAGE AUTHORITY – FLOOD PRONE AREAS

(No. B/460) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to flood prone areas, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to the number thereof identified since the setting up thereof, indicating the

number thereof having been removed from the said list on the recommendation of the Authority.

(Withdrawn)

CHAMAREL - FOOTBALL PLAYGROUND PROJECT

(No. B/461) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the football playground project at Chamarel, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Black River District Council, information as to where matters stand as to the implementation thereof.

Reply: In May 2019, the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning vested a plot of State Land of an extent of 13,540 m² (3A21p) situated at Chamarel in my Ministry for the construction of a football ground by the Black River District Council.

The project has been split into two phases consisting of -

- (a) Phase 1 - Construction of the football playground, and
- (b) Phase 2 - Construction of drains, retaining wall, parking, lighting and a cloakroom.

I am informed by the District Council of Black River that on 09 October 2020, following a bidding exercise, the contract for the construction of the football playground was awarded to the lowest evaluated substantially responsive bidder, Pybig Construction Co. Ltd for the sum of Rs4,228,469.89 inclusive of VAT.

The contract agreement was signed on 16 October 2020 and works started on 20 October 2020.

The project which should have been completed in 150 days has been delayed due to the recent confinement imposed in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent heavy rainfalls.

As at date, 85% of the project has been completed. The football ground has already been backfilled, provided with perforated drainage pipes, geotextile and topsoil layer. Turfing

of the ground is actually in progress, but the site is currently not practicable pending the completion of the outstanding works by the contractor following recent heavy rainfalls.

Once grass planting is completed and fully grown on the whole area, the ground will be marked and goal posts will be fixed. This is expected to be completed in one month.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC – TOURISM INDUSTRY – STRATEGIC PLAN

(No. B/462) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River)

asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the tourism industry, he will state if any strategic plan is being prepared for the revival thereof amid the Covid-19 pandemic and, if so, give details thereof.

Reply: As the House is aware, the tourism sector has been severely affected both economically and socially by the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020 and the second wave has worsened the situation for the country.

With a view to preserving employment and enabling the smooth relaunching of the tourism sector at the time of re-opening of borders, the Government has been providing considerable support through the Wage Assistance and Self-Employed Assistance Schemes, whereby more than six billion rupees has been disbursed to over 50,000 beneficiaries up to March 2021. In addition, the Mauritius Investment Corporation and the Development Bank of Mauritius have also been providing significant support to tourism enterprises.

Moreover, the MTPA and the AHRIM have been working in close collaboration since April 2020 to propose a comprehensive recovery plan to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 on Travel and Tourism. They are currently working on a comprehensive strategy to re-position Mauritius as a sustainable destination in terms of both tourism and investment opportunities.

I further wish to inform the House that a Joint Working Group (JWG), comprising representatives of the public and private sectors, has been set up by Government under my Chairmanship. The Joint Working Group is currently working for the safe and early re-opening of our Borders and for the relaunching of the tourism sector. The Joint Working Group will submit its recommendations in the coming weeks.