



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 25 MAY 2021

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Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage
Hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal	Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 09 of 2021

Sitting of Tuesday 25 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.

A. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

The Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Securities (Amendment) Bill (No IX of 2021).

(In Original)

B. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

(a) Virement Warrants - Quarter 3 (January – March 2021) Nos. 19 to 41 and 43.

(In Original)

(b) Virement (Contingencies) Warrants - Quarter 3 (January - March 2021) : Nos. 11 to 15. (In Original)

(c) Virement Certificates - Quarter 3 (January - March 2021): Vote/Sub-Head (Certificates Nos.): 1-1(4,6), 1-6(2-3,3A,4), 1-7(3-5), 1-10(1-3), 1-11(1), 1-12(2-3), 1-15(2-4), 2-106(2-3), 2-107(2), 2-3(2-3), 2-5(1-4), 4-1(5-7), 5-1(2-4), 5-2(4), 5-3(1), 6-1(2-4), 6-103(2), 7-1(1-3), 7-2(6), 7-3(2-4), 7-4(1), 7-6(1), 8-1(1-5), 8-2(1-3), 9-1(1-3), 10-2(5-11), 11-101(2-6), 11-104(1-9), 12-1(1-2,5), 13-1(3-4), 14-1(2-4), 16-1 (6-9), 17-1(2-5), 18-1(1-5), 18-2(2-3), 19-1(4), 19-103(3-5), 20-1 (2-4), 21-1(6), 25-1(2), 26-1(3-4) and 27-1(5) .(In Original)

(d) The Gambling Regulatory Authority (Personal Management Licence) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 104 of 2021)

C. Attorney General

Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security

(a) The Annual Report of the Food and Agricultural Research Council (FARC) including Agricultural Research and Extension Unit (AREU) for the period 01 January 2013 to 13 February 2014.

- (b) The Annual Report 2014 of the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute.
- (c) The Annual Report 2015 of the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute.
- (d) The Annual Report 2016/2017 of the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute

D. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training

Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 11) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 105 of 2021)
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 12) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 106 of 2021)

E. Ministry of Health and Wellness

- (a) The COVID-19 (Horse Race Meeting at Champ de Mars) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 103 of 2021)
- (b) The Medical Council (Registration of Registered Medical Practitioners) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 107 of 2021)

- (c) The Dental Council (Examination Fee) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 108 of 2021)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

ICTA - CONSULTATION PAPER - PUBLICATION

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 Consultation Paper issued by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority on 14 April 2021, he will state if his approval and that of the Board of Directors of the Authority, respectively, were obtained prior to the publication thereof and, if so, indicate when.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, for quite some time now, the number of ICT incidents including social media related incidents, has been on the increase. For the period 2018 to date, 4200 ICT related incidents including 386 offensive incidents have been reported on the Mauritian Cybercrime Online Reporting System (MAUCORS), concerning online harassment, identity theft, cyber bullying, sextortion, online scams, hate and racial posts, amongst others. Set up in March 2018, the MAUCORS is a centralised cyber incident reporting system.

In addition, according to the database at the Cybercrime Unit of the Police, 1925 offensive cases have been reported during the period 2000 to date. Moreover, the ICTA has also informed that 472 cases of social media complaints have been reported to it during the period 2010 to date.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the ICTA that social media platforms are being increasingly used by some subscribers as a means of propagating inappropriate/abusive/racial/violent contents causing irreparable prejudice to some categories of the population and also jeopardising the social fabric of the country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius faces a unique challenge as we do not have a social media regional office located in the country and the number of social media platform users is relatively small as compared, for example, to that of countries in the EU. We cannot, thus, adopt the same measures as taken by other countries such as those in EU, UK, New Zealand, Australia and India whereby strong fines and prescribed deadlines for the removal, that is take down notices, of offensive comments from social media platforms are imposed on the platform owners themselves.

It is also pertinent to point out that for Mauritius, if the social media platform accepts to remove a post, it takes ten days or more for them to do so following request by

local authorities. Often, these social media platform administrators do not even respond to such requests and, in most cases, refuse categorically to remove the contents as they do their own assessment according to their own usage policy or community standards irrespective of the domestic law of the country. This problem is further accentuated in Mauritius due to social media content in Kreol language any offensive vocabulary of which the international social media platforms cannot assess.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Information and Communication Technologies Authority is mandated under Section 18(1)(m) of the ICT Act 2001 to take steps to regulate or curtail harmful and illegal content on the internet and other information and communication services.

Accordingly, the ICT Board, at its meeting of 29 September 2020, decided that a proposal on social media regulation should be prepared.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to Parliamentary Question B/827 on 17 November 2020, I informed the House that a Committee under the Chair of the Secretary for Home Affairs has been set up to explore the possibility of providing, within the ICT Act, mechanisms such as the establishment of an Ethics Committee to prevent the posting of abusive comments and pictures on the social media platforms, and such proposed Ethics Committee could also be a platform whereby aggrieved parties could make representations for redress.

On 05 February 2021, Cabinet approved, in principle, that consultations be held by ICTA with stakeholders and the public in general with a view to addressing the problem of misuse and abuse of social media in Mauritius.

Accordingly, the ICTA prepared a Public Consultation document entitled "*Consultation on proposed amendment to the ICT Act for regulating the use and addressing the abuse and misuse of social media in Mauritius*". The Paper was approved by the ICT Board on 12 April 2021.

The Public Consultation Paper was published on ICTA's website on 14 April 2021 and a Press communiqué was also issued to invite comments from the public. The initial deadline for submission of comments was 05 May 2021 but this was extended to 20 May 2021 at the request of different stakeholders.

Thereafter, other Communiqués were issued by ICTA and published in the media for clarification to the public namely -

- On 19 April 2021, a first communiqué was issued to provide clarification on the purpose of the proposed mechanism which was to regulate social media platforms and not online messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal.
- On 29 April 2021, a second communiqué was issued to extend the deadline for submission of comments from 05 to 20 May 2021.
- On 30 April 2021, a third communiqué was issued to provide further clarification on the application of the technical tool which will not impact on private messaging applications.
- On 13 May 2021 -
 - (a) A set of Frequently Asked Questions was published on the Authority's website.
 - (b) A clip in Kreol to explain the purpose of the Consultation Paper has been produced and posted on the website of the Authority (www.icta.mu) and uploaded on the Facebook Page of Government Information Service.
 - (c) A news release to the media was made to raise public awareness about the clip and to remind the public of the deadline for submissions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Chairperson and officers of ICTA held several interviews with local and foreign media to bring further clarifications.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the public consultation exercise ended on 20 May 2021. ICTA held a special Board Meeting on 21 May 2021 to take stock of the response of the public. ICTA issued a communiqué on 21 May 2021 to thank all those who have contributed to the consultation exercise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government has all along been adopting a consultative and participatory approach in public policy making and in the management of the Affairs of the State. Hence, this democratic consultation exercise on the proposed measures to address the misuse of social media in Mauritius. I must emphasize that this is only a consultation exercise. It is the Government that will ultimately decide on the way forward, taking into account, *inter alia*, the public response during the consultation exercise and, amongst others, our national safety and security.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we must constantly remind ourselves that in any genuine democracy which also guarantees freedom of expression, rights must be balanced with obligations and duties.

Thank you.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, my first question relates to his personal approval of the document. He said that Cabinet approved the document in principle on 05 April, but he, as Minister responsible for ICTA, did he personally approve the contents of the Consultation Paper?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, neither Government nor myself approved this Consultation Paper. What approval was given in principle was for ICTA to hold consultations with stakeholders and the public in general with a view to addressing the problem of misuse and abuse of social media in Mauritius.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, are we to understand that none of his officers or advisors informed him of paragraph 12.2 of the Consultation Paper. Here it reads this -

“The proposed statutory framework will undoubtedly interfere with the Mauritian people’s fundamental rights (...) and liberties in particular their rights to privacy and confidentiality (...).”

Despite this paragraph, you did not take the trouble to read in full the Consultation Paper. Is that how we understand it works now?

The Prime Minister: It is not how it works now. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have had a look at the Consultation Paper after it has been published. But the hon. Leader of the Opposition is as if trying to make people believe that the Paper was first of all approved by Government before consultations being held by ICTA. It is the other way round. It is for ICTA to come up with proposals and, they are holding those consultations following which, they will, of course, if at all, make recommendations to Government and, ultimately, it will be for Government to decide on the way forward. It is not the other way round. Otherwise, if it were the other way round, there would be no need for ICTA to hold consultations.

Mr X. L. Duval: I remind the Prime Minister that something which is fundamentally affecting human rights in Mauritius, that his Officers did not draw his attention to the contents of the Consultation Paper which has brought so much ridicule and opposition, not only in Mauritius, overseas as well, and the world again is watching us today.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister whether before issuing this absolutely ridiculous Consultation Paper, which has been shot down in flames by a lot of overseas organisations and Mauritians, whether, in fact, let's take Facebook, not the others, Twitter, let's just take Facebook, whether himself, as Prime Minister, the Minister for ICT, our Ambassadors and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, whether any of these persons sought to contact the Facebook Oversight Board and tried to obtain satisfaction from them, therefore, avoiding this Consultation Paper. So, the question is: what diplomatic and other means did you use to contact the Facebook Oversight Board? And when did you do so?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, it is not for me...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: ... to contact Facebook. There is a consultation which is ongoing and anyone can make ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Don't obstruct!

An hon. Member: *Ki to pe obstruct, Mohamed?*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Don't obstruct you also!

Mr Mohamed: I am not obstructing. I said...

Mr Speaker: You are obstructing, both of you. Last warning!

(Interruptions)

Last warning!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I was saying, it is when this Paper was publicised, and when an invitation was made for anybody to react, and to make either comments or proposals, that, of course, not only local people could react to this publication, but also for anybody else. There was thus no need for me to contact Facebook.

Mr X. L. Duval: I suppose you were also sent a representation, a submission to ICTA. Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, *après la mort, la tisane*. Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether he has had occasion to ask ICTA as to which country did they follow, which precedent in the world did they follow so that they would come up with this proxy server solution to intercept potentially all HTTPS Traffic. Which country was taken as example for this?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have to ask...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: At this stage, I do not have to ask information from or put questions to ICTA. It is for them to do so, and, eventually, if they do make any recommendation to Government, then, questions will, of course, be asked. It will be then that Government will discuss, will debate and will come with a policy on this issue. I do hope you understand that it is premature at this stage for me to be putting questions right now to ICTA. But, of course, the time will come when I shall be asking a number of questions with regard to what has been publicised.

Mr X. L. Duval: Despite all the negative publicity in Mauritians overseas, comparing us to Kazakhstan, etc., are we to understand that you did not bother even to ask ICTA about it?

(Interruptions)

So, you have no idea which country...

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... ICTA is actually proposing to follow? Is that the case, at this point in time?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already answered. I say it is premature because when the recommendations will come to Government, they will be considered - this is how we work, not the other way round.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has taken note of what the Mauritius Bankers Association have said in their submission to ICTA. And they have actually said that what is proposed will potentially

allow ICTA to access all banking details and all internet banking details and this is what they say, firstly, that they did not support this proposal and they say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that it would compromise the whole Financial Services Sector which, according to them, holds USD750 billion, that is, Rs40 trillion of deposits for foreigners. Is he aware of the damage that has already been done by this ridiculous ICTA Consultation Paper? Is he aware of this?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Leader of the Opposition is again jumping the gun because, as yet, no recommendations have been made to Government. When recommendations will be made, when a proposal is made to Government, it is then that we are going to look into them, and see whether there have been representations by the Mauritius Bankers Association, X, Y, and Z and then we shall, of course, look at what comments have been made, and obviously Government will then decide.

Mr X. L. Duval: And soon afterwards I will ask you for a guarantee. May I draw your attention to what Mozilla and Google - I am sure you have heard of these two browsers - have said about our proposal, the vulnerable ICTA's proposal, ridiculous, that it will put all Mauritians' privacy at risk, that it will compromise the integrity and security of the whole internet system, and, Mr Speaker, Sir, puts us, poor Mauritians, at greater risk of fraud, internet theft and impersonation and surveillance? This is what the real experts of the internet are saying about ICTA and which you allowed to be published, not only in Mauritius but the whole world is aware of this.

The Prime Minister: We are going to take stock of all the observations, comments, criticisms, suggestions that have been and are being made. Eventually, we shall take all this into account.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, is he aware that what the ICTA is proposing, with the approval of Cabinet it seems, without the knowledge apparently of Cabinet but the approval of Cabinet, this is what the venerable Internet Society says, International Organisation, it says it will allow the Government to masquerade and they use that word 'masquerade,' masquerade as Mauritian citizens. This is the solution that you are proposing, Mr Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: Let me point out again that Cabinet has not as yet approved any Policy decision on any amendment with regard to ICTA. How many times do I have to make the hon. Leader of the Opposition understand that?

Mr X. L. Duval: Because I do not believe you! That is why you have to repeat.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: I do not believe you at all.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: I do not believe you at all.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, ICTA on whatever date, published, which I will table obviously, on 21 May published, he did not mention it just now, thank god and some sort of communiqué where it had a selective extract of what Facebook has submitted to him, a selective extract tantamount, Mr Speaker, Sir, to manipulating public opinion because information goes that Facebook who has been polite in the first paragraph was highly critical of what Mauritius is trying to do, highly critical, and also highly critical of this famous National Digital Ethics Committee.

Will he therefore, since ICTA has itself talked about complete transparency in its Consultation Paper, will he, if it does not have it here, agree to publish in full, in the name of transparency, since it is a discussion paper according to him, in full, the submission of Facebook to ICTA?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, I do not interfere with the work of ICTA. ICTA has decided to go ahead with such a Consultation Paper. Of course, we shall, eventually see what recommendations they are going to make and I shall ask for all those representations that have been made, and then we shall have a look at all these representations.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Board of ICTA which is responsible for this, is made up of many persons. Only one of which appears to have even the faintest idea of what internet is all about, all of them are from other spheres of profession or trade. Will he, Mr Speaker, Sir, after this debacle, do us all a favour, do this country a favour, to avoid us going to such a ridiculous situation since he has put it all now on the Board of ICTA, will he arrange to replace the Board of ICTA with another Board, that is more responsive to the needs of this country in terms of digital communications in 2021? Or will he support it blindly?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: There is no reason to change the Board, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to ask one or two other questions. One is, ICTA has seemed to be backtracking, *in perdi face* and trying to find a solution. Now, I will like to have the Prime Minister's commitment that now, even though he may not have been aware, I have made him aware of what international experts have said about what is being proposed. Can I get his guarantee that he will intervene now, since he is the Minister for ICTA, to ask them to put...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...this Consultation Paper in the dustbin where it belongs and to seek, to engage with Facebook, with Twitter, with Tik Tok, with YouTube, so that we can obtain, even if it at Prime Minister's level, that we can obtain from them satisfaction concerning what is truly harmful to our nation's interest therefore, put this Consultation Paper in the dustbin.

The Prime Minister: *M. le président, je dois dire je me suis retenu pendant tout le long de cette Private Notice Question. Je dois dire que le Leader de l'Opposition a un culot extraordinaire. Le 8 novembre 2007, when Facebook was completely blocked in Mauritius for 24 hours by the ICTA authority under the Chair of Mr Trilock Dwarka, you know what was the reason?*

An hon. Member: *Pas conner..*

The Prime Minister: There was a publication on Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, then Prime Minister of Mauritius and hon. X.L. Duval was a Minister in the front bench! Yes, indeed, and he did not then have anything to say?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Let me...

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: And let me say..

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: *À la suite de ce poste, il n'y avait pas de consultation. Il n'y avait pas d'engagement avec les stakeholders. Il n'y avait même pas de communication avec Facebook pour essayer de voir comment on peut éviter des telles choses. Non!*

They just acted, Mr Speaker, Sir. You know what? They said ICTA sent a letter directing 12 *détenteurs locaux d'une licence de fournisseur d'accès à l'internet. Ils n'ont eu aucun autre choix que d'exécuter l'ordre de l'ICTA.*

This is the way they proceeded. This is the way they did things and let me remind the hon. Member, but he has forgotten, I am sure, what Mr Trilock Dwarka said in reaction to this, and there was an upheaval, of course -

“Facebook et les autres sites communautaires ne sont pas au-dessus de tous reproches. Il y a des cas de cyber-bullying, de violation de la vie privée, d'usurpation d'identité, de fraude en tout genre et même de pédophile enregistré sur ces sites aux États-Unis.»

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Écouter do!*

Mr Speaker: No comments!

The Prime Minister: *« Il est clair que nous ne serons pas à l'abri de dérapage encore plus sérieux sur le net et plus particulièrement sur les réseaux sociaux à l'avenir.» Qu'est-ce qu'il préconise, le then président, M. Trilock Dwarka? «L'ICTA devrait-elle demander aux opérateurs de bloquer l'accès, même temporairement à des sites d'internet, en cas de problème grave comme ce que je viens de citer?»*

And, the hon. Leader of the Opposition was part of that Government, but now advocating, telling us, we should discuss with Facebook, we should discuss with Tik Tok! I think he has gone *Tik Tok!*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: And...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: *Ou bien...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order on both sides!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister : *Ou bien...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order on both sides!

The Prime Minister : *Ou bien devrait-elle uniquement attirer l'attention des fournisseurs d'accès and this is interesting what he proposed: "Il y a tout lieu d'avoir ... » and this you must listen to that, « Il y a tout lieu d'avoir une consultation générale avec les stakeholders afin de dégager une fois pour toute une politique qui pourrait prendre la forme d'un Position Paper on social networking.»*

I do not want to read more what he has said, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, when he was in Government, this is what he did and now, *il est en train de donner des conseils qui sont différents et contraires à ce que lui-même il a fait.*

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, with all due respect, this is a very childish reply from a young Prime Minister.

(Interruptions)

Very childish!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you were doing very well. Please, withdraw that word!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir. Now he has to go back to 2007 and says I should be aware when I was not even Minister, he is Minister for ICTA and tells us that he is not aware ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... what ICTA is doing today, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will come back to this, what is being proposed because I did not get an answer.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: I want an answer from the Prime Minister. The world is watching. Every single international association has shut down his proposals for being technically unwreckable and an attack on privacy and an attack even on the banking system.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, irrespective of whatever diplomatic solutions he may find from now on, ...

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... will he give this House, this afternoon, a guarantee that he will instruct ICTA today, to put this in the dustbin and stop with his childish replies.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, as I have stated in my reply - it seems that I do not know in what language throughout I should again say that this is not the proposal of Government. It is a proposal which has been made for consultations by ICTA. Ultimately, when Government will come forward with a Bill, if ever we decide to amend the law, then you can sit down and then you can comment and then you can criticise. But as yet, there is no policy that has been decided on this issue.

And secondly, what guarantee do I have to give? What guarantee do I have to give to the hon. Leader of the Opposition? Government will manage the affairs of the country whenever it thinks it fit, in fact, to try to curb all the abuse and, you know, I have not heard a word from the hon. Leader of the Opposition, at least mentioning all these racial posts that have been put, in an attempt to create instability in the country. I am not talking about political stability, religious stability, one insulting the other, one community and the other community and, as a result we have seen, but I do not want to go into it. Are we just going to

say, what has happened recently, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying, that we should put everything in the dustbin? But we are not a dustbin Government. We will do and we will act whenever the safety and the security of this country are at stake. And one of the priorities...

Mr Speaker: Time over!

The Prime Minister: ...and one of...

Mr Speaker: PMQT!

The Prime Minister:... the priorities of this Government is to preserve *l'harmonie sociale, intercommunautaire surtout, dans ce pays.*

Mr Speaker: Time over! Prime Minister's Question Time! Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

Mr X. L. Duval: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir! On a point of order! The Prime Minister has chosen his very last reply to make attacks, unjustified attacks on myself.

(Interruptions)

He has not the courage to say that when I had the chance to speak.

Mr Speaker: Order on both sides!

Mr X. L. Duval: He did not have the courage...

Mr Speaker: You made your point of order! Time over!

Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

**MR K. R. - ROAD ACCIDENT - PONT BON-DIEU ROUNDABOUT-
INQUIRY**

(No. B/464) **Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to Mr K. R., residing at Laventure, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if he was booked for driving under the influence of alcohol above permissible limit at Pont Bon-Dieu roundabout on 04 May 2021 at around 22 hours, and failed to provide the required specimen for analysis and, if so, if an inquiry has been initiated in relation thereto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on Tuesday 04 May 2021 at around 22.20 hours, Police Officers of Brisée Verdière Police Station attended to a case of road accident along Pont Bon-Dieu Road, Belvédère, which was reported by a member of J family. The accident involved a private car driven by one Mr K. R., aged 47 years and residing at Belle Vue Road, Laventure. His private car had gone off the road and had knocked against a pole of the Mauritius Telecom and the boundary wall belonging to J family. There was no injury but the wall, the pole, and the vehicle were visibly damaged.

On the same day at 22.47 hours, Mr K. R. was brought to Brisée Verdière Police Station for necessary enquiry, and, in accordance with the practice, the Police requested Mr K. R. to undergo a breath test for preliminary screening. He was informed of his constitutional rights prior to the breath test.

At 23.20 hours, officers of Flacq Emergency Response Service conducted a breath test on Mr K.R. using a Drager apparatus. The result established 74 microgrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath which is above the permissible limit of 9 microgrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath.

Mr K. R. was then requested to provide two specimens of his breath or two specimens of urine or a specimen of blood for further analysis, in accordance with legal requirement in such cases, but he refused to do so. He was then informed that a refusal from his part to provide the specimens without any reasonable excuse would amount to an offence and would be used as evidence against him in a Court of Law. He was further informed that this would

be treated as *prima facie* evidence that, at the material time, he was under the influence of alcohol.

Nevertheless, Mr K. R. maintained that he would not give the specimens. However, he did not complain of any illness or injury. He was then informed that he would be booked for -

- (a) failing to provide a specimen of blood or urine for analysis in breach of Section 123 H of the Road Traffic Act 2016; and
- (b) driving Motor Vehicle with alcohol concentration above prescribed limit in breach of Section 123 F of the Road Traffic Act 2016.

He informed that he would not make any statement for the time being but would do so the next day at 9.00 hours in the morning.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr K. R. was detained at the Brisée Verdière Police Station until the next day, that is, on Wednesday 05 May 2021 up to 06.12 a.m. and he was allowed to go after the Officer-in-Charge had found him to be sober.

On the same day at 10.07 hours, he called at Brisée Verdière Police Station for enquiry. He was interviewed and was requested to submit a written statement after he was cautioned and informed of his constitutional rights. He refused and stated that he would relate everything in Court. He was informed that he might also be booked for the offence of driving a motor vehicle without due care and attention. The enquiry into the case is ongoing.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Prime Minister. We need to commend and salute all those officers who rigorously ensure the implementation and respect of laws, without any fear and/or favour. Mr Speaker, Sir, in spite of so many attempts to curb road accidents in Mauritius, we find that the trend is still on the rise. Will the hon. Prime Minister consider intensifying road safety awareness campaigns, and revamping the traffic safety education to reduce such accidents and to make drivers more responsible?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say that we have, in fact, taken a number of measures, one of which, whereby we have tightened the law, and the Section 123H subsection 6 of the Road Traffic Act has been enacted and we have also increased penalties.

Let me, at least, quote the Road Traffic Act, which has been amended in December 2016 to put tougher penalties, whereby the fines have been increased from a maximum of Rs25,000 to Rs50,000 and the term of imprisonment of not exceeding 6 months to 5 years,

and for disqualification from a period not exceeding 8 months to 12 months. And in October 2018, the prescribed limits have been reduced from 23 micrograms of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath to 9 micrograms and from 50 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood to 20 milligrams and, finally, from 67 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of urine to 27 milligrams. And, we do have a sensitisation campaign every now and then to the effect, I must say, that it is for everybody to take also his own responsibility and not to be driving whenever he has consumed alcohol.

I am told that, since the new legislation, or this amendment to the legislation – I have to check - but I am told that the offences related to driving under the influence of alcohol have been on a declining trend. But let me get the figures and then I can come back again to the House.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Prime Minister. I think the battle against road accidents; against drunk driving is a national battle. It is above Party politics and so on. Now, will the hon. Prime Minister look into the possibility whether we can have a holistic and comprehensive system approach where we can educate our drivers a little more, and, especially, we go for rehabilitation of offenders apart from fines and imprisonment and so on; the rehabilitation of those drivers who have been involved, in one way or the other, in accidents?

The Prime Minister: I know, speaking from memory, that when those, who have been sentenced and whose licence has been disqualified, apply for their licence after having satisfied the conditions in the law, they have to undergo a training again to see to it that they are fit and proper to be permitted to drive. But I must say that we can legislate, we can increase sentences, we can make the law harsher, we can take a number of measures, which we are doing, but there is also the responsibility of any user of the roads, especially the drivers, who have to be more responsible and as I have said they should not be taking any liquor when they intend to drive.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Prime Minister inform the House what the law provides as penalty or consequences whenever a driver refuses to provide specimen samples of urine or blood? Thank you.

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: As I said, let me quote, Mr Speaker, Sir, Section 123H...

Mr Speaker: You can only speak on a point of order!

The Prime Minister: ... Subsection (6) of the Road Traffic Act which stipulates that, and I quote –

“A police officer shall, on requiring any person to provide a specimen for a laboratory test in pursuance of this section, warn him that a failure, without any excuse, to provide it may render him liable to prosecution and may be used against him as evidence”, unquote, and, I quote-

“in a prosecution under section 123D or 123F of this Act, a refusal without reasonable excuse by a person to submit himself to a breath test or to give a specimen of his blood or specimens of his urine when required to do so in pursuance of this section shall be held against him as *prima facie* evidence that at the material time the proportion of alcohol in his blood exceeded the prescribed limits.”

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary! No.

(Interruptions)

Next question!

**COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON DRUG TRAFFICKING – MEETINGS,
RECOMMENDATIONS, ETC.**

(No. B/465) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking of July 2018, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number, since July 2020 to date, of

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- (a) meetings held by the Task Force and by the Committee set up to look thereinto;
- (b) recommendations contained therein implemented, and
- (c) investigations carried out and arrests effected in connection therewith.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind the House that the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking was submitted to Government in July 2018.

A Ministerial Committee under my Chair met on 06 August 2018 and decided to set up a Task Force under the chairmanship of the Director General of the Independent

Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) to coordinate the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Report by the relevant investigative agencies. So far, five Progress Reports have been submitted to the Ministerial Committee. The composition of the Task Force is as follows –

- the Director General of the ICAC;
- the Commissioner of Police;
- the Deputy Solicitor General;
- the Director General of the Mauritius Revenue Authority;
- the Director of the Financial Intelligence Unit, and
- the Director of the Integrity Reporting Services Agency.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning part (a) of the Question, the Task Force has, since its setting up met on twelve occasions. The last two meetings were held on Wednesday 01 July 2020 and Tuesday 26 January 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a Committee chaired by the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service was also set up to look into the legal, institutional, and administrative issues and to expedite the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry. With the coming into operation of the National Drug Secretariat (NDS), as an apex body for drug related matters, the responsibility was taken over by the NDS. The objective of the NDS is also to coordinate and monitor the response to the drug issue among the stakeholders involved in demand and supply reduction strategies.

With regard to part (b) of the Question, the recommendations made by the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking have been scrutinised by the NDS and reviewed from 460 to 390, as there were duplications and others were mere observations. These 390 recommendations, excluding those under the responsibility of the Task Force, have been segregated under the responsibility of relevant and concerned Ministries and Departments which are required to implement same.

As at February 2021, 204 of the 390 recommendations, have already been implemented or have adequate measures in place. Actions have been initiated on 62 other recommendations while 53 recommendations which may require legislative amendments are under consideration at the level of different Ministries and Departments.

The NDS holds focussed administrative meetings with the different stakeholders on a regular basis and submits status reports on a quarterly basis to the Rodrigues, Outer Islands

and Territorial Integrity Division of my Office and through it, to the High Level Drugs and HIV Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the NDS is also responsible for the implementation of the Drug Control Master Plan, two meetings have been held with NGOs as partners in the fight against the drugs scourge and for the rehabilitation of drug addicts.

Accordingly, the following four thematic sub-committees have been set up -

- (i) the Drug Prevention Committee monitors implementation of all drug related prevention activities by Ministries, Departments and NGOs;
- (ii) the Harm Reduction Committee ensures the smooth implementation of the Methadone and the Needle Exchange Programmes;
- (iii) the Treatment and Rehabilitation Committee facilitates consultations among stakeholders for a comprehensive service to be provided to drug users, and
- (iv) the Supply Reduction Committee monitors the implementation of activities with regard to drug trafficking.

In this context, the NDS holds monthly meetings with the actors involved to guide, monitor, and follow up on the outcome of their activities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (c) of the Question, I wish to inform the House that -

- (i) the ICAC has initiated 53 investigations, out of which 35 have been completed and 15 persons were arrested;
- (ii) the Mauritius Police Force has initiated 64 investigations, out of which 2 investigations have been completed and 5 cases were submitted to the DPP who has advised no further action. 57 cases are still under investigation;
- (iii) the Mauritius Revenue Authority has initiated 75 investigations, out of which 32 investigations have been completed without yield and 43 investigations have been completed with yield. As at date, the MRA does not have any case under investigation;
- (iv) the Financial Intelligence Unit has carried out 71 investigations out of which 66 investigations have been completed. Its investigative analysis remains ongoing, and

- (v) the Integrity Reporting Services Agency (IRSA) started investigations on all the names mentioned in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking shortly after its publication.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must point out that the response of my Government to the drug scourge in Mauritius has constantly and consistently been guided by strategic interventions with a view to reducing supply and demand.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to once again reassure the House and the nation that my Government is fully and unflinchingly committed to address this scourge by waging a ruthless war against the drug trafficking and drug traffickers and their accomplices, wherever they are, and whoever they are. Thank you.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, the recent seizure of billions of rupees worth of drug in the North confirms what the Commission of Inquiry has said about drug having access through route. This being the case, may I know from hon. Prime Minister why have the recommendations made by the Commission with respect to reviewing our surveillance methodology, equipping National Coast Guards with sophisticated equipment and even drones, why have all these recommendations with regard to the National Coast Guards still not been implemented?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have over the years been increasing the budget of specialised Units, especially ADSU and the National Coast Guard, to provide them with appropriate equipment for them to fight, in fact, to counter these drug traffickers. I do not, now, have the list with me, I do not have the details of how much we have been spending regularly but I can provide to this House a list of such equipment, as boots, among others in order to better equip our officers to effectively fight those traffickers.

Mr Uteem: Can the hon. Prime Minister refer to a number of arrests made following the Report of the Commission of Inquiry? May I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether any of the lawyers, whose name have been cited in this Report, been enquired into and have any of them been arrested and if not, is it because they are close to your Government and your party?

The Prime Minister: I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I am really very disappointed, not by the Question, by part of the content of that Question. The hon. Member is, in fact, talking about lawyer in my party. I am not supposed to be giving any detail because I cannot get any information with regard to enquiry which is ongoing. But I know, because this has

come to public knowledge now, that one Barrister, who has gone to Court for a Judicial Review to contest part of the finding of the Commission of Inquiry, and I have read the Judgment, which, I recall from memory, *a donné raison à l'application qui a été faite en partie pour dire que c'était injuste et ce n'était pas exacte d'arriver à une certaine conclusion et de dire certaines choses.*

I think the hon. Member knows about the Judgment, he knows about the case, he should not be making such kind of remarks, which I consider to be unwarranted. When I say this, I speak with regard to that particular case. I am not talking about the other cases. In fact, there are cases which are pending before the Court. There is a number of cases, in fact. I believe there are 12. Well, excluding the case I have mentioned, there are 11 cases, now, before the Court, most of which are awaiting judgment. Pleadings have already been done, and they are awaiting judgment and there is only one case which is ongoing, wherein the pleadings have not been completed. I do not think it is warranted, especially coming not only from a Member of Parliament, but also from him as a Barrister.

Mr Uteem: Coming from a Barrister to a Barrister, this is why. And the hon. Prime Minister said he read the Judgment, so, he must surely have read that the Chief Justice stated that the report was right and that Police enquiry should look into the relationship between this lawyer and the number of prisoners which she visited and the number of calls she received and this comment would apply to also all the other lawyers who have close links to prisoners who are drug traffickers sending in the prisons.

So my question again, now that the Prime Minister has read this judgement, does not he find it fit to talk to the Commissioner of Police to expedite matters? Because if really there is collusion between lawyers outside and drug traffickers inside the prison, then his combat against drug trafficking would be seriously defeated.

The Prime Minister: Talking about lawyers, we know who are appearing now, you just mentioned a case previously. How this seizure has been done *si on n'était pas efficace, si nous n'avons pas la volonté politique de traquer ces trafiquants. Nous avons pu, M. le président, saisir des quantités record de drogues.* And then who is appearing, who rushed immediately to appear for those traffickers?

(Interruptions)

Unlike you, I am not going to mention any names but there are people who want, politically also, to be associated with some people in the Opposition. That you do not see?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo, I am sorry.

Mr Dhunoo: *Merci, M. le président.* In his reply, the Prime Minister mentioned about several cases that had been investigated by the Police, by the MRA and I would like to know that the two specific cases that he mentioned that have been completed by the Police, when were they completed?

The Prime Minister: As I have already said, Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot get information from the Investigative Bodies. In my reply, if I said that two have been completed, I believe that they must have been sent to the DPP. Obviously, this is the procedure. They must have been sent to the DPP for actions to be taken. Now, it can happen that either the case could be returned for further investigation, or that the DPP then will decide on whether there is any offence, and then will prefer charges against whomever.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Prime Minister gave the number of investigations and the number of arrests. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister if he has details of those current investigations, having any links, directly or indirectly, to gambling activity, more specifically, horse racing? I am not asking the names of the persons involved, but if he has the information of investigation having links with the gambling industry.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, what the hon. Member is asking, in fact, is for me to ask for the case file and to have a look at it, to peruse what statements and what evidence there are in those case files, and to inform the House now, whether there is any link. This is not my duty, it is for the investigating authorities, whether it is Police, ICAC to look at what information is available, what they have to look for as evidence and to establish, if there are any links with gambling or horse racing. And then, ultimately, when an enquiry is completed, we shall then be able to know the situation. Again, as I said, it is only when a case is going to proceed before a Court, that I can at least get some information with regard to charges.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary! Hon. Lobine!

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister, with regard to one of the main recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry, is the setting up of a National Drugs Commission; will your Government go ahead with the setting up of this

National Drugs Commission to fight this problem of drugs where we are number one in heroin trade and synthetic drug trade in Africa?

The Prime Minister: National Drugs Commission, Mr Speaker, Sir? I do not want to say that the hon. Member is implying that there is no action being taken with regard to drug trafficking. No, I hope not. But if we want to act - I believe what you are saying is, to act according to what the Commission has suggested, if we want to improve the system, if we want to be *plus efficace*, etc. But we have to be very careful because dismantling, for example, one unit and putting and setting up another unit, is not a solution *per se*. What, of course, is important is that we need to have the proper setting up, the proper unit, but we also need to have honest and very good people who also have the will to combat drug trafficking. And that is where I want to put more emphasis on, because we have seen there are, unfortunately, *certaines brebis galeuses* also, and this is what, I believe, all of us, want to get rid of. And we want the fight to be a permanent one because we cannot relax on this issue, and there must be a permanent fight. That is why, in fact, I want to give more equipment, there should be more training and there should be selection of very good and honest people to enable them to get the required results.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQs B/474, B/476, B/477 have been withdrawn.

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development is not well and will not be able to attend today's Sitting. Questions addressed to him will be replied by the Hon. Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage.

Further, PQs B/496, B/497, B/506, B/507, B/508, B/536 and B/540 have been withdrawn.

I am also advised by the hon. Minister Ganoo that he has to attend the Court in his case "Election Seat in his Constituency" and he has asked that his Question be taken out of turn, PQ B/486. I would ask hon. Mrs Tour to give way and hon. Uteem to go further. Thank you!

ROSE HILL/RÉDUIT - METRO LINE - EXTENSION

(No. B/486) **Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the extension of the metro line from Rose Hill to Réduit via Ébène, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Metro Express Ltd., information as to the –

- (a) costs thereof;
- (b) procurement method used for the award of the contract;
- (c) scheduled start and completion dates of work thereof, and
- (d) source of financing therefor.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to reply to PQs B/486.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius being a rapidly-growing economy, having high-density mixed-use development with an increasing unsustainable car ownership and limited travel options in terms of public transportation services, is causing considerable road congestion during peak traffic periods in and around the main cities.

To overcome these challenges, the Government is already implementing a solution that involves a world-class light rail transit project to serve commuters travelling in the most congested region of the country which is between Curepipe and Port Louis. The light rail system will deliver major and much needed travel improvements to communities in the Republic of Mauritius, as well as long term transport, economic and community benefits to the nation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as at date, I am proud to announce that the Phase 1 of the Metro Express project from Port Louis to Rose Hill is in commercial operation as from 10 January 2020 and 98% of the Phase 2a works along the stretch from Rose Hill to Quatre Bornes are completed and testing and commissioning of the system is in progress such as trial runs, static and dynamic testing. I would like to take the opportunity to inform the House that the Phase 2a will be operational soon. Moreover, the works along stretch from Quatre Bornes to Curepipe is progressing well.

As I have stated in previous PQs, this Government has a vision to improve and regenerate the transport system of this country and, as mentioned by the Prime Minister

during several occasions, studies are being carried out to investigate the potential extension of the Metro Express network across the island.

Ébène Cybercity has proven to be a critical area of growth in Mauritius, as evidenced by the rapid employment growth with a net developable area of about 100 *Arpents*, with up to 70% of the area already developed. Studies, Mr Speaker, Sir, show that the whole city will be developed in 5 years with more than 50,000 workers, which will account for nearly 10% of the total employment in Mauritius. Moreover, in terms of Business Growth, Ébène Cybercity has also become a preferred location for both public and private sector offices. Ébène Cybercity is considered as Mauritius new business hub for the future economic development and progress. Therefore, Ébène Cybercity remains a potential influence area to connect to the currently under construction light rail transit network.

On top of that, there is a high density of Educational and Health Institutions in the region of Ébène. It is estimated that the student population includes more than 10,000 pupils according to the Tertiary Education Commission 2016, and accounts for 27% of the total tertiary education enrolment in the country. The health employment accounted for 12.5% of total employment, or approximately 3,300 full time equivalent jobs. Hence, the decision of the Government to extend the light rail network to Réduit as a priority project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by Metro Express Ltd that the works will include major complex infrastructure along the 3.4 km stretch, namely

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- (a) a viaduct of 548m length connecting the existing superstructure at Rose Hill central station up to the entrance of the SSS Ébène;
- (b) a 120m Railway Bridge at Réduit which demands special technical consideration due to its proximity to the dam near a power generation unit, amidst complex topography. The existing old railway bridge will be preserved;
- (c) a 90m Railway Bridge at Rivière Sèche again amidst complex topography and also to preserve road infrastructures amongst others, and
- (d) there is also a special infrastructure for connectivity between Ébène Station and Ébène Cyber City, either an underpass or overhead pedestrian bridge to be confirmed after a detailed design stage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, you will also note that most of the track length will be mainly embedded as in Quatre Bornes and Vandermeersch considering that the alignment is mostly through urban areas. There will be 3 stations along the extended alignment –

- (1) Rose Hill interchange (Elevated);
- (2) Ébène (at-grade), and
- (3) Réduit interchange at-grade to intergrade with other modes of transport.

Furthermore, the stations will be equipped with similar Control and Monitoring Systems as for the mainline together with the Traffic Signal Priority System (TSPS) and 2 Traction Power Stations at Ébène and Réduit. The overall integration of systems with the mainline will involve critical necessary modifications and upgrading of the OCC. All the above works and the extension will cost Rs4.555 billion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that this extension line was evaluated by a Due Diligence Committee comprising of representatives of Prime Minister's Office, TMRSU, Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail, Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MOFEPD) and of Metro Express Limited (MEL) as per the Public Procurement Act under the G-to-G Agreement. The DDC concluded that the proposal on the Extension Project from L&T was responsive to the requirements of MEL and represented value for money.

Concerning part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, the main existing contract with L&T for the Metro Express project is under a G-to-G Agreement between Government of India and Mauritius. I am informed by MEL that this extension line is being treated under the same arrangement as the main existing contract.

As regards part (c) of the question, I am informed by MEL that L&T has already started the detailed design works, for instance, geotechnical surveys and so on as from May 2021 and the completion date is targeted for early 2023. Finally, as regards part (d) of the question, I am informed by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development that the extension of the project is planned to be funded under a Line of Credit as for the main project.

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister just informed us that for 3.4 kms of railway, we are going to pay almost Rs4.5 billion. So, that is more than Rs1 billion per km. So, can the hon. Minister tell us that we have received value for money or has

he tried to see whether there are other routes available, maybe through Quatre Bornes which would have resulted in less cost to taxpayers' money to taxpayers?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I just said all the avenues have been explored and this is what was the proposal of the Committee which was set up to explore the possibility of setting up this new extension line. And as I also said, Mr, Speaker, Sir, that there was a Due Diligence Committee which was set up and which looked into all the ins and out of the project and finally, as I said in my answer, this Due Diligence Committee which was made up of different members from different agencies, including the State Law Office, came to the conclusion that we were having value for money and, therefore, Government decided to go on with this extension line.

Now, the hon. Minister has mentioned the figure of Rs1 billion per km for such a project. The hon. Member has mentioned this figure, I supposed this is not the first time that somebody is saying that in the Assembly. In the past, even previous Ministers have also mentioned the fact that today 1 km of the Metro Express project cost about Rs1 billion.

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président. M. le président, M. le ministre a confirmé il y a quelques temps dans la Chambre que le Métro Express actuelle qui roule actuellement roule à la perte. Est-ce que le ministre trouve-t-il normal que d'investir R 4.5 milliard de *Line of Credit* de l'Inde dans un projet ou déjà avec la pandémie, nous n'avons pas de vision, rien sur l'avenir, est-ce que trouves-t-il normal d'aller investir R 5 milliard dans un projet ou on peut attendre un peu de temps pour voir la clarté, la clarification des choses pour pouvoir aviser?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, to correct the hon. Member, I never said in the past that Metro project is running at a loss. What I said is, we cannot at this stage, our partial operations decide what are the cost involved and whether Metro Express is presently running at a loss or not. We will have to wait for the whole project to be completed and then we can come or having obtained all the necessary data and figures, we can come therefore to the right conclusion.

Now, the hon. Member should know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that with this project, we are expecting a ridership of 15,000 additional passengers daily with this new extension that we are going to set up from Rose Hill to Réduit for the reasons I have just mentioned in my answer. So, when this extension line will be fully operational, Mr Speaker, Sir, the estimated additional passengers on a daily basis will be 15,000.

Mr Dhunoo: *Merci, M. le président.* I would like to know from the hon. Minister, what were the costs of the Metro project as proposed by the Labour Government?

Mr Ganoo: Well, the figures have been made public in the past, Mr Speaker, Sir. As far as I remember, according to the project which was proposed by the Labour Government at this time, it was Rs37 billion.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary.

Mr Uteem: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Government has been saying consistently that the Metro Express was a fixed fee project from Port Louis to Rose Hill, Rose Hill to Curepipe. So, may I know from the hon. Minister whether this extension also is a Fixed Fee Agreement and there would be no variation, no cost overrun?

Mr Ganoo: This is a fixed contract, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, as I have just said it was after a Due Diligence Exercise was done, all the experts have been sitting for weeks and weeks and deciding on whether we were obtaining value for money and after having assessed all the factors, Government decided to go with this project because it was going, as I just said, to be a valuable project bringing in 15,000 more additional passengers per day.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Mrs Tour!

CHILD DAY CARE CENTRES – PROPOSED RE-OPENING – HEALTH & SAFETY MEASURES

(No. B/478) Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Child Day Care Centres, she will state the proposed re-opening date thereof, indicating the measures taken by her Ministry to ensure that appropriate health and safety measures are taken thereat amid the COVID-19 pandemic?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I thank my hon. colleague for bringing up the question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before we re-open the Child Day Care Centres, my Ministry is doing its level best to ensure that these Day Care Centres open in the best sanitary conditions possible as soon as possible. A letter has been addressed to all managers of Child Day Care Centres by my Ministry to encourage their staff to get vaccinated. I have made an earnest appeal through a video that was posted on the website of the Government Information Service on Tuesday 18 May to the owners of nurseries, the staff, the drivers so that they can

come forward and get vaccinated as soon as possible. This is to ensure that the reopening takes place in the best conditions, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The appeal was also relayed to the public through various media platform. My Ministry has already started a vaccination campaign for nursery staff across the island. Concurrently, instructions have already been issued to all Child Day Care Centres to start cleaning the premises, for their sanitary amenities to be up-to-date, furniture and toys to be sanitised and prior to the reopening of Child Day Care Centres, the enforcement team of my Ministry will undertake inspections to ensure that all sanitary measures and precautions such as social distancing, as far as possible and checking of temperature at regular intervals can be taken in line with the guidelines for the reopening of those centres.

Mrs Tour: Can the hon. Minister advise how many people have been vaccinated as at date and how many cannot be vaccinated due to their medical conditions?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, as at 19 May 2021, 50%, that is, 929 of the personnel of Child Day Care Centres have already been vaccinated. Some 174 people, that is amounting to 9%, are on the waiting list for the vaccination and 8%, that is 155 of them, cannot get vaccinated due to underlying health conditions.

Mrs Tour: The hon. Minister advised in her reply that the Child Day Care Centres will reopen as soon as possible. Is she in a position to give an indication as to when she expect to reopen the Child Day Care Centres?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, I cannot provide an exact date for the simple reason that we can only reopen the Child Day Care Centres when we have reached a critical mass of vaccinated personnel. And once that is attained, my Ministry will be in consultation with the National Vaccination Committee and the High-Level Committee for Covid-19 to announce the official date for reopening of the Child Day Care Centres.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

Mrs Mayotte: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister state if for example, one staff of the Child Day Care Centres does not want for whatever reason to get vaccinated, are there some special measures that are being taken and if so, which ones?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do understand that vaccination is not compulsory, but it is also highly recommended that the vaccination is undertaken for the protection of the children and the protection of the staff as well. Should the person not wish

to get vaccinated because that is the desire not to go ahead with that, we are in consultation with the Ministry of Health to see whether we can provide a PCR test to those personnel. But again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I should reiterate in the House that the appeal to get vaccinated is a very well founded one.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci, M. le président. Il y a certainement des crèches où le personnel a déjà été vacciné et en attendant, les parents qui travaillent ont beaucoup de mal à allier travail et s'occuper des enfants en bas âge, la ministre ne pourrait-elle pas permettre la réouverture des crèches où le personnel a déjà été vacciné?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member of the Opposition for her very pertinent question. I happen to be one of those parents as well, let me reassure her. Indeed, the possibility of reopening the Child Day Care Centres who have already vaccinated their staff, their drivers, their personnel, the possibility of reopening those Child Day Care Centers is being strongly considered at the level of the High-Level Committee and we are looking forward, hopefully, to a response in that sense very soon.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Tour!

Mrs Tour: Can the hon. Minister inform the House what alternatives would parents have if the Child Day Care Centres remain closed?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the alternative if they do not reopen is quite scary to think about because, as I said earlier in one of my replies to hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie, I am one of those parents as well who is looking forward to the children returning to the crèches. There would be no alternative. Hence, the reason why we keep appealing and making earnest requests to those personnel of those Child Day Care Centres to come and get vaccinated so as we do not have to come to the eventuality of crèches and schools being closed for indeterminate times.

PARALYMPIC GAMES – ATHLETES - QUALIFICATION

(No. B/479) **Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the forthcoming Paralympic Games, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain for the Olympic Committee, the list of the athletes qualified for participation thereat.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to seize this opportunity to congratulate heartily members of the delegation who have participated this month in the Grand Prix Para Athletics in Switzerland which was a qualifier competition for the Tokyo 2021 Paralympic Games scheduled from 23 July to 08 August 2021.

The remarkable performance of our para athletes in Switzerland has brought great pride to the nation.

On 15 May 2021, Miss Noémi Alphonse, specialist in wheelchair racing, smashed the African record in the 100m T54 clocking up a time of 16.68 seconds. She presently occupies the third place in the world ranking.

On 22 May 2021, she repeated that feat in the Swiss Nationals this time stopping the clock at 16.57 seconds.

On 24 May 2021, that is, yesterday, Miss Noémi Alphonse set up a new African record in the 800m wheelchair race in 1 minute 54.60 seconds.

On the same day, in the Daniella Jutzeler Memorial competition held in Arbon, Miss Brandy Perrine also established a new African record in the 400m wheelchair race in 57.52 seconds. She progresses to the fifth place in the world ranking.

Miss Anaïs Angéline on her part has become the fourth best performer in the world in the long jump event T37 with a leap of 4m23. I am informed by the Mauritius Paralympic Committee that so far, only Miss Noémi Alphonse has been qualified for the Tokyo Paralympic Games. A historic qualification for the Paralympic Games for Miss Noemi Alphonse in four events, namely 100m, 400m, 800m and 1500m wheelchair races.

However, four other athletes namely Miss Anais Angeline, Miss Brandy Perrine, Miss Anndora Asaun and Mr Denovan Rabaye having improved their performance in international competitions stand a great chance to be qualified for the Paralympic Games. It is expected that the list of participants shall be finalised by the International Paralympic Committee by June 2021. Thank you.

Mrs Tour: *M. le président, permettez-moi, à moi aussi, de féliciter nos athlètes pour leurs qualifications aux jeux.* Can the hon. Minister advise what is being done by his Ministry to assist the qualified athletes for their preparation for the coming games?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, bien sûr nous attendons leur retour et nous attendons aussi le plan qui sera soumis par la fédération et les entraîneurs des différents athlètes

qualifiés et il y va sans dire qu'au niveau du ministère et au niveau du gouvernement, nous allons donner tout notre soutien possible aux athlètes afin qu'ils puissent briller durant les jeux paralympiques.

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

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

On resuming at 2.37 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

SSS - FOOD & TEXTILE STUDIES & DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY – SPECIALIST ROOMS

(No. B/480) 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 proposed construction and upgrading of 58 specialist rooms in the State Secondary Schools for the teaching of Food and Textile Studies and Design and Technology, respectively, she will state where matters stand, indicating -

- (a) if same have been completed;
- (b) the project costs thereof, and
- (c) the names of the contractors therefor.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with the NYCBE Reform, new subjects have been introduced for greater relevance to the 21st century realities. Thus, the introduction of Food and Textiles Studies in boys' schools and Design and Technology subject in girls' schools is meant to embrace a gender neutral approach providing equal chances to both genders.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that the Food and Textile Studies and Design and Tech subjects are already being taught in all regional schools since 2017 and these subjects have been taken by the first cohort participating in the NCE Examinations. Concurrently, action has been taken to enhance facilities either by converting and upgrading existing space or by construction of new infrastructure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, conversion works in 21 specialist rooms have been completed. Works in 6 schools are expected to be completed shortly. Tender documents for 16 schools are in the process of being launched. For the

remaining 15 schools, tender documents are being finalised and are expected to be launched by next month.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to parts (b) and (c) of the question, for the respective project costs and the names of contractors, I am tabling the following documents –

- (i) the list of schools in which conversion works have been completed, and
- (ii) the list of schools in which works are in progress.

I am also tabling the list of schools in respect of which the tenders are either in the process of being launched or are being finalised.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Speaker, Sir,, it is in the Budget Speech 2019-2020, under the heading ‘Conducive Learning Environment’, Item 241, that provisions for funds were made for these 58 specialist rooms. Now that, as you are saying, some of them will not be ready, will you inform the House whether Design and Tech is being offered in girls’ regional schools and Food and Nut is being offered in boys’ regional schools in Grade 10 in June 2021?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, after the results are out and considering the requests and demands from students in each of these schools, the Ministry will take necessary steps.

Dr. Gungapersad: It is good that we are catering for these subjects for Grade 10 in regional schools. Will the hon. Vice-Prime Minister inform the House if provisions and arrangements for specialist rooms have been made for boys and girls in Private Secondary Schools to facilitate the teaching and learning of Food and Textiles, Design and Tech in Grade 10 in June 2021?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, all schools have been requested to do same. And I have been informed that even in Private Secondary Schools, certain specialist rooms are being set up.

Dr. Gungapersad: Will the hon. Vice-Prime Minister confirm whether specialist rooms in academies will be functional for the resumption of studies in June 2021?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to a PQ set by the hon. Member himself, a few weeks back, I informed that the specialist rooms are ready and would be functional by the end of the first term in most of the academies.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CLIMATE CHANGE - INTER-MINISTERIAL COUNCIL - COMPOSITION

(No. B/481) **Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or)** asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the Inter-Ministerial Council on Climate Change, he will state the –

- (a) name of the Secretary thereof and table information as to the qualifications and experience held and remuneration drawn;
- (b) composition thereof and table information as to the names, qualifications and experience held and remuneration drawn in each case, and
- (c) number of meetings held as at to date.

Mr Ramano: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Climate Change Act 2020, which was promulgated in November 2020, came into force on 22 April 2021. The purpose of the Act is to establish a legal framework towards making Mauritius a climate-change resilient and low emission country.

Section 4 of the Act makes provision for the setting up of an Inter-Ministerial Council on Climate Change with the objective of setting national objectives, goals and targets with a view to making Mauritius a climate change-resilient and low emission country. As such, the functions of the Council are to make climate change policies and set priorities for –

- (i) adaptation in agriculture, biodiversity, coastal zones, infrastructure, the Port, marine environment, tourism, fisheries and water sectors and any other relevant sector, and
- (ii) mitigation in energy, transport, industrial processes and product use, agriculture, forestry, land use, waste management and disposal of other relevant sector.

The Council will also -

- (i) monitor and review progress made by Government departments on climate change projects and programmes;
- (ii) ensure coordination and cooperation between Government departments, local authorities and other organisations engaged in climate change projects and programmes, and
- (iii) make such recommendations and issue such directives as it may determine to Government departments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, section 6(2) of the Climate Change Act 2020 makes provisions for the Director of the Department of Climate Change to act as Secretary.

And according to Section 9, there shall be a Director who shall be a public officer appointed by the Public Service Commission and who shall be responsible for the control, management and administration of the day to day business of the Department of Climate Change. I wish to inform the House that actions towards the filling of the post of Director have been initiated. However, in view of the urgency to operationalise the Department of Climate Change ahead of the twenty sixth meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP26) and to enable meetings of the Council to be held, the Acting Director of the Department of Environment, who is already hands-on involved in climate change matters, has been designated as the Officer-in-Charge of the Department of Climate Change with effect as from 01 March 2021. Government has been apprised of this temporary arrangement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to part (b) of the question, according to Section 4(2) of the Climate Change Act 2020, the Inter-Ministerial Council on Climate Change shall consist - as provided by the Climate Change Act - of the Prime Minister as chairperson and Ministers responsible for various subjects as referred in the First Schedule of the Act. Other Ministers may form part of the Council as the Prime Minister may designate. Moreover, at the request of the Prime Minister, the Chief Commissioner may attend any meeting of the Council.

No provision has been made in the Act for remuneration of the Members or of the Secretary of the Inter-Ministerial Council on Climate Change.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (c) of the question, the first meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Council is expected to be held shortly, following consultations with the Prime Minister's Office.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. Given that the actual Director of Environment is acting as Officer-in-Charge on a temporary basis for the time being, may I know from the hon. Minister what is going to be the role of the Director of Environment when the incumbent, the new Director is going to be nominated / selected? How are they going to function?

Mr Ramano: M. le président, la procédure va se faire en toute transparence. Je dois dire qu'au niveau du ministère de l'environnement, il y a plusieurs directeurs. Il y a le directeur qui est responsable de *Climate Change Department*, il y a le directeur de

l'environnement, il y a aussi le directeur du *Solid Waste Division*. Donc, cela ne cause absolument aucun problème, mais en ce qui concerne le processus, la procédure pour la sélection du directeur pour le *Climate Change Division* va se faire selon les provisions de la loi, selon les recommandations du *PRB*.

Dr. Gungapersad: The hon. Minister just mentioned that meetings have not been held yet. So, may I know if this Inter-Ministerial Council on Climate Change therefore, did not meet to address the problems which occurred in the South during the torrential rain in that part of the island?

Mr Ramano: Non, M. le président, je dois dire que le ministère de l'environnement est *fully functional*. D'ailleurs, nous sommes en train d'entreprendre toutes les mesures nécessaires ; que ce soit en ce qui concerne le *Coastal Protection* et aussi la protection de la faune et la flore etc. Donc, les départements fonctionnent à plein régime. L'idée de venir de l'avant avec ce *Climate Change Bill*, l'idée de venir de l'avant avec le *Inter-Ministerial Committee*, c'est précisément comme je l'ai mentionné, M. le président, c'est avant tout, de venir de l'avant *to make climate change policies and set priorities*. Mais en ce qui concerne l'implémentation des mesures, cela se fait dans le processus normal du ministère, en ce qui concerne le *day to day management*.

Dr. Gungapersad: On this perspective, hon. Minister, I want to know in the future with the setting up of this Council, for example, when we have controversial infrastructural developments or constructions like the recent Stop Order that was issued to promoters of Villas in Belle-Mare, will this Council look into that or will it go as it was going in the past?

Mr Ramano : M. le président, le *Inter-Ministerial Committee* ne sera pas responsable du *day to day management* du ministère. Je l'ai mentionné, M. le président, le *Inter-Ministerial Committee* est responsable pour venir de l'avant avec des *climate change policies and set priorities*. C'est le but, parce qu'il faut bien le reconnaître aussi que, ce n'est pas Cabinet Ministériel liste qui est en train d'être instituée. L'idée même de venir de l'avant avec le *Inter-Ministerial Committee*, c'est de s'assurer avant tout, qu'on adopte une politique transversale en ce qui concerne la protection de l'environnement, en ce qui concerne le *Climate Change*.

Donc, l'idée de venir de l'avant avec une politique transversale, c'est avant tout de s'assurer que chaque ministère fasse de sorte que le *climate change*, le changement climatique soit une priorité au niveau de chaque ministère.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. In regard to the *transversale* aspect that the hon. Minister has just mentioned, being given that climate change has got adaptation and mitigation, can I ask him, since he has mentioned ‘national objective’ in his original reply, how is it done at the level of the Committee so that Ministries and Departments do not look at their own objective in silos but look at the national objective for the sake of climate change, mitigation and adaptation?

Mr Ramano : M. le président, j’ai eu l’occasion de le mentionner dans cette auguste Assemblée que nous avons une obligation au niveau de la COP 26 de venir de l’avant avec toutes les mesures que nous souhaitons implémenter pour les 5 prochaines années et aussi il y va de notre responsabilité de faire un *assessment* de toutes les mesures qui ont été prises les 5 dernières années depuis l’Accord de Paris en 2015. Donc là, nous sommes dans ce processus de préparation de nos mesures en termes d’adaptation et aussi de mitigation. Donc, ces mesures d’adaptation et de mitigation ne concernent pas seulement le ministère de l’environnement, il y va du ministère de l’énergie, du transport, de l’aménagement du territoire, du ministère de l’environnement.

Donc, cette portée transversale y est déjà. Donc, c’est notre responsabilité vis-à-vis du *Conference of Parties* qui aura lieu au mois de novembre à Glasgow. Mais, l’idée de venir de l’avant avec ce *Climate Change Act* c’est précisément de faire de sorte que chaque ministère qui fait partie selon le *Schedule* du *Climate Change Act* fasse du *climate change* une priorité.

Mr Speaker: The Table is advised that PQ B/537 has been withdrawn. Next question!

MAURITIANS LIVING ABROAD & TOURISTS - COVID-19 VACCINE

(No. B/482) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Mauritians living abroad and tourists having been administered both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine wishing to visit Mauritius, he will state if a special protocol is being or will be set up to grant them entry on the Mauritian territory.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, vaccines developed to combat COVID-19 represent concrete and tangible hope to fight the ongoing pandemic and allow for economic, social and sanitary situations to return back to normal.

All Covid-19 vaccines developed and in use up till date, are very efficient. Their degree of efficacy is on average, much more superior than the efficacy rates of former existing vaccines developed for other pathologies. They all protect very efficiently from risks of death, of severe forms of the disease and even from having symptoms if infected.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we should, however, bear in mind that no vaccine confers a 100% efficacy. We do know that they reduce the propagation of the virus and they also reduce transmission from one person to another by 30% to 60%. The rate of propagation, meaning the potential for further contamination by a vaccinated person, will also vary, depending on the prevalence of the virus of the country in which he or she has been vaccinated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we shall always remain on our guards in regard to opening of borders in order to prevent setbacks as reported in other countries and also in order to prevent the country from having to go backwards in the event of another epidemic surge.

In regard to the Mauritians living abroad they are currently allowed to come to Mauritius on a case to case basis. As for tourists, they will be allowed to come to Mauritius in the future.

Incoming passengers having been administered both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine wishing to visit Mauritius, will be allowed to enter the Mauritian territory provided they abide by the different protocols which will be put in place. For example, non-vaccinated persons will be directed to a mandatory quarantine period of 14 days, as is actually the case.

This will be maintained as long as a solid herd immunity is not achieved,

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry, along with the Ministry of Tourism, are currently working on protocols for fully vaccinated persons wishing to enter the Mauritian territory. There will be a progressive doing away of restrictive measures in place from protocol to protocol. The shifting from one protocol to another will be done upon evaluation of the current situation, of the former situation of the country, of the situation worldwide, of the degree of herd immunity in Mauritius and upon the evolution of the available knowledge.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. Are there certain vaccines which have been approved by Mauritius and the World Health Organisation, which are acceptable by Mauritius when Mauritians are coming, because we have a variety of vaccines? Are there specific vaccines that are recognised officially by Mauritius?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Health and Wellness has set up a Vaccination Committee comprising of the different experts. Upon validation of a vaccine by the Committee, then the Ministry of Health and Wellness administers those vaccines to the Mauritian population.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. Will you be considering self-home isolation as an option for returning residents who have had both doses of vaccination, same like we are doing for diplomats at the moment? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have seen in other countries, what is the efficiency of home self-isolation. Currently, in Mauritius, we do not have self-home isolation, but, in the future, as I have said, it will depend upon the evolution of the different statistics, of the different studies and then we can think on this aspect, but, as for now, for every returning Mauritian, for every passenger coming to Mauritius, we will be maintaining the 14 days quarantine.

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président. M. le ministre, une question assez directe, si un étranger ou un mauricien a son passeport sanitaire ou son passeport vaccinal en main, est-ce qu'il sera autorisé à rentrer, sans aller dans les quarantaines?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, no. As per our current protocols, we will still maintain quarantine period of 14 days, with the PCR test done before and after, for anybody who is coming to Mauritius, even if they have been fully vaccinated.

AIR QUALITY INDEX – INTRODUCTION

(No. B/483) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of the Air Quality Index in Mauritius, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Ramano: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, in 2010, the services of consulting firm, Euronet Consulting, were hired by the then Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development for the development of a strategy to establish an Integrated Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Framework, including the development of an Air Quality Index. In their report, the Consultants recommended the introduction of a network of Fixed Ambient Air Monitoring Stations across the island and the implementation of an Air Quality Index (AQI). In 2015, the Ministry subsequently acquired two Fixed Urban Background Ambient Air Monitoring Stations, one of which is currently located within the premises of the Mauritius

Meteorological Services at Vacoas and another one at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Port Louis. One Roadside Fixed Ambient Air Monitoring Station, presently located at Rose Hill, was also procured in 2017.

Pursuant to the said Consultancy assignment and in line with the announcement made in the last Budget Speech, arrangements are underway at the level of my Ministry for the introduction of an Air Quality Index, which would constitute an indexing tool that would be used by the National Environmental Laboratory of my Ministry to communicate, in a simplified manner, the prevailing air quality in selected regions. This index would thus facilitate policy making for the preservation of the air quality.

I am made to understand that the implementation of the Air Quality Index requires the upgrading of the existing network of Fixed Stations and the acquisition of three additional Stations to achieve the minimum amount of six Fixed Stations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, funds to the tune of Rs33 m., under the National Environment Fund, have been earmarked for this project. The procurement exercise for three additional Fixed Ambient Air Monitoring Stations and four Internet of Things (IoT) smart ambient air monitoring sensors for wider coverage is underway. Bids were invited through Open Advertised Bidding on 12 April 2021 with closing date 17 May 2021. A pre-bid meeting was held at the National Environmental Laboratory on 05 May 2021 and, upon requests from prospective bidders, the closing date for submission of bids has been extended up to 03 June 2021. Minor delays in the procurement exercise have been registered in view of the Temporary Restrictions of Movement Order 2021.

The new Air Quality Index system is expected to be operational by the end of this year. Locations have been identified on the basis of specific criteria laid down in the Report of the Consultants and cut across regions having national, urban and coastal backgrounds. Accordingly, specific premises at Quatre Bornes, Plaine Champagne and Grand' Baie have been selected for the Fixed Stations and would basically involve the premises of the Mauritius Police Force, educational institutions and local authorities. As regards to the four Internet of Things, these could be within the precincts of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill, Flacq, Rose Belle and Port Louis and basically concern educational institutions. I am informed that the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes and the Municipal Council of Port Louis have already stated their no objection to host one Fixed Ambient Air Monitoring Station and one Roadside

Internet of Things respectively, within their premises and that a Memorandum of Understanding is being finalised in this context.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to highlight that the Air Quality Index project is high on the agenda of my Ministry and has also been advocated at the *Assises de L'Environnement* held in 2019 and 2020. The ultimate objective being that our citizens can have hourly and daily indices in relation to the quality of air prevailing at selected regions. The Air Quality Index would be displayed through a web portal and five electronic display billboards. Arrangement has been also initiated for the Air Quality Index to be also featured in the Weather Bulletins for broadcast by the MBC.

My Ministry is, in fact, envisaging to further extend the network of fixed stations through the procurement of additional smart Internet of Things sensors to increase coverage over the whole island in terms of ambient air measurement in the future time. Admittedly, however, the project can only be implemented in a phased manner and attention would be given to areas such as Pointe aux Sables.

Mr David: Merci, M. le président. Selon l'Organisation Mondiale de la Santé, la pollution de l'air extérieur cause environ 3 millions de décès par an. Elle serait donc plus meurtrière que la COVID-19. Donc, cet indice de qualité de l'air qui sera introduit dans notre pays en fin d'année de par ma compréhension de la réponse du ministre, doit aller au-delà de la simple évaluation de la qualité de l'air et sera donc communiqué encore une fois, si j'ai bien compris, par internet et sur des afficheurs numériques. Le ministre, peut-il nous dire si notamment l'équipe qui travaille sur ce projet a prévu des seuils d'information et des seuils d'alerte et je pense notamment pour la population sensible de par des problèmes respiratoires au moment où cet indice sera mis en place?

Mr Ramano: Mr Speaker, Sir, the monitoring of Ambient Air Quality is being carried out by the National Environmental Laboratory on a continuous basis. Since August 2015, the NEL is continuously monitoring the ambient air quality through, as I mentioned, two Fixed Ambient Air Monitoring Stations equipped with Particulate Matter, PM10 Monitors, which are respectively located in the regions which I have mentioned mainly, the Mauritius Meteorological Services and the Islamic Cultural Centre at Port Louis.

As per the requirement of the World Health Organisation, fine dust 10 microns Particulate Matter particles known to have irreversible health impacts on people at high concentration is in ambient air are being measured, but so far, it is good to precise that the

result showed that neither the Mauritian Ambient Air Quality Standard prescribed limit of PM10 100 microgram per meter cube, nor the PM10 WHO guidelines for 24 hour average 50 microgram per meter cube was exceeded during the monitoring period.

For year 2020, the average is 16.63 microgram per meter cube at the Urban Background Station in Port Louis and is within the World Health Organisation prescribed limit of 20 microgram per meter cube.

M. le président, il est tout à fait normal si jamais il y a, si on excède les paramètres qui sont prévus bien sûr toutes les autorités compétentes qui sont en étroite collaboration avec le ministère de l'Environnement pour prendre des mesures qui s'imposent.

Mr Osman Mahomed: For the sake of clarity, can I ask the hon. Minister whether the index that is going to be prepared, whether will it concentrate solely on pollutants or will it also give an idea of other sources of irritants like natural sources like pollen, like from sugarcane fields or that kind of irritants nowadays a lot of people suffer from respiratory diseases because of these kind of natural phenomenon.

Mr Ramano: *Oui, M. le président, donc,* I should precise that we are presently working on the regulation The Environment Protection (Standards for Air) Regulations of 1998 and we are in the process, further to the recommendation of a Technical Committee under the chair of Professor Ramjeawon of the University of Mauritius, the Ministry and the Attorney General's Office in consultation with relevant stakeholders, we are coming forward with major amendments to the Environment Protection (Standards for Air) Regulations 1998 to be in line with the World Health Organisation, the World Bank and the European Guidelines. I should precise that in the proposed Regulation, there will be provision for 3 sets of standards.

First set would be the National Environmental Standards for Ambient Air Quality and measurement methods and these standards will be used as benchmark on the maximum allowable limits of pollutants in the ambient air to safeguard public health and the environment and the second set would be the National Environmental Standards for Stack Emissions and this standard will control pollutants emitted from any factory, industry stack emission into the ambient air based on the type of industrial activities and stack monitoring capacity in Mauritius. Six parameters of importance have been specified, namely –

- (a) smoke opacity;
- (b) sulphur dioxide;

- (c) Particulate Matter;
- (d) carbon monoxide;
- (e) nitrogen oxides, and
- (f) mercury and its compounds.

The Director of Environment will be empowered to impose a change in fuel type for a factory where limit of any pollutant is being exceeded.

The third and final set of standard, which is being contemplated, Mr Speaker, Sir, is Standards for Incinerator Stack Emissions. New provision is being introduced to regulate incinerators burning solid waste, medical waste and waste and sludge from petroleum products.

Furthermore, incinerators would be required to operate at an optimum temperature of 1100 degrees centigrade or more to prevent the release of dioxins and fluorine which are extremely hazardous for public health.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

MR. A. J. C. - DISAPPEARANCE AT SEA - INQUIRY

(No. B/484) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the disappearance at sea, on 13 May 2021, of Mr. A. J. C., he will state if his Ministry has caused an inquiry to be carried out thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof and, if not, why not.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that on 13 May 2021, Mr Ludovic Annoua, an applicant fisher, together with two non-registered and non-applicant fishers, namely Mr Antoine José Capiron and Steeve Michel set out for fishing on the boat bearing Registration No. A772 AF77.

As per information received from the National Coast Guard, at about 3 o'clock in the morning on 13 May 2021, the fishing boat had capsized in the outer lagoon at Poudre d'Or. Messrs Ludovic Annoua and Steeve Michel were rescued by the National Coast Guard on the same day.

However, Mr Antoine José Capiron has not been sighted, so far. Search and rescue operation by the Mauritius Police Force and National Coast Guard is in progress.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that an inquiry into the case has been initiated by the Police Department and referred to the Criminal Investigation Division, Northern, for further investigation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that Mauritius Meteorological Services issues three weather bulletins daily at 04.00 hours, 11.30 hours, and 16.00 hours.

As per information obtained from the Mauritius Meteorological Services, on 12 May 2021 at 18.05 hours, an earthquake of magnitude 6.6 occurred at about 414kms to the North East of Rodrigues. Observations from Mauritius and Rodrigues did not detect any change in sea levels. Therefore, it was inferred that no tsunami waves would generate following the earthquake. Therefore, there was no tsunami alert.

However, as per information received from the Mauritius Meteorological Services on 12 May 2021 at 11.30 hours and 16.30 hours, members of public were advised not to venture into the open seas, as swells were 2.50m and would reach 3m on the following day, that is on 13 May 2021.

On 13 May 2021, the Mauritius Meteorological Services had informed at 04.00 hours in the morning that swells were of 3 meters and had again advised members of the public not to venture in the open seas.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the weather bulletins for 12 and 13 May 2021 as well as earthquake information for 12 May 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very unfortunate that despite the advice of the Mauritius Meteorological Services not to venture into open seas, the three persons proceeded in the outer lagoon. I wish to express my solidarity to the family of the Mr Capiron and sincerely hope that the search and rescue operation will be successful.

With regard to the capsized fishing boat, I am informed that a preliminary inquiry is being carried out by my Ministry to investigate the presence of the three persons on a fishing boat belonging to a fisherman on that day and the findings of the inquiry will be communicated to the CID. As per regulation, there should be a registered fisher at all times on a registered fishing boat at sea.

In view of the seriousness of the matter and in order to forestall in such incident, I have called the Departmental Inquiry to situate responsibilities and make appropriate

recommendations given that the boat is registered as an artisanal fishery boat with my Ministry.

Mr David: M. le président, cela fait aujourd'hui 13 jours que M. Capiron est porté manquant, aussi permettez-moi au nom de notre Assemblée nationale d'exprimer notre solidarité comme l'a fait M. le ministre à la famille concernée que d'ailleurs mon collègue l'honorable Gungapersad et moi avons visitée à Grand Gaube.

La disparition, M. le président, de M. Capiron au large de Poudre D'or ouvre à nouveau l'essentielle question des moyens de sécurité et de survie en mer. Le ministre peut-il nous dire quelles sont les équipements de sécurité obligatoire pour les pêcheurs et quelles sont les aides prévues par son ministère pour d'une part équiper et d'autre part former les pêcheurs face aux dangers de l'océan.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am addressing this issue at PQ B/532 with all the details for hon. Richard Duval this will come in PQ B/532. It is a long list. I am going to explain everything.

Mr David: Dans un document émis aujourd'hui 25 mai, par le superintendant du shipping, M. Capiron est un ancien *bonafide seafarer*. Selon la formule consacrée et selon mes informations, M. Capiron a notamment servi comme marin à bord de notre ancien *Mauritius Pride*. Puis-je demander au ministre, compte tenu de la disparition en mer de M. Capiron et de ses années de service comme *seafarer*, si la famille Capiron peut prétendre à quelques aides de l'État, notamment à travers le *Seafarers' Welfare Fund* ?

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that Mr Capiron was a bank fisherman. This is the information I have. From 1996 to 2007, he worked as a bank fisherman, but since then, he is neither registered now nor an applicant fisher. So, in my Ministry, we have no financial provision for the family in distress. I think this issue may be addressed for Social Aid from the Ministry of Social Integration.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

INTEGRITY REPORTING SERVICES AGENCY – UNEXPLAINED WEALTH ORDERS

(No.B/485) Mr Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to the Integrity Reporting Services Agency and the Integrity Reporting Board, he will, for the

benefit of the House, obtain for each of the years 2016 to 2020 and since January 2021 to date, information as to the -

(a) remuneration and quantum of fees paid to the Director, Chairman and Assessors thereof, and

(b) number of unexplained wealth orders issued.

Mr Seeruttun: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to both PQs B/485 and B/492 as they are both related.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of PQ B/485, I am tabling the remuneration and fees paid to the Director, the Chairman and Assessors of the Agency for each of the years 2016 to 2020 and since January 2021 to April 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of PQ B/485 and part (a) of PQ B/ 492, I wish to inform the House that the Integrity Reporting Services Agency identifies and investigates suspected cases of unexplained wealth and send statutory requests to respondents, to explain the sources of the funds they have used to acquire a property. The Agency also receives referrals of suspected unexplained wealth cases from other Law Enforcement Agencies. When the respondents fail to provide a satisfactory explanation, the Agency reports the matter to the Integrity Reporting Board. The latter, in full independence, after its assessment, directs the Agency to apply for an Unexplained Wealth Order. The Agency then makes an application to a Judge in Chambers as per Section 14 of Part IV of the Good Governance and Integrity Reporting Act 2015 to obtain the Order.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that since the setting up of the IRSA, 180 cases were and some are still under investigation, out of which the Agency had made applications for three cases for Unexplained Wealth Orders, amounting to Rs280 m. and, so far, the Court has granted one Unexplained Wealth Order for an amount of Rs12 m. Currently there are two applications for Unexplained Wealth Orders amounting to approximately Rs270 m. which were scheduled to be heard in Court in March 2021 but has been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

For the period July 2020 to date, the Agency has received fifty-six cases of suspected unexplained wealth. Out of the fifty- six cases, twenty-six cases were prioritised for review as they had either a high profile or the initial enquiries have indicated a possible drug connection although they were not in the public domain.

Mr Speaker, Sir, eight of these twenty-six cases have been closed because the respondent has either satisfactorily accounted for the property in question or the property falls outside the ambit of the Good Governance Integrity Reporting Act 2015. Four of these closed cases have been referred to other agencies for investigation. As regards the eighteen remaining cases out of the twenty-six under review, the Agency has identified property amounting to Rs58 m. It is in the process of making applications for Unexplained Wealth Orders for these cases.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as the other thirty cases of suspected unexplained wealth out of the fifty six I mentioned earlier, they will undergo initial reviews to assess the order of priority for action to be taken.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the PQ B/492, I am informed that there is a formalised platform known as the AML/CFT Task Force, chaired by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and, as such, both institutions, along with other LEAs, meet on a fortnightly basis to discuss issues pertaining to cooperation and sharing of information. Besides that the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the IRSA have numerous meetings on an ongoing basis to share information and intelligence in the context of respective investigations carried out by both institutions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt that information sharing and efficient coordination among LEAs and other competent authorities are essential for ensuring effectiveness in investigations. I must highlight that following the inclusion of Mauritius in the list of “Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring” by the FATF, appropriate training have been provided to LEA’s and they have been upskilled to conduct money laundering investigations, including parallel financial investigations and investigations of complex cases.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Annual Report of the IRSA for 2019, it is reported that up until December 2019, there were only three applications for Unexplained Wealth Orders and today the hon. Minister again said as at today, there is still only three out of which only one has been successful. So, has the hon. Minister conferred with the IRSA to find out why are they not delivering? Why is there no application made in the past two years, since at least December, 2019 till now, no new application, what is the problem?

Mr Seeruttun: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, you must understand that the IRSA works under the Legal Framework set up under the Good Governance and Integrity Reporting Act 2015. They do receive referrals and cases that are referred to the IRSA by other LEAs. They

have to review those cases and ask from the respondents to explain any wealth they have built up over the years.

If they are satisfied that the explanation given are correct and that they are legitimately obtained, then they are set aside. Otherwise, they are referred to the Board which is an independent Board and this is where the Board then relook at it independently and then refer it for Wealth Orders. There are cases also that are referred to the Agency which do not fall under the ambit of the IRSA and they are referred to other Agencies like the MRA, the Police or the ICAC. So, I did in my reply mention that to date, 180 cases were referred to the Agency and out of those, some have been referred to the Court for Orders while others are still under review, and probably will see some outcome in the near future.

Mr Uteem: The hon. Minister mentioned that there is an AML Safety Task Force, where representatives of ICAC and ISRA meet together to share information. Is he aware of the comments made in the Annual Report of 2019 by the Director and I read -

“The Act places a statutory obligation on other Agencies to report to the Agency if they reasonably suspect that the person possesses unexplained wealth.”

This does not always happen. So, the Director is saying that those who have statutory duties to refer cases to the Agency are not doing their job. So, is the hon. Minister aware of this and what action has been done to remedy the situation?

Mr Seeruttun: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the very reason why we have today this platform, whereby we get all the LEAs to sit together to share information and to be able to also carry out what we call parallel financial investigations. And this, I must say, it is also a recommendation from the FATF as well. So, this is something which is now working, which is operational and from the information that I have, they meet on a fortnightly basis, so as information could be shared among all the LEAs to allow for more effectiveness in the way investigations are being carried out.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lobine!

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the hon. Minister aware of the open war between IRSA and ICAC; and they have elected the Supreme Court as their battleground? Is it normal?

Mr Seeruttun: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not say open war. That would be...

Mr Lobine: It is!

Mr Seeruttun: ...an expression that the hon. Member is making reference to. What I do know is, there is a case in Court whereby request is being asked from the Court to interpret certain provisions of the law that exist in two different set of legislations. So, those two institutions are independent institutions, they are *régies* by legal framework. There are different interpretations of certain provisions of those two legislations; and that is why they have referred the case to the Court, for the Court to thrash out that interpretation.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Uteem: The hon. Minister mentioned that the only attachment order obtained, unexplained wealth order, is to the tune of Rs12 m. Is the hon. Minister aware that every year, the budget - just the expenses is Rs35 m. So, multiply that by five, we have already Rs175 m. So, Rs175 m. on staff costs to get only Rs12 m. So, how does the hon. Minister justify spending so much public funds in that agency that is simply not delivering on its promises?

Mr Seeruttun: Well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can look at it this way, that is, we are spending that much money and then we have to recover wholly. If I go by the thinking of the hon. Member, we have to recover more than that. One must also recognise that if we have that kind of setup here, in Mauritius, it is also to deter people from undergoing or accumulating wealth that is illicitly obtained. So, we must look at the other way, how it is also becoming a deterrent for people to do things in an illegal way. But I must also say that there are cases that have been referred to Court, that do take time, and I can just mention that there is one particular case which has been postponed twelve times, and still being dragged on. So, sometimes it does take time, the system is like that. So, we have to bear with it.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/516, B/526, B/527, B/528 have been withdrawn.

Next question!

AIR MAURITIUS LTD - PUBLIC FUNDS INJECTED

(No. B/487) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to Air Mauritius Ltd., he will state the amount of public funds injected therein since January 2020 to date, indicating the –

- (a) terms and conditions thereof, and

(b) how these funds have been used by Air Mauritius Ltd.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'ai été informé que, compte tenu de sa situation financière, *Air Mauritius Ltd.* a été placée sous administration volontaire le 22 avril 2020, en vertu d'une résolution de son conseil d'administration. L'objectif étant de sauver la compagnie.

Le rôle et les pouvoirs d'un administrateur sont définis dans l'*Insolvency Act* et je tiens à préciser qu'aucune disposition de ladite loi ne permet au gouvernement d'intervenir dans les fonctions des administrateurs.

La mise en place de restriction de voyage suite à la pandémie de la COVID-19 a considérablement réduit les revenus d'*Air Mauritius Ltd* par rapport à ses coûts de fonctionnement. Dans ce contexte, les administrateurs ont demandé à bénéficier du *Wage Assistance Scheme*.

Je souhaite attirer l'attention de la Chambre sur le fait que, dans le cas du *Wage Assistance Scheme*, un employeur a droit à une allocation de l'État équivalente à 100% du salaire de base de ses employés lorsque ceux-ci gagnent jusqu'à R 25,375 par mois. Les employés qui gagnent un salaire mensuel de base compris entre R 25,376 et R 50,375 ont eux droit à une allocation de R 25,375. Cela signifie qu'un employé gagnant R 30,000 en moyenne, aura une allocation de l'État de R 25,375 et le reste est complété par l'employeur.

M. le président, de mars 2020 à aujourd'hui, *Air Mauritius Ltd.* a obtenu une assistance financière, le *Wage Assistance Scheme*, du gouvernement pour un montant de R 387,8 millions et sa filiale, *Airmate Ltd*, pour un montant de R 170 millions. Au total, cela représente une somme de R 557,8 millions. Je tiens à préciser que cette aide financière a été accordée à *Air Mauritius Ltd* et *Airmate Ltd* comme aux autres opérateurs économiques du secteur du tourisme.

Dans le cadre du *Wage Assistance Scheme* et selon la demande émanant des administrateurs, le gouvernement a ainsi déboursé –

- un montant de R 387,8 millions, et
- un montant de R 170 millions.

M. le président, en juillet 2020, afin de fournir une garantie à l'Association internationale du transport aérien (IATA) pour couvrir les billets émis par *Air Mauritius Ltd* à travers les systèmes de compensation de l'IATA, le gouvernement a fourni une garantie pour

un montant maximum de 47,5 millions de dollars américains à l'IATA. Cette garantie a été donnée pour permettre à *Air Mauritius Ltd* de rester dans les systèmes de compensation de l'IATA.

En septembre 2020, afin de fournir une capacité supplémentaire de fret aérien pour soutenir les secteurs de l'importation et l'exportation, un soutien financier s'élevant à environ R 14,3 millions a été fourni à *Air Mauritius Ltd*, pour opérer 5 vols *ad hoc* vers Paris. J'ai en outre été informé qu'en mai 2021, un montant de R 300 millions a été avancé aux administrateurs pour leur permettre de faire face à des besoins de trésorerie. Ainsi, M. le président, le soutien total apporté à *Air Mauritius Ltd* et *Airmate Ltd* s'élève à ce jour, à environ R 3 milliards. Merci.

Mr Uteem: In last year's Supplementary Appropriation Bill, the hon. Minister of Finance stated, and I quote –

« Permettez-moi d'assurer à la Chambre que les R 9 milliards allouées au titre du *National Resilience Fund* prendront principalement la forme d'une injection de capital dans la société.» talking about Air Mauritius.

So, may I know from the hon. Minister of Finance whether this Rs9 billion that was voted last year in this House, has that been injected by Government in Air Mauritius?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, les 9 milliards qui ont été provisionnés dans le budget vont être mis à la disposition pour la compagnie nationale aérienne quand ils feront la demande. Ça a été voté pour l'année financière 2020-2021. Et jusqu'à ce jour, nous avons déjà déboursé, comme je l'ai dit, R 3 milliards. Nous attendons actuellement les conclusions des administrateurs pour voir la marche à suivre. Et en fonction des conclusions des administrateurs, nous prendront les directives qu'il faudrait.

Mr Uteem: Can he give a timeframe as to when are you expecting *les conclusions* of the administrators? And when you have injected all these capitals, did you get any commitment from Air Mauritius in return for all these support; they will not lay off employees?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je ne peux pas avoir, comme je l'ai dit, selon les dispositions de la loi, nous ne pouvons imposer des règlements aux administrateurs, nous avons des administrateurs qui travaillent pour *Air Mauritius*, ils vont, je pense dans les semaines à venir, déposer leurs conclusions. En fonction de leurs conclusions, nous allons

prendre des mesures appropriées. Jusqu'à présent, par rapport au Budget 2020-2021, nous avons provisionné R 9 milliards pour soutenir notre avionneur national.

Nous allons, en fonction des recommandations de l'administrateur, mettre en place des mesures appropriées pour notre avionneur national. Donc, pour répondre exactement à l'honorable Membre, il me faut avoir les conclusions de l'administrateur pour pouvoir prendre des dispositions concernant la société.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The amount that has been injected in Air Mauritius, how is it being treated? Is it being treated as a loan to Air Mauritius or is it being treated as an increase in share capital, that is, increasing Government's take in Air Mauritius?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, encore une fois, ce sont des supports. Les supports qu'on apporte, ça peut prendre différents types de forme. Pour le moment, nous avons procédé à une garantie concernant les R 2 milliards et nous avons donné des allocations, *les grants* directement pour soutenir les salaires dans cette entreprise. Donc, voilà ce que j'ai à dire. D'un côté, c'est une garantie pour IATA et de l'autre côté, c'est une allocation pour payer les salaires dans cette entreprise.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary.

Mr Juman: Merci, M. le président. R 3 milliards injectées à Air Mauritius, c'est l'argent des contribuables, M. le président. Est-ce que l'honorable ministre peut nous confirmer si les administrateurs d'Air Mauritius ont empochés à ce jour pour le 13 mois, R 100 millions ?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je vais devoir vérifier parce que je n'ai pas ces informations à ma disposition.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

TEAM SPORTS – SANITARY PROTOCOL

(No. B/488) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to team sports, he will state if his Ministry has established a sanitary protocol to be observed for the respective federations concerned therewith to resume the championships and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry operates within the existing regulatory framework. In the present case, the closure of sports complex and the restriction on the holding of sports events or activities are governed by the COVID-19 (Closing Down of Premises and Restriction of Activities) (No 2) Regulations 2021 made under Quarantine Act 2020. For the purpose of preventing the spread of the pandemic in Mauritius, such restriction is in force up to 01 June 2021.

In this context, the issue of establishing a sanitary protocol for team sports does not arise for the time being. However, as soon as the restriction regarding the opening of sports complex and organisation of sports events/activities will be lifted, National Sports Federations will be invited to adhere to the same sanitary protocol put in place last year.

Thank you.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, autant que nous sachions, la saison hippique a pourtant bien débuté depuis deux semaines où plus de 300 personnes sont concernées à chaque journée de course. De ce fait, le ministre peut-il nous dire pourquoi les sportifs mauriciens n'ont pas les mêmes considérations ? On pourrait, par exemple, ouvrir les terrains de foot et les gymnases, effectuer une reprise à huis clos tout en suivant, comme je l'ai dit dans ma question initiale un protocole sanitaire ?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, il n'est pas juste de dire que les sportifs mauriciens ne sont pas vus de la même façon. Précédemment, j'ai exposé la belle performance de nos handisports et pour que cela arrive, il y a eu un travail qui a été fait derrière pour les encadrer dans leur entraînement et pour leur permettre d'aller à l'extérieur. Il y a d'autres sportifs mauriciens qui ont été encadrés de la même façon et qui ont l'autorisation de s'entraîner. En ce qu'il s'agit des *team sports*, pour le moment, nous sommes au niveau du ministère, obligés de respecter la loi.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, je comprends la position du ministre, mais je pense qu'il est certainement au courant que les fédérations, les athlètes ne cessent de dénoncer l'interdiction aux infrastructures sportives et que les compétitions sont toujours suspendues. En mai 2020, en réponse à une question parlementaire B/54 sur le même sujet, le ministre avait indiqué et je le cite –

« *The Ministry has set up a Technical Committee that is working on an Action Plan.* »

C'est-à-dire par rapport à une éventuelle reprise des compétitions. De ce fait, doit-t-on s'attendre que rien ne se passe comme une année après le premier confinement ou cette fois-ci, un Plan d'Action verra bien le jour en vue d'une éventuelle reprise des compétitions ?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, la situation n'est pas pareille. Nous ne pouvons certainement pas comparer à l'année dernière. Je pense qu'il est un fait que la population en générale est au courant de ce qui se passe dans le pays. Pas plus loin qu'hier, malheureusement, encore une fois, nous avons eu 14 cas et il nous faut prendre toutes les précautions nécessaires. Donc, le *High-Level Committee* qui se rencontre tous les jours avec tous les techniciens qui apportent leurs sagesses par rapport à tout ce qu'on peut faire et ne pas faire dans le pays. Pour le moment, malheureusement, certaines disciplines, certaines activités sportives sont interdites et nous avons besoin de respecter la loi.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised PQ B/531, B/532, B/533 have been withdrawn. Next question!

PUBLIC HOSPITALS - NURSING STAFF – WORKING HOURS

(No. B/489) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the nursing staff working in public hospitals, he will state –

- (a) the normal working hours thereof;
- (b) how often they are assessed for Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation;
- (c) the ratio of intensive care nurses caring for a ventilated patient, and
- (d) if the nurses are benefiting from continuous education/training and, if so, give details thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir I wish to inform the House that nursing staff in the public hospitals are required to work either on shift or at staggered hours in accordance with the recommendations of Pay Research Bureau Report 2016. The staff of the nursing cadres follows different shift patterns depending on their grade. Nursing Officers are required to work from 0730 hours to 1800 hours on day-shift and from 1800 hours to 0730 hours on the next day on night-shift on roster for a period of 28 days. The period of 28 days includes 11-day shift and 5-night shift with 12 days off in order to cater for a 24/7 coverage of nursing care.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) is a life-saving procedure during an emergency. CPR

can be performed by any trained person, be it Nursing Officers, Medical Officers or First Aiders.

During their traineeship, Nursing Officers undergo intensive training in CPR given that they will be posted on a rotational basis in different Units of the hospital in the course of their training.

All nursing and medical staff are posted on a rotational basis in different Units, namely, Accident and Emergency, Operating Theatres, Medical, Surgical, Orthopaedics, Cardiac and Intensive Care Units, hence their exposure to manage emergency situations involving CPR are frequent.

Additionally, Junior Nursing Officers are always assisted by Senior Nursing Officers in their respective Units and work as a team to coordinate their efforts whenever an emergency arises and there is need for CPR.

In parallel, Anaesthetists provide ongoing and up to date CPR training to nursing and medical staff to upgrade and enhance their skills. Having recourse to CPR technique is a frequent occurrence in these Units.

I am also informed that SAMU nurses, attendants and drivers are all trained by SAMU doctors to deliver CPR and provide any other first aid required during transfer of patients. There is no formal assessment but it is the responsibility of the Charge Nurse to ascertain the preparedness and efficiency of the trainees and, if ever, there is need for further training.

Likewise, Nursing Officers are further assessed in the course of simulation exercises for air crash, tsunami, landslide and floods, carried out regularly as a routine measure to gauge our preparedness to act in emergency situations. The same exercise was carried out in the context of the COVID-19 National Vaccination Programme.

Mr Speaker Sir, I am further informed that the ratio of intensive care nurses to patients who are under ventilation is 1:1, given that patients who are on ventilation, require intensive nursing care as there is a need to assess vital signs. In cases where a patient undergoes arrest, 2 to 3 nurses attend to a single patient for resuscitation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (d) of the question, I wish to inform the House that nurses in public hospitals benefit from continuous on the job education/training during

their career. At present, the following training courses are also being run for nursing staff at the Central School of Nursing -

- (i) Post Basic Midwifery Course;
- (ii) Clinical Nursing Management;
- (iii) Hospital Nursing Administration;
- (iv) Top Up Diploma Programme, and
- (v) Post Basic Community Health Nursing

In the same vein, short courses on infection and prevention control, management of cardiac patient, communication, customer care, fire safety and fire management, HIV, Personal Protective Equipment Use and Disposal as well as disposal of waste are also being run in our hospitals.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, récemment les syndicats du service civil ont dénoncé justement les heures de travail excessives du personnel soignant. L'honorable ministre ne pense-t-il pas que les risques d'erreur sont plus importants quand le personnel soignant est exposé justement à des heures de travail excessives comme ça a été le cas durant toute la période où les patients dialysés étaient en traitement, où un certain nombre est décédé malheureusement ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already reported on the working hours as per the PRB Report but, at the same time, Nursing Officers do a lot of additional posting and in that additional posting, for them it's tiresome. But now it's up to them not to go for extra duties because that will not allow them to go and be a burnout for the work they are doing.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, au vue du taux important de contamination à la COVID-19 noté chez le personnel soignant ces derniers temps, le ministre peut-il nous dire quelles sont les mesures prises par son ministère justement pour remédier à cette situation?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has already set up a National Infection and Control Programme and in all regional hospitals, we do have an IPC Regional Programme that is being set up in all the hospitals to look into the infection control measures.

Mr Quirin: Dernière question, M. le président. L'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire par rapport à la réanimation cardio-pulmonaire, dans sa réponse il a fait état qu'il n'y a

pas d'évaluation qui est faite pour le personnel soignant, peut-on savoir du ministre, lui-même, ce qu'il en pense réellement ?

Est-ce qu'il considère que cette évaluation dont je fais référence dans ma question initiale, n'est pas nécessaire parce que si nous prenons les standards internationaux, il est clair que cette évaluation est recommandée, peut-on savoir pourquoi l'honorable ministre, lui, dans sa réponse, il considère que ce n'est pas nécessaire?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Nursing Officers, in their Scheme of Duties, we do not have any formal assessment for them whenever they are posted and as well as at the time that they have to renew their licence through the Nursing Council, there also, we do not have any formal assessment that will be needed for them to renew their licence. Now, it's up to those authorities, they are independent to come forward and to advise the Ministry that they should be given a formal assessment whenever they are posted in these respective units.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

LOW-INCOME EARNERS – HOUSING UNITS

(No. B/490) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the Modular Housing Units for low income earners, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Empowerment Foundation, information as to the number thereof purchased since 2015 to date, indicating in each case the –

- (a) type and cost thereof, and
- (b) location thereof.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Empowerment Foundation that modular housing units are allocated to eligible SRM beneficiaries who are owners of a plot of land.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the National Empowerment Foundation has awarded only one contract for 24 modular housing units on 20 January 2020 for an amount of Rs23,640, 000.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that modular housing units are allocated to beneficiaries across the nine districts in Mauritius.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, peut-on savoir de la ministre combien de demande justement de logement de ce type ont été reçues par la NEF depuis 2015 et si ces demandes sont toujours d'actualité, c'est toujours considéré?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, I must say as a whole that demand for this type of house is, in fact, very low. So, we have launched a tender in September 2019 and contract was awarded in January 2020 for the design and fixing of this type of house. Unfortunately, for the time being, only 16 beneficiaries have opted for this.

Mr Quirin: 16?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Yes.

Mr Speaker : MP Armance!

Mr Armance: Merci M. le président. Puis-je savoir du ministre si elle est au courant qu'il y a des *modular housing units* qui se trouvent actuellement à Circonstance, Saint-Pierre en train de pourrir et moisir. Je peux vous montrer les photos. Donc, puis-je savoir qu'est-ce que vous allez faire de ces *units* là? Est-ce que vous allez les jeter, les cacher ailleurs ou les offrir à des ONG pour faire des *learning centres* ?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'm not aware of the issue that has just been raised. So, I will look into the matter and report to Parliament at a later stage.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Quirin: No, one more.

Mr Speaker: You cannot. You had four questions. You had enough exposure. Next question!

LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL CLUB - AGREEMENT

(No. B/491) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the commercial agreement of Rs400 m. signed with the Liverpool Football Club as an official tourism and economic development partner, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, information as to the quantum of the aforementioned amount paid as at to date, indicating if the discontinuation thereof is being envisaged on account of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the economy.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to Parliamentary Questions B/491 and B/509 together as both relate to the same subject matter.

I wish to recall that the hon. Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière and the hon. Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands have previously, that is, on 03 November 2020 and 17 November 2020 from hon. Quirin and 23 March 2021 in the case of hon. Yeung Sik Yuen put questions raising the same issues.

In response to those questions, I have already informed the House that as per information provided to me, the sponsorship agreement between the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) and Liverpool Football Club and Athletics Grounds Limited were signed on 10 June 2020 as part of the long term strategy to promote Mauritius as a tourist destination and to that end, enhance our visibility on all Liverpool platforms from September 2020 to June 2023. At the same time, it was considered that the benefits to accrue to Mauritius made the financial commitment involved a very interesting proposition.

For the record, the package included sponsorship rights, membership, imagery, player and club access, a partnership launched event, venue, advertising, merchandising, pitch use and access to the monthly magazine.

In accordance with provisions of the Agreement, a first payment of £1.5 m. corresponding to some Rs76,549,950 was made to Liverpool Football Club and Athletic Grounds Limited on 10 July 2020. It is to be noted that further to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, football events in England were suspended and later resumed behind closed doors in the year 2020, and the physical presence of spectators was permitted anew as from this month.

So far, despite the COVID-19 restrictions and to the extent that matches played by Liverpool Football Club (LFC) have throughout been transmitted on television and on the internet worldwide, the benefits accruing to Mauritian tourism remain highly relevant.

In my answer to PQ B/39 on 23 March 2021, I reminded the House and I quote –

- a) “Liverpool football Club, with a fan base of 451 million supporters around the world, some 18 million of them are high net worth individuals who could be targeted in our main tourism markets;

- b) out of the 18 million supporters, 36% are estimated to choose a brand that partners with LFC for their holidays or for investment opportunities;
- c) 42% of the total fans take medium to long haul vacations and around 36% are potential visitors to Mauritius, and
- d) it is anticipated that this can accelerate the country's progress towards its stated objective of attracting 2 million visitors in the coming years which would correspond to additional revenue of over Rs40 billion to the Mauritian economy.

It is further to be noted that, subsequently, Liverpool Football Club entered into an agreement with Expedia, the leading online tour operator and Mauritius can position itself as a preferred partner destination.”

In view of the projected reopening of our borders and re-launch of tourism, those remarks remain pertinent. However, given the unfolding events brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in England and across the world, my Ministry is closely monitoring the implementation of the Agreement by the Liverpool Football Club in the COVID-19 context from a cost-benefit perspective. We shall keep an open-mind and I would invite the two hon. Members and indeed any other hon. Member who wishes to do so to communicate any relevant submissions to my Ministry and I undertake to give careful consideration to same. We shall continue to act in the best interest of our country to ensure that public funds are prudentially and judiciously used.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, l'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire si dans la conjoncture actuelle où lui-même est venu dire récemment que le gouvernement ne pourra plus continuer à soutenir financièrement l'industrie touristique, ne considère-t-il pas que cet accord avec Liverpool Football Club dans le contexte actuel, je dis bien, est un gaspillage de fonds publics et que la pandémie de la COVID-19 est probablement une bonne raison pour mettre fin à ce contrat?

The Deputy Prime Minister: M. le président, avec tout le respect que je dois à M. le député, j'ai l'impression que cette question supplémentaire avait déjà été préparée en amont et ne tient pas compte de ce que je viens de dire. Donc, je le répéterai cette fois-ci en français.

(Interruptions)

Depuis, non, vous m'écoutez. Je vous ai écouté avec attention. J'ai expliqué qu'il y a des avantages avérés de cet accord. Je pourrais vous citer les *Digital Rights*. Je parle du site-

web de Liverpool qui est lié au site-web de la MTPA, donc, nous sommes déjà visibles sur le site-web de Liverpool. Je pourrai parler des *Branding-Rights*, c'est-à-dire, notre présence dans les magazines publiés par Liverpool Football Club. L'apparition de Maurice dans les stades à Anfield Road, le *LED Display* comme vous le savez. Je peux vous parler des *Player-Access Rights* qui vont être produits en juillet 2021. Je peux aussi vous parler de notre présence durant l'événement *The Award Winning Title Ceremony* en l'an 2020. Je peux donc vous donner plusieurs autres exemples où nous avons déjà bénéficié de cet accord. Donc il y a des avantages concrets, avérés, malgré le contexte de la COVID.

Cela-dit, je reconnais évidemment que tous ce qui aurait dû être fait en vertu des dispositions de l'accord n'ont pu se réaliser à cause du contexte de la COVID et c'est bien pour cela que j'ai parlé de ce qui est fait par mon ministère pour faire un suivi minutieux de la mise en œuvre de cet accord dans une perspective coût-bénéfice.

Nous gardons l'esprit ouvert, je l'ai dit tout à l'heure. Je le répète. Si M. le député ou n'importe lequel de ses collègues aurait des représentations très spécifiques à nous faire, nous sommes à l'écoute et à la fin du jour ce qui importe, c'est l'utilisation judicieuse faite des fonds publics.

Donc, si besoin est, nous reverrons toute la question. Nous gardons l'esprit ouvert mais je ne peux, à ce stade, venir me prononcer de manière catégorique pour vous dire que cet accord doit être résilié pour cause de la COVID-19. C'est un accord qui, potentiellement pourrait bénéficier énormément au tourisme à l'île Maurice. Mais savons-nous M. le président de quoi demain sera fait?

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ B/531, B/532 and B/533 have been withdrawn.

INTEGRITY REPORTING SERVICES AGENCY - REPORTED CASES

(No. B/492) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to the Integrity Reporting Services Agency, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the –

- (a) number of reported cases of unexplained wealth and number thereof investigated, since July 2020 to date, indicating the actions taken in relation thereto, if any, and

- (b) established protocol, if any, regarding a collaboration between the said Agency and the Independent Commission against Corruption.

(Vide Reply to PQ B/485)

Mr Speaker: Next Question!

POLICE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL – INTRODUCTION

(No. B/493) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Police and Criminal Justice Bill, he will state the expected date of introduction thereof in the Assembly.

Mr Gobin: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill has been the subject matter of a number of Parliamentary Questions in the years. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will appreciate that in view of the unforeseen circumstances and especially the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Legislative Calendar of Government has been seriously disrupted and Government is faced with a number of competing priorities with regard to other legislations and in these circumstances, I cannot, at this stage, venture a date or expected date of the introduction of this Bill in the Assembly.

Mr Lobine: The hon. Minister will appreciate that in a PQ dated 09 July 2019, he has informed the House that all consultation has been done and that this Bill would have been introduced very shortly, that is, in 2019. Why this Bill is not being introduced before this House in view of the debatable cases in Court with regard to provisional charge, because as it stands, this Bill would have put an end to the practice of provisional charge before our Court through the codes of practice that would have been introduced?

Mr Gobin: Yes. Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, the number of replies also were given by myself but the House would appreciate and the hon. Member would appreciate that shortly after July 2019, what came about were the General Elections and then soon after in March 2020, we were faced with this pandemic and, therefore, I reiterate that Government has had its Legislative Calendar completely disrupted. There are now competing priorities where other legislations have to come first. I therefore cannot once again venture. If I may use legal jargon as it used in the Supreme Court, this Bill is awaiting its turn.

Mr Uteem: Can I ask the Attorney-General, in a previous PQ, it was told in this House that the Bill was ready but the codes were not ready and it was the finalisation of the

codes of practice which was delaying the bringing of the legislation. In fact, there was already a draft Bill that had been circulated previously. So, may I know from the hon. Attorney-General whether the code also would be ready at the same time as the Bill would be presented before this House?

Mr Gobin: No, that reply has to be taken in the proper context. It was not only a question of codes. I recalled that I had informed the House that this Bill would overhaul the whole Criminal Justice System in Mauritius and that training had to be given to the relevant institutions, not only the Police, all those who are engaged in Criminal Investigation and Prosecution.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Gobin: Now, well let me stop there.

HOLYROOD NO.1 - BRIDGE - WIDENING

(No. B/494) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed reconstruction and widening of the bridge found along Royal Road, in Holyrood No. 1, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to the expected start and completion dates thereof.

The Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage (Mr A. Teeluck): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Holyrood Bridge is located along a non-classified road and as such does not fall under the purview of the RDA. The reconstruction of the bridge is being implemented by the National Development Unit. Servansingh Jadav & Partners Consulting Engineers limited was appointed on 09 September 2016 for consultancy services for the design and supervision of the reconstruction of the existing bridge at Holyrood, including road works.

A preliminary design report was submitted on 04 November 2016 and the detailed design report was submitted on 04 October 2017. The project could not start as private land had to be acquired for the implementation of the project.

In fact, procedures for land acquisition were initiated on 06 March 2018 and it is only on 06 February 2020, that the land acquisition procedures were completed. 8 portions of land have been compulsory acquired, under Section 8 of the Land Acquisition Act, to enable the implementation of the project. I am also informed that an application was made on 15 December 2020 to the Supreme Court of Mauritius for authorization, under Section 25 1(B)

of the Rivers and Canals Act for the construction of the bridge across River Rempart. The application was sworn in in the Supreme Court on 20 May 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the construction of this new bridge is estimated to cost around Rs70 m. The bidding documents are being finalised and the procurement exercise will be launched by mid-June 2021. And I wish to salute here, the good work of the PPS, hon. Gilbert Bablee, who followed up on the many issues which cropped up regarding this project and his efforts are finally bearing fruit.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Teeluck: The construction work is expected to start in September 2021 and be completed by May 2022.

Mr Speaker: One supplementary only!

Mr Lobine: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the reconstruction of this bridge take into account the historical structure of this bridge? It dates back to 1876, will it preserve part of the historical structure of this bridge?

Mr Teeluck: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member will appreciate that I might not have these information in hand, so, I would definitely pass on the message to my dear colleague.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Next question!

CENTRAL WATER AUTHORITY - NEW RECRUITS

(No. B/495) **Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Central Water Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the number of new recruits thereat since November 2020 to date, indicating the –

- (a) job descriptions of the posts filled, and
- (b) number thereof who reside within the locality and catchment area of the Authority found in Constituency No. 15, La Caverne and Phoenix.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the CWA that, for the purpose of implementing a roster system, 512 workers have been recruited since November 2020 in the grades of General Worker (Roster – Day & Night), Heavy Vehicle Driver (Roster – Day & Night), Operative (Roster – Day & Night) and Driver, following proper recruitment and selection procedures and through internal and external advertisement.

I must point out, Mr Speaker, Sir, that out of the 512 workers, 284 were already employed at the CWA either as hired labour or on a contractual basis, since 1996. Thus, as a result of the recruitment exercise, the situation of these 284 workers has been regularised.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, it must be highlighted that the Central Water Authority does not carry out recruitment based on place of residence, race or colour. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Lobine: Mr Speaker, Sir, with the recruitments of these 512 general workers, will the CWA now account for reparations of those networks in-house or will it continue to contract out?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes. One of the main purposes for recruiting those general workers is to allow the CWA to carry out, first of all, those repairs and maintenance after normal working hours and to provide a continuous customer service, to reduce overtime costs and also to reduce the amount paid to contractors who were doing these types of work at the Central Water Authority.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Dhunoo!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 17 – FLOOD-PRONE AREAS - SURVEY

(No. B/496) **Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands)** asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to flood prone areas in Constituency No. 17, Curepipe and Midlands, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to if a survey thereof has been carried out and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

LA BRASSERIE – FOOTBALL PLAYGROUND PROJECT

(No. B/497) **Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands)** asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the

implementation of a football playground project in La Brasserie by the National Development Unit, he will state where matter stands.

(Withdrawn)

**ROBINSON ROAD GOVERNMENT SCHOOL, CUREPIPE - NEW
BUILDING**

(No. B/498) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the proposed demolition of old blocks and of the reconstruction of new ones at Robinson Road Government School, in Curepipe, she will state where matters stand.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, the contract for the construction of a new building with a number of facilities at Robinson Road Government School consisted of 2 phases. Phase 1 constituted the construction of a U-shaped ground plus one building, the school canteen, parking facilities, drains, landscaping and site works. Phase 2 of the project involved the demolition of the existing old building, the construction of a pre-primary unit, landscaping and other site works.

Work started in June 2020 and as of now, the project has reached 35% completion. This covers the upper structure of the ground floor of the U-shaped building and the block work partitioning of the first floor, which have been completed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling documents to show the progress reached in this construction project.

Mr Dhunoo: I would like to know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister if the new design will comprise a new boundary wall because the school was constructed in 1956?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there has been a request for the construction of a new boundary wall, preparation works have started for this as well.

Mr Dhunoo: Can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister inform the House if provision has been made to include air conditioner in the computer room of the new school block?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that this is being done.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**SOCIAL MEDIA - INDECENT PHOTOS & VIDEOS - TECHNICAL
COMMITTEE**

(No. B/499) **Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Technical Committee set up in her Ministry to study the phenomenon of child/revenge pornography following the circulation of indecent photos and videos against payment on the social media application “Telegram”, she will state where matters stand as to the work thereof.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for bringing up this question, a very important one indeed.

Mr Speaker Sir, following the circulation of indecent pictures and videos on the social media application known as the Telegram, a Technical Committee was set up as an initiative of my Ministry in order to study the phenomenon of Child/Revenge Pornography and thereon to come up with recommendations.

A first Meeting was held on Wednesday 14 April, in the Conference Room of my Ministry where the purpose and objectives of the Committee were explained and a draft Terms of Reference was circulated. Members present were requested to go through the draft Terms of Reference and to come up with their views and comments which ought to be discussed at the next Meeting.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that two meetings which were fixed for 28 April and 12 May had to be called off due to, first of all, heavy Torrential Rain Alert and a COVID-19 positive case in Newton Tower respectively.

However, a second Meeting was held on 17 May where the composition of the Committee was finalised and enlarged to include representatives of the Ministry of Labour, the HRDC, Human Resource Development and Training and the Ministry of Tourism. It was also agreed that the committee would meet on a quarterly basis.

All the identified tasks were agreed upon and members were designated to form part of sub-committees. Each sub-committee has been assigned a specific task and they are expected to submit their report within 2 months, so that at the next committee, these could be reviewed by all the members.

Mr Dhunoo: Can the hon. Minister give information as to the composition of the Board?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Yes, indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Committee is composed of, obviously, Officers of my Ministry, representatives from the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, the Solicitor General's Office, the Ombudsperson for Children, the Information and Communication Technologies Authority, the Computer Emergency Response Team of Mauritius, the Police Department and Civil Society Organisation.

Mr Dhunoo: Circulating intimate photos of an individual without their consent is never acceptable. People are entitled to expect a reasonable level of respect and privacy. I would like to know from the hon. Minister, if the Technical Committee will also look into the proposal to review the law with greater sanction to tackle child and revenge pornography?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, indeed, one of the Terms of Reference is to work on, first of all, the nomenclature of this phenomenon because we actually do not have a definition of this in our legal terminologies at the moment and one of the Terms of Reference is actually to look into this image-based abuse and identify gaps in the existing legislation to deal with the subject matter properly.

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 Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to

(4.13 p.m.)

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

KREOL MORISIEN - UPPER SECONDARY LEVEL

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I propose to make a statement on the rollout of *Kreol Morisien* at the upper secondary level in

the wake of the recommendations made by the Ministerial Committee chaired by the hon. Prime Minister on the subject.

For recall, *Kreol Morisien* was introduced in primary schools in 2012. Much progress has been achieved since then. In 2017, 2480 pupils of Grade 6 completed the six-year of cycle of primary schooling and sat for the first PSAC assessment in *Kreol Morisien*. Following which, the subject was introduced at the lower secondary level in 2018. Three years later, in 2021, the subject has been offered at the First Edition of the National Certificate of Education assessment. Around 1200 students thus sat for the *Kreol Morisien* for this assessment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are now at a stage where after having been studied for nine years, it is important for the subject to be on offer as an examinable subject for those keen on pursuing the study of *Kreol Morisien* up to Grade 11.

It is keeping this expectation in view that the Ministerial Committee under the Chair of the hon. Prime Minister, came up with a roadmap for the unfurling of *Kreol Morisien* at upper secondary level. I'm pleased to inform the House that Government has agreed to the recommendations made by the Ministerial Committee for the teaching of *Kreol Morisien* at that level.

Kreol Morisien, as a taught subject, will now be reality in Grade 10 as from the resumption of studies in June 2021 and, thereafter, in Grade 11. At the end of Grade 11, there shall be a National School Certificate examination in *Kreol Morisien*. This certificate will be awarded by a National Examination Board. This award will be pitched at Level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework at par with an O-level certificate and will be reckoned for the purpose of promotion to Grade 12.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would now like to apprise the House of the steps being taken at the level of my Ministry to implement the decision taken by Government. The production of pedagogical resources and the training of Educators will be within the purview of the Mauritius Institute of Education. The University of Mauritius has been designated as the awarding body for the National School Certificate in *Kreol Morisien*. A National Examination Board will be set up for that purpose. The University of Mauritius and the MIE will be responsible for the design and development of the curriculum, as well as the elaboration of an assessment framework.

The Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, in collaboration with the University of Mauritius, will be responsible for the organisation and conduct of the examinations in *Kreol Morisien* and necessary amendments will be brought to the relevant legislations. My Ministry will steer and monitor the effective implementation of the whole project so that the First Edition of the National School Certificate in *Kreol Morisien* is successfully held in 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will agree that *Kreol Morisien* is a vibrant language understood and spoken by all Mauritians. It plays an important role in national cohesiveness and its introduction at the upper secondary level is indeed a step-up towards giving greater recognition to this language.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

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

Mr Speaker: At this stage, I will suspend the Sitting for half an hour.

At 4.18 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.03 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Second Reading

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL

(NO. VII of 2021)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2021).

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to express my gratitude to you for allowing me to comment on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2021) today.

Mr Speaker, Sir, speaking among the last orators on a debate is always tricky in the sense that most of the issues would have been already canvassed by that time and the risk of

repetition is very present, Sir. But I must say I am glad to be speaking on the second day on which this Bill is being debated because I have had the chance, the opportunity to hear from other hon. Members of the Opposition, of Government, in fact, from both sides of this House. And I feel that some of their inputs have significantly inspired and informed me.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, as we have heard, several arguments have been put forward in favour or against this Bill since last week and despite a certain level of inconsistency from the Opposition, or shall I say ‘cacophony’ perhaps is a better word, from the Opposition and I will certainly come back to this cacophony. It can be fairly said that the House including Members of the Opposition, more or less, agree with the postponement of the Municipal Elections.

However, it seems to be beyond the understanding of some of the Members of the Opposition, as to why it may be important for these elections to be postponed by one or at the maximum by two years.

I say ‘cacophony’, Mr Speaker, Sir, because we have heard criticisms which have been levelled against the Government, on the one hand for a lack of preparedness to organise these elections despite being in a pandemic situation as other countries have done, according to them. At the same time, some Members have even gone as far as stating that it is the mismanagement of the pandemic by Government which has resulted in the need of postponing the local elections. Some Members have also alluded to the fact that the Prime Minister is exercising a discretion that he has under our constitutional system to decide on the dates of elections in an undemocratic manner, contrary to other jurisdictions, such as India or UK or France, according to them. And one Member, Mr Speaker, Sir, has pushed the debate a bit further by stating *il s’agit d’un projet de loi concernant le droit de vote des citoyens*. And I must tell you, I am particularly pleased with this particular argument, with this specific argument, and this will allow me at the end of my speech to shed some light on this cardinal right to vote by citizens of Mauritius, in this case. The allegations made by the Opposition with regard to the fact that if this Bill is passed, it will constitute an infringement to the right to vote of Mauritian citizens, I will reply to that in a few minutes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will try to be concise and reflect on some of these points raised by the Opposition. But let me rush at the outset to reply to those who have criticised this Government, our Minister of Health and in fact, it is a pity that some of them have gone as

far as suggesting that we have failed in handling the COVID-19 situation, and hence, the need to postpone the local elections.

They have spoken of *mauvaise gestion de la pandémie, de relâchement, du laxisme* and so on, Mr Speaker, Sir. What a nonsense in fact, because Mauritius has the highest score in Oxford Stringency Index. Our management of the situation, stewarded by the Prime Minister, has been cited as an example by the WHO, praising this Government and the Prime Minister for timely actions and strategies, which have produced, as we all know, excellent results. I do not have to go in all the details, Mr Speaker, Sir. The complete lockdown, the COVID testing centres, the sanitary curfew, the closing of the borders, the new legislations and so on and so forth, Mr Speaker, Sir.

For the second episode of this viral circulation, we remember how the Government came up with a new plan, a new strategy; the creation of red zones, an efficient strategy which ascertains sanitary control and efficacy while, at the same time, allowing the economy to continue to operate. And today, in spite that we are having cases daily, most activities in the country, except tourism, have resumed. Our health sector has continued to operate even during the peaks of viral circulation in our country, our public health system has remained resilient; it still is. And this Government has shown that it has always stood guided by one sole objective, that is, putting the health and the wellness of our citizens as an absolute priority.

As for vaccination, I do not have to be long, Mr Speaker, Sir. We all know we are on track; our objective is to vaccinate 60% of the population. We have been to the airport 6 times to take possession of different doses, thousands and thousands of doses of vaccines. And as at today, as you know, more than 18% of the population have done their first dose and more than 10% have completed their second dose.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, this Opposition should be ashamed as they have been the one instilling doubts in the minds of our citizens regarding vaccination at the beginning; we all remember that. And this is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are probably the only country in the world where each and every positive patient, whether symptomatic or asymptomatic, is given in-patient treatment. Our contact tracing capacity has been tested and proven. Our contact-tracing suspected cases and systematically placed in quarantine facilities and so on and so forth.

I would not go any further on that, Mr Speaker, Sir, but we are one of the few countries in the world with a caring Prime Minister and which has produced such a results, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Let us look at just one criterion, in terms of percentage of the population *atteint par la COVID-19*, M. le président. *Si nous voyons les chiffres officiels aujourd'hui, les États Unis remonte le chiffre est à 10.7%, le Brésil 7.59%, la France 8.94%, Turquie 6%, les Royaumes Unis 6.71%, l'Italie 6.92%, l'Espagne 7.73%, l'Allemagne 4.38% et dans notre région, M. le président, Seychelles 10%, la Réunion 2.74 %, Mayotte, M. le président, 7.4 % et la république de l'île Maurice 0.1%, M. le présidente ! 0.1%!* And today, when some despicable individuals come and state that the COVID-19 situation was not well-managed, they are in fact, insulting the men and women who are toiling day and night, fighting this invisible enemy, putting their own lives and the security of their families at risk. And this is why it is a pity, Mr Speaker, Sir, that those Members, on the other side of the House, have been insulting the very persons, thanks to whom, they are able to sleep soundly in their homes.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, having said this, I come now to the postponement of elections. Sir, various statistics and data from renowned and respected international organisations and think tanks have been cited by Members of both Government and the Opposition concerning postponement of elections. Some were of the views that while 78 elections have been postponed, 108 have been organised. And, as mentioned above, some have stated that the Government should have prepared in advance to organise the local elections, that the need of a postponement would not have arisen.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not get into a never-ending debate on numbers and statistics, but I will just ask a simple question to the House. Since several Members of this House have cited, have consulted various websites such as IDEA, IFES, other international organisations responsible for holding of elections, but I ask one question to all of these Members today, whether they have been able to find one paper or one opinion from those recognised institutions and whether their research as prescribed, what is the good way or the bad way, or whether lessons should necessarily be drawn from those countries which have been able to organise elections during the pandemic by adopting progressive and far-sighted means and measures?

The answer is no, Mr Speaker, Sir, there can be no Blueprint. There is no paper that says, there is no document that says, such and such way or measures are the correct ones and

such are the wrong or undemocratic ones and the model to be followed should be based on such and such countries or measures. And this is simply because no one single country is comparable to another, in terms of adoption of measures regarding the containment of the pandemic. This exercise is very subjective and depends on a number of factors; social, political, sanitary, demographic and we can go on with the list. This is the reason, Mr Speaker, Sir, why no international organisation or think tank on elections has been able to prescribe a model to be followed or a timeframe to be respected for the purpose of postponing election. Having said that, it is the duty of every Government of the World to decide what is best for its population and for its democracy, in relation to organisation of election. And, for instance, Mr Speaker, Sir, one Member of the House and from the Opposition did mention last week that UK has been able to organise elections, but the person has omitted to highlight that this very country had postponed the same elections for one year, from May 2020 to May 2021. Would he now say that UK or UK's Government or Authorities are violating the principle of democracy? Then why such insinuation when it comes to this Government, Mr Speaker, Sir?

In fact, the decision of this Government to postpone the local elections is based on an established principle borrowed from International Environmental Law called the Precautionary Principle. Global Research has considered and approved the concept of COVID-19 legislation in the light of the Precautionary Principle. Several research articles have been published after peer review in the renowned and much followed Journal called the *Theory and Practice of Legislation*.

This principle, Mr Speaker, Sir, is synonymous to the foresight principle and two ideas underpin this precautionary principle -

1. Decision makers should anticipate harm before it occurs.
2. The concept of proportionality of the risk, the cost and the feasibility of any proposed action.

Some Public Health experts have advocated adoption of the Precautionary Principle in Public Health as a way of limiting harm from intervention.

This Precautionary Principle, Mr Speaker, Sir, has been an internal part of the European Union's Joint European Road Map towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures. It stated that the restrictive measures introduced by Member States have been based on available information in relation to the characteristics of the epidemiology of the disease and followed

a Precautionary Approach. This Precautionary Approach, therefore justifies the imposition of a timeframe of one to two years, maximum for the postponement of local elections in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill is proposing to postpone local elections for one year or two at the most. Such a decision of the Government is fully aligned with the Precautionary Principle since it is an act of anticipating the harm that the pandemic can cause to our country and it is also proportionate since the postponements are not indefinite but only of one year or two based on specific circumstances. Some Members of the Opposition have also alleged that the failure of the Government to take progressive measures with foresightedness has resulted in the need to postpone elections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, France may be used as a jurisdiction to prove that even such measures may not necessarily guarantee successful elections. Despite preparedness and the precautionary measures in place, the turnout for the first round was a relatively low 44% compared with 63% in 2004, thus down almost by 20% compared with six years earlier. A low turnout can undermine the legitimacy of the electoral process. Indeed, one of the main objectives of any election is to ensure broad participation across society and a very poor turnout, Mr Speaker, Sir, can therefore cause an election to be perceived as less inclusive.

India, Mr Speaker, Sir, has also postponed elections of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies indefinitely, the Election Commission of India has decided that due to outbreak of the second wave of COVID-19 in the country, it would not be appropriate to hold by-elections till the pandemic situation significantly improves and conditions become conducive to hold these by-elections.

In addition, the Commission has stated that it will take a decision in the matter at appropriate time in the future after taking inputs from the concerned States and assessing the pandemic situation. It is, therefore, this same Precautionary Principle that the Government of Mauritius is wishing to follow with the timeframe of the postponement between one or two years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if I quote from the United Nations, this is what I can read -

“Postponement of scheduled elections necessitated by Public Emergency may be permitted in certain limited circumstances, but only if and to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, any such exigencies must comply with all

the rigid International Standard Process Derogation and must not threaten democracy itself.”

The Bill and its provisions are, therefore, in complete harmony with what has been prescribed by the United Nations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, by the same token, allow me to respond to the argument of one Member of the House, who emphasised that in India, it is the Electoral Commission and not the PM who decides of the date of election. This is also the case of France and UK, I fail to understand the relevance here of the argument. Is it because in Mauritius the PM decides of the date of elections that a postponement of elections because of a pandemic becomes unjustified or rendered undemocratic? Who should decide on dates of election is altogether a very different matter, which is not the subject of today's debate of the House in my humble opinion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the exercise of the discussion of the PM in accordance with the Constitution regarding the holding or postponing of Elections, a brief overview of our history here may provide for guidance on this matter. You know that in 1972, a Bill was passed in our Parliament by the Labour Party in alliance with the PMSD to postpone the elections of 1972 to 4 years later, to 1976. Regarding this matter, in the case of Bérenger against Governor General & Anor, the Supreme Court made its position clear on matters relating to postponement of elections. However, politically unpalatable this was at that time, the Supreme Court said that the Court has to be satisfied that the alteration was made in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Constitution and that it is not inconsistent with the Constitution. In our view, the Court cannot go beyond the Constitution and inquire as to the reasonableness of the Act or the motive behind the making to it.

It is, therefore, clear that postponement of elections, in fact, has never been opposed by the Supreme Court, provided the Legal Procedures and the Amendments adopted for such postponement is not unconstitutional. There have been other election related matters in our country that have been the subject of judicial challenges, Mr Speaker, Sir, before the Supreme Court of this country, in the case of Vallet and Ramgoolam in 1973. The issue was whether a law passed by Parliament, which suppressed the limit of time within which an election was to be held was unconstitutional or not. There, the matter was distinct from local elections; the decision of the Supreme Court did give a sense of how the question of postponement of Elections, general or local, should be viewed in a democratic society.

It can be inferred from the decision that Government may have their strong reasons that warrant to postponement of elections in the country and that based on the principle of presumption of constitutionality, any such Amendment should not be out rightly deemed to be undemocratic or a violation of citizens' right to political participation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now come to the critical point of the right to vote of Mauritians which I feel has not been necessarily debated during this debate. Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to practical and sanitary reasons for postponing local elections in Mauritius, as we are doing today, as being prescribed by this Bill. It is essential for us to examine what impact does such an Amendment has on the democratic right of Mauritians to political participation which translate into the right to have elections being organised for them and their right to vote for their political representative. The nature of this political right should be very clear to everyone in view of avoiding any confusion regarding its constitutionality or its possibility to undermine democracy in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the right to political participation is provided for by –

- (a) Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- (b) Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- (c) Article 13 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to which Mauritius is a state party, and
- (d) Article 3 of the 1952 Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of the European Union can also be of persuasive value to this debate.

There are other standards relevant to Mauritius that also supplement these legal provisions, Mr Speaker, Sir, such as –

- (a) the African Charter on Democracy;
- (b) Elections and Governance;
- (c) the African Union Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, and lastly
- (d) the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections.

There is no doubt that the right to political participation of citizens has been given immense importance and sanctity by the above-mentioned international standards.

Mr Speaker: Time to conclude!

Time to conclude!

Mr Ganoo: In simple terms, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a primary legal obligation of any government to organise free and fair elections to allow people to cast their votes democratically. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, to finish, if you can give me two minutes, it is of utmost importance to note how this right has been qualified in international human rights.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the reason of an epidemic or a communicable disease no doubt will qualify as an objective and reasonable criteria in the interest of the population and in addition the exercise of this limitation on the right to political participation is aligned with rules on limitation of human rights as established in different cases, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in March last year, the Supreme Court of India also upheld the State Elections Commission's decision to postpone election to local and civic bodies on the basis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another example where the pandemic has been underlying reason for postponement has been in South Africa. There the Court of South Africa, in January of this year, granted the South Africa Independent Election Commission application to postpone all local elections scheduled to be held in January and February of this year and this decision was widely accepted by all political actors in South Africa to avoid elections to become a super spreader event for the COVID-19, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Our Government is not necessarily relying on the above decision to simply say that postponing elections is within the power of Parliament, especially if it is done in accordance, Mr Speaker, Sir, with the Constitution.

To end, Mr Speaker Sir, it is important to highlight that there is a certain degree of discretion that is left to the Government to decide on elections related matters as it is the case in several other democratic countries. This Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a responsible Government, is a conscientious Government, faithful, adheres to all democratic principles, and will commit itself to use this discussion in the most diligent manner and with all respect given to the letter and spirit of our Constitution. Therefore, it is manifestly evident that the Amendment being brought by the Bill today is entirely based on the principle of legality, democracy, fundamental freedoms, and liberties and human rights that all Mauritians enjoy. Therefore, elections' postponement is democratically and legally allowed in a number of circumstances which includes a pandemic situation. Nevertheless, Mr Speaker, this should not...

Mr Speaker: You have made your point! You have made your point already! Let me listen to hon. Obeegadoo!

(5.27 p.m.)

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, I dare hope that I will have the time to say what I want to say today.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think, by now, as we near the end of the debate, it is very clear what the Government is proposing to do. There are three points.

Drawing inspiration from Section 57 of our Constitution, the new Section 12A(1)(a) provides the possibility to extend the mandate of local government in certain specific circumstances. These are described in the new section 12A (1) referring to situations where there is, or there is likely to be, an epidemic of a communicable disease and I would like here to respond immediately to my former colleague, hon. Bodha, who could not understand what it means. There is likely to be, well this is drawn from Section 4 of the Quarantine Act, which my former colleague approved and supported in this Assembly when we voted it last year. Just as the term ‘communicable disease’ is also drawn from Section 2 of the Quarantine Act whereby COVID-19 is listed in the schedule and quarantine period is defined in Section 4 of the Quarantine Act. So, all the operative words of that crucial section are endowed with certainty. They are not an ad-hoc invention for the purposes of this Amendment. They are drawn from the Quarantine Act adapted to the COVID situation.

The second point is that we are extending the mandate of office bearers in line with the extension of the life of the relevant local authority until dissolution or elections, as the case may be.

Thirdly and this is very important, the Attorney General explained that we are adding an element of democratic certainty to the law. This is what Clauses 4 and 5 of the Amendments seek to achieve so that the writ of local elections must issue within 60 days of dissolution of the local authorities, just as Section 56(4) of the Constitution provides for legislative elections. So, this is an advancement towards consolidation of our democratic structure. This is what Government purports to do.

Now, the Opposition and I regret, once again, the absence of the person concerned, the Leader of the Opposition, who has proposed an Amendment but is not here to listen to the front bench of Government. The Leader of the Opposition has proposed an Amendment

which he has already debated in the House at Second Reading and I have two serious concerns.

You will have noted Mr Speaker, that our Amendment, that of Government, repeals Section 11(5) of the Local Government Act which refers to the duration of 6 years of a local authority unless it is sooner dissolved. We proposed to replace that section by a new Section 10A(3) which again refers to the possibility of a dissolution at any time which is a cardinal principle of our electoral system whereby the Executive may, at any point in time, dissolve a local authority or Parliament, may recommend the dissolution depending on circumstances.

Now, what the amendment appears to be doing and I wonder whether that was the intention, to replace that general provision by something that is very specific, Section 10A(3) is replaced in the amendment of the Leader of the Opposition by not a Section, Clause 3 that limits the possibility of dissolution only to circumstances described as soon as the sanitary conditions allow. So, this would be a fundamental change to what has pertained so far and I do not know whether it is just a reflection of infelicitous drafting or whether it was really the will of the Leader of the Opposition to evacuate any possibility of earlier dissolution.

My second concern is that expressed by hon. Collendavelloo, Senior Counsel who explained his surprise that after denouncing that we should be hostage to *le bon vouloir du Premier ministre*, the amendment proposes to replace an objective test by a subjective test whereby elections will be held as soon as the sanitary conditions allow.

So, instead of a provision, as being proposed by Government, which is very clear where there are two tests to be met, one speaks of the existence or likelihood of an epidemic of a communicable disease to be determined by the Ministry of Health and secondly, a quarantine period which is proclaimed under a specific provision of the Quarantine Act, so, very objective circumstances, we will now have a subjective precondition, as soon as the sanitary conditions allow. And who will decide that? The Prime Minister, because it is the Prime Minister who will then advise the President. So, here we are, the Leader of the Opposition through his amendment, reinforcing *le bon vouloir* of the Prime Minister in determining the timing of elections. So, honestly, I fail to understand the usefulness of the amendment proposed by the Leader of the Opposition.

But beyond that, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been here all the time and I have listened to every single speaker on the Opposition benches without exception. And I asked myself in whose name was the Leader of the Opposition speaking when he intervened in response to

the mover of the amendment. Was he speaking on behalf of the whole Opposition, Labour Party, PMSD, MMM - what else do we have - the independent Member of Parliament, Hon. Bodha or was he speaking *au nom de, ce que j'appelle moi l'alliance du désespoir? Je le dis parce que toutes ces longues années où j'ai été au MMM et je prends en témoins mes anciens amis du MMM de ce côté et de l'autre côté de la Chambre, durant tout le long de ces longues années, notre Leader de l'époque nous expliquait l'impossibilité de s'allier au PMSD parce que l'on ne peut pas réfléchir avec la moitié de la tête.*

(Interruptions)

Enfin ! Parlait-il au nom de l'alliance du désespoir ou bien parlait-il au nom du seul PMSD ? Je m'explique, si vous considérez l'amendement proposé par le Leader de l'opposition, il ne remet nullement en question la clause 12 (a) de notre amendement qui vient de permettre au Premier ministre de recommander au Président l'extension du mandat des Collectivités locales d'une année et si besoin est de deux ans. Cela n'est pas remis en question, n'est pas contesté par le Leader de l'opposition.

Mais qu'avons-nous entendu du côté des bancs de l'opposition ? Je fais la distinction entre deux lignes politiques tout à fait contradictoire. D'abord, il y a eu et je le reconnais deux discours que j'appellerai des discours relativement responsables, celui du Leader de l'opposition lui-même et celui de son adjoint, le député Khushal Lobine qui sont venus de manière très responsable reconnaître la gravité de la situation sanitaire et reconnaître la nécessité du report des élections et l'amendement de la loi pour créer cette possibilité, dès lors que la situation sera telle quelle est aujourd'hui pour l'avenir.

De l'autre côté, il y a les démagogues, les pense-petits. Ceux qui, à l'exemple des députés du MMM qui sont intervenus, on ignore, on fait abstraction totalement de la situation sanitaire présent. Je me réfère à mon ancien camarade, l'honorable Uteem qui est venu nous dire –

« If you want to hold elections, you can hold elections. »

Et, qui vient nous dire *we are postponing elections so as not to lose and this reflects the stupidity and the incompetence of Government*, ou le député Nagalingum qui vient nous parler de *unilaterally and abusively disposing of the right to vote, a mockery of democracy, a constitutional crime*. Et nous sommes en plein COVID! Il y a même eu quelques députés du Parti travailliste qui se sont joints à eux pour parler de peur du verdict, peur des élections, le gouvernement qui cherche à éviter à tout prix des élections.

Après, il y a une troisième tendance, un peu entre les deux. Le député, l'honorable Mohamed, est venu faire un discours très intéressant où il nous a dit : écoutez, oublions la politique partisane parce que tous les partis représentés à l'Assemblée, ici, à un moment ou un autre de l'histoire, ont reporté les élections locales. Il a été rejoint par le député Assirvaden, le député Juman pour venir nous dire : oui, il faut reporter les élections mais c'est parce que le gouvernement n'a pas su gérer la pandémie de la Covid-19.

M. le président, comment accepter de telles critiques tout à fait empreinte de légèreté, irresponsable et dangereuse ? Si on se réfère à la stratégie sanitaire et médicale adoptée par le ministère de la Santé et soutenue par le gouvernement, les résultats ont été salués à l'international par tout le monde, de l'OMS au FMI ces derniers jours. Tout le monde a salué la réussite de la République de Maurice. Il n'y a qu'à voir les statistiques rendues publiques, jour après jour par l'OMS pour réaliser que dans la région Océan Indien, nous sommes le pays le plus sûr, même si en ce moment, nous subissons une deuxième vague contre laquelle nous nous battons par tous les moyens, nous sommes le pays le sûr, considéré le nombre de cas par million d'habitants. Nous sommes de loin quatre fois plus sûrs que les Comores. 25, 26 fois plus sûr que la Réunion, que les Seychelles, que les Maldives, que Mayotte, que Madagascar. Dans la région Afrique, montrez-moi quel pays a eu moins de cas de la COVID par million d'habitants que Maurice ? De ce que je sais, de ce que je vois, de ce que je lis, je me trompe peut-être, mais démontrez-moi le contraire, nous sommes le pays le plus sûr.

A l'international, en comparaison avec les pays européens, les pays d'Amérique du Nord, les pays asiatiques, il y en a très peu qui ont fait mieux que nous. Oui, il existe mais il y en a très peu. En termes de décès par million d'habitants, là aussi, nous comptons parmi les meilleurs, certainement le meilleur dans la région Océan Indien, parmi les meilleurs dans le monde entier. Et vous venez, aujourd'hui, nous parler de la mauvaise gestion de la pandémie ! Eh bien, moi, je vous mets au défi. Permettez-le, M. le président, je mets au défi l'Opposition de venir nous démontrer par quel moyen nous aurions mal géré la pandémie.

Prenons maintenant la vaccination, que n'avons-nous pas entendu ? Nous aurions dû avoir écouté l'opposition pour placer des commandes ou des précommandes. Nous aurions dû avoir acheté plus de vaccins. Nous aurions dû avoir vacciné plus de monde mais les vaccins ne sont pas sur un étal du marché disponible à qui veut en acheter. Que nous a dit hier le Directeur Général de l'OMS. Je cite –

« Plus de 832 million de doses de vaccins ont été administré dans le monde mais plus de 82% d'entre elles sont allées à des pays à revenu élevé ou à revenu intermédiaire de la tranche supérieure tandis que les pays à faible revenu n'ont reçu que 0,2%. »

Donc, il y a un problème d'équité dans l'accès au vaccin contre la COVID. Tout le monde le sait sauf l'opposition.

M. le président, je ne révélerai pas un secret si je vous disais que dès l'apparition des vaccins, il n'y a pas un seul laboratoire fabriquant des vaccins. Il n'y a pas un seul fournisseur de vaccins au monde. Je parle des fournisseurs officiels qui n'aura pas été contacté par Maurice dans la tentative d'obtenir le plus grand nombre de vaccins le plus vite possible. Allez demander à n'importe quel gouvernement, je ne parle pas de l'Amérique du Nord, je ne parle pas de l'Europe, à n'importe quel gouvernement du Sud, combien sont ardues aujourd'hui les efforts pour obtenir des vaccins et malgré cela, M. le président, malgré cela, la petite République de Maurice a fait ce qu'il fallait. Aujourd'hui, plus de 500,000 doses de vaccins contre la COVID sont disponibles, sont arrivés à Maurice. Aujourd'hui, à peu près 20% de notre population déjà a reçu le vaccin. Et si nous nous comparons au pays de la région, Océan Indien, qui sont ceux qui ont commencé à vacciner avant nous ? Les Seychelles ! Qui d'autres ?

Si nous nous comparons à la région Afrique, quel est le pays qui a commencé à vacciner sa population avant nous ? Nous sommes parmi les premiers. Nous avons toujours été les bons élèves de la classe pour ce qui est du combat contre la COVID, de la gestion de la pandémie. Voyez le nombre de vaccinés au monde. Dans notre région, à part des petits pays comme les Seychelles et les Maldives qui ont pu avancer très vite, quel autre pays a fait autant que Maurice pour vacciner sa population, qu'il s'agisse de la région Océan Indien ou de l'Afrique ou même de l'Asie hormis les pays nouvellement industrialisés.

Donc, il est évident à mon sens, M. le président, que l'opposition nous fait un faux procès pour ce qui est de la gestion de la pandémie et qu'il s'agisse du Premier ministre de ce pays, qu'il s'agisse du ministre de la Santé, ils méritent nos félicitations pour ce qui est fait et ce qui a été fait par rapport à la gestion de la pandémie.

Donc, M. le président, je vous arriverai néanmoins que j'éprouve des sentiments mitigés en venant soutenir ce projet de loi à l'Assemblée nationale. Le militant que je suis ne peut de gaieté de cœur venir proposer le report des élections, quelles qu'elles soient. Je suis issu de ce parti, qui avec Sir Anerood Jugnauth à la tête en 1982, a inscrit l'obligation de tenir

des élections intervalles régulières dans notre Constitution après l'épisode malheureuse de 1967 à 1976 où le régime Travailiste/PMSD avait tout évacué la tenue des élections générales, la tenue des élections municipales et villageoise, l'abolition des élections partielles. Ce sont les militants qui sont venus en 1982 rétablir, inscrire dans la Constitution le droit à des élections régulières. Je suis de cette école de pensée qui a toujours accepté le verdict des urnes qui a perdu les élections en 1976, en 1983, en 1987 ensuite quoi, 2005, 2010, 2014 mais qui n'a jamais contesté le résultat des urnes. Jusqu'à ce qu'il se retrouve là, c'est obligé du parti Travailiste qui lui systématiquement conteste dès le moment qu'il est défait aux élections et aujourd'hui, malheureusement, tel Trump aux États-Unis est en train de faire quelque chose de très grave, qui est de briser la confiance de nos concitoyens dans le système électoral mauricien, la confiance dans l'indépendance de *l'Electoral Commissioner*, de *l'Electoral Supervisory Commission*, briser la confiance dans l'intégrité du processus électoral. Et nous savons tous dans les démocraties fragiles d'Afrique, combien on admire Maurice parce que justement nous avons ces institutions indépendantes. Justement depuis l'indépendance, il y a plus d'une moitié de siècle, personne n'a contesté comme cela se fait aujourd'hui le résultat des élections. C'est ce que moi j'ai appris au MMM quand les élections sont passées, quelque soient les résultats, on l'accepte et on dit le pays avant tout et on assume notre rôle de faire de l'opposition correctement. Et, aujourd'hui, c'est triste ce que nous constatons mais enfin, j'en reviens à mon propos, M. le président, ce n'est certainement pas de gaieté de cœur que nous proposons, nous soutenons cet amendement à la loi pour faire reporter les élections municipales. Mais, en même temps, nous sommes tout à fait serein, serein parce que nous savons, il suffit d'ouvrir les yeux pour comprendre que nous vivons la crise sociétal la plus grave depuis la grande guerre de 1939-45, la crise économique la plus grave depuis la récession de 1980-81, la crise sanitaire la plus grave depuis je ne sais pas, le choléra à Maurice. Nous vivons une situation on ne peut plus exceptionnel.

Et la deuxième vague qui nous a frappé de plein fouet il y a quelques semaines, elle n'est pas encore derrière nous. Nos amis de l'opposition viennent nous dire mais voilà, c'est la preuve que vous avez mal géré la COVID puisqu'il y a eu une deuxième vague comme s'ils ignoraient que dans les pays autrement plus riches que nous, autrement plus équipés que nous, ils connaissent une troisième, voire une quatrième vague, comme s'ils ne savaient pas que la COVID est un adversaire dangereux, un adversaire formidable qui s'invente des variantes au jour le jour. Et que l'humanité doit avancer très vite sur le plan scientifique et médical pour contrer les innovations de ce virus mortel au jour le jour.

Disons le franchement, notre réussite face à la première vague a été quelque chose de tout à fait extraordinaire, saluée par le monde entier. La période après la fin de la première vague, c'était juin 2020, juillet 2020 jusqu'au mois de mars de cette année relève du miracle. J'ignore quel autre pays au monde a connu cela. Cela relève du miracle comment nous avons su contenir la COVID. Mais cette deuxième vague, à mon sens, elle était inévitable. Tôt ou tard, par un moyen ou un autre, la contamination serait arrivée. Et aujourd'hui à l'image du reste du monde, nous reconnaissons qu'il faut apprendre à vivre avec la COVID.

It is no longer a question of risk avoidance; it is a question of risk management.

Il faut apprendre à vivre avec la COVID-19. Qui aurait cru qu'hier nous aurions eu 14 cas dans la communauté ? Qui aurait pu le prévoir ? Alors que toutes les indications étaient que cette deuxième vague, nous l'avions circonscrite, elle tirait à sa fin. Qui sait de quoi sera fait demain ? Peut-être n'aurons-nous aucun autre cas dans la communauté, peut-être que nous aurons encore cinq ou dix cas. Personne, nul ne sait de quoi demain sera fait.

Donc, c'est pour cela, M. le président, que je dis que nous sommes tout à fait serein parce que nous savons qu'il serait irresponsable et dangereux d'organiser des élections générales. Je sais que vous pointez du doigt l'horloge déjà, M. le président, mais je voulais juste illustrer mon propos en vous disant que le leader de l'opposition l'a reconnu. Chez nous, quand nous faisons campagne pour les municipales, nous faisons du porte-à-porte, nous tenons des réunions nocturnes. Et quel a été l'exemple de l'Inde, de la grande péninsule qui, elle, c'est la plus grande démocratie, a choisi de tenir les élections au mois de mars et d'avril? Dans l'Uttar Pradesh, au Tamil Nadu, au Kerala, dans l'État du Bengal de l'ouest – *West Bengal*, de l'Assam, on a vu le nombre de cas dans ces régions passer de 74,000 fin mars à 399,000 dans l'espace de deux mois.

Les élections n'y sont pas pour rien. Nous le savons tous. Il aurait été irresponsable et dangereux d'organiser ces élections, le leader de l'opposition l'a dit. Donc, laissez-moi dire à la Chambre qu'il n'y a aucun complot, aucun calcul, aucune manœuvre politicienne pour reporter les élections. N'importe quel gouvernement à la tête du pays aujourd'hui, Travailliste, PMSD, MMM, aurait agi de la sorte.

Donc, je conclus, M. le président, pour dire que dans ces circonstances douloureuses, sans doute les plus pénibles depuis les bagarres raciales au lendemain de l'indépendance, depuis plus d'un demi-siècle, la place de tous patriotes est d'être du côté de ceux qui agissent, de ceux qui sont dans l'action plutôt que parmi les cyniques et les pessimistes, parmi ceux qui

ont la critique facile puisque leurs propos n'engagent que ceux qu'ils croient, plutôt que parmi les esprits perfides, qui de manière insidieuse, continuent à distiller jour après jour des faussetés pour empoisonner l'esprit de nos concitoyens.

M. le président, la patrie est en danger et la place de tous patriotes est d'être dans le faire plutôt que dans le dire. C'est pour cela, M. le président, que tout à l'heure, je vais me joindre à tous les patriotes de ce côté de la Chambre et j'espère les patriotes de l'autre côté de la Chambre pour voter cet amendement avec le sentiment du devoir accompli.

J'en ai terminé. Je vous remercie, M. le président.

(5.55p.m)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe disruptions in the life of peoples across the world. No country has been spared from the negative economic, social, and health impacts of the pandemic.

The pandemic has also created an unprecedented situation globally, so much so that the need to protect and preserve lives has become the topmost priority of Governments. In this respect, many countries have adopted exceptional sanitary measures with a view to combating the spread of this virus.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is not an exception, and, since last year, we had to take several drastic measures to prevent the spread of this communicable disease. In this respect, we have reviewed several pieces of legislation and also enacted a new Quarantine Act 2020.

These measures contributed largely in containing the virus and subsequently making Mauritius a COVID-safe country. Having ensured that there were no health risks for community transmission of the virus, I advised the President to issue the writs of the Village Council elections which were held on 22 November 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since the first week of March 2021, unfortunately, there has been a resurgence of COVID-19 cases in the local community. With a view to halting the spread of the virus, I ordered, pursuant to the Quarantine Act 2020, all persons to remain indoor. In addition, I ordered commercial premises to remain closed during the confinement period. These bold measures had to be taken so as to prevent assembly of persons, given the fact that this virus spreads mainly among people who are in close contact with each other.

Since 01 May this year, the generalised Restriction of Movement Order has been lifted. However, some restrictions are still in force: social distancing, of course, should be

maintained, assembly of more than 10 persons in public is not allowed, some public places are still closed, amongst others. Moreover, since this virus is still being detected in some localised areas, I have declared those areas as red zones to restrict movement of persons therein.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are witnessing a resurgence of COVID-19 virus in so many countries, which, at a point in time, were considered to have successfully contained the spread of the virus. Hence, no one can predict with assurance when the world will free itself from this pandemic.

Against this backdrop, the holding of any election poses major challenges to any country. We have to recognise the fine balance needed between taking steps to protect the health and safety of citizens, candidates, election agents and polling officials, and the conduct of elections. In this connection, for any responsible Government, the safety and health of its population override any other considerations. In fact, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, of which Mauritius is a Member State, has underlined, and I quote -

“the decision to hold or postpone scheduled elections during the novel coronavirus disease outbreak can be equivalent to choosing between life and death, for people but also for democracies. When it comes to priorities, the health of the population should indisputably come first, closely followed by the health of democracy.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, faced with these challenges, several countries have taken the decision to postpone general and regional elections. As at 14 April 2021, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems has recorded postponements in 69 countries and eight territories, with a total of 116 election events postponed.

Furthermore, in May 2020, local and mayoral elections in England were postponed for a year to May 2021 due to the coronavirus outbreak. The authorities were of the view that it would be impractical to hold the elections as planned, as they could result in the spread of the virus. The United Kingdom Electoral Commission was also of the view that the elections should be postponed to mitigate the impact of the virus.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are all aware of the folklore of elections in Mauritius and we, Mauritians, are very passionate about elections. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, our prime concern is to protect the health of each and everyone in this country. Elections are public events that bring people together. Public and private meetings are held, mass rallies are organised, and these

involve assembly of thousands of people. How are we going to maintain social distancing in those meetings and rallies? We all know that candidates also do door-to-door campaigning to convince the electorate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the electoral legislation in Mauritius requires candidates or their representatives to personally attend the nomination centre to submit the nomination paper and complete all nomination procedures. Likewise, an elector must come personally to the polling station to cast his vote. Having to converge to the nomination centres or the polling stations, the candidates and the electors have to handle voting materials and, of course, inevitably have contacts which may result in rapid transmission of the virus.

All these activities take place in crowded spaces, where maintaining a safe distance from each other could prove to be a huge challenge. The presence of large numbers of election officers and the requirement for candidates and electors to be physically present at the nomination centres and polling stations is likely to pose health risks. This massive movement of people can spread the virus exponentially and worsen the impact of the pandemic across the country. The counting process would also prove to be particularly risky for the transmission of the virus as inevitably large numbers of persons, namely the election officers, the counting agents, candidates, election agents as well as the media, they all would be congregating in closed spaces.

And in such situations, we will not be able to contain the virus, but, instead, this, as I say, could lead to widespread contamination. Therefore, as a responsible Government, we cannot take such risks, but, instead, take all the necessary measures to contain the spread of this virus. This is the only reason which motivates us not to hold the general elections of the entire Municipal City and Municipal Town Councils which are due this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now enumerate on the amendments being proposed. A new section 12A is being inserted in the Local Government Act so as to provide that, 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, shall, by Proclamation, extend, during such periods, from time to time the life of 6 years of the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils, or entire Village Councils, 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.

Let me remind the House that we are not reinventing the wheel. In fact, this new section 12A, which will allow the extension of the life of local authorities, has been inspired from section 57 of the Constitution which provides that where a state of emergency is prevailing in Mauritius, the life of Parliament may, from time to time, be extended.

Mr Speaker, Sir, some Members of the Opposition are giving the impression that the new section 12A will allow the life of local authorities to be extended in any normal situation and as it pleases Government. This is, obviously, not correct. Let me reassure the population that this extension is very restrictive in that same can be done in only a specific situation, when the President declares that there is, or there is likely to be, an epidemic of a communicable disease in Mauritius and a quarantine period is, pursuant to the Quarantine Act 2020, in force in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition, I would like to reiterate that this extension, and I stress, may be extended from time to time, that is, it may be extended for a period of one month, 3 months or 6 months, but at any one time it cannot be extended for a period of more than a year. Moreover, we have not provided that the life of local authorities be extended indefinitely. We have restricted the period of extension to a maximum of 2 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when the life of local authorities has been extended, that does not mean that elections will only be held after the expiry of the period of extension. New section 10A, subsection (3), provides that the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, may, at any time, dissolve the entire Municipal City and Municipal Town Councils, and the entire Village Councils, for the holding of a general election of those local authorities. Therefore, where the life of local authorities has been extended, at any time before the expiry of that period of extension, those local authorities may be dissolved for the holding of elections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a consequence of provisions being made for the extension of the life of local authorities, further provisions are being made for the extension of the mandate of current Councillors.

There is also another very important aspect in this piece of legislation. As opposed to writs of election of Members of the National Assembly being issued within 60 days of the date of any dissolution of Parliament pursuant to section 56(4) of the Constitution, neither the Local Government Act, nor the Representation of the People Act, prescribes a time limit for

the President to issue writs of election after the dissolution of the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils, or entire Village Councils.

Now, since no definite period has been prescribed, this, in fact, could have led to a situation where the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, could have issued writs of election more than 6 months after the dissolution of the local authorities. Therefore, to avoid this kind of situation and to be in line with our supreme law, provisions are being made for writs of election to be issued by the President, for the general election of Councillors to the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils, and Village Councils, within 60 days of the date of any dissolution of the former Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils, and Village Councils.

Mr Speaker, Sir, currently, sections 11 and 12 of The Local Government Act make provisions for the election of a Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council or Village Council. Accordingly, some people have interpreted that a specific local authority could be dissolved and an election of that local authority could be held. To avoid this from happening and to avoid any confusion, provisions have now been made in the Bill so that the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils and Village Councils, and not a specific Council, be dissolved, and for the holding of a general election for the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils and Village Councils, and not for the holding of an election for a specific Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have heard some Members of the Opposition saying that, with this piece of legislation, too many powers will be given to the Prime Minister. Let me remind the Opposition that we are not innovating and it has always been the prerogative of the Prime Minister to decide on the date of elections, be it for National Assembly elections or general elections for local authorities.

M. le président, on a eu aussi droit à certaines diatribes hystériques lors des débats sur ce projet de loi. Certains orateurs de l'opposition nous ont accusés de bafouer la démocratie. Ils prétendent que ce gouvernement craint les élections municipales. *I cannot say when elections will be held, Mr Speaker, Sir. We do not know what is going to be the outcome, and I do not pretend and je ne me tape pas l'estomac.* On va participer, bien sûr. On verra, quel sera le résultat. *We are not afraid of any election.* Ils avaient dit la même chose pour les élections villageoises. Pourtant, eux qui croyaient remporter haut la main les élections

villageoises, ont, en réalité, été terrassés, à tel point que je dirais que presque tous les conseils de district ont juré allégeance au gouvernement du jour.

M. le président, les élections municipales qu'ils réclament tant, comme je l'ai dit, auront bel et bien lieu une fois que le pays aura surmonté la pandémie du coronavirus et ses séquelles. La population sait que la priorité du moment et des mois à venir restera le combat contre le COVID-19, le redressement de l'économie, et l'adaptation à une nouvelle normalité qui dictera l'avenir.

En fait, M. le président, ce projet de loi aurait dû faire l'unanimité tant les défis sanitaires, sociaux, et économiques auxquels nous faisons face sont connus de tous. Malheureusement, certains membres de l'opposition ont choisi de jouer aux pyromanes et ont agi d'une manière démagogique et antipatriotique.

De ce côté de la Chambre, nous sommes des démocrates convaincus, M. le président. Le gouvernement que je dirige ne va pas confisquer la démocratie régionale, comme allégué par certains membres de l'opposition ; contrairement à eux, surtout ceux émanant des rangs du Parti travailliste et du PMSD. Eux, ils sont connus pour leurs décisions anti-démocratiques, et cela fait partie des pages noires de l'histoire de notre pays.

M. le président, la nation le sait, et peut-être à l'intention des plus jeunes, il faudra rappeler qu'un gouvernement Parti travailliste-PMSD avait renvoyé les élections générales en 1972, aboli les élections partielles, de même que les élections villageoises et municipales en 1974. Les raisons avancées à cette époque traduisaient les velléités du régime en place de s'agripper au pouvoir et museler les opposants.

Le Leader de l'opposition d'alors, l'honorable Sookdeo Bissoondoyal, avait commenté ses dérives en ces termes, et je cite –

« Aujourd'hui est le jour le plus sombre de l'histoire de l'île Maurice. J'ai honte de voir à l'Assemblée tant de visiteurs, car ils assistent à des funérailles. Nous enterrons la démocratie, et mon cœur se brise. »

Voilà comment le Parti travailliste, en complicité avec le PMSD, avait violé la démocratie et tenu le pays en otage dans les années 70 !

Durant la période allant de 2010 à 2012, un autre gouvernement Parti travailliste-PMSD avait renvoyé les élections municipales à deux reprises dans un contexte de tumulte politique suivant le retrait du MSM de l'alliance gouvernementale et l'obsession du régime en

place de revoir à son avantage le *Local Government Act* de 2003 que le gouvernement précédent avait promulgué. Acculé par les critiques de l'opposition, le ministre des Administrations régionales d'alors, l'honorable Hervé Aimée, avait lâché laconiquement lors d'une fonction, et je cite, « *eleksion pa ranpli vant* ».

C'est l'histoire M. le président,...

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: *wi, koumsa mem sa !* C'est l'histoire M. le président ! C'est écrit noir sur blanc ; un ministre travailliste a affirmé haut et fort, *loud and clear*, comme souvent dit l'honorable Arvin Boolell, que les élections ne sont pas importantes! *That was adding insult to injury and certainly an insult to our democracy.*

Il est évident, M. le président, que l'ancien ministre Hervé Aimée disait tout haut ce que son Leader et Premier ministre d'alors pensait tout bas. Il y avait un agenda politique, ni plus ni moins. Le gouvernement d'alors essayait de gagner du temps tout en autorisant - et on se souvient à cette époque - les conseillers, comme je vais les appeler, les conseillers 'manger-boire' dans les conseils municipaux, de continuer à sévir impunément.

Laissez-moi donner quelques dates, la chronologie des événements pour prouver ce que je suis en train de dire –

- Le 10 août 2010, le ministre Hervé Aimée disait, et je cite: «Nous sommes tout près de finaliser le *Local Government Bill* qui est révolutionnaire et même spectaculaire. Il sera utilisé pour les cinquante prochaines années.» ;
- Le 10 décembre 2010, une autre déclaration: les élections seront renvoyées à 2011;
- Le 1^{er} février 2011, le gouvernement fait savoir qu'une somme de R 190 millions a déjà été votée pour les élections municipales et villageoises cette année;
- Le 11 février 2011, le nouveau projet de loi est prêt et sera promulgué avant juillet 2011;
- Le 9 mai 2011, les élections seront bel et bien pour cette année et la campagne commence dans trois mois;

- Le 18 octobre 2011, le *Local Government Bill* est présenté à l'Assemblée nationale, prévoyant des élections en 2011;
- Le 29 novembre 2011, une nouvelle version du projet de loi est présentée. Les élections sont renvoyées à 2012;
- Le 1^{er} décembre 2011, le gouvernement annonce que les élections se tiendront très tôt en 2012, et
- Les élections municipales sont annoncées pour le 2 octobre 2012, mais ont finalement eu lieu le 9 décembre 2012.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the then Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, intervened during the debates on the Local Government Bill (No XXX) of 2011. Of course, he defended vigorously the Bill and the postponement of municipal elections. He referred to the postponement of Village Council elections on 3 occasions during the 2002-2005 period and the postponement of municipal elections to 2006.

I refer the House to what he said, and I quote –

“For those who are saying that we are postponing local elections once again - I heard about *assassinat de la démocratie* - I say that they have a very, very short memory. Very short, indeed! Let me remind them. They forget that they have postponed local municipal elections twice and Village Council elections, believe it or not, three times”.

The then Prime Minister was trying to assert that what is good for the goose is also good for the gander.

M. le président, entre 2002 et 2004, il y a eu effectivement des renvois des élections villageoises et municipales. Le leader du MMM, alors *Deputy Prime Minister* et ministre des Finances et subséquemment Premier ministre, avait parlé d'un «petit renvoi obligatoire» en 2002 en vue de la nécessité d'une refonte totale des administrations régionales, où la municipalisation du pays avait été mis en avant. Lors des débats sur le *Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. XIV of 2003)*, l'honorable Bérenger avait déclaré, and I quote –

“I am saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we take time in the case of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly as in the case of the Local Government Act. We are taking time to make a success as in the case of Rodrigues, a real success of the new legislation that is coming, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have many priorities; and one of our priorities, after

Rodrigues, is to revolutionise, to have a complete overhaul of democracy in the regions, rural and urban”.

Le *Deputy Prime Minister* d’alors avait justifié le temps que prenait le gouvernement pour venir de l’avant avec un projet de loi révolutionnaire pour les Administrations régionales.

Et je n’occulte pas le fait que le MSM était en alliance avec le MMM et je ne suis pas en train de faire porter le chapeau au MMM. Ce que je suis en train de tout simplement faire comprendre, surtout à certains parlementaires MMM, c’est qu’il y a des choses qui se justifient et qu’ils doivent s’abstenir à se livrer à la démagogie.

Mon gouvernement peut aussi légitimement invoquer un renvoi obligatoire, car tel est effectivement le cas. Et tout le monde peut constater que nous n’avons pas de visibilité en ce qui concerne le Covid-19. Nous sommes tributaires de la situation sanitaire, social et économique et c’est la raison pour laquelle l’amendement proposé permettra d’étendre la durée légale des conseils municipaux d’un an au maximum à la fois mais ne dépassant pas deux ans.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while further perusing the debates on the Local Government Bill (No XXX of 2011), I also came across the speech of hon. Xavier Luc Duval, then Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

He justified the undue delay that was taken by the then Government to come up with the new Bill. He tried to put the blame on me by stating that, as his predecessor, I did not give financial clearance. Obviously, we know that was not true as there were serious divergences in Government at that time on the way forward. And hon. Duval forcefully condoned the postponement of municipal elections that was also one of the purposes of the Bill.

Let me quote what he said –

“this is not a time for bickering; it’s not the time for finding all sorts of political reasons why we should do this or not. I am quite sure that there is no Mauritian – *ça c’est extraordinaire ça* – who wants elections in December. December is a special time for Mauritius. People want to be able to enjoy the end of the year, they want to be able to enjoy a quiet social time with their family. This is not the time to have elections. They may be in a hurry to *gagne baté encore*. That is not our concern”.

Pour l'honorable Duval, tout était justifié; il ne fallait pas politicailler sur la question, et il trouvait que les élections ne pouvaient se tenir en décembre car c'était la période des fêtes. Pourtant, M. le président, après le renvoi de 2011 à 2012, les élections municipales ont bel et bien eu lieu en décembre, plus précisément le 9 décembre 2012. Donc, la population aura pris bonne note!

M. le président, je dois dire que j'accepte quand même une part de responsabilité dans le discours du Leader de l'opposition dans cette auguste Chambre mardi dernier ; je l'ai écouté attentivement. Il a reconnu que le renvoi des élections municipales est justifié compte tenu de la situation sanitaire dans le pays. Mais toujours est-il - et ça, j'essaye de comprendre ; je crois que c'est un peu l'habitude de certains politiciens de dire certaines choses ici, mais en dehors de la Chambre de continuer à critiquer, à accuser le gouvernement de bafouer la démocratie.

Dois-je rappeler à l'honorable Duval que le PMSD a souvent, depuis l'indépendance de notre pays, été le complice du Parti travailliste pour étouffer la démocratie. De plus, qui ne se souvient pas des abus des maires et conseillers PMSD dans nos municipalités! Enfin, je ne vais pas entrer dans ces détails, et je crois que c'est une occasion pour moi de faire rappeler Azor Adélaïde, qui a perdu sa vie sur le 'coal tar' à Curepipe. Je ne vais pas entrer dans ces détails.

(Interruptions)

Well, we know what happened.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister : Est-ce que...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! No fights!

The Prime Minister: Est-ce que vous niez qu'Azor Adélaïde ...

An hon. Member: *Al diman Paul Bérenger!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Est-ce-que vous niez qu'Azor Adélaïde a été assassiné à Curepipe ? Et nous savons dans quelles circonstances! Comme je l'ai dit, je ne vais pas entrer dans ces détails, mais...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Sharmougum?

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Qu'est-ce qu'il a...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Sharmougum, peut-être qu'il ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Est-ce qu'il est un témoin?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Now that you are in alliance with hon. Paul Bérenger, you ask him! He will tell you the whole story!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: I hope he will tell you!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, reading further the debates...

(Interruptions)

C'est le Parti travailliste qui va nous faire de la leçon ? Ce Parti travailliste-là qui va nous faire de la leçon ?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! What is happening in this House? Continue!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, reading further the debates on the Local Government Bill (No XXX of 2011), I found that hon. Dr. Boolell, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, did not say a word on the postponement of the municipal elections, as if that was not any of his interest, or as if it was something normal, maybe. But when he is in the Opposition, now he adopts a different attitude. In 2003, when he intervened on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. XIV of 2003), he said, and I quote, Mr Speaker, Sir –

“I can't understand why they don't spell out the naked truth, that they have become spent-swimmers, that they are running out of steam, out of the wit and they are scared to face the electorate.”

And, today, again from the Opposition ranks - lately outside the House - he had the guts to speak of rape of democracy and what not. The same sort of attitude is adopted by no one else than, obviously, hon. Mohamed. When he intervened on the 2011 Bill, he said, and I quote –

“As legislators, we have a responsibility; a responsibility of not only debating laws that are presented before this august Assembly. As legislators, there is a presumption that we know exactly what we are doing. That presumption, I hope, is not merely a presumption, and I hope it's true.”

Having said that, Mr Speaker, Sir, and knowing the immediate objective of the Bill, he deliberately chose not to say a word on the postponement of municipal elections from 2011 to 2012.

(Interruptions)

That blatant contradiction and doublespeak...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You want to walk-out?

Mr Mohamed: No.

Mr Speaker: Please keep quiet!

(Interruptions)

Quiet!

Mr Mohamed: Speak properly!

Mr Speaker: Properly? Please walk-out from this Chamber!

Mr Mohamed: Properly?

Mr Speaker: Properly! Walk-out from this Chamber! Withdraw!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: So, that blatant contradiction and doublespeak were highlighted by hon...

Mr Mohamed: *Bondie kone ...*

Mr Speaker: Walk-out from this Chamber, please!

Mr Mohamed: Am I being thrown out?

Mr Speaker: Yes!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: They are enjoying themselves.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: And do not try to follow!

Mr Assirvaden : *Mais pour quelle raison, M. le président...*

Mr Speaker: You do not have...

(Interruptions)

My ruling; this is the Speaker's ruling!

(Interruptions)

I am not accountable to you!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: He is accountable to the Prime Minister.

Mr Assirvaden: *Il n'a rien fait !*

Mr Speaker: You walk-out also!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: You made the Prime Minister happy.

(Interruptions)

You made the Prime Minister happy. The Prime Minister *est content*.

An hon. Member: *Aller! Aller! Aller!*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I was saying - I quoted hon. Mohamed, and at least he was here when I quoted him - that blatant contradiction and the doublespeak were highlighted by hon. Uteem at that time, disputing the timing of the Bill and the real motivation behind it. He said, and I quote –

“The only reason why we are here! We are postponing the local elections before the end of the year. Hon. Shakeel Mohamed spoke almost one hour, trying to give us lessons on principles of democracy! One hour and not a single word, not a single reason why he is condoning the postponement of local elections once again! Quoting from hon. Minister Shakeel Mohamed, last year, I referred to the term ‘rapist of democracy’. Little did I know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we are not dealing with a rapist of regional democracy but with a serial rapist of democracy! When we look closely at the Local Government Bill that is being proposed today, it is not just a serial rapist that we are dealing here, it is an outright murderer; we are murdering the local government today in this Assembly. *On est en train d’assassiner la démocratie régionale.*”

But that did not prevent them from getting together and going for elections together. Anyway!

Mr Speaker, Sir, the irony today is that the murderer and the accuser, as I say, they do sometimes get together, although at a distance, but they want people to believe that now we are killing democracy.

Je dirais qu’ils ne sont plus crédibles ; ils sont même ridicules, car les Mauriciens savent que les arguments de l’opposition à l’encontre du gouvernement ne tiennent pas la

route. Nos compatriotes constatent qu'en réalité la démocratie est plus vivante que jamais dans notre République.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would wish to remind Members on the other side, particularly those of the Labour Party and the MMM, that together, *en complicité* - talking about killing democracy? - they closed Parliament for nearly 9 months in 2014 to discuss an alliance behind the back of the population. That was an '*assassinat de la démocratie*'.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let us finish with the...

The Prime Minister: C'était sans précédent.

(Interruptions)

Ça fait du mal, ça fait du mal ! Ils sont...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No conversation! Make your speech! No conversation! Quiet there!

The Prime Minister: C'était, comme je l'ai dit...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

The Prime Minister: C'était sans précédent.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea, second time!

The Prime Minister: Le Parti travailliste et le MMM sont coupables d'avoir délibérément fermé le temple de notre démocratie, qui est l'Assemblée nationale, pour satisfaire leur intérêt politique. Ces deux partis ne peuvent donc prétendre nous faire la leçon sur la démocratie. Le PMSD, comme je l'ai dit, a un passé bien, bien lourd.

To those, Mr Speaker, Sir, who claim municipal elections must be held whatever the circumstances, I shall answer by quoting hon. Mohamed from his speech in this august Assembly on the Local Government Bill (No. XXX of 2011), and I quote –

“If there is only one thing in your mind: an election by all means; power at all means and being in the local council at all means because it is too hot out there when you are out in the dark, in the oblivion because you have not been elected to Government, this is not in essence what the people out there want.”

M. le président, ce pays ne peut pas et ne veut pas être dicté par des frustrés vivant dans le désespoir et dans l'abîme de l'opposition.

Nous assumons pleinement, en tant que gouvernement, les responsabilités que nous a confiées le peuple ainsi que les défis colossaux que nous a imposés le COVID-19. La campagne de vaccination va s'accélérer dans les jours à venir. 500,000 vaccins sont là ; d'autres sont attendus. Et contrairement à ce qui a été dit par le Leader de l'opposition, l'honorable Mohamed et l'honorable Uteem, les Mauriciens reconnaissent les efforts qui ont été déployés par le gouvernement pour

gérer la pandémie et se procurer des vaccins à temps, dans un contexte global sous haute pression.

Cela étant dit, M. le président, je souhaite réaffirmer catégoriquement que les élections municipales auront lieu aussitôt que possible. Les partis qui font partie de la majorité gouvernementale aligneront, bien sûr, des candidats dans tous les arrondissements urbains pour briguer les suffrages des citoyens, en toute confiance. L'avenir nous dira si les citoyens emboîteront le pas aux électeurs des régions rurales qui ont choisi d'être du côté de l'alliance gouvernementale au lieu de tenter l'aventure avec une opposition disparate qui se discrédite de jour en jour.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me conclude on this note. Elections to local authorities are only being delayed and not cancelled.

Thank you.

(6.40 p.m.)

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. First of all, I would like to thank Members on both sides of the House for their intervention, contribution and proposal on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2021).

My colleagues on this side of the House have already highlighted many pertinent points on the urgency of this Bill and now, I mean, today we have heard three Members of the front bench explain why we are doing it. They have gone in details and the Prime Minister has gone in details to explain why we are postponing the election. However, allow me to sum up the debate and to address a few salient points raised by some Members of the Opposition.

Although a few Members do not share our views, which naturally we expect and respect as well, I express my appreciation for the consensus in this House that -

- a. Municipal City and Town Councils elections cannot be held during these uncertain times, and should be postponed;
- b. Secondly, the Bill exclusively addresses the elections that are due when there is, or there is likely to be, an epidemic of a communicable disease and a quarantine period is in force in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my colleagues on this side of the House have strongly put forward valid arguments of our intentions which is only motivated, I said it the last time and I am going to repeat it again, by the safeguard and the best interest of the population. However, for a handful of Members who still doubt our intentions, and who are turning a blind eye to the obvious prevailing sanitary conditions that is existing now, and are pretending that the elections may be held now, let me elaborate a little further.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Republic of Mauritius is internationally known for its respect for civil and political rights and for holding regular, free and fair elections. However, given the prevailing sanitary conditions, on which I need not dwell any further, the fundamental question at this stage is: what is more important, the health and safety of our citizens or the holding of the Elections?

Mr Speaker, Sir, the answer to this crucial question to us on this side of the House, is clear and unequivocal, the health and safety of our citizen is our prime concern.

This Government will not, not at all, Mr Speaker Sir, put at stake the health and safety of our human capital even for short term objectives.

It is in this context, that Government is proposing to extend the life of 6 years of the entire Municipal City Council and the Municipal Town Councils, or the entire Village Councils, from time to time but by not more than one year at a time, provided it is not 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.

As I explained earlier, the Bill also provides for fixing of a period for the issue of writs by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister, for the general election of these Councils thereby enabling the curing of an omission.

This amendment is based on the same principles as for the issue of writs for the National Assembly elections as enshrined in the Constitution and provided in the Representation of People Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me, now, address some of the points raised by the Members of the other side of the House. Listening to the debate, for me there are basically two main aspects which came out of the discussion from the Opposition –

- firstly, the Covid-19 epidemic and its management, and
- secondly, postponing the Municipal Council Elections is against our democratic principles.

These are the two main issues that basically came out of the discussion. As for the COVID-19 epidemic, there is disagreement among the Members of the Opposition themselves. This has been discussed in details by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister as well, earlier.

The Leader of the Opposition agrees on the need to postpone the election but, the election has to be held as soon as the sanitary conditions allow. But the Leader of the Opposition did not actually explain what he meant by this. What does it mean? I mean we are not going to hold the elections? For how long can we be free of a local case in the community before we consider scheduling the elections? Is it after one week after having a local case? Is it after one month? Is it after 3 months or 6 months? We do not know yet. Can we organise the elections if one of the Municipal Council areas goes into the Red Zone?

Mr Speaker: So, you don't need a Speaker?

Dr. Husnoo: Sorry.

Mr Speaker: Go through the Speaker, or if not, I just suspend and walk out!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Husnoo: Okay, Mr Speaker, Sir! Can we organise the elections if one of the Municipal Council areas goes into the Red Zone as, for example, at Vallée Pitot now? Can we organise the elections in 4 Municipal Councils and, for one reason or the other, postpone it in the fifth one? Mr Speaker Sir, this is easier said than done. Or do we wait to have vaccine coverage of the population of more than 60% to 70%? Or again, in the meantime, if we get a different strand of the COVID-19 virus which is more contagious and virulent, what are we going to do? There are so many questions which can be raised from what the Leader

of the Opposition has said. That is why we do not believe in what actually, he said. The Leader of the Opposition is rather, I am afraid, quiet on all these points!

On the other hand, the thrust of some Members of the MMM and the Labour Party is to hold the elections now and as soon as possible. For example, hon. Assirvaden, for him, the present situation is the same as last year when we held the Village Council Elections. Is it the same, Mr Speaker, Sir? Is the situation now the same as it was last November when the Village Councils Elections were held? Maybe some people are dreaming. As far as I know, between the first phase of the COVID-19 epidemic last year and the present second phase that we are going through now, we had a safe window. That is why, the elections were held in November last year. I guess the hon. Member is the only one in this House who was not aware of this situation. Just to remind him again, the UK Government last year postponed the local elections for one year because of the pandemic.

He also mentioned that, if the PSAC Exams could also be organised, why can't we hold the Municipal Council Elections? Are they the same Mr Speaker, Sir? I just wonder. Is the last month of an electoral campaign, especially with our local folklore - we know how it is when we organise elections - the same as a student preparing for a PSAC Exams? Well, I would leave it for the House to decide how absurd or ridiculous we can be sometimes.

Hon. Wochit said that we have to keep the elections on schedule. He even said that we should do the elections in August this year. Mr Speaker, Sir, the percentage of voters in the Municipal Elections is about 40% to 50% usually. In the present situation, when we still have local cases of COVID-19, do you think the citizens would go out and vote now? I am sure the answer is obvious. So, eventually the percentage of voters would be lower than the usual. And, what would the Opposition say? Because of the low turnout the result is not representative, and we have to cancel the elections and organise it again. We are going to hear the same thing again. So, to my understanding, the COVID-19 situation is rather dynamic, and we do not have any visibility how the situation would develop in the near future. How can we say we have to schedule the elections in this coming August, now?

So, you see, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is actually no consensus even among the different Members of the Opposition, despite what is being said in the Press. To top it up, we have seen how in some countries the electoral campaign has turned out to be a super spreader event. We all know about it and we have seen how catastrophic it can be. Is that what we

want to happen here in Mauritius as well, by holding another election in the next few months?

As we know, in India, the Chief Justice Banerjee and Ramamoorthy even said that the Electoral Commission should be put on murder charges as a most irresponsible institution, just because they have organised the elections during the pandemic period.

Another point which was raised by the Leader of the Opposition and hon. Assirvaden is, the mayors are going to stay in post if we extend the life of the council. Let me say, Mr Speaker, Sir, where is this written in the Bill? I'm not saying it myself.

Again, some Members of the Opposition have even hinted in the media that we may consider replacing the present council members by an Administrative Commission. Is that what the Opposition really want? An administrative Commission instead of a Municipal Council run by elected councillors. Mr Speaker, Sir, this shows how ridiculous the stand of some of the Members of the Opposition is.

Now, Mr Speaker, I will go to the second point raised by Members of the Opposition, postponing the election is anti-democratic. I think the Prime Minister has gone into details about this, how the Prime Minister has discussed that in detail. So, I am not going into that, just to remind –

- (a) we know that the municipal election in 2010 was postponed for 2012;
- (b) in 2014, the Parliament was closed again for 9 months, and we don't have to go down memory lane obviously;
- (c) in 1972, the General Elections were postponed for 1976, and
- (d) the Municipal and the Village elections in 1974 were postponed.

Again, this has been canvassed in detail by the Prime Minister. So, I am not going to go into that.

On the other hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, most of the Members of the Opposition seem not to have seen that a new clause has been inserted in the Bill, that is, Sections 11 and 12 of the principal Act, has been amended to make provision for the writs of the election to be issued by the President for the General Elections of Councillors to the Municipal City Council, the Municipal Town Council and Village Council to be held within 60 days of the date of any dissolution of the former councils. It seems that nobody in the Opposition has seen this amendment. I wonder is this selective blindness or selective amnesia?

Some Members, Mr Speaker, Sir, are alleging that we, on this side, are afraid to face the urban electorate. The same allegations were levelled last year for the Village Council election. Yet, it had not been the case. Elections were held within the prescribed timeframe and you know the outcome. We are not afraid to schedule the election as soon as the Government thinks it is ready, you can do it. For those who are making these kinds of insinuations, I would like to remind them of the results of the Municipal Council in 2015. The Government won by 120 for the Government and not one Member of the Opposition was elected. So, you can laugh.

Before I end, Mr Speaker, Sir, some Members on the other side mentioned that we did not manage the COVID-19 well, and hon. Uteem said that our control of the COVID-19 epidemic was a failure and that's what led to the postponement of the Municipal election. Mr Speaker, Sir, this has been mentioned, I think, by hon. Ganoo.

The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response is a study done in England at Oxford University, which compiled different indices from more than 186 countries. Do you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, what indices they use? They do not just look at the number of cases, not about the mortality figures, not just about contact tracing, not just about the number of PCR that was done, they look at –

- school closure;
- workplace closure;
- public event cancellation;
- public transport closure;
- public information campaign;
- restriction on internal movement;
- international travel control;
- financial measures;
- monetary measures;
- emergency investment in healthcare, and
- investment in vaccines.

These are the indicators that were used and on that score, Mr Speaker, the last study was done in April this year and out of 186 countries, Mauritius was ranked second in the world and despite this, the hon. Member said that we have failed to control the situation. I don't know what to say.

(Interruptions)

I think that speaks for itself how we respond to the epidemic in Mauritius. I realise we can be partisan in our approach but, I think, we should not be that biased as well, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Before I end, please allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to thank all the Members of the House who have taken part in the debate. Allow me to thank the three orators who just spoke earlier this evening and also allow me to thank the staff of the Ministry of Local Government and the Attorney General's Office for their help.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, we, on this side of the House, strongly believe that in view of the present sanitary conditions, the Municipal Election should be postponed.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I, once again, commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL

(No. VII of 2021)

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 (New section 10A inserted in principal Act).

Motion made and question proposed: "that the clause stand part of the Bill".

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment –

“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 the 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 a general election of the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils, and the entire Village Councils.”

Mr Chairperson, in support of this amendment, I must say firstly that I appreciated the speech of the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, which differed significantly from some of his colleagues. I will say also that he has indicated that he will not support this amendment but, nevertheless, for the record, Mr Chairperson, I will say that the proposed Amendment Bill, as it stands, as Government has proposed, is too vague. It can allow Municipal elections to be postponed up to one year and up to the next year. The Prime Minister, himself, has said in the part of his speech that I understood, anyway, that he is going to call elections as soon as sanitary conditions allow. This is what I heard him saying in his speech and, in fact, this amendment merely seeks to codify that, is codify exactly the commitment that the Prime Minister has taken. Therefore, I still move for this amendment, although I understand that Government will not support it. Thank you.

Amendment defeated.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 4 and 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6 (Section 12A of principal Act repealed and replaced)

Motion made and question proposed: “that the clause stand part of the Bill”.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment –

“In clause 6, in the proposed section 12A –

(a) by deleting subsection (1) and replacing it by the following subsection –

(1) 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,

the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, shall, by Proclamation, extend, from time to time, the life of 6 years of the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils, or entire Village

Councils, 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.

(b) in subsection (6), by deleting the definition of “period of public emergency”.

Amendment agreed to

Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 7 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

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

Third Reading

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

Second Reading

THE TAXI OPERATORS WELFARE FUND BILL

(No. III of 2021)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill (No. III of 2021)

Question again proposed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Diolle!

(7.03 p.m.)

Mrs T. Diolle (Fourth Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): M. le président, le ton et la teneur des discours qui ont précédé mon intervention sur ce projet de loi démontrent qu'il existe un consensus. Un consensus sur la nécessité de régler la situation de précarité des opérateurs de taxi. Opérateur est un terme approprié pour définir ce groupe de personnes.

En effet ce projet de loi définit les opérateurs comme étant ceux qui possèdent une patente de taxi et qui opèrent eux même leur véhicule ou ceux qui opèrent un taxi à temps plein et qui ne sont pas propriétaire. Une définition nécessaire puisqu'elle témoigne non

seulement de l'effort de concertation qui est derrière ce projet de loi mais aussi de la complexité de ce métier et de ce secteur. La complexité qui vient de la précarité à laquelle sont confrontés les chauffeurs de taxi. De nombreux intervenants qui ont pris la parole avant moi, ont énuméré ces nombreux problèmes auxquels ce groupe de travailleurs doit faire face au quotidien. Heureusement que le gouvernement actuel contribue à atténuer les difficultés rencontrées par ces opérateurs.

Ce projet de loi est non seulement un grand pas en avant mais il met en place une institution qui vise à assurer le bien-être de ces opérateurs mais il permet également au secteur de s'organiser autour d'un objectif commun, celui de la solidarité et du bien-être de chaque membre du corps des opérateurs de taxi. Les activités qui seront organisées régulièrement permettront à ces familles d'échanger mais aussi d'évoluer en synergie. Une synergie M. le président, qui nous l'espérons sera un catalyseur pour ce corps de métier pour qu'il évolue et innove dans leur métier mais aussi dans ce secteur qui est un maillon important du secteur du transport.

La crise sanitaire à laquelle nous sommes confrontés touche la plupart des secteurs de service. Les opérateurs de taxi sont directement touchés et doivent relever le défi de survivre dans un contexte économique difficile.

Deux situations qui illustrent l'impact direct de la crise sanitaire M. le président et de ce qui en découle, la première est la fermeture des frontières et la diminution drastique de touristes visitant notre pays. Cette première situation qui est un mal nécessaire pour contrôler le COVID-19 et pour la santé de notre population affecte directement 2300 opérateurs qui évoluent dans le secteur du tourisme.

La deuxième situation qui me vient à l'esprit est l'impact de la récession économique sur ce secteur de services. Nous constatons une baisse de l'utilisation de ce mode de transport. J'ai pris la liberté de brosser ce tableau afin de démontrer la pertinence de ce projet de loi et de cette approche. Ce projet de loi arrive à un moment où la solidarité et la résilience de notre état providence est mise à l'épreuve. Ce gouvernement a pris un engagement dès le départ, celui d'être au côté des plus vulnérables à tout moment et celui de préserver cet état providence. Cet engagement a été testé à de nombreuses reprises depuis le début de la pandémie. C'est avec fierté que j'affirme que cet engagement a été respecté.

Dès le premier budget, le gouvernement a investi dans sa population. En tant que gouvernement responsable, tout est fait pour assurer la pérennité des piliers de la réussite

mauricienne qui sont la solidarité entre les habitants et la résilience de notre état providence. Lorsque les plus vulnérables sont au plus bas, ce gouvernement et ses membres du Parlement sont directement impliqués et fournissent les outils pour permettre à la population de se remettre sur pied.

Le *Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill* en est l'exemple. Ce fond sera très réceptif aux besoins des opérateurs de taxi puisqu'ils seront non seulement représentés au nombre de 4 au conseil d'administration mais aussi les membres de cette auguste Assemblée auront la possibilité de porter la voix des opérateurs de taxi qui ne sentent pas représentés au conseil d'administration puisque la clause 21 de ce projet de loi prévoit que le rapport annuel de cette institution sera déposé à l'Assemblée nationale. Cela permettra aux membres du Parlement d'examiner minutieusement les activités organisées avec ce fonds et ainsi que la gestion de ce fonds. Cette disposition est d'autant plus pertinente étant donné que la clause 14 permet au gestionnaire de ce fond en consultation avec les cadres du ministère des Finances d'investir les surplus de ce fonds afin de faire fructifier et de pérenniser ce capital.

Ce gouvernement est en train de créer un allié puissant pour les opérateurs de taxi. En conclusion, M. le président, je n'ai pas voulu énumérer toutes les mesures que ce gouvernement et que notre Premier ministre et son équipe a prises en faveur des plus vulnérables depuis le discours du Trône en 2020 mais le palmarès en dit long sur l'état d'esprit de ce gouvernement. Nous assumons nos responsabilités et la population peut toujours compter sur nous pour faire ce qu'il faut pour soutenir ceux qui veulent avancer. C'est pour cela que je soutiens ce projet de loi.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister!

(7.09 p.m.)

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, please allow me to thank all Members who have intervened on this piece of legislation for their meaningful suggestion. As I already mentioned we cannot emphasise on the crucial role laid by taxi operators in ensuring the mobility of our citizens. It is, therefore, high time that we acknowledge their contribution and see to it that their social and economic welfare are taken care of.

I am pleased to note that there is a broad consensus from both sides of the House as regards the setting up of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund. I am also appreciative of the

support extended by my colleagues with regard to the proposal of setting up such a Fund and for showing concern to the well-being of taxi operators.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now delve on some comments made by the hon. Members. With regard to the appointment of persons to form part of the Board of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund, I need to highlight that Clause 5(2)(f) already makes provision for consultations to be held with Taxi Unions or Taxi Associations prior to the designation of their representatives to serve on the Board of the Fund. Likewise as it is the usual practice in the Public Service, the designation of representatives of Ministries is devolved on the Permanent Secretaries of the respective Ministries. These would thus guarantee the independence of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I stated earlier during my speech, powers accruing to the Minister are general in nature and do not allow the latter to interfere with the good running of the Fund. In fact, I am informed that similar provisions are enforced in other welfare fund enactment such as the Fishermen Welfare Fund Act and the Bus Industry Employee Welfare Fund to name but a few.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened to the comments made by hon. Members of the Opposition. With regard to comment made by hon. Richard Duval, hon. Woochit and hon. Dr. Gungapersad on Clause 16 of the Bill which reads as you remember –

“Protection from Liability

No liability, civil or criminal, shall attach to the Fund, the Board, a member or an officer in respect of any act done or omitted to be done in good faith in the discharge of its or his functions under this Act.”

With regard to this Bill and the comments made by the hon. Members of the Opposition, in respect of acts or omissions made in good faith by the Fund, its officers or members, I need to point out that this provision should not be construed as an exculpation for any gross negligence or intentional act made by any person.

I understand that these three hon. Members are new to the House. In fact, the purpose of this Clause is to avoid unnecessary, frivolous and vexatious litigation against employees or members of the Fund. However, this does not preclude a litigant from suing an employee or member. May I, accordingly, also refer these hon. Members to Clause 10 (3) where provision is made for dismissal or for disciplinary matters against staff of the Fund. There is, thus, nothing in this provision which is sinister or which is obscure.

In fact, these hon. Members may wish to note that such Clause already exists in the legal framework of other welfare funds such as the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund Act or even the Manufacturing Sector Employees Welfare Fund Act and these Acts were, in fact, passed when the Labour Party was at the helm of the country. So, as I said, there is nothing sinister in this Clause 16 on which the three hon. Members from the Opposition made adverse comments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clauses of this Bill, therefore, intend to provide an enabling legislative framework for the operation of the Fund. Moreover, my Ministry will see to it that the Fund operates in strict compliance with the prevailing legislation. With a view to ensuring adherence to best practices including recording of accounting transactions, arrangements will be made for checks and audits to be carried out by officers of the Internal Control Cadre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the Hotel-based and Airport-based taxis, contrarily to what has been stated by hon. Bodha in his speech on 11 May 2021 and I understand that hon. Bodha also made a Press conference in which he made certain comments on 22 May 2021. Mr Speaker, Sir, there are currently 1,143 Hotel-based and Airport-based taxi operators, licensed by the NLTA instead of 2000 or 3000 as mentioned by hon. Bodha in his Press conference.

Moreover, what is more interesting, Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the comments made by hon. Bodha, I am informed that out of these 1,143 taxi operators, only 10 out of them are registered with the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund and hon. Bodha has been Minister of Transport for five years. He managed to convince only 10 taxi operators out of 1,143 to be members of the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund. And, I am further informed that these taxi operators ceased to contribute to the above Fund since June 2019, that is, almost two years ago. In fact, the total amount contributed by these operators to the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund amounted to Rs10,880 *seulement*, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, this is why I am proposing to move for an amendment at Committee Stage in order to repeal Sections 2 and 16 (1) (b) of the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund Act. With this amendment, these taxi operators will not be required to contribute to the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund and they will instead contribute only to the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund with all the other taxi operators of this country.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, as you remember, our objective is to set up such a Fund which is inclusive and open to all taxi operators irrespective of where they are based at.

Moreover, it is not in our intention to discriminate between the different categories of taxi licensees. It is unfortunate that hon. Bodha chose to make such comments at his Press conference, Mr Speaker, Sir. We all know that he has been Minister for 5 long years and this Fund was, in fact, announced in last budget. And as I said, it was only when I assumed office that we started to discuss, to consult the Taxi Associations in order to finally set up this Taxi Operators Fund which will be voted today by this House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Bodha also talked about the sustainability of the Fund but he will surely recall that the Bus Industry Employees Welfare Fund (BIEWF), whose rates of contribution are lower and who has fewer members than the present Taxi Operators Welfare Fund, is financially sound. Similarly, with clear eligibility criteria and control mechanisms in place, there is no reason to be apprehensive of the financial sustainability of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund. In fact, according to financial projections carried out by my Ministry, the Fund is expected to generate a surplus.

We just have to make a small calculation, Mr Speaker, Sir. 7000 taxis, Rs300 per month multiply by 12 months per year and, as I reminded the House, the Minister of Finance, gracefully donated Rs800,000 in last year's budget to this Fund and year by year, the amount of money in this Fund will increase and it will be up to the Board to manage, together with the other members of the Board, or the other public servants who will be in this Board to manage this Fund so that the taxi operators can benefit from all the schemes which will be proposed by the Fund.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the other hand, I am made to understand that provision has been made for taxi stands within the Urban Terminals. This also was raised. However, it seems, again, because hon. Bodha talked about that, I looked into the matter and it seems that the efforts of hon. Bodha, as Minister responsible for Transport in terms of provision of specific amenities to taxi operators and bus drivers within the Urban Terminal in Port Louis, did not pay off because, in fact, from information received, there has been no provision of specific amenities to taxi operators. This will have to be looked into, Mr Speaker, Sir.

With regard to comments made by the same Member in respect of the livelihood of taxi operators, you would remember that hon. Bodha talked about: 'we should not only talk about welfare but we should talk also of livelihood of taxi operators based at hotels'. But, we, on this side of the House, have been very sensitive to the plight of these taxi operators. Usually they are allowed to operate from their localities whenever the hotel they are based at

is undergoing renovations. I am informed that the same policy has been applied during the COVID-19 situation and we enable taxi operators to operate from the locality they reside when the hotels at which they were working, were closed and are still closed.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am just enumerating the different measures as a demonstration of the concern that we have for the taxi operators. In line with our Programme of 2020-2024, financial support up to the tune of Rs100,000 was extended to holders of taxi licences for them to acquire or renew their vehicle. This measure indeed incentivised taxi operators to purchase better and more comfortable cars. I am informed that for the period 18 February 2020 to 04 May 2021, 714 licensees have availed of this one-off facility.

Moreover, following the Wakashio oil spill last year, arrangements were made to include taxi and contract car operators plying within regions impacted by the oil spill under the Wakashio Solidarity Grant Scheme. I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that payments totalling Rs19.8 m. has been made to 350 taxi operators beneficiaries.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, arrangements were made in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic for taxi operators to benefit from the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme. I am made to understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, that some Rs129 m. has been disbursed to that effect. Taxi operators based at hotels and at the airport have also been receiving an allowance under the said Scheme to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 on their activities.

In the same vein, Mr Speaker, Sir, as hon. Bholah mentioned it in his speech, loan facilities of up to Rs100,000 were extended by the Development Bank of Mauritius (DBM) to hotel-based taxis with a very low interest rate of 2% as well as a one-year moratorium. I am made to understand that since July 2020, around 400 operators availed of this facility for an amount totalling to Rs35 m. Similarly, I am informed that in 2020, the DBM sanctioned loans and financial assistance of some Rs52 m. in favour of taxi operators. These constitute concrete actions, Mr Speaker, Sir, taken by this Government to alleviate the financial hardships of taxi operators.

Mr Speaker, Sir, several other measures were taken by my Ministry to soften the impacts of the COVID-19 on the public transport sector and the House may rest assured that efforts will be pursued accordingly. As an example, in view of the difficult situation in the tourism industry, my Ministry decided that the replacement period for taxis based at hotels and airport be increased from 10 to 16 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have also taken note of suggestions for the development of payment platforms to ease settlements of taxi fares as well as the need for web-based applications. The Board of the Fund would, accordingly, assess such proposals including the creation of a website. However, in line with the communiqué issued by the National Land Transport Authority (NLTA) on 17 March 2021, there is need for taxi licensees to serve the community from a specific base of operation and to operate in accordance with the conditions of the licence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Board of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund will be responsible for devising schemes and conceiving projects while having regard to the long-term sustainability of the Fund. There were many suggestions that were made by hon. Members on both sides of the House. So, it will be up to the Board of this Welfare Fund to devise the necessary schemes. With regard to suggestions made by hon. Members from both sides of the House on facilities to be provided by the Fund, the Board of the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund will be requested, upon its constitution, to assess these proposals including those relating to the emotional well-being of taxi operators.

I need to highlight that the Fund will have to consider the specificities of the taxi industry as well as the particular needs of taxi operators so that facilities provided by the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund meet the requirements of these operators and are responsive to their needs. These facilities could be in the form of assistance to enhance security on-board their vehicles in terms of GPS or CCTV cameras or extending financial support for maintenance of their vehicles.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are also mindful of the risks encountered by taxi operators in the course of their daily activities. The Board of the Fund would consider, in collaboration with insurance companies, arranging for a life insurance scheme so that taxi operators and their families are adequately covered or compensated in the event they meet with an unfortunate event. With regard to Pensions Schemes, as the operators are already acquainted with the insurance companies, they may consider to liaise directly with them for the provision of such facilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it gives me immense pleasure to note that there is no quarrel on the proposal to set up such a Fund. In fact, I could sense an enthusiasm from Members who intervened last week and today. I also need to laud the consensual, polite and courteous tone of Members who participated in these debates. There is no denial that the establishment of

Welfare Funds has been pivotal in ensuring the socio-economic welfare of thousands of employees and of their families. In fact, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of such Funds has become more relevant in order to devise facilities to support and assist persons forming part of these Funds.

History will again bear testimony, Mr Speaker, Sir, that it is this Government that committed itself to promote the welfare of transport operators as it did in 2002, under the leadership of Sir Anerood Jugnauth, then Prime Minister, when setting up the Bus Industry Employees Welfare Fund.

M. le président, aujourd'hui, nous faisons une autre fleur au taximen, employés du transport et je peux assurer à la Chambre que nous nous n'arrêterons pas en si bon chemin. L'avenir nous le démontrera. Pour mieux faire, le temps n'est point une barrière.

I commend this Bill to the House, Mr Speaker, Sir. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

THE TAXI OPERATORS WELFARE FUND BILL

(NO. III OF 2021)

Clauses 1 to 25 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 26 (Consequential amendments).

Motion made and question proposed: "that the clause stand part of the Bill".

Mr Ganoo: I move for the following amendments in clause 26 -

"In clause 26, by adding the following new subclause –

- (4) The Tourism Employees Welfare Fund Act is amended –
 - (a) in section 2, in the definition of "tourism enterprise", in paragraph (b), by repealing subparagraph (iii), the words "; and" in subparagraph (ii) being deleted and replaced by a full stop and the word "and" being added at the end of subparagraph (i);

(b) in section 16, by repealing subsection (1B) and replacing it by the following subsection –

(1B) Any hotel-based or airport based taxi operator shall make a monthly contribution to the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund in accordance with the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Act 2021.”

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 26, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 27 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Taxi Operators Welfare Fund Bill (No. III of 2021) was read a third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 11 June 2021 at 5.00 p.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned. I will ask the Deputy Speaker to handle the Adjournment Matters.

At this stage, Mr Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated!

Hon. Juman!

MATTERS RAISED

(7.32 p.m.)

**CITÉ MARTIAL MARKET FAIR - MARKET GARDENERS - SELF-EMPLOYED
ASSISTANCE SCHEME**

Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête est adressée au ministre des Finances. Nous venons d'apprendre que la municipalité de Port-Louis a décidé de fermer la foire Ibrahim Abdoolah à Cité Martial qui compte plus de 500 maraichers et aussi, il y a la région de Vallée-Pitot, décrétée zone rouge, où la plupart des habitants sont des *self-employed*. De ce fait, il serait souhaitable que le gouvernement leur accorde une allocation sous le *Self-employed Assistance Scheme* exceptionnellement, afin qu'ils puissent faire vivre leurs familles.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): M. le président, nous sommes en train de travailler là-dessus parce que tous ceux qui ne peuvent pas ouvrir leurs commerces ou aller travailler parce qu'ils sont confinés dans les zone rouge. Nous sommes en train de travailler pour procéder au paiement des allocations, que ce soit le *Wage Assistance Scheme* et le *Self-employed Assistance Scheme*.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms Bérenger!

(7.33 p.m.)

FLOREAL - RESIDENCE L'OISEAU- HIGH TENSION CABLE

Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci. Ma requête s'adresse au ministre des Collectivités locales. Les habitants de Résidence L'Oiseau à Floréal m'ont informé de la présence d'un câble à haute tension dans un des coins du terrain de football de l'endroit. Celui-ci se trouve en plein air, donc en dehors du sol et peut provoquer des graves accidents. Je lui serais reconnaissante de bien vouloir faire le nécessaire car les habitants ont interpellé à plusieurs reprises le maire, mais la situation reste inchangée.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we will look into this.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

(7.34 p.m.)

CHAMOUNY - RAFIA RIVER - PROJECT

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management in regard to the Riviere Rafia at Chamouny. We have been informed that consultant survey and reports are ready. So, I will humbly ask the Minister if this project can be treated as urgent, as we know what were the consequences after the heavy rainfall a few days earlier. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we appreciate the problem. We know what happened about three weeks ago. So, we will look into the problem.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

(7.35 p.m.)

SHELTERS - CHILDREN PLACEMENT - ABUSE OF POWER

Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Je vous remercie M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au Premier ministre, mais je regrette qu'il ne soit pas présent donc, je m'adresse au *Deputy Prime Minister*. Je me permets de prendre le temps de la Chambre pour porter à votre attention la situation très alarmante et grave, concernant les abus de pouvoir envers nos enfants vulnérables, mineurs et en détresse, placés dans les abris. Deux exemples récents où un petit garçon de 4 ans a été arraché de sa famille...

The Deputy Speaker: Hold on! Make your request, I will allow you. More than that, I will move on. Your request, specifically!

(Interruptions)

Ms Anquetil: Oui.

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Please!

Ms Anquetil: Alors, M. le *Deputy Prime Minister*, au vue des récents articles de presse et vidéos choquantes circulant sur les réseaux sociaux, concernant le cas des enfants

vulnérables mineurs et en détresse, je vous interpelle pour demander au Premier ministre, s'il vous plait, qu'une enquête policière soit menée sur les abus de pouvoir lors des placements des enfants vulnérables dans les *shelters*.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Deputy Prime Minister!

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): M. le président, je serais heureux de communiquer les préoccupations de madame la députée au Premier ministre mais je la prierai de fournir de plus amples renseignements parce que là, ce qu'elle nous dit est d'un caractère très général pour que le Premier ministre puisse agir, il faudrait qu'elle puisse nous communiquer des renseignements plus précis. Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

(7.37 p.m.)

VICTORIA HOSPITAL - PARKING SPACE

Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr. Jagutpal. It concerns problems being faced by patients going to Victoria Hospital in Candos, with regards to the parking space. Actually, the problem is that many of these parking slots are being taken by people from outside as well as the employees in the hospital. So, patients are not being able to have parking space and easily get to be treated. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister, please!

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Yes, I agree that the parking space is a real *casse-tête*, especially during visiting hours and during *heure de pointe* but yet, the Ministry is trying to facilitate parking. We have reserved parking for the public and at the same time trying to delocalise some specific services, already, we have engaged in delocalising the radiotherapy services and the nursing school. This is the short-term solution to provide parking and but for a long-term solution, we have to get a new structure, a new building for the Victoria Hospital so that we can accommodate more parking.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Uteem!

(7.38 p.m.)

RUISSEAU DU POUCE & PLACE IMMIGRATION - MARKETS - CLOSURE

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): M. le président de séance, le problème que je voudrais soulever concerne le vice-Premier ministre, ministre des Collectivités locales. M. le président, depuis le début du deuxième confinement en mars dernier, les marchands opérant dans la foire Ruisseau du Pouce et à la Place Immigration n'ont pas pu travailler et ce malgré que leurs collègues dans le marché central et dans d'autres foires, Abercrombie, par exemple, ont pu travailler depuis le début de ce mois. Donc, je vous fais un appel pour que vous puissiez parler à la municipalité de Port-Louis pour que des marchés qui sont clos notamment à Ruisseau du Pouce et l'Immigration s'ouvrent de nouveau et que ces personnes puissent à nouveau travailler et pour le mois de mai, si le ministre des Finances peut leur accorder une indemnisation parce qu'ils n'ont pas pu travailler par ce décri gouvernemental.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Dr. Husnoo!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at present, it is difficult to open all the fairs, it is a bit difficult now but, as soon as the situation improves, I am sure that the COVID-19 Committee under the chairmanship of the

Prime Minister will consider these suggestions but we have to wait for the situation to improve.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Lobine!

(7.39 p.m.)

FOOTBALL GROUNDS - MAINTENANCE

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the hon. Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management. It concerns the regular maintenance and cutting of grasses of all football grounds by the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix within Constituency No. 15 because after the confinement, inhabitants are being allowed to go for their daily morning and evening walks, so that same is done without any hindrance because

most of those football grounds are still not being maintained properly. This is causing hindrance to the inhabitants.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will talk to the Mayor of Curepipe to solve it out.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea!

(7.40 p.m.)

INTERNET – SLOW CONNECTION

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The issue I am raising tonight is addressed to the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for quite some time now, many internet users around the island have been complaining about the poor and slow internet connections and in a time of COVID-19, where work and study at home is very common, if not crucial, good internet connection is very important. So, I am making an appeal to the hon. Minister if he can look into the matter urgently. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will take the matter with the operators and revert back.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

(7.40 p.m.)

DOMAINE LE HOCHET - GRASS - TRIMMING

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Obeegadoo. The inhabitants of Morcellement Raffray, Le Hochet would appreciate if the hon. Deputy Prime Minister could use his good Office to request the MHC to proceed for a trimming of grass, both in the green space and open space along the *Domaine Le Hochet*. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): I am not sure whether the hon. Member is referring to the NHDC or the MHC. If it is the MHC, then I think my colleague Minister of Finance might answer.

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): Est-ce que l'honorable membre peut reposer la question, je n'ai pas bien ...

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Okay, this is a request on behalf of the inhabitants of *Morcellement Raffray*. The MHC over there, it is called the *Domaine Le Hochet* and they would request that if we could proceed for trim of grass in both the green space and open space as well. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je vais faire le nécessaire.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

(7.42 p.m.)

FORBACH ROUNDABOUT- TROIS BRAS JUNCTION – ROAD LIGHTINGS

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand Baie & Poudre D'Or): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My issue is addressed to the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management. I wish to draw the attention of the hon. Vice-Prime Minister about the absence of lightings along the main road from the Forbach Roundabout to the Trois Bras Junction.

This causes a serious risk for road accidents and inconveniences to road users. I also want to add that every year, the Goodlands Maha Shivaratri Organising Committee has been systematically requesting for these lightings for the security of pilgrims who use this road on the way back from Ganga Talao. I am making an appeal to you to do the needful so that this region is soon equipped with the necessary road lighting facilities for the security of one and all. I thank you for doing the needful.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will talk to the Chief Executive.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Quirin, come on!

(7.43 p.m.)

PLAZA, ROSE HILL - VACCINATION - ORGANISATION

Mr. F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête ce soir s'adresse au ministre de la Santé et concerne les personnes qui se sont déplacées hier au Plaza à Rose Hill pour se faire injecter leur deuxième dose d'AstraZeneca.

Il y avait une foule, M. le président, de plus de 1,000 personnes, incluant des personnes âgées, des personnes avec handicap, qui ont dû faire la queue pendant plus de cinq heures et pour certains, ils ont dû rester sous un soleil de plomb. Donc, M. le président, beaucoup parmi eux n'avaient rien sur l'estomac et la distanciation physique était quasi inexistante. Merci à l'honorable ministre de la Santé de remédier à cela en donnant priorité aux personnes âgées et avec handicap et de s'assurer qu'il y ait une meilleure organisation.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, yes, so far information that I have, that yesterday we had more than 1,000 people coming for the second dose. But, at the same time, they were called through alphabetical orders, through the beSafeMauritius, but, unfortunately, senior citizens, many have not respected that alphabetical order and they have come as early as six o'clock in the morning in the vaccination centre. Now, it was a time when we cannot allow these people to keep on waiting, even if they have not come on alphabetical order. We have to do their vaccination, and that created the whole difficulty of getting people have their vaccination on time. But now we believe that we have been trying to call people at staggered hours because of sanitary measures so that you will not have so many people at one time coming and that created the confusion of having people getting vaccinated on the time that have been allotted to them.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Dhunoo!

(7.45 p.m.)

CUREPIPE – SQUARE BRUCE FAIR - RENT

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête ce soir s'adresse au vice-Premier ministre, le Dr. Anwar Husnoo. Cela concerne les marchands qui travaillent à la foire de Square Bruce à Curepipe.

Avec la pandémie du COVID-19, ils ne travaillent pas ces jours mais ils doivent payer l'emplacement à R 2,800 par mois, R 2,000 pour la location et R 800 pour la tente érigée à côté de la gare Jan Palach Sud. Je demanderai au vice-Premier ministre, le Dr. Husnoo, s'il peut voir avec la municipalité de Curepipe s'ils peuvent considérer –

- (i) la réouverture de la foire avec toutes les gestes barrières, et
- (ii) s'ils peuvent revoir à la baisse l'allocation, tenant en compte la situation économique difficile que ces marchands sont en train de faire face.

Merci, M. le président.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as opening the fair, I have just mentioned earlier, it is going to be a bit difficult now. We will have to wait for the COVID Committee to decide on that. That is number one.

As far as the rent is concerned, maybe I will discuss with the Municipal Council of Curepipe to look into it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Ramful.

(7.46 p.m.)

MAHEBOURG NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM – ROOF & EXHIBITS - REHABILITATION

Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have an issue which concerns the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage. It is in regard to the Mahebourg National History Museum. Recently, as a result of the heavy rainfall in April, I have been informed that the roof has been severely damaged and the exhibits as well have been damaged. Can I make a request to the hon. Minister, given the upcoming budget, if he can make a request to the Minister of Finance so that funds may be available in order to rehabilitate the roof of that building?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage (Mr A. Teeluck): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I thank the hon. Member for giving me advance notice on this issue. There was a preliminary study that was conducted by the Ministry of National Infrastructure because there is a serious problem of roofing which is quite damaged. The Ministry of National Infrastructure has recommended that an in-depth survey be conducted so that we know exactly how to proceed with the renovation and reparation. This is being entertained right now and, in the meantime, remedial measures have been taken by the Board of the Mauritius Museum Council and we hope that very soon, once the in-depth study is completed, that we will be able to proceed with the renovation work. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

(7.48 p.m.)

MORCELLEMENT RAFFRAY, PAILLES - WATER DISTRIBUTION

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse à l'honorable ministre de l'Énergie et les utilités publiques et concerne la distribution irrégulière d'eau à Morcellement Raffray, Pailles depuis la semaine dernière, plus particulièrement à la rue Perdrix 3, près du terrain de football. Ce problème cause énormément de problèmes aux habitants. Je fais donc un appel au ministre à faire diligence à ce problème. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Yes, thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I have taken note of this prevailing situation. I understand it has been going on for a week. I would request the hon. Member next time as soon as there is such problem, to give me a phone call and I will try to find a solution. Okay, I have taken note and tomorrow I will refer the situation to the Central Water Authority.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Le ministre est disponible. Hon. Mrs Joanne Tour! Thank you very much.

(7.49 p.m.)

**LONG MOUNTAIN - MOHABEER FOOGOOA GOVERNMENT SCHOOL -
ELECTRICAL WORKS**

Mrs J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my query is addressed to the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology. Mohabeer Foogooa Government School in Long Mountain has requested for electrical works for the relocation of their ICT room to be carried out. Can I ask the hon. Minister to see with the Electrical Services Department that the needful is done so that the students can use the facilities of the new ICT room when they resume school?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science & Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me first of all thank the hon. Member for having given me notice of this issue. I am glad to inform her that the contract for the ICT room has been awarded already and it is expected that the works will be completed by mid-July 2021.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

(7.50 p.m.)

VALLÉE PITOT - REFUSE COLLECTION

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request is addressed to the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management. It is regarding following the implementation of the Red Zone in Vallée Pitot, whether he can see with the Municipality of Port Louis that refuse collection can be conducted on a regular basis, then make arrangements for empty garbage trucks to be placed at various locations since this morning, the refuse collectors have refused to go within the area and caused certain panic among the population there. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we discussed about this problem this morning. What I can tell you is that we have made arrangement for the trucks to go there but the scavengers, people who stay in the Red Zone, would do the job, I mean, collect the

garbage in the morning, put it in the truck and the truck will take it away. So, we have discussed it already this morning with the Municipal Council of Port Louis.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(7.51 p.m.)

VALLÉE PITOT - PCR TEST

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Yes, thank you. I would like to address the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness tonight regarding again Vallée Pitot being a Red Zone as from yesterday, which I understand is the case because PCR tests conducted by the Ministry of Health and Wellness, people have not been forthcoming for the test and the situation was not clear and Red Zone was imposed as from yesterday from what I gather from the hon. Minister's Press conference. My request to him, because this is causing a lot of hardship, I think it has been said that Vallée Pitot is a region where people are self-employed and have small businesses and it depends on their...

The Deputy Speaker: Go to your request, hon. Member!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes. So, my request to the hon. Minister tonight is, please conduct a PCR test as soon as possible. I understand there are no Government MPs in Constituency No. 2. I would like to help.

The Deputy Speaker: I got your request already.

Mr Osman Mahomed: I am finishing. I hope my colleague also will hear so that we can lift that, we can try to canvass people ...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mahomed!

Mr Osman Mahomed: ...to come for the test so that we can uplift the Red Zone status as soon as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Health and Wellness (Dr. K. Jagutpal): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is in fact, the Ministry will be conducting PCR tests for the public in that region because it is only through the test that we will come to know the status of propagation of the virus in that place and we will be grateful if whenever the contact tracing team will be in that region, that people are welcome to do their tests and then that will help the Ministry to the way forward to know what is the situation over there.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Wochit!

(7.52 p.m.)

NHDC, POINTE AUX PIMENTS – TRANSPORT PROBLEM

Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet): Thank you Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request concerns the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade for the welfare of the inhabitants of NHDC at Pointe aux Piments who are deprived from connectivity of bus services. In that connection, I humbly request the hon. Minister to look closely into this matter on a priority basis as several meetings with different stakeholders had been held on several occasions since two years but till date the bus transport problem has not been resolved. Your intervention will be highly appreciated by these inhabitants of NHDC of Pointe aux Piments.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I can assure him. I will look very closely into the matter.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. David!

(7.53 p.m.)

LA BUTTE - CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au vice-Premier ministre et ministre des Collectivités locales et elle concerne l'état des jardins d'enfants de Port Louis.

M. le président, le weekend dernier lors de ma visite à La Butte, non loin de Marie Reine de la Paix, les habitants ont tenu à me faire voir leur jardin d'enfants, je dois dire que j'ai été choqué par le spectacle de désolation, clôture démonter, éclairage inexistant, équipements ensevelis par la dense mauvaises herbes, jeux d'enfants endommager, ordures entasser.

Cet état de délabrement et de danger pour les enfants de La Butte est inacceptable et malheureusement il ne s'agit pas d'un cas isolé. Puis-je demander au ministre de faire effectuer par la municipalité de Port Louis une évaluation de l'ensemble des jardins d'enfants

de la capitale afin d'établir un plan d'action et par ordre de priorité des travaux de remise en état et de rénovation de ces espaces publics municipaux.

Merci pour les citoyens.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I mean we know about the problem. We have this, not just in La Butte, it's across, I must say, the whole city of Port Louis we have this problem, we have discussed about it and there is a program of work has already been established to look into this problem.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Nuckcheddy, you have more than 30 seconds today.

(7.54 p.m.)

CONSTITUENCY NO. 9 - OLD BRIDGES

Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My request tonight is addressed to the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage. It concerns the old bridges, not only in Constituency No. 9 but all around the island. What is happening is where we got the parapet walls, the top row that we call the coping and those on the sides that are commonly called *encoignure* are being removed. So, may I request the...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order over there! Listen!

Mr S. Nuckcheddy: May I request the hon. Minister to look at it and take the necessary measures to prevent this crime against our National Heritages. Thank you. Goodnight.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage (Mr A. Teeluck): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are well aware of the situation and I can reassure the hon. Member that we are following up on this closely. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I do not see any hand raise, we are done for today. Thank you very much.

At 7.56 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 11 June 2021 at 5.00 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AUTHORITY - CONSULTATION PAPER

(No. B/474) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the recent Consultation Paper of the Information and Communication Technologies Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to -

- (a) the reasons for the proposals contained therein, and
- (b) if discussions have been held with the social media platforms such as Facebook in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

POLICE OFFICERS – SUSPENSION – JAN 2010-25 MAY 2021

(No. B/476) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Police Officers, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof suspended from duty, since January 2010 to date, indicating the reasons for the suspension in each case.

(Withdrawn)

JOCKEY N.J. - DEATH - POLICE INQUIRY

(No. B/477) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the death of Jockey N. J. on 15 May 2021, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the inquiry initiated thereinto.

(Withdrawn)

PATIENTS - OVERSEAS TREATMENT – JANUARY 2015-25 MAY 2021

(No. B/500) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to overseas treatment, he will state the –

- (a) quantum of funds disbursed therefor, since 2015 to 2020, on a yearly basis and since January 2021 to date;
- (b) number of patients sent for treatment overseas per specialty, and
- (c) foreign medical centres to which the patients have been referred, indicating the specific treatments currently not available in Mauritius for which the services of these specialised centres are required.

Reply: In reply to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the amount disbursed by my Ministry for Overseas Treatment since 2015 to date is Rs387,806,428.88 –

- Rs59,941,203.88 was disbursed in 2015;
- Rs45,696,018 in 2016;
- Rs45,367,332 in 2017;
- Rs69,579,454.61 in 2018;
- Rs82,394,250.64 in 2019;
- Rs63,277,059.97 in 2020, and
- Rs22,551,109.14 has been disbursed from January 2021 to date.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that since January 2015, the number of patients sent for treatment overseas per specialty is as follows –

- 111 patients for Ophthalmology;
- 366 patients proceeded for Neurosurgery;
- 262 patients proceeded for Cardiology, and
- 730 for Cancer.

I wish to inform the House that currently patients under the Overseas Treatment Scheme are referred to institutions in India with which my Ministry has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) and whereby preferential tariffs are granted to patients. These include –

- (i) VIMHANS, New Delhi;
- (ii) Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, New Delhi;
- (iii) Manipal Hospital, Bangalore;
- (iv) Apollo Hospital, Chennai;
- (v) Sankara Nethralaya Eye Hospital, Chennai, and
- (vi) Artemis Hospitals, New Delhi.

However, my Ministry has also been referring cases to Apollo Hospital Mumbai, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, SMH Curie Cancer Centre and KKR ENT Hospital depending on complexity of cases, availability of treatment and patient's choice. Specific treatments, as I have indicated above, relating to complex cases in all medical specialties are referred for treatment abroad.

REGIONAL HOSPITALS - HIGH-RISK PREGNANT WOMEN - PROTOCOL

(No. B/501) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the labour ward of each regional hospital, he will state if there is a protocol for high-risk pregnant women attending thereto, indicating –

- (a) the frequency of antenatal ultrasound offered thereto and by whom;
- (b) the choices of pain relief in labour, and
- (c) if the presence of husbands or partners are now allowed thereat at time of delivery.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that a diagnosis of high-risk pregnancy is made right from the antenatal follow-up at the Area Health Centre level and subsequently the antenatal clinic of the Regional Hospital. High-risk pregnant women are seen by Specialist as

early as the first trimester. The plan of management of such patients is charted out by the treating obstetrician in the patient's folder. Usually, high-risk patients are admitted to the prenatal ward of the regional hospitals well before their expected date of delivery and are monitored on a daily basis by the treating Specialist along with paramedical staff.

When high-risk pregnant women attend the labour room, their folders are available and they are seen and examined by the midwife and the Medical and Health Officer on duty. The latter liaises with the Specialist Doctor for the plan of care.

Normally, Gynaecologists follow high-risk pregnant women and the treating Specialist decides on the frequency of antenatal ultrasound on the patients depending on the pregnancy and comorbidities. For any pregnant woman attending antenatal clinics, a minimum of three ultrasounds are done; one in the first trimester, one in the second trimester, and a final one in the third trimester.

Moreover, the frequency of antenatal ultrasound offered to high-risk patients varies from once weekly to once monthly depending on the severity of the condition and the gestational age. Ultrasound is routinely done by the treating Gynaecologist and complicated cases are referred to the Radiologist for echography.

Pain relief in labour ward is carried out by parenteral administration of drugs such as spasmolytic and opioids.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the presence of husbands or partners is currently not allowed at the time of delivery. The current setting in labour wards of the other hospital do not allow for the presence of the husband or partner. Nonetheless, with the existing infrastructure at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital, a pilot project allowing husbands or partners to accompany their wives on selected/planned caesarean section came into effect as from 12 October 2018. This ongoing practice has been halted following the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**GOVERNMENT-OWNED BUILDINGS & PROPERTIES - FIRE
CERTIFICATE**

(No. B/503) 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 Government-owned buildings and properties, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service, information as to –

- (a) if a survey has been carried out to assess the number thereof not holding fire certificates and, if so, table copy thereof, and
- (b) the procedure for the renewal of a fire certificate.

Reply: A Fire Certificate is granted under section 19 (3A) of the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Act and is valid for a period of one year or three years depending on the risk assessment of the premise.

With regard to the first part of the question, I am informed by the Chief Fire Officer that out of 1,082 Government owned premises surveyed, 277 have a valid Fire Certificate.

Concerning the remaining 805 premises whose certificates have expired, improvement notices have been served on all Ministries and Departments which are owners of these premises for non-compliance to fire safety measures. These non-compliances may be categorised into two groups, namely minor improvement which involves 401 premises and major improvements with regard to 404 premises.

Minor improvements relate to -

- non-submission of building architectural layout plan, which is a mandatory requirement for obtention of a Fire Certificate;
- lack of appropriate or adequate means of firefighting equipment such as fire extinguisher and fire hose reel;
- lack of Emergency Lighting System, and
- fire safety signs such as exit signs not affixed.

Major improvements, which require substantial funds for implementation, include -

- absence of fire alarm system, and
- lack of means of escape such as fire exit door and staircase.

These Ministries and Departments have been given a period of three months to attend to the minor improvements, whereas one year has been provided for the major improvements.

The information sought is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am further informed by the Chief Fire Officer that, in accordance with section 19 (5C) of the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Act, an owner shall, 60 days before the expiry of the validity of a Fire Certificate, apply for the renewal thereof. The application should be accompanied by -

- (i) a copy of the site plan;
- (ii) four copies of architectural layout plan of the building;
- (iii) maintenance certificates in respect of all firefighting equipment and the fire alarm system, and
- (iv) evidence that no alteration has been made to the premises.

MAURITIUS FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE – RESTRUCTURATION

(No. B/504) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if the restructuration thereof is being envisaged and, if so, indicate where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed by the Chief Fire Officer that, with a view to further enhancing service delivery, increasing operational capabilities and reducing response time of attending to emergencies, the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service has embarked on a digital transformation. In this context, various processes will be digitalized through the development or acquisition of the following specialised softwares -

- (i) Fire Safety and Fire Prevention Management System for the Online application of Fire Certificate through the National E-Licensing System;
- (ii) Fleet and Equipment Management System – to enhance monitoring and optimization of use of vehicles;
- (iii) Control Room and Mobilizing System for Incident Command System for better coordination of all types of emergencies, and
- (iv) Training and Development Management System.

This transformation has prompted the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service to revisit its processes and procedures, thus leading to a restructuring exercise as follows –

- (i) with the launching of e-licensing of Fire Certificates, it is expected that there will be a substantial increase in the number of applications. Hence, Fire Safety Division, which is currently based at the Head Office, will be staffed by additional firefighters of the rank of Station Officer and decentralized across all Fire Stations. This will also enable more preventive visits and inspections of premises for the enforcement of the fire safety norms and protocols, and
- (ii) in 2019, the Service has been vested with powers of prosecution for the enforcement of the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Act. As this is a specialised field, a new Unit, which will be known as the Prosecution Unit, will be set up for the prosecution of owners or occupiers which do not comply with the legislations relating to Fire Safety. In this context, 25 officers have undergone training on Prosecution Procedures by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. This Unit is expected to be operational in the month of September 2021.

LAND DRAINAGE MASTER PLAN- IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/506) 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 - INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES – DIGITALIZATION

(No. B/507) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the

Information and Communication Technologies sector, he will state the measures and initiatives being put in place to cope with future digitalization requirements of the country to benefit the citizens amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

(Withdrawn)

LAND DRAINAGE AUTHORITY - FLOOD PRONE AREAS

(No. B/508) 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 of the Authority to date, indicating the number thereof having been removed from the said list on the recommendation of the Authority.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS TOURISM PROMOTION AUTHORITY- LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL CLUB – COMMERCIAL AGREEMENT

(No. B/509) Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the commercial agreement of around Rs400 million signed with the Liverpool Football Club, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, information as to if a postponement of the implementation or cancellation thereof is being envisaged on account of force majeure attributable to the Covid-19 pandemic.

(Vide reply to PQ B/491)

PACK & BLISTER – DEFECTIVE VENTILATORS

(No. B/510) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the dispute between his Ministry and Pack and Blister regarding the purchase of 50 defective ventilators Acomed VG70 in 2020, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed that my Ministry is making arrangements to return the Aero Duo ventilators to Messrs Pack and Blister, the supplier of the equipment. The latter has agreed for the ventilators to be returned to it in Spain. Hence, my Ministry has retained the services of a Freight Forwarder to handle the shipping of the ventilators and other related matters.

I am further informed that, on 14 May 2021, Messrs Pack and Blister informed the Freight Forwarder to dispatch the ventilators to Messrs ALPRESS KALIPÇILIK DAN, manufacturer of the ventilators in Turkey instead of Spain. My Ministry is liaising with Messrs Pack and Blister to confirm the name and contact details of the consignee before despatching the ventilators.

OPTICIANS REGISTRATION BOARD – GRADUATES FROM INDIA IN OPTOMETRY

(No. B/511) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Opticians Registration Board, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to if graduates from India in optometry have applied for registration therewith since January 2020 to date and, if so, indicate the number of applications having been –

- (a) accepted, and
- (b) rejected, indicating the reasons therefor.

Reply: The Opticians Registration Act was passed in 1962 and subsequently, amended in 1985. It recognises three categories of opticians, namely the ophthalmic optician (optometrist), the dispensing optician and the optician-*lunetier*. There is established for the purposes of this Act an Opticians Registration Board which examines applications for registration in respect to the three categories of opticians.

I wish to inform the House that no application for registration with the Opticians Registration Board has been received from graduates in Optometry from India since January 2020 to date.

Nevertheless, I am informed that there are two pending applications at the level of the Opticians Registration Board from graduates in Clinical Optometry from India. The applications were received in October 2015 and August 2016 respectively.

Following examination of both applications, the Board noted that as per Section 6 (ii) of the Opticians Registration Act, an applicant is entitled for registration with the Board provided that he/she holds a qualification as an ophthalmic optician or dispensing optician or any comparable qualification acceptable to the Board and recognised in the country in which the qualification was obtained as entitling that person to practise as such in that country. However, in India, there is no central registration of Optometrist or Ophthalmic Optician. The authorities are in the process of enacting the Allied and Healthcare Professional Bill for regulation and standardisation of education and services in that area.

In view that the professional practice of optics has evolved considerably over the years and the Opticians Registration Act lacked the necessary legal structure to assess the competence of new applicants from Universities such as Belgian, Ukrainian, Filipino, Indian and Malaysian Universities, to regulate illegal sales of optical appliances by unregistered, unqualified and untrained persons, to enforce standards and discipline in the profession and to promote continuous education and training in the field, the Board drafted a new piece of legislation in replacement of the Opticians Registration Act.

The objective of the Optical Council Bill is to provide for the establishment of the Optical Council of Mauritius and for better regulation of the profession of opticians. The proposed Bill will, *inter alia*, regulate and control the profession of opticians, register opticians, temporarily register non-citizens, other than non-citizens who are residents of Mauritius, as foreign opticians or visiting opticians, exercise and maintain discipline in the profession of optometry and promote advancement in the field of optometry. It will, further, allow for the establishment of a code of practice for this profession.

DIALYSIS ADMINISTRATOR – QUALIFICATIONS & EXPERIENCE

(No. B/512) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Dialysis Administrator in his Ministry, he will state if the latter holds office on a permanent or contractual basis, indicating the –

- (a) qualifications and experience held, and
- (b) monthly pay packet drawn.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that the incumbent is the National Dialysis Coordinator who is currently employed on contract. The latter retired from the service on ground of age limit with effect from 25 September 2020. He was employed as National Dialysis Coordinator, on contract basis, for an initial period of six months with effect from 06 October 2020. His contract has been renewed for a further period of six months with effect

from 06 April 2021, as per the terms and conditions approved by the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms.

The qualifications held by the incumbent are as follows –

- (i) School Certificate and General Certificate in Education;
- (ii) General Certificate in Nursing;
- (iii) Certificate in Nephrology, which is a requirement for the post of National Dialysis Coordinator, and
- (iv) Certificate in ICU Care Management for post-operative care of Cardiac Surgery.

The incumbent has served as Nursing Officer in my Ministry from 1981 to 1984, after which he took up employment in Saudi Arabia. In 1985, the incumbent followed a training in ICU Care for post-operative care of Cardiac Surgery at King Fahd Teaching Hospital. From 1986 to 1990, he was in charge of the Intensive Care Unit at Rabigh General Hospital in Saudi Arabia. From 1990 to 1992, the incumbent received a training in Nephrology at the Jeddah Kidney Centre in Dialysis and Renal Transplant in Saudi Arabia. He also formed part of the Renal Transplant Program in Saudi Arabia Transplant Program from 1992 to 1995.

In 1995, he was appointed as Dialysis Administrator in the Trust Fund for Renal Dialysis under my Ministry and had the responsibility to set-up all Dialysis Units in our hospitals. In 2001, he was posted at the Headquarters of my Ministry and was appointed as Haemodialysis Supervisor with effect from 14 October 2004. The post of Haemodialysis Supervisor was restyled as National Dialysis Coordinator in the Errors, Omission and Anomalies Committee Report – Pay Research Bureau (PRB) Report 2013.

Given his long experience in dialysis, the services of the incumbent are being retained by my Ministry in the delivery of a course at the Mauritius Institute of Health, which aims to train Nursing Officers in Nephrology for recruitment as National Dialysis Coordinator.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that incumbent is presently drawing a monthly salary of Rs42,325 as approved by the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms and monthly travel grant of Rs7,250 in accordance with the recommendations of PRB Report 2016.

MINORS - ALLEGED VIOLENCE - 15.05.21

(No. B/513) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether she will state –

- (a) if she is aware of an incident which occurred at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Hospital on 15 May 2021 wherein officers of the Child Development Unit (CDU) allegedly used force when removing a child in distress from his family and
- (b) the established protocol for the removal of a child in distress from his/her family by the CDU.

Reply: On 15 May 2021, upon renewed alert of alleged violence on three minors B., an Emergency Protection Order (EPO) was solicited to enable the Child Protection Team to arrange for medical examination of the minors in order to ascertain and verify as to whether minors have sustained injuries (both external and internal), especially that it was alleged that violence had been perpetrated at the level of the Place of Safety.

On the same day, the District Magistrate On-Call was contacted for application of an EPO, which was granted. The On-Call Team went to the house of Mrs. B., which was found to be under lock and key. It was gathered from the neighbours that the mother, her partner and the children went out since early morning. To that effect, an entry was made at the Police Station *vide* DB 110/21 and the Police was requested to effect patrol and inform my Ministry whenever the family returned to its place of abode.

Later CDU officers were informed that the parents and children had returned. On the same day, the On-Call Team carried out a visit at the residence of minors B. with the assistance of Police Officers to ascertain the veracity of the allegation.

The parents showed much resistance and refused to hand over the minors to CDU officers and they contacted their lawyer, Ms S. After much effort, minors were conveyed to the Hospital for medical examination along with the parents.

Minors were medically examined but were not admitted as they were faring well. A request was made to the Medical Superintendent for a medical report, which was obtained later. While being at the Hospital, minors' parents became even more aggressive and threatened officers.

Minors were interviewed by the CDU officer and minors K. B. and I. B. stated that they got those marks on their neck while playing with other residents in Place of Safety. Minor K. B. stated that she got a mark on her chin when she fell down in the Place of Safety.

All the three minors and the parents were assessed by the Psychologist of my Ministry.

With the assistance of Police Officers, including Officers of the *Brigade Pour La Protection des Mineurs*, the On-Call Team conveyed the minors to a Place of Safety.

On 16 May 2021, the minors were seen by this Ministry's Psychologist at the Place of Safety and their statements were recorded in the presence of CDU officers, pending the medical report.

At no point in time force was used in the execution of the EPO. CDU officers acted in good faith and in accordance of the provisions of the Child Protection Act.

Upon receipt of the Medical Report which revealed that the scars were healed ones, the EPO has been lapsed and the minors have been discharged in the care of the mother.

As regards part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that there is well-established protocol for the removal of a child in distress from his/her family by the CDU.

Whenever there is a case reported which require the intervention of CDU, the following protocol is followed –

(a) first hand situation assessment -

- Interview of the child (alone), away from parents as far as possible.

It is important that appropriate interviewing techniques be used, namely –

- build a rapport with the child;
- establish eye contact (as far as possible), and
- then, try to obtain information on the alleged abuse.
- Gather information on reported chronic injuries, on occurrence or recurrence of sexual abuse, substance abuse etc – any information relevant to the child.
- Check for bruises and scars (old and new) (visible signs only).
- Look for signs and symptoms of different forms of child violence.
- Interview parents and responsible parties and gather the following information, (relevant to adults), amongst others – Family History/situation – separated/divorced parents or living in concubinage –

legal guardian – other guardian – financial situation – domestic violence – substance abuse – homelessness.

- Interview people from the neighbourhood –
 - (i) neighbours, and
 - (ii) relatives
- Decide whether to remove the child, and
 - (i) if possible place with next of kin,
 - (ii) or else refer to a place of safety under an Emergency Protection Order.

(b) placement at Shelter/or in to other Residential Care Institutions –

- 1) whenever a child is being removed, from his living environment, explain in simple terms to the child actions being taken, reassure the child and always keep the child informed of changes which are to occur in his life;
- 2) before placing any child at shelter, the officer ensures that the child has been medically examined;
- 3) if placement is being done without Court Order, officer ensures that a statement to that effect is recorded at the level of Police Station;
- 4) arrangement is made to provide shelter/institution with all required documents such as Court Order, Birth Certificate, Health Cards, etc., as soon as possible, and
- 5) application to Court for the issue of an Emergency Protection Order is made the next working day. Covering approval for the issue of such Court Orders is made within one week (7 days), and

(c) visits -

- 1) visits of biological parents is carried out at the level of sub-office and is fully supervised by officers; at no point in time the child is left alone in the company of visitors;
- 2) visits depend on a case to case basis to ensure safety and security of child;
- 3) when a child is under Court Order, the child is not allowed to go to his/her parents' place without authorisation from the Court, and

- 4) the parents/siblings are only allowed to have contact with the child inside an office and not outside the office to prevent the child from being taken away by visitors.

REGIONAL HOSPITALS - PSYCHIATRIC WARDS

(No. B/514) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the regional hospitals, he will state if psychiatric wards are operated thereat and, if so, give details thereof, including the number of beds, the staff attached thereto and the treatments available and, if not, why not.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that psychiatric services are presently available in all regional hospitals around the island. In each regional hospital, the Psychiatric Unit is manned by three psychiatrists and two psychologists to cater for psychiatric patients.

I wish to inform the House that decentralisation of psychiatric services from Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre to regional hospitals started as far back as in 1997.

In our regional hospitals, namely Victoria, Jawarharlal Nehru, Dr. A. G. Jeetoo and SSRN Hospitals, psychiatric patients with comorbidities are admitted to general wards and are referred to psychiatrists who consult them on a daily basis. Most of the patients with mental disorders are admitted in regional hospitals. Only cases with gross behavioural and psychological problems are transferred to Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre for further care.

As regards Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital, same is equipped with a fully functional 16 bedded psychiatric ward. Three psychiatrists, two psychologists and five Medical and Health Officers as well as Medical and Social workers are attached to the Psychiatric Unit thereat. The Psychiatric Unit caters for inpatient treatment for alcohol related problems, relapsed cases of depression, anxiety and schizophrenia, and outpatients follow-up.

CDU - MINORS - PROTOCOL

(No. B/515) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to minor children in situations of difficulty, she will give details of the protocol in place at the Child Development Unit to deal therewith, indicating the composition of the intervention team in relation thereto.

Reply: In regard to minor children in situations of difficulty, my Ministry has a well-established protocol in place to deal with intervention therewith.

The protocol is designed to cater in a coherent and consistent manner the need to standardize process and procedure in Child Protection cases.

The protocol set up provides for guidelines to conduct step-wise intervention in respect of -

- (i) handling of disclosure,
- (ii) conduct of assessment, and
- (iii) initiation of Child Protection Enquiry by the multi-disciplinary Child Protection Team in place at the level of the six Child Protection Services.

For all recorded cases where it is suspected, detected or reported that there are Child Protection Concerns, meaning children are living with parents who are totally inadequate to serve their children's need for support, growth and development, the Child Protection Team comprising the Family Welfare and Protection Officer (FWPO) as the Social Worker, the Psychologist and the Police Officer in civilian moves out of office both within and after office hours to attend to the Child Protection Enquiry, which is, in fact, a composite of a criminal and social enquiry.

This enquiry is carried out through a joint step-wise interview by both the Social Worker and the Police Officer, with the help and psycho-emotional support of the Psychologist. The Child Care worker is also part of the team and provides support as appropriate to the Social Worker during the intervention.

The Social Worker leads the team and initiate the enquiry in the most child friendly manner, ensuring that the child is fully at ease and comfortable.

The need for reassurance and rapport building and support during the interview session is catered for by the Psychologist who also ensures that both the Social Worker and the Police have age appropriate questions being put to the child and that the child understands the questions put to him/her. In situation where the child is disturbed, the Psychologist provides full support to the latter.

As regards the role of the Social Worker, he or she is the one to prepare and lead the joint step-wise interview to gather information regarding the overall welfare and safety of the child in a first instance; then, he/she proceeds with finding out on availability of basic emergency needs of the child, both in terms of appropriateness and adequacy of the case and case plan envisaged.

Whenever a crime of neglect or other abuse comes out of the enquiry, then Police proceeds with his/her recording of statement in the presence of the Social Worker for the criminal enquiry to be carried out.

The Child Protection enquiry is carried out to verify and ascertain existence of elements of hazards to safety/security of an alleged child victim and comprise the following -

- (i) mental status examination of parents;
- (ii) mental status examination of immediate carers;
- (iii) psychological assessment of minor, alleged victim as well as minor's siblings; and
- (iv) a thorough examination of the housing and immediate environment where minor is living.

The outcome of thorough investigation determines the course of action that follows regarding the "*prise en charge*" of the child's case by the Ministry.

LA RIVIÈRE RAFFIA, CHAMOUNY – FLOODING – REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. B/516) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the last flooding at La Rivière Raffia at Chamouny, he will state if a survey thereat has been conducted and, if so, indicate -

- (a) the main thrusts of the report, and
- (b) if urgent consideration will be given for remedial measures to be taken in the light thereof.

(Withdrawn)

AGALEGA - PROJECTS - ECOLOGICAL SURVEY

(No. B/518) 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) 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

- (b) who is carrying out environmental monitoring onsite, indicating if the environmental report will be made public.

Reply: As stated at the Sitting of 18 May 2021 by the hon. Prime Minister in reply to the Private Notice Question on Agalega - Infrastructural Development Projects, there are several projects that are currently being implemented for improving sea and air transportation facilities in Agalega, namely the construction of a new runway and a jetty for ship berthing together with the associated infrastructure. These projects are entirely financed by the Government of India. Besides these two main projects being implemented, Government is also in the process of implementing the following projects –

- (i) a Fish Landing Station;
- (ii) an Office Block;
- (iii) a Refugee Centre;
- (iv) an Open Gymnasium;
- (v) a Library;
- (vi) equipment for coconut harvesting, and
- (vii) construction of 50 housing units.

With respect to part (a) of the question, Contractor AFCONS Ltd is undertaking the implementation of the runway and jetty projects and is required to fully comply with the mitigative measures as provided in the EIA reports in respect to those projects to avoid any negative impacts on the surrounding environment. It is to be noted that the Contractor has set up a 350 Kilolitres per Day (KLD) Sewage Treatment Plant on site. The treated water is being passed through an ultra-filtration plant and then through a Reverse Osmosis plant before being discharged to the leaching area. The treated water from the treatment plant complies with the required standard.

Brine emanating from the desalination plant is being diluted before being discharged into the sea at a distance of 150 metres where there is no reef. Water samples are collected from the location of the discharge and sent to SGS Vacoas for laboratory testing. Solid waste is also being managed by the Contractor through collection, segregation and composting. In addition, all plastic wastes are sent for recycling in Mauritius. Empty bottles are returned to the Outer Islands Development Corporation shop at the island and sent to Polypet Recyclers Ltd for recycling.

As regards construction waste such as waste oil, construction debris, waste batteries, rubber and tires are also being managed either through reuse or recycling. The waste oil is being transported to Mauritius and sent to Ecofuel Ltd (Mauritius) for recycling on a regular basis. The identification of recycling agents in Mauritius for the waste batteries is underway while rubber and tires are being used as barge fenders.

The Contractor has also taken numerous measures for dust management and noise level monitoring through, *inter alia*, imposing speed limits, regular water spraying of roads and collection of cement dust in ready-mix plant chambers and installation of a special air quality monitoring equipment on site.

In terms of rehabilitation measures, the Contractor has, so far, undertaken tree plantation and 2,750 trees have been planted on the island. Moreover, an area has been identified for the plantation of a further 500 trees.

Concerning part (b) of the question, and as informed by the hon. Prime Minister in reply to the Private Notice Question on Agalega - Infrastructural Development Projects at the sitting of 18 May 2021, all the works are being supervised by RITES Ltd India and a qualified Environment Engineer is also posted at site by the Contractor. Furthermore, there are three technical people who are based in Mauritius; two of them are regularly in Agalega and one is on and off on site to monitor those projects.

Additionally, authorities present thereat, namely the National Coast Guard, the Mauritius Meteorological Services and the Outer Islands Development Corporation, amongst others, according to the Environment Protection Act, do assume their reporting responsibility. There has been no report of any damage to the ecosystem. Nevertheless, in the eventuality of any adverse effect caused due to the implementation of the projects, the Contractor will be required to take all appropriate corrective measures.

Furthermore, in line with section 13 of the Environment Protection Act 2002 (as amended), the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change along with enforcing agencies are required to carry out monitoring. Accordingly, the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change has carried out monitoring of

the shoreline against erosion and other environmental matters in 2003, 2015 and 2019. It was observed that there was an accentuation of beach erosion which could be attributed to the impacts of climate change and sea level rise, and various recommendations have been made to the Outer Islands Development Corporation. Further environmental monitoring will be carried out shortly by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change and other relevant Ministries in Agalega taking into consideration all sanitary requirements. All the monitoring reports carried out by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change shall be rendered public by publishing same on the Ministry's website in due course.

Besides, the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping has informed that an ecological survey was carried out at eight sites in Agalega in March 2021 in connection with fisheries resources.

COVID-19 VACCINATION CAMPAIGN

(No. B/522) 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.

Reply: In my reply to the Private Notice Question at our Sitting of 23 March 2021 and Parliamentary Question B/275 of 20 April 2021, I informed the House that in accordance with our National Deployment and Vaccination Plan, it was initially proposed to start vaccination with the 15,000 frontline healthcare workers, 5,000 frontline Police and Prison Officers and 25,000 other frontline workers.

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 was given to other sections of the population who were considered to be most at 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.

I am informed that as at 23 May 2021, 228,195 persons have been administered the first dose of vaccine and 133,115 persons have received their second dose.

SHELTERS/RESIDENTIAL CARE INSTITUTIONS – SAFETY & PROPER ADMINISTRATION

(No. B/523) 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 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) proper administration thereof.

Reply: As regards part (a) and (c) of the question, there are currently 21 Shelters/Residential Care Institutions working in collaboration with my Ministry for the protection and welfare of children victims of violence, abuse and neglect. Out of which, 17 are run by NGOs and the remaining 4 are Government owned shelters.

As from October 2019, The Child Protection (Place of Safety for the Welfare and Protection of Children) Regulations 2019 stipulates that “No person shall operate an institution for the welfare and protection of children unless the institution is designated as a place of safety”.

Under Additional Conditions Attached To License Section 7(f) and 7(g) of the Regulations, shelters are required to make provisions of security at the entrance of the place of safety for effective movement control and to provide for security, either in the form of security services by a security company duly licensed by the Commissioner of Police under the Private Security Service Act, or security alarms.

As at date, all shelters have in place either security alarms, CCTV cameras or security guard.

Furthermore, the provision security is a criterion under the application form under Schedule 1 of the Place of Safety Regulations. An additional provision of Security Clearance is sought from the Police Department as part of the documents to be submitted at the time of application of the shelter to be registered as Place of Safety.

These legal provisions are enforced by a team of Enforcement Officers who conduct regular inspection and follow-up visits every 15 days at each shelter, which entails the state of the building, including security hygiene, caregiver ratio, adherence to food policy and logistics as well as the overall management of the shelter. Any shortcomings observed are immediately communicated to the management of the shelter for remedial actions within a reasonable delay.

Additionally, surprise inspection visits are carried out by the Enforcement Team of my Ministry during early morning breakfast time and evening during dinner time to ensure that minors thereat are having sufficient food and in compliance with the food policy under the Regulations.

Out of 17 Shelters run by NGOs, 7 have successfully registered under Child Protection (Place of Safety for the Welfare and Protection of Children) Regulations 2019. The remaining are in the process of causing an application.

Furthermore, The Child Rehabilitation Section of the Child Development Unit ensures the monitoring of the overall well-being of the children placed thereat.

As regards part (b) of the question, appropriate measures are being taken by my Ministry to ensure that shelters do not accommodate more children than they should. Placements of minors under Court Orders are done taking into consideration the accommodation capacity of the shelter. Moreover, my Ministry has made operational a Relay Shelter at Cap Malhereux since 09 December 2020, which is managed by my Ministry.

A second Relay Shelter, as announced in the 2020-2021 Budget Speech at paragraph 325, at Notre Dame, is in the pipeline and it is estimated that same may be made operational by end of June 2021.

I also wish to inform the House that since March 2021, 3 new shelters have been opened, namely in Vacoas, Rose Hill and Pointe aux Sables, following an increase in cases of violence, abuse and neglect of children reported to my Ministry. The opening of these shelters has also helped in attaining my Ministry's objective of operating shelters with a reasonable number of children.

Furthermore, measures taken to rehabilitate minors from shelters to their families through the Back to Home Programme have yielded positive results. Since January 2020 till date, 375 minors have been reintegrated within their biological family settings.

The Foster Care Programme is also engaged in providing a family like setting for those children who do not have any place of abode; or cannot be reintegrated to their biological families, thus decreasing the number of children admitted for a long-term in our shelters.

LA COLOMBE, POINTE AUX SABLES - MODEL SHELTER – PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/524) 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 the expected date of coming into operation thereof.

Reply: I am informed that, on the 07 October 2019, my Ministry was made aware by the then Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport that the site was not suitable for the setting up of the Model Shelter La Colombe.

Consequently, my Ministry is undertaking upgrading and renovation works at the existing Shelter La Colombe at Pointe aux Sables, and the land initially earmarked for the Model Shelter will be used for the setting up of a children's playground for children accommodated at the shelter.

HORSE RACING – MONEY LAUNDERING – INQUIRY

(No. B/526) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development 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 set up in September 2014.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS INVESTMENT CORPORATION LTD - IMF RECOMMENDATION

(No. B/527) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development 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 Ltd., and that the financing thereof should be provided through the budgetary process, he will state if consideration is being given thereto.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS - EU LIST - HIGH-RISK COUNTRIES – ECONOMIC IMPACT

(No. B/528) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to the inclusion of Mauritius by the European Union on its revised list of high-risk countries allegedly having strategic deficiencies in their anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing frameworks (AML-CFT Framework) since 01 October 2020, he will state if an assessment of the impact thereof on the economy has been carried out, indicating the quantum of loss of revenue to the financial services sector.

(Withdrawn)

LOCKDOWN PERIODS – MINORS – SEXUAL ABUSE

(No. B/529) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to minors, she will state the number thereof victims of sexual abuse during the lockdown periods, indicating the measures taken for the protection thereof.

Reply: In regard to minors, victims of sexual abuse during the lockdown periods, I wish to inform the House that 102 cases regarding same have been reported to my Ministry.

The measures taken for their protection thereof were as follows –

The Emergency Child Protection Teams would normally solicit for Emergency Protection Orders (EPOs) from the respective District Magistrates to provide the victims with full emergency child protection support and enquiry, which comprise the following –

- psychological support inclusive of active listening, psychotherapy, counselling in respect of gravity of trauma on minor, support to parents if need be, as well as therapy and parental counselling to parents if they are not the perpetrators;
- immediate conveyance to hospital for full medical examination and treatment as appropriate. Pregnancy test as well as HIV testing are part of the support;
- depending on the mental and physical state of the minor, recording of statement in respect of the case is undertaken by the Police with prior arrangements and facilitation by the FWPO;
- if minor is admitted for a long stay at the hospital, the Ward Manager is informed of the implications of the EPO and the support that they have to provide thereof to safeguard minor at hospital;
- depending on outcomes of preliminary enquiry, if gauged possible, parents are allowed to have contact with minor during the whole process;
- in conditions of incest and sexual abuse occasioned by relatives and next of kin, or even close family friends, the minors are removed to a place of safety which is normally known only to the Ministry;
- investigation and conduct of in-depth social enquiry by the child protection team provides for further outcomes to work out the case plan and the different support that the case would warrant as per its specificity, and
- referral to stakeholders for support as appropriate (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Drop-in-Centre, Police, Ministry of Social Security, NGOs) is also undertaken to ensure that minor is not deprived of his rights.

SURGICAL OPERATION –WEEK-ENDS

(No. B/530) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the regional hospitals,

he will state if it is the practice for surgical operation not to be carried out thereat during week-ends and, if so, indicate the reasons therefor.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that all specialist doctors in general surgery employed by my Ministry work from 0900 hours to 1600 hours on weekdays and from 0900 hours to noon on Saturdays, as per the recommendations of the PRB Report 2016. After normal working hours, the general surgery service is sustained by one specialist doctor in each regional hospital who is on call until the next morning to attend to any emergency which may arise.

Based on the working hours of specialist doctors, all elective surgical cases are carried out from Monday to Friday as from 0900hrs to 1600 hours in all regional hospitals and all routine cases are operated on Saturdays from 0900 hours to noon. As regards emergency cases, same are catered for, as and when they arise, on a 24-hour basis from Monday to Sunday.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY - REVENUE GENERATED – 2018-MAY 2021

(No. B/531) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the horse racing industry, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the total quantum of revenue generated for the period 2018 to date, indicating if consideration will be given for the re-investment of part of the said revenue in the said industry with a view to ensuring the sustainability thereof.

(Withdrawn)

FISHING BOATS - LICENSED FISHERMEN - COMPULSORY EQUIPMENT

(No. B/532) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether in regard to the fishing boats owned by licensed fishermen, he will state the equipment which should be compulsorily taken on board.

(Withdrawn)

GRA – JOCKEY – DEATH 15.05.21

(No. B/533) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) ask the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the death of a professional jockey on 15 May 2021, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority, information as to if a joint inspection with the Chairperson of the Race Meeting Steward for a proper inspection of the track was conducted.

(Withdrawn)

DRAINS - ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/534) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the illegal constructions of drains obstructing water passages during torrential rainfall, he will state if his Ministry has made an assessment thereof with the collaboration of the Land Drainage Authority and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

Reply: First of all, I wish to highlight that illegal construction has been a serious problem since long and it was in this perspective that the Local Government Act was amended on 17 July 2018 and proclaimed on 10 October 2018.

After the passage of cyclone Berguita in January 2018, the hon. Prime Minister and the then Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands had effected several site visits and it was observed how some places were affected due to irresponsible development on rivers, drains and watercourses.

As from October 2018, very few cases of illegal construction on drains have been reported.

In this respect, I am informed by the local authorities that they have carried out surveys jointly with the Land Drainage Authority for assessment and remedial actions to be taken in respect to illegal construction obstructing water passages.

Thirteen cases of illegal construction on drains and rivulets have been reported, out of which ten cases have been solved and three cases are still at Court level.

BUILDING & LAND USE PERMIT - PROSECUTIONS

(No. B/535) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the building and land use permit, he will, for the benefit of the House,

obtain from the local authorities, information as to the number of prosecutions initiated over the past five years against promoters/contractors for failure to abide by the legislation in relation thereto.

Reply: As per section 117 of the Local Government Act 2011, no development work should be undertaken unless a Building and Land Use Permit has been issued in respect of that development work by a local authority, except where the law specifically provides an exception. As such, local authorities initiate prosecutions for development works which are undertaken either without a Building and Land Use Permit or for a development work which has not complied with the conditions of an approved Building and Land Use Permit. Normally, notices are served on owners of properties, on the holder of a Building and Land Use Permit or where these are not available, on the person carrying out the development.

The House may recall that in the year 2018, the law concerning illegal development was reinforced so as to give local authorities more powers in dealing with illegal development works. In line with the new provisions, when a development is being undertaken without a Building and Land Use Permit, a compliance notice is served and a person is granted 30 days to apply for a Building and Land Use Permit. However, if a development work does not comply with the conditions of an approved Building and Land Use Permit, an Enforcement Notice is served and a developer has 30 days, within which he/she may take appropriate measures to become compliant with the approved Building and Land Use Permit. If a developer does not comply with the conditions of a compliance or enforcement notice, a pulling down notice is served and the developer has a period of 30 days, within which the development works shall be pulled down.

I am informed by local authorities that over the last five years, a total of 2,132 cases have been lodged in Court for illegal development works, out of which a final judgment has already been delivered by the District Court for 1,591 cases. You may wish to note that for the other cases, either appeals have been lodged or the cases are still ongoing in Court.

METRO EXPRESS PROJECT - PROPOSED EXTENSION – FINANCING

(No. B/536) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the proposed extension of the Metro Express Project from Rose Hill to Réduit, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Metro Express Ltd., information as to the cost thereof, indicating how same is being financed.

(Withdrawn)

HOUSING UNITS – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/537) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the proposed construction of 12,000 housing units as announced in the last budget exercise, he will state if a business plan has been worked out and, if so, give details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

RECREATIONAL & SPORTS FACILITIES – MAINTENANCE

(No. B/539) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the recreational and sports facilities in Vallée Pitot, Tranquebar, Ward IV and Plaine Verte, respectively, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to if measures are being taken for the upliftment thereof in anticipation of the re-opening thereof following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that the recreational and sports facilities found in the regions of Vallée Pitot, Tranquebar, Ward IV and Plaine Verte, including Cité Martial are regularly maintained. Mowing and cleaning are accordingly performed at the children playgrounds and football grounds systematically.

However, the Council proposes to carry out upliftment works at some of these municipal infrastructures as follows –

- (i) painting works have recently been completed at *Centre de Boxe* at Cotillon Street, Tranquebar;
- (ii) repairs to damaged fencing at two mini soccer pitches at *Champ de Mars* are presently being undertaken and repairs/replacement of the lights have been programmed. These will be completed before re-opening of the services;
- (iii) repairs to lighting works at mini soccer pitch in Ward IV have been completed at Plaine Verte;
- (iv) new play equipment will be placed by the National Development Unit at the Children's Playground at Magon Street;

- (v) renovation works will be carried out at Abdool Kader Ahmed Bhayat Swimming Pool, Plaine Verte to the tune of Rs9.5 m. out of Economic Recovery Programme. Bidding exercise is in progress, and
- (vi) civil works, painting and welding of equipment at Children's playground at Cité Martial are in progress.

LANDSLIDE SITES - REMEDIAL MEASURES

(No. B/540) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North and 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)

MAGON STREET – STREET LIGHTING

(No. B/545) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to Magon Street, at the level of Boulevard Victoria up to the Mariamen Temple street, on both roads, 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 installation of LED street lanterns at the dark spots thereat.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that a night survey was carried out in the region and it was found that Boulevard Victoria Street up to the Mariamen Temple Street had sufficient street lanterns and the roads were well lit.

With regard to street lighting along Magon Street, the existing lanterns along Magon Street comprise a mix of LED bulbs and high pressure sodium lanterns. The Municipal City Council of Port Louis is considering to provide 10 additional LED street lanterns with poles in its Budget 2021/22 so as to improve lighting along this road.

QUAY D ROUNDABOUT - STREET LIGHTING

(No. B/546) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to street lighting on the roundabout on the motorway, at

the level of Quay D, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to if same is out of order and, if so, since when, indicating if urgent remedial measures will be taken.

Reply: With regard to the street lighting along the motorway at the level of Quay D and the lateral roads, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that they are all functioning properly. However, lanterns on the pole of more than 12 metres high on the roundabout are out of order and due to the height of the poles, the repairs could not be effected by the Council.

I am also informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that the responsibility for the operation and maintenance of street lighting along motorways has been entrusted to the Central Electricity Board (CEB) since July 2019.

The Municipal City Council of Port Louis has already informed the CEB to undertake repairs of the street lighting at the roundabout at the level of Quay D. The CEB would seek the services of the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service, Special Mobile Force or that of a private contractor in case they are unable to carry out the repair works.