



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 27 JULY 2021

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(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity
Hon. Louis Steven Obeegadoo	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism
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Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo	Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage
Hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal	Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 27 of 2021

Sitting of Tuesday 27 July 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**

- (a) The Transfer of Prisoners (Commonwealth Countries) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 167 of 2021)
- (b) The Transfer of Prisoners (Convention) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 168 of 2021)
- (c) The Transfer of Prisoners (Republic of Guinea) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 169 of 2021)
- (d) The Transfer of Prisoners (Republic of Madagascar) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 170 of 2021)
- (e) The Transfer of Prisoners (Republic of India) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 171 of 2021)
- (f) The Transfer of Prisoners (Republic of Mozambique) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 172 of 2021)
- (g) The Transfer of Prisoners (Republic of Seychelles) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 173 of 2021)
- (h) The Transfer of Prisoners (Republic of Uganda) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 174 of 2021)

B. Ministry of Local Government and Diaster Risk Management

The Municipal City Council of Port Louis (Rent of Hall) Regulations 2020. (Government Notice No. 179 of 2021)

C. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

- (a) The Integrated Annual Report 2019/20 of the Mauritius Revenue Authority.

- (b) The Reports of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of National Arts Fund for the year ended 30 June 2020.

D. Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance

The Annual Report 2019/2020 of the Financial Reporting Council.

E. Attorney General

Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security

- (a) The Mauritius Cane Industry Authority (Sale Price of Molasses) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 175 of 2021)
- (b) The Mauritius Cane Industry Authority (Sale Price of Cane Juice or any Other Intermediate Product for Production of Products Other Than Sugar by a Miller) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 176 of 2021)

F. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training

Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 177 of 2021)
- (b) The Consumer Protection (Control and Supplies Control) (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 4) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 178 of 2021)

G. Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage

The Copyright (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 178 of 2021)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

COVID-19 - VACCINES

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice Question*) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard the COVID-19 pandemic in Mauritius, he will state –

- (a) the percentage of persons over 60 years old, and with co-morbidities who have been fully vaccinated;
- (b) the vaccines to be received before 15 September 2021;
- (c) when children aged 12 to 17 years will be vaccinated;
- (d) the number of severe adverse effects or deaths noted post-vaccination, including the Guillain Barré Syndrome, and the vaccines involved, and
- (e) the number of Genomic Sequencing tests for each variant performed on local cases since April 2021.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 vaccines with the support and collaboration of World Health Organisation (WHO) and other stakeholders was approved and highlights the target population of Mauritius, including Rodrigues and Agaléga.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House was informed that it was expected to immunize 62% of the population by August 2021. As at date, almost 650,000 persons, that is, nearly 52% of the population and 64% of the adult population, representing 2 out of 3 adults, have been administered the first dose of the vaccine. More than 531,000, that is, over 42% of the population and 50% of the adults have been administered both doses.

In reply to part (a) of the question, as at date, out of some 230,000 persons over 60 years old, 145,872 have been fully vaccinated, representing 63.4%.

Moreover, out of some 280,000 persons with co-morbidities, including the elderly, 169,462 have been fully vaccinated, representing 60.5%. The vaccination for these two categories of persons was carried out at the regional hospitals, at the dedicated vaccination centres and in the residential care homes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to previous Private Notice Questions and Parliamentary Questions, I have already informed the House on the actions taken by my Ministry for the

procurement of COVID-19 vaccines. As at now, my Ministry has already received the following vaccines –

- 200,000 doses of Covishield;
- 200,000 doses of Covaxin vaccine, and
- 1,100,000 doses of Sinopharm.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these vaccines have been administered in a timely manner with due compliance to cold chain management, side effect monitoring and expiry date, whilst ensuring no wastage of doses as compared to other countries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I seize this opportunity to express my gratitude to Her Excellency, the High Commissioner of India and the Government of India for facilitating the procurement of these vaccines at a time when India itself was in dire need of vaccines, as in other parts of the world.

I also express my gratitude to His Excellency, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China and the People's Republic of China for their support and my thanks also go to the United Arab Emirates which has made available as donation 5,000 doses of Hayat-Vax vaccines through our Ambassador.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to the above, my Ministry has also procured the following vaccines –

- (a) 60,000 doses of component I (one) of Sputnik V vaccines, and
- (b) 72,400 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines from the COVAX Facility.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has also placed orders for additional vaccines, which are expected to be received as follows –

- | | | |
|-------|-------------------|--|
| (i) | COVAX Facility | 38,200 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines by first week of August 2021; |
| (ii) | Sinopharm vaccine | 500,000 doses. The delivery is to be confirmed; |
| (iii) | African Union | 1,134,975 doses of Johnson and Johnson vaccines. Delivery to be confirmed; |

(v)	COVAX Facility	165,600 doses of Johnson and Johnson vaccines. Vaccines to be confirmed;
M		
(vi)	African Union	48,451 doses of Pfizer vaccines. Delivery to be confirmed.
M		
(vii)	COVAX Facility	76,050 doses of Pfizer vaccines. Delivery to be confirmed.

My Ministry, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade and our Missions abroad, is following with the manufacturers and suppliers of vaccines in order to expedite delivery thereof.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to place on record that we have been able to achieve these results through the coordinated efforts of the High-Level Committee, chaired by the hon. Prime Minister who has been at the forefront since the very beginning of the pandemic.

All the stakeholders have joined forces to ensure that the Vaccination Programme is carried out as scheduled. Moreover, my Ministry has enlisted the services of additional doctors and nurses on contract for the Vaccination Programme.

Furthermore, I wish to thank the frontliners who have carried out the programme efficiently and the population at large for having responded to our plea to be vaccinated so as to protect each other.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (c) of the question, as at now, children aged 12 to 17 years can only be administered the Pfizer BioNTech vaccines. As already announced, my Ministry is expecting delivery of 124,501 doses of this vaccine from the African Union and the COVAX Facility.

Moreover, my Ministry has made a request to the World Health Organisation to approach the COVAX Facility with a view to considering the supply of 140,000 doses of Pfizer vaccines in lieu of the allotment for other doses of vaccines. These vaccines would be used to vaccinate adolescents aged between 12 and 17 years. We are still awaiting confirmation of the delivery dates of these vaccines.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that Jansen Laboratory, manufacturer of Johnson and Johnson vaccines, is currently carrying out clinical trials to assess whether the said

vaccines can be administered to children between 12 to 17 years in the first instance and subsequently to those aged 3 to 11 years. My Ministry is closely following the matter and a decision will be taken based on the findings and recommendations of the manufacturer.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that a Pharmacovigilance mechanism has been put in place following the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccination programme. The main objective of this mechanism is to facilitate early detection, investigation and analysis of Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI) and Adverse Events of Special Interest (AESI) to ensure an appropriate and rapid response.

The specific objectives of safety surveillance system are –

- (a) to detect serious adverse effects rapidly to provide timely data that can be shared with relevant stakeholders for action;
- (b) to generate data to characterise the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines in use;
- (c) to identify, investigate, assess and validate safety signals and recommend appropriate public health, and
- (d) to support public and stakeholder confidence in vaccines and immunisation by ensuring high quality safety surveillance.

As part of this mechanism, the Pharmacovigilance Committee has been set up specifically for COVID-19 vaccine and is chaired by a Specialist in Internal Medicine. The Committee also comprises three members, of whom one is a Medical Practitioner in Infection Prevention and Control Disease and two are Pharmacists.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to part (d) of the question, I am informed by the Pharmacovigilance Committee that –

- 1,153 cases of Adverse Event Following Immunization (AEFI) have been reported as at date.
- 70 cases were reported as serious by a treating doctor. A serious case is defined by the WHO as one requiring hospitalisation. These 70 cases were hospitalised and all have recovered. No deaths were reported.
- 41 investigations were assessed by the Causality Committee as at date. 29 cases are still being assessed by the Causality Committee. The Pharmacovigilance Committee reports all investigations to the Causality Committee whose role is to determine whether there is any association between the reported Adverse Event Following Immunization and the vaccine.

The Causality Committee comprises two Specialists in Internal medicine, one Specialist in Chest Medicine and one Specialist in Infectious Disease.

- 4 cases of Adverse Events were attributed to COVID-19 vaccine.
- 2 cases of Guillain Barré Syndrome were reported by the treating doctor to the Pharmacovigilance Committee. One patient was administered Sinopharm vaccine and one patient administered Covishield vaccine.

The outcomes of the Causality Assessment Committee for the two patients with Guillain Barré Syndrome are as follows, according to WHO AEFI causality assessment –

- (a) Case A-A1: Upon discharge from Private Clinic, Case A-A1 is walking with support, and
- (b) Case B-B1: Upon discharge from Hospital, Case B-B1 is ambulant with minimal support. The patient had a previous history of Guillain Barré Syndrome.

The manufacturer of Sinopharm vaccines was requested for further information regarding association, if any, between the vaccine and Guillain Barré Syndrome. The manufacturer has stated that there has been no report of association of Sinopharm with Guillain Barré Syndrome.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (e) of the question, I am informed that Genomic Sequencing tests started with samples referred abroad in January 2021 and since then my Ministry has developed the capacity to perform sequencing locally.

Mauritius is among the few countries in Africa doing sequencing on site. Within a short period, procurement of equipment, reagents and training of staff in bioinformatics has been carried out at Central Health Laboratory. Prior to the local set-up, samples for sequencing have also been sent abroad to WHO collaborating centres in UK and South Africa.

As from April 2021, a total of 239 cases of COVID-19 have been successfully sequenced. Of these, 209 were local cases and 30 were imported cases.

Results of the sequencing have shown that all 209 local cases have lineage B.1.1.318. This lineage is neither a variant of concern nor a variant of interest according to the WHO and the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

Among the 30 imported cases, no cases of Alpha or Gamma variants have been reported. 4 cases of Beta and 18 cases of Delta variants have been reported. 8 other variants have been detected.

Out of the 239 cases, 71 have already been sequenced at Central Health Laboratory and the others referred abroad.

Mr X. L. Duval: Thank you. I must say it is my turn to be pleasantly surprised with the direct answer from the hon. Minister. Can I firstly, Mr Speaker, Sir, ask the hon. Minister whether the statement of the hon. Deputy Prime Minister in March 2021 that they would require 60% of the population to be vaccinated before 01 October for the opening still stands good, or given the situation with Delta and Beta, etc., you are looking for a much greater percentage of the population to be vaccinated before opening?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, that forecast that we have done earlier still stands good and I should also add that, in fact, we are before schedule. As I have already reported in my reply earlier, at this moment, we have already vaccinated more than 52% of the population and with the rate at which the vaccination is being done daily, we are expected to reach 60% before.

Mr X. L. Duval: I would like to ask the hon. Minister, given the experience of other countries, we take Seychelles, 86% have been fully vaccinated; UK, 90% vaccinated anyway, France, etc., whether this percentage of 60% is not, as it appears, far too low to generate comfort in the population as to protection against the Delta and Beta variants?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: It is serious question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: And whether, therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, we should not seek to get a much greater percentage ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... before we fully open the country?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the forecast of the percentage of vaccination is 60% by this time, that is, before 01 October, but the vaccination programme will continue. Obviously, this vaccination programme will continue and we expect to go beyond 70-75%. It does not mean that once we reach 60%, the vaccination programme will stop; it is not the case. The vaccination programme will continue, as I have reported earlier, even if it comes that we will have to vaccinate the adolescents and the children. There is no question that the vaccination is going to stop after we reach 60%; it is an ongoing process and it will continue.

Mr X. L. Duval: With all due respect, this is not the question. The question is not whether we will stop, but whether we should start on 01 October given that if we have only 60% of vaccination in the population. I would like the hon. Minister to refer to cases in Seychelles, for instance, where there is a huge pandemic going on at the moment, whereby 86% of the population, with 90 deaths in Seychelles already vaccinated. So, I would like to ask the hon. Minister if he will not reconsider the percentage of local people vaccinated, which is a trigger for the opening, and whether that would not be safe today to say that we would need to go to 70% or even 90% before opening, and special effort should, therefore, not be done in the months to come to obtain the vaccines? That is my question.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that anybody who will do the vaccine, it will protect from not getting a serious form of the disease. It is understood that if the population is vaccinated, the presence of COVID-19 will be there, but the percentage that will have serious form of the disease will reduce considerably. I believe he knows very well in the international figures, cases might be rising, even in Seychelles, as he has already reported, but serious cases keep on decreasing. In referring to Seychelles, we have also to consider whether Seychelles, at the time of opening the borders, have waited for both doses to be vaccinated and at what point in time. You should also take into consideration that at a point in time, when you have not done both doses, and they have already opened. There are different points to be taken into account while comparing to Seychelles.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will table a Press Conference by the Seychelles Authority, showing that 16% of deaths there were from vaccinated persons. But my question here, Mr Speaker, Sir, concerns a red list of countries where the Delta and the Beta variants are so prevalent that most countries – you take UK, you take USA, France, etc. – where these two variants are prevalent are, in fact, included on the red list and inward travel is virtually prohibited. I look at Mauritius and there is no red list; I think it is only Brazil and South

Africa at the moment. Whether this red list should not be extended now, and especially on 01 October to protect the population.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come with the first part of the question where the hon. Leader of the Opposition has again compared us to Seychelles. We should also see what has been the testing capacity of Seychelles, what are the treatment facilities offered in terms of quarantine, in terms of other treatment facilities before jumping to the conclusion that Seychelles might have been vaccinated, there are positive cases over there and that has been attributed to, and there are deaths. So, I think there are different elements and this has to be also pointed out.

Now, in the second case, especially referring to the Delta variant, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have specifically devised protocols concerning the entry of passengers in Mauritius, be it in terms of testing, be it in terms of quarantine facilities. So, while comparing Mauritius or any other countries around the world where there is local transmission of Delta variants, and in the very beginning whether these people are tested before entering into that country, whether tests are being carried out and what are the different facilities, just vaguely, to put the comparison, it does not justify. At the same time, Mr Speaker, Sir, for Delta variants, I believe that we all know all information about Delta variants, especially about the high rate of infectivity and also about whether patients are really developing serious forms of Delta variants. Experts are still working on these information. So, we cannot jump to the conclusion - bringing like a little kind of fear - what would be the outcome of Delta variants. We have to be very careful in making such comments.

Mr X. L. Duval: At this point in time, Mr Speaker, Sir, the population can only hope that the Government will be very prudent, and this is the whole point of the question.

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, we are!

An hon. Member: We are being prudent!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, now concerning vaccinations...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: ... I note that most of the deliveries in the months to come or in the weeks, whatever, are to be confirmed - I think only one small delivery has been confirmed for August; the rest is to be confirmed - whereas I think he informed the House some time ago

that the Pfizer vaccines which would be used for the youth would be received in August. Is that now no longer the case?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, this does not depend upon the Government. We have already signed our vaccines procurement with the different agencies. Government is being transparent on informing the population when those agencies will make available any vaccines in Mauritius; it has been the case since the very beginning. Nothing like we have a pre-order delivery time, unfortunately, but, yet, Government has been able, since the very beginning, to procure the vaccines, to make the vaccines available in Mauritius. That is why today, we have already vaccinated and we are reaching 60% of the population. Now, we have signed agreements and commitments with agencies, and I am sure that once an agency has reported, has given us the commitment of delivering vaccines to Mauritius, that will be done, but, of course, the time schedule we do not know. But it will be coming in the near future.

Mr X. L. Duval: The hon. Minister himself mentioned Pfizer will be received in August. This is why my question is concerning the young ...

(Interruptions)

You are getting briefed. The young persons, whether we should not wait for the secondary school children to be vaccinated – I was hoping the Pfizer would arrive soon – before opening the schools because there seems to be a terrible confusion at the moment and great anxiety in the minds of parents as to the opening of the secondary schools and the situation there.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is fully aware that the school calendar has already been delayed by half a year. We all, especially parents who have children attending school, should at the same time have a balance upon delaying school calendar and at the same time looking for the vaccines. So, there is this balance that has been made and especially even schools are opening, we have devised specific protocols for that. We understand that there are some schools where we have detected cases, but those specific protocols are met, and the academic session can start, but, at the same time, looking at the safety of the children. Now, I believe that the hon. Leader of the Opposition, again, has referred to international journals and international recommendations, guidelines about what is the impact of COVID-19 amongst children. Now, we all know that children are least affected and at the same time, they do not develop the severe form of the illness. It has been the case in Mauritius; we have seen the percentage of adolescents and

children being infected and also the recovery rate among those children. So, taking into consideration the impact of COVID-19, both in terms of starting schools and at the same time protect the children, this balance has been made. That is why we are in this direction.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister again, we have, I think, six schools closed this morning; that represents many thousands of students, and I am also informed by the school authorities that in some schools, they have 40% to 60% absenteeism in secondary schools. Therefore, given this situation and given the upsurge in the number of cases - which I am sure you will agree with - would it not be better, for these few weeks, for the schools to be closed, for the children to be given, all of them, online courses? Because at the moment, you have many people who do not attend and schools are closed and these people are not getting any education. So, would it not be better, during this upsurge in cases, to have a uniform online schooling for a few weeks until the vaccines come, hopefully, or until the situation gets better?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe the hon. Leader of the Opposition has already given the answer. Obviously, the schools are not running at full capacity. The Ministry of Education has devised a way where at the same time online courses are being run and schools are running at a reduced capacity. That also impacted the attendance of the schools. But the principle behind this is that children should engage in their schooling early and, obviously, our vaccination programme is ongoing. That is why there is regulation on the vaccination for the education personnel. So, taking all these into consideration, the academic session has started and, obviously, with time, depending upon the situation, schools will have to devise. There is no one formula at this moment to say whether we have to delay school. Even if we consider this, how long that would be? I think the right balance is to start the school, let the academic session start at this time and, obviously, putting a balance between online schooling and those who are attending school.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for giving the figures for the serious adverse effects following vaccination. But I understand that the international protocol, the WHO protocol requires for these figures to be regularly published in the country so that people are aware of even suspected adverse cases. My first question, therefore, is: why are we not following the protocol to routinely publish figures on adverse effects of vaccination for the population to be aware of this?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, all the information related to vaccines, adverse effects, at any time, are being provided to anybody - as you have asked the question - who is willing, but, at the same time, of course, it is disseminated to WHO and CDC in the first instance, and then we are going to publish all these.

Now, we have given all the information to all those agencies which are concerned and even up to now, we are ready, at any time, to give information about adverse effects.

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

**BREAKWATER, FISHING PORT & CRUISE TERMINAL BUILDING –
INVESTMENT**

(No. B/781) 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 proposed investment of Rs2.2 billion into the Breakwater, Fishing Port and the Cruise Terminal Building, as announced in the 2020-2021 Budget speech, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Ports Authority, information as to where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius aims at becoming a regional maritime hub in the Indian Ocean. In line with Government policy, the vision of the port is to provide modern infrastructure in anticipation of demand, to streamline port processes, to enhance security and to consolidate environment protection.

Given the crucial role played by the Port Louis Harbour in the economic development of the country, Government has embarked on the expansion, diversification and modernisation of the port infrastructure to support its economic activities.

In 2016, the Mauritius Ports Authority commissioned a Port Master Plan Study to define the land use and infrastructure development up to the horizon 2040. Most of the projects recommended have already been implemented while others are in the process of implementation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority that among the projects recommended in the Port Master Plan 2016, are the construction of a fishing port comprising a breakwater and fishing quay at Fort William as well as the construction of a Cruise Terminal Building.

The rationale for the construction of the breakwater at the north of the reclaimed area at Fort William was to provide a tranquil basin for the mooring of ocean-going fishing vessels. These non-working fishing vessels are currently berthed at multiple commercial quays in the harbour. This gives rise to security issues in the port area, mainly due to the movement, in and out, of their crew.

Following an open advertised bidding exercise, Messrs CWP Engineering FZ LLC, an Italian firm based in Dubai in association with GIBB (Mauritius) and GlobOcean, a French firm, was awarded a contract on 29 October 2018 to undertake the consultancy services comprising technical feasibility, planning, design, preparation of tender documents and supervision of works for the fishing port at the total cost of USD780,420.20 exclusive of VAT.

The Consultants carried out the preliminary design and accordingly recommended a development layout which they estimated at Rs2.3 billion exclusive of VAT for the full scheme comprising the breakwater and shore protection, mooring facilities, dredging and land reclamation over an area of about 10 hectares, 300 metres of fishing quay and 50 metres service quay.

On 17 June 2019, the Mauritius Ports Authority launched a Request for the Pre-qualification of Contractors exercise through the Central Procurement Board.

Thereafter, in view of funding constraints, it was decided to review the scope of the project and to construct the breakwater and shore protection, land reclamation, mooring facilities and a service quay of 50 metres only and to consider the implementation of the 300 metres fishing quay under a Public-Private Partnership arrangement. Accordingly, the cost estimates, as submitted by the Consultants, were revised to Rs1.75 billion for the reduced scope of this project.

Following the review downwards of the scope of the project, the Mauritius Ports Authority, acting on the advice of the Central Procurement Board, annulled the Request for the Pre-qualification of Contractors exercise on the ground that the scope of the project had significantly changed.

Subsequently, on 12 December 2019, a fresh pre-qualification exercise for the revised scope of works, comprising mainly land reclamation, shore protection and breakwater structures, dredging for creation of a tranquil basin, mooring facilities and the 50 metres

service quay was launched under the aegis of the Central Procurement Board. Twelve potential bidders have been pre-qualified.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the Final Preliminary Design Report was submitted by the Consultant in June 2020. The Report confirmed the technical feasibility of the breakwater at Fort William, the dredging and land reclamation, the creation of a mooring area for some 100 ocean-going fishing vessels, the construction of the 50 metres service quay as well as the development of a fishing quay of 300 metres by private promoters at a later stage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with the provisions of the legislations in force, an Environmental Impact Assessment licence is required to enable the project to be implemented. Accordingly, the Consultant had concurrently undertaken the study for the Environmental Impact Assessment. The EIA report was finalised on 07 February 2021 and on 31 March 2021, the Mauritius Ports Authority applied for the Environmental Impact Assessment licence to undertake the project. The decision from the Department of Environment is awaited.

The Consultant is in the process of completing the detailed design of the various project components and is also finalising the bid documents for the breakwater, the dredging and land reclamation, the creation of a mooring area and the construction of the 50 metres service quay.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is to be pointed out that, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Consultants have suffered unavoidable delays in their home office in Italy and Dubai due to restrictions on their normal operations. This has impacted severely on their resource planning and the overall implementation plan of the project.

I am now informed that the Mauritius Ports Authority is currently reviewing its strategy in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the Cruise Terminal Building project, I am also informed that, with the rising trend in cruise passenger arrivals, it was considered that there was a real potential to develop Port Louis Harbour as a home port for cruise tourism and also as a port-of-call which would benefit the economies of not only Mauritius but also of the regional island countries. Accordingly, the Mauritius Ports Authority embarked on the project for the construction of a Cruise Terminal Building at Les Salines.

In 2014, a bidding exercise was launched to appoint a Consultant for the Design and Supervision of Construction of the Cruise Terminal facility. Messrs Bermello Ajamil & Partners in association with GIBB (Mauritius) Ltd was awarded the consultancy services contract in the same year. Messrs Bermello Ajamil & Partners is an Architectural firm based in the USA which has in its portfolio the planning and design of a number of cruise terminals worldwide.

The approved project proposal provides for a building of floor area of about 7,500 square metres which will be an iconic structure having the capacity to handle peaks of 4,000 cruise passengers. The sizing was based on the Consultant's forecast of 40,000 cruise passenger arrivals in 2020.

Following completion of the design and preparation of the tender documents by the Consultants, bids were floated in April 2018, under the aegis of the Central Procurement Board, for the selection of a contractor for the construction works. However, only two bids were assessed to be technically responsive, but their bid prices were excessively above the estimated cost of the project. A new bidding exercise was accordingly launched on 25 April 2019.

Following evaluation of the bids received, the contract was awarded to China Road and Bridge Corporation - PADCO Joint Venture on 21 August 2019 for the sum of Rs769,173,833, inclusive of VAT. The contract between the Mauritius Ports Authority and the Contractor was signed on 30 October 2019.

The Contractor mobilised his personnel and works commenced on site on 04 September 2019. Work progress was, however, seriously impacted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in China in early 2020 and the lockdown in Mauritius during the period March to May 2020. As the Contractor had sourced most of its supplies and materials from China, the procurement of materials and other supplies was also impacted.

Subsequently, on 07 July 2020, PADCO, the minority partner of the Joint Venture, entered into Voluntary Administration. That situation adversely impacted further on the progress of the construction works with a drastic reduction of the workforce on site. Moreover, the placing of PADCO into Voluntary Administration resulted in legal and contractual issues between the Joint Venture partners, which brought the works virtually to a standstill.

Following lengthy discussions with the assistance of the Attorney General's Office, the complex legal and contractual issues were resolved between the Mauritius Ports Authority, the China Road and Bridge Corporation and the Administrator of PADCO. During the discussions, it was agreed, *inter alia*, that an extension of time without cost would be granted for the completion of the project. The revised completion date would be 30 November 2021, taking also into account the delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, the Joint Venture issues between the two partners were finally settled amicably in December 2020 and works restarted on 04 January 2021 by the Contractor.

However, work progress was again affected by the lockdown from 10 March to beginning of April 2021 due to the resurgence of COVID-19 in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the site activities are presently being impacted anew following the detection of four COVID-19 positive cases among the site workers. This has caused the site to be closed since 16 July 2021 until further notice in accordance with the sanitary protocol of the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

As at the end of June 2021, approximately 65% of the works have been completed. In view of the prevailing situation, it is now foreseen that the works under the construction contract would be completed around February 2022.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that the hon. Prime Minister has already taken 15 minutes on that question, I am not going to ask any supplementary questions.

The Prime Minister: You asked a question and I have given you all the information. In fact, I have probably answered all your intended supplementary questions.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Don't put the question, then.

Mr Speaker: If you have no supplementary, I will give one supplementary to hon. Dhunoo.

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister tell us, with regard to the Breakwater and Fishing Port Project, whether a geotechnical survey has been carried out? If yes, who was selected and how was the company selected also?

The Prime Minister: The Consultants, Mr Speaker, Sir, have recommended a series of geotechnical investigations to be carried out and I understand survey works have been

undertaken. The bids were floated through an open international bidding exercise and the scope of works included, amongst others –

- bathymetric survey of the approaches to Port Louis; Port Louis entrance and navigation channel and Caudan basin, and
- topographic survey of Fort William reclamation, including existing reclaimed platform and revetment structures.

The geotechnical investigations would include the –

- drilling of landslide borehole;
- drilling of marine boreholes;
- excavations of test pits, and
- *in situ* and laboratory tests.

I have the information that, when the bids were floated through an open international bidding method on 05 February 2020, three bids at the closing date of 17 March 2020 were received with the prices also. The bidders were -

- (i) Water Research Co. Ltd;
- (ii) Coastal Marine Construction & Engineering Ltd; and
- (iii) Sotravic Ltée.

The contract was awarded to Water Research Co. Ltd as it was the lowest in terms of the price quoted and also as it satisfied the criteria that were specified in the bidding document.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

SMF MARRIED QUARTERS (FORMER) - GYMNASIUM & ALLIED FACILITIES

(No. B/782) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) 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 proposed construction of a gymnasium and allied facilities onsite the former SMF married quarters, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if ancient buildings are being pulled down in the wake thereof, indicating if a heritage impact assessment was carried out prior to the implementation of the said project.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Special Mobile Force does not have a proper gymnasium and that the current Barracks in use as gymnasium is inadequate. The space is limited and cannot accommodate modern physical training apparatus, and, therefore, the SMF personnel cannot optimise the use of the gymnasium.

The objective of providing a new gymnasium is to accommodate all existing and new physical fitness apparatus in order to make available optimum training to the SMF troops so as to keep them physically fit and ensure a high state of preparedness and readiness at any point in time, especially as physical fitness is one of the most important prerequisites for an SMF Officer to perform his duties efficiently. In fact, the SMF being a vital component of the Mauritius Police Force, must be provided with necessary training facilities to maintain the highest standards of operational preparedness for the security and safety of the country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the location of the Ex-Wooden Married Quarters along Willoughby Road, Vacoas, had been identified in 2014 for the construction of the new gymnasium as it is adjacent to the SMF Main Gate at Abercromby Barracks and, therefore, easily accessible to SMF personnel. The site comprises seven blocks which have wooden structures and roof covered with asbestos slates.

As the blocks were in a very bad state, their demolition was recommended by the then Ministry of Public Infrastructure, as far back as April 2008, that is, prior to the decision taken to construct a modern gymnasium on the site. In fact, following a survey carried out by the said Ministry, at that time, the latter recommended the pulling down of the buildings as these were beyond economical repairs for the following reasons -

- (a) the presence of asbestos;
- (b) heavy leakages;
- (c) the presence of termites;
- (d) damaged false ceilings, and
- (e) cracked wooden planks.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed the SMF Married Quarters Complex were not listed as a national heritage in accordance with the National Heritage Act of 2003 and, therefore, the SMF had no obligation to preserve same. Nevertheless, the SMF consulted the then Ministry of Arts and Culture, in October 2011, prior to the demolition of the SMF Abercromby Married Quarters.

Subsequently, the SMF decided on its own to preserve and renovate two of these buildings because of their historical value. One of the buildings, which was located opposite the main gate of the SMF, has been renovated and is presently occupied by SMF Centralised Training Wing. One more block, which has been partly renovated, is being used for Urban Search and Rescue Training of the Disaster Response Unit of the SMF.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that, as at now, two blocks have been pulled down as part of the project for the construction of the gymnasium which has been designed in such a way that it blends harmoniously with the surrounding environment. The works which have started in June 2020 are expected to be completed in August 2021.

Ms J. Bérenger: It may be important to note that the cultural and historical significance of this region of Vacoas is not only limited to the ancient buildings but also to the open fields. So, can the hon. Prime Minister give an undertaking to the House to the effect that his Government will not proceed with any further eventual construction project which will negatively impact or cause the loss of the unique historical structures in Vacoas, especially those along Willoughby Road and the more so, that needful will be done to ensure their preservation unlike what we have witnessed with regard to the former Dr. Maurice Curé School. Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say I do not really understand the object of this question. What does the hon. Member want the Government to do? That we just keep everything as it is today and we do not undertake any project in that area? This is what I have understood, unless the hon. Member can be more specific. We are talking about this particular project of a gymnasium. I think because I have given all the information that is required, I do not see the question as relating to the specific project of building the gymnasium. The hon. Member is asking me about the whole of that region of Vacoas. I do not think it is appropriate.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: If you have a specific issue to raise with regard to a project in that area, I shall provide the information to you. And I understand, when I provided all the information to a main Question from a previous hon. Member, why there was no supplementary question!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Ms J. Bérenger: Thank you. The hon. Prime Minister referred to a report. Can he table the report and can he state whether the public has had the opportunity to give their views and, if no, why?

The Prime Minister: Which report is the hon. Member referring to?

Ms J. Bérenger: The hon. Prime Minister referred to a report with regard to the Heritage Impact Assessment.

The Prime Minister: I never mentioned that. The hon. Member has not listened to my answer! I think the hon. Member should listen properly to what I have stated!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! You do not have the right to speak there!

Ms J. Bérenger: I understand that both reports have been done.

The Prime Minister: Which report are you talking about?

Ms J. Bérenger: I understand that both reports have been done.

The Prime Minister: Well, there is...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Ene vier report sa !*

Mr Speaker: No, do not engage into a conversation.

The Prime Minister: If you had listened carefully, you would have noted that I had stated that the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development had carried out a survey and had submitted a report and had recommended that the buildings be pulled down. That is since...

(Interruptions)

Ms J. Bérenger: Table the report!

The Prime Minister: Let me finish!

Mr Speaker: Wait! Do not engage in conversation, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger.

The Prime Minister: You think this is a debate? You have put a question! Will you give me enough time to answer? Maybe, if I give you all the information, there will be no supplementary again!

(Interruptions)

This survey has been conducted as far back as April 2008 and, therefore, I shall look into the recommendations, and if need be, I can...

Ms J. Bérenger: Table it!

The Prime Minister: I shall seek advice as to whether this report can be tabled.

Ms J. Bérenger: Thank you.

Mr Lesjongard: *Apran pose question!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait! No comments!

Ms J. Bérenger: *Trop mari ou!*

The Prime Minister: Ah!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: *La honte!*

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Papa-tifi!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, ..

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, is it in order for the hon. Member to say '*trop mari toi*'? Is it in order?

(Interruptions)

Ms J. Bérenger: *C'est li ki in roder!*

Mr Speaker: Really...

Ms J. Bérenger: *Li ki in roder!*

Mr Lesjongard: Sexist!

Mr Speaker: Wait! Wait! Wait!

Mr Lesjongard: Sexist!

An hon. Member: *Quel language!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Lesjongard: Sexist!

Mr Speaker: Wait! Order! Really, I did not hear that word. Now that I hear those words being said, hon. Ms J. Bérenger, be kind, be gentle, please. Withdraw!

Ms J. Bérenger: He should be gentle as well!

Mr Speaker: Withdraw the word first! Withdraw!

Ms J. Bérenger: Is it in order to say that I should learn how to ask questions? *Ale appran pose...*

Mr Speaker: No! There is no discussion, hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Lesjongard: Because you are wasting the time of the House!

Mr Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: *Ki mentalite sa?*

Mr Speaker: You withdraw?

Ms J. Bérenger: He should withdraw before!

Mr Speaker: No! Then, you make a point of order, hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

(Interruptions)

Ms J. Bérenger: I want him to withdraw what he said and then I will withdraw.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: *Belle attitude!*

Mr Speaker: I am helping you to get out of this problem!

An hon. Member: ...*mentalité!*

Mr Speaker: Withdraw the word and if there is anything else, you would like to add, come with a point of order!

Ms J. Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I withdraw what I have said, but I want him to withdraw what he said also.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait! You withdraw without any condition! Then, you come with a point of order.

Mr Dhunoo: *Aprann!*

Mr Speaker: Whatever you have to say, I will see if there if there is a point of order, and then I will remedy to it. Please, without condition, just withdraw!

An hon. Member: She said it already!

An hon. Member: *Ine fini dire.*

Mr Speaker: You have already withdrawn, without condition?

An hon. Member: *Fini* withdrawn!

Ms J. Bérenger: I have already withdrawn, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Without condition!

An hon. Member: *Fini* withdrawn!

Mr Speaker: Okay. Now, you have a point of order and we will listen.

Ms J. Bérenger: Thank you. The hon. Member stated before me '*al aprann pose question*', and I do not think that this is in order as well as the hon. Prime Minister stated...

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

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait! There is only one Speaker here. I can see many Speakers; one former. You want a point of clarification?

Mr Lesjongard: No, a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Okay.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, not knowing how to put a question in this House is wasting the time of the House!

(Interruptions)

We have very serious matters to deal with. I believe hon. Members of this House should know how to put supplementary questions. That is why I said that remark.

(Interruptions)

Mr Ramful: The hon. Minister, unfortunately, should know his Standing Orders. He cannot comment on the way someone puts questions!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Right now, the time is 12.33 hrs. Time is over! I will respond to all these Standing Orders at a later stage. Question time!

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will also ask another ...

Mr Speaker: No, I have already ruled!

Mr Uteem: ... point of order.

Mr Speaker: I already ruled. Time is over!

Mr Uteem: Yes, but the matter I wish...

Mr Speaker: Then, any point of order - learn this, and this applies for all hon. Members - should go through that slot. So, the slot is done. Now, it is Parliamentary Questions.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is something which you have to ask him to withdraw!

Mr Speaker: I already said that I will look into the matter and I will come back at a later stage.

Mr Uteem: Yes, but listen to what I have to say...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I cannot hear you well, believe me!

Mr Uteem: Yes. I said that if you can give me just half a second to tell you what was said by the hon. Minister and...

Mr Speaker: I will review everything, don't you worry! Do not instruct me!

Mr Uteem: I am not...

Mr Speaker: As I always tell hon. Members, the Speaker does not receive orders. The Speaker will look into all these points of order and will come with a statement at later stage.

Mr Speaker: Please, allow me to work. Hon. Ms Anquetil!

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES - INAPPROPRIATE REMARKS - INQUIRY

(No. B/791) **Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the proposed inquiry to be initiated by her Ministry into the recent case of utterance by Mrs R.S. of hateful and inappropriate remarks towards persons with disabilities on the social media platform, she will state where matters stand.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the evening of 01 July 2021, with great concern, I took cognizance of a video clip circulating on social media wherein Mrs R.S. was making heinous and unacceptable comments towards people with disabilities. I immediately requested the Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry to view the video clip and to take prompt actions to report the matter to the Police.

On Friday 02 July 2021, at around 9.15 a.m., two officers of my Ministry reported the case to the Pope Hennessy Police Station. A letter was also addressed by my Ministry to the Commissioner of Police on the same day, to take actions as deemed appropriate. I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, on the same day, that is, 02 July 2021, Mrs R.S. was arrested and appeared before the District Court of Moka on a provisional charge of breach of ICTA. She was remanded to Police cell on the same day.

On 06 July 2021, she was bailed out upon furnishing a security of Rs8,000 and a recognition of Rs50,000. The inquiry is still ongoing.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Suite à ce dangereux dérapage, il y a eu la réaction immédiate de la ministre. On sait que le fils de Mme R.S. a présenté des excuses. Par contre, l'*Equal Opportunities Commission* n'a eu aucune réaction, alors qu'on pensait qu'elle était justement là pour cela. La ministre pourrait-elle indiquer à la Chambre ce

que fait son ministère pour stopper la provocation à la haine envers les personnes en situation de handicap et pour valoriser et sensibiliser le public sur la situation de handicap ? Merci.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, your supplementary question is very far from the original question. Your original question is very specific, but I can say that with regard to empowerment of persons with disabilities, making sure that their rights are being respected is one of the top priorities of my Ministry. We do have sensitisation campaigns on a regular basis. I must also say that, at the beginning of this year, we have had large consultation workshops with different stakeholders, different Ministries, the private sector, the public, to sensitise the public at large on the rights of persons with disabilities and also, at the same time, to see to it that they are being looked after properly.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Cette question inévitablement nous ramène au *Disability Bill*. Il y a une incompréhension totale de la part des ONG et de la société civile autour du retard à l'introduction de ce projet de loi qui est au bureau de *l'Attorney General* depuis 2016, c'est-à-dire cinq ans. La ministre, peut-elle indiquer à la Chambre les réelles raisons derrière ce retard ? Merci.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, once again, this question is very specific, but since the hon. Member has put questions on the status of the Disability Bill, I am more than happy to reply because on this side of the House we are also very much concerned about this *projet de loi*. But, at the same time, you do realise that it is a very complex piece of legislation. I can safely say that the Disability Bill is presently being carefully examined by the State Law Office. It is in progress. You have to understand also that there are many stages through before a Bill becomes a law. Well, you are from the Labour Party, hon. Member. I do not want to be nasty but since you have put the question, so your Party also promised to introduce very important pieces of legislation, but those pieces of legislation have never seen the day. I presume that your intention was good but I guess that your Party does meet constraints and challenges which explain that important pieces of legislation like the Freedom of Information Bill, the Children's Bill was announced almost 10 years back, the electoral reform and all these pieces of legislation have not seen the day. In the Government...

(Interruptions)

Let me finish!

In the Government Programme of the Labour Party 2012-2015, you announced that a Disability Bill will be introduced. You were in power three years. No Bill! No draft! We

have not seen the draft; we have not seen the Bill. So, I will urge the hon. Member to be patient. We are working on the Bill, but, as I have said, making new policies and laws, is usually a slow process involving a number of stages during which key issues are being discussed. So, we cannot make haste with a piece of legislation, and then we find ourselves in difficulty when we reach the stage of implementation. So, we have to make sure that when a Bill becomes law, it is enforceable.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Je voudrais juste dire au départ que je ne me permettrais jamais de politiser un sujet aussi sensible.

(Interruptions)

Jamais! Jamais!

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised...

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, Maurice a signé la Convention des Nations Unies relative aux droits des personnes en situation de handicap. Dans notre législation, il existe des termes dégradants et humiliants, tels que, écoutez-bien : *Incapacitated Voter* à l'encontre des personnes en situation de handicap, entre autres. Est-ce que le gouvernement...

Mr Speaker: Excuse me.

Ms Anquetil: ...est conscient...

Mr Speaker: Excuse me. Is your question directly related to the original question?

Ms Anquetil: *Yes, I am coming.* Est-ce que le gouvernement, la ministre, pourrait-elle indiquer à la Chambre si le gouvernement est conscient de l'urgence de cette loi, surtout dans les circonstances actuelles ? Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just said; I am happy to hear that the hon. Member is not *politiser* the present subject. We all know. I have said it a hundred of times, on this side of the House, we are doing our level best to bring this piece of legislation in Parliament. But, as I have said, you will need to be patient. We are doing the needful. I cannot do more than that. I have said there is a process. Making new policies and laws is usually a slow process involving a number of stages. So, we have to respect all those stages. We cannot bring a piece of legislation in a short period of time. So, we have to be very careful. All the policy issues need to be discussed thoroughly and as I have said, we are doing the needful. I am not saying we are not bringing the Bill in Parliament. It is like the

Children's Bill. As I have said, you announced the Children's Bill 10 years back, and we have brought it. So, this is an example to be taken into consideration.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ B/798 will be replied by hon. Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection.

PQs B/790, B/825, B/844, B/845 have been withdrawn.

Next question!

COVID-19 TREATMENT – IVERMECTIN

(No. B/792) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state if his Ministry is considering the use of Ivermectin in the treatment thereof and, if so, give reasons therefor and, if not, why not.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that Ivermectin is a broad spectrum anti-parasitic agent like Zentel with reported in vitro antiviral activity for RNA viruses, such as HIV, dengue fever and West Nile virus. Ivermectin acts by inhibiting the Nsp9 protein of the virus.

This non-specific effect, also observed in vitro on SARS-CoV 2, for the first time by an Australian team in April 2020, it requires very high plasma concentrations which are difficult to achieve without causing significant toxicity in humans. The 2020 study demonstrated in vitro that in cell cultures infected with SARS CoV-2, the insertion of Ivermectin reduced the viral load by a factor of 5000 after 48 hours.

However, results published in numerous clinical trials to date have clearly shown the absence of benefits at achievable doses of Ivermectin without the risk of serious side effects in humans. This prompted the WHO to issue an unfavourable opinion on the use of Ivermectin for the treatment of SARS COV-2 in humans on 31 March 2021. The WHO stated that current data on the use of Ivermectin for the treatment of patients with COVID-19 is not conclusive. Until more data becomes available, the WHO recommends the use of Ivermectin only for clinical trials.

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. L'honorable ministre, est-il informé que certains médecins du privé recommandent l'utilisation de l'ivermectin dans le traitement contre la COVID-19, et en ont même ouvertement fait état dans les médias. De ce fait, peut-on

connaître la position de son ministère par rapport à cette prise de position de certains médecins ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, all patients suffering from COVID-19 are treated in our centres and no private practitioner is allowed to treat COVID-19. Our doctors, our team of experts, they have been treating COVID-19 since last year and we will stand guided by their recommendation. If ever they decide that Ivermectin should be used to treat COVID-19 patients, the Ministry will provide such medication.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, l'honorable ministre, peut-il nous dire si l'hydroxy-chloroquine est toujours utilisé dans le traitement contre la COVID-19, ou il y a-t-il d'autres types de traitements qui sont utilisés actuellement, et si oui, de nous préciser lesquels ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, no, the chloroquine is not being used for the treatment of COVID-19, but in previous parliamentary questions I have already given the whole treatment protocol being used for the treatment of COVID-19. I will table later on this information again.

Mr Speaker: You have four questions. Let's move on!

MAURITIUS FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION – 1st & 2nd DIVISION FOOTBALL CLUBS - FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

(No. B/793) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Mauritius Football Association and the first and second division football clubs, he will state the quantum of the financial grant/assistance allocated thereto in financial years 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, respectively, giving details thereof.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker Sir, with your permission, I would like to start by sending my salutations to the Mauritian delegation that is currently in Tokyo for the Olympic Games and by conveying my warmest congratulations and encouragement to the two boxers, namely Mr Merven Clair and Mr Richarno Colin, who have won their bouts in their respective categories. As at date, they have, thus, qualified to participate in the quarter and eighth finals, respectively.

My best wishes go also to the four Mauritian athletes who will participate in the Tokyo Paralympic Games from 24 August to 05 September 2021.

Aller Moris!

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the PQ, with your permission I am tabling the relevant information.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, à mon tour de saluer nos athlètes qui participent actuellement aux jeux olympiques et je leur souhaite bonne chance. De ce fait, vu que le ministre est en train de déposer - encore une fois, je n'ai pas d'information sous les yeux, vu que des sommes importantes - peut-être l'honorable ministre pourrait-il nous dire, même s'il a déposé les informations requises, les sommes qui ont été accordées à la *MFA* pour les années financières que j'ai demandées? Peut-il nous dire s'il y a un bilan qui a été fait par rapport à toute cette somme qui a été accordée et par rapport à l'utilisation de cet argent, et si les objectifs qui avaient été fixés, ont été atteints?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, premièrement, puisque la question parle des clubs de première et de deuxième division, laissez-moi informer la Chambre que pour l'année financière 2017-2018, une somme totale de Rs19,200,000 avait été allouée aux différents clubs de football, incluant ceux de *National Super League Division 1 and 2*. Pour l'année financière 2018-2019, une somme totale, encore une fois, de Rs19,200,000 avait été allouée aux clubs et non à la fédération. Et pour l'année financière 2019-2020, pareil, Rs19,200,000 ; pour l'année financière 2020-2021, cela a diminué avec la réduction du budget, et une somme de Rs13,500,000 avait été allouée aux clubs.

Pour répondre à l'honorable membre, en 2017, une somme de Rs4,673.60 avait été allouée à la fédération ; en 2018-2019, une somme de Rs7,433,881 avait été allouée à la fédération et en 2019-2020, Rs9,800,513 avait été allouée à la fédération. En 2020-2021 : zéro, pas le moindre sou n'avait été alloué à la fédération. Nous connaissons tous les différents soucis que nous avons eus. Et il faut dire que depuis 2017, les sommes allouées à la fédération étaient surtout en vue des préparations par rapport aux jeux des îles, où l'équipe nationale devait faire plusieurs stages à l'étranger et tout cela bien sûr coûte énormément. Donc, c'était principalement dans ce but que les sommes avaient été allouées à la *MFA*.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, puisque pour la prochaine saison le ministère des sports soutiendra financièrement les clubs comme ce fut le cas ces dernières saisons même si probablement avec une baisse dans les allocations car le montant total budgété a subi une réduction de Rs3 millions, l'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire si son ministère exigera de la *MFA* que la saison footballistique cette fois-ci aille jusqu'au bout, pandémie ou pas ?

Mr Toussaint : M. le président, j'ai déjà répondu à la question par rapport à l'organisation du championnat. Le championnat avait été annulé à la suite d'une réunion du *Managing Committee* de la MFA. Donc, c'est le *Managing Committee* de la MFA qui prend toutes ces décisions. De toutes les façons, pour la nouvelle saison et pour les allocations que nous allons remettre bientôt, les discussions sont encore en cours, certainement il y aura des changements. Donc, nous attendons que les officiers aient terminé avec les différentes discussions puisque nous rencontrons en ce moment toutes les fédérations, pas uniquement le football, mais toutes les fédérations pour voir un peu leurs différents plans pour l'année en cours.

Mr Speaker: The question has been sufficiently canvassed; move on to your next question!

NATIONAL DATABASE FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS – ELIGIBLE FAMILIES

(No. B/794) 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 National Database for Vulnerable Groups, she will state if the measure announced in the Budget Speech 2021-2022 for households earning a monthly income in the range of Rs10,500 and Rs14,000 eligible to register for support thereunder, is presently applicable and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I wish to inform the House that the setting-up of a national database for vulnerable groups was announced in the Budget Speech 2020-2021. Once this measure was announced, my Ministry initiated consultations to work out the applicable threshold for families to be eligible under the national database.

However, in July 2020, immediately after the Budget Speech 2020-2021, my Ministry embarked on a recertification exercise of existing eligible households on the Social Register of Mauritius. Following the recertification exercise, the Government took the decision to review the poverty threshold in order to capture vulnerable families on our database.

I wish to inform the House that the exercise to review the poverty threshold and to work out the applicable threshold for the national database for vulnerable groups had to be worked out concurrently. To that effect, several consultative meetings were held with the

Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, my Ministry and the Statistics Mauritius.

On 09 April 2021, Government approved the following threshold –

- (i) the poverty threshold was revised from Rs2,720 to Rs3,000 for an adult, and
- (ii) from Rs1,360 to Rs1,500 for a child.

The maximum threshold was capped at Rs10,500 instead of Rs9,520. As for the national database for vulnerable groups, households earning a monthly income between Rs10,500 and Rs14,000 will be eligible for support.

In the Budget Speech 2021-2022, the revised poverty threshold and the threshold for the national database for vulnerable groups were announced. My Ministry is currently working on the modalities for the implementation of both measures. A communiqué will soon be issued to invite households to register on the Social Register of Mauritius and the national database for vulnerable groups in due course.

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. Peut-on savoir si ces familles qui vont tomber dans la catégorie R 10,500 à R 14,000 vont aussi bénéficier des mêmes services de la NEF que ceux dont les revenus s'arrêtent à Rs10,500 ?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Yes, a very good question, hon. Member. Well, they will be provided with the same types, I must say, of assistance provided to SRM beneficiaries except financial assistance. They will get all the support in the field of education, training, family empowerment. However, I must also add that the assistance will be provided on a needs basis.

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. L'honorable ministre vient de confirmer qu'une campagne de communication, je pense, pour informer la population et en particulier, les familles tombant dans cette catégorie. Peut-on savoir quel type de campagne de communication qui sera mis en place?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, we are presently working on the modalities, there will be Press communiqué, there will be talks on the radio and on TV. I think, since it is a new measure, it will be good if we can reach out as many vulnerable groups as possible. Our intention is good, we will try to have a very effective sensitisation campaign so that all those who are in difficulties can reach out to us and be registered on the national database for vulnerable groups.

Mr Speaker: The next substantive question!

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT – STATISTICS MAURITIUS

(No. B/795) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to youth unemployment, he will state the immediate actions taken, if any, by his Ministry in the light of the latest figures thereof published by Statistics Mauritius.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that as per Statistics Mauritius, the unemployed youth aged between 16 to 24 years in the first quarter of 2021 was estimated at 18,600 compared to 17,300 at the first quarter of 2020. This shows an increase in youth unemployment rate in the first quarter of 2021 to 31.5% compared to 23.5% in the corresponding quarter of 2020 which is equivalent roughly to 1,300 youths.

According to ILO, globally the participation rate of young people in the labour force has continued to decline. There are structural barriers preventing young people from entering the labour market, one of which is their limited work experience. As such, the youth need to be skilled to acquire the required competencies for employability.

With a view to addressing the current youth unemployment issue, my Ministry has initiated the following measures –

- The National Training and Reskilling Scheme (NTRS) has been introduced with a view to skilling and reskilling 6,000 individuals who have lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as those who are unemployed including youth;
- The National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) implemented in 2016 continues to facilitate training and placement of unemployed persons including youth. The NSDP has been mounted to promote employment;
- The Graduate Training for Employment Scheme (GTES) which was introduced some five years ago has proven to be an effective tool to combat unemployment amongst graduates. It aims at up skilling and reskilling existing unemployed graduates based on immediate skills needs of enterprises;

- The Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD) operating under the aegis of my Ministry has introduced the National Apprenticeship Programme to enable youth to be skilled and to acquire the required competencies for employability;
- The Youth Employment Programme provides the youth with first hands-on work experience to increase their chances of employability. The YEP has been revamped and give young persons the possibility to acquire work experience not only in private sector but in the public sector as well;
- The Training Engineer Scheme (TES) which is an on-going training programme provides graduates in different fields of engineering and those possessing the eligibility criteria from the Council of Registered Professional Engineer (CRPE) to be placed in either public body or private sector to undergo training in order to qualify for registration under the CRP of Mauritius and thereafter operate as full-fledged engineers;
- The Dual Training Programme, provides for a mix of practical on the job training and classroom studies for Diploma and Degree courses, furthermore, and
- The Employment Service of my Ministry is also providing a helping hand to the unemployed youth as well as other jobseekers through the various programmes put at their disposal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition to the above mentioned measures, I wish to inform the House that other Government Institutions, namely the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, the Financial Services Commission, the Financial Services Institute (Mauritius), the SME and Service to Mauritius are also providing training and placement programme thus facilitating the employment of young persons.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, l'honorable ministre dans sa réponse a fait état du *National Apprenticeship Programme* qui avait été annoncé dans le budget 2021-2022 et peut-il nous donner des détails sur les 750 apprentis qui devraient être formés par le biais de ce programme ?

Mr Callichurn : Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, HRDC is responsible for this program, the National Apprenticeship Programme Training is a dual programme with youth spending their

time dually at the MITD and at participating enterprises level, thus, significantly improving their employment. Since 2018, 2,952 apprentices have completed their courses and some of them are still enrolled and the program is ongoing.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can we know from the hon. Minister, he mentioned about the Youth Employment Programme (YEP). Can we know how many youth are actually enrolled on this programme and what are the future plans of the Ministry for this programme?

Mr Callichurn: I can give you figures for a year. As at 30 June 2021, Youth Employment Programmes are programmes designed for either a year or two. So, as at 30 June 2021, there are 605 trainees who have been placed in the private sector and 505 are actually benefiting from training in the public sector.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Many young unemployed are suffering because they are staying home and doing nothing. Will the hon. Minister consider having a system where a youth who is unemployed can get psychological assistance from his Ministry during the time where he is not employed?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Career Guidance Department of my Ministry is providing this service and we are providing assistance to young unemployed persons.

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

At 1.04 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.41 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Next question!

STATUTORY BODIES & LOCAL AUTHORITIES EMPLOYEES - BENEFIT PENSION PLANS

(No. B/796) 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 the Defined Benefit Pension Plans for employees of statutory bodies and local authorities, he will state the current amount of deficit thereunder, indicating the measures taken for the reduction thereof, if any.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'ai été informé qu'il existe 120 fonds de pension à prestations définies d'organismes statutaires et de collectivités locales qui sont gérés par *SICOM* conformément à la *Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act*.

Sur les 120 fonds de pension –

- 26 fonds de pension ont effectivement un excédent ;
- 88 fonds ont un déficit actuariel, et
- 6 fonds de pension ont été récemment créés.

Au total, le déficit actuariel combiné des 120 fonds de pension à prestations définies s'élève à quelque 16 milliards de roupies.

Ce déficit s'est accumulé depuis plusieurs décennies et selon les techniciens, s'explique principalement par les facteurs suivants –

- premièrement, la pension des employés retraités est continuellement ajustée à la hausse suite à l'attribution d'une compensation salariale chaque année et à toute révision périodique des salaires ;
- deuxièmement, nous faisons face à un phénomène d'augmentation du nombre de bénéficiaires compte tenu de l'allongement de l'espérance de vie ;
- troisièmement, les obligations de pension sont calculées sur la base du salaire projeté du dernier mois d'un employé au moment de sa retraite et non sur le salaire actuel perçu ;
- quatrièmement, la contribution est basée sur le salaire réel perçu par l'employé au lieu du salaire projeté du dernier mois au moment de sa retraite, et
- enfin, les taux de cotisation ne sont pas au niveau requis pour répondre aux obligations futures en matière de pension.

M. le président, je tiens à informer l'Assemblée que les 120 fonds de pension à prestations définies n'ont pas de déficit de trésorerie et disposent de liquidités suffisantes pour remplir leurs obligations en matière de pension envers les employés retraités et ceux qui partent à la retraite, conformément à la *Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act*.

M. le président, un certain nombre de mesures ont été prises pour résoudre le déficit actuariel des fonds de pension. Il s'agit notamment de –

- l'introduction du régime de retraite à cotisations définies pour tous les employés recrutés à partir du 1^{er} janvier 2013 ;
- l'augmentation des taux de cotisation pour un certain nombre de fonds de pension ;
- la fusion des fonds de pension de certaines institutions qui ont été fermées, et
- l'injection de liquidités par le Gouvernement dans les fonds de pension qui ne sont pas en mesure de faire face à leurs obligations en matière de pension.

Par ailleurs, en novembre 2020, un comité a été mis en place au niveau de mon ministère. Ce comité comprend des représentants de la *SICOM* et a pour but de suivre continuellement la situation financière des organismes statutaires et des fonds de pension des autorités locales. A la lumière de cette analyse, le comité fera les recommandations appropriées.

M. le président, je souhaite également informer l'Assemblée que certains organes statutaires disposent de leurs fonds propres de pension autogérés ou à prestations définies. Les informations relatives à ces fonds de pension sont en cours de compilation, en consultation avec la *Financial Services Commission*, et seront déposées. Merci.

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development referred to a deficit of Rs16 billion whereas the Director of Audit talks about a deficit, as at 30 June 2019, of Rs26 billion. May I know from the hon. Minister of Finance being given this big amount and this big discrepancy, between the figures that is advanced and that of the Director of Audit, whether he would consider commissioning an independent report by actuaries, in order to ascertain whether the pension schemes are sustainable or not?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, à notre niveau, au niveau du ministère des Finances, nous avons mis en place ce comité pour travailler sur toutes les options. C'est une des options qu'a proposée l'honorable membre, mais il y a d'autres options aussi qui sont sur la table. Ils sont en train de travailler dessus. Ça a démarré, ils ont commencé en novembre 2020. On comprend qu'il y a quand même un processus où ils vont travailler, ils vont récolter les informations, voir l'évolution de ces différents fonds, voir aussi l'évolution au niveau mondial parce qu'on sait très bien que ces fonds, il faut regarder aussi les taux pratiqués sur le marché mondial et le marché local par rapport à ce qui se passe concernant les

investissements, et par la suite ils vont venir avec ces propositions. Je peux soumettre la proposition de l'honorable membre à ce comité à travers mon *DFS*, qui est le président de ce comité, pour voir ce qui en ressort. Merci.

Mr Uteem: Does the hon. Minister find it normal that this Committee, as part of this Committee, you have SICOM sitting in that Committee? And SICOM is the fund manager, is the one who is responsible to manage the pensions fund. So, how would the Committee come up with suggestions which go against the interest of SICOM? Because, maybe you need to privatise the management; maybe SICOM is the problem.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour sa question. *SICOM* fait partie de ce comité, parce que ce comité a besoin d'avoir les informations relatives à *SICOM*; parce que ces fonds étaient placés auprès de la *SICOM* qui font les investissements et qui font les retours et qui distribuent les pensions. Donc, ce comité, comme je l'ai dit, est présidé par un *DFS* au niveau de mon ministère, qui suit l'évolution, et qui va prendre en toute indépendance, par rapport à la *SICOM*, les mesures appropriées et fera les recommandations appropriées au niveau du ministère pour que nous, à notre niveau, on puisse par la suite venir avec des mesures appropriées pour corriger ce déficit parce que c'est sûr c'est un déficit actuariel élevé. Nous allons voir comment on va mettre des fonds dedans. Quels sont les fonds qu'on va mobiliser pour mettre dedans ? Comment on va le faire ? Quelles sont les entreprises, les corps paraétatiques, les entreprises qui sont concernés et comment on va faire pour pouvoir dégager ces fonds supplémentaires nécessaires pour rééquilibrer ces fonds de pension.

Mr Uteem: Being given that the Government is going ahead with the *Contribution sociale* and the Social Benefit Bill, is Government going to revisit these 120 Pensions Funds as they did for the National Pension Fund?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, l'honorable membre va comprendre que je n'ai pas de réponse immédiate à cette question parce que j'attends de voir les recommandations de ce comité pour venir avec les mesures appropriés.

Merci.

Mr Speaker: Move on to your next question!

DISABLED PERSONS - TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT –

2017-JULY 2021

(No. B/797) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the disabled persons, she will, for the benefit of the House, for each of the years 2017 to 2020 and since January 2021 to date, obtain from the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board, information as to the number thereof –

- (a) trained, indicating the courses imparted and respective places of training, and
- (b) having -
 - (i) been placed in employment, and
 - (ii) complained thereto relating to employment issues.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board is regulated by the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act 1996 as amended by The Training and Employment of Disabled Persons (Amendment) Act 2012. I am tabling the information requested.

With regard to part (b) (ii) of the question, I am informed by the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board that only four complaints relating to employment issues have been received over the period 2017 to date. I wish to inform the House that all of them have already been resolved.

Mr Uteem: Thank you. Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that since the Training Centres at Calebasses and Rose Belle, have been closed since 2017 and 2018 respectively, there are 3 instructors at TEDPB who are sitting and doing nothing?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Now I will have to look into the matter. This has not brought to my knowledge that they are sitting and doing nothing. So I will have to check and then come back to Parliament.

Mr Uteem: There is no training centre...

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Yes there is no training centre because of a good reason. The Training Centre at Calebasses was in a very dilapidated state. It was not conducive for persons with disabilities, for youngsters to be in the said centre, so we have had to take a decision to close it. That is the main reason why, for security reason.

Mr Uteem: May I know from the hon. Minister whether she finds it normal that for the first three years, since 2017/2018, TEDPB did not find it necessary to lease premises?

Even if Calebasses Centre is unsafe, they could at least have rented premises and carry out those training instead of not carrying out the training activities.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Even though we are not running any training centres, this does not mean that efforts are not being made by the Ministry to train persons with disabilities. Although I always stress on an inclusive society, training of persons with disabilities in itself is a very complex issue. You will agree with me that it is in fact the right thing to do. It has a social and economic dimension, but at the same time, it depends on several factors, for example, the type of disability of the person; in certain cases, persons with disabilities have more complex needs, so they can never be expected to be trained, willingness of the person, the ability of the employer to create a disability friendly environment and also the aptitude of the persons. As you can see, it is indeed a very complex issue but rest assured hon. Member, I do know that time and again, you did ask questions about persons with disabilities but we are doing our level best to address all those issues in the Disability Bill.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/807 and B/842 have been withdrawn. Move to your next question, Hon.Uteem!

COMPETITION COMMISSION REPORT – RECOMMENDATIONS

(No. B/798) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the pharmaceutical sector, he will state if consideration will be given for the implementation of the recommendations on the conditions of competition published in the Competition Commission Report dated 08 June 2021.

The Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Mr S. Callichurn): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I shall reply to PQ B/798 addressed to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

In 2019, the Competition Commission launched a market study into the pharmaceutical sector in Mauritius. This study was conducted following complaints received from two wholesale pharmacies and issues raised by Consumer Organisation in relation to the registration process and pricing of pharmaceutical products. The objective of the study was to understand and publicise the conditions of competition in the pharmaceutical sector and to identify any potential competition concerned that may be arising therefrom. It also covers the market structure and concentration and as well as identification of potential hurdles to

competition across the pharmaceutical supply chain. The study aimed at ensuring that the pharmaceutical sector is not constrained by regulatory or other market conditions that might unnecessarily limit competition amongst the market player to the detriment of consumers.

In September 2020, views and comments were sought from interested parties on a draft report for consultation and on 08 June 2021, the Competition Commission published its report on the pharmaceutical industry in Mauritius. The Competition Commission has made recommendations pertaining to the –

- (i) facilitation of access to information in relation to the Pharmacy Board Registration Process criteria and application standards;
- (ii) reviewing of Pricing Control Policies, and
- (iii) consideration to be given for amending law for parallel import.

Mr Speaker, Sir, after having taken cognisance of the recommendations made in the report of the Competition Commission, a Technical Committee has been set up at the level of my Ministry, comprising representatives of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Economic Development Board and the Mauritius Revenue Authority. The Technical Committee has been mandated to thoroughly examine the recommendations of the report relating to the Pricing Control Policy on the basis of the following terms of reference –

- (a) to examine the recommendations contained in the report of the Competition Commission on the market study of pharmaceutical sector in Mauritius;
- (b) to study the price revolution of pharmaceutical products and the importation cost for price fixing unit;
- (c) to establish a database of all pharmaceutical products in Mauritius by volume, price and use;
- (d) to undertake technical analysis to determine whether maximum mark-up system encourages wholesalers and retailers to sell higher priced pharmaceutical products that are mainly branded originator as had been highlighted by the Competition Commission;
- (e) look into the recommendations for a regressive markup;

- (f) to explore the possibility of monitoring prices by undertaking price comparison and publishing same on a regular basis to encourage price transparency at all levels, and
- (g) to come up with proposals and advice on policy decisions regarding prices of pharmaceutical products where possible.

The Committee will come up with appropriate proposals for the implementation of the relevant recommendations made by the Competition Commission if found feasible. I need to inform the House and the hon. Member that a first meeting of the Technical Committee was held on 22 July this year and another meeting is scheduled for next week.

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The price of pharmaceutical products has plummeted. May I know from the hon. Minister whether a timeframe has been given to the Technical Committee to consider the report of the Competition Commission and come up with solutions and proposals?

Mr Callichurn: Well, I have requested the Technical Committee to work as quickly as possible and submit its proposals to me so that we can take appropriate and corrective measures.

Mr Uteem: The main importer of pharmaceutical products and the main distributor remains the Government through hospitals, where they distribute those pharmaceutical products. At least at the level of Government, will consideration be given to break down this monopoly when it comes to import of pharmaceutical products, as has been highlighted by the Competition Commission?

Mr Callichurn: The recommendations and the proposals made in the Competition Commission report, the Technical Committee will assess those proposals and then we will surely look into it.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary, if you have one? Let us give a chance to hon. Dr. Aumeer, you have four questions.

NEUROSURGERY – QUALIFIED SPECIALISTS

(No. B/799) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to neurosurgery, he will state –

- (a) the number of qualified specialists thereof employed in the public sector, indicating the respective posting thereof, and
- (b) patients who, over the past four years –
 - (i) underwent same within normal working hours and on emergency outside normal working hours, respectively
 - (ii) were sent overseas therefor, indicating the reasons why same could not be performed locally, indicating if an audit of mortality rate of patients having undergone same locally and overseas has been carried out.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are 4 Specialist doctors in neurosurgery employed in the public sector. Two Neurosurgeons are posted at Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital and the remaining two at Victoria Hospital.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to parts (b) (i) and (ii) of the question, I am tabling the information on the number of patients who underwent surgery during and after normal working hours.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to further inform the House that all neurosurgery cases which are inoperable in Mauritius are referred for overseas treatment after thorough assessment by a medical board. The main reasons are that such operations need high tech equipment and expertise which are not available locally.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that an audit of mortality rate of patients having undergone neurosurgery locally or abroad would not be conclusive. Carrying out an audit of mortality rate post-surgery will not depict a true picture as the patient may have passed away due to comorbidities and diseases.

Mr Speaker: Supplementary?

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. There are various conditions which are pretty critical that affect the brain and demand acute intervention. Can the Minister inform the House whether he has any information as to when clipping and coiling of vessels would be feasible in Mauritius, keeping in mind that there was an MoU that was signed between the Government and the Government of India regarding the setting up of a neurointerventional suite and angiography. Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Thank you, hon. Member for this question. In fact, due to COVID situation, we have not been able to progress on this Memorandum of Understanding. In the near future, once we go away with the COVID situation, the Ministry will carry on discussions as to how we can carry on with the Memorandum of Understanding, especially in the cases where such operations can be conducted in Mauritius in a near future. We also have to understand that it is not only the expertise that will be required also the high-tech equipment, the maintenance of such equipment. So, all have to be taken into consideration before going ahead with such a project.

Mr Speaker: Another one?

Dr. Aumeer: Last one. There are new approaches in neurosurgery, including stereotactic, laser treatment and endoscopic treatment. Does his Ministry have plans to send our surgeons who want to have a career in neurosurgery for training abroad in highly specialised centres, keeping well in mind that in the recent Budget, there is a budget earmarked for one of these high-tech equipment like the Gama Knife surgery? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, this is under consideration. Again, we will be waiting for all restrictions to be waived off due to COVID and then we can proceed with such recommendations.

Mr Speaker: Your next question!

DR. BRUNO CHEONG HOSPITAL, FLACQ - RADIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

(No. B/800) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether in regard to the Bruno Cheong Hospital at Flacq, he will state the number of radiological investigations carried out thereat, particularly CT scan, MRI and mammography, respectively, over the past four years, indicating the number –

- (a) of CT scan and MRI requested and performed after normal working hours, and
- (b) thereof related to casualties due to road traffic accidents.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that CT scan, MRI and mammography services are not available at Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital. Patients requiring these services are referred to SSRN and Dr. A. G. Jeetoo hospitals respectively.

I am further informed that the total number of patients referred from Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital for CT scan are as follows –

- 1,015 for 2017;
- 1,058 for 2018;
- 1,234 for 2019, and
- 1,256 for 2020.

The number of patients referred for MRI from Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital is as follows –

- 498 for 2017;
- 350 for 2018;
- 362 for 2019, and
- 444 for 2020.

The number of patients referred for mammography from Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital

–

- 99 for 2017;
- 58 for 2018;
- 26 for 2019, and
- 48 for 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, in cases of casualties due to road traffic accidents, the treating doctor liaises directly with the CT Scan Department at SSRN Hospital and the Radiologist at Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital writes the report there.

Provision is being made for CT Scan, MRI and mammography units in the New Flacq Hospital such that casualties due to road traffic accidents would benefit from such services in the near future.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. Since the facilities of CT Scanning, MRI and mammography are not available at Flacq Hospital, can the Minister confirm whether cases, be it emergency or elective, are sent to private clinics for same and which clinic during that same period of time?

Dr. Jagutpal: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, I can just report for the last two years. No patients are being sent to private clinics, all are sent to the different hospitals that I have already mentioned.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, thank you. I had raised this issue during Committee of Supply, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he does not consider it important to install at least a scanner and MRI facilities at Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital because patients suffering from *traumatisme du crâne, de la colonne vertébrale, de l'abdomen et du thorax* having to go to SSRN Hospital, which is very far away, can worsen their medical condition along the way in the process?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, such equipment before installation we need a preparation, there are bunkers, there are so many conditions that have to be satisfied before installing such equipment. Given that the New Flacq Hospital is coming shortly in the next two years, it is not cost-effective at all to set up such facilities in the old hospital. We have to wait for the new facilities because you have to see also the cost implications as well as the facilities. We cannot do something that will last only for two years and it is not proper to do it in this way. There are SAMU facilities available at Flacq Hospital, where patients can be transferred on a fast-track basis.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Dr. Aumeer: The need of the population in the eastern district demands, as pointed out by my colleague, such services. There is the new concept; I know you are talking about in two years' time.

Mr Speaker: No! Put your question! You are doing very well! Put the question!

Dr. Aumeer: The new concept of mobile CT Scanning, which will have the added benefit of emergency use in critically-ill patients and be also used in ICU care and can eventually be transferred to the new hospital. Is that something that you could consider, please?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think we have to seek the advice of the experts before engaging ourselves in mobile specialised services.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

EXPATRIATES – RECRUITMENT

(No. B/801) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the expatriates, he will state the –

- (a) number thereof working in Mauritius over the past five years
 - (i) sector-wise, and
 - (ii) nationality-wise, and
- (b) names of the Mauritius-based recruiting agencies involved in the recruitment thereof.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am hereby tabling the information being sought for by the hon. Member.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Dr. Aumeer: May I have supplementaries, please?

Mr Speaker: But you did not raise your hands! Now, I give you. How would I know?

Dr. Aumeer: Sorry.

Mr Speaker: Go ahead!

Dr. Aumeer: With regard to recruiting agencies in Mauritius, can the hon. Minister disclose the composition of the Board that decides upon quota given to prospective clients seeking to employ expatriates?

Mr Callichurn: Well, there is a committee at the level of my Ministry comprising of representatives of different Ministries, including PMO. It depends, if a work permit is being sought for the tourism industry, then the representative of the Ministry of Tourism will be on that Board. So, it depends on a case to case basis, on which sector work permits are being sought.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Dr. Aumeer: COVID-19 has had a major effect on one and all and all businesses have been affected. Will the hon. Minister consider, at the request of recruiting agencies, waiving the licenses for these recruiting agents, since they have not been able to operate amidst travel restrictions?

Mr Callichurn: It is not a hefty amount that is charged as recruitment fee for recruiting agents. So, we do not envisage making any concession on that.

Mr Speaker: Move on to your next question!

CANCER PATIENTS - DISABILITY BENEFITS

(No. B/802) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to disability benefits to cancer patients, she will state the number of –

- (a) beneficiaries thereof, and
- (b) successful outcomes following appeals lodged with the Medical Tribunal, indicating if an oncologist forms part of the Tribunal.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that cancer patients may benefit from a basic invalidity pension if they meet the eligibility criteria. Furthermore, patients who require the constant care and attention of another person are also paid a carer's allowance.

As regards part (a) of the question, I am informed that 1,130 cancer patients under the age of 60 currently benefit from a basic invalidity pension. Out of this number, 84 patients also receive a carer's allowance.

I am further informed that there are 859 cancer patients above the age of 60 who receive a carer's allowance as their condition requires constant care and attention. Since they are above the age of 60, these persons are, of course, beneficiaries of a basic invalidity pension.

As regards part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the Medical Tribunal is composed of a representative from the Solicitor General's Office, and two specialists in the relevant fields of medicine depending on the nature of the cases.

I am also informed that during the Financial Year 2020-2021, 231 applications were lodged before the Medical Tribunal. Eleven of these cases were allowed by the Medical Tribunal.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. Most terminally ill patients and clinically ill patients do follow treatment at public hospital and do have a Medical Certificate certifying their chronic condition or impending terminal care. Can the hon. Minister see with the Director of the Medical Board at his Ministry why certain patients have to be assessed yearly or even have their pension suspended when medically speaking, these patients will not get any better, some even have weeks to survive. I have with me, I can circulate it, the case of a very sad person regarding this issue.

Mr Speaker: No, please! I am giving you a supplementary; put questions!

Dr. Aumeer: I have asked the question to see...

Mr Speaker: You have already asked the question. I am sorry! Hon. Minister, reply to the question.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Well, I fully understand the concern of the hon. Member. The question of disallowance of basic invalidity pension and carer's allowance has been raised in the Assembly on a number of occasions. I fully understand all the hon. Members, but as I have said, I stand guided by the clinical assessment made by the Medical Board and the Medical Tribunal. I am not an expert; there is the Medical Board which is independent. If a person is not happy with the decision of the Medical Board, he can appeal to the Medical Tribunal. The Medical Tribunal is composed of two specialists in the relevant field of illness and is chaired by a representative from the Solicitor General's Office. So, I cannot say much, I stand guided; I cannot question the findings of the Medical Board and the Medical Tribunal. I think we should trust their assessment and findings. They are independent; there are avenues available if someone is not satisfied.

As I have said, there is the Medical Board and the Medical Tribunal and if the beneficiary's appeal is disallowed, he can, after a period of six months, come with a fresh application and if need be, we will try to give him priority if the case is a serious one and see to it that he is re-boarded as quickly as possible. So, the hon. Member may rest assured, we have to trust the Medical Tribunal and the Medical Board.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Will the hon. Minister provide the eligibility criteria for cancer patients to be granted disability benefits, please?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, it is not specific to the cancer patients. To benefit from a basic invalidity pension, a person should be under the age of 60 and suffer from a disability or mental disability of 60% or more, which is likely to last for a period of one year. This is the general criteria.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS MAPPING - DRAFT

(No. B/803) **Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change whether, in regard to the Environmentally Sensitive Areas, he will state where matters stand in respect of the validation by relevant authorities of the draft Environmentally Sensitive Areas Mapping produced under the Management of Coastal Zones in Mauritius Project, indicating if same is being taken into consideration in the preparation of the National Environment Master Plan.

Mr Ramano: M. le président, en réponse au *PQ B/168* qui m'a été adressé le 6 avril 2021, j'ai informé que –

- (i) le projet *Mainstreaming biodiversity into the management of the coastal zone in the Republic of Mauritius* qui est un *grant-funded* du Global Environment Facility (GEF) et soutenu par le United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), est dirigé par le *Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping* ;
- (ii) mon ministère est l'une des agences d'exécution pour l'une des trois composantes du projet, à savoir l'intégration de la biodiversité dans la planification du développement physique au niveau local et la gestion du tourisme et dans le cadre de laquelle, l'une des activités mises en œuvre comprend la mise à jour des données, des cartes et politique sur les zones écologiquement sensibles, les *environmentally sensitive areas*, à savoir les *coastal marshes and uplands, sand beaches and dunes, coral reefs, seagrass beds and algae and intertidal mudflats*.
- (iii) en ce qui concerne l'activité mentionnée plus haut, l'UNDP country office avait engagé les services d'un cabinet de conseil, à savoir, le FCG ANZDEC

Ltd pour la mise à jour des données, des cartes et des politiques des *ESAs* côtières et marines à Maurice et à Rodrigues ;

- (iv) cependant, compte tenu des divergences et incohérences constatées, le Cabinet de conseil avait été prié d'examiner les *drafts ESA datasets* en janvier de cette année, et
- (v) dans l'intervalle, les *draft maps* avaient été téléchargés sur une plate-forme électronique de l'observatoire des océans au niveau du *Department of Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration*.

J'ai également indiqué que les données sur les *ESAs* ne deviendraient accessibles via la plateforme en ligne qu'après leur validation par les autorités concernées.

M. le président, je suis maintenant informé que les quatrièmes ensembles de données d'*ESAs* révisés ont été reçus du Cabinet de conseil le 06 mai 2021. Le contrôle de la qualité des données effectué par la suite par les officiers de mon ministère le même mois a révélé que les écarts et les incohérences observés sur les *ESA datasets* avaient été seulement partiellement pris en charge.

Étant donné qu'il est prévu d'intégrer les ensembles de données des *ESAs* dans les *Outline Planning Schemes*, les dernières soumissions du Cabinet de conseil ont été transmises au *Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning* pour la réalisation d'un contrôle de la qualité des données. Cependant, le 16 juin 2021, mon ministère a été informé que le *Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning* ne pouvait vérifier que deux types de données *ESAs*, à savoir les *coastal and upland marshes, sand beaches and dunes*.

M. le président, les ensembles de données *ESA* restantes ont également été renvoyées à d'autres autorités compétentes, notamment –

- le *Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration* du *Prime Minister's Office* ;
- le *Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management* ;
- le *Water Resources Unit* du ministère de l'énergie et des utilités publiques ;
- le *National Parks and Conservation Service* et le *Forestry Service* du Ministère de l'Agro-Industrie and *Food Security* ;
- le *Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping*, et

- le *Black River District Council*.

M. le président, à ce stade, je suis amené à comprendre que les ensembles de données *ESA* vérifiées jusqu'à présent ne sont pas acceptables par le *Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning* en termes, entre autres, de leur niveau de précision et de la délimitation des *ESAs* qui ne reflètent pas leur configuration physique réelle, pour permettre la transcription dans les schémas de planification.

Je suis également informé que d'autres parties prenantes sont invitées à soumettre leurs vues et commentaires pour permettre au Comité technique dirigé par mon ministère de rencontrer le Cabinet de conseil au plus vite. Ce dernier sera éventuellement invité à effectuer toutes les vérifications au sol nécessaires et à réviser et finaliser les *datasets* dans un délai de 3 semaines, pour leur éventuelle intégration dans les *Outline Planning Schemes* en vertu du *Town and Country Planning Act* de 1954.

En ce qui concerne la deuxième partie de la question, permettez-moi, M. le président, de confirmer qu'outre la biodiversité étant l'un des huit domaines thématiques prioritaires du Plan directeur de l'environnement de la République de Maurice pour la prochaine décennie, les *ESAs* sont considérées comme un domaine thématique transversal important dans le contexte du changement climatique, des *nature-based solutions* et du *ridge to reef approach* dans le contexte de la gestion intégrée des zones côtières, entre autres. Par conséquent, les *ESAs* seront dûment prises en considération dans l'élaboration de ce document très important dans la politique environnementale du pays pour la prochaine décennie.

En fait, le plan directeur sur l'environnement est en train d'être finalisé par une équipe de consultants internationaux et locaux recrutés par l'*UNDP country office* et le rapport devrait être soumis à mon ministère sous peu.

Ms J. Bérenger: Dans la pratique et en l'absence d'une loi spécifique à la protection des *Environmentally Sensitive Area*, est-ce que l'honorable ministre peut nous dire comment est-ce qu'il compte donner effet, comment est-ce qu'il compte faire respecter cet *ESA Mapping*, que ce soit sur les terrains privés ou les terrains appartenant à l'état?

Mr Ramano: M. le président, donc, l'idée même de venir de l'avant avec cette étude, c'est vrai – permettez-moi de faire un petit rappel pour dire que *the study of ESAs in Mauritius and Rodrigues was identified as one of 6 priority projects in the Environment Investment Programme* de 1999. *The ESA study was commissioned by the then Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit in January 2008 and the project contract was*

awarded to American Consultancy firms, New World Forestry Service et cela a été financé par le gouvernement à l'époque pour un budget de R 29 million. À ce jour, cette étude a identifié 14 *main ESAs* – si l'honorable membre souhaite avoir une liste de ces 14, ce sera avec beaucoup de plaisir que je soumettrai ces 14 *ESAs* et je dois dire que, valeur du jour, les autorités travaillent avec cette étude à base de référence mais quand-même il n'y a pas mal de problèmes qui ont surgi et c'est la raison de plus pourquoi on est en train d'élaborer un nouveau *survey* avec la collaboration de cette firme étrangère avec le financement de l'*UNDP*.

Ms J. Bérenger: Merci. Encore une fois, le *survey* c'est bien, mais comment est-ce que l'honorable ministre compte donner effet à ce *survey* parce que depuis plusieurs années on entend parler d'un *ESA Bill*, on sait également qu'un *Wetland Bill* avait été produit en 2019, est-ce qu'on pourrait avoir un *time frame* pour la présentation d'un *ESA Bill* au Parlement ?

Mr Ramano: M. le président, au niveau du ministère de l'Environnement, nous sommes dans cette phase d'élaboration de notre *master-plan* pour la prochaine décennie mais il y a un comité qui travaille déjà sur la refonte de l'*Environment Protection Act* et là, dans l'élaboration du *Environment Protection Act*, cet amendement en profondeur, il y aura bien sûr un mécanisme de coordination pour, avant tout, assurer l'intégrité des *ESAs* et nous allons nous assurer que l'intégrité des *ESAs* ne soit pas affectée et, bien sûr, dans la refonte du *Environment Protection Act*, il y aura tout un processus, tout un mécanisme qui seront mis en place – un mécanisme de clearance où toutes les autorités qui sont concerné dans l'émission des permis de travailler sur des *ESAs* auront cette loi à base de référence.

Je dois aussi préciser, M. le président, avec votre permission, que dans l'élaboration du *master-plan* qui est arrivé au stage de finalisation au niveau du ministère, les *ESAs* ont une place importante, notamment, il faut absolument qu'on s'assure à 4 niveaux que l'intégrité des *ESAs* soit protégée. Donc, dans le *master-plan*, il y aura un titre concernant la biodiversité et toute cette élaboration de la politique en ce qui concerne la biodiversité prenant en considération nécessairement les différents *ESAs*. Il y a aussi l'*Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan*, autre thème qui sera abordé dans le *master-plan*. Cela prendra aussi en considération les *ESAs* et nous travaillons avec cet approche de *ridge to reef*.

En troisième lieu, M. le président, nous travaillons aussi pour s'assurer que toutes ces données soient mises à la disposition des *Outline Planning Schemes* dont le *Ministry of*

Housing and Land Use Planning est en train de travailler toute une série d'élaboration de plan en collaboration avec les différentes collectivités locales et finalement, autre thème qui sera abordé, qui prendra toujours en considération les différents *ESAs*, c'est le titre ayant trait au *climate change* et là, ce sera le *nature-based solution* qui sera prise en considération, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/843 and B/846 have been withdrawn.

Next question!

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANISATION - PESTICIDES USE

(No. B/804) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to pesticides, he will state if he has taken cognizance of the recent statistics published by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations showing an alarming use thereof and, if so, indicate the –

- (a) sensitisation being done as to the use thereof;
- (b) incentives provided to opt for organic solutions, and
- (c) frequency of controls on the use thereof, indicating if the existing legislation will be reviewed to better regulate the use thereof.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, pests constitute a major constraint to agricultural production and as such the use of pesticides is a common practice worldwide. A pesticide is composed of an active ingredient and other filling materials. It is the active ingredient which is responsible for reducing and eliminating pests. An active ingredient is normally present in a small amount in the composition of a pesticide.

The statistics published by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) relate to the total volume of pesticides imported and is not based on the amount of active ingredient present in the pesticide used for agricultural purposes.

Although the unit of measure adopted by the FAO is based on volume of active ingredient, there has been a misreporting for Mauritius since 2015. The attention of Statistics Mauritius has been drawn to this and the FAO has been notified accordingly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the publication of the FAO report, I personally chaired meetings with officers of my Ministry as well as Statistics Mauritius and my attention was therefore drawn to what I have stated earlier. Based on what has been reported to me, I do not consider that there is an alarming use of pesticides in the agricultural sector. In fact, the quantity of pesticides imported for Agricultural purposes is demonstrably on the decline for the past 5 years.

In respect to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that sensitisation of planters and other users of pesticides is an on-going activity and is carried out by FAREI. A total of 123 training sessions have been organised attended by 2,088 planters.

In addition, sensitisation is conducted during field visits by officers of FAREI, and on average, annually, there are about 24,000 field visits conducted. Flyers showing good agricultural practices including controlled use of pesticides are distributed to farmers and those good practices are also available for consultation on the website of FAREI.

With regard to part (b) of the question, my Ministry has been providing various support, facilities and schemes for the transition towards organic and sustainable production, namely –

- (1) the setting up of organic production zone over 63 *arpents* at Britannia;
- (2) Bio Farming Support Scheme to enable farmers to purchase bio inputs at subsidised prices;
- (3) free organic compost of up to a maximum of 1 ton per *arpent* is provided to small registered farmers under the Compost Subsidy Scheme, and
- (4) issue of Organic Development Certificates to encourage bio farming.

With regard to part (c) of the question, the Pesticides Regulatory Office has been set up in 2018 to regulate, control and monitor the use of pesticides, among others.

Regarding the frequency of control, the Pesticides Regulatory Office is collecting samples on a weekly basis to monitor level of pesticide residues in both locally and imported agricultural commodities. Since the enactment of the Act, a total of 1,811 samples have been collected at farm gates, markets, auction markets, supermarkets for analysis of pesticide residue.

So far, 96 improvement notices have been issued to suppliers of fruits and vegetables for non-compliance to the Act.

My Ministry is considering the strengthening of the existing legislation so as to ensure a sustainable, reliable and safe food system for the population.

Ms J. Bérenger: The Minister said that the quantity imported is on decline. Can the Minister table the list of the different types of pesticides imported and the respective quantities, please?

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to clarify that the quantity of pesticides imported, I said is on the decline, for agricultural purposes. Let me explain so as there is no confusion in the minds of hon. Members and the public at large. Statistics are gathered from Customs, based on HS Codes. There is no difference whether the pesticide is imported for agricultural purpose or non-agricultural purpose. It is based on only the HS Code which is supplied by Customs. This is why I say we have to segregate and this is the request we have made to both Customs and Statistics Mauritius. If we look at those who are imported for agricultural purposes, it is on the decline since 2015 up to the year 2020, that is, last year.

Now, if you want to know about the specific brand or make of the pesticide, I have the statistics from Statistics Mauritius and I can table but not at this stage because it is not in a format which I can table, but I can do so.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. My question pertains to the part (a) 'sensitisation'. Can I refer the hon. Minister to a reply given by his predecessor, the hon. Mahen Seeruttun in 2019, PQ B/850, whereby he said –

“Most of the planters registered with my Ministry have already been sensitised and trained on proper handling and use of pesticides.”

And to ask the hon. Minister whether the 2,228 or so planters that attended training are those who are registered with his Ministry only? Because there are a lot more planters out there which are supplying to the population vegetables in markets and other places.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, this gives me an opportunity to thank my distinguished predecessor for the work he has done at the Ministry of Agriculture.

(Interruptions)

And sensitisation, my good friend, hon. Mahomed will appreciate, is an on-going process. It is done every year at every field visit and it is done, not only in the formal way of lectures and classes, but also in the informal way, very specific and peculiar to the agricultural community. Trust me, the work is being done.

Ms J. Bérenger: Je voudrais savoir du ministre, est-ce qu'il existe un système de suivi, c'est-à-dire, depuis l'importation des pesticides, depuis l'achat des pesticides jusqu'à la disposition des contenants car très souvent on se retrouve face à des scènes de désolation où les contenants de pesticides, qui sont des produits dangereux, se retrouvent partout dans la nature.

Mr Gobin: *Oui, effectivement. Le contrôle se fait à travers la distribution.* All those “retailers” are registered, are licensed and we know where they are. With regard to the empty containers, yes, you are very correct to highlight this problem. There is a programme at the FAREI where empty pesticide containers are collected for recycling. I have the statistics for the year 2019, 2020 and up to May 2021. They are respectively 172 kg, 456 kg and 129 kg of empty pesticide containers, collected and sent for recycling and the efforts are on-going.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House if there has been an increase in the use of bio pesticides among farmers since the sensitisation campaign by FAREI and Small Farmers Welfare Fund?

Mr Gobin: Yes, it is slowly picking up. The House will appreciate the use of Pesticides Act is only hardly three years old – 2018 – but if we take the statistics from 2018 since the enactment of that legislation, the figures speak for themselves. The import, as I said, of pesticides for agricultural sectors are on decline. Use of the bio ones are slowly picking up. I said that last time at the last PQ which was asked I think from hon. Ms Bérenger herself – it is a very slow process, we have to change the mindset of planters who have been adopting a particular practice for the past, maybe 100-150 years, over generations and this will take some time. I am satisfied that we are on the right track. As I said: *Là, pour le moment, on n'est même pas au stade de bio, on est agriculture raisonnée.* We will come to the bio a little bit later and then the use of Pesticides Act perhaps and this is what I have in my mind, then it will become the Bio Farming Bill because in the meantime we will be moving from *raisonnée* to Bio. It is a very slow process especially because we are in a tropical island.

Mr Speaker: Move to your next question, hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

PAS GÉOMÉTRIQUES – LAW VIOLATION

(No. B/805) **Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the *Pas Géométriques*, he will state if any ongoing project has been

identified as being in violation of the law stating that a person to whom a lease is granted shall not alter or change any marsh, lake or sand dunes and mangroves found thereat and, if so, give details thereof.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that there is no record at my Ministry of any violation presently of the law in regards to ongoing projects on leased *Pas Géométriques* with any marsh, lakes, sand dunes or mangroves.

Ms J. Bérenger: Le ministre peut-il nous dire s'il a pris connaissance des contestations entourant un projet d'hôtel, West Coast Leisure Ltd situés en partie sur les Pas Géométriques à Bel Ombre et qui vraisemblablement serait en train d'être développé sur les dunes de sable et sur les Zones humides: 84 et 85, toutes deux répertoriées dans le *ESA Mapping* de 2009. Je dépose sur la table une lettre qui lui a été adressée ainsi qu'à ses collègues par une ONG, militant pour la protection de l'environnement.

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact the question is of a very general nature. It is an open question, it would have sufficed, if the hon. Member wanted an answer to the question as opposed to an opportunity to circulate a document if it had been a specific question, of course, I would have investigated, I would have inquired and would have provided all information available.

Ms J. Bérenger: Pourrait-on savoir du ministre, comment est-ce qu'il réconcilie d'une part le *Climate Change Act* promulgué en 2021, qui empêche toute altération aux dunes de sables et zones humides, et d'autre part, le fait que ce projet, qui va donc à l'encontre de ladite loi, ait bénéficié d'un permis de construction en mai 2021 malgré l'entrée en vigueur du *Climate Change Act* ?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure the hon. Lady would be aware of a specific Standing Order that explains the purpose of supplementary questions. It is to elicit further information flowing from the main question. In this case, I am asked a very open and general question and then the supplementary relates to a specific matter. And I would have been very pleased to answer the question, if only I could have guessed what the hon. Lady wanted to obtain as information.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

CAMP ROUILLARD - SEWERAGE WORKS

(No. B/806) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the sewerage works undertaken in Camp Rouillard, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to the work progress thereof.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority that the contract for the Sewerage Project at Camp Rouillard, Eau Coulée, was awarded to Joint Venture Square Deal/Serveng on 08 September 2020. Works started on 06 October 2020 and are expected to be completed on 05 October 2022, with a defects liability period of one year following completion of works.

The project covers the regions of Engrais Martial Road, Camp Rouillard, La Meilleraye Road, Engrais Martial Street, Cathan Lane, Gautray Street, Pats Lane, Sauriders Street, Goolam Hossen Lane and other associated laterals.

Approximately 194 houses with on-site wastewater disposal systems comprising mainly cesspits will be connected to the public sewer under the project.

The works to be carried out under the contract also include the following –

- (i) a detailed design and construction of about 1.9 km of new street sewer reticulation;
- (ii) replacement of some 770 metres of existing 160mm diameter sewer by a 250mm pipe, including the refurbishment and reconnection of existing house connections and lateral sewers connected thereon, together with individual provisions of y-junctions for premises and bare lands along the street sewer alignment, and
- (iii) replacement of about 500m of CWA water pipes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that as at date, all survey and design have been completed. Works are ongoing and are on schedule.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I understand from the hon. Minister that the project is going to cover 194 houses as per the information as at today. I also understand that the Contractor on site is facing technical challenges at some sites, where the topology is preventing the Contractor to access all the houses that were initially to be covered. Can the hon. Minister inform the House as to what is being envisaged for these houses, which due to these technical challenges, will not be covered at this stage? Thank you.

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for putting this question. I understand that the original scope of works is to connect 194 houses to the public sewer. Up to now, 120 internal house connection works have been completed and would eventually be connected to the public sewer. I understand that the remaining houses will be connected during the contractual period. I also understand that works along certain roads, for example Engrais Martial, have been altered because of problems encountered while excavating the road.

I also understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, that 15 houses have been identified as low-lying cases. From the information that I have been provided, I also understand that a site visit was effected on 21 May 2021. Now, while that site visit was to explain to the inhabitants of the technical constraints, I also understand that the Contractor is working in close collaboration with the inhabitants present and that the Contractor is also identifying other possibilities where possible, and investigations are being carried out to know whether those people in the low-lying areas could be connected to the main sewer.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have visited some households which reported poor workmanship with regards to rehabilitation works in their properties, that is, after the connection is completed. Can the hon. Minister inform what is being done from the Wastewater Management Authority side to assess and rectify these issues?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for this question, which is very pertinent. I think the hon. Member will understand that connection to households involve excavation within private properties and this is very often accompanied by site difficulties such as narrow corridors and construction on boundary walls.

Now, internal connection and street sewer works which are being carried out in that area, Mr Speaker, Sir, the WMA technical team including the Public Relations Coordinator, who are present on site, they are the ones ensuring a proper monitoring of the works carried out by the Contractor, and they will ensure that at the end of the contract period, whatever works that have to be done to ensure that we restore where possible the damage caused during the excavation work will be taken care by the Contractor.

Mr Speaker: Move to your next question!

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - OVERSEAS TREATMENT - PROTOCOL

(No. B/807) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to overseas treatment, he will state the protocol put in place therefor amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Withdrawn)

PONT LOLO & AUSTIN BRIDGE - WORK PROGRESS

(No. B/808) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed reconstruction of Pont Lolo and Austin Bridge, he will state the work progress thereof.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Road Development Authority that Pont Lolo and Austin Bridge are found on none classified roads and therefore falls under the purview of the relevant local authorities. However, the RDA is undertaking the works on both bridges in a spirit of collaboration and for the benefit of the road users in these regions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regard to Lolo Bridge, in my reply to Parliamentary Question B/880, on 17 November 2020, I informed the House that the bridge is a steel one, spanning over 20 metres, with a width of 2 metres, and is presently used by pedestrians and motorcyclists only due to its narrowness.

With a view to allowing the vehicular movement between Eau Coulée and Rivière Sèche, a new bridge of 6 metres wide, with a footpath of 1.5 metres on both sides, is being constructed over a span of 20 metres alongside the existing bridge.

To this end, works order to the tune of Rs18.5 m., inclusive of VAT was awarded in September 2019 to Gamma Construction Ltd in view of the lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic and land acquisition issues relating to the project and recent weather inclement conditions, works which were initially expected to be complemented by March 2021, will now be completed by September 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish also to inform the House, that the approach roads on both sides of the bridge will also be realigned with new road furniture such as road markings, guardrails, traffic signs and cat eyes, amongst others. The status of work as at date is 60%.

With regard to the Austin Bridge, it was a concrete one, of a length of over 7 metres and with a width of 0.1 metres. It was used by pedestrians only once again due to its narrowness. This bridge is presently being reconstructed into a new reinforced concrete one, of 10 metres long and 6 metres wide with a footpath of 1.5 metres on one side. The road on the side of Floréal has also been realigned and new road furniture such as road markings, traffic signs, amongst others will be installed. The works to the tune of Rs8.05 m., inclusive of VAT which started in August 2019, which have been delayed again for the same reason I have mentioned earlier, now the progress of work is at date 95% and the project is expected to be completed by next month, that is, end of August 2021.

After completion of the works, these two bridges will be handed over to the relevant local authorities for upkeep and maintenance.

Thank you.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. With regard to Austin Bridge, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether a retaining wall will be constructed downstream as part of the project and as well as a drain from the Ballucksing Roadside towards the new bridge?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, the project also provides for wing walls of length 3 metres on both sides of the abutments. The wing walls are adjacent to the abutments and act as retaining walls to support the road embankment. The request for construction of a further retaining wall downstream after the wing wall is being looked into by the National Development Unit under the purview of the PPS, hon. Bablee. A site visit will be carried out shortly to assess the river flow and its capacity downstream for a decision regarding the retaining wall. There was no retaining wall expected in this project. So, I will request the hon. Member to be present in the same site visit so that we can have his valuable input.

Regarding the Ballucksing Road, once again, drainage issues in the vicinity have to be addressed in a holistic manner, taking into consideration the topography, availability of land for construction. This, unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, is outside the scope of works and work area of Austin Bridge. I shall discuss together with the hon. Member and the PPS of the region, hon. Bablee regarding the need for such facilities so that we can, together, with the Land Drainage Authority, consider the needful.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Mr Ittoo: With regard to Pont Lolo, given that Pont Lolo will be called to become a major shortcut for the inhabitants of Engrais Martial, can the hon. Minister inform whether

consideration has been given to enlarge access from Pont Lolo towards Floréal in terms of road enlargement and acquisition, etc.?

Thank you.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, previously that narrow bridge in steel allowed only motorcycles and pedestrians between Floréal and Eau Coulée regions. With the new construction of the Lolo Bridge, motor cars will also be allowed to circulate between these two regions. A traffic management study will be carried out to assess the traffic flow, future widening of the existing road may also be considered but this will necessitate additional land acquisition.

Pertaining to the security of the pedestrians, the consultant is working on this. TMRSU will also be called so as to assess the whole project once it is completed and will surely, together with the hon. Member again, take necessary actions so that pedestrians can use the bridge safely.

Mr Speaker: Move to your next question!

LA MARIE, GLEN PARK & CANTIN - WATER SUPPLY

(No. B/809) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to La Marie, Glen Park and Cantin, in the region of Plaine Wilhems, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the future plans, if any, being envisaged to remedy the persistent water problems thereat.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that Mare-aux-Vacoas Reservoir and Beard Borehole mainly supply the Upper and Lower Plaines Wilhems. The regions of La Marie, Glen Park and Cantin are found in water supply zone, Mare-aux-Vacoas Upper, commonly called MAV Upper which also supplies water to Curepipe, Floréal, Vacoas, Phoenix and Moka District up to Quartier Militaire.

Water from Mare-aux-Vacoas Reservoir is treated at La Marie Water Treatment Plant, which has a maximum treatment capacity of 130,000 m³ per day. It is to be noted that MAV Upper consists of some 74,267 households, out of which, 14,690 are supplied with potable water on a 24/7 basis. I am informed by the Central Water Authority that the normal hours of supply for La Marie, part of Glen Park and Cantin is 12 hours per day while regions such as

Bernica and Mumbai of Glen Park, Vacoas Centre, Jackson and part of Clairfonds, are supplied on a 24/7 basis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, several projects have been undertaken by the Central Water Authority to improve water supply in MAV (Upper), namely the replacement of 82 km of old and defective pipelines for an amount of Rs623.7 m. under the Non-Revenue Water Project in 2015. Works were completed in August 2016. The Authority has also renewed the existing pumping main with a 600 mm diameter ductile iron pipe from La Marie Water Treatment Plant to La Brasserie reservoir, over a length of 6 km, which will be commissioned by end of July 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards future plan in the MAV (Upper) regions, the CWA proposes to increase the filtration capacity of La Marie Water Treatment Plant from 130,000 m³/day to 160,000 m³/day. In this context, consultancy services for upgrading of the rapid gravity filtration plant, is currently under preparation. The objective is to improve the hours of supply in MAV (Upper) region to 16 hours in the medium time.

Moreover, containerised pressure filtration plants are planned to be installed next year at Henrietta to improve supply in the regions of Glen Park, Camp Mapou, Camp Belin, part of La Marie and Henrietta.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ittoo: No more supplementary. Thank you.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS – COVID-19 POSITIVE TESTED PERSONS

(No. B/810) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the educational institutions, she will state the –

- (a) number of COVID-19 positive tested persons thereat, indicating the number thereof having been quarantined following contact tracing exercises, and
- (b) list thereof having been closed down, indicating the duration thereof in each case.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that

with respect to educational institutions, the number of COVID-19 positive cases as well as the number of people on quarantine or on isolation since 05 July 2021 till 26 July 2021 are as follows –

9 pupils and 3 staff members in pre-primary schools –

- The number quarantined: 38
- Number of people on isolation: 85

As for the primary schools -

- 14 pupils and 2 educators were found positive
- The number quarantined: 14
- Number on isolation: 56

For the secondary schools -

- 44 students and 4 educators were found positive
- The number quarantined: 20
- Number of people on isolation: 128

As for tertiary institutions -

- 3 students and 1 staff have been found positive
- 5 were on quarantine, and
- 2 on isolation

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to schools which have been closed down due to detection of COVID-19 positive cases, I am circulating a list of the educational institutions concerned. Most of them have resumed after two or three days. In one school, namely Cosmopolitan College, after the detection of 5 positive cases, the Ministry of Health and Wellness reviewed the situation on 22 June 2021 and advised that the students and educators of all Grade 10 classes be placed on self-isolation.

As 23 educators are on self-isolation, Cosmopolitan College shifted from in-person schooling to remote online teaching and learning for the duration of the self-isolation period, as will be determined by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Please note that the remaining schools will be resuming during the course of this week with the exception of one pre-primary school, which has remained closed, as the Manager was tested positive as well as the educator and the helper who were on self-isolation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that in line with the protocol that has been developed, educational institutions are not subject to closure when a student or a staff member has been tested COVID-19 positive, I mean permanent closure. Instead, measures are adopted for cleaning and disinfection of the schools and isolation of persons in direct contact or referral to quarantine.

This process enables reopening of schools after a short period of closure whilst ensuring continuity in teaching and learning. In parallel, as part of the education resilience strategy, educational programmes are being aired for learners of Grades 1-9, who are unable to attend school due to the fact that they are either in quarantine or on self-isolation or in red zone, on four learning channels of the MBC TV.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister if she is considering to review the established official communication strategy with the stakeholders? Because we have had cases where schools were asked to operate and then were asked to close down. She has cited the example of Cosmopolitan College in Plaine des Papayes, where 30 out of 47 educators were requested to go on self-isolation and the other 17 were asked to come to work. If there is a proper protocol of communication, there would be no anxiety and stress on behalf of the stakeholders.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the schools have been given all the information required and the measures taken were to ensure the safety of the students and also due to the fact that we could not have students in school when the teachers were on self-isolation. This is why, for Cosmopolitan College, we have shifted to the online teaching, awaiting the isolation period to be over.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister to inform the House how far the guidelines set by the UNESCO and UNICEF in relation to psychological support to students, parents and staff are being effectively implemented?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, as rightly put by the hon. Member, UNESCO and UNICEF have advised that schools remain open. As far as psychological support is concerned, all requests made to the Ministry are attended to by the Counselling Unit of the Ministry.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Given the increase in number of COVID-19 cases in our educational institutions, will the hon. Minister consider going for online courses and closing down of our schools and colleges till things get better?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned that UNESCO and UNICEF have been advocating for the reopening of schools because keeping students away from school has a negative impact on their socialisation and also on their psychological and even physical state.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

REGIONAL HOSPITALS - MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS

(No. B/811) **Dr. M. Gungapersad** (**Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or**) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to each of the regional hospitals, he will state the number of outpatients awaiting fixing of appointments to undergo

—

- (a) echography;
- (b) endoscopy,
- (c) angiography, and
- (d) lithotripsy.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the waiting list consists of patients who are due for a procedure but who have not yet been given a date of appointment. The booked list consists of those patients who have already been given a date for their procedure.

With regard to the waiting list for echography, I am informed that there was no patient on the waiting list for echography as at 30 June 2021. However, there was a total of 1,728 patients who had been booked for appointments in around three weeks time.

The booked list of appointments for echography is as follows –

- 122 patients for Dr AG Jeetoo Hospital;
- 475 patients for SSRN Hospital,
- 162 patients for Dr Bruno Cheong Hospital,

- 239 patients for Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, and
- 730 patients for Victoria Hospital.

With regard to the waiting list for endoscopy, I am informed that there were –

- 11 patients at Dr Bruno Cheong Hospital,
- 272 patients at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, and
- 407 patients at Victoria Hospital as at 30 June 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the waiting list for angiography, I am further informed that there were –

- 128 patients for Dr AG Jeetoo Hospital;
- 293 patients for Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, and
- 266 patients for Victoria Hospital as at 30 June 2021.

In regard to the waiting list for lithotripsy, I am informed that there were –

- 55 patients for SSRN Hospital;
- 89 patients for Dr Bruno Cheong Hospital,
- 105 patients for Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, and
- 2 patients for Victoria Hospital as at 30 June 2021.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister what measures his Ministry is taking in order to reduce the waiting list of patients so that they can get their treatment as rapidly as possible?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, whenever the waiting list, the duration, the time interval is increasing, the Ministry makes a sessional basis available so that patients who are on waiting list can be catered for in the sessions that will be provided on a case to case basis.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer to the Director of Audit's Report, February 2021, pages 263-264, where it is said that –

“Repeated requests for the same medical equipment were made by hospitals but were not entertained or took a long time for hospitals to obtain them.”

Will the hon. Minister look into the matter so that this is sorted out?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, this has already been sorted out. Equipment and specifications by the user department have to be given proper consideration before equipment are procured and this has already been sorted out by the Ministry.

GOODLANDS - NEW MARKET – PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/812) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a new market in Goodlands, he will state where matters stand.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, last week I had a working session with the PPS of Constituency No.6, hon. Dr. Anjiv Ramdhany, amongst others, this particular project was discussed as well. This subject was again raised by the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage, hon. Avinash Teeluck, a couple of times as well. I do appreciate there is a lot of concern about this particular project in Constituency No.6.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development that the project construction of the new market fair and traffic centre at Goodlands has been completed up to 52% and works are still in progress.

The site was handed over to the contractor RBRB Construction Ltd on 05 November 2019 and works started on 19 November 2019 and the initial intended completion date was 11 February 2021.

However, due to the national lockdown on March 2020, the completion date was extended for the first time to 25 April 2021, based on the advice from the Solicitor General’s Office, without any cost. Moreover, as there was a shortage of foreign labour and workforce, coupled with the unavailability of steel structures due to COVID-19 pandemic both in Mauritius and in overseas, a second extension was granted up to the 10 January 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that because of the second wave of national lockdown from 10 March 2021 to 03 April 2021 and the inclement weather, a third extension has been given to the contractor from the 14 January 2022 to 15 March 2022.

I know, this is the third time we are having an extension but it is unfortunate because of COVID-19 and all that. I wish to reassure the House that presently works are in progress and as per new schedule.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, may I kindly request the hon. Minister to consider devoting some funds to partially renovate the existing market so that the users for the time being can at least have a hygienic place to sell and buy vegetables and other items because the condition is extremely deplorable as at now.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said that the new market is supposed to open on 15 March 2022 but anyway we will look into it and see what the situation is and if anything has to be done, we will do it.

Dr. Gungapersad: May I know from the hon. Minister details regarding the parking area, because Goodlands is extremely congested; we have a new market coming, whether this aspect has been taken care of and the number of stalls that will be available in the new market?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, there will be 544 stalls, that is, including vegetable, non-vegetable, food shops and SME shops. There will be a total of 302 parking spaces. There will be car parking about 275, bus parking and bus parking for alighting as well.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

WORLD BANK REPORT - SUGAR SECTOR

(No. B/814) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the sugar sector, he will state if he will table the latest World Bank Report thereon and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the difficulties being faced by the sugarcane sector, the profound market uncertainties and distortions coupled with the continually declining sugar prices in the world market, my Ministry had, in January 2020, enlisted the services of the World Bank for a study on the long-term viability of the sector. The objective of the study was to provide policy recommendations to enable Government to come up with programs for the future development of the sugar cane sector.

Due to the lockdown associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the conduct of the study was delayed and as a consequence, the report was received only in December 2020. It was originally scheduled to be received in August.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the report consists essentially of a competitiveness assessment of our sugar sector.

In the light of the report we have received in December 2020, a Multi-Disciplinary Committee chaired by the Deputy Financial Secretary and comprising, inter alia, representatives of my Ministry and the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority, has been set up, early this year, to analyse the policy options proposed by the World Bank, the related implications, the corresponding measures to be adopted, the implementation time frame and schedule as well as the financial requirements.

I am informed that following meetings held by the said Committee, an implementation plan is being elaborated. Once this implementation plan is elaborated, both the report as well as the implementation plan will be submitted to Cabinet for Government's consideration.

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le président. Peut-on savoir de l'honorable ministre si on peut avoir un *time frame* quand cet *implementation plan* sera finalisé et rendu public ?

Mr Gobin: *Difficile à moi de donner un time frame à ce stade. Je laisse les techniciens travailler mais l'intention du gouvernement c'est de ne pas retarder la considération par le conseil des ministres d'abord et la publication. L'idée c'est de ne pas, comme on dit, proceed by instalment. The report first and then the implementation plan, it is better we consider it altogether, as well as the financial implications. So, the sooner the better!*

Mr Speaker: Time over! Thank you very much.

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

(4.14 p.m.)

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

BAI COMPANY (MAURITIUS) LTD - BRITAM HOLDINGS LTD (KENYA) - DISPOSAL OF SHARES - COMMISSION OF INQUIRY REPORT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to make a Statement on the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on the disposal of shares of BAI Company (Mauritius) Ltd in Britam Holdings Ltd (Kenya).

The House will recall that in reply to Parliamentary Question B/291 on 21 July 2020, I informed that the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on the Disposal of Shares of BAI Company (Mauritius) Ltd in Britam Holdings Ltd (Kenya) was being awaited.

I now wish to inform the House that the Commission of Inquiry has submitted its Report to the President of the Republic on 02 July 2021. I received a copy of the Report on the same day and Cabinet has already taken note of the observations and recommendations of the Report.

As the House is already aware, on 08 April 2017, the President of the Republic had set up a Commission of Inquiry to inquire into the facts and circumstances in which shares which BAI Company (Mauritius) Ltd and its related entities held in Britam Holdings Ltd (Kenya) were sold. The Commission of Inquiry was chaired by Mr Satyabhooshun Gupt Domah, retired Judge of the Supreme Court and had as Assessors, Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoula, Chartered Accountant and Mr Imrith Ramtohum, Financial Analyst and Chartered Certified Accountant.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the first meeting of the Commission was held on 18 May 2017. 25 sittings were held in public and 12 sittings were held *in camera*. 44 witnesses deponed before the Commission.

The Commission, in accordance with its Terms of Reference, was to inquire into and report on –

- (i) whether the method of disposal of the shares of the BAI Company (Mauritius) Ltd and related entities in Britam Holdings Ltd (Kenya) was in the best financial interest of the seller;
- (ii) the circumstances in which the Special Administrators, Messrs Yacoob Ramtoolah and Georges Chung, did not proceed with the sale of the BAI Company (Mauritius) Ltd and related entities shares in Britam Holdings Ltd (Kenya) for the sum of MUR4.3 billion offered by a potential buyer, namely MMI Holdings Ltd (South Africa) and, instead, proceeded to sell the said shares to the existing shareholders, namely Messrs Peter Munga and other investors (Kenya) for the sum of only MUR2.4 billion;

- (iii) whether there was any transaction adviser for the said sale and to inquire into the role of BDO in the said transaction and to inquire whether there was any conflict of interest in relation to BDO's involvement;
- (iv) whether all proceeds from the said transaction have been received to date, including dividend, if any, prior to the said sale;
- (v) whether funds have been transferred otherwise than into the account of the seller, and the amounts received if any, into any third-party account, the currency in which it was so received, and any amounts retained as fees or commissions by or paid to other parties;
- (vi) whether, in relation to transaction, there has been any fraud, malpractice, corruption, undue influence or other misdeeds by any person involved in negotiating and finalising the sale of said shares and whether any financial prejudice has thereby been caused to any person in Mauritius;
- (vii) whether Kenyan Shilling was the underlying currency of the transaction and why the Kenyan Shilling was preferred to USD; and
- (viii) also report on any matter ancillary to the Terms of Reference and to establish responsibility, both criminal and civil, of all persons, entities, companies involved in the said transaction and make recommendations thereon.

Mr Speaker, Sir, based on the depositions of witnesses and documents scrutinized, the Commission has addressed all the issues included in the Terms of Reference and has come up with a number of conclusions, some of which I wish to highlight.

At the very outset, the Commission has, at paragraph 264, highlighted, that in the BAI/Bramer Banking saga, both KPMG and BDO, as auditors and accountants, failed in their professional duty and responsibility, in public interest, to bring to the attention of the financial institutions concerned and the investing public, the precarious financial situation of the BAI Group. They had duly reported the state of affairs to the Company Audit Committee, but they failed to advise the public as they should have done through their report. Had they done so, the public would have exercised due caution. The Commission has also dwelt on the role and responsibilities of auditors and regulators and has made pertinent remarks at paragraphs 262 to 276. In fact, at paragraph 276, the Commission was of the view that the collapse of the BAI Group might have been prevented, had KPMG and BDO acted responsibly and qualified the audit report of the BAI Group.

With regard to whether the transaction was in the best interest of the seller, the Commission concluded that, and I quote –

- (a) “There was no formal method used for the disposal of the shares of the BAI Company (Mauritius) Ltd and related entities in Britam Holdings Ltd (Kenya).
- (b) It was by one-to-one discussion taking place behind closed doors where Cabinet, the Financial Services Commission and National Property Fund Limited (NPFL) Board were all kept in the dark.
- (c) Lack of method was coupled with lack of record, lack of science and lack of professionalism of those who were involved.
- (d) The result of that lack of method, lack of record, lack of science and lack of professionalism has been that it has caused tangible prejudice to the NPFL which as per the law should have been the seller.
- (e) The NPFL as the shareholder was debarred from exercising any key ownership function in the exercise of its ownership rights in the sale of the shares. So was the Government as the sole shareholder.
- (f) Shareholders, if prejudiced in their rights, have a cause of action against the author/s.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the underselling of the Britam shares at MUR2.4 billion, the Commission remarked that had the undertaking been transferred to NPFL as had been decided by Cabinet and which was known to ex-Minister Bhadain, the Special Administrator and BDO, the NPFL would have gone through the procedures of the sale and exercised its key ownership rights in accordance with established procedure. The shortfall of MUR1.9 billion was obviously due to the lack of proper methodology and evaluation, the absence of proper negotiation and the non-existence of a transaction advisor and legal oversight.

Regarding the role of some of the main protagonists in the disposal of the Britam Shares, the Commission had the following to say, and I quote -

“The facts reveal that BDO had a major role to play in the transaction, a role which was unethical, unprofessional and irregular but that the ex-Minister had something to do with it.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the same note, the Commission has also made a number of pertinent observations on the conduct of the public affairs. I wish to stress on the following, which I quote –

“Aside the fact that the matter of sale was never brought to Cabinet, the decision that the undertaking should be transferred to NPFL was simply ignored.

The proposal for the creation of NPFL originated in the report submitted by BDO & Co. Ltd to the FSC, recommending strategic measures to protect the value of underlying assets of BAI. At one of the strategic measures (Paragraph 9.1 of the report) it has been recommended that *“the government needs to set up a NPFL as a wholly owned subsidiary of NICL.”* The decision to entrust BDO & Co. Ltd to produce the report was taken reportedly in a meeting chaired by ex-Minister Bhadain in his office in the presence of other Ministers and high officials of FSC, advisers of the Minister and BDO & Co. Ltd as well. This is not the way public affairs are run. On matters of appointment of experts, Ministers do not gather condescending Ministers and officials to choose a contractor in the manner of a roving Mini-Cabinet. The manner in which BDO & Co. Ltd was appointed to prepare the Strategic Measures in the aftermath of the BAI collapse leaves a lot to be desired.”

On the question as to whether there had been any fraud, malpractice, corruption, undue influence or misdeed/s, the Commission’s reply was, and I quote -

“That the acts and doings are suggestive of all those offences and/or breaches incurring criminal or civil liability as the case may be.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Commission has also highlighted that the facts elicited in this enquiry reveal the possible commission of criminal offences by a certain number of persons. In this respect, it has recommended that criminal investigation be carried out by relevant authorities for possible offences relating to forgery or making use of a forged document under the Criminal Code and/or giving false evidence in the proceedings before the Commission. The names of persons/entities and companies are mentioned at page 347 of the Report and I propose to refer the matter to Police for enquiry.

Furthermore, the Commission has indicated that there might be possible offences relating to breach of sections 109 and 215 of the Insolvency Act. With regard to whether all proceeds from sale transaction have been received to date by NPFL, including dividend, if

any, prior to the said sale, the Commission came to the conclusion that NPFL had been unfairly deprived of an amount of approximately Rs43 m., representing dividend in 2015.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Attorney General's Office has also been consulted to determine whether civil proceedings could be initiated against the persons and institutions concerned who may have incurred civil liability by their acts and doings.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me conclude by informing the House that I am tabling a copy of the Report of the Commission, which will be made public. The Commission has made several other recommendations and same are being carefully examined and their implementation will follow in due course.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Ganoo!

(4.31 p.m.)

**LATE JEAN PIERRE JHUMUN - HIGH COMMISSIONER, MOZAMBIQUE -
TRIBUTE**

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, we were all shocked and saddened by the sudden demise of High Commissioner Jean Pierre Jhumun due to COVID-19 in the Lenmed Maputo Hospital, on Saturday 24 July 2021.

High Commissioner Jhumun had a long professional career as accountant, and since 2015, he was appointed as High Commissioner of Mauritius in Mozambique. He was also our non-resident High Commissioner to Tanzania, Zambia, and Angola.

Late High Commissioner Jhumun has been instrumental in reinforcing our bilateral relations with SADC countries, in particular with Mozambique and Tanzania. He was much appreciated within the Diplomatic Community in Mozambique and his other countries of accreditation.

As a strong proponent of the economic integration of Africa, he has worked steadfastly towards promoting Mauritius as a platform for Africa. I recall his passionate intervention during the Ministry's last webinar consultation on the implementation of our Africa Strategy a few days before he was hospitalised. We shall certainly miss his enthusiasm and unique perspective which he always displayed during our brainstorming sessions.

Prior to joining the Diplomatic Cadre, High Commissioner Jhumun was also President of the Mauritius Taxpayers Association. He was well known for his quest for justice in favour of people in vulnerable situations, guided by his motto to contribute towards “reducing the sufferings of taxpayers in Mauritius”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the Government spared no efforts in ensuring that the best medical treatment was administered to High Commissioner Jhumun. He was admitted at the Lenmed Maputo Private Hospital, a South African Hospital, considered as the best hospital in Maputo.

We were in touch with the family members of the High Commissioner and they were consulted on whether they would wish for the patient to be transferred to Mauritius for medical treatment. However, upon medical advice, the family members decided that it would be better for the High Commissioner to remain in Maputo to pursue his treatment. We have abided by the wishes of his close ones while ensuring that the best treatment be administered to him.

The hon. Prime Minister and all members of the Government have been constantly following the state of health of High Commissioner Jhumun, and the COVID High Level Committee chaired by the hon. Prime Minister has fully been apprised on a daily basis.

I wish to inform the House that my Ministry is currently making all the necessary arrangements for the mortal remains of High Commissioner to be cremated in Mozambique, and for his ashes to be repatriated thereafter to Mauritius, as requested by his family members. My Ministry has also set up an electronic condolence book in memory of late High Commissioner Jhumun. I humbly invite members of the House who wish to express their condolences to do so through this platform.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has lost a true and distinguished son of the soil who hailed from a humble family from Mahebourg. Throughout his life, he was relentless in creating bridges for a better understanding between people of different faith. I understand that he was working on a book to that end.

Once again, in the name of Prime Minister, Government and my own name, I would like to extend my sincere condolences to the bereaved family and close friends of late Mr Jean Pierre Jhumun.

May his soul rest in peace.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I also associate myself with these words to extend my condolences to the bereaved family and close friend of late Mr Jean Pierre Jhumun. Thank you.

Hon. Teeluck!

COPYRIGHT (FEES) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2021 - PROMULGATION

The Minister of Arts and Culture (Mr A. Teeluck): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to make a Statement regarding Copyright Fees.

Since the coming into force of the Copyright (Amendment) Act 2017, the Mauritius Society of Authors (MASA), has been empowered with the administration of the economic rights of its members and to collect Copyright Fees and charges from the users of a work and distribute those fees among its members.

As there were no regulations, Copyright Fees, as applicable, were being charged administratively, on behalf of the members of MASA for users of works (that is, inter alia, public performance for the diffusion of music, the broadcasting and rebroadcasting of music).

Last year, the Copyright (Fees) Regulations 2020 were introduced on 10 October 2020, to take effect as from 1 July 2021. These regulations did not only review the tariff rates but also the tariff base of users of a work to ensure wider collection for the commercial use of music – for example, new economic operators like holders of Subscription Television Broadcasting Licence and mobile network operators, will now be captured within the ambit of Copyright Fees.

The rationale behind the increase of the Copyright Fees is based on the compound inflation rate (which varies from 10% to 50% for different categories), rate of technological progress in copyright transmission, consultations with copyright owners and artists and the fact that these fees had not been revised since 2008.

The Copyright Fees have also been aligned with classified trade fees as per the Local Government Act 2011, the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act 2007 and the Tourism Authority Act 2006. Small businesses exempted from the payment of trade fees, would also be exempted from payment of Copyright Fees.

However, in view of the adverse impact of the prevailing sanitary and economic conditions on businesses, my Ministry has, after extensive consultations made amendments to the Copyright (Fees) Regulations 2020.

As such the Copyright (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 have been promulgated and were gazetted on Saturday 24 July 2021. One of the main amendments brought to the 2020 Regulations, was to further enlarge the tariff base by including to the list of users of a work – Internet Service Providers, as licensed by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority.

Given the adverse effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses, the following amendments were also brought to the 2020 Regulations –

- (i) part I of the Schedule, which concerned mainly small economic operators, has been revoked and replaced by items “Hypermarket” and “Supermarket”, and
- (ii) the date of application of the Regulations for tourist operators, hotels and restaurants has been deferred to 01 July 2022. However, this exemption will not apply to Rodrigues. This amendment has a subsequential impact on aircrafts of Air Mauritius and live performances in hotels and restaurants.

Save for the tourism sector and certain businesses as just mentioned, the Copyright (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 shall be deemed to have come into operation on 01 July 2021.

I would like to highlight that though the tourism sector and certain businesses are presently being exempted from payment of Copyright Fees, copyright owners and MASA would still benefit from the increase in the tariff rates since the tariff base has been extended to new economic operators, as mentioned, internet service providers, subscription television and mobile network operators - therefore, avoiding any shortfall in collection.

Mr Speaker, Sir, music creators have to be duly remunerated for the use of their works. Therefore, depending on the evolution of the local economic and sanitary conditions, the provisions of the Regulations would be reviewed in consultation with all stakeholders so that the Copyright Fees are applied to other relevant businesses and sectors, which are presently being by way of the amended Regulations, relieved from payment of the Copyright Fees.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Hurdoyal!

(4.40 p.m.)

PUBLIC OFFICER - DEATH - NAME - DISCLOSURE

The Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms (Mr T. Hurdoyal): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, further to my reply to Parliamentary Questions B/659 and B/680, I wish to make the following Statement.

Although I did inadvertently mention the name of the deceased public officer in my reply, her name had by then already been disclosed in the Press.

I also wish to inform the House that the medical certificates submitted by the deceased officer to the Ministry contain further details on the nature of her medical conditions. However, in my reply I gave only relevant extracts thereof for the sake of transparency and in order to dissipate any doubt or speculation.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for 30 minutes.

At 4.41 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.27 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Why are you in good humour? Please be seated!

I have an announcement!

ANNOUNCEMENT

**HON. MS J. BÉRENGER & HON. MINISTER LESJONGARD -
OBJECTIONABLE WORDS - EXCHANGE**

Mr Speaker: In the course of Prime Minister's Question time earlier today, there has been an exchange of objectionable words between hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger and the hon. Minister Lesjongard.

The hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger has already unconditionally withdrawn the words uttered by her to the address of the hon. Minister Lesjongard.

I now invite the hon. Minister to withdraw the objectionable words which he addressed to hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger.

I, once again, make an appeal to all hon. Members to be moderate when addressing each other and avoid provocative words and personal attacks in the course of the proceedings of the House.

Thank you.

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): May I, Mr Speaker, Sir? As the First Member for Vacoas & Floréal, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger has already withdrawn what she stated, I also withdraw what I stated earlier, Mr Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much!

Hon. Ganoo!

PUBLIC BILLS

Second Reading

THE SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION AND SOCIAL BENEFITS BILL

(No. XII of 2021)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Social Contribution and Social Benefits Bill (No. XII of 2021).

Question again proposed.

(5.28 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, allow me to thank you for allowing me to comment on the Social Contribution and Social Benefits Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, by the very nature of this Bill, which will usher in one of the most defining reforms in our modern day social schemes, it has understandably been the subject matter of a lot of controversy and misapprehension.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, before I come to the Bill proper, I would like to respond to some remarks made by hon. Reza Uteem during the last part of his intervention. You will remember, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in a nutshell, hon. Reza Uteem implied that this Government had no right to come before this House to present this Bill when there were matters related to the issue before the Supreme Court. He used, in fact, very strong words, he said it was 'improper', he spoke of 'impair', 'a mockery' and also 'disrespectful'. I would like to clarify the legal situation, Mr Speaker, Sir.

But what is also very important, as I will elucidate in a few minutes, hon. Reza Uteem did not, in fact, disclose all information to the House with regard to what happened in fact, before the Supreme Court. In fact, he was right there were applications lodged by Business Mauritius in about November 2020, Mr Speaker, Sir. There were two main actions before the Supreme Court by way of an application for judicial review and an action for constitutional redress by way of plaint with summons. The purpose of these applications, when the amendments were brought to the NPF Act, was to challenge the legality of the amendments to the National Pensions Act, which amendments were brought in the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 and the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* Regulations 2020.

But, alongside these two cases, Mr Speaker, Sir, Business Mauritius further moved for an order to stay the application of section 30B(4) of the National Pensions Act, pending the determination of those two main actions. This section 30B(4) of the National Pensions Act provides that the CSG collected by the Mauritius Revenue Authority shall be credited to the Consolidated Fund, but this is where I said he did not give all the information. The Supreme Court of Mauritius refused to grant the order for stay, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the reasons were given in the judgement which is public, which we all can go through, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Supreme Court, in fact, gave three reasons which I do not want to go in details, but what the Court said that –

“The Court did not find any evidence of irreparable harm being caused as a result of any blatant violation of some constitutionally entrenched right.”

There were two other reasons also, but the Court therefore held, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there is accordingly, at this juncture no risk of any serious harms, stepping from the violation of constitutional rights, which requires the immediate suspension of section 30B(4) of the Act, pending the determination of the constitutionality of the impugned legislation.

So, hon. Uteem was very well aware of this judgement in this case, where the order, which was being sought to stay the applications, was not granted, but he made several comments and failed to inform the House about this. Therefore, what I want to say, today, Mr Speaker, Sir, when he was saying that it was an *impair* for us to come before this House to present this Bill, it was disrespect to the judiciary and so on; we must know to all intents and purposes, the Supreme Court did not stay any executive or even parliamentary action with respect to the CSG. No stay was granted by the Supreme Court binding the hands of the executive in any manner, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, the application for leave for judicial review is still before Court, judgement has been reserved, Mr Speaker, Sir. And I wish to say also that consultations were held with all stakeholders, including Business Mauritius and the trade unions after the judgement of the Supreme Court, refusing to grant any stay with respect to the implementation of the CSG.

Mr Speaker, Sir, therefore, the lodging of the cases before the Supreme Court does not preclude Parliament from legislating with respect to the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, the more so, as I repeat, no stay was granted by the Court, no injunction has been issued by the Court preventing the executive from bringing a Bill relating to the CSG into Parliament.

Mr Speaker, Sir, contrary to France, where the *Conseil Constitutionnel* which is habilitated to effect a *contrôle à priori* of constitutionality of laws before its introduction into parliament; or even in India where the President of the Republic has another power which our President does not have, they call it - this is in the Constitution - the President referral - the President can send a Bill before the Supreme Court of India, before the Bill comes to the House and is voted or is not adopted by the House. But we do not have this system and it is not the case here. Our Parliament is sovereign in its law making functions, of course, subject to the Constitution.

In our country, the Supreme Court can only be seized in accordance with section 17 and 83 of the Constitution, coupled with the Supreme Court (Constitutional Relief) Rules. Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, the rules do not provide for a *contrôle a priori* of the constitutionality of legislation. Therefore, the lodging of cases in the Supreme Court does not *per se* preclude parliament from legislating. The more so, that no judgement has been given in either the judicial review application or the application for constitutional relief application. There is no interference and there cannot be any scope for any interference with any of the functions of the judiciary where no judgement has been delivered by the Supreme Court conferring any advantage on any party or recognising any acquired right of any party, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, we are talking of the presumption of constitutionality which is a well-known principle, which is well-known to the hon. Member being a very experienced lawyer. And this principle of constitutionality, Mr Speaker, Sir, has found endorsement in several leading constitutional law cases in Mauritius and in other Commonwealth jurisdictions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, therefore what hon. Reza Uteem was intimating, is that by presenting this Bill to Parliament today, the Government is in conflict with this principle of supremacy

of the Constitution and that there is a lack of respect being shown to the judiciary. As I said, the hon. Member was making a dangerous assumption, Mr Speaker, Sir, that amendments to the NPF Act are unconstitutional even though the Supreme Court has not yet adjudicated on the matter. I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that our Government respects the constitutional right of all individuals to challenge legislation when they are made in Parliament. But, at the same time, it would be inappropriate to say that to every constitutional challenge, the Government must wait for the outcome and then move forward with its progressive agenda as a responsible Government. What hon. Uteem sees as a lack of respect towards the judiciary is, in fact, the normal functioning of any parliament and Government in a functional democracy. The judiciary does its job in all independence and the Government through Parliament, as we know, by way of section 45 of the Constitution makes laws and regulations to fulfil its mandate strictly within the premises of the Constitution. The amendments are adequately covered by the presumption of constitutionality which is to the effect that, unless declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, any Bill presented, debated, adopted in the National Assembly has to be presumed to be constitutional unless it is manifestly evident that it goes against the spirit of the Constitution, and for that matter, those who are claiming so much prove in a satisfactory manner to the Court.

Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, it was misleading and erroneous for hon. Uteem to assume that this Government could not present this Bill on the basis that the amendments to NPF Act were being challenged as being unconstitutional when the basic principle of constitutional law gives utmost importance to the presumption of constitutionality.

Mr Speaker, Sir, by presenting this Bill today, Parliament is exercising its sovereign legislative power. Consequently, laws made under this power are presumed to be constitutional unless the judiciary adjudicates differently on their constitutionality. We do not see, therefore, how this Government is digressing from constitutional pillars such as constitutional supremacy or separation of powers as was being alleged by hon. Uteem.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to the historical background of pensions in Mauritius for a few minutes. The earliest mention of the introduction of old age pension in our country was made in 1937, a Commission of Inquiry Report on sugar estates. In 1940, the then Director of Labour, Lord Twining, was appointed as Chairman of a Committee to report on the need for social insurance in the colony. The Committee then proposed a contribution of a minimum of Rs3 per month whereby a worker could benefit up to Rs25.50 per month as from the age of 56. The proposed scheme would have covered 70,000 citizens. The proposal was rejected

until September 1950 where a non-contributory system of pensions was introduced by the Public Assistance Department whereby a maximum pension of Rs15 per worker was paid to all persons aged 65 and over as well as to blind persons aged 40 and over.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since 1950, a lot of water has flown under the bridge. We have reached a very long way. The current National Pension Fund which was set up in 1976 has performed admirably since then, by supporting hundreds of thousands of hard working Mauritians with a contributory post-retirement guaranteed pension. However, the unbearable and unsustainable burden on the NPF in securing pensions has increasingly been highlighted over many years and across several local and international economic reports.

Mr Speaker, Sir, global ageing populations have led to pension systems across the world facing sustainability issues and our country has not been spared. According to a Citibank report, from 2016, the 20 largest OECD countries alone, of USD78 trillion shortfall in funding pay as you go and defined-benefit public pensions obligation. Countries with large public pension assistance in Europe appear to have the greatest problem. Citibank also noted that Germany, France, Italy, U.K, Portugal, Spain had estimated public sector pension liabilities that topped 300% of Gross Domestic Product. Hence, pension underfunding is a global problem rather than one faced by individual providers of countries given the unprecedented scale of the deficits and the number of economically important countries caught up in the problem.

Mr Speaker, Sir, pensions for any Government across the world has never been a smooth policy area. It requires, on the one hand, careful long-term planning management of public finances and on the other hand, a balanced and considerate approach. It is widely known that our country faces an increasingly aging population which adds corresponding pressure on the pension expenditure. As per the IMF predictions, it is estimated, as we all know, that the population aged over 30 will increase to 30% of the total population in 2050, Mr Speaker, Sir. In spite of the increase of the retirement age from 60 to 65 years in 2018, the NPF is still under enormous pressure unless any further urgent and major reforms are undertaken. And according to some actuarial models, the NPF will not be secure for long, as commented by the IMF Report entitled 'Pension Reforms in Mauritius' and published in 2015. The relevant quotations have already been provided to this House by other Members, I will not repeat what was said.

Based on the above analysis, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is clear that the NPF- centered pension system is at risk of not being able to meet its liabilities towards hundreds of thousands of retirees who have contributed over decades to the Fund. It has duly served its purpose and it has provided the retirees with their pension, but, now, we all know there is a stark outlook for the NPF, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the IMF has also underlined that.

The risk we run as a nation is clear and we have to be honest with the population that given the current NPF system, at some points in time, some pensioners might not be able to obtain their pensions unless the Government steps in financially which will put even more stress on our public finance. And I was listening to hon. Ramful, I think, last time, Mr Speaker, Sir, when he was intervening. He was very adamant on this proposal and he was saying that it is not true that the NPF is not sustainable and it is the CSG which is unsustainable. His speech, in fact, was focused on that argument. But Mr Speaker, Sir, it is now more than two decades that all Governments - I am talking of Mauritius of course - except for the Labour Party, have not spared any opportunity to market the threat that the NPF is not sustainable due to our ageing population. The previous Labour Party-led Governments clearly failed in reforming or showing any interest in reforming our pension system. In 2002, Mr Speaker, Sir, the then MMM/MSM Government, with hon. Paul Bérenger as Minister of Finance, set up an Interministerial Steering Committee on pension reforms. One of the main concerns of the Committee was the management of the National Pension Fund and National Savings Fund. The then Minister of Economic Development, Financial Services and Corporate Affairs tabled a paper where the concerns were, and I quote –

“Over the past two decades, Mauritius has made enormous progress in economic development and poverty reduction, however, the rapid aging of the population is likely to exert pressures on Pension Funds in the country, especially the National Pension Fund.”

The Government then engaged itself in a process for modernising the pension system in Mauritius. A working document, Mr Speaker, Sir, prepared by Consultants in modernising the Mauritian retirement income system in Mauritius, in the context of an open conference on pension reform, was organised in March 2001. During that same period, all private insurance pension schemes started to recommend the shifting from defined-benefits scheme to a defined-contribution one where investment of companies in pension schemes could be reduced.

In 2005, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Labour Party came to power, the Labour/PMSD did not address this problem, on the contrary, this Government came with very antic worker measures. We will remember, Mr Speaker, Sir, a *quasi-gel des salaires* for almost eight years, full compensation for the payment of a compensation was lowered to Rs2,500 monthly from the Rs4,500 monthly. Compensation was linked to productivity, unemployment and competitiveness and lastly inflation. What was the result of this policy, Mr Speaker, Sir? It resulted in an acute salary erosion, with a *gel* in basic wage and the contribution to the National Pension Fund decreased accordingly and inevitably. And all throughout, the different Trade Union Federations with the CTSP in the Vanguard, Mr Speaker, Sir, called for urgent tripartite consultation on the sustainability of the NPF but all their attempts remained in vain.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2015, with a change of Government, a second Interministerial Steering Committee was set up under the aegis of the Minister of Social Security, chaired by hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo, as we will remember. The Committee was multipartite and stakeholders were directly concerned with pensions and the stakeholders were invited to focus on the solution to this thorny problem, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, this is a little bit of history, Mr Speaker, Sir. But why do we need a new pension models? Pensions are key part of any worker's future as they offer sustainable security later in life.

This Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, demonstrates our commitment to workers to provide a more comfortable level of financial security to hard working employees. In fact, this Bill creates a transformative scheme which has the potential to provide a top-up to the current contributory pension payment. Hence, at the very heart of this Bill is the interest of the worker, Mr Speaker, Sir. The current unparalleled period experienced by the world has demonstrated the magnitude of financial resilience but more importantly, the focus on future resilience. The prevailing crisis, Mr Speaker, Sir, has created serious financial difficulties for people across the world, including in our country and many of our seniors.

Hence, it is clear that an increase in the Retirement Pension of our retirees would not only afford them a better quality of life which they have long deserved but will also help them face the current crisis and participate at our economic recovery. This has been the priority of the hon. Prime Minister since well before the pandemic and the majority of the seniors are people, who upon retirement, have no income other than the Basic Retirement Pension, Mr Speaker, Sir, and unfortunately in many cases, in spite of all the financial

support provided by the Government, the Retirement Pension is not always enough to cover seniors in everyday needs.

Sadly, and increasingly retirees are often forced to continue working long past retirement age and it is stressful to be struggling to make ends meet, to be afraid of not being able to meet current and future needs and to have only enough money for necessities and nothing more.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on this side of the House, we are fully aware of the current financial challenges facing employees and employers and we have left no stones unturned to provide the required support especially with the Budget 2021-2022 measures. The proposed Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, will create the climate, the structure and the machinery to ensure a sustainable additional contributory scheme for employees and, as I said, the unsustainability of the current system is clear and proven hence why, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, was bold and decisive.

Following the announcement of the introduction of the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* in the Budget of 2020-2021, an Interministerial Committee as well as a Technical Committee of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, was setup and with a spirit of constructive engagements, consultations were held with all the impacted stakeholders ranging from public sector and private sector, trade unions, business organisation such as the MCCI and Business Mauritius and other industry representatives to gather the feedback and report back to the Technical Committee, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This Government has been open to dialogue and has listened attentively to all school of thoughts across all the stakeholders.

M. le président, ce gouvernement a prouvé a maintes reprises qu'il est au côté des plus faibles, au côté de ceux qui ont été toujours marginalisés au profit de quelques groupes d'intérêts. Au cours de ces dernières années, il a entrepris plusieurs grandes réformes en vue d'une redistribution plus équitable de la richesse nationale en faveur de la classe laborieuse. Ce gouvernement, au fil des années, a renversé les politiques régressives de son prédécesseur, l'une après l'autre, avec de grandes réformes socialistes et socialisantes notamment avec l'avènement historique de la politique de salaire minimum, le rétablissement du tripartisme et l'introduction de nouvelles lois en faveur des droits des travailleurs. L'avènement de la Contribution Social Généralisée, M. le président, s'inscrit dans le droit fil de ce vaste mouvement réformiste.

M. le président, ce projet de loi, donc qui est devant la Chambre aujourd'hui, constitue à plus d'un titre une avancée majeure pour la classe des travailleurs. Soyons d'accord, M. le président, le *Social Contribution and Social Benefits Bill* vient apporter un cadre législatif et règlementaire à la Contribution Social Généralisée et propose un nouveau système de pension qui est nettement plus avantageux au salarié mais aussi aux *self-employed* et ceux qui exercent dans l'économie informelle. In addition to the Basic Retirement Pension payable under the National Pensions Act, the Bill makes provision for the payment of a guaranteed monthly retirement benefit to a person above the normal retirement age.

The benefits on retirement will therefore be payable at retirement age which is currently at 65 years. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, workers in the sugar, salt, tea, public transport and block making sectors and who are allowed to retire earlier than the retirement age will benefit from the *CSG* as from the age of 60, 6 sectors, Mr Speaker, Sir, and you know what was hon. Uteem's remark about this provision? He said this is a blatant example of discrimination but it is positive discrimination, Mr Speaker, Sir, and if he does not know, I am sorry to have to tell him that in our previous law, in the different remuneration orders, this category of workers; construction workers, transport workers and sugar industry workers were already positively discriminated, Mr Speaker, Sir.

He should know a labourer could retire at the age of 55 under the old Labour Act and he was given what we call at that time gratuity upon retirement. Even female labourers, sugar industry labourers, were allowed to retire earlier. So, this Bill does not invent the wheel with regard to this provision, sugar, salt, tea, public transport and block making sectors have been allowed to retire earlier than the retirement age, Mr Speaker, Sir, and when hon. Reza Uteem is saying that *il va contrairement à tout ce que les syndicats du MMM ont lutté pendant des longues années*, Mr Speaker, Sir, to allow this category of workers to retire earlier than 60 years because 60 then was the age of retirement and if he does not know, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the construction sector, BACECA, which represents all the construction industry, has signed an Agreement, an MOU with trade union federation with the CTSP, in fact to allow workers in the construction sector to retire earlier, 55, Mr Speaker, Sir, and there is a logic behind that. The employers themselves, *les patrons eux-mêmes réalisent qu'à 60 ans, quelqu'un qui a travaillé toute sa vie dans le transport, dans la construction ou comme un laboureur*, Mr Speaker, Sir, is not the same as somebody who has done a light job and hon. Uteem talks of –

“... go back at his speech, blatant example of discrimination”

Mr Speaker, Sir, and I was amazed when I heard an MMM Leader talking of discrimination against that category of workers, Mr Speaker, Sir. The CSG benefit and retirement will be payable at a rate Rs4,500 per month as from 01 July.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the benefits will also be paid to those employees who are still working beyond their retirement age. Employees drawing a basic salary of Rs50,000 or less will contribute 1.5% and the employer shall contribute 3%. For those deriving a basic monthly salary in excess of Rs50,000, the rate of contribution for the employee is 3% while the employer will contribute 6%.

Self-employed people also, Mr Speaker, Sir, earning Rs50,000 or less will pay only Rs150 per month. Mr Speaker, Sir, an appropriate rule based on transparent mechanism will be put in place to review as and when required the CSG benefits on the basis of criteria relating to erosion of purchasing power, sustainability, affordability and other economy factors. The mechanism will be enshrined in a legislation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, under the NPF system, the benefits at retirement were lower compared with the new rate. The new system is bringing more fairness and equity to people in the lower-income rungs especially and help them lead a more decent life once they have retired.

We also know the benefits with regard to injury compensation for the private sector employees in case of industrial accidents, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the different types of benefits that have been elaborated and proposed in the law. The House will appreciate that this new piece of legislation is a momentous accomplishment as far as workers' rights and dignity are concerned. The hard working class is henceforth entitled to a larger and fairer claim on the wealth which this country is creating. Government is re-engineering the allocation of resources in line with its policy of putting people at the heart of the development agenda.

It is, therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, essential that a fairer share of national income is devoted to replacement income and transfer payment so that these are adequately funded to meet their social objectives. Modern redistribution policies are premised upon a set of fundamental social rights to education, health and retirement and this Government, subscribed to this principle, Mr Speaker, Sir, and remains deeply committed to redefining a new social order where social justice prevails.

M. le président, malheureusement, comme c'est toujours le cas à chaque fois que le gouvernement vient de l'avant avec des idées progressistes, l'Opposition choisit de se ranger du *wrong side of history*, s'adonnant à la démagogie et à une rhétorique déconcertante.

Mr Speaker, Sir, une rhétorique qui certes peut générer des headlines dans des medias acquis à sa cause mais qui ne proposent rien en termes de substance et de solution à la priorité du moment. Face à critique facile et plein de contradictions, je dois dire de l'Opposition, le gouvernement propose un projet cohérent pour faire progresser le pays et assurer encore plus de protection aux plus faibles et aux plus vulnérables.

L'Opposition veut instaurer un climat de doute, de suspicions chez les salariés, M. le président. J'ai entendu le Leader du MMM, l'honorable Paul Bérenger, parlé d'escroqueries envers les vieilles personnes. Escroquerie, *Mr Speaker, Sir* ! Quel excès de langage, M. le président après tout ce que je viens de commenter, je viens d'élaborer sur les propositions dans ce projet de loi. Quelle tristesse que le MMM est devenu un Parti qui s'oppose systématiquement à toutes les grandes avancées socialistes de notre temps, il sera fermé dans une orthodoxie budgétaire et économique qui fait fis à toute idée d'un socialiste moderne et qui affaiblit le renforcement de notre système de protection sociale.

Mr Speaker, Sir, le Parti s'est montré réfractaire à l'introduction du salaire minimum. Rappelez-vous, aujourd'hui c'est la même posture adoptée par rapport à l'introduction d'un système de contribution sociale qui pourtant juste, solidaire, équitable et progressiste. Les travailleurs au bas de l'échelle vont dorénavant cotiser moins mais toucheront des bénéfices beaucoup plus conséquents à la retraite que sous le régime du *NPF*.

Par ailleurs, M. le président, quelques 200,000 travailleurs indépendants du pays seront désormais sous les filets de la protection sociale lorsqu'ils partiront à la retraite à l'âge de 65 ans. Ces travailleurs pourront, grâce au nouveau système, toucher un revenu mensuel décent de R 4,500, en sus du *Basic Retirement Pension* de R 9,000. Un couple de retraités peut ainsi s'attendre à des bénéfices au moins de R 27,000 par mois sous forme de pension de l'État.

Contrairement au système du *NPF*, où seuls les travailleurs qui ont contribué avaient droit aux bénéfices, la CSG sera elle, universelle, M. le président. Et, il faut ajouter aussi qu'en cas d'accident sur le lieu du travail, un salarié touchera une compensation de R 40,000 contre R 15,000 seulement sous le *NPF*. Les travailleurs indépendants qui cotisent à la CSG auront aussi droit des indemnités en cas d'accident.

Encore une fois ce gouvernement est déterminé à changer les règles du jeu pour libérer les travailleurs au bas de l'échelle de leur situation de vulnérabilité. Avec cette protection sociale fortement revigoré, ce gouvernement vient réduire à coup sûr la pauvreté absolue parmi les retraités, nos vieux, surtout ceux qui ont une vie difficile pourront ainsi aspirer à une vie décente. Les risques qu'ils soient contraires à travailler au-delà de l'âge de la retraite pour subvenir à leurs besoins vont grandement diminuer avec ces nouveaux acquis sociaux et cette grande avancée dans le *Welfare State*.

De toute manière, M. le président, même s'ils choisissent une raison ou une autre de poursuivre leur activité professionnelle au-delà de 65 ans, ils toucheront toujours les bénéfices de la CSG.

M. le président, voilà ce qui est décrit et qualifié par le MMM comme escroquerie mais la population n'est pas dupe. En temps et lieu, elle sera faire la différence entre les progrès indéniables pour les travailleurs et la vraie escroquerie politique de certains qui ont perdu leur épeure militante et la cause du travailleur, et elle agira en conséquence, tout comme elle l'a fait lors des élections générales de 2019 et les élections villageoises de novembre 2020.

M. le président, il y a beaucoup d'observations et de commentaires sur la viabilité de la CSG. Laissez-moi rassurer cette Chambre, parce que j'ai pris beaucoup de temps à relire ce texte de loi, que la CSG n'est pas un *Ponzi scheme*. La CSG n'est pas un fond d'investissement et il n'y a aucun risque qu'il ne se retrouve en situation de déficit. Les bénéfices éventuels ne sont pas là, à la merci des aléas des marchés financiers. Les retraités seront mieux protégés car c'est le budget de l'État qui va recevoir les cotisations et qui va payer les bénéfices. Par contre, le risque des déficits était manifeste avec le *NPF*. Le *NPF* n'était pas viable et il fallait qu'on trouve des solutions durables pour assurer la pérennité du système de retraite, compte tenu de notre population vieillissante. Le nouveau système CSG, M. le président, préconisé est plus durable et plus efficace.

Il était aussi inexact de dire que la CSG aura une incidence négative sur les *Company Pension Schemes* auquel les salariés sont prescrits. En réalité, plus de 80% des entreprises vont contribuer moins à la CSG qu'elles ne le font au *National Pension Fund*. Il y restera de ressources financières disponibles qui peuvent être réallouées vers des fonds de pension privée et éventuellement proposer une protection additionnelle aux futurs retraités.

M. le président, l'Opposition fait croire aux travailleurs que la CSG viendra diminuer leur pouvoir d'achat. Les faits sont que la très grande majorité des salariés vont contribuer moins à la CSG. En effet, quelques 271,000 salariés avec un salaire de base de moins de R 39,800 payeront moins qu'ils ne le faisaient sous le *NPF*.

Par ailleurs, fidèle à leur tactique de diversion, l'Opposition à tenter de jouer la carte du PME pour discréditer la CSG. En effet, le nouveau système va largement profiter aux petites entreprises qui génèrent un chiffre d'affaires annuel inférieur à R 50 millions. 84 % de ces petites et moyennes entreprises, c'est-à-dire 12, 584 entreprises sur un total de 15, 054 vont contribuer moins qu'ils faisaient à travers le *NPF*.

Bref, M. le président, la CSG vient réconcilier compétitivité des entreprises et injustices sociales en faveur des travailleurs. C'est un *win-win situation* pour la grande majorité des salariés et les employeurs. La réforme de retraite est une nécessité pour un pays avec une population vieillissante. Le gouvernement, le Premier ministre s'attaquent au cœur du problème et enclenchent des réformes nécessaires pour assainir et renforcer le système de pension et l'Etat-providence dans un sens plus large.

J'ai entendu aussi la critique que le gouvernement consacre trop de ressources financières à nos vieilles personnes et autres groupes vulnérables. Ils nous accusent systématiquement d'en faire une question politique et électorale.

M. le président, les ressources que nous consacrerons à la protection sociale reflète notre philosophie de placer l'humain au cœur même de notre politique de développement. Nous ne pouvons certainement pas obliger nos adversaires à partager cette philosophie, mais nous ne pouvons pas être responsables s'ils n'ont pas le même sens des priorités que nous.

Le gouvernement lance ici un signal encore plus fort qu'il restera farouchement aux côtés des plus faibles parce qu'ils méritent toutes notre considération. Je dois solliciter mon collègue, le ministre des Finances, le Dr. Padayachy pour venir de l'avant avec un texte de loi d'une extrême importance dans la construction d'une économie forte, inclusive et solidaire.

Dans le même souffle, permettez-moi, M. le président, de saluer le leadership fort, éclairé et cohérent du Premier ministre, en matière de politique sociale. Il vient démontrer encore une fois la preuve de sa détermination à apporter des changements en profondeur pour consolider l'Etat-providence et soulager les plus démunis, tout en favorisant une politique de reprise économique forte pour surmonter la crise du Covid et les autres défis qui nous guette.

Avec la crise du Covid, M. le président, les risques de fractures sociales et économiques se sont multipliés dans les quatre coins de la planète. À Maurice, fort heureusement, M. le président, se trouve un *caring Government* qui continue à insuffler plus de résiliences, de cohésion et d'inclusion à notre tissu social.

C'est pourquoi, M. le président, pour terminer, j'invite cette auguste Assemblée d'adopter et à voter en faveur de ce projet de loi.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Deputy Prime Minister!

(6.05 p.m.)

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me after the excellent speech of my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, add a few words in support of this Bill, introduced by the hon. Minister of Finance.

This Bill obviously, Mr Speaker, Sir, is very important, because it deals with our pension and social benefit system which lies at the heart of the concept of a welfare state.

The welfare state, through its pension social benefit system, acts irrespective of who contributes as a social insurance mechanism, to protect human beings, to protect the old, those unable to work, the weak, the vulnerable from the vagaries of life. As such, it is the hallmark of a civilised society. It is the recognition of the right to a decent life and to a decent retirement whatever the social and economic circumstances of any individual.

Yet, Mr Speaker, Sir, that was not always the case. That charity was eventually in the course of human history, replaced by generalised state sponsored social insurance, is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is the fruit not of mathematical calculations or experts debating the appropriate formulae, but it is the fruit of social struggles, originating in the now developed countries since the latter part of the 19th century, developing in the early 20th century. More pronounced with the great depression of the 1930s and then came in 1942 the Beveridge Report, which went on to become the foundation of the modern welfare state, as we know it.

The welfare state emerged as a truly global phenomenon after decolonisation in the 1960s and the 1970s as the former colonies adopted models drawn from Britain and France and other developed countries.

In our own country, Mauritius, it is not easy to trace back the history of our social security system. We had our own poor laws introduced in 1902 and as I tried to research the history of our social security system, I was fortunate to come across a UN discussion paper by an expert by the name of Larry Willmore. And here, I will echo what my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, said before me, it was in 1940 that the then British Governor became concerned that people in need were relying too much on the State, set up a Social Insurance Committee to look into the possibility of implementing a system of contributory old-age pensions.

In 1941, that Committee recommended a compulsory system of flat contributions with benefits strictly proportional to contributions paid. This proposal was severely criticised by Dr. Millien, who was a member of the Committee, who rejected this attempt to shift the cost of old age relief from the taxpayer to workers who were desperately poor and could not afford to pay contributions. So much so that by 1950, there was still contributory system in our country, so, the Government in that year tabled legislation for a non-contributory system as a stop-gap measure. So, our Social Insurance Scheme dates back to 1950; it became universal in 1958 following the abolition of the means test.

In 1960 the qualifying age was lowered to 60, but the means test was reintroduced. I think this is interesting because the debate of what should be the share of contribution as opposed to non-contributory principle; what is the age of qualifying for social security in terms of retirement pensions has always – and whether there should be means testing or not – has always been the key elements of the debate going back a century.

But the system we are replacing today, of course, dates back to 1976. In 1960 the age was reduced but the means test was reintroduced to exclude the very rich. In 76, of course, the National Pensions Act was voted. Government sharply increased the size of the non-contributory pension and abolished the means test. Now since the mid-1970's we have known this dual universal and social insurance pension which, and I agree with hon. Ganoo, has served the country well for many years but has never been fundamentally reformed over its 45 years or so, of existence.

In Mauritius as well, it was not just the doing of British Governors and the Legislators but it was the reflection of protracted and fierce social struggles dating back to 1947 – the workers uprising of 1937, as hon. Ganoo said. History tells us that, of course, those who fought for the Independence of this country in the Labour Party, in the IFB, Sir Seewoosagar

Ramgoolam, played a crucial role in setting up our welfare state which was then vigorously defended and extended by Sir Anerood Jugnauth while he was Prime Minister.

Indeed, I was very interested to note that after 1976, the next major change in non-contributory pensions was announced by the Minister of Finance in the Budget Speech of 11 October 1983, the second Sir Anerood Jugnauth government. In 1983, when for a first time higher pensions were provided for the very old namely; Rs200 for those aged between 75 and 89. Rs300 for those aged 90 and over compared to Rs174 for younger pensioners.

So, it is very instructive that while we debate this today, we should recall that Sir Anerood Jugnauth was the first person who introduced this graduated formula so that the oldest could benefit more since their needs were that much greater.

But anyway, throughout the years there has been broad consensus on the need to maintain and develop our welfare state. From the Labour Party and the IFB to the MSM, even the PMSD despite its right-wing political stance in the 1960s and 70s never questioned the welfare state, and the MMM which was not long in government, always spoke of *l'approfondissement de l'Etat providence*.

However, this consensus was not to last. I must say that over the last 20 years, it would appear that while everybody agrees to the principle of the welfare state; how we should adapt the welfare state to the evolving economic and social realities, how we can make the pension system sustainable, has not been a consensual subject. It has instead been the object of party political football, unfortunately. But let me go back to after this historical detour to the basic principles to explain why the NPF needed to be either fundamentally reformed or replaced. What is, Mr Speaker, Sir, a good pension system in this day and age? It is – I would like to suggest – a system that guarantees to each and every one, to all retirees, a basic retirement pension that maintains them above the poverty line and preferably offers two-thirds of the last income, as is the case for long serving civil servants. To ensure that these principles are met, a good pension system has a universal coverage that includes the self-employed and the underemployed, and it has several pillars; the basic pension, which in Mauritius was, of course, the non-contributory basic retirement pension and then comes the main pension which in Mauritius was the NPF and supplementary pensions.

Now, clearly the NPF was failing us in many of these respects. Let me just give a few examples –

- (i) the NPF was providing only up to Rs5,000 per month which even together with the Rs9,000 non-contributory basic retirement pension, would only allow the replacement rate of 50% for those who are earning less than Rs28,000. So, for those at the bottom of the ladder, it was inadequate;
- (ii) coverage for the self-employed and the underemployed was woefully inadequate;
- (iii) while some employers could provide a supplementary pension, the majority of workers, especially in the small and medium enterprises, had no supplementary pension or a supplementary pension that was too low to enable them to maintain their living standards after retirement;
- (iv) while there were various schemes for private savings for retirement, only those in the upper income brackets could access these and there were no generalised incentives to save for retirement, and
- (v) as the IMF itself pointed out in a 2013 paper, the universal pension disproportionately benefitted the better-off. 43%, Mr Speaker, Sir, 43% of benefits went to the richest 40% of the population.

So, it is clear that the NPF system, after having well served the country, required either fundamental reform or replacement. Now, should Government have proceeded differently? This was one of the points that were made by the Opposition. Of course, ideally, if we were in an ideal world, we should have gone for depoliticised consensus building by means of a white paper, for instance, and had extensive consultations with all the experts, with all the stakeholders, but I asked myself would it have worked?

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *To kouma enn nam perdi!*

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Would it have worked with this Opposition and I am not referring to hon. Lobine who stands out as a shining example of what the Opposition could and should be and hon. Abbas Mamode, of course!

Would it have worked, Mr Speaker, Sir? This Opposition that from the word ‘go’ has set itself the sole objective of overthrowing the Government by any means, challenging

election results, street protests, even now on the social media, I see calls to the people to go onto the streets to protest against this Bill and to overthrow the Government.

Despite the sanitary and economic crisis, this Opposition is seizing each and every difficulty. Take the example of the Wakashio tragedy, each and every difficulty to try to overthrow the Government even if it means letting the country go to the dogs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, look at the attitude today, we have had four orators from the Opposition; hon. Ramful, hon. Duval, the Leader of the Opposition, hon. Bérenger and hon. Uteem and we have listened to them carefully. I missed the beginning of the speech of hon. Uteem and I went to listen to the recording, making sure that every argument was noted so that we could listen, reflect and respond but look at the attitude today.

The Prime Minister of this country will address the House in a few minutes, the Minister of Finance will sum up, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has spoken and apart from the two gentlemen whose presence I salute, the Opposition does not partake in the spirit of parliamentary democracy to come and listen and exchange and debate. It is an intolerant Opposition and how can we have any meaningful dialogue with such an Opposition, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, however much I would have liked to agree that we should ideally have had depoliticised consultation, white papers, how can it be in the present circumstances? As I said, the consensus, unfortunately, is no longer there. Over the last 30 years, nobody has dared to fundamentally reform the NPF although everybody acknowledged the NPF required reforms.

The IMF working paper of 2015 quoted by my colleague the Minister of Social Integration the other day makes it clear that the 2012 reforms were limited to the Civil Service but the Universal Old-Age Pension Scheme remains unreformed and the IMF warned of fiscal spending pressures and NPF financial shortfalls as the percentage of seniors increase steadily to 30% in 2050 against a backdrop of an ageing and declining population.

We agree pension reform has always been controversial. It has been a political minefield. In 2015, that IMF paper listed the options; reducing the generosity of the system, tightening eligibility by increasing retirement age or targeting, increasing the workforce by discouraging retirement or increasing fertility, most of these proposals would appear to be politically unpalatable to the extent we cannot generate a consensus.

Remember 2004 when the present Prime Minister, then Minister of Finance attempted to bring an element of reform so that the pensions went essentially to those who really needed the pensions. It became a political football and the Opposition made much of this measure to criticise and to wage a vicious campaign against our then Government.

But that is not only true of Mauritius. Across the world, pension reform is one of the hardest to tackle, often eliciting political opposition and mass protest. Remember Russia in 2018, France in 2019, because pension reform involves intergenerational transfers, because it involves young people who will have to pay for a form whereas they are uncertain about what benefits it will bring them in the future. It involves achieving goals that are complicated and costly because of the challenge of providing coverage to the self-employed, to the under-employed and because some firms are better able to supplement pensions.

Now, the Opposition has been very critical, the Opposition has not hesitated to use all sorts of superlatives but their arguments are full of contradictions. I will not repeat all that hon. Ganoo said, he tackled the issue of whether we were disrespectful to the courts, about whether because there is an electoral petition that mentions pensions we should be debarred as a Government from carrying on reforms of the pension system but let me stop at hon. Bérenger's allegation that '*ces 226,000 piégés qui auront à contribuer*'. This was about the self-employed, persons who are not in the formal sector of the economy, who will now be called upon to contribute.

What is more normal than that? The transition from the informal to the formal economy is supposed to be a positive step that allows the system to recognise those that remained in the shadows, to acknowledge their presence, to regulate their work and to extend the hand of social solidarity. Remember the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme at the time of COVID. Could the Minister of Finance have turned a deaf ear just because those persons were not officially on the rolls of the MRA? But we did not do that, we opened our hands, we opened our hearts and we came in support of all those self-employed persons in Mauritius.

During the second confinement, Rs10,000 was paid to all those self-employed persons who had during the first confinement requested assistance. Even without their asking people were surprised to see the payment being affected at their doorstep, into their bank account. That is called social solidarity, social solidarity requires that each and every one should contribute according to his ability, according to his means and that we should support each

and every one according to his needs, irrespective of his situation and that is precisely what we are doing.

That is precisely what the International Labour Organisation calls for by stating that workers in the informal economy have little or no social protection and receive little or no social security either from their employer or from the Government. Now, for all these self-employed who are now officially recognised, there is a guarantee that they will be protected by the laws of this country and by the social welfare system of this country.

Of course, there are practical difficulties. The hon. Leader of the Opposition referred to difficulties to calculate net income, digital filing of tax returns. But does the MRA not offer assistance at the time of filing of income tax returns? Do the Citizens Advice Bureaus not offer assistance when people had to claim self-employed grants? So, of course, the MRA will address those difficulties, but surely we need to start somewhere.

The Opposition went on to say that this contribution which is being proposed is in the nature of a tax and is not appropriate in times of recession, yet, at the same time, they go on to argue that they expect solidarity towards those in need. And at the same time, the Opposition denounces a wild spending spree of Government - I am quoting from the Leader of the Opposition - and at the same time, the Opposition goes on to claim that the benefits system is unsustainable. So, which is it? Their arguments are replete with contradictions.

Just let me take the example of what hon. Bérenger stated, that this Government never said that pensions would be capped at Rs9,000. But where did the Rs9,000 come from? These Rs9,000 were supposed to be capping. Where did it come from?

In 2014, when Sir Anerood Jugnauth came back to Government, the old age pension stood at Rs3,623. It was practically doubled to Rs6,210 by the time of the last General Elections. Who capped the pensions? Since the last elections, the old age pension and all the other social benefits that are associated, that are based on the old age pension, have increased from Rs6,210 to Rs9,000. When was that done before? And hon. Bérenger accuses this Government, this Prime Minister, this Minister of Finance of capping pensions! Mr Speaker, Sir, how can one live with such contradictions? How can one live politically with such contradictions? In fact, unfortunately, it shows that pension reform has become a matter of party political football.

(Interruptions)

The simple truth is that whatever Government would have done, the Opposition would have obstructed Government. Whatever Government would not have done, the Opposition would have criticised. Whether it would have been whitepaper, whether it would have been consultations, everything would have been met with the same bad faith and the same petty politicking. But what is done is done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

We have a new social contribution and social benefits system and it is a new system that is inherently progressive. I do not want to repeat all that has been said by my able colleagues earlier, but let us just remember that this Government has had the courage to tackle pension reform that was solely needed. And as a progressive Government, it shows to start at the bottom of the ladder for those who are least able to fend for themselves. The reforms ensure that whereas low income earners are to contribute less, those earning up to Rs30,000 are now better taken care of. Secondly, the end of year bonus is now payable to retirees. Thirdly, the ceiling for industrial injury benefit has increased. Fourthly, while pension becomes payable as from age 65, which is the normal retirement age, six sectors, quoted by hon. Ganoo earlier, have been identified as possible exceptions to the general rule in recognition of the nature of the work involved. *La pénibilité du travail* as the French called it.

This is a progressive piece of legislation. But make no mistake; I would be the last one to deny that we have solved every problem. The challenges are there, the basic challenge of providing decent pension for all in a sustainable manner remains, as it remains for every developed country with an ageing and a diminishing population.

This legislation, this Bill is only the start of a process of pension reform and I am sure the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development will agree with me. And that is why we have set up a social benefits review mechanism. The next step will be to ensure that those in the middle class with incomes between Rs30,000 to Rs100,000 per month are also able to achieve a replacement rate of at least 50%, that would be an objective. The next step is to address the issue of private sector and public sector contributions. The next step will be the continued structural reforms to anchor long-term sustainability while ensuring fairness through an equity-based approach, linking retirement age, for instance, to life expectancy. These are things we can discuss in the future, in the years to come. Each Government will be confronted with the basic issue of long-term sustainability of a pension system with an ageing and diminishing population. But at least we have made a first step. There are real issues and the key challenge which confronts Mauritius like all other middle income, high income

societies with an ageing and diminishing population is to guarantee to the whole older population an adequate level of income without placing excessive demands on younger generations and on national economies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I was hoping the Opposition would be here because once again, I would have tried to appeal to their patriotism. Because I believe...

(Interruptions)

But, hon. Abbas Mamode is here and hon. Lobine is here. And my appeal would be, instead of criticising the very first step in a much needed reform, we would wish to call on all citizens of goodwill in this country, including those in the Opposition, to support the efforts of this public-private social benefits review mechanism, to come up, as we go along year after year, with implementable and adapted solutions so that we can keep bettering and improving on our pension system.

I will conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, by observing that in addition to high income, an advanced economy, as defined by the World Bank, has an extensive social welfare system and is well integrated into the global economy. As we emerge from COVID-19 and return to high income status, we should also aspire to be an advanced economy by strengthening our social protection. The pension reform we have started is intended as a key building block towards that end.

I have done. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

(6.37 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Merci, M. le président. J'avais pris un grand élan pour déplorer l'absence de l'opposition, surtout que les derniers intervenants étaient l'honorable Alan Ganoo, le *Deputy Prime Minister* et moi-même, mais je dois dire que le retour de l'honorable Khushal Lobine a quelque peu calmé mon ardeur. Mais j'espère que le *Parliament Broadcasting* va pouvoir montrer à la population les bancs vides de l'Opposition. Comme je dis, à l'exception de l'honorable Khushal Lobine du PMSD et de l'honorable Salim Abbas Mamode, dont je salue la présence pour nous écouter. Je ne sais pas si les membres de l'Opposition sont allés chercher l'espoir ailleurs.

(Interruptions)

Mais je pense, M. le président. Ah, le retour ...

(Interruptions)

M. le président, j'allais dire que je pense que le ...

(Interruptions)

... même le dernier né du plagiat est retourné à l'Assemblée.

(Interruptions)

M. le président, j'allais dire je croyais peut-être que les membres de l'Opposition sont allés consulter le rapport de la commission sur Britam, parce que c'est volumineux, et il faut prendre beaucoup de temps pour pouvoir non seulement lire mais digérer ce que les commissaires ont écrit.

Let me come, Mr Speaker, Sir, to this Bill, on the Social Contribution and Social Benefits Bill, and I want, by my intervention to, first of all, send a very strong signal to whomever who attempts to draw a wedge between me and my hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, that the reform we have engaged in our pension framework is a well-thought out initiative of my Government to ensure the sustainability of our pension reform.

As a responsible and caring Government, we have decided to act whereas others are drowning themselves in the stinking waters of irrational conservatism and demagogy. Mr Speaker, Sir, I had planned to mention so many instances in our history about, I would not say the proposals but I would say the need to reform the pension system.

The hon. Deputy Prime Minister and the hon. Ganoo have talked lengthily. So I shall not repeat all those historical times when all governments have called for the need to carry out a reform in our pension system but, as usual, we have some irrational politicians who have tried to block fundamental reforms, I would say either due to excess of egoism, incompetence and short-mindedness or to cheap political considerations and this, Mr Speaker, Sir, brings me to the bold reform in the Sugar Sector which I spearheaded in 2001. I can still remember the virulent attack by the Labour Party and others although they knew that such a reform was long overdue and was urgently required to ensure the long-term viability of the sugar cane industry, and time has proved the sceptics and the demagogues wrong, and, today, when this Government has had the courage to bring forward the pension reform, we have the same people trying to instil fear in the minds of the population but I am confident that once again they will be proved wrong as workers and employees of this country will see

at the end of the day that they will be better off if they are already retired or when they will retire.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know that we have an ageing population and that the National Pension Fund will not be sustainable if nothing is done. *Status quo*, in fact, would have brought havoc and to prevent that, we came last year in the Budget with the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée (CSG)*. We are convinced, on this side of the House, that the *CSG* and the proposed legislation being debated since Tuesday last, provides the framework for a sustainable pension system that will cater for enhanced benefits to the pensioners.

Mr Speaker, Sir, indeed, the Bill ushers in a major reform of the pension system with the objectives of –

- ensuring the sustainability of the pension system, that is also fair and equitable;
- addressing the sustainable issues that the National Pension Fund will be facing in the years to come;
- providing a decent retirement benefit, over and above the Rs9,000 basic retirement pension, to those aged 65 and above;
- ensuring that no one is worse off compared to the NPF, and
- supporting those at the lower end of the income ladder, and thereby reducing inequality and bringing more social justice.

The Bill provides for a regulatory framework for the establishment and operation of a new social contribution and social benefits system. It accordingly makes provision for –

- the payment of social contribution by employees and employers of the public and private sectors and by self-employed persons;
- the payment of a retirement benefit;
- the payment of industrial injury benefits to employees in the private sector as well as to the self-employed persons;
- the administration of the collection of social contribution and payment of social benefits, and
- the establishment of a mechanism to review the social benefits.

It is worth noting that, in the course of working out this legislation, there have been extensive consultations with relevant stakeholders, including representatives of the public sector, organisations of the private sector, and workers' organisations.

With the introduction of this new system, Government is taking yet another bold step to improve the purchasing power of those at the lower income range. Those earning up to Rs40,000 are contributing less than they were under the NPF.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to recall the main measures taken by Government since December 2014 to support those at the lowest rungs of the social ladder and to improve the purchasing power of the population in general –

- (a) the Basic Retirement Pension has been increased from Rs3,623 to Rs9,000;
- (b) we introduced the National Minimum Wage which stands as at date at Rs10,575;
- (c) we introduced the Subsistence Allowance and the Negative Income Tax;
- (d) we paid salary compensations well above the rate of inflation,
- (e) we provided for cash transfers and other supports to households in absolute poverty under the Marshall Plan Against Poverty;
- (f) we have been providing subsidies on rice, flour, cooking gas, and SC & HSC examinations fees, and
- (g) we have made tertiary education in public institutions free.

It is good to remind everybody that since December 2014 to December 2020, we had put a massive Rs100 billions of additional revenue in the pockets of our fellow citizens. Never before, and I repeat it, never before in the history of our country had any Government done so much. And, this has certainly improved the standard of living of the population.

And we have not stopped supporting our compatriots amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The efforts put in by Government are recognised by a vast majority of the population and that is what matters the most for us.

Mr Speaker, Sir, increasing pension benefits forms part of our philosophy to improve the standard of living of our elders and all those concerned. With what is proposed in the Bill, those aged 65 and above will receive an enhanced Retirement Pension which is much above what they would have earned under the NPF.

Presently, around 53% of the 120,000 beneficiaries under the NPF are earning Rs1,000 or less each month. With the new system, with a payment of Rs4,500, their purchasing power and living conditions will definitely improve.

Moreover, the Bill provides for the payment of an end-of-year bonus equivalent to the amount of the monthly retirement benefit.

Government is aware of the specificities of some sectors where workers have to put in extra efforts. They cannot sustain such efforts as they grow older and are thus allowed to retire before the retirement age. The Bill, therefore, provides for the payment of the retirement benefit to those employed in the specific sectors, namely sugar, salt, tea, block making, and public transport as from the age of 60, provided that they have worked for at least 10 consecutive years in any of those sectors at the time of retirement.

Government is going the extra mile. Henceforth, self-employed will also receive the benefits payable in case of injury at work. They will be better protected and their families spared from the harsh difficulties that follow after an injury occurs. They are being placed at the same level as that of other employees. They will, however, have to register themselves with the MRA and pay their contribution and rightly so, and I fully concur with what the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has said.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not see anything sinister in asking self-employed to contribute to be able to derive a pension benefit at the age of 65. As at now, they do not get any pension in excess of the Basic Retirement Pension when reaching the age of 60. I strongly condemn the attitude of Members of the Opposition who are playing with the sentiments of self-employed to make them believe that Government is targeting them with a new tax. I am confident that our self-employed fellow citizens are intelligent enough to assess that this Government is setting up a mechanism for them to get a decent pension when they will need it the most, that is, when they retire.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Members of the Opposition are using all ways and means to brand the social contributions and social benefits system as a tax. Let me say it clearly that they are wrong and they are deliberately misleading workers and employees of this country.

When you look at all the benefits that are associated with the system, everyone will agree that it is an investment for the future. How can it be a tax? It is good that I remind them, especially Members of the Labour Party and the PMSD, that they tortured the population when they were in power with all sorts of taxes. They introduced the –

- National Residential Property Tax;
- tax on interests;

- tax on SMS, Mr Speaker, Sir!
- a tax of Rs3 on every litre of petroleum products to pay for the huge hedging losses after their cronies erred at the State Trading Corporation;
- they even taxed cooperative societies at 15%.

And these people they now dare to accuse us of taxing workers! Let me say it again, the CSG is not a tax! It is a contribution to benefit from a contributory pension.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the new system, this Government is also increasing the maximum amount of benefits payable in case of injury at work compared to what is being paid under the NPF. For example –

- the maximum amount of the industrial injury benefit, payable in case of an industrial injury resulting in a temporary total incapacity for work, will now be Rs40,000 per month instead of Rs15,920 under the NPF;
- the maximum amount of the disablement benefit is being increased to Rs40,000 instead of Rs15,920, where the disablement is 100%. In case the disablement is less than 100%, the maximum benefit is Rs32,500 against Rs12,935 presently, and
- the survivor's benefit payable to the spouse of an employee who died as a result of an industrial injury will be up to a maximum of Rs25,000 monthly compared to the present Rs9,950.

The new system, Mr Speaker, Sir, is also reducing the burden on the majority of businesses, particularly SMEs. It is estimated that more than 80% of companies are paying lower contribution than they were under the NPF. This will allow these companies to allocate more resources to improve their competitiveness and enhance the quality of life of their workers.

The Bill provides for public sector employees to contribute to the system on the same basis as private sector employees, as from the date to be prescribed.

The Bill also provides for a mechanism to make recommendations to the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development with a view to enhancing the social benefits and maintaining their sustainability. For that purpose, a Social Benefits Review Committee

will be set up. It will comprise representatives of the public sector, organisations of employers, and workers' organisations.

Moreover, the Bill provides for the amendment of the Sugar Industry Pension Fund Act so that employees contribute to the Sugar Industry Pension Fund on the same basis as they were contributing prior to 01 September 2020. In fact, administrative arrangements had already been made for the contributions to be paid in accordance with the previous formula.

As regards the administration of the system, the Bill provides for –

- the Mauritius Revenue Authority to collect and manage the social contribution;
- the payment of the social benefits to be administered by the Ministry of Social Security, and
- the existing logistics and institutional arrangements established under the National Pensions Act to be maintained in the new system, namely –
 - the Medical Board to assess the degree of disablement/loss of faculty to be used as a basis for determining the payment of the industrial injury benefits;
 - the Appeal Tribunal to determine an appeal made by a claimant against a decision of the National Pensions Officer, and
 - the Medical Tribunal to determine an appeal against the decision of a Medical Officer or the Medical Board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, questions have been asked as to whether the payment of the retirement benefit under the CSG régime would be sustainable. Some have spoken about « *bombe à retardement* ». *A force de trouver des bombes partout, je pense qu'ils finiront par se faire exploser eux-mêmes. En tout cas, on verra. L'avenir nous le dira. M. le Président,...*

(Interruptions)

Oui, je pense que comme en 2014 et en 2019, les faits sont là. On verra.

In fact, I have been given the assurance that the payment of the retirement benefit under the CSG is expected to be sustainable over the medium term. As the economy recovers and income level rises, it is expected that the amount of social contributions will also

increase. Thus, over the medium term, the social contributions will increase to cover the cost of the retirement benefit.

Questions have also been asked whether, the payment of Basic Retirement Pension (BRP) at Rs9,000 monthly is sustainable. My answer is clearly yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. The payment of the BRP is sustainable. Over the medium term, the deficit in the recurrent budget is expected to decline significantly. This implies that recurrent revenue will be sufficient to meet the cost of the BRP, in addition to other recurrent expenditures.

It is expected that the ratio of BRP to GDP will decline from 5.8% in 2021-2022 to 5.5% in 2022-2023 and further to 5.2% in 2023-2024.

The ratio of BRP to Recurrent Revenue is expected to decline from 21.6% in 2021-2022 to 21.8% in 2022-2023 and 20.7% in 2023-2024.

Another question that many have put is whether the BRP will remain fixed at Rs9,000. As announced in the Budget Speech 2020-2021, Government will continue to pay the basic retirement pension of Rs9,000 per month to all individuals at the age of 60 years and above. All increases in benefits to the elderly will be paid through the retirement benefit under the new pension system.

Another question that has come up is whether a person who is presently earning Rs9,000 BRP and, say, Rs3,400 under NPF, will receive the social benefit of Rs4,500 or the difference of Rs1,100? I can state that the full amount of the retirement benefit of Rs4,500 will be paid to that person over and above any contributory pension benefit he may derive under the NPF.

Those who are already beneficiaries under NPF will continue to receive their contributory pension benefit. Similarly, those who have contributed to the NPF will receive their contributory pension benefit at retirement. Over and above that contributory benefit, the Rs4,500 retirement benefit will be paid to them. If a person is earning Rs9,000 BRP and say Rs3,400 under NPF, he will receive the social benefit of Rs4,500 under the CSG, thus allowing him to have a retirement benefit of Rs16,900 in total.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have had a look at the speech of hon. Uteem. There are two things I would like to take up. I am happy that he is here, very happy. One is he mentioned that presently there is a case before the Court and that we are coming with this law. In other words he is saying it is shameful and questioning constitutionality and so on. Well, the little I know about law, Mr Speaker, Sir, maybe I can quote the case of Jawoojee and others versus

the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection of 2020 SCJ 48. I give the reference so that any member who would wish to consult that judgement can read it. I shall not quote much of that judgement, but just what the Court has said, and I quote –

“This Court has on numerous occasions referred to the following well-known dictum of Lord Justice Clerk Thomson in *Macnaughton v Macnaughton’s Trustees* 1953 Supreme Court, at page 387, to explain that it is incumbent on the Court to decide only live litigious issues.”

And I also quote further –

“Our Courts (Mauritian Supreme Court) have consistently acted on the view that it is their function in the ordinary run of contentious litigation to decide only live, practical questions, and that they have no concern with hypothetical, premature or academic questions, nor do they exist to advise litigants as to the policy which they should adopt in the ordering of their affairs. The Courts are neither a debating club nor an advisory bureau.”

This is the first remark I am making.

The second one, I am very sorry to have to take it up. At the end of his speech, *je dirais ça commence à être fidèle à lui-même. L’honorable Uteem a fait des commentaires concernant premièrement, mon affaire: the case of Suren Dayal against Pravind Jugnauth and others before the Supreme Court. I thought, my Lord...*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: I thought, Mr Speaker, Sir... I was thinking I was in the box.

Mr Speaker: In UK, you have Lord Speaker.

The Prime Minister: Hopefully in the future.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming from a Member of Parliament who is a barrister, I thought he would have refrained from making any comment on a case which is presently being heard by the Court, and which is pending. That is my first remark.

Secondly, he goes on, I have read this, he goes on and I quote – he is quoting from the petition – I shall repeat it now, what he says, and I quote from the petition –

“If this amounts deliberately and purposefully engineered with a corrupt motive designed to procure votes in order to secure the election of respondents No.1, that is

me, No. 2, that is Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, No. 3, that is Yogida Sawmynaden”.

And we are hearing an election petition contesting the election of the Prime Minister for bribery.

He is still sitting in the box; I am still sitting in the box talking about the same thing whether this increase in pension is an electoral bribery or not. I shall on the contrary not make any further comment on this because I do first of all respect the Supreme Court – there is a case pending. We shall talk and certainly I shall talk after judgment in that case.

And then he goes on to say how it is indecent for me to be talking, intervening on this Bill. I wonder whether there is any law or whether there is any Standing Order which prevents me from intervening on this Bill. What is indecent? I think it is indecent on his part to have commented in such a manner! But, at any rate, I know he is part of the panel of lawyers who are not only advising but also appearing in the cases before the Court contesting the election of a number of Members in this House. Well, if he knows so much about my case, probably I would have expected him...; in fact, I have been subjected to cross-examination for nearly two whole days. He could have joined Counsel there and he could have put any question that he would have wished there and showed to the Court because there, there is an independent Judiciary. But, anyway, I refrain from making any further comment, but this, Mr Speaker, Sir, reminds me that this is not the first time that I am subjected to vicious attacks from hon. Uteem. It is becoming a recurrent feature! Recurrent feature! I can remember, I shall only mention one example. After I had won my case before the Supreme Court, the MedPoint case I am referring to – and before the Privy Council, they have been unanimous; there has been unanimity on the part of all the Judges.

Thereafter, hon. Uteem who was sitting there – I can still see him, there – making as if he was like another Tribunal or another Court. And repeating and saying that I was in conflict; there was a conflict of interest. Do they not respect the judgements of such highest courts, not only in Mauritius, but the Privy Council? And not acknowledging, not recognising the fact that the truth has been exposed, finally. From what they have been saying initially –

“liem aste, liem vande, liem fer tou, liem...”

Where is it now? At least one should have kept quiet! But no; repeating the same thing over and over again, as if he believes in it. But, anyway, that is his attitude, that is his stand and I

must say I am very, very disappointed with such comments and such remarks that have been made.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is clear that the new pension system is fairer and more equitable. It caters for increased benefits to pensioners. It brings on board self-employed persons and provides for enhanced injury benefits to employees in the private sector as well as to self-employed persons. And, most importantly, it addresses the issue of sustainability which has been a major concern over the years.

The objectives and intent of the new pension system have been well understood by trade unionists. The CTSP (*Confédération Syndicale des Secteurs Publics et Privés*) has clearly stated that the CSG is more advantageous to workers than the NPF.

The *Confédération* has highlighted, and I quote –

“It is untrue to say that the 5% of working people earning more than Rs38,000 monthly will contribute more than what they will benefit. The benefits of the CSG cannot be looked upon individually. It is a new and progressive system to ensure that everyone in the country enjoys a peaceful retirement without being compelled to go back on the labour market to survive”.

I, of course, leave these comments for the appreciation of one and all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Social Contributions and Social Benefits framework, as detailed in the Bill, forms part of our philosophy to reduce inequality and ensure social justice for all. Our political commitment to improve the conditions of living of our fellow citizens at the lowest rungs of the ladder is the cornerstone of our strategy for an inclusive society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before concluding, I wish to congratulate the Minister of Finance on steering courageously this bold pension reform. He knows he has my full support, and courage, Mr Speaker, Sir, is what it takes to deliver landmark achievements. This is the mantra we have learnt from the great achievers this country has known.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance!

(7.16 p.m.)

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): M. le président, avant toute chose, permettez-moi de débiter mon propos en

saluant mes collègues ministres et parlementaires pour leurs récentes prises de parole. Je les remercie d'avoir contribué aux débats entourant la présentation du *Social Contribution and Social Benefits Bill* devant cette auguste Assemblée avec tant de conviction et de pédagogie.

Ils ont, avec raison et détermination, porté haut la vision de notre Premier ministre pour une société plus juste et une économie plus équilibrée. Chacune de leurs interventions a ainsi ajouté une pierre supplémentaire à l'édifice du projet national de ce gouvernement. Alliés aux mauriciens et unis derrière des valeurs communes, nous sommes, nous les membres de la majorité, mobilisés pour atteindre un objectif, celui du progrès, de la résilience et de la justice sociale.

Comme je l'ai énoncé lors de l'ouverture des débats, le vote de ce projet de loi constitue une étape fondamentale dans la mise en place d'un nouveau système de cotisations et de prestations sociales. Ce modèle solidaire, c'est la base de notre Sécurité sociale. La CSG entre aujourd'hui dans notre patrimoine national. Un patrimoine dont l'ADN souche est la justice sociale. J'ai pourtant entendu l'opposition affirmer que cette réforme nous mettait bien mal à l'aise.

J'ai pourtant entendu l'opposition affirmer que cette réforme nous mettait bien mal à l'aise. A trop vouloir prendre leurs rêves pour des réalités, ils resteront encore de longues années de l'autre côté de la Chambre.

Laissez-moi donc dissiper tout soupçon. La CSG est une réforme emblématique que je porte avec fierté. Elle incarne notre combat, celui de ce gouvernement. Une bataille que nous avons décidée de mener aux côtés de notre Premier ministre au sein du Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien et de nos amis, de nos frères et sœurs de *l'Alliance Morisien*. La lutte pour l'égalité que nous menons, elle est essentielle pour les Mauriciens d'aujourd'hui et de demain. Elle est, pour le Premier ministre, sa signature. Elle est, pour les Membres de la majorité, l'essence de notre engagement politique.

Nous de ce côté de la Chambre, nous ne faisons pas de la politique pour nous divertir. A l'attentisme immotivé, nous choisissons l'action juste. Nous nous battons pour donner vie à nos idées et aux aspirations de la population. Nous défendons ceux qui ont le moins. Aux côtés des vulnérables, notre combativité n'a pas de limites. Face à un tel engagement, la fracture des idées saute aux yeux. Le gouvernement a choisi le peuple. L'opposition, lui, a choisi les possédants.

M. le président, malgré le contexte dans lequel nous évoluons depuis près de 18 mois, ce gouvernement n'a sacrifié ni ses idéaux ni ses convictions sur l'autel de la COVID-19. Bien au contraire. Face à ce tourbillon, le gouvernement, guidé par la vision, la combativité et la détermination de notre Premier ministre garde le cap, et conduit le pays tout entier vers plus d'inclusivité, de solidarité et de progrès.

Si nous, nous avons opté pour la politique de l'action ; eux, ils s'embourbent dans la politique de l'autruche. L'Opposition semble en effet faire comme si nous évoluons encore dans un contexte normal. Un syndrome à la croisée du déni de réalité et de la mémoire sélective. L'honorable Uteem a notamment dit que la CSG n'était pas utile, que nous avions le temps avant d'engager une réforme de cette envergure. Mais dans quel monde vivent-ils ? Ils se sont construit une dangereuse réalité parallèle. Une sorte de matrix révisionniste, un monde merveilleux sans pandémie, sans crise, sans contraction de l'économie et sans diminution des recettes publiques. Ils sont complètement déconnectés de la réalité, de la population, et de ses préoccupations.

Cette Opposition n'a ni le sens des responsabilités ni le courage de l'action. Leurs raisonnements sont creux, dénués de toute logique économique et de toute raison citoyenne.

M. le président, le Leader de l'opposition a démarré son allocution en s'exclamant, tout azimut, que le principal problème de ce projet de loi était la soi-disant absence totale de consultation. Avant de rentrer dans les considérations techniques de la CSG, je vais, moi aussi, débiter mon intervention par une réponse complète et factuelle à cette allégation mensongère. Permettez-moi de le renvoyer au processus...

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir...

Dr. Padayachy: ...par lequel ce projet de loi est passé...

Mr Speaker: Point of order!

Mr X. L. Duval: It cannot be an *allégation mensongère* made in this House. I mean, the Minister here, we have every respect for him but he should respect us, he cannot say I lied in the House. You heard what he said, Mr Speaker, Sir? *Une allégation mensongère!* This is not correct to say in this House. Could you ask the hon. Minister to withdraw and refrain from these sorts of allegations?

Mr Speaker: I will review the recording.

Mr X. L. Duval: But, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you ask him, he will confirm he just said that. Did he not just say that?

Dr. Padayachy: J'ai dit 'à cette allégation mensongère.' C'est une allégation.

Mr Speaker: Allow me to review and to...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: C'est une allégation mensongère, je n'ai pas dit que c'était une...

Mr Speaker: I will come back to that. For the time being, you continue.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, juste pour le rassurer je n'ai pas dit qu'il a menti, j'ai dit qu'il a fait une allégation mensongère. Ça a une grosse différence, ça à une très grosse différence.

Mr Speaker: You continue!

Dr. Padayachy: Je vais continuer. Permettez-moi de le renvoyer au processus sur lequel ce projet de loi est passé avant d'être présenté à cette Assemblée. Depuis novembre 2020, un comité interministériel présidé par l'honorable Premier ministre ainsi qu'un comité technique présidé par le secrétaire du Cabinet ont été mis en place.

En outre, un groupe de travail a été institué par des représentants de *Business Mauritius*, de la Chambre de Commerce de Maurice et des Syndicats publics et privés. Mais aussi bien entendu du ministère des Finances, du ministère du Travail, du ministère de la Sécurité sociale, du bureau de l'Attorney General et du NPF. Un actuaire indépendant a également siégé sur ce comité.

Le groupe de travail a tenu plusieurs sessions et a fait part de ses recommandations au comité technique, qui comprenait les représentants du secteur privé et des employés.

Le Comité technique a ensuite fait part des recommandations au Comité interministériel présidé par l'honorable Premier ministre et comprenant le ministre des Finances, le ministre de la Sécurité sociale, l'Attorney General, le ministre des Services financiers, le ministre du Travail et le ministre de l'Industrie et des PME.

Les recommandations du Comité interministériel ont été soumises au conseil des ministres pour approbation, puis transmises au *State Law Office* pour la rédaction de ce projet de loi. C'est donc un mensonge éhonté de prétendre que ce texte de loi n'a pas été préparé en concertation avec l'ensemble des parties prenantes.

M. le président, je vais répondre méticuleusement et point par point aux inepties et contradictions des Membres de l'Opposition. Ce projet de loi est d'une importance capitale pour le futur de notre pays. Il est de mon devoir de réaffirmer la vérité de la CSG aux Mauriciens et ainsi écarter tous les doutes que certains ont vraiment tenté d'introduire dans la tête de la population. Ces doutes ont été semés par une opposition malintentionnée, mais soyez-en sûrs, jamais ils ne germeront. C'est d'ailleurs une grave erreur de leur part de vouloir prendre les mauriciens pour des ignorants.

Je dois le dire, nous avons à faire à une opposition schizophrène, qui ne semble pas être d'accord avec elle-même. Rien d'étonnant au fait qu'elle n'arrive pas à convaincre ! L'un dit que la CSG n'est pas viable, un autre s'exclame qu'elle rapporte déjà bien trop d'argent. L'un dit que nous n'avons pas les moyens de financer l'augmentation de la pension à R 13,500, un autre dit qu'il faut verser le montant additionnel mensuel de R 4,500 dès maintenant. En littérature, nous appelons ça le comique du ridicule. C'est un genre stylistique, allez-vous me dire. C'est cependant dommage pour la population.

M. le président, après ces brèves considérations, je vais revenir sur le bien-fondé et les procédures d'introduction de la CSG. La réforme de la Contribution Sociale Généralisée et des bénéficiaires y afférant est non seulement juste mais également nécessaire. Et cela comparativement au système du *National Pension Fund* dont les principes de viabilité et de progressivité étaient clairement devenus caduques.

Pour bien comprendre le sens de ces propos et de les mettre en perspective, je souhaiterais dans un premier temps retracer l'historique de la calamiteuse épopée du gouvernement Travailleuse/PMSD. Il est aujourd'hui connu de tous que l'arrivée au pouvoir de ce régime a donné un brutal coup d'arrêt à la lutte contre les inégalités. Ils ont freiné, mais pire, ils ont rebroussé chemin ! A coup de mesures antisociales, ils ont pendant de nombreuses années enclenché la marche arrière de l'ascenseur social.

En effet, la stratégie politique et économique appliquée par l'ancien gouvernement à base de réformes économiques ultra-libérales et d'une systématisation des cadeaux aux plus fortunés a entraîné une montée inexorable des inégalités de revenus dans notre pays. L'ascenseur social avait été remplacé par le déclassé social, par le descenseur social. Cette stratégie barbare, sans âme, a fait chuter nos niveaux de croissance économique, à la fois potentielle et réelle.

Conséquence de leur irresponsabilité, il n'est donc pas étonnant que les inégalités socio-économiques aient explosé durant cette période alors que la croissance ait, quant à elle, été négativement impactée. Les chiffres sont irréfutables, et en voici la preuve - de 2006 à 2015, le Coefficient de Gini a pris son envol, impliquant une envolée des inégalités. Un triste rebond qui l'a fait passer de 0,388 à 0,42.

Ce phénomène d'accroissement des inégalités a été confirmé par la Banque Mondiale dans son rapport de 2017 démontrant que les inégalités des revenus des ménages se sont accrues entre 2008 et 2015. L'OCDE avait également tiré la sonnette d'alarme sur cette dangereuse stratégie qui est clairement un cercle vicieux. Selon le rapport - *Trends and Income Inequality and its Impact on Economic Growth* - l'OCDE a formellement établi un lien de causalité entre inégalités de revenus et croissance économique.

Ainsi, il est estimé qu'une augmentation des inégalités de revenus de 0,03 point de Gini entraîne une baisse de la croissance économique de 0,35 point de pourcentage par an. À Maurice, cela s'est vérifié par une baisse de la croissance réelle et potentielle du PIB entre 2006 et 2015 en raison de l'augmentation des inégalités de revenus.

En effet, la croissance économique potentielle, qui était de plus de 6 % en 2006, a chuté de manière significative à moins de 3,7 % en 2015. En conséquence, entre 2009 et 2015, les chiffres montrent que la croissance économique réelle est tombée en dessous de la croissance économique potentielle, ce qui indique en même temps une baisse des niveaux de productivité.

Fort heureusement, dès 2015, *l'Alliance Lepep* avait repris les choses en main. La population avait donné un mandat clair pour renverser la vapeur travailliste. Il s'agissait de rétablir la confiance, le lien social et le développement pour tous. Nous avons dès lors, embarqué dans une lutte acharnée contre les inégalités dont notre Premier ministre a fait son cheval de bataille.

Marqué au fer rouge pendant la période sombre de 2006 à 2014, l'électorat a opté pour un gouvernement centré sur l'humain. Un choix qu'il a exprimé lors des deux dernières consultations populaires de 2014 et de 2019. Au regard de l'héritage qui nous avait été légué par ceux que la population avait rejeté, la tâche était des plus ardues mais nous n'avons pas baissé les bras. Des mesures historiques ont ainsi été introduites, les unes plus courageuses que les autres pour relancer l'économie mais aussi et surtout pour s'assurer que l'humain demeure au centre du développement économique et social de Maurice.

C'est dans cette optique que le gouvernement de notre honorable Premier ministre est venu de l'avant avec le salaire minimum, le *negative income tax* ou encore l'augmentation graduelle de la pension.

Si aujourd'hui les institutions internationales, à l'instar de la Banque mondiale, parlent d'un inversement de la tendance en matière des inégalités, c'est justement grâce aux mesures inclusives que le gouvernement a pris durant ces dernières années. Les faits sont là pour témoigner de la réussite de notre politique.

En effet, les 20 % des ménages situés au bas de l'échelle ont vu leurs parts de revenus augmenter, passant de 5,3 % en 2012 à 5,7 % en 2017. En revanche, la part des 20 % de ménages se trouvant dans la tranche supérieure a baissé de 47,5 % à 46 % lors de cette période. Cette tendance a entraîné une baisse dans le coefficient de Gini qui est passé de 0,42 en 2015 à 0,400 en 2017.

Dans sa dernière analyse, la Banque mondiale démontre que le coefficient de Gini a encore baissé. L'indice a atteint 0,342 en 2020, indiquant une baisse drastique des inégalités.

M. le président, s'il y a une philosophie qui anime ce gouvernement c'est bien celle de la justice sociale. Nous l'avons systématiquement démontré en nous rangeant aux côtés des plus démunis de notre société. Notre engagement à porter la pension à 13,500 roupies d'ici 2024 s'inscrit dans le droit fil de cette doctrine. L'Opposition se méprend en affirmant que la CSG ne sera pas suffisante pour financer les 13,500 roupies. Je rappelle, une fois pour toutes, que la CSG a vocation à financer une partie de la pension de retraite, celle des 4,500 roupies par mois et non l'entièreté des 13,500 roupies. Je montrerai dans quelques instants et chiffres à l'appui en quoi cela est possible, souhaitable et durable dans le temps.

M. le président, cette augmentation constituera une avancée sociale sans précédent dans la mesure où le montant total de la pension sera porté à 150 % du seuil relatif de pauvreté en 2024. L'initiative du gouvernement est en parfaite harmonie avec les recommandations de l'OCDE qui préconise que le montant de la pension soit nettement supérieur au seuil de la pauvreté relative. Le contraste avec la situation sous l'ère Travailleuse/PMSD en 2012 est plus que saisissant.

À l'époque, la pension représentait tout juste la moitié du seuil de pauvreté relative. Demandez à nos aînés s'il est possible de vivre avec 3,350 roupies par mois ? Peut-être que les membres de l'Opposition devraient en faire l'expérience pour un mois seulement. Ils

comprendront alors, je l'espère, ce qui motive de ce côté de la Chambre, notre engagement farouche pour plus d'égalité.

M. le président, la hausse de la pension ne doit surtout pas être analysée en isolation. Notre démarche s'insère dans le cadre d'une stratégie bien plus large visant à soutenir la croissance économique. En augmentant la pension, c'est toute la chaîne de la demande qui est stimulée et pour cause, une dynamique positive a été observée entre fin 2014 et 2019 soit dans le sillage de l'augmentation graduelle du Basic Retirement Pension.

M. le président, des dépenses d'environ 23 milliards de roupies ont été encourues au titre du *BRP* en 2019. Son augmentation à 9,000 roupies à la fin de 2019 couplée au paiement d'une allocation supplémentaire de 4,500 roupies d'ici 2024, nécessitera des financements additionnels. Or, la crise économique provoquée par la pandémie de la Covid-19 a lourdement impacté les revenus de l'État. Il est donc de notre responsabilité de trouver le financement nécessaire pour respecter l'engagement pris envers la population.

Plusieurs choix s'offraient à nous –

- Augmenter la TVA ;
- Relever les impôts sur les entreprises ;
- Payer les 9,000 roupies du *BRP* à 65 ans ;
- Baisser le montant du *BRP*, ou encore
- Introduire un ciblage.

Ces différentes options nous avaient été proposées par différents parties prenantes lors des consultations budgétaires 2020-2021. Nous les avons étudiées et il s'avère qu'elles auraient eu de très lourdes conséquences sur notre tissu socio-économique.

Permettez-moi de prendre un exemple en particulier, allons dire que nous décidons de réduire le montant du *BRP* à 7,000 roupies.

Cela aurait immédiatement entraîné une baisse dans le revenu de 270,000 individus. Avec pour conséquence, une diminution des dépenses de consommation de 7 milliards de roupies par an, soit une baisse potentielle de 0,9 point de pourcentage du PIB par an.

Face aux différentes options dont je viens d'évoquer, ce gouvernement a fait un choix responsable. Celui d'éviter à tout prix un drame humain. C'est ainsi que nous sommes venus

avec la présente réforme. Celle-ci consiste à payer le *BRP* à 9,000 roupies à 60 ans et une allocation supplémentaire de 4,500 roupies à 65 ans à travers la CSG.

M. le président, je suis médusé par le fait qu'une fois de plus, le Leader de l'opposition essaie d'induire en erreur non seulement la Chambre mais aussi toute la population.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a limit to this.

Mr Speaker: No, no! First of all, ...

Mr X. L. Duval: But he is saying that I am misleading the House!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: He is in front of you; you are listening to him.

Dr. Padayachy: Il prétend...

Mr Speaker: First of all, if you have a point of order.

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

Mr Speaker: This is what you should say: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order.

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a point of order; you are here listening to him. It is in French; nevertheless, he is saying that I am trying to mislead the House. This is what he said just now. You are sitting there, listening to him, Mr Speaker, Sir. Therefore, I would ask you to ask him, now, to withdraw, firstly, the fact that he said that I am saying 'mensonge', which is in English 'lying', and secondly, that I am misleading the House. These are the two points, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I am making.

Mr Speaker: So, did you say this?

Dr. Padayachy: Je retire et je continue.

(Interruptions)

Je retire et je continue. Je retire le mot, mais je continue sur la démonstration.

Mr X. L. Duval: You will repeat it?

Dr. Padayachy: Je ne vais pas répéter, ne vous inquiétez pas, monsieur le Leader de l'opposition. Moi, je vous ai écouté raconter toute vos histoires la dernière fois. S'il vous plaît, écoutez un peu ce que j'ai à vous dire, merci. *Okay?*

Mr Speaker: Okay!

Mr X. L. Duval: You are young; you should go according to the Standing Orders. You are not supposed to...

Mr Speaker: No, common on! You cannot comment. The hon. Minister is making his speech and you are commenting. Should I wait for you?

At this stage, the hon. Leader of the Opposition left the Chamber.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: Allez, merci. M. le président, je ne sais pas s'il faut en rire ou en pleurer après cette démonstration, encore une fois, car donner une telle réponse est d'une absurdité totale. Il prétendait que lui-même et l'Alliance Nationale allaient financer l'augmentation de la pension de 6,210 roupies à 14,000 roupies en s'appuyant uniquement sur la croissance économique.

A chaque fois qu'il en a l'occasion, il nous rappelle pourquoi tous ses amis d'aujourd'hui ont dit de lui qu'il était le pire ministre des Finances que le pays n'ait jamais connu. Une nouvelle fois, avec la CSG, il nous en fait la remarquable démonstration.

Sa consistance en matière de médiocrité est incontestable.

Laissez-moi rappeler au Leader de l'opposition, même s'il n'est pas dans la Chambre, que lorsqu'il était ministre des Finances, le taux de croissance économique moyen était de 3,5 % dans un contexte global favorable.

En revanche, il n'avait en moyenne assuré une augmentation de la pension que de seulement 159 roupies par an.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No comments!

Dr. Padayachy: A coup de 159 roupies par an, nos aînés auraient eu à attendre 50 ans...

An hon. Member: *Tousala ?*

Dr. Padayachy: ...pour que la pension atteigne 14,000 roupies par mois, comme promis par le Leader de l'opposition et son Alliance grandiloquente. C'est-à-dire, M. le président, en 2069.

En 2069 ! Je le répète. En 2069 !

Je laisse à la population le soin de juger de la démagogie dont fait preuve, l'Opposition.

Nous sommes habitués à ce genre d'arguments de la part du Leader de l'opposition. Mais tout de même, il pousse le bouchon loin, trop loin.

M. le président, que fait l'honorable Duval de la pandémie de la Covid-19 qui a provoqué une contraction de 14,9 pourcent de notre PIB ? Sa stratégie aurait impliqué de baisser fortement et proportionnellement le montant de la pension d'environ 21 %.

Bien au contraire, alors que le pays traverse un moment difficile, la population a besoin d'être soutenue par le Gouvernement. Et non pas de se faire planter un couteau dans le dos.

A l'inverse, de ce côté-ci de la Chambre, lorsque nous prenons un engagement, nous passons à l'action. La protection de nos aînés est trop importante pour être piétinée.

M. le président, fidèle à ses habitudes, l'Opposition ne voit pas plus loin que le bout de son nez. Atteinte d'une forme sévère de la dictature des idées et du conservatisme de l'inaction, elle tente d'utiliser des vieilles recettes qui ne sont plus en phase avec notre réalité. Voilà leur vrai problème avec la CSG. C'est que c'est une réforme non seulement juste mais également innovante et pertinente. S'ils siègent de l'autre côté de cette auguste Assemblée, c'est justement car ils n'ont ni le panache des idées ni le courage de l'action juste.

Je reprends et souscris aux propos de Jean Jaurès qui avait proclamé –

« Je n'ai jamais séparé la République des idées de la Justice sociale, sans laquelle elle n'est qu'un mot. »

Que cela donne à réfléchir.

Notamment à ceux qui s'enferment dans un conformisme d'un autre temps et tentent de déstabiliser la population. Ils se reconnaîtront.

La meilleure réponse à ces viles attaques c'est celle qui est écrite dans le bulletin de salaire des travailleurs Mauriciens. En comparant les fiches de paie avant et après l'introduction de la CSG, ils voient bien, eux, qu'ils en sortent gagnants. Pour être précis, 89% d'entre eux contribuent moins grâce à la CSG. Leurs bénéficiaires, eux, seront en progression !

M. le président, le vote du *Social Contribution and Social Benefits Bill* fait partie intégrante de cette démarche gagnant-gagnant. Une fois pour toute, je souhaiterais que les membres de l'Opposition cessent de faire de la démagogie au sujet du *NPF*. Que n'a-t-on pas entendu ?

Des idées les plus grossières les unes que les autres dont le seul but est de faire inutilement peur à la population. C'est une attitude irresponsable que nous condamnons fermement. Pour faire taire les détracteurs, appuyons-nous sur des faits et non sur des chimères inventées. Ils ont l'outrecuidance de dire que la CSG est une bombe à retardement. Mais de quoi parlent-ils ?

Savent-ils que le déficit actuariel du *NPF* est tel que si ce Gouvernement n'avait pas eu le sens des responsabilités, nous aurions conduit le pays dans l'impasse économique et sociale ?

Sans réforme, ce système est non viable. Les différents rapports actuariels de 2005, 2010 et 2016 montrent tous, sans exception, un déficit actuariel pour le *NPF*.

En fin de compte, selon le FMI en 2015, cité par ma collègue, la ministre de la Sécurité sociale, ces déficits projetés au titre du *NPF* pourraient devenir un passif de l'État.

Dans le dernier projet de rapport actuariel, soumis en mars 2020 pour la période de janvier 2014 à juin 2017, le niveau de financement est de 67 %, ce qui entraîne un déficit actuariel de 33 %.

Si le *NPF* devait être réformé, il aurait été nécessaire d'augmenter le prélèvement de 9 % à 19,2 % et de relever le plafond de la contribution à 90,400 roupies, soit quatre fois le salaire moyen. Cela n'aurait pas été concevable. Nous aurions vu un important impact négatif sur la compétitivité des entreprises et le niveau de vies des Mauriciens.

Et aujourd'hui encore, malgré ces données qui parlent d'elles-mêmes, l'Opposition et certains actuaires qui sont tout sauf indépendants, car grassement payé par le *NPF*, défendent bec et ongles la durabilité de ce fond.

L'honorable Uteem tente d'utiliser le FMI pour argumenter que le *NPF* est sain pour les prochaines années. Il a néanmoins et comme trop souvent cité le rapport de manière sélective.

Pour clore le chapitre et rétablir la vérité, je vais donc lire mot pour mot ce que le FMI a exactement dit sur le sujet –

« ...Il est prévu qu'il y ait un déficit substantiel à long terme. Les projections à court terme reflètent le fait que le système n'a pas encore atteint sa pleine maturité et que le NPF continue d'accumuler des actifs.

Cependant, on s'attend à ce que le NPF soit déficitaire et que ses actifs s'épuisent, ce qui laisse présager que l'État supportera une partie du paiement des pensions du NPF. En outre, les finances du NPF sont très sensibles aux taux de rendement prévus, ce qui constitue un autre facteur de risque. »

M. le président, le leader de l'Opposition parle également d'un déficit de R 5 milliards par an. L'honorable Ramful, évoque lui, un trou de R 6 milliards tandis que l'honorable Bérenger parle d'un manque à gagner de R 4 milliards. Un véritable panaché d'estimations faites 'au petit bonheur la chance,' démontrant une nouvelle fois le manque de sérieux et de cohérence des membres de l'Opposition. Soyons sérieux et revenons-en à l'essentiel!

Permettez-moi donc de faire la démonstration de la viabilité des cotisations sociales et des prestations sociales. En ce qui concerne les recettes de la CSG, en 2020-2021, sur seulement 9 mois, nous avons collecté R 5.3 milliards par le biais de cette contribution effective depuis septembre dernier et cela en pleine période crise avec une contraction d'environ 7 %.

Plus encore, au cours de l'exercice 2023-2024, il est prévu que les contributions au titre de la CSG s'élèvent à R 9.6 milliards. Par ailleurs, le coût de la prestation de retraite de R 4,500 pour tous ceux qui ont été en activité s'élèvera à R 8.8 milliards, par an. Ce qui fait émerger un solde excédentaire de R 875 millions.

En tant que gouvernement qui place l'humain au cœur de ses décisions, promu la justice sociale et accorde une attention particulière à ceux qui se trouvent au bas de l'échelle, nous avons décidé de verser la prestation sociale de R 4 500 par mois, même à ceux qui n'ont jamais travaillé de leur vie.

Cela bénéficiera notamment aux femmes au foyer, dont la contribution à la société doit être pleinement reconnue. Elles élèvent et prennent soin de nos enfants. Les efforts et sacrifices auxquelles elles consentent sont un don qu'elles offrent à notre nation. Cela coûtera un montant supplémentaire de R 1.6 milliard qui sera financé en partie par le solde excédentaire. Le reste, le sera par des fonds publics.

Au fil du temps, à mesure que l'économie se redresse et que le niveau du revenu augmente, il est prévu que la contribution sociale augmentera pour couvrir le coût total de la

prestation de retraite. Enfin, avec la formation des talents et l'ouverture de l'économie, on s'attend à une augmentation de la population active contribuant à financer cette portion de pension de retraite à R 4,500 par mois.

Ce projet de loi apporte donc la durabilité souhaitée de telle sorte qu'il finance entièrement la prestation à ceux qui ont déjà travaillé et qu'il apporte un revenu supplémentaire pour financer partiellement le paiement à ceux qui n'ont jamais travaillé auparavant.

C'est l'objectif de ce projet de loi et de ce gouvernement. Il s'agit de justice sociale, d'équité et de progrès. Avec de tels chiffres à l'appui, comment peut-on décevant et ouvertement dire que cela n'est pas soutenable?

M. le président, après avoir parlé chiffres, laissez-moi en venir aux procédures, simples et efficaces, qui entourent les contributions au titre de la CSG. Il est triste de constater à quel niveau l'Opposition est tombée, tout cela juste pour essayer de marquer des points auprès des électeurs. Ses membres vont même jusqu'à essayer de créer une psychose au sein de la population.

À commencer par l'honorable X.L. Duval, qui a tenté de faire croire que les travailleurs indépendants, surtout les marchands de *dholl-puri* et autres petits opérateurs, devront retenir les services d'un comptable pour contribuer à la CSG. Il parle, je cite de –

« cauchemar administratif » pour les petits gens.

Alors qu'en réalité, et là je tiens à rassurer tous les travailleurs indépendants, que la contribution à la CSG est ce qu'il y a de plus simple. Ils n'auront qu'à déduire les dépenses qu'ils ont encourues de leur revenu et ensuite faire leur déclaration.

Pour éclairer ce propos, je vais vous donner quelques exemples concrets –

- Un travailleur indépendant gagnant moins de R10, 000 par mois paiera un montant fixe de R 150 ;
- Un professionnel exerçant en tant qu'indépendant devra additionner ses honoraires pour le mois et payer la CSG sur 90% de cette somme. Il est déjà tenu de le faire pour l'impôt sur le revenu. Cela n'ajoutera donc aucune lourdeur inutile ;
- Quant à une personne qui exerce une activité professionnelle et dont les comptes sont établis sur une base annuelle, le projet de loi prévoit qu'elle

puisse choisir de contribuer à la CSG sur la base de ses revenus de l'année précédente, à titre de paiement complet et définitif ;

- Le leader de l'Opposition a pris l'exemple d'un contracteur. Je tiens à souligner qu'un contracteur a la possibilité de se baser sur ses comptes de l'année dernière pour faire sa contribution sous la CSG ;
- Tout autre travailleur indépendant dont les revenus ne peuvent être facilement déterminés fera simplement une estimation.

Je ne perçois pas de difficulté particulière.

M. le président, je souhaiterais maintenant aborder les nombreux droits et avantages qu'octroient la réforme de la CSG - contributions et bénéfices sociaux. Du côté des contributions, nous introduisons un système basé sur la progressivité car nous sommes intimement convaincus que le niveau de contribution pour le bénéfice de tous doit être juste, être réparti en fonction des possibilités de chacun. C'est le cœur même de la philosophie de ce gouvernement.

À l'inverse de ce qui guide nos convictions, ceux qui siègent dans l'Opposition semblent se moquer des principes fondateurs de notre modèle de justice sociale. Certains ont osé dire que la CSG était une insulte aux travailleurs du secteur privé et un coup de massue pour les employeurs.

N'en déplaise à l'Opposition, je tiens à rappeler une nouvelle fois que la très grande majorité des entreprises et des employés contribuent moins sous la CSG qu'ils ne le faisaient dans le cadre du NPF. À vrai dire, plus de 80% des entreprises et près de 90% des employés paient moins grâce à ce nouveau système. Pourtant, les bénéficiaires ne seront pas moins bien lotis par rapport à ce à quoi ils avaient droit dans le cadre du NPF. Bien au contraire, plus de 53% des cotisants au NPF touchent une pension mensuelle inférieure à R 1,000 par mois.

Je tiens à illustrer ce propos avec un cas réel. Prenons par exemple un employé de la zone franche qui a contribué au NPF pendant toute sa carrière, soit 40 ans. Après 4 longues décennies de travail et de contribution, il ne recevra que R 2,000 par mois à sa retraite sous le NPF. Une vie de labeur et de sueur pour seulement R 2,000 par mois!

Avec le nouveau système de pension de retraite, les bénéficiaires recevront un montant décent, jusqu'à un total de R 13,500 par mois. Cette réforme est la manifestation de notre engagement sans faille auprès de la population. Avec sa confiance, nous bâtissons une

société plus juste, qui vivra mieux en contribuant moins. Pour pouvoir financer ces R 4,500, il est nécessaire que ceux qui ont les moyens financent proportionnellement plus pour ceux qui ont moins.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne les bénéficiaires, ils sont si nombreux que j'ai parfois de la peine à voir l'opposition s'embourber dans leurs notes.

Je voudrais d'ailleurs saluer le travail du comité technique qui a fait part de ses recommandations. Ce comité, constitué comme je l'ai dit précédemment d'une pluralité d'acteurs allant des représentants des ministères concernés aux associations patronales en passant par les syndicats, a positivement contribué à l'élaboration de ce corpus législatif. Les recommandations transmises au comité interministériel prises en considération se retrouvent pleinement dans le contenu de ce projet de loi.

M. le président, comme à chaque fois qu'ils se retrouvent dans l'impasse, les membres de l'opposition utilisent tous les moyens les plus farfelus et éthiquement questionnables pour entraver le développement économique et social du pays. Cette fois-ci, ils tentent de faire passer le système de cotisations sociales et de prestations sociales pour un impôt qui ne rendra pas service à la population.

Si l'on considère tous les avantages qui sont associés à ce nouveau paradigme, tout un chacun conviendra qu'il s'agit d'un investissement pour l'avenir.

Avec la CSG, nous assistons à un *bis repetita* de l'introduction du *National Minimum Wage*. Qu'est-ce qui n'avait pas été dit à l'époque par les membres de l'opposition lorsque le gouvernement avait introduit le salaire minimum ? Comme c'est le cas pour la législation actuelle, ils étaient allés jusqu'à prédire qu'il y aurait des licenciements massifs dans divers secteurs de l'économie. Ils annonçaient le chaos social. Ce chaos, il n'a pas trouvé de réalité dans la population, mais au sein de l'opposition. Je comprends qu'ils font depuis la queue devant la porte du Leader de l'opposition pour se procurer les mêmes médicaments.

M. le président, ce scénario noir s'est naturellement avéré infondé. Et rien de cela ne s'est produit. Selon le *Minimum Wage National Council*, l'introduction du *National Minimum Wage* en 2018 et la révision de son montant en 2020 n'ont pas eu d'impact négatif sur l'emploi global. Ce sont des faits, et non des spéculations ou de la démagogie. Malgré cela, nous entendons aujourd'hui encore la même chanson de la part de certains de l'opposition. Permettez-moi de leur suggérer de changer de disque.

M. le président, les membres de l'opposition prétendent également que la CSG va tuer les retraites privées. Au contraire, cela aura l'effet inverse. Plus de 81% des entreprises contribuent moins au titre de la CSG que du NPF. Les entreprises pourront ainsi libérer de la trésorerie pour investir dans des fonds de pensions privées pour leurs employés.

A vrai dire, il n'y a aujourd'hui que 1580 employeurs prenant en charge 71,844 employés qui sont couverts par des régimes de retraite privés, tant dans le cadre des régimes à cotisations définies que dans celui des régimes à prestations définies.

Pour y remédier, à l'occasion du discours du Budget 2021-2022, nous avons annoncé une déduction fiscale de R 30000 par an pour les individus ayant contracté un plan de pension privée.

M. le président, certains de l'autre côté de la Chambre, à l'instar du MMM qui est pourtant né dans le ventre des travailleurs, ont même renié leur idéologie. Le passé du Mouvement Militant Mauricien est soi-disant indissociable de la lutte des travailleurs, des laboureurs qui travaillent dur dans les champs. Pourtant, l'honorable Uteem abjure la pénibilité du travail et demande de ne pas verser mensuellement les R 4500 aux travailleurs des champs de cannes avant l'âge de 65 ans. C'est inhumain.

Au fond, l'objectif de certains de l'opposition est de ne pas donner ces R 4500 supplémentaires. Déjà à l'époque, en 2014, ils ne voulaient pas octroyer R 5000 de pension. Qui parle des inégalités dans l'opposition ? Personne. ! Nous, de ce côté de l'Assemblée, nous croyons dans la population et eux, ils ne croient que dans les possédants.

M. le président, permettez-moi également de citer ce que la Confédération des Travailleurs du Secteur Privé (CTSP) a dit. Je sais bien que cela ne va pas plaire aux membres de l'opposition qui s'évertuent à critiquer la CSG, contre le bénéfice des travailleurs. Mais peut-être, je dis bien peut-être, que cette lecture leur fera faire une introspection sur la façon dont ils ont dévié de la vérité. Je cite –

« La CTSP ne comprend pas l'attitude de certains qui considèrent maintenant que le NPF est le meilleur du meilleur pour les travailleurs du secteur privé. Le NPF est discriminatoire, plus de 200,000 travailleurs gagnent le salaire minimum. Cela signifie qu'à l'âge de la retraite, ils bénéficieront d'environ 2000 roupies par mois. Ce qui compte pour un travailleur, c'est le montant des prestations et non le nom qu'on lui donne.

Aujourd'hui, tous les citoyens bénéficient de la CSG, comment le NPF peut-il être meilleur alors que la moitié de la classe ouvrière sera ignorée et laissée à son propre sort.

C'est le rôle de tout gouvernement de veiller à ce qu'il y ait une justice sociale pour tous. »

M. le président, c'est justement ce que fait ce gouvernement. Nous sommes un gouvernement par le peuple et pour le peuple.

M. le président, après avoir désavoué la pénibilité du travail, certains s'en sont pris aux travailleurs indépendants. L'honorable Uteem, son leader, l'honorable Bérenger et son ami l'honorable Aumeer critiquent en effet les dispositions relatives aux travailleurs indépendants.

Lorsque la CSG a été introduite, ces mêmes personnes ne cessaient de dire que cela avait conduit à la création de 3 catégories de travailleurs, à savoir ceux du –

- secteur privé ;
- secteur public, et
- les indépendants.

Ils expliquaient comment dans une famille avec 3 médecins, l'un employé dans un hôpital privé, l'autre dans un hôpital public et le dernier exerçant en tant qu'indépendant, ils auraient été soumis à la CSG de manière différente alors qu'à la retraite, ils auraient obtenu les mêmes bénéfices.

Or, lorsque dans ce projet de loi nous mettons sur le même pied d'égalité tous les travailleurs, qu'ils soient du secteur privé ou public ou bien travailleurs indépendants, là encore ils ne sont pas satisfaits. Une fois pour toutes, ils devraient décider ce qu'ils veulent exactement. Il leur est très facile de critiquer, mais leur est beaucoup plus difficile de proposer des solutions concrètes. Ils nous en font la superbe démonstration.

De ce côté de l'Assemblée, nous proposons un système progressif et octroyons de nouveaux bénéfices à plus de 200,000 travailleurs indépendants.

Un indépendant qui paie la CSG sera désormais couvert par l'indemnité pour accident du travail. Il s'agit d'un important filet social pour tous les indépendants, un nouvel acquis qui

n'existait pas auparavant. Il n'y a rien de plus juste qu'un système qui permet aux individus de recevoir une indemnité pour accident du travail sur la base de leurs revenus déclarés.

M. le président, l'honorable Uteem a allégué que le *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* et la subvention unique de R 10,000 ont été versées pour piéger les travailleurs indépendants, en particulier les plus vulnérables. C'est odieux, M. le président, d'essayer de manipuler la population de la sorte.

Toutefois la population n'est pas dupe. Elle sait que ce gouvernement est à ses côtés.

Ce Premier ministre, notre Premier ministre, a à son actif, excusé du peu –

- l'introduction du *National Minimum Wage* ;
- du *Negative Income Tax* ;
- de l'éducation tertiaire gratuite ;
- d'une allocation pour combattre la pauvreté absolue ;
- de subsides sur les produits de base, mais aussi
- de la pension à R 9,000.

Revenons maintenant au cas des travailleurs indépendants. En fait, à partir de septembre 2020, un indépendant était tenu de payer la CSG à un montant mensuel fixe de R 150.

Cependant, le paiement de la *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* et de la subvention unique a été effectué par la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* séparément, que le travailleur indépendant ait contribué à la CSG ou non.

A partir de l'exercice 2021-2022, si un indépendant est en activité, il devra être en règle avec la CSG au cours de l'exercice pour bénéficier du *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* ou de tout autre soutien financier du Gouvernement. C'est aussi cela la justice sociale. Ainsi, un indépendant en activité dans le secteur du tourisme ou dans une zone rouge n'a pas besoin de payer la CSG pour bénéficier du futur *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* puisqu'il n'est pas en mesure de travailler. Il n'y aura ni amende ni peine de prison pour toute personne ayant déjà bénéficié du *Self-Employed Assistance Scheme* mais n'ayant pas payé la CSG. Soyons clairs sur ce point, l'amendement du projet de loi ne s'applique pas rétroactivement.

En tout état de cause, la *MRA* ne commencera pas simplement à prélever les indépendants sans avoir au préalable mis en œuvre une campagne de sensibilisation et donné

aux indépendants une période prédéfinie pour se mettre en conformité. C'est ainsi que le paiement de la CSG par les travailleurs indépendants permettra au gouvernement d'envisager le versement de futures aides proportionnellement aux revenus de chaque indépendant.

C'est une véritable avancée et un gain majeur pour cette catégorie de travailleurs. Cela permettra en outre aux travailleurs indépendants de bénéficier d'autres régimes d'assistance fournis par le gouvernement, de la même manière que tout employé du secteur formel. Etant donné que cette information n'était pas disponible pendant le premier et le deuxième confinement, un montant forfaitaire de respectivement R 5,100 et R 5,287 leur avait été versé mensuellement.

Dorénavant, nous pourrons ajuster le montant en fonction des revenus perçus.

M. le président, car ce gouvernement a cœur d'améliorer sans cesse les conditions de vie des Mauriciens, nous mettons en place, au travers de ce projet de loi, un Comité de révision des bénéficiaires. Cela garantira l'amélioration continue de notre système de pension et de couverture pour les accidents du travail. Là encore, c'est une avancée sociale indiscutable. Pourtant, ceux qui siègent de l'autre côté de la Chambre s'y opposent farouchement!

Ainsi, un autre argument du leader de l'opposition mais aussi de son nouvel ami, le leader du MMM, est que le Comité de révision va être amené à diminuer le taux de la prestation de retraite de R 4,500. Soit, ils n'ont manifestement pas lu la législation, soit ils essaient de tromper la population. Dans les deux cas, c'est pathétique.

Pour dissiper tout soupçon, permettez-moi d'apporter la clarification suivante. Le mandat du Comité de révision est de faire des recommandations pour améliorer les prestations de retraite, et non de les diminuer contrairement à ce qu'ils prétendent. Je peux comprendre que la diminution des prestations de retraite est leur philosophie, mais ce n'est pas la nôtre. Nous croyons en la justice sociale pour tous.

M. le président, avant de conclure, permettez-moi de redire l'attachement que nous portons ici, de ce côté de la Chambre, aux principes de justice sociale, de progressivité et de solidarité. Ce nouveau système de contribution et bénéficiaires sociaux, en étant contributif, équitable, intergénérationnel et soutenable, est la manifestation concrète de la philosophie et des engagements de ce gouvernement. Avec cette réforme, nous mettons une nouvelle fois l'humain au cœur de la prise de décision publique. Il est légitime que nos aînés vivent décemment, et cela peu importe ce qu'ils ont contribué en tant qu'actifs. Car tous nos concitoyens ont le droit à une retraite paisible, la CSG s'inscrit dans la philosophie de justice

sociale, d'équité et de progrès économique portée par notre Premier ministre. Il en va de même pour les travailleurs, qu'ils soient salariés ou indépendants. Grâce à cette loi, ils bénéficieront d'une encore meilleure couverture sociale pour les protéger des accidents du travail. Plus de 200,000 travailleurs indépendants auront accès à des droits supplémentaires! C'est donc une réforme placée sous le signe du progrès car elle permet de concilier les exigences de sécurité sociale avec les impératifs de croissance économique qui s'imposent à nous. Et c'est précisément le double mandat qu'on s'est donné.

Je suis donc honoré et fier de porter, avec le soutien de l'honorable Premier ministre et de mes collègues de la majorité, cette loi historique devant l'Assemblée.

M. le président, sur ces mots, je recommande à présent le projet de loi à la Chambre.
Merci.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

THE SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION AND SOCIAL BENEFITS BILL

(No. XII OF 2021)

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 (Interpretation).

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

Dr. Padayachy: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendments at clause 2 –

“In clause 2 –

(a) in the definition of “employee”, in paragraph (b), by inserting, after subparagraph (iii), the following new subparagraph, the existing subparagraphs (iv) and (v) being renumbered as subparagraphs (v) and (vi), respectively –

(iv) a person who draws an allowance under the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (Allowances and Privileges) Act;

- (b) in the definition of “employer”, in paragraph (a), by inserting, after subparagraph (ii), the following new subparagraph, the existing subparagraph (iii) being renumbered as subparagraph (iv) –
- (iii) is responsible for the payment of an allowance to a participant under the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (Allowances and Privileges) Act;
- (c) in the definition of “participant”, in paragraph (a), by inserting, after subparagraph (iii), the following new subparagraph, the existing subparagraph (iv) being renumbered as subparagraph (v) –
- (iv) a person who draws an allowance under the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (Allowances and Privileges) Act;
- (d) in the definition of “remuneration” –
- (i) in paragraph (b), by deleting the word “or”;
- (ii) by inserting, after paragraph (b), the following new paragraph, the existing paragraph (c) being relettered as paragraph (d) –
- (c) an allowance paid under the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (Allowances and Privileges) Act; or”

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 to 23 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 24 to 43 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The Schedules 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 Social Contribution and Social Benefits Bill (No. XII of 2021) was read the third time and passed.

*Second Reading***THE FINANCE (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL****(No. XIII of 2021)**

(8.20 p.m.)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (Dr. R. Padayachy): The Bill provides for the implementation of measures announced in the Budget Speech 2021-2022 and its annex, and for matters connected, consequential and incidental.

The Budget has set out a comprehensive action plan to deal with the fallouts from the COVID-19 pandemic, speed up the economic recovery process and prepare the country for engaging on a higher long-term growth and development path. As such, a large number of measures and new policies were announced. This is reflected in the number of enactments that are being amended in this Bill. In fact, the Finance Bill brings amendments to 93 enactments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will focus my speech on 4 main themes –

- First, giving an exceptional boost to investment, shaping a new economic architecture and restoring confidence;
- Second, strengthening our Regulatory framework;
- Third, addressing the issues relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- Fourth, elaborate on the amendments relating to Tax Policies and Tax Administration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now speak on the main amendments which relate to giving an exceptional boost to investment, shaping a new economic architecture and restoring confidence. Clause 6 amends the Build Operate Transfer (BOT) Projects Act to –

- (a) exempt a BOT project with a majority of commercial component from conducting its procurement process through the Central Procurement Board, and
- (b) empower a Contracting Authority to carry out a procurement exercise with the assistance of the BOT Project Unit or a consultant to select a private party to implement a BOT Project.

Clause 8 amends the Central Electricity Board Act to –

- (a) include 2 new members, having wide experience in Renewable Energy, on the Board of the Central Electricity Board (CEB), and
- (b) empower the CEB to provide training and award certificates in the fields of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency.

Clauses 8, 9, 91 and 93 amend the Central Electricity Board Act, Central Water Authority Act, Utility Regulatory Authority Act and Waste Water Management Authority Act.

They empower the CEB, CWA, WMA, respectively to compulsorily obtain way leave for extending their respective networks in case of no response within 21 days from the owners on a notice to grant the way leave. Consequential amendments are being made to the Utility Regulatory Authority Act.

Clause 14 amends the Construction Industry Development Board Act to review the grading designation and value of contract which a contractor is allowed to undertake.

Clause 20 amends the Dangerous Chemicals Control Act to extend the delegation of power by the Board to the authorised officer to also include administration of trusted trader certificates.

To avoid unnecessary administrative hurdles in the importation of goods from trusted suppliers, relevant legislations are being amended.

To this end, Clauses 20, 29, 58, 65 and 66, respectively amend the Dangerous Chemicals Control Act, Fisheries and Marine Resources Act, National Agricultural Products Regulatory Office Act, Pharmacy Act and Plant Protection Act to provide for the issuance of Trusted Trader Certificates.

Clause 22 amends the Economic Development Board Act to provide for the –

- (a) setting up of a –
 - (i) Premium Investor Scheme to promote emerging sectors, pioneering industries and innovative technologies;
 - (ii) Business Regulatory Review Council (BRRC) to make recommendations on regulatory reforms in relation to the process of granting licences and permits, and

- (iii) Trusted Trader Committee for the approval of Trusted Trader Certificates.
- (b) Review of the process and criteria for registration and deregistration of permits issued by EDB;
- (c) CEO of EDB to refer the monitoring and supervision of a regulatory sandbox licensee to any other regulatory or competent authority;
- (d) review of the process for suspension and revocation of a Regulatory Sandbox Licence, and
- (e) EDB to exchange information with a public sector agency.

Clause 29 amends the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act to –

- (a) provide for the implementation of resolutions adopted in international conservation and management agreements, and
- (b) prescribe conditions for exploratory fishing in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Mauritius.

Clause 31 amends the Food Act to allow for food testing in a private laboratory accredited by the Mauritius Accreditation Service (MAURITAS).

Clause 32 amends the Forests and Reserves Act to forbid backfilling or obstructing of a natural water or drainage path.

Clause 34 amends the Freeport Act with a view to expanding activities in the Freeport zone. Accordingly, third party developers will be authorised to provide warehousing facilities in a Freeport zone and rent space to an enterprise outside the Freeport zone for the manufacturing and storage of goods.

To further open-up the economy, Clause 37 amends the Immigration Act to –

- (a) allow a non-citizen to hold the status of resident provided that he purchases or acquires an apartment of not less than USD375,000 as residence in a building of at least 2 floors above ground floor.

Consequential amendments are being made to the Non-Citizens (Employment Restriction) Act;

- (b) provide that the holder of a Family Occupation Permit, his dependents and those working for the family unit will hold the status of resident;

- (c) enable holders of a 10-Year Permanent Residence Permit prior to 01 September 2020 to have the automatic validity extension to cover a 20 - year period;
- (d) enable holders of a Permanent Residence Permit to switch category to Retired Non-Citizen provided that the holder has a monthly disposable income of USD 1,500 or its equivalent;
- (e) provide that spouse of Occupation Permit holders will, on application, be granted an Occupation Permit;
- (f) extend the validity of the Occupation Permit for Professional for the period specified in his contract of employment or for a period of 10 years, whichever is lesser;
- (g) allow a non-citizen to apply for a Family Occupation Permit for himself, his spouse, dependent child, parent, other dependent and any other person working for the family unit provided that he fulfils the criteria referred to in the EDB Act;
- (h) allow a non-citizen to apply for –
 - (i) an Occupation Permit for his spouse to carry out any occupation in Mauritius, and
 - (ii) a Work Permit to take up employment for the purposes of attending to the needs of the family, and
- (i) allow the Passport and Immigration Office to share information of non-citizens with another public sector agency and the Financial Intelligence Unit.

Clause 55 amends the Medical Council Act to –

- (a) register a person holding a specialist qualification from France as general practitioner or specialist provided that he is a duly registered Specialist with the competent Regulatory Body in France, and
- (b) allow a person, who is abroad, to make an application for registration by electronic means.

Clause 61 amends the Non-Citizens (Employment Restriction) Act to –

- (a) increase the fine as well as term of imprisonment and introduce other sanctions in cases where an employer contravenes the Act by employing an illegal foreign worker;
- (b) provide for the issue of a provisional permit in cases where the process for renewal of work permit has been delayed, and
- (c) provide for the issue of a special permit, on humanitarian grounds, to a victim of trafficking or a foreign worker in a stranded situation.

Clause 62 amends the Non-Citizens (Property Restriction) Act to –

- (a) provide that no approval would now be required from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) for disposal of property under the EDB Schemes.
However, the EDB will have to notify the PMO of such disposal;
- (b) provide that non-citizens have to seek the authorisation of the PMO for, among others, obtaining title or continuous use of immovable property in Mauritius, and
- (c) create a Non-Citizens Property Restriction Register which will be maintained by the EDB and contain particulars about the acquisition or disposal of properties by a non-citizen and securities taken on the property.

Clause 65 amends the Pharmacy Act to provide for the –

- (a) establishment of an Education Committee to advise the Pharmacy Board on the qualifications, examinations, training and registration of Pharmacy Technicians, and
- (b) keeping a record of all prescriptions.

Clause 72 amends the Public-Private Partnership Act to empower –

- (a) the BOT Projects Unit to monitor the implementation of a PPP project until the signature of a contract with a private party;
- (b) the CPB to authorise, approve and carry out the pre-selection exercise to procure a private party, and
- (c) a contracting authority to proceed with a request for proposal by itself or through the CPB.

Clause 73 amends the Public Procurement Act to –

- (a) cater for new procurement methods, namely, competitive negotiations and electronic reverse auction;
- (b) provide for termination of a contract by a public body or contractor where there is fundamental breach of a contract, and
- (c) allow for sharing of information, relating to procurement proceedings, to an investigatory body vested with powers of investigation.

I now come to the second theme which is about strengthening the country's regulatory framework.

Amendments are being brought to 17 legislations aiming at reinforcing our AML/CFT Framework.

The various amendments will, amongst others –

- (a) formalise the Core Group on AML/CFT in the FIAMLA;
- (b) promote effective cooperation and coordination among the different regulatory and law enforcement agencies in the discharge of their functions;
- (c) impose effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions for non-compliance with AML/CFT requirements;
- (d) make Real Estate Agents, Land Promoters and Property Developers acting in their own name to register themselves with the FIU as soon as they are licensed;
- (e) facilitate and speed up asset recovery process and procedures under the Asset Recovery Act and the Prevention of Corruption Act;
- (f) require the carrying out of terrorism financing risk assessment of Non-Profit Organisations under the Foundations Act;
- (g) provide that a company service provider reports suspicious transactions to a competent authority upon the authorisation by the company for which it acts, and
- (h) provide for the setting up of a Central Registry of Accounts at the BOM to facilitate data collection and financial investigation of serious financial crime.

Furthermore, the Bank of Mauritius Act is being amended at Clause 3 to –

- (a) empower the Bank of Mauritius (BOM) to –

- (i) regulate financial institutions or start-ups providing relevant services under the FinTech Regulatory Sandbox licence;
 - (iii) be the macroprudential authority of Mauritius;
 - (iv) issue guidelines, directives, rules or instructions for the issue of sustainable bonds including blue and green bonds, and
 - (v) prescribe the framework under which digital currencies will be held or used by the public;
- (b) authorise the BOM to open accounts for a licensee under the National Payment Systems Act;
 - (c) make it an offence for any person who makes, counterfeits, or alters a digital currency, or uses a counterfeit digital currency and provide for the applicable sanctions;
 - (d) empower the Mauritius Credit Information Bureau (MCIB) to provide credit scoring as a value-added service, and
 - (e) protect the BOM, the MCIB or any person providing information, for the purpose of credit scoring, from any liability for acts done in good faith for that purpose.

Clause 4 amends the Banking Act to –

- (a) establish the framework for applying for a Regulatory Sandbox Authorisation in the banking sector;
- (b) authorise the BOM to set up a FinTech innovation hub and digital lab for banking and payment services sectors;
- (c) allow a financial institution to appoint a firm of auditors after 3 years of the last audit assignment instead of 5 years;
- (d) set out the criteria for granting an extension to a financial institution on the appointment of its auditors for an additional period of up to 5 years for a branch or subsidiary of a foreign bank;
- (e) allow for disclosure of information with the Central KYC and Accounts Registry and whilst reporting alleged or suspected offences, and
- (f) extend examination of the operations and affairs of financial institutions to cover their affiliates.

Clause 28 amends the Financial Services Act to –

- (a) authorise the Financial Services Commission (FSC) to regulate financial institutions or start-ups providing relevant services under the FinTech Regulatory Sandbox licence;
- (b) establish the framework for applying for a Regulatory Sandbox Authorisation for the financial services sector;
- (c) provide for the establishment of a FinTech innovation hub and digital lab for the financial services sector;
- (d) allow for issue of shares of less than 5% in a licensee without the approval of the FSC unless such issue results in a change in control in the licensee;
- (e) require an Official Receiver, Liquidator, Provisional Liquidator, Administrator or Special Administrator to provide the FSC with information relating to its licensee or past licensee for the discharge of its functions;
- (f) allow service of notice for administrative sanction be also made through a registered usher or by encrypted electronic mail in addition to registered post;
- (g) remove Self-Regulatory Organisations (SROs) from the purview of the decision of the Review Panel;
- (h) extend the possibility to request for a certificate of good standing from the FSC to all its licensees and to legal practitioners and accounting firms with the consent of the licensee, and
- (i) allow the FSC to exchange information with other supervisory bodies and other public sector agencies.

Clause 41 amends the Insurance Act to –

- (a) provide for the establishment of the National Insurance Claims Database to implement the Bonus-malus system;
- (b) provide for the licensing of other insurance professionals;
- (c) enable the FSC to extend the time limit when a person is unable to comply with provisions governing time limits of this Act, rules or guidelines due to a reasonable cause, and
- (d) allow the FSC to exempt, on specified conditions, a person or any class of persons from specific reporting obligations.

Clause 63 gives more power to the Ombudsperson for Financial Services to issue instructions and guidelines or impose requirements on financial institutions and publish any decision and award, amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now come to amendments in the Gambling Regulatory Authority (GRA) Act. The GRA Act is being amended to set up a Horse Racing Division which will be administered by a Horse Racing Committee. The Committee will be appointed by the GRA Board and the head of the Horse Racing Division will be the Chairperson. The functions of the Committee are specified in the Bill. Henceforth, the horse racing organiser will be responsible for a number of steps in race planning and race-day operations. The GRA Act is also being amended to -

- (a) allow the operator of the Mauritius National Lottery to conduct lottery and lottery games through remote communication;
- (b) enable the conduct of digital games by a casino operator, gaming house operator and limited pay-out machine operator;
- (c) empower the GRA Board to take disciplinary actions against its licensees for failing to comply with the anti-money laundering and terrorism financing and proliferation guidelines issued by the GRA;
- (d) increase in the rate of betting duty and taxes from 12% to 14%;
- (e) provide for the payment by the *Loterie Vert* operator of 47.16% of its net proceeds to the Consolidated Fund on a quarterly basis, and
- (f) strengthen penalty provisions for non-submission of return and payment of taxes by due date.

I now come to amendments to addressing issues relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Clause 15 amends the Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act to introduce an additional levy on Mogas and Gasoil to contribute towards the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund and COVID-19 Vaccination Fund. These contributions will be deemed to have come into operation on 04 April 2020 and 1 July 2021 respectively.

Clause 42 amends the Interpretation and General Clauses Act to –

- (a) provide for judicial proceeding to be instituted or lodged not later than the commencement of this amendment where the time imposed to institute or

lodge such judicial proceedings has either expired or has been during the COVID-19 period, and

- (b) empower the Prime Minister to prescribe Regulations under the Act.

Clause 45 amends the Landlord and Tenant Act to allow a tenant to pay 50% of rent for the months March to August 2021 by the end of December 2021. The remaining 50% of rental is payable in 12 equal monthly instalments from January to December 2022 or such other later date.

Clause 74 amends the Quarantine Act to –

- (a) empower the Prime Minister to authorise such persons or class of persons, specified in an order issued, to be outdoor during a quarantine period;
- (b) empower the Minister of Health to prescribe Regulations to either –
 - (i) restrict a person to have access to a specified institution; or
 - (ii) prevent the spread of the disease including closure of premises, restriction of activities and prohibition to attend places;
- (c) provide for a person to pay a fine not less than twice the quarantine expenses, but not exceeding Rs500,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years, where he was quarantined in a quarantine facility as a result of committing of an offence under the Act, and
- (d) introduce Fixed Penalty Notice in respect of offences made under the Act.

Clause 85 amends the State Lands Act to defer the payment date of annual rental to 30 June that is at the end of a financial year instead of being payable in advance by 31 July of each financial year for specified operators in the tourism sector.

Clause 94 amends the Workers' Rights Act 2019 to –

- (a) clarify that the provisions regarding COVID-19 related absences be applicable to all workers irrespective of their remuneration;
- (b) provide for conditions for the payment of remuneration or grant of leave in relation to absences where a worker cannot have access to his place of work as a result of him not being vaccinated or not being able to produce a negative PCR test result;

- (c) allow an enterprise intending to reduce its workforce on ground of restructuring to refer the case to the Redundancy Board;
- (d) provide that a compromise agreement be mandatory for a worker drawing an annual salary of up to Rs600,000;
- (e) empower the Supervising Officer of the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training to make an application for a protective order in Court where –
 - (i) severance allowance has not been paid following an order made by the Redundancy Board; and
 - (ii) an enquiry has confirmed that a worker has not been paid his remuneration and gratuity under the PRGF by an enterprise which is under receivership, administration or liquidation;
- (f) provide that workers are paid remuneration due under the Wage Guarantee Fund whether or not an enterprise is considered to be insolvent by the Supreme Court;
- (g) clarify that end of year bonus is payable on termination of employment or at end of contract;
- (h) broaden the definition of transport to provide that a worker who travels by a light rail vehicle from his residence to his place of work and back be paid the equivalent of the return light rail fare;
- (i) standardise time frames for notifying a worker of the termination of his contract of employment following disciplinary proceedings;
- (j) provide that suspension pending the outcome of an enquiry related to misconduct or poor performance be with pay;
- (k) clarify that severance allowance is paid only where a termination of employment is deemed to be unjustified;
- (l) provide that a person drawing an annual salary exceeding Rs600,000 on a fixed term contract will not be entitled to the payment of a severance allowance when he is paid a gratuity or a compensation at the expiry of his contract;

- (m) require an employer, who intends to reduce the number of workers, to show cause to the Redundancy Board at least 30 days instead of 15 days before the intended reduction;
- (n) require the Redundancy Board to complete its proceedings within 30 instead of 15 days from the date of notification by the employer, and
- (o) require the Redundancy Board to ensure that the procedure for the reduction of work force is in the best interest of the business;
- (p) allow the Redundancy Board to conduct a conciliation or mediation in case of reduction of workforce with a view to promoting a settlement;
- (q) give reasonable time to the Redundancy Board to process an application for reduction of workforce;
- (r) provide for a worker who cannot submit his application within the prescribed delay of 60 days for reasons of illness or injury to be entitled to the payment of a Transition Unemployment Benefit (TUB);
- (s) stop the payment of TUB where a worker declines a job or training offer, in line with his profile and qualifications, for 3 consecutive times;
- (t) provide that failure by a worker to notify that he has been gainfully re-employed and continued to be paid TUB be considered as an offence;
- (u) require an employer to refund the amount of TUB paid to a worker where the employer has, over a period of 24 months, terminated the employment of the worker for more than once and re-employed him on a new contract after 28 days;
- (v) allow for sharing of information between the Supervising Officer of the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training and the Director General of MRA for the purpose of collection and recovery of contribution under the National Savings Fund Act;
- (w) provide that a jockey or track rider providing services in the horse racing to be entitled to the payment of a gratuity under the PRGF, and
- (x) provide that an employer commits an offence where he fails to convey a worker who suffers from injury or illness at workplace to a medical institution or fails to submit minutes of proceedings of the Disciplinary Committee.

I will now elaborate on the fourth theme of my speech which is about Tax Policies and Tax Administration.

Clause 18 amends the Customs Act to –

- (a) allow a compliant importer to submit a consolidated Bill of Entry for all goods imported by air and cleared during a month, provided duties and taxes are paid on a monthly basis;
- (b) provide that an administrator, executor, receiver or liquidator appointed to manage or wind up the business of a person transacting business with customs inform MRA Customs of his appointment within 15 days;
- (c) allow MRA Customs to carry out the inspection of aircrafts/ships on a risk-management basis provided that the master/owner of the aircraft/ship has submitted all the required information in advance;
- (d) empower MRA Customs to enforce customs laws where there is suspected money laundering involving precious stones and metals or any goods of high value; and
- (e) provide for penalty and interest to be applicable under the Deferred Payment Scheme in case of non-payment of duties and taxes by the due date.

Clause 19 amends the Customs Tariff Act to –

- (a) allow a beneficiary of a duty exempted motor vehicle to benefit from another duty exempted motor vehicle within a period of 4 years provided that the full amount of duties and taxes exempted on the current motor vehicle is reimbursed, and
- (b) provide for the creation of new tariff lines to ensure proper identification and control of the importation of chemicals which may be misused.

Clause 24 amends the Excise Act to –

- (a) provide for the introduction of a “composite licence” to allow a manufacturer to make a single application for two or more excise licences;
- (b) allow manufacturers of sugar sweetened products to submit a consolidated Bill of Entry for goods warehoused or cleared during a month, provided that excise duties and taxes are paid on a monthly basis;

- (c) align the provisions regarding the penalty and rate of interest payable on late payment of excise duty with those applicable under the Customs Act;
- (d) provide for deferment of the effective date of the extension of the sugar tax of 6 cents per gramme of sugar applicable on a number of sweetened products from 01 November 2020 to 01 July 2022;
- (e) exempt sugar-sweetened products with a total sugar content of up to 4 grammes per 100 grammes or 4 grammes per 100 ml from the sugar tax, and
- (f) provide for the validation of the Resolution passed in the National Assembly on 11 June 2021 relating to the increase in the rates of excise duty on alcoholic and tobacco products.

I will now elaborate on the main amendments relating to Income Tax Act. Clause 38 amends the Income Tax Act to implement the income tax measures announced in the Budget Speech and its Annex.

The following personal income tax allowances and exemptions are being introduced or increased with effect from 01 July 2021 –

- (a) contributions of an amount of up to Rs30,000 in respect of an individual pension scheme will be tax deductible;
- (b) the maximum exemption in respect of a child pursuing tertiary education is being increased to Rs225,000;
- (c) the maximum allowable deduction for medical insurance premium is being increased, and
- (d) it is also clarified that any financial assistance provided to the bedridden person under the National Pensions Act will not be considered in determining his eligibility as a dependent.

The Bill also provides for tax holidays and other fiscal incentives as announced in the Budget Speech and its Annex.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the main amendments relating to property taxation and registration of deeds are at Clauses 44 and 77.

- A Mauritian citizen acquiring a house, an apartment or land to construct a residential unit will be eligible to a refund of 5% of the declared value of an immovable property up to a maximum of Rs500,000;
- The deed has to be signed and registered during the period 01 July 2021 to 30 June 2022;
- Refund under the scheme will also be effected for deeds signed and registered during the period 01 July 2022 and 30 June 2024 provided that the reservation has been made during the period 01 July 2021 to 30 June 2022;
- An individual contracting a secured housing loan for the construction or completion of his residence, will be eligible to a refund of 5% of the home loan contracted, up to a maximum of Rs500,000. The deed of loan has to be signed and registered during the period 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2022. Refund will be made on disbursements effected up to 30 June 2024,
- No registration duty will be payable by a first-time buyer on the first Rs5 m. on the acquisition of a built-up residential property. Previously, only a property below the threshold of Rs5 m. was eligible to the exemption;
- Land transfer tax will be harmonised and levied at the standard rate of 5% on the resale of a residential unit under the IRS or RES;
- Tax on transfer of leasehold right in State land will apply according to the percentage of shares transferred in a company which holds such right;
- The Registrar-General will have 5 months to notify a buyer or seller of the reassessed value and claim any additional duty where the statutory delay falls during or 3 months as from the end of a confinement period;
- The tax on transfer of leasehold right on the transfer of a built-up hotel on State land will be 10%, instead of the current rate of 20%, during the period 01 July 2021 to 30 June 2023;
- Registration duty, land transfer tax and tax on transfer of leasehold right in State land is payable only on the value of an immovable property excluding any element of VAT;
- Registration duty on the sale of a residential unit under the IRS, RES or IHS schemes will now be levied at the rate of 5% or USD 70,000 whichever is the lower, and

- Only 50% of the registration duty will be payable on the first registration of an electric autocycle/motorcycle purchased before 31 March 2021. This reduction will apply to vehicles registered on or before 31 December 2021.

Clause 54 amends the Mauritius Revenue Authority Act to, amongst others, reintroduce the Tax Arrears Settlement Scheme.

Under the Scheme, if tax arrears are paid in full by 31 December 2021, penalties and interest will be waived. SMEs will benefit under the Scheme provided they register by 31 December 2021 and pay the tax arrears by 28 June 2022.

Clause 92 amends the Value Added Tax Act to –

- (a) empower MRA to raise assessments in cases of fraud, wilful neglect or non-submission without seeking the authorisation of the Independent Tax Panel;
- (b) provide for residential care services to be made a zero-rated supply;
- (c) make the National Empowerment Foundation and the New Social Living Development Ltd to be exempt bodies for VAT purposes in respect of the construction of social housing with retrospective effect, and
- (d) provide for revised criteria for new applications for refund of VAT on the construction of a house or residential apartment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now highlight some other legislative amendments in the Bill.

Clause 21 amends the Dangerous Drugs Act to regulate retail trade and transaction of precursors.

Clause 23 amends the Environment Protection Act to review the composition of the Board of the National Environment and Climate Change Fund to include a representative of the Prime Minister's Office.

Clause 25 amends the Finance and Audit Act to include the National Environment and Climate Change Fund in the list of Special Funds.

Clause 30 repeals the Fishermen Investment Trust Act as the Trust has not been operating since 2014.

Clause 96 provides for the Savings accordingly.

Clause 36 amends the Human Resource Development Act to authorise the MRA to remit directly to the HRDC the amount of training levy accruing to the National Training Fund.

Clause 39 amends the Information and Communication Technologies Act to improve the regulatory framework and promote competition within the sector.

Clause 12 amends the Civil Status Act to –

- (a) take corrective actions in relation to regenerating a National Identity Card Number and harmonising the notification of birth form;
- (b) allow the Registrar of Civil Status to keep a new Register to record, among others, births occurring in foreign countries;
- (c) enable sharing of information, and
- (d) require the surviving spouse, heirs or any relatives of a Mauritian citizen who has died abroad to inform the Civil Status Office within 2 months of the death.

Clause 17 amends the Courts Act to provide for –

- (a) agreement of facts between the Prosecution and the Defence in relation to any criminal proceedings before the Financial Crimes Division of the Supreme Court or the Intermediate Court;
- (b) a certificate issued by a quarantine officer to be used as evidence in Courts, and
- (c) admissibility of out of Court statement as evidence in financial crime offence cases.

Clause 43 amends the Land Drainage Authority Act to empower the Land Drainage Authority to issue enforcement notice to the relevant stakeholder to upgrade or maintain the drainage infrastructure falling within their jurisdiction. Appropriate fines will be imposed for non-compliance.

Clause 49 amends the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing Act for the Agricultural Marketing Board to control the supply of certain products, and regulate the National Wholesale Market.

Clause 52 amends the Mauritius Qualifications Authority Act to allow the MQA to approve non-award courses dispensed by training institutions and employers with effect from 15 October 2021.

Clause 53 amends the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC) Act 2019 to extend the mandate of the MRIC to conduct research on identified national-priority areas.

Clause 60 amends the National Pensions Act to review the eligibility age and pension benefit of an orphan.

Clause 58 amends the National Agricultural Product Regulatory Office Act to allow for animals to be slaughtered in licensed slaughterhouse.

Clause 76 amends the Reform Institutions Act to give effect to the banning of cigarettes in prisons.

Clause 79 amends the Rivers and Canals Act to exempt any local authority, the NDU and the RDA, and the Land Drainage Authority from seeking the authority of the Supreme Court to carry out works along rivers and canals.

Clause 82 amends the Roads Act to allow for controlled advertising on the structures of flyovers or lighting poles.

Clause 84 amends the Social Integration and Empowerment Act to increase the absolute poverty threshold and maximum poverty threshold for a household. The amendments will be deemed to have come into operation on 01 July 2021.

Clause 86 amends the Statutory Bodies (Accounts and Audit) Act to require the auditor of a Statutory Body to submit his audit report to the Board of that Statutory Body within 10 months of the end of every financial year.

Clause 88 amends the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act to –

- (a) provide for the remuneration of sugar planters and producers of bagasse used in electricity production, and
- (b) exempt a holder of an investment certificate issued by the EDB from the payment of land conversion tax for the construction of buildings for the manufacture of pharmaceutical products or medical devices or the conduct of clinical and pre-clinical trials.

Clause 89 amends the Sugar Insurance Fund Act to temporarily review statutory deadlines for recovery of the difference between the general insurance premium and the provisional estimate and declaration of event year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am proposing amendments at Committee Stage to the Courts Act, Customs Tariff Act, Gambling Regulatory Act, Income Tax Act and the Registration Duty Act. These amendments are being circulated in the House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am confident that the Bill will consolidate the legal framework to support the socio-economic development of Mauritius.

I now commend the Bill to the House.

The Prime Minister seconded.

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

At 9.06 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 10.29 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated.

I call upon hon. Uteem!

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have before this House today, a Bill which is 300 pages long and which purports to amend no less than 93 Acts of Parliament and we were given only one week to read this very complex and very technical piece of legislation. We had hardly any time to hold consultations with stakeholders and get their feedback. I wonder, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, how many of hon. Members here have actually read this Bill. Let alone, understood all these 300 pages.

This begs a question whether it is proper for a Finance Bill to purport to amend 93 Acts. There has been a ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, by the former Speaker, hon. Purryag, on 21 July 2009 following a point of order raised by the then Leader of the Opposition. The Speaker gave the following ruling and I quote –

“The Finance Miscellaneous Provisions Bill should not contain provisions intended to make permanent changes in existing law, unless they are essentially connected with national finance or are consequential open or incidental to the taxation proposals and may also include provisions that are sufficiently closely related to those matters within the spirit and scope of the Bill as defined in the long title”.

Following the ruling of Mr Speaker in 2009, the Standing Orders were amended in March 2015 and we now have a new section 52(1)(b) which reads as follows –

“A Finance Bill may, in addition to the measures relating to taxation and national finance announced in a Budget Speech, contain provisions relating to the other measures announced therein and provide for matters connected, consequential or incidental to those measures”.

So, we have a Standing Order, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, telling us what can go into a Finance Bill. Yet several provisions of the Finance Bill, today, before this House, have nothing to do with the budget. They were never announced in the Budget Speech and they were never included in the annex to the Budget Speech, which is circulated with the budget every year. For example, there are proposed amendments to the CEB Act, to the CWA Act, to the Waste Water Management Act, which were not in the budget and not in the annex and therefore, it is a breach of Standing Order 52(1) (b) today for us to deal with this 300 pages long Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some of the provisions in the Bill actually deserve to have been in a separate Bill, a stand-alone Bill. They are important enough to have warranted a debate on their own. One of these amendments relates to the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act, which is in section 35 of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is the latest twist in the tug-of-war between the Gambling Regulatory Authority and the Mauritius Turf Club and many believe that the GRA is in fact merely a Trojan horse – *Cheval de Troie* – for a specific operator who has been the subject matter of several PQs in this august Assembly and who today has a real *mainmise* over the betting industry. The amendment to the GRA Act will have a very serious effect on the way horse racing is organised in Mauritius and instead of having a separate Bill to consider those amendments, they are buried among the pages of this Finance Bill.

Essentially, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the law is being amended for the establishment of the Horse Racing Division of the GRA which will be administered and managed by a Horse Racing Committee appointed by the board of the GRA. The Horse Racing Division will regulate, control and monitor the organisation of horse racing in Mauritius. The Horse Racing Committee will have wide powers and this raises several questions, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir –

- Is this the end of the organisation of horse racing in Mauritius by the Mauritius Turf Club?
- Is it the end of 209 years of history for this Mauritius Turf Club?

- Is the law paving the way for the licensing of another horse racing operator?
- Has another horse racing track already been identified in the region of Cote d'Or?
- Does the amendment really implement the recommendation of the Commission of Enquiry on horse racing in Mauritius; the famous Parry Report?
- Will the organisation of horse racing in Mauritius now be politicised?
- Is it normal for the GRA which is the regulator of horse betting to be also responsible for controlling horse racing activities?

So many questions, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, which are left unanswered and which deserve to have a Bill on its own and I am sure my colleagues, the hon. Quirin and the hon. Rajesh Bhagwan, will provide a more detailed insight on the likely effect of the proposed amendment to the GRA Act.

Another provision of the Bill that requires a stand-alone Bill is, most definitely, the repeal of the Fishermen Investment Trust Act in section 30 of the Bill. The Trust was set up by Act of Parliament back in 2007 and has as object to invest in fishing activities, fishing processing activities and marketing but very few people know that actually the Chief Executive Officer and the Chairperson of the Trust have resigned as far back as the 22 December 2014; more than 6 years ago and since then, the Board of Trust has not been reconstituted and the CEO has not been replaced and today, we are being called upon, purely and simply, to repeal that Trust.

Now, I am sure if this Bill came on its own – a Bill to repeal the Fishermen Investment Trust – there would have been many speakers, many hon. Members would be interested to speak on that Bill, especially hon. Members who have fishermen in their respective constituencies. I am sure that Fisherman's Association would have come to the forefront and taken position on the proposed Bill but the effect of burying this very important piece of legislation among 300 pages of the Finance Bill is that it is being done *comme une lettre à la poste*.

But the reality of the situation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that fishermen have a right to know why the Board was never constituted and a CEO was never appointed ever since Government took Office back in 2014? Why is such a lack of consideration for fishermen by

this Government? Ever since they came into power, they have not bothered to reconstitute the Board of the Fishermen Investment Trust. Why did this Trust fail? What were the shortcomings? And now the Trust is being repealed, is the Government envisaging another entity to take over the function of that Trust?

Under the FIT Act, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there was a specific provision section 21(2) which actually provided that –

“In the event of the dissolution of the Trust, all the assets of the Trust shall be transferred by a body designated by the Board”.

Now, we know that the Trust have certain assets, they have certain fishing vessels, they have certain equipment but, unfortunately, the Bill is just being repealed purely and simply. There is no transition mechanism as far as the assets of the Trust are concerned. The only saving provision relates to the transfer of the staff, that is in section 96 of the Bill, the transfer of employees of the trust to the Seafarers Welfare Fund. So, again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think that such an important piece of legislation ought to have being debated on its own.

Another proposed amendment which deserves to be debated in a Bill on its own and I am sure that many hon. Members would have been interested to intervene, especially those who have legal background, are the proposed amendments to the Worker’s Rights Act, in section 94 of the Bill. There are actually 16 pages of amendment to the Worker’s Rights Act. 16 pages of amendment! And because of the lack of consultation, this morning we could read in the Press and I quote: « *Les dirigeants syndicaux s’offusquent du fait que les amendements soient apportés à la Worker’s Rights Act sans que le gouvernement ne les consulte.* »

Monsieur Ramjuttun, dirigeant du *Joint Negotiating Panel* de l’industrie sucrière dénonce surtout les amendements concernant le *Redundancy Board*.

Le président du *Mauritius Labour Congress* dénonce lui aussi ces changements sans consultation avec les syndicats et je cite : « je souhaite que le gouvernement rencontre, au plus vite, les syndicats car il y va de l’avenir des travailleurs du secteur privé. »

Le président de la *Confederation of Independant Trade Unions* condamne aussi la manière de faire du gouvernement, il appréhende une vague de licenciements à venir surtout que les compagnies en difficulté n’auront plus droit au *Wage Assistance Scheme* dans un proche avenir.

Not the Opposition talking; trade unionists! Trade unions are criticising the Government for coming up with this important amendment to the Worker's Rights Act without consultation, buried in 300-pages of the Finance Bill.

Now, why are the trade unionists so angry with the Government for this Bill? Because according to them, the Government is making a U-turn as far as the reduction of workforce is concerned. Hon. Members will recall that the situation at the moment is as follows: certain kinds of workers are protected under the Worker's Rights Act against reduction of workforce. An employer who wants to reduce workforce, an employer who wants to terminate the employment of an employee cannot do so unless he has applied to one of the Financial Schemes available under the COVID Schemes to help enterprise in financial difficulties and that enterprise did not get financial assistance.

Now, it will take months before the enterprise reaches this stage and during that negotiation process, the enterprise cannot terminate the contract of employment of employees. So, workers were protected by this section of the Worker's Rights Act.

But now the law is being changed. The employer can apply to the Redundancy Board for a reduction of workforce on the ground of restructuring for financial reasons. Restructuring for financial reason, if you have financial difficulties and you are restructuring your company you do not need to go and try to get financial assistance from the DBM, from MIC or any other institution lending to COVID afflicted companies. You just have to aver that you are restructuring for financial reasons and you can refer the matter to the Redundancy Board and the Redundancy Board, has to hold conciliation, mediation, he will try to find a solution but if there is no solution, the Redundancy Board is likely to say that the termination is justified because the company is facing insolvency, is facing liquidation problems and, therefore, it is justified to go to the Redundancy Board.

So, it is a big U-turn of this Government and definitely a law that is against workers of this country and again I deplore the fact that the Government has chosen to bury the amendment to the Worker's Rights Act in this 300-page long Finance Bill instead of coming with a standalone Bill and have proper consultation and proper debate in this House and outside Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one aspect of this Bill which is the most controversial is probably the one in relation to 'wayleave'. Four different Acts of Parliament are being amended –

- (i) the Central Electricity Board (section 8 of the Bill);
- (ii) the Central Water Authority Act (section 9);
- (iii) the Waste Water Management Authority Act (section 93), and
- (iv) the Utility Regulatory Act.

Now, where the CEB needs to install electric line, equipment or electric pole, under or over land, where the CWA needs to install water pipes, under or over land or where the Waste Water Management Authority needs to install conduit on or over land. So, whenever they need to pass their lines, their pipe or their drain on the land, the situation today is that these Authorities go and negotiate with the owner and the occupier. They ask permission: 'Can I lay the line? Can I put the electrical post on your land? Can I put the pipe on your land?' And the owner and the occupier can say: 'okay, I do not have any objection, provided you give me a compensation because you are affecting the beauty of my land, I will not be able to build where you put your post, I will not be able to build where you are going to lay your pipes, I will not be able to build where you are going to install your drainage system.'

So, that has been the case always, there is a negotiation between the occupier, owner and the Authority; CEB, CWA, Waste Water Management. Now what is being proposed in this Bill is to change all this. CEB, Waste Water Management, CWA, just gives you notice; in 21 days, we are going to put the post, we are going to install the pipes. If in 21 days you do not say anything, we will come, bulldozers will come, everybody comes on your own land and installs the pipes and you cannot say anything, you cannot say anything because you had 21 days to react, you had not reacted within 21 days.

Now, if you react within 21 days then the CEB, CWA, Wastewater Management will try to negotiate with you and if they cannot reach a compromise, what will they do? They will refer the matter to the Utility Regulatory Authority. Then the Utility Regulatory Authority gives you 7 days, gives the land owner 7 days to show cause why CEB should not compulsorily take your land to put their post or why should the CWA not compulsorily acquire a piece of your land and lay pipes. And then, URA after listening to you has another 7 days to give its decision.

Now, anyone in his right mind can tell you that there is something wrong. It is my land, my property, I bought this land. Now CEB, CWA, Waste Water Management is going to give me 21 days. If I do not react, they are going to put their post there. If I react, it is the URA which is going to give an order, compelling me to allow CWA, CEB, Wastewater

Management Authority to use my land and what I get in return? What do I get in return? Nothing! Nothing!

Now, is this not against Article 3 of the Constitution? Is this not against Article 8 of the Constitution? Does not that amount to deprivation of property without compensation? Now, how can this Government, how can the Attorney-General, who is not even here, come up with a law like this? How can you come up with a law, compulsorily acquiring property and then if the aggrieved party does not agree, there is no recourse to the Supreme Court? You have to go to URA. Who is URA, Utility Regulatory Authority? Utility Regulatory Authority has nothing to do with Waste Water Management Authority, has nothing to do with Central Water Authority. Who sits on URA, Lawyers? There is only one member who is from the Attorney General's office, all the others are layperson.

So, now URA is going to come to your land, evaluate how much your land costs. Is that the duty of URA? And there is no recourse to the Supreme Court. So, I am very worried, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and that is what happens when you have the 300-pages long document prepared and people who are supposed to read, do not read, because for not one second I can think of all the lawyers, the respected lawyers on the other side, could have missed this. And I can tell you there are lawyers from the other side who have come to me and said they do not know how come this law is being amended. It is so obvious. This is blatantly anti-constitutional.

And I would say it again, I regret that the Attorney General is not here because it is his job. He advises the Government. Come here and tell me I am wrong. Tell me that no, it is possible. The Explanatory Memorandum says it clearly that CEB; look at the word that they actually use in the Explanatory Memorandum, the CEB is going to 'compulsorily obtain' wayleave, 'compulsorily obtain'. So, it is not innocent. They know what they are doing. They are compulsorily acquiring land to put posts, to put water pipes, and they are not going to give you a cent of compensation. This is the caring Government? And it is not the Supreme Court that is going to defend you, it is the URA. So, I really hope that some people in this Government have some sense to remove these proposed amendments at Committee Stage.

Since we are on the issue of constitutionality, there is another provision of this Bill that raises a constitutional issue and that is the proposed amendment to the Landlord and Tenant Act, Section 45 of the Bill. Now we all agree that during COVID, hardship was suffered by tenants. We all agree that the tenants have to be protected but you cannot force

the suffered by tenants. We all agree that the tenants have to be protected but you cannot force the tenant to pay the rent and if he does not pay the rent, he is taken out, he is evicted. Same thing for borrowers; the law was changed and certain enterprises, SMEs, were given delay, moratorium, that was the term used, to pay interests. All very well. I am very happy for the tenants. But what about the landlord? Statutorily, you are telling the tenant, 'you do not have to pay'. You are statutorily saying that the District Court, the Court does not have the right to order eviction if the tenant does not have to pay. But what is the landlord getting in return? Isn't that again acquisition of his right without compensation? And look at this double standard of the Government when it comes to Bank. When Commercial Bank was allowed to negotiate for a Moratorium, forego the interests, borrowers did not pay interests but the Central Bank compensated the Commercial Bank for the loss of interests. There was no deprivation of property without compensation. But for the landlords, no, the landlords do not deserve anything. This is what this Government, a Bill that has been vetted by the State Law Office, a Bill that has been passed in Cabinet where you have lawyers sitting, and they find it normal, very normal that landlords should be deprived of their rental income. The landlord should not be able to take action against its tenants, normal. The landlord does not have to be compensated, normal.

Still on the legality, another provision; section 15 of the Bill is an amendment to the Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act. Now, what is this? The Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act deals with the fixing of prices of petroleum products and the Explanatory Memorandum, at page 11 reads as follows –

“Clause 15 amends the Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act section 3 (a) to include two new contributions that will, (this is the word) be levied on petroleum products.”

So we are passing a law to give the power to the STC and the Minister to levy two new contributions on petroleum products. And what are these two contributions that are going to be levied? One is contribution to COVID-19 Solidarity Fund and the second one is contribution to finance the cost of COVID-19 vaccines. The problem with this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that the Government and STC have already increased the price of petroleum products. They have already started charging for COVID-19 Solidarity Fund. They passed actually a regulation last year, on 07 April 2020, where they imposed; the STC and the Minister concerned, imposed Rs4 on each litre of Mogas and Gasoil. Why? To contribute to COVID-19 Solidarity Fund. And last month, we all had to pay Rs2 on

each litre of Mogas and Gasoil for contribution to finance the cost of COVID-19 vaccines, and today, we are passing a law because the Act did not allow the Government to impose these levy.

So, for one year, we have been contributing to a Fund that is totally illegal. It is not permitted by law and that is why now, we are being asked to vote a law section 97 of the Finance Bill says that -

“Section 15 insofar as it relates to paragraph (e) shall be deemed to have come into operation on 4 April 2020.”

So, for one year, we have been paying all this money. We have been taxed for contribution to the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund and it is only today, after one year, that we are going to pass a law with retrospective effect to make something that was illegal, legal. Is that a serious Government? And today, buried under these 300 pages, and not a word; the hon. Minister of Finance went on and on and listed all the sections that are being amended, but he did not say one word about what we are doing something today to rectify an illegal act. For one year, they have been exploiting Mauritian consumers. For one year, they have been charging levy when the law did not give them the right to do so. So, today we are going to backdate the coming into force of a law to permit them to take money from consumers. Is this a serious Government? Is this the Government that works for the people, now asking us to condone something which they have been doing for one year without the authority of an Act of Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like now to talk about the amendment which is being brought to the Income Tax Act. Again, some more controversial amendments, controversial because changes have been made without proper consultation. In fact, in a letter from Mauritius Finance to the Minister of Finance dated 19 July 2021, we can read –

“We will like to bring to your attention some strong concerns expressed by operators with regard to the Finance Miscellaneous Provision Bill 2021 which will severely,”

This is not my word.

“severely undermine the competitiveness and development prospect of the Mauritian economy.”

Operators in the off-shore sectors were not consulted before this Government decided to change the law which is going to undermine the competitiveness of Mauritius as the Financial Centre. And what is the law being changed? The law affecting Trusts and Foundations. Today, a Trust whose settlor is non-resident or holds a global business license and whose beneficiaries are non-residents or hold a global business license can elect to be treated as non-resident and they are exempt from paying tax. The same thing for the Foundation, whose founder is a non-resident, and the beneficiaries are all non-resident or GBC companies; they can elect to be non-resident. And we have thousands of Trusts which come to Mauritius for that purpose. Why? Because a Trust is like a transparent vehicle; it is see through like a *société*. In Mauritius, we have *société* where the *société* is not taxed at the level of a *société* but at the level of the partners; les *associés*. Similarly, the Trust is very often viewed as a pass-through vehicle and it is the beneficiaries, in their country, that are taxed on the profit made, the profit realised by the Trust. So the Trust is transparent vehicle. And without consultation, just with a stroke of the pen, the hon. Minister of Finance today is abolishing the special regime applicable to Trusts and Foundations. Now, what would have it cost the Government to sit down with the operators, give advance notice, tell them what is going on? Maybe they have reasons to do it; maybe it is the OECD putting pressure on them, but there were solutions. If you sit down, there are solutions! The solution is so easy. You just have to change the residence. You just have to alter the definition of the residence. But this Government has the...

An hon. Member: *To ena reponse la toi!*

Mr Uteem: Yes, I have! Not me; all the operators, the experts have it...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Uteem: But, for the experts, you need to be listened. This is the problem with this Government!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Uteem: The problem with this Government is they do not listen! They do not listen to trade unionists; they do not listen to stakeholders; they do not listen to actuaries. They have the monopoly of knowledge. Only they know; they are the only ones who know!

So, now, the Trust is being amended, the Foundations are being amended and frankly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have very serious concern about the future of the Trust and Foundation industry because I know most of these Trusts would probably redomicile to a country where they would be exempt from tax.

The next issue is the amendment to section 75 of the Income Tax Act, the arm's length principle. Section 75 gives the power to the Director General of the MRA to assess the economic value of a transaction when the transaction has not been at arm's length. Let's say, for example, you have one person who is lending money to a company and because of the relationship between himself and his company, he does not charge interest, or a worker who gets a bank loan from the bank at a preferential rate of interest because it is an employee, a staff. So, in these circumstances, the MRA has the power to adjust the economic value to make it a transaction as if it was carried out at arm's length between two parties who were not related. This law has always applied to companies which derive income in Mauritius. There have been number of cases. Recently, the Assessment Review Committee gave a ruling saying that this section does not apply to Global Business Companies which derive income outside of Mauritius, not in Mauritius. So, now, the law is being amended to clarify that the arm's length, the transfer pricing provision will apply to both the companies that carry out activities in Mauritius or from Mauritius. Now, I do not agree with this, but it is a policy decision. I am not going to interfere with it. But what I find most objectionable, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the drafting. When we look at section 97(21), it clearly says that section 38(s) - this law - shall come into operation in respect of the year of an assessment commencing on 01 July 2022. So, it is clear that the law will have forward-looking effect. It will come into force with respect to the year of assessment in 2022.

But when we look at the proposed amendment, this is something completely different. Section 75 (1A), page 117, reads as follows – 'for the avoidance of doubt, subsection (1) shall apply to all business or income earning activities carried out in Mauritius or from Mauritius since the commencement of this Act.' The Income Tax Act was enacted in 1995. So, how can you have a law now, saying that it is coming into effect next year, with respect to the financial year of assessment 2022, which is totally logical, because it is going to apply once you are aware of the situation, and then, at the same time, saying that it will have effect as if it was enacted back in 1995. Again, I do not know who drafted these legislations, but, clearly, that is the problem when you have 300 pages in a Finance Bill, and no serious thought has been given when drafting such pieces of legislation.

Next, still on the part of Income Tax Act, on the same page, 117, section 112A - Simplified return by Self-Employed individuals; self-employed individuals who were not required to submit a return because they did not have enough income, because their income was less than exemption - personal exemption threshold that was given to self-employed. Now, these people, even if they do not pay tax, even if they do not file returns, now they will have to submit a return electronically. It is not just in the *contribution sociale* and Social Benefit Bill that we just voted. It is also now in the Income Tax Act. All self-employed, even if you do not pay tax, you will have to register with the Director General of the MRA and you will have to submit a return electronically.

And finally, on the issue of Income Tax Act, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there have been changes, again, that were not highlighted by the hon. Minister of Finance, but this is going to have a lot of effect on taxpayers of this country. Today, taxpayers benefit from a limitation period. The Director General of the MRA can only raise an assessment for 3 years of assessment. So, after 4 years, the MRA cannot raise assessment. But, exceptionally, the MRA could have raised assessment, but then it would have had to go through a procedure involving the consent from the Independent Tax Panel. Now this is gone. Now, what the law is providing is that the Director General of the MRA can raise an assessment any time, without any limitation, without the 3 years of assessment limit, any time where there is fraud.

And what is fraud? Any person who files a declaration which is not what the MRA feels ought to have been the declaration, that amounts to fraud for the MRA. The MRA is sitting as judge and party; judge, jury, executioner. The MRA can say: 'Oh, you have said that you have an income of Rs20,000, but, actually, I think that you have an income of Rs25,000, so you have committed a fraud and because you are a fraud, I am going to assess you for the past 10, 15, 20 years'.

This is what is being proposed. This is what is being proposed, buried in these 300 pages of the Finance Bill. There is today a war by the MRA on all taxpayers. This is what it is saying and there is going to be no any time limit to raise an assessment. All the MRA has to do is aver fraud. You have underdeclared your income; that is fraud. And, therefore, MRA can assess you for an unlimited period of time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am almost done. I would like to refer to the Non-Citizen (Property Restriction) Act, section 62 that is being amended. Earlier this year, on 27 of April 2021, we debated the amendment to the Non-Citizens (Property Restriction) Act and during

our debate, I remember very well the Leader of the Opposition said that we should not have to go through the Prime Minister whenever a non-citizen has to dispose of its assets. But, the Prime Minister stated: ‘No, the amendment, in fact, now requires every non-citizen disposing a property, including property under a scheme overseen by Economic Development Board, to seek authorisation under the Act.’

So, I am glad that today, this Government has taken heed of what the Opposition has said and is amending the law. So, from now on, any non-citizen who acquired immovable property, pursuant to a scheme approved by the Economic Development Board, will not have to go to the Prime Minister for approval when they have to dispose of their assets.

But, unfortunately, the Government did not listen and pay heed to all that the Opposition has said. For example, the Bank of Mauritius Act is still not being amended to reflect what the IMF and the World Bank have stated. I will quote and I will end up here. In the 2021, Article IV Consultation, the IMF said and I quote –

“Directors stressed that the central bank should refrain from providing direct financing to the government and engaging in quasi-fiscal activities and advised reforming the Bank of Mauritius law, including to pre-empt further exceptional transfers to the government. Directors also recommended that the central bank be recapitalized and relinquish ownership of the Mauritius Investment Corporation (MIC).”

And it is very sad today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the Government has decided not to listen to the IMF and World Bank. There is absolutely nothing in this law to make the allocation of money from the MIC to private individuals, public, transparent and we all know how, today, a lot of people who are close to Government, are actually looting this Fund.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(11:11 p.m.)

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to intervene on the Finance Bill this year. In the same vein, I need to express my sadness and disappointment to the House that my colleague, hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell, is unable to intervene on this Bill this year.

The Deputy Speaker: No! No!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Having said so...

The Deputy Speaker: No! Wait! Saying so would be tantamount to commenting upon the ruling of the Speaker and you know I am not going to allow it. So, kindly withdraw whatever you have said and continue.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Continue, please!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Having said so, there are 93 pieces of legislations which are being amended and I have only a maximum of 30 to 40 minutes at my disposal. In this race against time, I will try to cover as much as possible the material issue and especially those that my colleague, hon. Reza Uteem, who has been quite extensive in his coverage, has not.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish, firstly, to draw attention to the amendments that are being brought to the Board constitution of two prominent entities of the Utility Sector, the CEB and the Utility Regulatory Authority (URA); different aspects from what hon. Uteem has gone into just now. I shall begin with the URA and will leave the CEB towards the end of my speech.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Utility Regulatory Authority is to be amended as per Section 91 of the Finance Bill. According to the Board constitution, pursuant to Section 8 of the URA Act, the authority is administered and managed by the Board, which consists of a Chairperson and three Commissioners. The appointment of the Chairperson and Commissioners is done by the President, on advice of the Prime Minister, after consultation with the Leader of Opposition.

Now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Section 91 of the Finance Bill amends Section 8 of the URA Act regarding the constitution of the Board of the URA, as well as, the manner appointments are made such that –

- (a) instead of one Chairperson and three Commissioners, the Board of the URA will now be having one Chairperson and six Commissioners;

- (b) instead of the appointment of the Commissioners being made by the President, as is currently the case, with the amendment, the Minister, presently hon. Lesjongard, will himself appointment its six Commissioners,
- (c) Instead of the Commissioners being appointed by the President, on advice of the Prime Minister, given after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, with the amendment, there will not be any consultation whatsoever with the Leader of the Opposition.

I here call the attention of the hon. Leader of the Opposition on this important matter.

Furthermore, the three additional Commissioners, as being proposed, will comprise a representative of –

- (a) the Ministry responsible for the subject matter of finance;
- (b) the Ministry responsible for the subject matter of public utilities, and
- (c) the Attorney General's Office.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with this new constitution of the Board of the Utility Regulatory Authority, a befitting name for this authority can be GURA, meaning the Government Utility Regulatory Authority!

But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to draw your attention and that of the House, that Section(a) of the URA is also very clear about the independence of the URA on that it states –

“The Authority shall not, in the exercise of its functions under this Act or the Utility legislation, be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority.”

The proposed amendments are thus flawed.

Two crucial points to be noted on this matter are that –

- (1) As per the URA Act, the URA ought not be subject to the direction or control of any other authority. Yet, appointments of the Commissioners will now be made by the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities and the Board will comprise of representatives of two key Ministries and one representative from the Attorney General’s Office;
- (2) The issues of conflict of interest and of the regulator being put in potential position of judge and party. The CEB, CWA and WMA are all parastatal bodies with the Government as its sole shareholder. CEB for instance, has on

its Board a representative of the Ministry of Public Utilities and representative of the Ministry of Finance. But now, the Board of the URA shall also be having representatives of the Ministry of Finance and Public Utilities.

Adding insult to injury, all the Commissioners will be appointed by the Minister of Public Utilities on such terms and conditions as he may determine. There is a very common parlance which says that –

“Justice must not only be done, but must also be seen to be done.”

That is to be manifestly and undoubtedly seen to be done. All members of the Board of the URA must be seen to be independent and impartial, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Therefore, this amendment to the URA Act is fundamentally flawed.

My intervention on this important matter is being recorded, seen and heard by our population. If this amendment is passed, we may be faced with potential litigations in the future. But then, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the recent events, as we have witnessed, this Government does not seem to be concerned about the legal or even reputational risk that run our country. I would be very much grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if the Minister – unfortunately, he is not here - could once and for all convey to this House to what extent the URA is functional and operational.

I will now move to the amendment being brought to the CIDB Act, per Section 14 of the Finance Bill. Contractors are currently required by law to register with the CIDB to be able to operate and contractors are classified by Grades A+ to H, which pertains to the highest value of contracts or works which a contractor is allowed to undertake. For example –

- a Grade H contractor can take up work of highest value of R10 m.;
- with Grade G, up to R20 m.;
- with Grade D, up to R200 m., and
- Grade C, contractor up to R350 m.

In effect, the contractor is assessed by the CIDB over the last five years on many factors such as previous works of highest value undertaken and completed, on its turnover, human resources employed etcetera. This allows the board of the CIDB to effect a proper assessment exercise when awarding an applicant with a particular grade. This is essential to protect members of the public and provide a first-hand safeguard concerning contracts awarded by public bodies.

Section 14 of the Finance Bill eliminates the current grading exercise and instead contractors will be classified as small, medium and large, such that –

- (a) large contractors can take works with highest value of above Rs500 m.;
- (b) medium contractors up to Rs500 m., and
- (c) small contractors to Rs10 m.

Now, this is where the problem is with this amendment. Firstly, a contractor who previously has only undertaken works, for example, up to the highest value of Rs11 m., because the ceiling is 10 m., will now be able to bid for contracts of up to Rs500 m. This will tantamount to one sentence, which I often very heard on the construction site, is going to be a dog's breakfast, because suddenly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the event the contractor who used to tender up to Rs10 m. gets a contract of Rs500 m., will it be performed as per requirements and ensure timely completion? Because, otherwise it can run the risk and peril of the public who end up paying *les pots cassés*.

I am not against contractors growing but there has to be a transparent and gradual approach in graduating contractors from one particular category to another category, not certainly from Rs10 m. to Rs500 m.

Secondly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the new categorisation also enhances to a large extent the risk of contractors bidding for very large contracts, where they lack competencies or experience. At the end of the day, the works may end up being subcontracted, and quality of work may be compromised or the contractors may simply abandon the site of works.

Now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister Hurreeram, who is present and who is also speaking on this Bill, may argue that the burden lies on the public bodies to specify their requirements in their bidding documents, but, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the St Louis Gate is an on-going proof where matters stand in this regard and I think I do not need to say any more.

I now come to section 72 regarding amendments to be brought to the Public-Private Partnership Act and I will raise a matter which I believe is of concern. Section 72(b) of the Bill amends the Public Private Partnership Act by inserting section 2(a) - Non Application of Public Procurement Act which states that the Public Procurement Act shall not apply to a project under this Act. Even the definitions of 'control' and 'own' of the Public Private Partnership Act, which is presently defined in the Act as being the same definition as in Public Procurement Act, are being amended such that instead of the Public Procurement Act,

the Public Debt Management Act is being referred to for the definition of the aforesaid terms but the irony is that the words 'control' and 'own' are defined exactly the same way in both the Public Procurement Act and the Public Debt Management Act.

However, contrary to the Public Procurement Act, the Public Debt Management Act does not have its *raison d'être* to be mentioned in the Public-Private Partnership Act. Or, would this Government has a phobia on the Public Procurement Act? Only this much I can make out.

On a more and very serious note, the Government is proposing to get rid of the Public Procurement Act in its entirety in regard to matters of public-private partnership agreements. This is another reason to be even more scared about the future of this country, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Whatever blunder this Government has been committing, the hon. Uteem has raised many points just now, we will still be committing or we will still be committing in the future, we will have intra-generational repercussions. It is just like climate change. If the problem is not tackled at the soonest, it will have great repercussions on all generations to come. I have children, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and I am deeply worried.

By removing the Public Procurement Act from the Public Private Partnership Act, we are also removing from aggrieved bidders their rights of review under the Public Procurement Act. An aggrieved bidder will thus no longer have recourse for timely review before the Independent Review Panel.

I would like to briefly touch on the amendments being brought to the Public Procurement Act as per section 73 of the Finance Bill now. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, pertaining to the Public Procurement Act, the choices of procurement method have been enlarged by the introduction of two terms –

1. competitive negotiation, and
2. electronic reverse auction.

Even though the circumstances during which these techniques can be used are specified, yet fundamentally, these terms themselves have not been clearly defined. The devil is in the details, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may be the lack of it as well, as is the present case. It is inconceivable that two terms are being introduced in an important piece of legislation, and the terms themselves are not very clear.

It is also regrettable that stakeholders have not been consulted on such a fundamental change in the public procurement method. It is worth mentioning that the term ‘electronic reverse auction’ has already found its way into the Mauritian landscape and many local stakeholders, who have been contacted by the Indian counterparts, have problems with this new concept, I am told. A recent tender exercise, being the civil consultancy services and other associated works for 8 MW of solar photovoltaic farm at Tamarind Falls, Henrietta, phase 2 Mauritius, prepared by Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, the closing date of which was last Friday.

Since COVID-19 pandemic, this country has witnessed the havocs of emergency procurements. The judicial enquiry of late Mr Kistnen, ex-activist of the MSM, is but an example, and last week only the judicial inquiry has been reopened. What has been closed by the Police for being a suicide case is now coming out to the fore to be a matter of foul play.

The Deputy Speaker: No.

(Interruptions)

Order! Order!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Public procurement, this case...

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, no problem, but when you say what was at one point suicide or whatever and now is being seen as something else, it is not correct. You cannot make a conclusion.

(Interruptions)

Order! You cannot draw a conclusion on a matter which is before the Court.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: So, please, all that you have said concerning Kistnen ...

Mr Osman Mahomed: That suicide matter.

The Deputy Speaker: ... wherein you make a conclusion has to be unconditionally withdrawn. No conclusion!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay, fine.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I now need to address section 5 of the Bill on the amendments to be brought to the Borrowers Protection Act. The Government has announced that it will deliver 12,000 housing units. I fail to understand that how this Government is protecting borrowers wanting to buy a social housing unit, when the NHDC is currently charging beneficiaries, interest rate at 6 per cent per annum over a maximum period of 35 years on loan taken, when the repo rate is 1.85% but I understand that the NHDC has to finance its operations, but more importantly, it has to cross-subsidise the bad payers and here I would like to raise a few issues in the interest of borrowers and beneficiaries.

The issues are the following –

- (i) I stand inform that the Chairman of the NHDC sits on the Social Housing Allocation Committee and is also the chairperson of the Projects Steering Committee.

All recommendations made are then brought to the level of the main NHDC Board for approval which he, himself, chairs for ultimate approval and onwards implementation. It is worth mentioning that he is also the Chairman of the NSLD. Well, this is surely not good governance, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! And the consequences are even troubling.

I stand further informed that last year, social housing units have been allocated to people who were not first-time buyers as ought to have been the case. This has happened at a few sites. Fortunately, those whom these housing units were unduly allocated were cooperative and the keys were returned to the NHDC...

The Deputy Speaker: No, one second again! You know, I am very much minded to allow you to speak and not interrupt you, but, now, when you are making allegations, saying that it has been allocated, you need to come up with some documents.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay!

The Deputy Speaker: I cannot allow something as damning as what you said to be admitted in this Chamber ...

Mr Osman Mahomed: Not even submitted for the information of the hon. Minister, for him to check, in the interest of country?

The Deputy Speaker: No! Hon. Osman Mahomed!

(Interruptions)

Order! I am not preventing you from imparting your views to the hon. Minister, but, then, it is not just imparting. You are going directly in laying allegation. This is what you just did, and laying allegation is not permissible ...

Mr Osman Mahomed: No, that Chairman of NHDC is chairing subcommittees is an allegation?

The Deputy Speaker: No! It was not just the Chairman chairing the Committee. You said: 'people who already had houses benefited from the social housing.' Saying 'they have benefited', for me, I am not aware of it! Not being aware, for me, to the Chair, they are allegations; allegations, as of now, which there is no evidence to me. So, please do not go in allegations!

Mr Osman Mahomed: So, you will not allow me even to submit a...

The Deputy Speaker: You can always rephrase it! No problem, I will allow you to rephrase it!

(Interruptions)

Order! I will allow you to rephrase. Try to rephrase it without saying: 'he did'.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay! There is an issue in house allocation and I would tender to the hon. Minister to kindly verify whether this is the case or not.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, that is well done!

Mr Osman Mahomed: You are most welcome. But it is the credit worthiness of some beneficiaries that have to be looked into because this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, bears directly on the borrowers. Because if houses are allocated to people who do not have the means to pay, then it will happen that those who are paying will have to cross subsidise for those who are not paying. And I stand informed as well, and this is not an allegation, this is a fact, that bad debts at the level of the NHDC stands at Rs90 m., and I hope you will allow me to say it; Rs90 m. for such a small company.

And since we are on matters of the NHDC, which provides credit facilities to thousands of borrowers, I must briefly say that there is a malaise at the NHDC - to finish this issue - because the Officer-in-Charge has not been holding management meetings since his appointment in April 2021. And this has a lot to do with the malaise happening at the NHDC right now.

And, again, in the spirit of protecting beneficiaries and borrowers, there are many beneficiaries of housing units whom after one year have not obtained their contracts and this causes a lot of hardship to them because if they want to go to the local authorities for whatever permit, they cannot even apply, because although they are owners of the housing unit, they do not have a contract. So, this is an issue. It is an issue laying mainly at the doorsteps of the notaries, I am told. The notaries who are charging a beneficiary, not on the subsidised cost of the housing, but on the full cost of the housing unit. So, if the hon. Minister was here, I would really want him to address this because I received constituents and many of them come to us for these kinds of complaints and every time we must keep on calling the NHDC for a solution.

Again, regarding *morcellement* permit, I would like to touch briefly at paragraph 57 regarding the amendments to be brought to the *Morcellement* Act and to include a representative of the Land Drainage Authority on its Board. So, I believe this is a good proposal, but, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House will recall my Parliamentary Question B/741, this year, addressed to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, regarding allegations of fake *morcellement* permits and fake Pin Numbers having been issued by the *Morcellement* Unit. This question did not come for debate, unfortunately, because of time constraint, and I would like to refer him to one particular case because I do not know when the question will come again. It is a case that myself and hon. Deven Nagalingum have looked into, regarding a proposed *morcellement* at Vieux Stanley. So, it is in his constituency. The victim came to see me, but I referred it to him and back to me again. So, it happens that officers at the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning have even cashed in money, but then they have issued fake *morcellement* permits.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! I am listening to you, please! I do not need murmuring.

Hon. Osman Mahomed!

Mr Osman Mahomed: I am going to give details. These are not allegations.

The Deputy Speaker: No!

(Interruptions)

Order! It is not for you to determine. I am hearing; I am listening very carefully and attentively to what you are saying. To me, they appear to be allegations. So, you can either rephrase it, but, for now, withdraw what you said, unless you want ...

(Interruptions)

Order! Unless you want me to go back and look for it word by word.

Mr Osman Mahomed: *Non*, I ...

The Deputy Speaker: And I will do that. Please withdraw it; rephrase it!

Mr Osman Mahomed: This is not allegation! There are several cases, and if you want me to table, I will table! Letter from the Minister of Housing ...

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, table it! I will very happily take it.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, I would like to refer to the hon. Minister...

The Deputy Speaker: Let me have a look at it!

The Deputy Prime Minister: I would like to raise a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Osman Mahomed: Fake *morcellement* permits.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, order! Let me have the...

(Interruptions)

Wait! We will listen to the point of order, then we will take his cause.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My point is simply that we are debating the Finance Bill, and I believe the hon. gentleman has a duty of relevance. Now, what he is telling the House is that because his question did not come up, he is now going to raise this matter at Finance Bill debate. So, would it then be expected, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that when I intervene on the Finance Bill, instead of addressing issues raised by the Bill, I will have to respond to the hon. gentleman? This is perverting the order of business of the House. The debate on the Finance Bill is now becoming an extension of Question Time. The hon. gentleman can certainly put a question next week or raise the matter at adjournment time, which will be acceptable, but surely not in the context of the debate on the Finance Bill.

The Deputy Speaker: I got it, hon. Deputy Prime Minister. I do take note of your point that irrelevancies are not to be debated today, but, for the time being, I see they are still relevant. But the hon. Member has to withdraw the allegation, unless he wants me to go, check the tape, and tell him word by word what is not acceptable to me.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay, we are talking about amendments to the *Morcellement* Act...

The Deputy Speaker: You are withdrawing it first? You are withdrawing those allegations? Otherwise, I will go and check.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Which part is an allegation?

The Deputy Speaker: You want me to go and check? Okay, no problem! I suspend! 10 minutes!

At 11.38 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 11.50 p.m. with Mr Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

ANNOUNCEMENT

HON. OSMAN MAHOMED SPEECH – HON. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER – POINT OF ORDER

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated.

May I first of all, with regard to the point of order made by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, I will request the hon. Member to stick to the Bill.

With regard to what you what you said, I have to say that you have showed me the document that you intend to table and what you have to say concerning what we said earlier on, first of all, and then the document.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, I wanted to say that whatever I said is not based on allegations. It is well captured in a letter from the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning, dated 27 July 2020, bearing reference MHLM19951, which clearly states that fake *Morcellement* permits have been issued by the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning itself and I would like to table this document to testify that what I am saying is true and correct.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much; table it.

Mr Osman Mahomed: And the reason why I raised it in this House is there are several such cases and many people are waiting for their plot of land to build their houses. I raised it in that spirit.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, we got the point. Now, stick to the Bill. Continue.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay.

The Deputy Prime Minister: May I, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir...

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

The Deputy Prime Minister: ...know what your ruling is as regards the point concerning relevance to the debate?

The Deputy Speaker: In fact, I stated that hon. Members should refrain from repetition and irrelevance. I did.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay, like I said Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the start of my speech, I now come to section 8(b) of the Finance Bill which amends section 5 (1) (a) of the CEB Act on the constitution of the Board of the CEB to include not one, but two additional members on the Board of the CEB. It is also important to grasp that the two additional members will both be having just the same expertise, which is a wide experience in renewable energy.

In one of my previous interventions concerning the CEB Amendment Bill, I have called the attention of the hon. Lesjongard and I am glad that he is here, on section 5 (1) (a) of the CEB Act. In his effort to bring the amendment on the two additional members and ironically with the same expertise on the Board of the CEB, I am sure if the Minister had gone through the current Board constitution he would have noticed the following –

Firstly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, section 5 (1) (a) of the CEB Act states that the Board shall consist of a representative of the Ministry of Finance, and section 5 (1) (b) goes on to state that the Board shall also consist of a representative of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development. Yet, the hon. Minister Lesjongard is fully aware that the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development have long since become one and same Ministry, that is, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. This entails that there ought to be only one representative of that Ministry on the Board of the CEB and certainly not two representatives as presently is the case.

So, the hon. Minister, since I raised it in the past, could have taken this opportunity of this amendment to resolve this issue which I am canvassing, like I said, for the second time. *L'exemple vient d'en haut*, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while the population is finding itself compelled to do cost cutting, at no point this Government speaks in terms of cost cutting such through the elimination of pointless two nominations from one and same Ministry as I have just put to the fore and to cut down the irrelevant expenses here and there.

Secondly, pursuant to section 5 (3) (a) (viii) of the CEB Act, two members of the Electricity Advisory Committee ought to be on the Board of the CEB to represent the interest of rural and urban consumers of electricity.

Matter of fact, last Sunday, in my own Constituency in parts of Ward 4, Vallée Pitot and Tranquebar there was a major power cut at night and this has caused a lot of inconvenience to the inhabitants and lately this is happening very frequently. We have had to intervene on this matter. But who will do so at the level of the Board of the CEB when the law provides for this, that is, two Board Members representing consumers which are not yet appointed.

Thirdly, by virtue of section 5(1) (vi), a representative of the CWA has to form part of the Board of the CEB, but it is noteworthy that this is not the case for the CWA to have a representative of the CEB on its Board. The question is what is the modern day relevance of having a representative from CWA on the Board of CEB, more specifically now that CWA will be a licensee of the URA. If there is no relevance, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, then the required amendment is to be made.

I think this is all that I had to say and I thank you for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister Seeruttun!

(11.56 p.m.)

The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr M. Seeruttun): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at this time of the hour I wish I could have shortened my speech but you will have to bear with me.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, during my intervention on the Budget Speech, I highlighted, that this Budget, comes as a new breath to the economic sector and the entrepreneur community.

In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Budget is surely a key step in helping us recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has certainly not spared our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I also mentioned, that the financial services sector, is one of the few sectors, which has remained resilient to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and that in spite of the inclusion of Mauritius in the list of jurisdictions under increased monitoring by the Financial Action Task Force. While we are faring well, in spite of the current situation, we cannot sleep on our laurels.

This is the reason for which, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are already ensuring that the measures, which have been announced, can be implemented at the earliest. Allow me to enumerate these measures.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, coordination and exchange of information domestically, is key for the development and implementation of policies and activities to combat money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing.

A Core Group with the Financial Secretary as Chairperson was set up to develop and coordinate the strategy, policies and actions required to ensure the implementation of the recommendations made by the Mutual Evaluation Report. The National AML/CFT Committee had set up 11 Immediate Outcome Sub-Committees to enhance institutional, technical and operational coordination to ensure Mauritius implements an effective AML/CFT system which meets international standards.

The Inter-agency Coordination Committee, regrouping all AML/CFT Supervisors, has proved to be an effective platform to continuously improve AML/CFT supervisory effectiveness in different areas, notably, in pulling resources together to conduct joint training for the benefit of supervisors and outreach sessions for the industry. These key coordination mechanisms have enabled Mauritius to ensure a well-organised and timely implementation of the recommended actions under the Mutual Evaluation Report and FATF Action Plan to reform the AML/CFT system. I wish to highlight here that the ESAAMLG Secretariat has commended this coordination mechanism that Mauritius has put in place. The amendments made to FIAMLA will now give legal status to the AML/CFT Core Group and Inter-agency Coordination Committee as opposed to their current administrative set up. This, in fact, goes in the right direction, in demonstrating the commitment of this Government to sustain the reforms and maintain a high level of effectiveness at all times.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius will be going through the onsite assessment of the FATF during the period 13 to 15 September 2021 to verify that the implementation of Mauritius' AML/CFT reforms has begun and is being sustained and that the necessary political commitment remains in place to sustain implementation in the future. The onsite report will be considered at the October 2021 FATF Plenary when a decision will be taken for the exiting of Mauritius from the FATF grey list.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, all measures taken so far, demonstrate the underlying, unflinching commitment of the Government to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of our efforts to combat money laundering, terrorism and proliferation financing in the future. Mauritius is committed to continue along this path, not only to confirm the progress made during the onsite assessment but to take all necessary steps to sustain reforms well beyond the ICRG process in order to strengthen our AML/CFT system, thereby strengthening our financial system. This is the reason for which we need to be ready. Ready, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to position ourselves, as the most attractive international financial centre-

- (a) in terms of products and services,
- (b) in terms of ease of doing business,
- (c) in terms of cost of doing business,
- (d) in terms of skills, and
- (e) in terms of infrastructure.

And, for this to become a reality, we need to pick our poles of focus.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, an important aspect of the financial services sector which needs our full attention is FinTech. My Ministry has conducted a call for views on 19 March 2021 which has yielded more than 25 responses. Based on information gathered, from this call for views, we have come up with key proposals. There is no doubt that the development of FinTech is the future of the financial sector in Mauritius. There can be no more opportune time to re-engineer our current legislation, to cater for the FinTech sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a major step, was taken, by introducing a definition for FinTech in the Financial Services Act. This clearly demonstrates the importance being given to the growth and development of this sector. Furthermore, the amendment brought to Section 14 (b) of the Financial Services Act will now ensure that the Financial Services

Commission will be vested with the authority to issue regulatory sandbox authorisation. This new regime of authorisation will bring more clarity to the types of FinTech activities which will fall under the purview of the Financial Services Commission or the Bank of Mauritius. The new FSC Regulatory Sandbox will enable licensees of the Commission, namely, entities operating in the mainstream financial services sector of the Mauritius IFC and FinTech incumbents as well to apply for such an authorisation.

Government, through this particular amendment of financial services laws, is aiming to accelerate the adoption of new and emerging technologies such as Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence, Big Data Analytics, amongst others. Allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to underscore the attributes of the FinTech Innovation, now commonly referred to as 'Finnovation Hubs'. This innovation combines all the elements of a conducive ecosystem for the growth of the FinTech sector. Through this amendment to the Financial Services Act, we are facilitating the operationalisation of FinTech Digital Lab(s) to enhance connectivity and inter-operability between Financial Institutions and established technology providers as well as other relevant parties in cost-effective and scalable ways.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, other jurisdictions such as Singapore and Abu Dhabi, have established similar digital sandboxing or labs on cross-border basis. The FinTech Innovation Hubs would be valuable to the FinTech stakeholders and community in Mauritius, who will, in turn, benefit from a range of exclusive services and benefits such as the availability of office space, incubation and acceleration spaces, IT infrastructure and shared platforms to develop software. This measure will be complemented by networking opportunities and creativity experiences, from local and international experts of the FinTech industry.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the implementation of such a strategic project by the relevant regulatory agencies of the financial sector will be, *inter alia*, linked with, the following key requirements -

- Firstly, there will be the absolute need for constant dialogues and collaboration with interested parties to establish the necessary operational foundations of the Finnovation Hubs and to develop a dedicated physical space which will cater for private offices, meeting rooms, communal lounges, co-working spaces, media studios and event space. In fact, there should be active engagements with partners, to help define the FinTech infrastructure requirements.

- Secondly, we should endeavour to provide support to engage with stakeholders, interested in setting up FinTech incubation or acceleration programmes within the Finnovation Hubs.
- Thirdly, the creation of a special desk within the Finnovation Hubs' initiative to encourage dialogue, on potential regulatory implications at an early stage of development, of innovative products or services or even on business models, and
- Fourthly, regular engagement with the Fintech community, to discuss innovation developments and policy proposals.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the introduction of this innovative section 14 C, under the Financial Services Act, will provide industry stakeholders, with the appropriate controlled testing environment and safeguards, to apply technologically enabled financial innovations. The FSC will have the responsibility, to issue further guidelines, to facilitate the orderly administration, of the regulatory sandbox regime. This new authorisation will be applicable for a defined time frame, as determined by the FSC and also, allow successful applicants, to benefit exemption from any relevant regulatory requirement.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I had mentioned in my previous intervention, the financial services sector includes the banking sector, the global business sector, the investment and asset management sector, the insurance sector as well as equity and securities markets, which, all together play a prominent role, in the Mauritian economy.

The FSC will work jointly, with the Bank of Mauritius, to implement the new regulatory sandbox regime across the financial system. It is to be highlighted that, the Banking Act, is equally being amended, to embrace regulatory sandboxing.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some specific changes have been brought to Section 23 of the Financial Services Act, to improve the regulatory purview, of the FSC for both issues and transfers of shares, for companies holding licences for financial business activities. Furthermore, in the same spirit, of increasing the oversight, of the FSC on its licensees, Section 42 of the Act, has also been amended, to ensure that there is adequate sharing of information, between an insolvency practitioner and the Commission.

As the law currently stands, the Commission is unable to access information relating to its licensees, upon the appointment of a liquidator or Official Receiver, Administrator or

Special Administrator. The FSC usually needs such information to discharge its functions under the relevant Acts and to adhere to its commitments under arrangements. However, when the FSC makes a request to obtain information from a liquidator or an administrator or special administrator, the latter may ignore the request given the absence of any statutory obligation to respond.

Given this absence of appropriate direction, there was a need to address this issue which would allow the FSC and the insolvency practitioner to rely on the exchange of information. Furthermore, the amendment is also proposed in line with FSC's vision to be an internationally recognised Financial Supervisor, committed to the sustained development of Mauritius, as a sound and competitive Financial Services Centre.

In its commitment towards this objective, the FSC is signatory to many international arrangements and admitted on high level committees within international standard setters. One of the main expectations from the FSC is the removal of barriers to facilitate the exchange of information in the wider common objective, which is the fight against financial crimes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, please allow me to elaborate on changes brought in respect to the insurance sector. The management of insurance claims has, over the years, been a subject of continuous discussions, given the increasing complexity of insurance claims. Fundamentally, to ensure that a fair and reflective sum of insurance premium is paid by a policyholder, premiums should be proportional to the risk, which the policyholder represents to an insurer.

Ideally, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, an individual, causing less accidents, should be charged a lower premium and belongs to a category of low risk policyholders while a driver, with previous claims history, with responsibility for accidents, should be paying an insurance proportionate to the risk he or she represents.

Hence, the introduction of a bonus-malus system, this system will add fairness in the calculation of motor insurance premiums, reduction of insurance fraud, duplication of claims and contribute to improve road safety levels in the long term. Accordingly, section 86 of the Insurance Act is being amended. There have also been numerous complaints on the business conduct of insurers that have been officially filed with the FSC in the past, and also with the Ombudsperson for financial services.

The FSC acknowledges that access to information delays the ability for authorities to rapidly bring changes at macro level in the claims management processes of insurers. Timely access to information and the completeness of information received are the two identified root causes of the issues raised by policyholders and third party claimants.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for a holistic approach to this sector-wide issue, the Insurance Act is being amended to include a new Section 6C, regarding the introduction of a National Insurance Claims Database. The FSC will develop a unified platform that will capture all motor insurance claims. This platform will allow the FSC to observe the business conduct of licensed insurers and insurance intermediaries. Insurers will also benefit, from the ability to detect the duplication of insurance claims and other instances of insurance fraud. The FSC will then have a complete picture of the position taken by insurers in their business conduct and their claims management processes. It is expected that visibility provided by this platform will encourage orderly business conduct by licensed insurers and insurance intermediaries. The FSC is required under the Insurance Act, to ensure that licensed insurers are treating policyholders fairly. With a complete and accurate picture, the FSC will be able to make evidence-based interventions and require remedial action from its licensees where necessary. I wish to highlight that, similar systems are being introduced on a pilot basis by the Singaporean Government to regulate medical insurance claims.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the amendment being proposed in the Insurance Act also caters for the importance of the role being played by insurance agents. Section 71 of the Insurance Act has been amended to ensure that there is an ongoing reporting obligation for insurance agents.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to ensure a sound insurance business, insurers have the obligation to ensure that their insurance agents are compliant with the licensing and regulatory requirements of the FSC during the length of their business relationships.

Furthermore, it has also been noted over the years that, stakeholders, such as travel agents, surveyors, and claims administrators, do not all operate on the same level playing field and have varying degree of difficulty.

For instance, travel agents are already selling travel insurance policies as an ancillary service. Nonetheless, they play a key role at the start of the business relationship between the insurer and the policyholder as insurance intermediaries. Travel agents are remunerated through commissions paid by insurance companies. Their activities are, presently restricted to

travel insurance and it is being proposed that less stringent licensing requirements be imposed in the case of travel agents.

Surveyors, on the other hand, are as important actors in the insurance eco-system and they play a determinant role in the claims management process.

Presently, insurers remunerate surveyors for their surveys and in turn rely on the estimated figures in the procured surveys to settle insurance claims. Ordinarily, motor insurance and building insurance claims require the involvement of surveyors.

The elevated risks to the independence of judgment of surveyors, lack of transparency, reported instances of unethical behaviour and the potential for conflicts of interest are issues that the Commission need to address, to protect consumers of financial services and bring an orderly conduct of business in the insurance sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, another set of stakeholders are the claims administrators who play a key role in the administration of health insurance claims. Claims administrators are presently unregulated and are found to play key roles at the start of business relationships between licensed insurers and the policyholders and throughout that relationship.

The FSC has noted the rise in insurance complaints, highlighting unethical conduct by claims administrators during the last few years. Therefore, section 78A of the Insurance Act, has been introduced which will allow for the licensing of other insurance professionals and the conduct of their business. For the Commission to capture surveyors and claims administrators under its regulatory purview, these two activities will be recognised as licensable activities, in the form of insurance intermediaries and regulations will be drafted to ensure the orderly conduct of business by surveyors and claims administrators.

Although, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Third-Party Administrators, play a vital role in the insurance value chain and provide a number of services to insurance companies, they are currently not regulated by the FSC. Amendments to the regulatory framework will therefore be made to bring Third-Party Administrators to fall under the ambit of the Insurance Act and provide for a regulated environment for Third-Party Administrators to operate.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, alongside measures to promote the jurisdiction, we have implemented key measures to protect the financial services sector. The Financial Reporting Act has been amended to give more clarity to penalties for licensed auditors and audit firms in case of breach of the Financial Reporting Act.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you will appreciate, that another bold step was taken by the Government by repealing Section 46(3) of the Income Tax Act which will now prevent the Trusts and Foundations set up in Mauritius from filing declaration of non-residence before the Mauritius Revenue Authority.

Early on, hon. Uteem referred to the impact of such an amendment would have on this sector, I must say, whilst we do understand that this will have, effectively, an impact on the industry, however, this is mandatory to be compliant with the norms of the OECD.

I wish to highlight that the forum on harmful tax practices has informed the Government on 09 June 2021 that the practice of filing of non-residence which exempts the trust from tax payment is actually enabling ring-fencing of funds and also the possibility for entities to be exempted from substance requirements.

Accordingly, repealing this section will ensure that entities set up in Mauritius will be deemed as resident. However, we also need to ensure that the financial services sector is not adversely impacted especially at a phase where Mauritius is rebuilding its economy. It is therefore being proposed that appropriate measures, in consultation with industry players, be taken to give more clarity and certainty to investors.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we need to understand that Mauritius is at a cross road whereby we cannot afford to be on any other list which can again impact on our attractiveness before our investors. This is the time to rebuild the economy and not to take any uncalculated risk.

With these words, I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Khushal Lobine!

(00:26 a.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. At this very early hour of Wednesday morning, I shall try not to be repetitive and not to go on amendments that have been already canvassed by hon. Members in this House.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. XIII of 2021) shall be bringing amendments to some 93 legislations and I shall be speaking on a few amendments being brought that, in my humble view, are not clear enough as to the intents

and purposes and I shall thus invite the hon. Minister to enlighten the House accordingly when he will be summing up.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have also been informed by some stakeholders that more time ought to have been given to them for a proper in-depth analysis of the amendments being brought but also to be given the opportunity to make proposals thereon, which they feel is a must as it has been the case previously, so they can disseminate same amongst all stakeholders within their respective business and economic activities. Unfortunately, they have informed me that this has not been the case and this time, they have not been able to hold consultations with hon. Members of this House but also with other stakeholders to give their views as to the amendments being brought to the Finance Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, hon. Uteem debated and canvassed the constitutional issues that shall arise with amendments being brought to the CEB Act, the CWA Act and the WMA Act with regard to compulsorily obtaining wayleave, I shall invite the hon. Minister that the legality of such amendments may be challenged in Court and better be wise before the event and do back pedal on these above mentioned amendments.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, basically this Bill has been following on the trend on which the hon. Minister has embarked upon since the presentation of his previous Finance Act, that is, sticking with a sense of continuity, I must say, in introducing new ways and means to come forward with measures to tax our people from all spheres of the society: super rich, rich, upper middle-class, middle-class, lower-middle class and the most vulnerable ones. And, despite being fuelled with abundant money at its disposal, I fail to understand this lack of empathy from Government towards all people in seizing every opportunity to tax them.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the additional levy of Rs2 per litre of Mogas and Gasoil, applied as from 01 July 2021 to apparently finance the cost of procuring COVID-19 vaccines is yet another vivid example after the CSG Tax of what the people of Mauritius have been gratified with in terms of philosophy from this Government. As if in those difficult days in our history, taxing our people in this 'new normal' has become the economic panacea of this Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me also add that it goes without saying that many amendments being brought, need to be tested, put into practice and also made workable within the proper, legal and regulatory frameworks. And, as such, a proper monitoring as to

the implementation of those proposed amendments, should be considered as being of utmost importance and I shall urge the hon. Minister to give due consideration to same.

Let me now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, provide my views as to amendments being brought to some legislations. Clause 3, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is bringing amendments to section 5 of the Bank of Mauritius Act which will allow the Bank of Mauritius to regulate and supervise financial institutions or start-ups providing relevant services under the FinTech Regulatory Sandbox License issued by the BoM and to be the macroprudential authority of Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the above mentioned amendments in my opinion, shall give a new role and dimension to the operation of the Bank of Mauritius which is supposed to discuss and take account of the financial stability, risks connected with a given monetary policy stands in formulating its macroprudential policies.

Monetary policymakers, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in turn, should take account of action or inaction on the part of the macroprudential authority, that is, the Bank of Mauritius, in this particular case when calibrating monetary policy.

Mutual internalisation of policy action that is conducive to an optimal policy mix can be more readily achieved, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when the Central Bank works in coordination with the Monetary Policy Committee. And, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they are expected to compliment and support each other.

However, there is also potential for a conflict of interest or at least trade-offs between them such as a monetary policy, that is too loose and is amplifying the financial cycle or conversely a macroprudential policy that is too restrictive having detrimental effects on credit provision and hence, monetary policy transmission.

Other amendments that are being brought, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is with regard to section 36 of the Bank of Mauritius Act which will empower the Bank of Mauritius to prescribe the framework and of which it will issue digital currency to be held or used by the public. An introduction of a new Section 42A, to make it an offence for any person who makes, counterfeits or alters a digital currency or uses a counterfeit digital currency and provides for the applicable sanctions.

Furthermore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at Clause 4, it is bringing amendment to the Banking Act with the introduction of new sections 11C and 11D that will establish the framework for applying for a Regulatory Sandbox Authorisation and authorise the BoM to

set up a FinTech innovation hub and digital lab for banking and payment services sectors amongst others.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, taking into account that such amendments cannot be brought now and then, in a piecemeal manner, as it has been the case year in, year out, I shall invite the hon. Minister to have a holistic approach and to come up with a comprehensive and new piece of legislation, a new Bank of Mauritius Act, a new Banking Act that will englobe all these amendments and thus help in bringing more clarity to all stakeholders and so that, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it becomes a piece of legislation that will cater for the future role of the Bank of Mauritius and also a golden opportunity to introduce a more coherent, independent and transparent checks and balance mechanisms so that the Central Bank of Mauritius may regain its credibility.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, talking about transparency, I do not also understand why an amendment is being brought to the Build Operate Transfer Projects Act whereby, at Clause 6 of the Bill, it will bring amendment to section 2 of the main Act, that is, they are reviewing the definition of 'control', 'own' and 'private-party'. But what is more puzzling, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that at section 3, a new subsection is being introduced to exempt the BOT project with a commercial component exceeding 80% of the estimated project value from conducting its procurement process including pre-qualifications of bidders through the Central Procurement Board.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when we very well know the ways and means of this Government that has mastered the technique of the setting up of special purpose vehicles and other entities to by-pass Public Procurement procedures and also evade the scrutiny of accountability so as not to be amenable to questions in Parliament, I am not convinced that this House should go ahead with this amendment to the BOT Act.

Because, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with this amendment at section 7 of the BOT Act, if a contracting authority has to seek the approval of Cabinet to proceed with a BOT project after structuring the project and empower a contracting authority to carry out the procurement exercise to select a private party, I shall move that same should be done within the parameters of the Public Procurement Act and another supervision of the Central Procurement Board.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have listened very carefully to the hon. Minister Seeruttun. At Clause 26, with regard to amendments being brought to the Financial Intelligence and

Anti-Money Laundering Act, by inserting after section 19A, a new section 19AA, for the establishment of Core Group. The functions of that Core Group shall be -

- (a) to ensure the effective implementation, by the relevant competent authorities of the Financial Action Task Force international standards on AML/CFT, and
- (b) to make recommendations to the Prime Minister on matters, including implementation, strategy and international developments, pertaining to AML/CFT; amongst others.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, how can such a group has as Co-chairperson the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius? How is that possible, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? The moreso, that he will operate under the Financial Secretary who shall be the Chairperson. But also, how can the same Core Group, has as member and the Chairperson and the Chief-Executive of the Financial Services Commission? And the Chairperson and the Chief-Executive will be sitting in the same Core Group; how can this be possible, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? In my humble opinion, this places this Core Group in an awkward position with overlapping of functions. You cannot have executives and political nominees running such an important Core Group.

Again, the composition of same should be looked at thoroughly and it is certainly not appropriate for the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius to be the Co-chairperson of this Core Group, together with the Director General of ICAC as the other Co-chairperson, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This is not correct! This is not within the policy of good corporate governance, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! These are two, supposedly, persons who are above politics. They are above policy-making mechanism. How can they now be called upon to make recommendations to the Prime Minister, amongst others? They are regulators. They should be independent. They cannot sit on a committee that will give recommendations on policy matters to the Prime Minister of Mauritius. This should be revisited, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. There is another amendment being proposed by Clause 12 to the Civil Status Act whereby Section 48 of the main Act is being amended to require the surviving spouse, heirs or any relatives of a Mauritian citizen who has died and whose body has already been disposed of abroad to inform the State of Mauritius within two months of the death by means of an original death certificate or certified true copy and to introduce a fine, not exceeding Rs5000 if there is non-compliance.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is harsh. Somebody's relative has passed away. They have done all the needful abroad. They cannot, without any, if I may say, *garde-fou* in the

law, ask them to pay a fine if there has been non-compliance. I am of the view, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that there should be more clarity and I propose that this section be redrafted so that only in the case if the non-compliance is through a wilful and intentional action from the surviving spouse, heirs and other relatives that the fine may become applicable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to make things more bitter for our people to swallow, maintaining the imposition of an additional sugar tax is also an outcry measure in my humble view. Clause 24 of the Bill is bringing amendment to the Excise Act so that this tax is maintained and there is only a change in the commencement date of the sugar tax of 0.06 cents per gram of sugar. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do not agree with this amendment because, at first, when we tax sugar, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we put the burden on people who are already burdened. All we are doing is continuing to make food more expensive, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while chronic diseases related to sugar like heart disease, obesity, diabetes affect all of society, they do disproportionately affect the poor, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The sugar tax is another round of policies that blame the victim rather than uprooting the systems that cause these chronic diseases. Second, putting this policy into place satiates our needs to address the real issues, the real problem. So the real problem continues Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

At Clause 45, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do however welcome amendments being brought to the Landlord and Tenant Act in Sections 3 and 17 of the main Act to allow a tenant to pay 50% of rent for months of March to August 2021 and for any subsequent month in 2021 as may be prescribed by the end of December 2021 and the remaining 50% of rental is payable in 12 equal monthly instalments from January to December 2022. I do appreciate and I do agree with this piece of amendment being brought to the Landlord and Tenant Act. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do also hope that incentives and amnesties are also provided to landlords who will be facing financial setbacks in the light of those amendments as pointed out rightly by hon. Uteem, because we have got two sides of the coin; the landlords who have invested massively in constructing houses, buildings and it might be their sole source of income. So, there should be also a look at those landlords and cater for more incentives to be offered to them through, maybe the Development Bank of Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will conclude with the Economic Development Board. Last year, the Finance Act gave EDB additional powers to process, for example, application for smart and innovative Mauritius Development Certificate and also provided for the creation of the Sports Economic Commission which now falls under the ambit of the EDB. This year, Mr

Deputy Speaker, Sir, Clause 22 is bringing yet again amendments to the Economic Development Board, whereby more powers are being given to the EDB to clarify schemes which EDB will administer and manage to enable EDB to provide relevant facilitation and advisory services to business in Mauritius. Its board is being reinforced to include representatives of the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning. The further consolidation of the powers of the EDB, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is provided for the EDB to review the process and criteria for registration and deregistration of permits and to provide for the setting up of the Premium Investor Scheme.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, holders of the premium investor certificate will benefit from incentives to be recommended by the Technical Committee which is catered for in this Bill. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, another amendment being brought apart from the creation of the Technical Committee is the setting up of the Business Regulatory Review Council that will develop a national business-related regulatory reform policy on the licensing, permits and administration of system in Mauritius. This is a dangerous precedent again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when such powers are being given *ad nauseam* by this Government, making EDB, as is already the case with Landscape Mauritius Ltd, operate as a super-ministry through those amendments.

Again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this ought to have come before this House as a separate Bill for us to debate on the accruing powers being given to the EDB so that all stakeholders may have a look at all the powers that EDB has been offered by this Government since 2019. Every year, year in, year out, you are building up and they are becoming a very formidable force in the economic sector of Mauritius and within the investing arm and advisory bodies of Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as it stands, the EDB, through those consolidated amendments being brought by this Bill, will be also acting as a parallel Cabinet of Ministers. I urge my hon. friend Ministers to take stock of the situation and again, this is a fit and proper case for the hon. Minister to come before this House with a substantive piece of legislation with regard to the Economic Development Board Act because powers of the Executive are being vested in the EDB and many powers that were vested to the Executive, hon. Ministers going to Cabinet are being undertaken by the Economic Development Board.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this pandemic has brought the biggest shock to workers' wages since independence and it is the paramount duty of Government to support our vulnerable households, our stressed working class and Government has got the means to do so. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, taxing our people is certainly not the way forward. It is certainly not justifiable to continue to impose the additional levy of Rs2 per litre of Mogas and Gasoil applied as from 01 July 2021 to apparently finance the cost of procuring COVID-19 vaccines. The hon. Minister should revisit this decision in the best interests of our nation, the more so, as we are all facing the ripple effect of the depreciation of our rupee towards the main foreign currencies, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

So, I shall urge the hon. Minister to kindly consider the points being canvassed from this side of the House and to revisit, for the sake of our country, this levy, this tax of Rs2 on Mogas and Gasoil. I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for your kind attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

(00.47 a.m.)

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and good morning.

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning to you too.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: M. le président, je ne vais pas être long parce que je vois que tout le monde prend sommeil actuellement...

The Deputy Speaker: I am not!

Mrs Navarre-Marie:...mais il est de mon devoir de m'associer à mon jeune collègue, le deuxième député de Port-Louis Sud, Port-Louis Central pour mettre en exergue le fait que le *Fishermen Investment Trust* aurait dû faire l'objet d'un profond débat.

M. le président, le *Finance Bill*, devant la Chambre aujourd'hui, fait mention à la section 30 – *to repeal the Fishermen Investment Trust*. Or, aucune mention dans ce sens n'a été faite dans le discours du Budget par le ministre des Finances. Le ministre de *Blue Economy* non plus n'a pas fait d'allusion à ce projet de dissolution de *FIT* lors de son intervention sur le discours du budget, seulement en une petite phrase laconique, en annexe du discours du budget, à la page 63. Même hier soir, le ministre n'a pas mentionné une seule fois le *Fishermen Investment Trust*. Pourquoi cette décision de dissolution?

Le ministre doit des explications à la communauté des pêcheurs. Une telle décision, M. le président, aurait dû être débattue avec la présentation d'un *full-fledged Bill*. Le *FIT*, le *Fishermen Investment Trust*, a été mis en place à la suite d'une loi votée au Parlement en 2006 sur la même philosophie que le *SIT*, le *Sugar Investment Trust*, émanant du *Sugar Efficiency Act*. Le gouvernement a injecté R 15 m. en 2007 en termes d'actions pour le compte des pêcheurs de Maurice et de Rodrigues. 300 actions plus R 10 à chacun soit R 3000 pour chaque pêcheur. Le *Trust* est censé être géré par un conseil d'administration et trois représentants de pêcheurs auraient dû siéger sur le *Board* selon les provisions de la loi.

En 2013, un accord a été signé avec la *FAO-Smart Fish* pour le projet intitulé '*Support to Sustainable Aquaculture Development through the Promotion of Small-Scale Cage Culture in the Lagoon of the Island of Mauritius*'. Une extension du projet a été approuvée en 2013. L'un des objectifs du projet est de promouvoir l'aquaculture en tant que *diversification opportunity for redundant fishers*, soit pour les pêcheurs qui ne peuvent plus aller en mer. Des cages ont été installées dans différentes régions de l'île, à savoir à Grand-Gaube, à Trou D'Eau Douce et Quatre Sœurs. Deux bateaux ont été acquis par le *Trust*, achetés par le *Trust*. La *MEXA* a également fait don d'un bateau de pêche, entièrement équipé pour la pêche à la palangre. Le *FIT* a un quota de 300 tonnes de poissons pêchés à St-Brandon et de 400 tonnes sur les bancs de Nazareth, quota que le *FIT* peut commercialiser auprès de n'importe quel opérateur du secteur.

Il existe également un Protocol d'entente avec le *Sepang Today Aquaculture Centre*, basé à *Kuala Lumpur* en Malaisie pour *capacity-building*. Il semblerait, M. le président, qu'il n'y ait pas eu suffisamment de volonté politique pour faire évoluer le *FIT*, d'où la décision de dissoudre cette organisme. De 2018-2019, l'audit avait recommandé *that the Ministry had to decide on the future operation of the FIT after consultations with the stakeholders concerned* mais, toutefois, certaines questions doivent être posées -

1. Pourquoi venir avec la fermeture de ce *Trust en catimini*?
2. Est-ce qu'il y a eu des consultations avec les pêcheurs actionnaires avant d'arriver à cette décision?
3. Pourquoi est-ce que le *FIT* n'a pas marché?
4. Qui ont bénéficié de la vente des quotas de poissons de *FIT* ?
5. Combien est-ce qu'ils ont payé à la *FIT*?
6. Pourquoi des dividendes n'ont pas été distribués aux actionnaires, aux pêcheurs?

7. Combien ont été payé en termes de salaire?
Le rapport de l'audit mentionne que d'août 2014 au 30 juin 2020, *FIT* a payé R 4 m. en termes de salaire.
8. Combien de personnes sont employées par le *FIT*?
9. Qu'advient-il des employés du *FIT*?
10. Est-ce que ces employés seront affectés ailleurs? Si oui, où?
11. Est-ce que les pêcheurs, les actionnaires sont au courant de ce qu'advient les *assets* du *Trust*?
12. Pourquoi le ministre redoute-t-il ces questions et choisit de dissoudre ce *Trust en catimini* ?

Il y a trop des questions sans réponses.

Au nom des pêcheurs, M. le président, et surtout au nom de la transparence, cette décision mérite un vrai débat et je pense que le ministre aurait dû présenter un *full-fledged Bill* pour permettre un débat profond sur la question. J'espère que le ministre nous éclaircira.

Je vous en remercie.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. You have been very quick and short at this early hour of the morning.

Hon. Minister!

(00.56 a.m.)

The Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping (Mr S. Maudhoo): Good morning to everybody. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 30 July at 03.00 p.m.

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

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned. Hon. Quirin!

MATTERS RAISED

ALBION – INHABITANTS - PETITION AGAINST CHINA JIANGSU COMPANY LTD

Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse au ministre de l'Environnement et concerne une pétition des habitants de Belle Vue Phare à Albion contre la compagnie *China Jiangsu Mauritius Construction Ltd*. Cette société déverse illégalement des déchets et des débris de ses chantiers de construction dans la réserve de la rivière Belle-Eau à Albion. J'ai d'ailleurs des photos pour le prouver et que je vais déposer. J'attire l'attention du ministre sur le fait que cette réserve fluviale est située à proximité des propriétés résidentielles, ce qui explique, M. le président, la colère et l'incompréhension des habitants de Belle Vue Phare devant l'absence des réactions du Conseil de District de Rivière-Noire et de la police d'Albion face à leurs doléances.

Mais déjà, M. le président, il a été constaté que la rivière est remplie de déchets et cela peut causer des inondations en cas de grosses pluies. Avec les agissements de cette compagnie, les habitants de Belle Vue Phare doivent faire face à une pollution sonore en raison des va et vient incessants des camions et d'autres machines qui affectent la tranquillité. L'accumulation des déchets a commencé à affecter la qualité de l'air avec une odeur nauséabonde qui se dégage quotidiennement, ce qui à terme peut provoquer des maladies et nuire à la santé des habitants de cette région et pour terminer, M. le président, les habitants se plaignent aussi des mouvements dangereux des métaux, surtout des feuilles de tôles en cette période où il y a des gros coups de vent et ajouter à cela, des dortoirs et un store qui ont été aménagés illégalement.

Merci, donc, à l'honorable ministre de l'Environnement de réagir promptement à cette requête.

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre pour le point soulevé. J'ai bien reçu une lettre à ce propos des habitants le 26 de ce mois-ci. Et la police de l'environnement est descendue sur les lieux à Albion. La compagnie de construction en

question y opère un *yard* pour le stockage de ses matériaux et aussi, à ce qu'il paraît, un dortoir.

M. le président, aucun cas d'*illegal dumping* tel quel n'a été constaté dans les cours d'eaux avoisinants. Je parle de vérifications qui ont été faits récemment. Il se peut très bien qu'il y ait eu des cas d'*illegal dumping* avant mais à ce jour rien n'a été constaté sur place. Toutefois, le responsable des lieux et le représentant de la compagnie a été intimé à s'assurer que le *yard* soit dans un état ordonné et ne soit plus considéré comme une nuisance à l'environnement. Un délai d'une semaine a été accordé pour y remédier. Je peux assurer la Chambre, aujourd'hui, que le suivi va être fait par la police de l'environnement. S'il y a un quelconque égard, donc les mesures appropriées seront prises.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Hon. Dhunoo, try to address your request directly rather than like making a speech.

(1.00 a.m.)

DILCHAND LANE, COUVENT STREET - DORMITORY

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The matter I wish to raise tonight is addressed to hon. Soodesh Callichurn, Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection. It concerns a company which has made a residential house a dormitory in Dilchand Lane at *La Rue Couvent*, and it seems it is not complying with conditions as required by the Ministry of Labour, for a dormitory. It is causing many problems to the inhabitants with regard to the number of foreign workers, more than usual it can accommodate in the house, and also causing sanitary conditions with used water being discharged in the neighbourhood. I will give the name of the company to the Minister and I will request him to use his good office for necessary actions to be taken to remedy the situation, and check if the said company is complying with the necessary conditions as stipulated by his Ministry.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you! Hon. Minister Maudhoo will take it.

The Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping (Mr S. Maudhoo): Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member. I will definitely relay this problem to my colleague.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Armance!

(1.01 a.m.)

POINTE AUX SABLES - FLATS GUILLARD - WASTE WATER

Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): M. le président, ma requête ce soir s'adresse au ministre de l'Environnement, de la Gestion des Déchets solides et du Changement climatique, l'honorable Ramano. C'est concernant un cas de pollution, plus précisément d'eaux usées dans la région de Pointe aux Sables en face des Flats Guillard. Il est porté à ma connaissance que le ministre ainsi que la *PPS* ont visité les lieux il y a quelque temps. C'est un problème qui dure depuis des mois, voire même des années. Et je souhaiterais que le ministre revienne dans la Chambre pour nous dire s'il a pu trouver une solution pour un problème qui est récurrent, un problème qui dure assez longtemps et qui cause beaucoup de nuisances pour les habitants de la région.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: I got your request. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): M. le président, je peux rassurer l'honorable membre, effectivement, j'ai fait une visite suite aux doléances des habitants, conjointement avec la *PPS* Dr. Dorine Chukowry. Et je dois dire que la *Wastewater Authority* a été très réceptive à la doléance. Je sais qu'une solution a été trouvée au problème, et je pense que dans les mois à venir le problème sera résolu.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Uteem!

(1.02 a.m.)

LA BRILLANE & DESROCHES STREETS, PORT LOUIS - ONE-WAY ROAD SIGN

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The issue I want to raise is addressed to the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development. It concerns the inhabitants of La Brillane Street, Port Louis and Desroches Street, Port Louis. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these two streets are one-way streets. Unfortunately, we no longer have the one-way sign post and we do not have the white line anymore, and there is a risk of serious accidents being caused because those who are not familiar with these streets can go into a one-way street thinking that it is not a one-way street. So, I would make a request to the hon. Minister of

National Infrastructure and Community Development, if he could liaise with the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit to ensure that these two streets are properly indicated that they are one-way streets.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister Toussaint will take it.

The Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation (Mr S. Toussaint): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will pass on the message to my colleague.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. David!

(1.03 a.m.)

MAURITIAN BOXERS – FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête de ce petit matin s'adresse au ministre de la Jeunesse et des sports, et concerne quatre boxeurs Mauriciens de boxe-française qui défendent actuellement nos couleurs en Autriche. En effet, M. le président, alors que nous avons nos yeux et nos cœurs - et nous avons bien raison de le faire - braqué sur nos sportifs olympiques à Tokyo qui font notre fierté nationale, une petite délégation mauricienne participe depuis hier au championnat du monde de savate boxe-française en Autriche. Il s'agit de Sharon Claire, Didier Brasse, Akilesh Bhantooa et Olivier Lafleur. Alors, je sais que le ministère de la Jeunesse et des sports a accordé à la fédération mauricienne concernée une aide financière pour l'achat de trois billets d'avion, mais je sais aussi que ces quatre boxeurs qui se battent sur le ring actuellement en Autriche, se battent également hors du ring pour rassembler l'argent nécessaire pour payer les frais de quarantaine à leur retour à Maurice dans quelques jours. Puis-je solliciter la considération du ministre pour voir dans quelle mesure il serait possible de soulager le fardeau financier de Sharon, Didier, Akilesh et Olivier ?

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member.

Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation (Mr S. Toussaint): M. le président, je remercie l'honorable membre qui m'avait prévenu qu'il allait soulever ce point à l'ajournement. Nous avons pu pendant le dîner avoir une discussion et je lui ai

expliqué comment le ministère fonctionne et comment chaque fédération est allouée un budget spécifique. Alors, en ce qu'il s'agit de boxe-française, le ministère a alloué à cette fédération une somme de R 121,500 pour les billets. Et il était convenu avec la fédération qu'au niveau du ministère nous allons aider pour le billet d'avion et que la fédération avait accepté de trouver d'autres moyens de financement. Donc, il n'est pas normal que cet autre moyen de financement revienne encore une fois vers le ministère, tout en sachant que c'est une fédération qui a un budget total de R 220,400 et dedans, donc, nous avons déjà alloué R 121,000, presque la moitié. Dans ce qui reste, il y a R 50,000 qui sera utilisées sur toute l'année pour payer la secrétaire administrative. Et il va sans dire que si nous enlevons encore une certaine somme pour le paiement de quarantaine, il ne va absolument rien rester pour que la fédération puisse gérer ses différentes activités tout le long de l'année. Malheureusement, nous ne pouvons accéder à cette requête.

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of all hon. Members that the House is already adjourned. However, I see only 16 hon. Members here. We have to be very careful on the next occasion. I will still take your adjournment matter because it has been adjourned. *Il y a 16 membres.*

(1.06 a.m.)

DAUPHINE & SIR VIRGILE NAZ STREETS, PORT LOUIS - ROAD ACCIDENTS

Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I wish to raise an important matter of road safety to the attention of the hon. Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, hon. Alan Ganoo. The problem is located at the intersection of Dr. Eugene Laurent Street, with two busy roads, namely Dauphine and Sir Virgile Naz Streets in Port Louis, at the intersection. Several road accidents and even a fatal one have occurred at these junctions and accidents keep happening there. And what makes matters more worrisome, is the proximity of two colleges there, namely the Loreto Convent of Port Louis and the Muslim Girls College. I have written to the TMRSU...

The Deputy Speaker: Put your request!

Mr Osman Mahomed: ... on 28 August 2020, nearly one year ago, but so far no actions have happened. I am tabling a copy of this letter to the attention of hon. Ganoo, hoping that needful will be done so that no further accidents happen at these junctions.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Anybody will take the request?

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Yes, may I, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? On behalf of my colleague, I have taken note of the issue raised by hon. Osman Mahomed and I will convey same to hon. Minister Ganoo. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Have a safe trip back home!

At 1.08 a.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 30 July 2021 at 3.00 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

GOODLANDS POLICE STATION - OFFICERS - RANKS

(No. B/783) 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 the Goodlands Police Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of officers, grade-wise, posted thereat since 2015 to date, indicating if it is adequately resourced to discharge the roles and responsibilities thereof optimally.

Reply: The Commissioner of Police has informed that the Goodlands Police Station is presently manned by 96 Police Officers of different ranks. I am placing the information regarding the number of Police Officers, grade-wise, posted thereat since 2015 in the Library of the National Assembly.

The Commissioner of Police has also informed that, in addition to the existing workforce of the Goodlands Police Station, the officers are supported in the exercise of their duties by Police Officers posted to other units/branches such as the Divisional Criminal Investigation Division, the Divisional Supporting Unit, the Anti-Drug Supporting Unit, the Emergency Response Service, the Traffic Police and Field Intelligence Officers. This collaborative approach and the images and information received from the Safe City Monitoring Bays, are adequate for an effective and efficient policing of the station area.

It is to be noted that whenever there is a major event or incident in the station area, the station personnel is reinforced with additional staff from other Police Stations and units/branches. There are also regular mobile patrols by the Special Mobile Force and the Special Supporting Unit in the Northern Division including Goodlands Station Area.

Moreover, the Police have been working in close partnership with community representatives, business operators, private security companies, and other stakeholders, to further enhance the fight against crimes and illegal activities in the Goodlands Police Station area. This holistic and multi-sectoral approach is yielding positive results.

MAURITIUS PORTS AUTHORITY – TUGS – PROCUREMENT PROCEDURES

(No. B/784) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to tugs, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Ports Authority, information as to –

- (a) the number thereof in operation as at to date, indicating in each case the –
 - (i) capacity, and
 - (ii) date of commissioning thereof;
- (b) if new ones are being purchased and, if so, indicate the –
 - (i) capacity thereof, and
 - (ii) procurement method used therefor, and
- (c) if additional ones are presently being leased and, if so, indicate the leasing procedures resorted to.

Reply: One of the main responsibilities of the Mauritius Ports Authority (MPA) is to provide safe and secure pilotage services for the berthing and unberthing of vessels in the Port. Port Louis Harbour is the deepest port in the Region and can service the latest generation of vessels.

The Director General of the MPA has informed that the MPA has adequate number of tugs available to service all types of vessels presently calling at Port Louis Harbour. The MPA operates a fleet of four big tugs and four small tugs at Port Louis and two small tugs at Port Mathurin. For Port Louis Harbour, three big tugs and three small tugs are required at any point in time to offer an efficient and reliable service. Having spare capacity facilitates rotation for planned maintenance and *ad hoc* repairs.

As at date, all the tugs are operational except one big tug, Mahé de Labourdonnais which is under repairs and another big tug, Sir Edouard, whose class certificate has expired on 07 July 2021. The Sir Edouard tug was commissioned in 2016 and, as it has been in operation for five years, it will have to be dry docked for maintenance as per the conditions

attached to the class certificate. After maintenance, the tug will be surveyed prior to renewal of the class certification. The tug is expected to be back in operation within a period of two months. Meanwhile, a combination of two big tugs and small tugs will be used to safely manoeuvre vessels at Port Louis Harbour.

As regards part (a) of the question, I am placing the requested information in the Library of the National Assembly.

Regarding part (b) of the question, the Director General of the MPA has informed that the MPA, taking into consideration its replacement plan for old tugs, has started procurement procedures under the aegis of the Central Procurement Board, for acquisition of two big tugs and four small tugs through an Open International Bidding exercise.

One big tug will have a bollard pull capacity of 70 tonnes whereas the second tug will be designed as a First Response Tug with a bollard pull capacity of 80 tonnes. The First Response Tug, apart from operating as a harbour tug, will also be used to respond to any ship in distress and to any oil spill in our waters pending the timely mobilisation of an appropriate salvage tug. These two tugs will replace the tug Mahé de Labourdonnais which is 20 years old and tug Al Tareef 1, presently on lease from Abu Dhabi Ports Company PJSC.

As regards the small tugs, the MPA has planned to procure immediately off the shelf, two tugs of bollard pull capacity between 15 to 18 tonnes for which bids have already been launched and will be received under the aegis of the CPB and will be opened on 12 August 2021. The two other tugs of bollard pull capacity of 15 tonnes to be procured through normal tendering.

Regarding part (c) of the question, the Director General of the MPA has also informed that the MPA has leased a two-year old tug of 60 tonnes bollard pull capacity as from 14 November 2020 from Abu Dhabi Ports under an existing Memorandum of Agreement, signed in June 2019, providing for cooperation to pool their combined expertise to enhance the maritime sector across the Indian Ocean.

In fact, the MPA had, in February 2019, floated an Expression of Interest through the local Press, the websites of Mauritius Ports Authority/Procurement Policy Office and the foreign embassies/consulates for selection of brokers. Five firms submitted their applications and two ship brokers were shortlisted following an evaluation exercise. In January 2020, they were requested to submit firm proposals for chartering of one big tug and one small tug. The financial proposals received were examined by the MPA and found to exceed by far the estimated cost of Rs3.5 m. per month, that is, Rs84 m. for two years. The offers made were

of the order of Rs6,318,000 and Rs7,080,000 per month. The proposals were, therefore, not retained for further consideration.

The Board of the MPA decided to explore leasing of tug under cooperation programmes it had with other ports. The Abu Dhabi Ports was the only one that had responded favourably at an approximate cost of Rs3 m. per month, which was found to be fair and reasonable by the Bid Evaluation Committee of the MPA.

Accordingly, on 11 September 2020, a Charter Agreement, in accordance with international standards, duly vetted by the Attorney General's Office, was signed between the MPA and the Abu Dhabi Ports Company PJSC for the lease of the tug for a period of two years. The tug has been in operation since November 2020 and is giving full satisfaction to the Mauritius Ports Authority.

**SIR GAËTAN TUG - OFFICERS - DEATH - COMPENSATION &
ASSISTANCE**

(No. B/785) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the families of the officers lost at sea in the wreck of the Sir Gaëtan tug, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Ports Authority, information as to if –

- (a) all compensations due have been paid thereto and, if so, when, and
- (b) assistance has been extended for the payment of the education fees of the children thereof.

Reply: On the night of 31 August 2020, the MPA Tug Sir Gaëtan, while towing the barge L'Ami Constant in connection with the MV Wakashio salvage operation, had an accident and sank off the coast of Poudre d'Or. Following this tragic accident, it was very unfortunate that, out of eight crew members, three were retrieved dead and one was reported missing. Following an application made to the Supreme Court by the wife of the crew member reported missing, a judicial declaration of death of the latter was pronounced on 07 December 2020.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority (MPA) has informed that the families of the four Officers who perished at sea, have each been paid, under the Pension and Family Protection Schemes with SICOM Ltd, a death gratuity, a lifetime pension to the spouse of the deceased crew members, a pension allowance for the children below 18 years old and benefits under the Family Protection Scheme. The families of the three deceased crew members have been paid their compensation

on 25 September 2020, 12 October 2020 and 16 October 2020, respectively. As regards the family of the crew member who was declared dead by the Supreme Court on 07 December 2020, disbursements of compensations have been made on 29 January and 26 February 2021.

The Director General of the MPA has further informed that the payment of only one compensation is still pending. This compensation pertains to an insurance cover, namely the Group Personal Accident Insurance Cover which is taken by the Mauritius Ports Authority with SICOM Ltd for its employees in cases of injury or accidental death.

The proceeds under the Group Personal Accident Insurance Cover for the four families have been remitted by SICOM Ltd to the Mauritius Ports Authority in February 2021.

Since March 2021, the Legal Counsel of the MPA has been liaising with the Attorney representing the interests of the four bereaved families for the disbursement of compensation proceeds under the Group Personal Accident Insurance Cover.

On 30 May 2021, the Legal Counsel of the MPA requested the Counsels and the Attorney of the four families to propose a date for the heirs to collect the remaining compensation from the Authority. However, no response was obtained from them regarding the collection of the compensation payable under the Group Personal Accident Cover.

In the circumstances, the MPA has addressed a correspondence to each of the four families on 14 June 2021 requesting them to liaise with their legal representatives for the collection of the compensation payable to them under the Group Personal Accident Cover, by 21 June 2021.

The Director General of the MPA has also informed that none of the families has, so far, responded to the correspondence of the MPA. On the other hand, two of the four families informed the Mauritius Ports Authority, on 21 June 2021, that they have retained the services of new Counsels and that they will revert to the MPA in due course.

As regards part (b) of the question, the Director General of the MPA has also informed that only two of the four families have children pursuing secondary or tertiary studies.

A scheme for educational support was devised by the MPA to assist the children of those two families during their secondary and tertiary education and proposed to the families on 11 December 2020. However, the two families have not agreed to the proposal.

The MPA has informed that it is awaiting a response from the families to conclude the matter.

**MPA - NEW AUTOMATED IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM & VESSEL TRAFFIC
SYSTEM - STAFF - TRAINING**

(No. B/786) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the new Automated Identification System and Vessel Monitoring System installed at the radio tower control, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Ports Authority, information as to if training has been given to the personnel for the use thereof.

Reply: The Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority has informed that the Vessel Monitoring System referred to by the hon. Member is in fact a Vessel Traffic System. This system is a vital tool for tracking and monitoring the flow of vessels heading to Port Louis Harbour. It includes radars and Automatic Identification System for vessels and provides graphical display for traffic movement at Port Louis Harbour. The Automatic Identification System onboard vessels continuously emits signals which are received by the Vessel Traffic System at the Port.

On 20 November 2019, the Mauritius Ports Authority awarded the Contract for the Supply, Installation, and Commissioning of a new Port Louis Vessel Traffic System to Elman S.R.L. at the total price of Euro 1,283,860 in replacement of the previous system which was installed in 2008.

The installation of the system was completed in March 2021 and has been in operation since then. However, the system has not yet been commissioned due to travel restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Commissioning is scheduled after opening of borders in October 2021.

The contract for the supply of the equipment provides for on-site training for harbour radio staff for a period of 20 days.

The supplier could not travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic and proposed to dispense a preliminary training via video conference in the first instance. Once travelling to Mauritius becomes possible, the on-site full-fledged training would be carried out. In the meantime, a 5-day online training has been provided by the supplier to port radio operators in batches from 22 February to 05 March 2021. The purpose and objective of the online training was to provide an overview of the new Vessel Traffic System and its functionalities. The trainers walked through the system configuration and explained to the operators some core operations and tasks on the Vessel Traffic System to render it functional.

It is to be noted that the port radio operators were already using the old Vessel Traffic System since 2008 and are thus familiar with a Vessel Traffic System. Moreover, the Mauritius Ports Authority is providing supplementary in-house training to port radio operators at the Harbour Radio Unit to prepare them for the specialised training to be provided by the supplier which will enable the operators to fully optimise the use of the advanced features of the new system.

LONG MOUNTAIN POLICE STATION - MR J. J. - ARREST

(No. B/787) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to one Mr J. J., arrested by a Police Officer of the Long Mountain Police Station, on 17 July 2021, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) reasons for the arrest, and
- (b) if the arrest was executed pursuant to a warrant of arrest duly issued or pursuant to the inherent power of arrest of a Police Officer.

Reply: With regard to parts (a) and (b) of the question, the Commissioner of Police has informed that Mr J. J. was summoned to appear before the Pamplemousses Court on 09 June 2021, as accused in a case of Outrage against Depository of Public Authority in breach of Section 156(1) (3) of the Criminal Code. As Mr J. J. did not attend Court at that material time, the District Magistrate issued a warrant of arrest against him at 09.40 hours on that day.

On that same day, at around 14.45 hours, Mr A. J., the brother of Mr J. J., called at Pamplemousses Court and informed the District Magistrate that Mr J. J. could not attend Court as he was at the place of his mother-in-law who resides at Vallée Pitot, declared a red zone from 24 May 2021 to 12 June 2021. Consequently, the District Magistrate issued a Notice to Police to stay execution of the warrant.

On 11 June 2021, the Pamplemousses Prosecutor's Office reportedly overlooked this Notice and forwarded the warrant of arrest to Long Mountain Police Station. Unaware of the Notice of stay of execution of the warrant, the Long Mountain Police Station proceeded with the arrest of Mr J. J. on 17 July 2021.

It is only on 19 July 2021 when Mr J. J. was brought to Pamplemousses District Court for appearance that the Police was informed by the Court Clerk that the warrant had already been recalled on the 09 June 2021 itself. Mr J. J. was, therefore, released by the Police.

The Commissioner of Police has further informed that he has instituted a departmental enquiry to investigate into the matter with a view to situating responsibility for executing an arrest warrant which had already been recalled by the Magistrate. The enquiry is ongoing.

Moreover, the Police Department has a computerisation project in the pipeline to link the entire Police Force to facilitate the relay of information in real time. The system would also be linked to the Judiciary regarding prosecutions and Court cases. Hence, the recurrence of a similar incident will be reduced.

BORDERS - REOPENING - AUTHORISED INTERNATIONAL & REGIONAL PASSENGER FLIGHTS

(No. B/788) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam International Airport, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the airlines which are authorised to operate flights through same with effect from 15 July 2021, indicating the countries –

- (a) from which incoming passengers will be allowed to disembark thereat, and
- (b) to which outgoing passengers will embark.

Reply: For the phase 1 of the re-opening of borders, from 15 July to 30 September 2021, Air Mauritius and four other airlines, namely Emirates Airlines, Turkish Airlines, Air France and Air Austral have as at now been authorised to operate international and regional passenger flights to and from Mauritius. Consideration of requests from some other airlines, which have applied to operate during phase 1, is proceeding at the level of the Department of Civil Aviation.

With regard to part (a) of the question, passengers from any country except South Africa and Brazil will be allowed entry into Mauritius subject to compliance with sanitary measures as approved by the Ministry of Health and Wellness. Passengers arriving from South Africa and Brazil will be allowed entry into Mauritius only if they have stayed in a country other than South Africa and Brazil for at least 15 days.

As regards part (b) of the question, there is no restriction on departing passengers. In Mauritius, all departing passengers are subjected to temperature check, social distancing, wearing of face mask, and use of hand sanitizers at the airport. The onus for disembarking in a country with sanitary restrictions is on the passengers who should, prior to boarding the

flight in Mauritius, ensure that they comply with the sanitary protocol applicable in the country of destination.

POLICE SERGEANT & POLICE INSPECTOR - VACANT POSTS

(No. B/789) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the vacant posts in the grade of Police Sergeant and Inspector of Police, respectively, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to when competitive examinations will be held for the filling thereof.

Reply: Promotion in the Mauritius Police Force is governed by Regulation 19 of the Disciplined Forces Service Commission (DFSC) Regulations 1997, and is based on, and made by way of –

- (a) competitive examination;
- (b) successful completion of approved courses;
- (c) promotion in specialised unit, and
- (d) seniority.

The Commissioner of Police has informed that, as at Thursday 22 July 2021, there were 783 vacancies in the grade of Police Sergeant and 22 vacancies in the grade of Woman Police Sergeant, and 32 vacancies in the grade of Inspector of Police. There is no vacancy in the grade of Woman Police Inspector.

It is reminded that Government pledged that Police Constables/Woman Police Constables reckoning 20 years' service would be automatically promoted to the grade of Police Sergeant/Woman Police Sergeant. In line with this commitment, Government has agreed that the vacant posts of Police Sergeant/Woman Police Sergeant be filled as follows –

- (i) 80% of the total number of vacancies by way of promotion of Police Corporals/Woman Police Corporals and Police Constables/Woman Police Constables reckoning at least 20 years' service in the Police Force, and
- (ii) the remaining 20% by selection, which will involve a competitive examination, from among Police Constables/Woman Police Constables reckoning at least five years' service in the Police Force and from Police Corporals/Woman Police Corporals.

Accordingly, action has already been initiated by the Mauritius Police Force.

With regard to the grade of Inspector of Police/Woman Police Inspector, the Commissioner of Police has informed that consideration will be given for the holding of competitive examination once the promotion exercise of Police Corporals/Woman Police Corporals and Police Constables/Woman Police Constables to the grade of Police Sergeant/Woman Police Sergeant has been completed.

POINTE D'ESNY - VESSELS - BREAKING DOWN

(No. B/790) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the vessels which ran aground/broke down off the shores of Pointe D'Esny since August 2020 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) the number thereof which solicited the help of the National Coast Guard to exit therefrom, and
- (b) in each case, the –
 - (i) country's flag flown;
 - (ii) length of stay on-site;
 - (iii) destination thereof, and
 - (iv) goods being transported.

(Withdrawn)

INTERNET CONNECTION - SPECIAL PACKAGE - ONLINE LEARNING

(No. B/815) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to internet connection, he will state if he will consider liaising with the relevant stakeholders therefor with a view to devising a special package for the users thereof for online learning.

Reply: Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are licensed by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) for the provision of internet access to the public. These operators generally have their own respective infrastructure, business models and pricing strategies when designing their commercial offers towards the public, including the student community. They are all subject to the regulatory supervision of the Information

and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) which ensures that fair competition exists between them so that consumers benefit, including the student community.

Accordingly, each of these ISPs offers different competing internet packages to both communities, that is, households and corporates. ICTA ensures that neither predatory nor excessive prices are charged.

The proposal of the hon. Member has been noted and the operators will be encouraged to come up with special packages for the student community in the new reality.

SIR SEEWOSAGAR RAMGOOLAM INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT – OPENING OF BORDERS

(No. B/816) 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 taxi operators based at the Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam International Airport, he will state if he will use his good office to come up with an agreement with the stakeholders regarding the conveyance of passengers following the opening of our borders phase one.

Reply: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by the DPM and myself to the House on 20 July 2021. Meetings with the concerned taxi drivers were held both at my level and at the level of the Deputy Prime Minister wherein the necessity for strict adherence to the sanitary measures, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, for the transfer of incoming passengers from the Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam International Airport to the quarantine facilities was clearly spelt out.

The rationale as to why this transfer has been entrusted to two Destination Management Companies (DMCs) with more than 10 years' experience at this stage, relates to the imperatives of the revised and updated sanitary protocol agreed by the Government and the conditions attached, namely –

- i. Operators to make use of collective means of transport as opposed to individual motorcars;
- ii. All drivers to bear an identification badge and are either protected by a plexiglass screen or wear a face shield in addition to their masks;
- iii. The DMC must designate an overall airport supervisor, equipped with a logbook and be responsible to ensure strict compliance with sanitary measures;

- iv. The lists of staff and vehicles involved in the transfers are submitted to the Ministry of Health and Wellness and other relevant authorities two days prior to relevant flight arrivals;
- v. All the vehicles involved in the airport transfers must be thoroughly disinfected between each airport or hotel transfer, and
- vi. Their frontliners have been fully vaccinated and have also benefited from COVID-related and protocol-based training dispensed by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Tourism.

The Taxi Unions representing taxis operating at the Airport and Hotels have been invited to submit additional proposals that they may wish to submit to assist them, in these present exceptional circumstances, by Wednesday 28 July 2021.

I wish to reassure the House that once these proposals are obtained, same would be urgently examined for recommendations to be made to Government. Close follow-up would also be ensured for speedy implementation.

COVID-19 PATIENTS - MORTALITY RATE, DEATH CAUSE & COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

(No. B/817) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to COVID-19 patients, he will state the –

- (a) current treatment protocol applied thereto;
- (b) mortality rate wherein COVID-19 is the –
 - (i) direct cause of death, and
 - (ii) underlying cause of death, and
- (c) number of complaints received therefrom or from family members thereof by his Ministry for poor treatment administered thereto.

Reply: With regard to part (a), I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has a detailed protocol for the handling of COVID-19 patients. The Protocol provides for the criteria for admission and release and the follow-up of patients after discharge from the treatment centre. I am placing a copy of the Protocol in the Library of the National Assembly.

With regard to part (b), I am informed that there were 228 patients who were admitted at the ENT Hospital from 15 May to 15 July 2021. Out of the 18 patients who presented severe symptoms of COVID-19, 8 of them passed away from 15 May to 15 July 2021.

Only two patients passed away due to COVID-19, the cause of death being severe COVID pneumonia and organic brain disease SARS-COV 2 respectively.

The death of the other six patients was not attributed to COVID-19 but was due to acute respiratory distress syndrome, acute myocardial infarction, severe SEPSIS Metabolic Acidosis and severe Urosepsis.

PUBLIC HOSPITALS - COVID-19 HEALTH PROTOCOLS & COVID-19 POSITIVE PERSONS

(No. B/818) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the public hospitals, he will state the –

- (a) COVID-19 health protocols put in place thereat, indicating the number of complaints received, if any, for non-compliance therewith;
- (b) number of times same have been fully or partially shut down due to COVID-19 positive testing of the staff thereof, and
- (c) number of persons COVID-19 positive tested thereat as at to date, indicating the number of persons placed in quarantine after contact tracing exercise.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, COVID-19 health protocols have been implemented in all public hospitals in order to mitigate the risks of contamination of the disease.

These include wearing of face masks, regular washing and sanitisation of hands, social distancing, wearing of Personal Protective Equipment by staff who are at high risk of exposure, self-isolation or quarantining depending on level of exposure, conduct of regular PCR test amongst staff and patients, amongst others. As at date, no complaint has been received in respect of non-compliance to the COVID-19 health protocols.

In reply to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that only the New Souillac Hospital was closed on 26 March 2021 following detection of multiple cases thereat. Consequently, arrangements were made to redirect patients to the Arya Sabha of Souillac where they could avail of the services that were being provided at the New Souillac Hospital. On the other hand, following detection of cases in several wards of hospitals, arrangements were made to quarantine staff working in those wards.

With regard to part (c) of the question, information in relation to the number of persons COVID-19 tested positive and to the total number of persons placed in quarantine after the contact tracing exercise are being compiled.

CHILD TRAFFICKING - CASES - JANUARY 2015-JULY 2021

(No. B/819) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to child trafficking, she will state the –

- (a) number of reported cases thereof since January 2015 to date, indicating the number of convictions secured in connection therewith;
- (b) measures taken to combat/prevent same, and
- (c) protection afforded and care provided to victims thereof.

Reply: With reference to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has officially recorded 23 cases of child trafficking, namely 4 males and 17 females, since January 2015 to date.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that 2 convictions have been secured so far.

As regards parts (b) and (c) of this question, I wish to inform the House that the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare has in place a pool of measures to tackle the issue of child trafficking, namely –

- a) All cases of alleged child trafficking are reported to my Ministry and recorded at the level of the CDU for social enquiry. The reported cases, if not already reported to the Police are then reported to the Police for criminal enquiry. There are also joint interviews by the Police and CDU Officers to avoid repeated narrations of the incident.
- b) My Ministry works in close collaboration with the “*Brigade Pour la Protection des Mineurs*” (BPLPDM) and other stakeholders to assist in the identification of victims and to provide them with necessary support. The BPLPDM carries out raids in game houses, hotels, discotheques and also investigates in suspected/alleged cases of child trafficking.
- c) Child victims are provided with immediate and long-term protective and support services at the level of the six CDU Outstations across the island, notably at Goodlands, Flacq, Souillac, Port Louis, Bambous and Vacoas.
- d) Protective and supportive services are also provided in the Drop-in-Centre at Port Louis and Residential Care Institution at Grand River North West (GRNW).
- e) The Drop-in-Centre provides for the following main services, namely -

- Long-term counselling and therapy;
 - Monthly medical sessions;
 - Parental counselling;
 - Couple/Contraceptive counselling;
 - Monthly home visits to clients;
 - Prevention and sensitisation of adolescents/public on sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy;
 - Referral to other NGOs/social aid and other institutions (as and when needed);
 - Echography and clinical services, including gynaecologist at MFPWA clinic;
 - Laboratory tests (HIV, Pregnancy);
 - Group Activity Therapy (personality development, Art and Craft Therapy, Art Competition in school holidays);
 - Referral to vocational courses through MITD/NEF/HRDC;
 - Radio Programmes, and
 - Networking.
- f) The Residential Drop-in-Centre ensures protection and assistance to children victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation in a sustainable manner. It provides: adequate, appropriate and safe shelter to child victims of exploitation; opportunities for education as well as family mediation; and medical and psychological care in coordination with national health and social services.

My Ministry has also established other salient protective and supportive measures such as –

- a. A Hotline/Helpline 113 for reporting cases of child abuse, including Child Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) either anonymously or otherwise;
- b. Assistance to victims of child trafficking for medical and Police medical examinations as well as HIV testing and pregnancy tests, and
- c. Psycho-social counselling/Psycho-social support to victims and their families.

On the preventive level, the Child Development Unit has carried out 96 campaigns from January 2015 to May 2021 on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) (including child trafficking). 5,430 persons were reached through these campaigns. From

2015 to May 2021, 169 campaigns have been carried out by the Drop-in-Centre, reaching approximately 6,500 persons.

The *Atelier Partage Parents* reached a total of 416 parents and 232 children from 18 regions from 2015 to May 2021 through its campaigns on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) (including child trafficking). The Children's Clubs reached a total of 100,590 children through their campaigns during the aforementioned period. On the other hand, the campaigns were undertaken in School Child Protection Clubs in 374 primary schools and 256 secondary schools for the period of January 2015 to Year 2020.

The School Child Protection Clubs reached 15,222 primary school girls and 11,696 primary school boys for the period of January 2015 to May 2021. Furthermore, the School Child Protection Clubs reached 13,230 secondary school girls and 9,568 secondary school boys for the same period, that is, January 2015 to May 2021.

Moreover, since 2018, officers of my Ministry have participated in numerous Radio and TV Programmes to create awareness and discuss on Children's Rights, Child Abuse and Child Protection Issues and Services.

FOOD WASTAGE – AMOUNT, ACTIONS TAKEN, ETC.

(No. B/820) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to food wastage, he will state –

- (a) the amount thereof for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020, respectively and commercial value thereof;
- (b) the actions taken, if any, to reduce same, particularly in hotels, restaurants and bars, and
- (c) if consideration will be given for the introduction of a Food Wastage Reduction Bill.

Reply: Food Security including access to quality and nutritious food is of utmost importance. We are becoming more conscious of the need for a sustainable and resilient food system and addressing food wastage will contribute towards consolidating same.

As a matter of fact, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 aims to halve food waste and reduce food loss by 2030.

In this respect, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) published its first Food Waste Index report in March 2021. An estimate for household waste in Mauritius

was also included and the per capita waste generation amounted to 93 kg per year and 118,632 tonnes per year.

According to Statistics Mauritius, 7,492 tonnes of food wastes were generated locally at household level for the whole population in 2018, representing 0.64% of the total consumption. In 2019, 7,216 tonnes of food wastes have been produced, that represented 0.61% of the total consumption. The figures for 2020 are still being compiled.

Food wastage occurs at any stage along the food supply chain, at the primary production level, manufacturing/processing stage, retail stage and consumption stage. Hence, the issue of food wastage has to be tackled at all these stages.

At the primary production level, food wastage occurs during the pre-harvest stage due to pests, diseases, untimely harvest and other abiotic factors (heavy rainfall, drought, scorching sun) and also edible food left unharvested for various reasons. Post-harvest losses occur due to mishandling, inappropriate transportation of produce and inappropriate storage conditions.

Addressing food wastage requires actions at all levels and involves the collaboration of different stakeholders such as Government institutions, private enterprises, research institutions and Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) among others.

Food wastage at the primary level is being addressed through the Extension Services of the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI). Consideration is also being given to set up a multidisciplinary Committee to discuss on the implementation of the recommendations of the UNEP Report on Food Wastage.

The introduction of a Food Wastage Reduction Bill is premature at this stage.

AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE – CURRICULUM – GRADES 7 TO 9

(No. B/821) Mr J. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to Agricultural Science, she will state if consideration will be given for the inclusion thereof as a subject in the curriculum for students of Grades 7 to 9 and, if not, why not.

Reply: In the curriculum for Science of Grades 7 to 9 there are basic notions which are broad-based and adequate enough to enable any student interested in Agricultural Science to subsequently opt for pure science or applied science subjects at Grades 10 and 11.

I am also informed that there are 38 private secondary schools in the Republic of Mauritius where Agriculture is being taught from Grades 7 to 11.

There are a number of reasons that make it imperative to consider a renewed emphasis upon Agriculture in our schools.

For one thing, such a subject will help to shape the attitudes of learners towards the environment and contribute to the development of environmental literacy for a more sustainable future.

For another, if COVID-19 has taught us something, it is the urgent need for us to be self-sufficient, to ensure sustainability of our agriculture sector and thus forestall any food insecurity. This, in fact, is in line with the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) 2020-2024 elaborated by the Human Resource Development Council. We know that this Strategy outlines incentives for our youth to engage in modern agriculture and today, modern agriculture relates, among others, to agro-production, genetics, research and development in food science, among others.

In view thereof, my Ministry is working towards the introduction of Agriculture in our curriculum at the upper secondary level, obviously keeping in view the availability of human resources as well as other resources.

As part of this drive, the MIE, in collaboration with the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Mauritius, has developed the PGCE Part-Time programme in Agriculture which is being run in Mauritius since January 2021. The same programme is currently advertised in Rodrigues and will start in September 2021.

**MAURITIUS RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COUNCIL - RODRIGUES
BRANCH - PROGRAMMES IMPLEMENTED**

(No. B/822) Mr J. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the Mauritius Research

and Innovation Council, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the programmes being implemented by the Rodrigues branch thereof.

Reply: The Rodrigues branch of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC), which was opened in 2011, initiated the implementation of a number of projects which have already been completed; for example, the implementation of Seaweed Farm in Petite Butte. The following three projects are currently under implementation –

- (i) improving scientific understanding of Fishing Aggregating Device (FAD) Fishery, a project which started in October 2020 and is expected to be completed in March 2023;
- (ii) Acacia Nilotica Valorisation: A new perspective for improved management of Invasive Alien Species, a project which started in 2019 and due to end in December 2022, and
- (iii) improving Quality and Safety of grilled – sliced octopus and seaweed – based food products through improved drying technology, a project which started in April 2017 and due to end in January 2023.

Following the official visit of the hon. Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation in Rodrigues in October 2020, a special call for proposals was launched by MRIC in January 2021 to invite applications for research and innovation projects, given that the specificities of Rodrigues are different from that of Mauritius. An amount of Rs5 m. has been earmarked for the purpose. Out of 27 applications received, the following five projects were selected and are currently also under implementation –

- (i) using a response to intervention logic to meet the needs of learners with speech and motor difficulties within an inclusive education;
- (ii) assessment of the biodiversity on the submarine platform to the south of the South East Marine Protected Area;
- (iii) development of a fermented pitaya beverage;

- (iv) building the capacity of 5 local primary schools to use data-driven decision making to improve educational outcome, and
- (v) development of a Rodrigues listing directory.

CÔTE D'OR NATIONAL SPORTS COMPLEX – SWIMMING POOL

(No. B/823) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Côte d'Or National Sports Complex, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Multisports Infrastructure Ltd., information as to the functionality of the electronic switchboard of the swimming pool thereat, indicating if same is in order and, if not, since when and if same has been repaired.

Reply: I am informed by the Mauritius Multisports Infrastructure Ltd that the electronic switchboard of the swimming pool is in good working condition and is functional. The system is regularly maintained.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 4 – YOUTH RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

(No. B/824) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the youth, particularly in Constituency No. 4, Port Louis North and Montagne Longue, he will state the recreational activities organised by his Ministry therefor.

Reply: In December 2019, the portfolio for 'Recreation' was added to my Ministry. Despite the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, my Ministry organised no less than seven major recreation activities around the island during the preceding financial year while ensuring that the sanitary protocols were observed. These activities were –

- (i) Celebration of Music Day (21 June 2020);
- (ii) *Zenes Montre To Talan Depi Lakaz* (15 June to 27 August 2020);
- (iii) World Walking Day (04 October 2020);
- (iv) Summer Holiday Camps (07 to 18 December 2020);

- (v) Street Dance Battle (28 November to 19 December 2020);
- (vi) Regatta Competition and Cultural Programme in collaboration with the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority for the Festival *Kiltir Ek Langaz Kreol Morisien* (13 December 2020), and
- (vii) Online FIFA 2021 Inter Region Competition in line with EURO 2020 (11 June – 11 July 2021).

In addition to the abovementioned activities, four major recreation activities are presently under preparation at the level of my Ministry, namely –

- (i) Street Dance Battle (scheduled from September – November 2021);
- (ii) World Walking Day (scheduled in October 2021);
- (iii) *Pédaler en Sécurité* (scheduled in October 2021), and
- (iv) PS4 FIFA 2021 Team Challenge (scheduled in October 2021).

I would also wish to apprise the House that presently a recreation activity, namely “*Zenes Montre To Talan Depi Lakaz Version 3.0*”, which started in April 2021, is still ongoing.

INTERNET CONNECTION - BREAKDOWN - 19 JULY 2021

(No. B/825) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the internet connection breakdown on 19 July 2021, he will state the reasons therefor, indicating the measures that have been taken to prevent the recurrence thereof.

(Withdrawn)

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU HOSPITAL - MRS A. A. - BABIES - DEATH

(No. B/826) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the delivery by Mrs A. A., of her stillborn on 18 April 2021 and the death of her two newborn babies on 19 April 2021 at the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital in Rose Belle, he will state if inquiries were initiated at the level of his Ministry thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that an enquiry was conducted at the level of Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital and a report was submitted by the Ag. Regional Health Director to my Ministry on 19 July 2021.

According to the report, Mrs A. A. attended the Accident and Emergency Department at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital for the first time on 26 January 2021, complaining of vomiting. She was admitted and prescribed treatment accordingly. An ultrasound was also performed and revealed triplets with two placental beds.

Mrs A. A. had regular antenatal follow-up and was admitted on 16 April 2021 with a history of vaginal discharge. On 17 April 2021 at 10 35 hrs, a specialist doctor attended to the patient and noted that she was in labour. Given that she was of 23 weeks' gestation, labour was allowed to progress.

Mrs A. A. delivered a macerated stillborn of 455 grams at 09 25 hrs. The foetus was seen by the Paediatric Medical Officer who confirmed the findings and directed to handle the foetus as per protocol for stillborn. After the expulsion of the first foetus, as the patient was stable and there were no signs and symptoms of acute infection, the patient was managed conservatively.

On 19 April 2021, Mrs A. A. went into spontaneous labour and subsequently expelled the other 2 foetuses at 23 15 hrs and 23 30 hrs weighing 625 grams and 620 grams respectively. At 23 35 hrs, two placentae were delivered conjoint and at 23 55 hrs a third placental bulk was expelled. After the procedure was completed, the patient was stable and there was no active bleeding. Mrs A. A. was counselled and given adequate treatment while the two foetuses were handed over to the paediatrician for active management.

On 20 April 2021, patient had a suction evacuation where minimal blood clots were expelled with no obvious product of conception present in the curettings. Mrs A. A. was discharged on 22 April 2021 and given review in 6 weeks' time.

I wish to inform the House that upon discharge, Mrs A. A. expressed her gratitude and satisfaction concerning the management and treatment she received throughout her stay in the hospital. Both the patient and her partner handed a recognition card addressed to all those who managed her case for the care and support provided during those trying times.

For the information of the House, I am placing a copy of the recognition card in the Library of the National Assembly.

REGIONAL HOSPITALS - NEWBORN BABIES - DEATH

(No. B/827) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to newborn babies, he will state the number thereof who died during/or following delivery at each regional hospital since January 2020 to date, indicating if inquiries have been carried out and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof in each case.

Reply: With regard to the number of newborn babies who died during and following delivery in each Regional Hospital from January 2020 to date, I am placing a copy of the information in the Library of the National Assembly.

I wish to inform the House that each and every case involving death of a newborn baby is treated distinctly. Following the death of a newborn baby, the Regional Health Director conducts a preliminary enquiry at hospital level and submits a detailed report from treating doctors involved in the case along with his recommendations to my Ministry.

The report is then perused at the level of my Ministry and a decision is taken for referral of the case to the Medical Negligence Standing Committee for investigation. In case the Medical Negligence Standing Committee finds any evidence of negligence or malpractice, the case is then referred to the Medical Council of Mauritius for a more in-depth investigation and appropriate action. Thereafter, the matter is submitted to the Public Service Commission for further action.

FISHERMEN WELFARE FUND - SCHOLARSHIPS - ELIGIBILITY

CRITERIA - BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/828) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Fishermen Welfare Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the eligibility criteria for the award by the Fund of scholarships to the children of the fishers, giving the list of the beneficiaries thereof, since January 2015 to date.

Reply: I am informed that the objective of the Scholarship Scheme implemented by the Fishermen Welfare Fund is a gateway to democratise access to higher education for fishers' children by providing financial support in the form of stipend.

I am also informed that the launching of invitation for scholarship application is made following the announcement of the Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC), National Certificate of Education (NCE), School Certificate (SC) and Higher School Certificate (HSC) examinations results. Scholarship application forms are dispatched to all the Fisheries Posts in Mauritius and Rodrigues as well as to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

Posters also are affixed at all Fish Landing Stations and Press advertisements are issued. Duly filled in scholarship forms are thereafter collected, verified, tabulated on various schedules and submitted to the Scholarship Committee, for consideration.

The eligibility criteria for selection of scholars after the Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC) are such that equal numbers of scholarships are allocated to both girls and boys of Grade 7.

For Mauritius, the Post PSAC scholarships are awarded on a zonewise basis so that all the children of fishers from different parts of the island participate in the scheme and nobody is laid off.

The zone for allocation of scholarship is based on-

- a) the Educational zone established by the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology; and
- b) the concentration of fishers in the particular Fisheries Post catchment area.

For Rodrigues and Bank Fishers, the Post PSAC scholarships are awarded on the basis of best results. As regards the Post SC scholarships, the awards are based on best results achieved by the applicants irrespective of gender. In case the last applicant is in *ex aequo* with other applicant, the latter is also awarded a scholarship.

In the event that Post PSAC and other scholarships awarded to children of Bank fishers in Mauritius in one particular zone could not be fully utilised, the different scholarship/s is/are reallocated to the short listed applicant/s in other zones on a merit basis.

The Fishermen Welfare Fund awards a maximum of 168 annual scholarships to the children of registered fishers in both Mauritius and Rodrigues in nine categories, namely post PSAC, vocational or polytechnic and tertiary up to post-graduate levels. As per its Annual Report for the Financial Year ended 30 June 2020, scholarships were allocated as follows:

- (i) 102 to the children of fishers in Mauritius;

- (ii) 44 to the children of fishers in Rodrigues; and
- (iii) 22 to children of bank fishers both in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

I am pleased to announce that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my Ministry is exceptionally contemplating to reallocate funds under the Sectoral Support Programme of the EU Fisheries Partnership Agreement to *inter alia* review and increase-

- (1) the quantum of stipend paid to beneficiaries of the scholarship scheme and the number of scholarships awarded to children of registered fishers; and
- (2) the welfare schemes implemented by the Fishermen Welfare Fund.

I am placing a copy of the details of scholarships awarded and amount of stipend in the different categories of the Scholarship Scheme and the data for the period from 2014 to 2020 in the Library of the National Assembly.

INLAND AQUACULTURE SCHEME - BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/829) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Inland Aquaculture Scheme, he will give the list of the beneficiaries thereunder since the inception thereof to date.

Reply: In the Budget Speech 2020/2021, the introduction of an ‘Inland Aquaculture Scheme’ under the Economic Development Board (EDB) Mauritius was announced. Under this scheme, promoters wishing to invest in inland aquaculture activities would benefit from –

- (a) an 8-year tax holiday, and
- (b) duty and VAT exemption on equipment.

It is to be noted that the 8-year tax holiday applies only to income derived from activities relating to a project as approved by SME Mauritius.

I am also informed that the company shall be registered with the EDB under the Inland Aquaculture Scheme and the list of equipment to be used by the promoter needs the approval of my Ministry.

Unfortunately, this sector is not picking up due to the economic downturn resulting from COVID-19 pandemic and the two confinement periods that affected the country in 2020 and 2021.

I have to inform the House that one local private company (Freshwater Prawn Mauritius Ltd) has been authorised by my Ministry to carry out inland aquaculture at Rivière du Poste, and is involved in fresh water prawn culture.

I am informed that the list of 57 equipment and materials, costing approximately Rs545,000, submitted by the promoter under the scheme was approved by my Ministry in October 2020.

I also wish to inform the House that two companies intend to make heavy investment in this sector through very interesting project proposals. This will not only create employment but also develop a competitive market that will ensure that the Mauritian public gets quality fish at extremely reasonable prices and which will also be export-oriented. The project proposals of the two companies are being assessed at the level of my Ministry, as well as the Economic Development Board.

It goes without saying that prawns, especially the pacific white shrimp (*Litopenaeus vannamei*), are a commodity which is highly demanded by the locals, as well as the tourists, thus, an opportunity for huge expansion.

Currently, we have about thirty persons involved in the culture of *Macrobrachium rosenbergii* in Mauritius. However, this variety of freshwater prawn which was introduced in the 1970s, has outlived its lifespan. Thus, I intend to introduce a new variety of freshwater prawn which will be better in taste and more resilient. This will be an opportunity for expansion in value for money.

Tilapia fish farming is one of the most profitable businesses in the world and fortunately, Tilapia has adapted very nicely in our environment. I intend to promote Tilapia fish farming at a larger scale, not only for local consumption but for export as well.

I wish to point out that the promoters are in discussions with relevant institutions for potential inland aquaculture projects. These projects are in their infancy phase and shall meet all necessary criteria prior to be potentially delivered with the exemptions under the mentioned scheme.

SURINAM - STATE LAND - LEASE

(No. B/830) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to State land leased at Cemetery Road in Surinam, he will state the reasons for the disparity in the quantum of the lease payable by the 50 lessees thereat.

Reply: I am advised that there are, in fact, 76 lessees each holding a building site lease and 3 lessees each holding a building cum commercial site lease at Cemetery Road, Surinam.

The policy regarding annual rental payable by any lessee holding a building site lease is based on the monthly family income at the time the lease is granted. More detailed information is available on the website of my Ministry.

As regards the commercial component of the lease, the rental is assessed by the Valuation Department.

CHAMAREL – EX-CHA HOUSES – SEPTIC TANKS

(No. B/831) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the defective septic tank at the Cité CHA of Chamarel, he will state if land has been acquired for the installation of septic tanks in replacement thereof and, if so, indicate when same will be operational.

Reply: The CHA Housing Estate at Chamarel, constructed in the 1980s, is made up of 8 housing units. All the residents have already become owners of their residential units and thus, these housing estates are now referred to as ‘Ex-CHA’.

I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority (WMA) that the communal septic tank, initially built at the Ex-CHA at Chamarel was damaged in the early 1980s as a result of collapse of a big tree under cyclonic conditions. That septic tank was partly backfilled and, thereafter, a new one, relatively smaller, was built. With the households extensions over the years, there have been recurrent overflows of wastewater from this septic tank.

I am further informed by the WMA that complaints have been received since year 2017. In order to prevent the overflow of wastewater, the WMA has, as a palliative measure, been assisting the inhabitants through pumping of the septic tank, pending the construction of a new one.

Given that the new septic tank cannot be accommodated on the site where the old septic tank is found, meetings and site visit were held, in June 2021, with officers of my Ministry and other stakeholders, including the Ministry of Local Government, Disaster and Risk Management, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Wastewater Management Authority and the Black River District Council. Accordingly, a plot of State Land of the approximate extent of 1,030m², adjacent to the Ex-CHA Housing Estate has been identified.

Necessary clearances are being sought on the way forward.

**FISHERMEN WELFARE FUND - REGISTERED PROFESSIONAL FISHERS
- ELIGIBILITY FOR PENSION SCHEME - *CONTRIBUTION SOCIALE
GÉNÉRALISÉE***

(No. B/832) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the registered professional fishers, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if they are eligible to any existing pension scheme for enhanced pension benefits upon retirement under the Fishermen Welfare Fund and, if not, will he state if consideration will be given for them to benefit under the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity.

Reply: As you are all aware, we are referring to registered professional fishers who are referred to as registered bank fishers also known as *Pêcheur Banc*. I am informed that my Ministry has 210 bank fishers who are registered with the Fishermen Welfare Fund and who participate in fishing campaigns on the Nazareth and Saya de Malha banks. The fishing operators employing the bank fishers contribute 3% of their salary and the bank fishers contribute 1.5% of their salary to the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée (CSG)*. The bank fishers would, therefore, receive the appropriate pension benefits under the CSG.

The bank fishers also benefit from a contributory scheme whereby the fishing operators contribute a sum of Rs2,000 per bank fisher, per trip. And, the Fishermen Welfare Fund contributes Rs2,000 per bank fisher per trip. A total amount of Rs4,000 per bank fisher, per trip is paid as Winter Allowance to the bank fishers.

I am informed by the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity that registered artisanal fishers as well as bank fishers contribute to the National

Pensions Fund on a voluntary basis as self-employed. For the month of August 2020, date on which contributions to the National Pensions Fund had ceased, 739 registered fishers had paid contributions to the Fund in the range of Rs40 to Rs320 per fisher.

The registered fishers who have contributed to the National Pensions Fund are entitled to a Contributory Retirement Pension on reaching the age of 60 based on the amount of contributions. In any case, they will not be paid less than the minimum Contributory Pension which is actually Rs605 since July 2020. However, if the contributor passes away, his widow will be entitled to a Contributory Widow's Pension.

FISHERMEN WELFARE FUND - FACILITIES

(No. B/833) Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping whether, in regard to the Fishermen Welfare Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if consideration will be given for –

- (a) an extension of the facilities granted thereunder to families of the registered professional fishers who meet with problems at sea in the course of their professional activities, and
- (b) a review and increase of the support granted thereunder.

Reply: I am being given to understand that the Hon. Member refers to registered professional fishers as registered bank fishers also known as *Pêcheur Banc*.

I am informed that the Fishermen Welfare Fund implements several schemes for the betterment of the fishers' community of both Mauritius and Rodrigues. Four schemes are directly related to professional registered fishers who encounter problems at sea during fishing activities. The schemes are as follows –

1) Interim Assistance to Fisher's Family in Distress Scheme

This allowance is granted to the family of a registered professional fisher who has disappeared at sea during fishing activities. An amount of Rs2,500 is being given on an interval of 15 days to cater for the basic needs of the family. A maximum of Rs10,000 is being granted for the first two months of absence of the fisher. The case is also referred to the

Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity for social aid and to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare for psychological support.

2) Funeral Grant Scheme

This Scheme has been introduced in the financial year 2014 under which the Fishermen Welfare Fund assists the family of a registered fisher who has passed away. The quantum of the grant is Rs5,000 and is payable at once to the deceased fisher's family who has borne the funeral expenses, thus alleviating the sudden unexpected additional expenses.

3) Hardship Case Scheme

The Fund provides financial assistance whenever the residence of a registered professional fisher is damaged by fire. A one-off payment of Rs10,000 is being given with a gift hamper of Rs 2,500 to meet the family's basic needs for one week.

Regarding part (b) of the question, you may wish to note that the Fishermen Welfare Fund has an annual budget of Rs7 m. for its welfare schemes. With a view to providing an additional budget to the Fund, I am pleased to announce that due to the COVID-19 situation, my Ministry is exceptionally contemplating to reallocate to the FWF (Fishermen Welfare Fund), funds under the Sectoral Support Programme of the EU Fisheries Partnership Agreement to *inter alia* cater for the review and increase –

- (1) The quantum of stipend paid to beneficiaries under the scholarship scheme and the number of scholarships awarded to children of registered fishers by at least 25%, and
- (2) Welfare schemes implemented by the Fishermen Welfare Fund.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - POSITIVE TESTED PERSONS

(No. B/835) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, he will state, since 01 July 2021 to date, the number of persons having been positive tested, indicating the number thereof being foreign workers.

Reply: I am informed that since 01 July 2021 to date, a total number of 1,955 persons have contracted the COVID-19 disease, out of which 800 were foreign workers.

VACOAS MARKET FAIR – PARKING SLOTS

(No. B/836) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the parking spaces provided to stallholders of the Vacoas Market Fair on Tuesdays and Fridays, respectively, following the relocation thereof, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Vacoas and Phoenix, information as to the –

- (a) number of available parking slots;
- (b) costs incurred in relation thereto as at date, and
- (c) name of the contractor who was allocated the contract therefor.

Reply: I am informed by the Chief Executive of the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that prior to the relocation of part of the Vacoas Fair and works pertaining to the Metro Express Project, a total number of 230 parking slots were available for both stallholders and customers at the following sites –

- i. along Sivananda Avenue - 75 parking slots;
- ii. along Stevenson Avenue - 30 parking slots;
- iii. roadside parking next to Vacoas Fair, mainly for stallholders - 75 parking slots, and
- iv. parking along Greenville Drive for stallholders - 50 parking slots.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that due to ongoing construction works pertaining to the Metro Express Project and the setting up of the Palmerston Project (New Sivananda Avenue), the following parking provisions have been made for both stallholders and customers –

- i. parking slots which were formerly available along Sivananda Avenue have been replaced by the provision of some 80 parking slots on the plot of land previously occupied by the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development. The setting up of the said parking was carried out by Larsen and Toubro free of charge;
- ii. the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix made provision for around 100 temporary parking slots for stallholders on the ex-SMF quarters site located along Greenville Avenue;
- iii. around 50 parking slots have also been made available to customers on the plot of land found along St Paul Avenue next to Central Electricity Board, and

- iv. the Council is also setting up parking slots for 150 vehicles on the plot of land along St Paul Avenue, next to Dr. Maurice Curé State Secondary School under the Economic Recovery Programme.

As such, a total number of 230 parking slots is currently available and upon completion of the parking at St Paul Avenue, a total number of 380 parking slots would be available for both stallholders and customers.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that an amount of Rs72,000 has been spent on excavation works on the ex-SMF Quarters site. Moreover, an amount of Rs49,737.50 was incurred by the Council for the purchase of 50 tons of spalls and crusher run to be spread thereat.

Concerning part (c) of the question, I am further informed by the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix that following a tender exercise, the contract for the setting up the parking slots along St Paul Avenue, next to Dr. Maurice Curé State Secondary School, has been awarded to Sonallal and Sons for a total amount of Rs4,691,000 excluding VAT. Construction works started on 22 June 2021 and are expected to be completed by end of September 2021.

FISHERMEN INVESTMENT TRUST - SHAREHOLDERS

(No. B/837) 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 Fishermen Investment Trust, he will state the total number of shares and of shareholders thereof prior to the repeal of the Fishermen Investment Trust Act, indicating the reasons why the Trust has not been operating since 2014.

Reply: I have to inform the House that the Fishermen Investment Trust (FIT) was established under the Fishermen Investment Trust Act of 2006 and was set up in 2007 to enhance the socio-economic condition of the fisher community through the investment, directly or through a body controlled by it, in fishing activities, fish processing activities, fish marketing, and such other activities related to the fishing industry, as may be approved by its Board.

The FIT has received grants of Rs15 m. from the Government in 2007 and a further amount of Rs2 m. in 2011, to meet both its recurrent and capital expenditures.

With regard to the first part of the question, I am informed that, in line with subsection 11.1(a) of the Fishermen Investment Trust Act 2006, Government subscribed 1.5 million shares at a face value of Rs10 per share in the FIT in June 2007, for an amount of Rs15 m.

Out of the 1.5 million shares subscribed by Government, 1,338,300 shares were freely distributed (300 shares per fisher) to 4,461 artisanal fishers of Mauritius and Rodrigues, registered under the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act. The value of shares distributed to the shareholders represented a face value of Rs13,383,000/- (4,461 x 300 x Rs10) free of charge.

With regard to the second part of the question, I am also informed that the Fishermen Investment Trust was set up with a view of operating as a commercial entity whilst ensuring a reasonable return on its investments.

The intent of the FIT was to acquire fishing boats to be leased to artisanal fishers for fishing activities in outer lagoon and around Fishing Aggregating Devices. The rentals received from the lease of the boats would accumulate to be the revenue of the FIT whereby dividends would be distributed to the shareholders, obviously after deduction of expenses.

In this regard, I am further informed that the FIT decided to invest into three fishing boats. The procurement exercise for the fishing boats was carried out in 2009 and the contract for the construction and supply of the fishing boats was awarded in February 2010 to GRNW Boat Yard Ltd, a subsidiary of the ex-BAI Group, for the sum of Rs10,350,000.

Out of the Rs10,350,000 earmarked by the FIT for the construction of its 3 fishing boats, Rs5.9 m. was paid to the Boat Constructor, that is, GRNW Boat Yard Ltd.

Meanwhile, in December 2009, the FIT received a boat (MEXA 1) as donation from the Mauritius Export Association (MEXA).

MEXA 1 was leased on a pilot basis from 23 March to 22 September 2010 to Mr S. B., Mr J. L. and Mr L. L. No revenue was received from the lease.

Subsequently, the FIT had a one-year lease agreement with Mr S. K., Mr S. S. and Mr F. M. from 19 July 2013 to 18 July 2014. The monthly lease charges were Rs33,360. However, the FIT received only one month payment, that is, Rs33,360 and they returned the boat on 14 September 2013, that is, before the end of the lease.

The FIT thereafter had a one-year lease agreement with Mr S. P., Mr S. S. and Mr F. M. from 15 September 2013 to 14 September 2014. The monthly lease charges were Rs33,360. However, the FIT received only Rs70,040 as payment and they returned the boat on 30 December 2013, again before the lease expired.

Finally, the FIT had a one-year lease agreement with F. C. Ltd from 01 May 2014 to 30 April 2015. The monthly lease charges were Rs25,000. However, the FIT received only one month payment, that is, Rs25,000 and the company returned the boat in January 2015, once again, well before the expiry date and without settling the outstanding balance.

The first fishing boat (FIT 1) procured by the Fishermen Investment Trust was constructed for the sum of Rs3,450,000 by GRNW Boat Yard Ltd and was delivered to the FIT in October 2012.

The FIT had a one-year lease agreement with F. C. Ltd from 01 May 2014 to 30 April 2015. The monthly lease charges were Rs30,000. However, the FIT received only Rs30,000, that is one month payment. Thereafter, no rent was paid and the boat was found abandoned at Grand Gaube.

Thus, both fishing boats, namely MEXA 1 and FIT 1, could not generate sufficient income to the FIT, as the fishers were reluctant to use them and were not prepared to pay neither any rent fee nor insurance.

Since 2015, both boats remained idle and were subject to wear and tear and were partly submerged.

Consequently, a Board of Survey was appointed in March 2019 by my Ministry to carry out a complete survey of MEXA 1 and FIT 1 with a view to establishing a fair and reasonable scrap value.

Following the recommendation of the Board of Survey, offers were received from five bidders and the Board of the FIT decided to –

- a) accept the highest bid for FIT 1 (Rs313,000/-) received from Mr M. D., and
- b) accept the highest bid for MEXA 1 (Rs75,000/-) received from Mr A. J. for fishing boat MEXA 1.

Both boats were sold in August 2019.

As regards the uncommissioned fishing boat “FIT 2”, the advice of the Attorney General’s Office was to take possession of “FIT 2” on an “as is” basis, as we had already made part payment for the boat.

Arrangements are being made by my Ministry for the refurbishment of fishing boat “FIT 2” to be in operational mode. The boat will be used by the Mauritius Oceanography Institute and the Albion Fisheries Research Centre of my Ministry for their surveys/field activities at sea.

It is also to be noted that staff emoluments alone from 2007 to 2014 amounted to some Rs12 m. Since 2014, the FIT did not have any funds to meet its recurrent expenses and the Ministry had to bail out the FIT to pay its staff costs. As an institutional support, the Parent Ministry has been bearing FIT’s administrative costs since August 2014 to June 2021. The grant allocated by my Ministry from August 2014 to June 2021 is Rs5,080,130.

Given that the FIT failed to meet its objectives as the above projects initiated were not successful and, as such, the Office of Public Sector Governance (OPSG) had carried out an overall assessment of the FIT and submitted its Report in May 2015. The following three options were proposed by the OPSG –

- Option 1 – merger with the Fishermen Welfare Fund;
- Option 2 – the Fishermen Investment Trust be restructured as a section of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping, and
- Option 3 – the Fishermen Investment Trust to cease its operations.

In the light of the recommendations of the Office of Public Sector Governance, the then Board of the FIT, at a Special Board Meeting held on 12 November 2018, agreed to wind up the Fishermen Investment Trust taking into account the fact that the Trust had failed to honour its mandate and the unsuccessful projects, the moroso, that no return had been recouped on the investment made by the Trust.

It is very sad to note that the scheme itself was a total failure, as all the fishers could not perceive any benefit coming to them. As a result, they could not avail themselves of the facilities provided by the FIT.

The scheme was more of a political luring nature towards the fishers, going to an extent of allocating 300 shares to our fishers in Mauritius and Rodrigues. The fishers, holders of these shares, have been left only with a certificate with no economic value.

Thus, the intent was to lure fishers into this venture and since the start it was bound to fail.

Additionally, I am sorry to state that the concept of the FIT was itself full of contradictions and it seems that the project was done without any clear-thinking process or planning.

SAVANNE DISTRICT COUNCIL - RIVER DREDGING & CLEANING WORKS

(No. B/838) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the river dredging and cleaning works ordered in April 2021 by the District Council of Savanne, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to –

- (a) the number of sites concerned therewith;
- (b) the name of the contractor;
- (c) the scope of works;
- (d) the contract value;
- (e) if procurement procedures were strictly abided by, and
- (f) if clearance from the Forestry Service and if the issue of an Environmental Impact Assessment Licence were sought and obtained prior to start of works.

Reply: I am informed by the District Council of Savanne that in view of the forecasts of heavy rainfall that could affect the southern regions of Mauritius in April this year, the Council undertook several additional urgent works, which included cleaning of open drains, rivers and canals, and removal and carting away of debris within its jurisdiction.

With regard to parts (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the question, I am placing the relevant information in the Library of the National Assembly for the benefit of the House. Furthermore, with regard to part (e) of the question, I am informed by the District Council of Savanne that all procurement procedures were abided to, and the contractors had respected all the conditions of the contracts.

In respect to the last part of the question, clearance from the Forestry Department and application for an Environment Impact Assessment License were not required as the Council undertook the urgent cleaning works under Section 50 (2) (e) of the Local Government Act 2011 so as to mitigate the risks of flooding and prevent loss of human lives

and damage to property. In addition, as the Council had only cleaned the rivers and no dredging works were carried out, such clearances were not required.

**MAURITIUS NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD SYSTEM - PROPOSED
REVAMPING - ESTIMATED COST**

(No. B/839) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the proposed revamping of the Mauritius National Identity Card System, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation thereof, indicating the estimated cost thereof.

Reply: The current Mauritius National Identity Card Scheme was implemented in 2013 under a Government to Government agreement between the Republic of Singapore and the Republic of Mauritius. After eight years of operation, the existing hardware comprising, amongst others, printers and scanners, and software have reached their end of life and end of support respectively. In addition, the card manufacturer, the firm IDEMIA, has ceased production of the current chip, on the card.

For these reasons, following consultations between the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, Government has decided to revamp the Mauritius National Identity Card System and to come up with a state-of-the-art system. To ensure the smooth implementation of the project within the expected timeframe, a Steering Committee has been set up, under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, and a Technical Committee, under the chairmanship of the Secretary for Home Affairs.

The estimated project value is of the order of Rs230 m.

The technical specifications for the project are presently under preparation at the level of the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation and are expected to be ready by end of July 2021. They will then be validated by the Steering Committee, under the chairmanship of the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation. Thereafter, procurement procedures will be initiated by the Prime Minister's Office. It is expected that the new system will be ready by June 2023.

CSG - QUANTUM COLLECTED - MRA

(No. B/840) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the *Contribution Sociale Generalisée*, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the quantum thereof collected since the inception thereof to date.

Reply: La Mauritius Revenue Authority m'a informé que depuis la mise en application de la *Contribution Sociale Généralisée* au 1^{er} septembre 2020, un montant de 5,33 milliards de roupies a été collecté au 22 juillet 2021.

HOTELS - RESORT TOURISM

(No. B/842) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the hotels identified for resort tourism with effect from 15 July 2021, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of rooms thereof booked by foreigners as at to date.

(Withdrawn)

MRIC - PROJECTS - JANUARY 2020-JULY 2021

(No. B/843) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to Innovation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council, information as to the projects implemented in relation thereto since January 2020 to date, indicating the assessed impact thereof.

(Withdrawn)

COVID-19 - FOREIGN WORKERS DORMITORIES - SANITARY MEASURES

(No. B/844) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to foreign workers dormitories, he

will state the measures taken, if any, by his Ministry to ensure enforcement of COVID-19 precautionary sanitary measures thereat.

(Withdrawn)

METRO LINE – EXTENSION – ROSE HILL TO RÉDUIT

(No. B/845) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) 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, he will state the –

- (a) extent of land acquired therefor and cost thereof, and
- (b) number of service amenities that will require relocation in the wake thereof, indicating the estimated cost thereof.

(Withdrawn)

CEB (FIBERNET) CO. LTD - COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES

(No. B/846) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the CEB (Fibernet) Co. Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Central Electricity Board, information as to the –

- (a) quantum of funds invested therein by the Board to date, and
- (b) current commercial activities thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS POST LTD - BASIC PENSIONS - PAYMENT

(No. B/848) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to pensions, she will state the number of beneficiaries thereof who are being remitted same by post, indicating the fees payable in relation thereto to the Mauritius Post Ltd. on a yearly basis over the past two years.

Reply: For the Financial Year 2019-2020, Mauritius Post Limited remitted Basic Pensions to an average of 57,000 beneficiaries each month. The total amount paid to the Mauritius Post Limited for the whole year was around Rs10 m.

As regards the Financial Year 2020-2021, Basic Pensions were remitted to an average of 53,000 beneficiaries monthly. The total amount paid to the Mauritius Post Limited for that period was around Rs9 m.

PRIVATE CLINICS - EXPENDITURE INCURRED

(No. B/849) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the services procured by private clinics to Government, he will give the list thereof, indicating in each case, the expenditure incurred in relation thereto, since September 2015 to date.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has recourse to private clinics for CT Scan, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), Electromyography (EMG) and Dialysis services. Please note that it is medically advisable not to transport patients over long distance in cases of emergencies or serious road traffic accidents and hence medical tests in the nearest health institutions have to be sought.

I wish to inform the House that MRI services and CT Scans are provided to patients in all the hospitals except for Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital which does not have a CT Scan and MRI equipment. Therefore, patients of Flacq Hospital are referred to SSRN Hospital and Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital for CT Scan and MRI. Please note that from September 2015 to date, my Ministry has incurred Rs543,500 for CT Scan, Rs179,975 for MRI services and Rs63,500 for EMG services from private clinics.

With regard to dialysis services, there are currently around 1,508 patients who are undergoing dialysis treatment both in Government hospitals (1,232 patients) and in the private clinics (276 patients). The service is available at the five regional hospitals as well as at Souillac Hospital and Long Mountain Hospital.

My Ministry also has an agreement with three private clinics and three private dialysis centres whereby patients are referred to these private health institutions and the costs of the treatment are met by my Ministry at the cost of Rs800 per dialysis session per patient.

The six private health institutions are Wellkin Hospital, Clinique Du Nord, Chisty Shifa Clinic and three private dialysis centres are AURAM Dialysis Centre, Nephron Dialysis Centre and the National Dialysis Centre. From September 2015 up to April 2021, my Ministry has incurred Rs224,585,400 for dialysis services.

With the prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) and an ageing population, the number of patients requiring dialysis treatment is expected to reach more than 1,600 in the coming years. The policy of my Ministry is to further expand the dialysis facilities in all hospitals with a view to accommodate a maximum number of patients.

In this regard, the service has been expanded in all regions and a second Dialysis Unit was set up at Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital, which is operational since January 2019. This Unit is equipped with 26 dialysis machines where around 160 patients are being treated. Dialysis services have also been expanded to Long Mountain Hospital.

KHADAFI SQUARE, PLAINE VERTE – LED STREET LANTERNS

(No. B/850) Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Khadafi Square, in Plaine Verte, 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 level of the former HSBC office and on the bus stand thereat and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that the Khadafi Square in Plaine Verte, including the former HSBC zone and the bus stand are already lighted by eight (8) LED bulbs. Additionally, six (6) High Pressure Sodium and four (4) decorative Lanterns equipped with LED and Compact Fluorescent lights (CFL).

These lanterns, which are fully functional and are in good condition, provide adequate lighting to the area.

I am further informed by the Municipal City Council that, with a view to decrease energy consumption, it has already embarked on a programme for the gradual replacement of all existing High Pressure Sodium lanterns by LED lamps within its administrative area. Such lamps found in the Khadafi Square will be replaced by LED lanterns as and when they wear out.

RODRIGUES - EMPLOYEES WELFARE FUND - QUANTUM OF FUNDS & CAPITAL PROJECTS

(No. B/851) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Employees Welfare Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the -

(a) quantum of funds thereof invested in Rodrigues island over the past five years, and

(b) list of capital projects undertaken thereunder since January 2014 to date.

Reply: *L'Employees Welfare Fund* est un organisme parapublic qui a été créé en vertu de la *Employees Welfare Fund Act 1995*.

Il fonctionne sous l'égide de mon ministère et répond aux enjeux de bien-être, de loisirs et de détente des employés et de leurs familles travaillant dans les secteurs public et privé.

En ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, j'ai été informé que *l'Employees Welfare Fund* n'a pas investi dans des projets à Rodrigues au cours des cinq dernières années.

Cela étant dit, *l'Employees Welfare Fund* envisage d'acquérir l'ancien complexe hôtelier de Pointe Venus à Rodrigues.

En novembre 2020, *l'Employees Welfare Fund* et l'Assemblée régionale de Rodrigues ont finalisé la négociation.

Les deux parties ont convenu que le prix d'acquisition, payable par *l'Employees Welfare Fund*, serait de 65 millions de roupies.

L'Employees Welfare Fund finalise actuellement la mise en place d'un *special purpose vehicle*, avec un capital social de 100%, pour acquérir, exploiter et gérer l'hôtel.

En ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, j'ai également été informé que *l'Employees Welfare Fund* a investi dans sept projets d'investissement au cours de la période allant de janvier 2014 à ce jour.

Il s'agit de –

- i. la rénovation du *Sealife Resorts & Spa* (hôtel Calodyne);
- ii. l'acquisition d'un terrain à Rose Belle,
- iii. le projet de *TIC du New Loan Management System and Servers*;

- iv. l'acquisition d'un nouvel espace de bureaux au 7ème étage de la Moorgate House à Port Louis;
- v. la rénovation du bureau de l'Employees Welfare Fund et création d'une nouvelle zone de réception;
- vi. la mise en place d'un nouveau gymnase extérieur et la rénovation du parc de bien-être de Sodnac, et
- vii. la construction d'un nouveau parc de loisirs à St Felix.

SCHOOL MATERIALS – PROCUREMENT –BIDDERS

(No. B/852) **Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the procurement of school materials by her Ministry, she will give the list of the successful bidders therefor over the past six years, indicating in each case, the –

- (a) procurement method used, and
- (b) contract value.

Reply: The information on the list of successful bidders, the procurement method used and cost thereof with regard to the provision of school materials for the past six years is being laid in the Library of the National Assembly.

NATIONAL EMPOWERMENT FOUNDATION - PROCUREMENT OF GOODS & SERVICES - COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEE

(No. B/853) **Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the procurement of goods and services by the National Empowerment Foundation, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information, as to the –

- (a) procurement method/s used therefor, and
- (b) composition of the Committee set up for the processing thereof, indicating the remuneration drawn in each case.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, the National Empowerment Foundation has informed that the methods for procurement used are as follows -

- Direct Procurement, with a minimum of three quotations, for goods and services of the value of up to Rs500,000;

- Request for sealed Quotation for goods and services of the value varying from Rs500,001 to Rs2 m.;
- Restricted Bidding for goods and services of the value varying from Rs2,000,001 to Rs5 m., and
- Open Advertised Bidding for goods and services above Rs5,000,000.

Regarding part (b) of the question, the National Empowerment Foundation has in place a Departmental Bid Committee (DBC) and a Bid Evaluation Committee (BEC). The Departmental Bid Committee comprises the Chief Executive Officer as Chairperson, one member with knowledge in Procurement, one Head of Department as member and a Secretary.

The Bid Evaluation Committee comprises a Chairperson, representatives of Ministries concerned acting as members and a Secretary.

The Chairperson and members of the Departmental Bid Committee and Bid Evaluation Committee are paid fees at approved rates in accordance with Circular No. 5 of 2017 dated 23 March 2017 issued by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - SMEs - SUPPORTIVE MEASURES

(No. B/854) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the small and medium enterprises, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from SME Mauritius Ltd., information as to –

- (a) the number thereof having closed down amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- (b) if a survey has been carried out to assess the number thereof in financial difficulties, indicating the supportive measures provided by his Ministry thereto.

Reply: I wish to refer to the reply I made to PQ B/149 at our Sitting of 06 April this year.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the updated figure of SMEs having closed down from March 2020 to June 2021 is 81. I am also informed that SME Mauritius has carried out an assessment on the impacts and challenges caused by the COVID-

19 pandemic on SMEs. Data collected is at analysis stage and a final report is expected in the coming weeks, following which additional strategies and supportive measures to uplift SMEs may be envisaged.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I have to emphasise that Government has adopted a multi-pronged approach and put in place a whole array of measures since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020. Various initiatives such as the *Plan de Soutien*, *Plan de Relance*, including schemes such as the SME Interest-Free Loan Scheme of Rs100,000 and the Rs1 m. SME COVID-19 Special Support Scheme have been put forward. The DBM has approved Rs2,761 m. in respect of 4,390 cases, out of which Rs1,874 m. has been disbursed.

SME Mauritius, on its side, is providing appropriate support to SMEs in the form of five schemes which have been extended till June 2022. These support schemes aim at improving the resilience of SMEs through a series of interventions along their value chains or in relation to the development of their capabilities. As at date, at the level of SME Mauritius, 676 applications have been considered for an approved/committed amount of Rs32.7 m., out of which Rs21 m. has been disbursed. The cumulative turnover of those SMEs stands at Rs2.857 billion, with a total number of 3,954 employees.

Ongoing training and capacity building to allow SMEs to rebuild or re-engineer their business models are also being provided. As for the Tourism Sector specifically, some 100 SMEs will be accompanied to assist them in acquiring new skills and competence to better face challenging circumstances.

I would like to assure the hon. Members of the House that no stone is being left unturned when it comes to supporting SMEs efficiently. I am confident that all these actions taken by the Government, my Ministry and SME Mauritius will definitely contribute to bringing a more conducive business ecosystem for improved SME resilience.

**MEDICAL EQUIPMENT AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES - DONATION
RECEIVED SINCE AUGUST 2020 TO DATE**

(No. B/855) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to medical equipment and medical supplies, he will state the quantity thereof donated by each donor country and international agency, since August 2020 to date.

Reply: I am placing the required information in the Library of the National Assembly.

ESSENTIAL GOODS - FREIGHT COSTS - ASSISTANCE SCHEME

(No. B/856) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to essential goods, he will state if consideration will be given for the provision of an assistance scheme to assist importers thereof to maintain a constant supply thereof on the local market, following the recent increase of the freight costs.

Reply: Suite à la pandémie de Covid-19, une importante hausse du coût du fret a été constatée pour l'importation de marchandises.

Cela a eu pour effet d'augmenter le prix des marchandises importées. Cela étant dit, aucune perturbation d'approvisionnement en biens essentiels n'a pas été observée.

Comme l'Assemblée le sait, après la première session du dialogue entre le secteur public et le secteur privé, un comité a été mis en place au niveau de mon ministère afin de proposer des mesures appropriées pour faire face à l'impact de l'augmentation du coût du fret.

Dans l'intervalle, en vue de réduire le prix des biens essentiels et de préserver le pouvoir d'achat des consommateurs, le gouvernement a promulgué les *Consumer Protection (Maximum Price of Essential Goods) Regulations 2021* avec effet au 12 juillet 2021.

Et cela dans le but de fixer le prix de sept biens essentiels.

Il s'agit du poisson en conserve, des tomates en conserve, du fromage, de l'huile de cuisine, de la margarine, du lait en poudre et des légumineuses.

La fixation des prix couvre les marques spécifiques largement achetées par les Mauriciens pour ces produits essentiels, à savoir 231 produits.

Suite à des demandes entrantes, la liste a été étendue le 19 juillet 2021 pour couvrir 140 produits supplémentaires, portant le nombre total de produits à 371.

Pour compenser la perte de revenus des importateurs, des fabricants, des grossistes, des distributeurs et des détaillants, un programme de subvention a été mis en place afin que la réduction des prix soit effective immédiatement.

Un montant de 500 millions de roupies a été affecté au programme de subsides afin d'améliorer le pouvoir d'achat des consommateurs et sera financé par le *COVID-19 Solidarity Fund*.

(No. B/858) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the Lolo Bridge, La Savanne bridge and Austin Bridge in Constituency No.16, Vacoas and Floréal, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation of the proposed infrastructural projects in relation thereto.

Reply: With reference to Lolo Bridge and Austin Bridge, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to Parliamentary Question B/808.

With regard to La Savanne Bridge, I wish to inform that in my reply to Parliamentary Question B/789 on 10 November 2020, I informed the House that the RDA was undertaking a project to construct a bridge 3.4 metres wide which will mainly allow for movement of pedestrians as well as for limited vehicular access, that is, at least for an ambulance or for two wheelers. I further informed the House that the works which started in April 2019 were expected to be completed by early December 2020.

Chose promise, chose due.

I am informed by the RDA that the works have indeed been completed in December 2020 and that the bridge is open to the public.